

Solar farm that Goulburn built to bypass policy gaps.

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In 2014, a group of Goulburn residents disgruntled about the former Coalition government's efforts to tackle climate change decided to take matters into their own hands.

"We basically said if they're not going to do it, we will," says Ed Suttle from the Community Energy 4 Goulburn group.



Community Energy 4 Goulburn president Ed Suttle says the project has been profitable. **Rohan Thomson**

Fast-forward to March 2026, and the group had transformed a vacant industrial site into a 4-megawatt hour battery and a 1.4-megawatt solar farm – enough to power about 500 homes.

For their efforts in helping realise the Goulburn community's renewable energy ambitions, Smart Commercial Energy and Komo Energy have taken the top spot in the Community engagement category of the Financial Review Energy Awards.

The project itself took patience. The first step was to conduct a feasibility study, which indicated it stacked up on financial and technical grounds, with an estimated build cost of \$4.2 million.

But delays caused by the vagaries of federal energy policy put the project on hold before it was ultimately revived by a NSW government initiative, the Regional Community Energy Fund. The NSW government contributed \$2.1 million on the condition that the community raise \$1.05 million of its own money.

Within a week of receiving the grant, Community Energy 4 Goulburn had raised \$1.25 million from Goulburn residents, comfortably exceeding the government's requirement. Within months, that figure had reached \$2.1 million – enough to fund the entire project.

Today, there are 288 investors – about 80 per cent of whom live in the Goulburn region – with a direct stake in the project.

Smart Commercial Energy was selected to provide the engineering expertise required to deliver the project, while Komo Energy conducted the complex regulatory and administrative requirements to get it off the ground.

The site had its challenges as an irregularly shaped former gravel washing pit bordered by a river and a train line.

“The site asked a lot of us from an engineering perspective,” says Kealy Day, chief technology officer at Smart Commercial Energy and lead engineer on the project.

“Because it sits in the catchment, every design decision had to account for runoff and water quality. We had to work around legacy landfill and an unusual footprint without compromising the yield the community was relying on. Using one integrated supplier – Trinasolar – for the modules, racking and battery made a real difference, because it meant fewer interfaces to manage on a site that already had plenty of complexity.”

Suttle says the project has been profitable.

“On a gloriously sunny day ... wholesale electricity prices are probably very close to zero [in the middle of the day], so we stop pumping it into the grid – we pump it into the battery instead,” he says.

“And towards about 4pm or 5pm, when electricity prices begin to rise again towards peak, then we pump the battery into the grid.”

While Suttle would like the project to have powered local homes, that would have required millions of dollars worth of high-voltage wires. Instead, the group has signed a power agreement with tech giant Atlassian, which is buying 70 per cent of the power generated by the project.

Energy Awards

Community engagement



Result	Company	Entry
Winner	Smart Commercial Energy (with Komo Energy)	Goulburn Community Solar Farm
Finalist	Yindjibarndi Energy Corporation	Jinbi Solar Project
Finalist	Origin Energy & Ausgrid	Breaking down barriers to renewable energy storage
Finalist	European Energy Australia & Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corp	Powering communities through self-determination, partnership and co-design
Finalist	Transgrid	Wiradjuri cultural education module

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