

SEN Association History

From 'Alarm to Action' to conception

When the Howard federal government proposed nuclear power for Australia in 2006, Jo Valentine and Scott Ludlam called a "From Alarm to Action" community meeting in Perth, Western Australia, to counter this worrying proposal. The meeting was well attended by people united in their concerns, including Steve Gates, Eddie Lee and Libby Verscheuer who subsequently founded Sustainable Energy Now (SEN) as an independent association. Their mission? to promote renewable energy in Western Australia, by demonstrating its technical and economic feasibility along with its benefits.

Establishing our core principles

Steve Gates' research showed that our own ready-made and safe solar nuclear fusion reactor – the sun – was capable of supplying roughly 9,000 times the amount of energy the whole world required to power everything. All we needed to do was harness 0.01% of that.

This idea shaped SEN's six core principles to promote and advocate for:

- widespread use of sustainable energy
- efficient energy use and the reduction of energy waste
- greater awareness of the economic and environmental benefits of sustainable energy
- sustainable energy research and technology
- a nuclear-free future
- a safe climate future (by reducing the impact of energy generation, transportation and utilisation).

Early growth and milestones

Our first major milestone in demonstrating the full potential of renewable energy came early on when system architect and programmer Angus King joined our technical team in March 2007 and collaborated on the development of computer simulation software. Now known as the widely respected SIREN and Power Match tools, this software enabled the technical and economic modelling that informs SEN's reports and communications. Many people have contributed to the ongoing development of this software, now widely recognised by industry and governments as a useful modelling tool for simulating renewable energy scenarios of Western Australia's electrical network.

Overcoming barriers and redirecting focus

Initially, we had little interest from the WA government until we finally secured a meeting with the Energy Minister's office after Colin Barnett became Premier in September 2008. We were told renewable energy would not be supported by the government and understood that Barnett's view of the energy future was gas and nuclear (although he wasn't a fan of nuclear power plants in WA).

We decided our best means of influencing public policy was to educate the public on the many benefits of renewables to counter the false and misleading claims of the conservative media, industry and government.

As the world gained a greater understanding of the climate crisis, and the need to phase out our reliance on fossil fuels, the State Government and their Energy Policy team began engaging with SEN representatives to discuss this transition towards a zero-carbon economy.

Growing public knowledge and political influence.

SEN's participation in various rallies and industry, media, community and school events increased our profile and reach as a grass-roots, member-based advocacy group. We continue to provide important and accurate education for the community.

2008 – SEN speaks at WA Governor Ken Michaels' Renewable Energy Roundtable.

2009 to present – Our premiere event '[SEN Presents](#)' enhances our community outreach program.

2010 to 2012 – Participation in the 'Parliamentary Renewables Update' resulted in numerous politicians, from all parties, becoming honorary SEN members.

2012 to present – Engagement with the Greens, providing detailed renewable energy modelling for the party's campaigns and reports, and co-presenting at various events.

2017 to present – Engagement with State Government policy bodies, ministers, energy utilities and industry.

Advocating for sustainable energy, now

As public energy policy and technology constantly evolve, we continue to adapt, grow and advocate to strengthen community support for the energy transition to renewables. However, the energy transition is a complex political process, requiring strong technical skills to build credibility and engage like-minded allies. It also requires an understanding of the political bureaucracy to create tightly focused campaigns that successfully maintain political engagement and bring about energy policy change in the face of powerful vested interests.

Member Contribution

SEN recognises the many thousands of volunteer hours members have contributed since 2006 towards achieving our association's objectives. We thank all past and current volunteers for their service and support.