



*Application Form submitted by the initiatives to participate in the Transformative Cities People`s Choice Award*

| <b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b>  |   |
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| <b>Location:</b>  | Morwell, Melbourne, Australia   |
| <b>Title of the Transformative Initiative:</b>  | Earthworker Cooperative   |
| <b>Name of organization:</b>  | Earthworker Cooperative   |
| <b>Type of organization:</b>  | Cooperative and Cooperative hub   |
| <b>Website:</b>   | <a href="https://earthworkercooperative.com.au/">https://earthworkercooperative.com.au/</a> |
| <b>Category and Edition:</b>  | ENERGY. Transformative Cities Award 2 <sup>nd</sup> edition (2019).                         |
| <b>STORYTELLING</b>   |   |
| <b>Summary</b>  |   |
| <p>Earthworker Cooperative is a 22 year long effort to bring the environment/climate movement and labour movement together building the cooperative manufactories and other cooperatives to enable communities to work our way out of the climate emergency. We are building manufacturing and other cooperatives in energy, water, transport, land care.</p>   |   |
| <b>Context and problem definition</b>   |   |
| <p>The need to build a vehicle to make the environment movement's alternatives begin to happen on the ground led to the formation of Earthworker Cooperative. Over 22 years we of course ran into the traditional problems of 'jobs vs the environment' which exist between the two social movements, but continued to redirect energy and focus back into the practical outcomes called for by the existence of the climate emergency.</p> |   |

The problems confronted at the beginning arose when we were asked to mediate between the Timber Worker Union and the Wilderness Society. We were asked and we accepted the role. We learnt through a very bitter experience that our role is not to attempt to reconcile social movements whom the Market has driven apart. Our role is to achieve the positive outcomes across energy, water, transport and alternative jobs and uses for that industry in mitigating the climate emergency.

### **Design and Initiation**

The Earthworker project came out of active unionists who were/are environmental activists as well. Some of us had been involved in the Green Bans of the 1970's and that was a major influence on formation. Also the "Blueys, Boots and Overalls" campaign where as younger men and women we fought to have a Bluey (woollen work jacket) to keep the cold away on construction sites. The Bluey company in Tasmania was nearly broke and thanks to our campaign survived. An unintended consequence which showed us that we can use our social weight as unionists to cause things to happen which otherwise might not have occurred, and an important principle was thus shaped when Earthworker formed.

The Victorian Trades Hall Council (the peak body for Victorian unions) has supported over many years and recently formally put a representative on the Earthworker Cooperative Board, taking on a more active role. We are an affiliate of Friends of the Earth in Australia, they being one of the founding organisations alongside Victorian unions.

### **Implementation**

Earthworker's first large worker-owned cooperative is the Earthworker Energy Manufacturing Cooperative (EEMC) located in Victoria's coal region in Morwell. It is a unique initiative, assisting Victoria's transition to a low-carbon economy and empowering the Latrobe Valley community through dignified employment and environmentally friendly enterprise. Earthworks is a worker-run factory producing premium quality solar hot water and energy storage products for Australian households and businesses.

The cooperative sells its products to customers, governments and through union Enterprise Bargaining Agreements. The Maritime Union of Australia is the first major union to place the Earthworker Clause into their Agreements. This means that waterfront workers will be able to choose the goods our cooperatives make, instead of cash for their wage rise which means they build climate jobs and reduce their energy bills.

Earthworker is focused on social and environmentally just outcomes and have already placed solar hot water systems into low income housing and importantly, we are engaged in the act of practical Treaty building with first nations peoples which involves installing hot water systems in Indigenous Housing.

### **Results achieved and Evaluation**

Currently Earthworker Energy Manufacturing Cooperative has their factory in Morwell and now fully functional! That would not have happened without the fundraising of our community of well over \$650,000. We have 5 employee's working for the cooperative, working towards being a worker owners'. We manufacture stainless steel tanks that paired with a heat pump to reduce power needs by 80%. Other sodium nickel battery products, a domestic plug and play unit and a portable trailer batteries and panels unit in the waiting.

Redgum is our fully functioning cleaner's cooperative a proud part of the Earthworker family. Cleaning has long been an exploited area of employment; this coop is living proof of another way.

Cooperative Power is a retailer for power in Australia, we are proud founding members of this new venture, alongside many great unions of Australia.

### **Political Strategies**

The strategy to achieve our goals was framed by three main criteria: That we needed to move beyond relying only on a protesting which had seen us stereotyped us "The Protesters;" to demonstrate that the model in which we could literally work our way out of climate emergency.

We believe the need to unite the broadest possible alliance behind the positive outcomes we are striving for through:

1. Development of a stronger social sector of the Australian and Global Economy via Cooperatives and Mutuals linked through membership of, and distribution of goods and power through, unions;
2. Introduction of Public Social Partnerships bringing particularly our union-fought-for-and-won Superannuated wages Funds and Governments together to achieve the big infrastructure projects our country and the world needs, and
3. Linking such activities globally through Social Sector Fair Trade Agreements (SSFTA's) with labour, cooperative, environment/climate movements, Superannuation/Pension Funds, national and regional Governments, Faith Communities and others to build the critical mass of action on the climate emergency.

We are advocating around our work, trying to maximise the profile of the work we do and build the boarder social and solidarity sector of the economy.

### **Related legislations**

We have had a number of Municipal bodies, for example the Moreland Energy Foundation Limited in Moreland Council region support us over many years. Latrobe City, the Council governing Morwell where the first cooperative manufactory now lives, has also been very supportive, at one earlier foundation stage they had a representative on the Board of Earth-worker.

We are seeking Councils to procure the goods we make for Municipal buildings, and also we have initiated a proposal to Moreland Council for installation of a 1.4 MWh sodium nickel chloride battery storage system on Council land; the proposal is then that Moreland will come with us to Morwell to seek a partnership between the inner urban and regional Councils around battery storage; we are calling that "Morwell, Moreland, More of Everything." Furthermore we have been in ongoing talks with the Victorian government with regards to the states new Social economy procurement policy.

**Lessons learned**

Keep struggling for what you believe in.

The Earthworker project has had many ups and downs over the last 22 years and we could have given up many times, but continue to breath life into this beautiful idea.

**EXTRA INFO**

**Supporting documents**

<https://earthworkercooperative.com.au/>

<http://www.latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/story/5460138/solar-hot-water-systems-ready-to-go/>