

Wind Energy Case Study

Business and community opportunities

There is more to wind energy than wind turbines and renewable energy. A new wind farm can become a catalyst for business and community renewal, as the people involved with Te Uku wind farm, near Raglan, are finding out.



Earthworks at Te Uku wind farm

Out towards Raglan, Meridian Energy is developing a new wind farm at Te Uku. This high and windy site has become an important community asset. The wind farm has added a new, positive dynamic to this isolated farming site.

Business opportunities

An important aspect of the construction and ongoing management of the wind farm was that the existing farm operations had to continue with little or no disruption. That meant that stock and pasture had to be managed along with heavy construction, quarrying and new roading. Jim Munns, a local fencer played an integral role.

"It is a big job," says Jim. "I have already fenced over 20 kilometres." Jim had to remove old fences as new roads and access were developed, make temporary fences for stock management and then create permanent fences once construction was completed.

"I was just a one-man band but I had to employ staff and learn all about how to do that. It was a real eye opener but I had lots of help from the managers of the construction firms Hick Bros and Spartan Construction," says Jim.

It was a very wet winter, which did not help, but Jim is proud of his contribution. "We all need power at the end of the day."

Local Hamilton firm Spartan Construction together with Hick Bros from Silverdale formed Hick Spartan Joint Venture and won the contract to supply infrastructure roading, foundations and erosion and sediment control at Te Uku. They won the contract through their expertise, innovation and local availability. "Being local helped, but it was our innovation that made the real difference," says Mark Gerrand, the Project Manager.

Mark is particularly proud of the environment award they won from the regional council. "Each week Environment Waikato

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inspected and monitored the site. Even though the site had a high clay content and was particularly wet, Spartan Construction and Hicks Bros, along with BBO and Meridian won the Erosion and Sediment Control Project of the Year.”

All sorts of companies are involved in working on the site, including Maskill Contracting. “We helped move some of the heavy equipment onto the Te Uku site,” says Wayne Maskill, Managing Director of Maskill Contracting. “We are very organised and take care to do it right.” Maskill Contracting are based out of Palmerston North. “So we know all about wind,” says Wayne.

Even the local school benefited from all the construction activity at Te Uku. The local school house was rented for accommodation. The playground benefited from the donation of huge truck tyres from Hick Bros. The school fund raising committee also caters the monthly safety seminars held in Te Mata, generating another income stream.

Building partnerships

Robert Batters, Meridian’s Te Uku Project Manager, is interested in the opportunities surrounding a new wind farm and how it can create positive spin offs for both the environment and local businesses. “The simplest benefit to the local economy has been leasing offices and having staff and contractors coming into Raglan during winter, which is normally the quietest time of the year.” Apart from numerous cups of coffee purchased from Raglan cafés, the Te Uku development has meant many locals have been employed throughout the construction phase.

Existing local industries have benefited. The Te Mata Quarry has been able to open up new resources and modernise its equipment, substantially increasing its capacity. It is now well positioned to meet the growing demands for aggregate in the region, and it has also upgraded its water and waste systems so that its environmental footprint has improved.

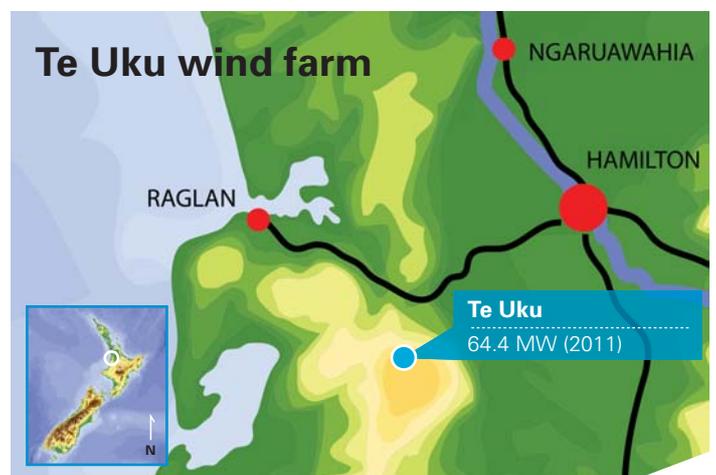
Robert really values the partnerships developed with local communities. “I am interested not only in working with local groups but helping them create sustainable business opportunities for the future.”

Another way Meridian has worked with the community is to help develop Ngati Mahanga’s native plant business. Within the wind farm site a number of regionally significant wetland areas were identified. Already 40,000 native wetland plants have been planted in these areas, which will help to improve water quality downstream. Developing a large native plant resource means that further wetland developments around the Waikato can now be serviced. Te Ariki Pihama, spokesperson for Ngati Mahanga, says, “A large scale development like Te Uku can lead you into new areas that you never thought about before.

“Any construction project has environmental risks, but we have also discovered new and rare areas of native fauna and flora that we did not know about. A lot of thought goes into these sorts of projects and they can actually enhance the environment,” says Te Ariki.

“Building a wind farm can challenge people’s perceptions. The visual aesthetics have to be offset against long-term environmental gains,” says Te Ariki. “Considering the ongoing needs for energy in Aotearoa, the extremely minimal environmental footprint of Te Hauhiko o Wharauroa/Te Uku is a better option for power generation than anything else we can consider at this stage. We are proud to be part of creating a better, cleaner world for our nation’s grand-children to inherit.

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The New Zealand Wind Energy Association (NZWEA) is an industry association that works towards the development of wind as a reliable, sustainable, clean and commercially viable energy source. We aim to fairly represent wind energy to the public, government and the energy sector. Our members include 80 companies involved in New Zealand’s wind energy sector, including electricity generators, wind farm developers, lines companies, turbine manufacturers, consulting firms, researchers and law firms. Find out more about wind energy and wind farms in New Zealand at www.windenergy.org.nz