

Alternative Technology Association Toowoomba Branch 2016 Annual Report

The Toowoomba Branch of the Alternative Technology Association was formed in January 2015 and is now in its second year. In that time a variety of events have been held to encourage the utilisation of technology to help people live sustainably.

2016 was a very successful year for the Branch. The Branch held or contributed to six public events during 2016. Of great assistance this year was the use, for a modest fee, of the community meeting rooms at the new Toowoomba Regional Council library. These are well equipped and have good common space for refreshments and discussion before and after meetings.

The first meeting of the year was on 16 April 2016 and discussed the very popular topic of domestic battery technology. Over 80 people attended and the presenters, Andreas Helwig from USQ and Stan Jonsson of Solar Solutions 24/7 did excellent jobs of letting attendees know what is happening with this technology.

In June, award winning architect and environmental consultant, Mahalath Halperin, spoke about creating more energy efficient homes. This was another very well attended meeting and took place with the support of the Toowoomba Solar Centre.

The third public meeting for the year on August 9, exposed another large audience to the idea that it is possible to achieve 100% renewable energy in communities and Australia as a whole. The speakers were Craig Banks from Beyond Zero Emissions and Gerard Wedderburn-Bisshop of Zero Emissions Byron.

The Branch hosted two large public events: Sustainable House Day and the Toowoomba Electric Vehicle Expo. Sustainable House Day is a national ATA event and this year three Toowoomba homes participated. Over 300 people viewed these homes and generated a lot of enthusiasm for sustainable house design. Branch secretary Ross Campbell was responsible for this day being the success it was. Two of the houses at Grapetree, north of Toowoomba, were his design, while the third was exhibited by Geoff Gibson Homes.

The Toowoomba Electric Vehicle Expo took place with the aid of a grant from Toowoomba Regional Council and was held at the Cobb+Co Museum. It was conducted in co-operation with the Brisbane Branch of the Australian Electric Vehicle Association, local electric vehicle owners, Toowoomba Mitsubishi and Ergon Energy. Toowoomba bicycle retailer, Jonny Sprocket, also participated bringing along a selection of electric bicycles. Almost 1,000 people attended the day and it was an outstanding success in bringing the future of vehicle transport to the Toowoomba public.

The Toowoomba Branch again supported World Environment Day and is a member of the Darling Downs Environment Council.

In addition, submissions were made to the Queensland Productivity Commission enquiries into electricity pricing and the solar feed in tariff. A submission was also made to the Renewable Energy Expert Panel, on their draft report: *Credible pathways to a 50% renewable energy target for Queensland*.

Following the success of the Electric Vehicle Expo an approach was made to the Toowoomba Regional Council, through Councillor Carol Taylor who had attended the Expo, to suggest that Council sponsor an innovations forum. Nothing has eventuated yet with respect to this suggestion.

The branch has received excellent support for all its endeavours from the Melbourne head office of the ATA. In particular from branches co-ordinator, Doug Rolfe, Chief Executive Officer, Donna Luckman and media and online content manager Sasha Shtargot.

The branch would not be able to achieve what it has in 2016 without the consistent and valuable support of all its committee members. I thank each of them: Secretary, Ross Campbell, Treasurer, Don Carlson, committee members, Jill French, Lorraine Biggin, Gavin Reilly, Terry Ryan, Bill Curnow and Bob Carpenter.

It is anticipated that in 2017 the branch will continue to run public meetings on matters of interest in the alternative technology sphere for the Toowoomba public. The community meeting rooms have been booked for this purpose. It is also anticipated that sustainable house day and world environment day will again be part of the branch's activities in 2017.

The topic of community energy has been raised a number of times during the year. I will travel to a congress on this topic in Melbourne in February and at the same time attend an ATA branch resources and training session. Perhaps in addition to the planned events, there may be something to emerge in this sphere in 2017.

2016 was a very good year for the Toowoomba ATA Branch to advance its goal of connecting, inspiring and assisting people to make sustainable choices in their homes and Toowoomba community. It sets the bar at a high level for 2017.

Mark Tranter
Branch Convenor