

Put a solar panel on your roof

Lou Beaumont

The Neighbourhoods Project, an initiative from Beyond Building Energy (BBE), has seen 600 households all over Mullumbimby, Wilson's Creek, Main Arm, Federal and The Pocket obtain solar panels for a fraction of retail cost. The project is now set to expand Shire-wide.

Through normal retail outlets, installing 1kW solar panels can cost around \$6,000 after the \$8,000 government rebate. Currently, as part of the project, fifty neighbours are paying around \$895 each for a 1kW system. If fewer neighbourhood houses are committed to the scheme, the panels become more expensive per house – so the scheme encourages community consultation at the least. Each household must 'self-fund' their installation by paying the \$8,000-plus panel cost upfront. After the panels are installed and the government has received proof of installation, the \$8,000 will be refunded.

So how does BBE manage to save each household nearly \$5,000? By dealing directly with a solar panel manufacturer in China, the company cuts out the middle-man when it comes to the export-import-wholesale-retail chain and they order and buy in bulk. Additionally, the obvious logic behind the households being in the same vicinity is delivery and installation costs are drastically reduced.

Shunyam Peinecke, neighbourhood coordinator for 100 hinterland households, told *The Echo*, 'There is a huge demand for solar energy. This system has proven it and it is no longer simply a possibility for the well-off. While the politicians



Matthew and Shaun McIntyre with one of BBE's rooftop solar arrays. Photo Jeff 'Strike a Light' Dawson

are dragging their feet, BBE has made it possible to afford solar today.'

Beyond Building Energy's general manager, Mitra Ardron, said, 'As far as we

know, this is the biggest roll out of solar panels ever. We hope to make the Byron Shire the most solar connected community in the country.'

BBE can provide assistance in the form of information and leaflets to hand out to your neighbours. Call 6685 5587 or email info@beyondbuilding.com.

Blues traffic a boon for two Byron schools



Will Radburn and Julia Brophy from St Finbarrs kindergarten helped out as Peter Noble, Bluesfest Director (left), and Brendan Meek, Venue Manager (right), presented St Finbarrs Catholic Primary School and Byron Bay High School with cheques for \$10,300 each last Wednesday. Also standing by were Byron High captains, Tony East and Molly Lewis.

The funds are part of the profits from the parking at the Blues Fest this year. Over the five day festival, more than 60 school parent volunteers parked approximately 1,500 cars each day.

Spotlight on Lighthouse Road restoration project

Jann Gilbert

Council held a meeting last Tuesday at the Byron Bay Surf Club to inform residents about the progress of the restoration works to Lighthouse Road and the lengthy delays.

The meeting presented an overview of the project, its constraints, the progress to date and the current situation. It also covered the timeline from the slippage event in 2005 to the present, the complexity of the project, the difficulties in getting funding approval from the RTA, and in attracting an appropriate contractor.

Trying to avoid road closure

Much of the delay with the project has been caused by a resolve to constrain restoration options to those that would not involve road closure. Other, more expedient options would have necessitated the closure of Lighthouse Road, which is obviously an unworkable situation, and may have compromised the overall safety of the project.

The investigation and design processes also proved lengthy, primarily due to the geotechnical issues with the site. When the final design of a pile wall was decided upon in 2006 preparatory work, including a stormwater outlet and gabion wall behind Clarks Beach cottage, was commenced. This work was completed in late 2007 and the intervening period has been spent dealing with the (unsuccessful) tender process and the submission of further information to the RTA from Council and its engineering consultants, GHD.

The current delay with works centres on the cost of

the project, which the RTA agreed to fund through the disaster relief program, and the timeline for funding. At the time of the slippage the RTA estimated the cost of the restoration work at around \$2 million and provision was made in the 2006/07 budget.

However, slope stability problems, soil and geotechnical issues make the project extremely high risk for a contractor (who would also bear legal liability for any worst-case scenarios) and have resulted in a prime display of commercial opportunism with only one tender submission at a cost of over \$4 million. (Not the only display of commercial opportunism where this project is concerned it seems.)

Currently, Council is in the process of seeking confirmation from the RTA for the project to proceed based on the submission of the additional information. Subsequent to approval by the RTA Council will still need to call for and accept a suitable tender, and then actually get the work done. Philip Holloway, Director of Asset Management Services, had the unenviable task of informing the meeting that it was 'still a 56-week project from approval to final report.'

Inaccurate report

Contrary to a subsequent local media report, the meeting was a public meeting, not a meeting 'between traders and Council.' The information presented at the meeting has been available on Council's website throughout the entire process, and was also detailed in an *Echo* report in January this year.

Mayor Jan Barham said

continued on page 5

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