



**Off grid:** Licola visitors admire newly-installed solar panels at the Lions Licola Wilderness Village 50th anniversary last week.

photograph supplied

## Licola turns on solar

By MICHELLE SLATER

LICOLA has turned off diesel and switched onto solar to make the town totally renewable, in a project partly-funded and backed by the Latrobe Community Power Hub.

Lions Licola Wilderness Village went off the grid for its 50th anniversary, celebrated last week, which will save \$135,000 a year running and maintaining noisy generators.

Wilderness Village chief executive Tony Davis said the project would turn Licola into a sustainable tourist destination, as well as a drawcard for people wanting to learn about off-grid communities.

"Sustainability and renewable energy is the way forward, the ability to switch off our generators with the large carbon footprint is important," Mr Davis said.

The diesel generators had been deployed full-time to power the village day and night, providing

amenity to Licola's 270-bed wilderness village, general store, caravan park and CFA shed.

The village, which receives 20 per cent more sunshine than Melbourne, has also been used as a hub for emergency service crews during bushfires.

"This will give us the ability to cut the generator noise out, when they are turned off it's blissful, you can hear the birds and the river," Mr Davis said.

The \$800,000 set-up includes a total solar capacity of 167 kilowatts, with 35-tonne batteries providing 100 kilowatt hours.

Part of the design also included making the entire town more energy-efficient by replacing old wall heaters with split systems and installing LED lights.

The project is being funded by the Lions Club with a partial amount kicked in from the Latrobe Community Power Hub, using local contractors and inverters manufactured in Melbourne.

Mr Davis expects the project

will pay for itself in between six to eight years, and the cash saved on diesel will be put back into running camps for disadvantaged kids.

However, he said the generators would still be kept handy for an extra boost for an hour-or-so in peak demand when the town is full with visitors on long weekends and holidays.

Latrobe Community Power Hub project officer Chris Barfoot said it was a "vital" project that would be used as an example of how to establish a total off-grid system.

"This scheme will provide real-time information on the internet so anyone can study it, people will be able to learn from it and we want this knowledge to be available to everyone," Mr Barfoot said.

"There is also a large argument that remote communities are better off-grid as then distribution companies don't have to maintain the powerlines."

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