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sustainable prosperity

The Cape Paterson Ecovillage is forging a path to an ultimate coastal lifestyle that doesn't cost the earth...

On a lush green hill overlooking the swirling waters of Bass Strait stand three pioneers of hope for Australia's future. Brendan Condon, Mike O'Mullane and Tosh Szatow survey the site that will soon begin its transformation into a unique sustainable housing project. The Ecovillage aims to be Australia's first operationally zero-carbon residential development.

Over nine years ago, Brendan and Mike embarked on their journey to develop a lifestyle option with a difference. Like all journeys into the unknown, it's been full of unexpected twists and turns, and now the destination is in full sight. Cape Paterson Ecovillage is the first and only of its kind in Australia and its zero-emission concept is even quite rare internationally.

"We doggedly held on to the concept for nine years because we see how critically important living, breathing examples of sustainable, cost-effective, low-carbon living are," says Brendan passionately. He admits that he and fellow director Mike O'Mullane were not prepared

for the hurdles they have faced – they thought that compromising big profits for big ideals would be an easy sell.

In May, the State Government gave the village the green light. Land release and construction will begin in early 2012. "We are making a red-hot attempt at developing a functional, zero-carbon housing project," says Brendan. It's a development with a difference. The village concept has been fully developed to integrate solutions across biodiversity, sustainable architecture, onsite clean-energy production, electric vehicles powered onsite, water efficiency, on-site food production, community development and promotion of an active lifestyle.

This equates to a coastal community of 220 lots, with residents living amongst restored wildlife habitat including wetlands. An active lifestyle is encouraged through provision of walking and cycling paths for a community that uses clean energy generated on-site, in stylish, efficient houses that capture their own water. Shared spaces

including a workshop, garden and café are integral to the project.

As permanent residents establish themselves, it is anticipated that opportunities for involvement in local enterprise will emerge and grow. This may include on-site management of energy services, a workshop that will re-purpose tired goods for the local community and beyond, and food services that draw on produce from household and community gardens and local farmers.

It may sound a little futuristic, but ironically many of the solutions draw on historical, commonsense practices such as good orientation of homes and access to community facilities – simple practices that are often forgotten in modern developments.

The Ecovillage team started with the assumption that achieving this standard of sustainability in housing would generate costly up-front premiums. They were prepared to share this cost with residents to achieve a legacy. In 2010, Brendan assembled a skilled team of

builders and designers and, for six painstaking months, worked through the economics of building 220 sustainable houses. Leading sustainable house designers were identified and consulted. Some of the world's largest solar panel producers were approached to quote for clean energy generation for all houses and also electric vehicles, to future proof the project against rising energy, water and oil costs.

The team grew to include Sustainability Victoria, Master Builders and Alternative Technology Associations, and the Moreland Energy Foundation. The study drew on input from talented local Bass Coast builders TS Constructions, and designers Beaumont Concepts, winners of the National HIA Greensmart home award for 2010 and 2011. And then came the Eureka moment. The team found that a combination of rapidly reducing costs for sustainability features such as solar panels, combined with good design, reduced the upfront premium. When the running costs of the houses were calculated over the life of a mortgage, Tosh and Brendan explain that even with conservative scenarios for future energy, water and oil costs, the style >

of housing and lifestyle options offered will put residents way ahead financially compared with conventional housing options.

Tosh completed the final detailed analysis for the project, using his background as a researcher and advocate for local energy systems. He recently left the CSIRO and joined the development team to realise his dream of demonstrating the effectiveness of local clean energy. He believes we have already reached a tipping point where, if done right, clean energy can be more affordable than the alternative.

Brendan is quick to point out this is not a commune or even an 'alternative' development – his ambition is to 'mainstream' the core elements of the project. He expects it will attract a diverse community of like-minded people that are seeking low-cost, low-impact living in an integrated community that supports rewarding lifestyles.

"People of all ages have already registered their interest in the village, including many locals, and people from all walks of life from doctors to tradies and everything in between," he says.

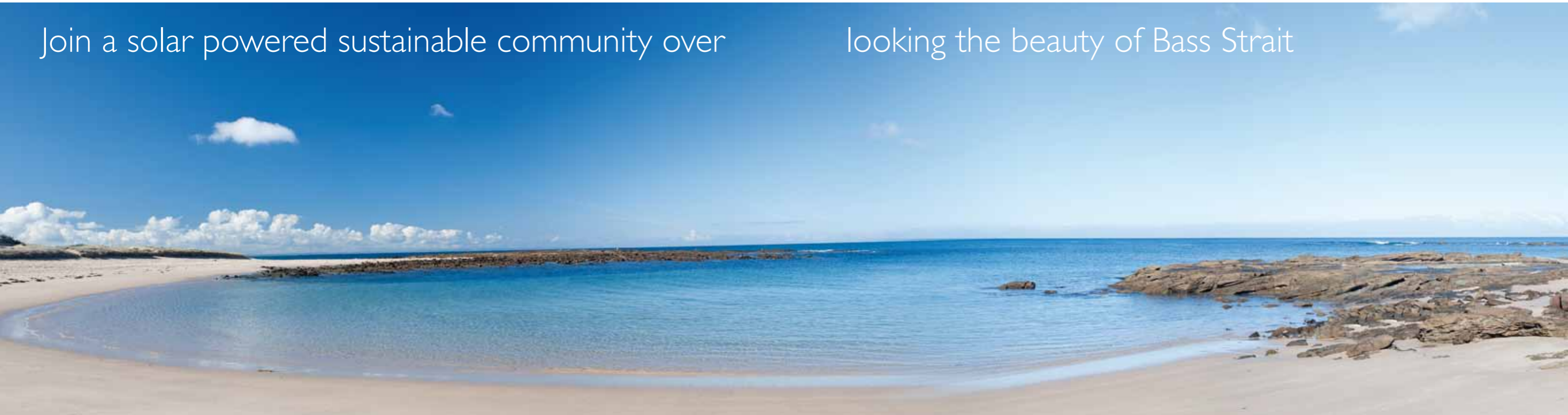
It is hoped the Cape Paterson Ecovillage will be a flagship project that guides future housing development and prosperity.

www.capepatersonecovillage.com.au 



Join a solar powered sustainable community over

looking the beauty of Bass Strait



The Ecovillage will be a place where people can enjoy a strong sense of community and an active healthy lifestyle while contributing to the restoration and ecological values of the coast. The project will combine beautiful parks, ocean views and open space, walking and cycling tracks, and the light footprint solutions of modern sustainable architecture, solar energy and water sensitive design.