

The Secretary  
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into Australia's future oil supply and alternative transport fuels:  
With reference to potential new sources of oil and alternative fuels to meet a significant share of Australia's fuel demands taking into account technological developments and environmental and economic concerns.

The looming prospect of energy scarcity and the subsequent need for energy transition provide a compelling case for a centralized clearinghouse for information on alternative energy sources. There is an urgent need for sharing knowledge. While the evolution of alternatives has been progressing for quite some time in many different areas, it tends to be hidden from view. There is a need for access to information on progress to date as well as best practices suited to a given locale.

In Minnesota alone, there are some significant energy transition efforts underway that do not receive much attention. For example:

- The Green Institute is working on a Biomass Community Energy Project that would use urban tree trimmings and agricultural residue to generate green power (20 Megawatts) and distributed heat for the community;
- The McKnight Foundation – Energy Foundation Upper Midwest Clean Energy Initiative is working on commercializing cellulosic ethanol as fuel.
- The Minnesota Project's Clean Energy Resource Teams are engaging rural communities in strategic planning for renewable energy.
- RENew Northfield, a group of citizens dedicated to energy independence, has just created its own Biodiesel Buyers' Club.
- The University of Minnesota's Initiative for Renewable Energy and the Environment is funding research in areas such as Bioenergy and Bioproducts; Conservation and Efficient Energy Systems; and more.

While significant, these projects suffer common constraints. Even if funders are aware of energy scarcity as a legitimate concern, they may not be willing to openly acknowledge it. All too often, allowable activities are limited to those that fall neatly under one of the more socially acceptable environmental justifications: climate change or sustainability. The focus on clean energy, for example, reflects the concern for reducing carbon emissions which contribute to global warming and abrupt climate change. While this is certainly a crucial concern, it remains a venture with limited scope and resources. Competition for funds under this category of environmental concern is fierce. Progress is slow.

An organization that adopts the mission of serving as information clearinghouse for energy transition would need legitimacy and resources appropriate to treat a larger scope and faster timetable. Ideally, legitimacy would come from recognition by formal authorities acknowledging the urgency of energy transition as well as the need for collaborative effort to meet common needs. Ideally, resources would come from stakeholders who anticipate benefiting from the information.

One potential model for such an organization is a subscription based cooperative. The State of Minnesota has created a new cooperative incorporation designation known as 308B (Minnesota Statutes 2005, Chapter 308B, Minnesota Cooperative Association Act). This incorporation designation allows the cooperative to bring in outside equity. An example is Avalanche Corporate Technology Cooperative, an organization structuring open source development of mission critical software for member firms Best Buy, Cargill, Imation, Josten's, Medtronic, and Thomson.

In addition, a Minnesota connection could add value by asking some notable Minnesota NGO's if they would like to play a part – organizations such as:

- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy;
- Institute for Local Self-Reliance;
- Minnesotans for an Energy Efficient Economy.

The time has come for a dedicated effort to structure open source development of energy transition solutions and best practices. We need your help in achieving that so we can help you.

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