

Chapter 5 Lord Howe Island interview results

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the results from semi-structured interviews conducted on Lord Howe Island in September and October 2005. I begin by presenting the thoughts, opinions and attitudes expressed by participants during interviews on both established and alternative energy options. I present their views on the system of diesel fired electricity production, solar hot water systems, gas and vehicle usage. I then present their views on alternative energy options in general, upgrading diesel generators, wind energy, solar photovoltaics, marine technologies, nuclear energy, improving energy efficiency and electric vehicles. During interviews, I questioned participants on aspects of change, and I present their responses to these questions. They gave responses on many different aspects of change, and I separate their views into two categories: issues that are drivers for change and issues that are inhibitors of change. Most participants felt the Lord Howe Island Board¹⁵ would be involved in a change to alternative energy options, and I present participants' responses to issues regarding the role of this institution. Many discussions during interviews broadened to topics relating to the political and social context on the Island. It became apparent that issues relating to the social and political landscapes of the Island such as the relationship between the Lord Howe Island Board and the community, and outside involvement in the affairs of the Island were fundamental to the discourse on energy options and decision-making. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of these issues.

¹⁵ Also referred to as "the Board", the Lord Howe Island Board is a consent authority under the New South Wales Environmental Protection Authority. It performs the role of a local government and has a charter for the wellbeing of the Island. The Lord Howe Island Board had an office on the Island, a Manager and a staff of around twenty.

5.2 Definition of terms

Table 16 shows the terms I use in this chapter to quantify the portion of participants who held a certain view or expressed a certain opinion. Each term represents a percentage band.

Table 16 Terms used to quantify participant's views and responses

Term	Portion of participants
"A minority"	Less than 9%
"A small number"	10-24%
"Some"	25-49%
"Many"	50-75%
"Most"	Greater than 75%

5.3 Established energy options

Participants expressed a range of views on the suitability of established energy options. When asked what they thought of established energy options, most participants gave responses relating to the electricity production system. This was viewed as the most important and controversial of the established energy options. Most participants believed that the current system of diesel fired electricity production was reliable and performed well given the limitations of the small grid, small economies of scale and having to operate in a remote location. However, most participants saw diesel production as a solution that would not be suitable in the future, and therefore alternatives should be adopted. A small number of participants were in favour of diesel generation as an energy option for the future. They cited its reliability, the ability to control generation independent of environmental factors and the perceived lack of suitable alternative energy options as reasons to maintain the existing system.

Participants gave mixed reports of solar hot water systems. Some participants were in favour of solar hot water heaters and believed they provided a cheap and reliable service that they were good for the environment. Some participants thought their hot water systems were unreliable and were unhappy with their performance. Many of the participants who were dissatisfied with the technology were using broken or poorly

maintained systems. All participants used gas for cooking and some used it for heating. They were generally satisfied with the services gas provided, although viewed it as expensive. Some considered switching to gas hot water heating due to perceptions of its simplicity and reliability.

5.3.1 Suitability of the electricity generation system

Many participants felt that the existing diesel generation system was reliable, and had been a good system for the community, but it would not be suitable for the future. One participant explained:

Well I think even though it may not be ideal burning diesel fuel to produce electricity, the logistics and all things considered, it is probably the most reliable for this isolated community. But it would be, I think, desirable to look at alternatives

Some participants felt that although the price of electricity from the current system was high, there were no solutions that could offer a “better” alternative. These participants felt that there was little impetus to change, simply because the current system was functioning adequately:

Obviously renewable energy ideas have been around for a while. There's plenty of people on the Island who are interested in it, so the Board has paid consultants over the years to look at different options, but at this stage the reliable one is the one we've got, and there's an “if it ain't broke, don't fix it mentality” to some extent. And people will complain about how much it costs, but most people who live here have family and relatives who have lived here for a long, long time, and now is as good as its ever been, and we just rattle along the way it is.

A small number felt that the small population of the Island¹⁶ meant that electricity supply systems would always be expensive due to economies of scale and that diesel was the best option because it was suitable for the size of the community:

It all comes down to that technology being able to make it cheaper to operate whatever we choose to select to supply energy to such a small population. That is where we seem to fall over all the time - we are so small. 400 permanent residents. 300 guests, or 400 maximum guests, and so including staff is only about 800 people here. And I don't know, the only option that works economically at the moment is the diesel and that is with the support of the Australian government as well.

A small number of participants did not hold the current system in high regard, and felt that there was a need to modernise and improve it in general:

The powerhouse that is up here is a failure as far as I'm concerned. They have the wrong engines, and they are the most expensive engines you can buy, or just about the most expensive engines you can buy, they use the most fuel, they are the noisiest.

5.3.2 Solar hot water systems

The use of solar hot water systems on dwellings and tourist accommodation was reported to be high. Many participants were happy with the level of service that the systems had provided, and were comfortable with the technology:

Obviously there is the sun. Most of the time of the year the sun is out [sic]. Most people have got Solaharts¹⁷ or their solar hot water systems and as long as I can remember they've been there. So that's already being used as a form of saving energy. And I know at home probably more than nine months of the year I don't use power whatsoever to heat my water – it's purely solar. So obviously the sun could be very effective.

¹⁶ Around three hundred permanent residents

¹⁷ a brand of solar hot water heater common on the Island

One participant reported that he considered it to be more reliable than the electricity service:

It's great, yes; it's 15 years old and still running. I mean it costs you, you know, the initial cost. But after that, it's free, but it's just the fact that it's always going work. You don't have to rely on electricity for it to work, because the power over here can be finicky.

Some participants were unhappy with their solar hot water systems due primarily to occurrences of cold or luke-warm water in winter caused by shading and consumption of hot water outside periods of solar gain and boosting windows¹⁸. Some also complained of overproduction of hot water in summer:

...during winter it's a very fickle sort of system, because of the weather. I would say during winter, you'd probably still have to rely on electrical or a gas boosted solar hot water. So, I guess that would put a lot of pressure on power - on gas or the powerhouse, one way or the other. So, whether there is a better way of using, or maybe of increasing the solar output, you know, I don't know... it's good, but as I say sadly in winter you haven't got enough, and in summer you've got too much.

Some participants described how they had neglected their solar hot water systems by allowing vegetation to shade their collectors, or not repairing broken collectors. A minority of participants described using only the horizontally-mounted tank and booster as their system. Some complained that the panels accumulated salt from sea spray and this contributed to the corrosion of their systems or their rooves.

¹⁸ Boosting occurred in two windows and individual heaters were assigned to one of four "channels" to enable staggering of the increase in load. Boosting times were 10.30am, 11.00, 11.30 and 12.00 noon to 5.00pm for the first window, and 9.30pm, 10.30, 11.30, and 12.30am until before dawn for the second window.

5.3.3 Gas

Almost all cooking on the Island is done by gas, and most participants were happy with the service it provided. Some participants reported that occasionally members of the community complain about the increasing cost of gas, but most are “resigned to the fact” that it is an “unavoidable” cost.

Some participants reported that there was an increasing uptake of gas heaters due to perceptions that they offered a better service, and more reliable hot water for a similar cost to solar hot water systems. However, participants reported that the use of gas hot water heaters was small in comparison to solar systems.

5.3.4 Vehicle use

Vehicle use on the Island was topical at the time of interviews. Many interview participants commented on issues relating to the number and usage of vehicles on the Island, and the level of control exercised by the Lord Howe Island Board by restricting the importation of vehicles. Many participants felt that switching to alternative transport fuels or electric vehicles was not a priority because air quality on the Island was good:

So, with traffic, the issues that are coming up with transport are principally around public safety, amenity, and economics, not around pollution. Public amenity is a kind of pollution, people don't want to see too many cars and there is a certain aural pollution around hearing cars and all that sort of stuff, but air quality is not an issue.

A small number of participants complained about the cost of fuel on the Island for terrestrial and marine transportation. However, due to the small road network (around 13 km of road), travel distances were short, and fuel expenditure was low. Most participants bought fuel in two hundred litre drums, and it was reported that these lasted for some time:

But really a 200 L drum goes for some months - on the mainland that would last a week or two.

A small number of participants reported that the Lord Howe Island Board conducted a survey on public opinion of vehicle usage on the Island and found that:

“people all felt there were too many vehicles here, but were not willing to part with their own vehicles”

Participants involved with tourism were generally concerned about the number of vehicles on the Island. They cited evidence that tourists saw common vehicle usage as a negative aspect to holidaying on the Island:

Vehicle numbers in use on the Island is a major concern to the Island administration and the Tourism Association, which is the industry body that represents everyone. The vehicle use on the Island is one of the few but most major negative complaints that visitors have to the Island. They perceive that there are too many vehicles, too large and so the concept of smaller cleaner electric vehicles I'm sure would sit much better with our main clientele.

5.4 Alternative energy options

There was generally a high level of interest and engagement in the topic of alternative energy. Almost all participants were in favour of further investigation of alternatives, and believed that long term, the Island would need to find a primary source of energy other than diesel fuel. There was no consensus within the study population on which energy options were most appropriate for the Island. Participants presented arguments for or against different energy options. In this section I present the range of opinions expressed on different energy options. I begin by outlining participants' attitudes to alternatives in general, and then give more detailed descriptions of their attitudes to upgrading the existing diesel system, wind energy, solar photovoltaics, marine technologies, nuclear energy, improving energy efficiency and vehicle usage.

5.4.1 Alternatives in general

Most participants were in favour of alternatives in general. They thought alternative energy options were generally good for the island, but should only be adopted if they were proven to be cheaper, equally or more reliable, and have less environmental impact than established energy options.

Many participants were attracted to renewable forms of energy due to the abundance of resources on the Island. They saw a potential advantage in being able to harness local sources of energy rather than transporting energy to the Island:

Well, the Island has got three natural resources I guess and that's wind, water and solar, and ideally any one of those would be great, providing its going to fulfil all our requirements. Anything that's got to be transported to the Island's obviously going to be very expensive. So one of the natural resources that we have, I guess, if we can utilize that, it'd be the way to travel.

Most participants used cost, reliability and environmental performance as criteria for assessing the merits of both established and alternative energy options. One participant explained:

The punch line really is whatever is chosen, it has to be economically viable and reliable, and obviously environmentally friendly. And it really boils down to that.

Some participants held conservative views on energy development and were risk averse. They were concerned that the island could potentially invest in an energy option that would not deliver what was promised by proponents and may not be a long-term solution for the Island. They felt the need to switch to an alternative was not urgent due to the adequacy of the diesel generation system, and a decision should only be made to switch to “well proven” and “better” options:

We have to find it, but we shouldn't jump unless it is going to be a long-term answer.

Most interview participants were concerned about how much alternative energy systems would cost and who would pay for them. Many believed alternatives would be more expensive than the existing diesel production system, and this explained why the community had not adopted alternatives. There was a general concern that due to the particular circumstances of the community with regard to its size, population, remoteness, dependency on tourism and other factors, a decision to invest in an alternative energy system would need to be carefully considered. Different participants made these comments:

You can't afford to go wrong anywhere, but here in particular you've got to get it right. Because if you import a particular technology and infrastructure associated with it, you are going to spend a lot of money if it is not right.

This community is very cost conscious, and I would suggest that if something is a great idea environmentally or socially or whatever, if it doesn't mean a dollar benefit to them, it would be difficult to implement.

Some participants were concerned about the maturity of different energy technologies. They were sensitive to the idea of being used as “guinea pigs”, and reported that they were wary of proponents of some alternative energy technologies (marine technologies in particular) who had marketed their products to the Island without full disclosure of the maturity of the technology. These participants felt that immature alternative energy technologies that were not considered to be “proven” technologies were unsuitable for the Island:

... the main thing [is that] people want something that is going to work. They don't want to be caught with a white elephant so to speak.

A small number of participants were generally interested in alternatives and thought the community should stay informed about the technological development of energy options. They generally believed that research and development into alternative energy options was advancing, and new options that could deliver cheaper abundant sources of electricity could be invented in the near future. One participant made these comments:

There could be some form of energy generation that comes along that nobody's even thought of yet. You don't know do you, you really don't.

There was a perception amongst a small number of participants that alternative energy technologies would not deliver all that was expected of them by some members of the community. These participants reported that some members of the community held alternatives in high regard without having a sound understanding of the technologies

and what they could offer. These members of the community saw alternatives as a panacea for the Island's energy needs. One participant made this comments:

I think there would be, there would be benefits in it. Not as much as what a lot of people think. There would be limitations on its use, but I think it would be viable.

5.4.2 Upgrading the diesel generation system

Many participants felt upgrading the diesel generation system could provide benefits for the Island such as greater efficiency and reduced fuel consumption. However, these participants felt it was unwise to invest in a system of generation that committed the community to paying rising fuel costs. They felt upgrading the diesel engines was a short-term fix that deferred making a decision on alternative energy options. A small number of participants felt that upgrading the existing diesel engines to more efficient models was an attractive option due to the short payback period:

I think if you look at the payback period for energy-efficient diesels, it is probably in the order of two years. So it is much more attractive in the short term.

A small number of participants reported that the skill base on the Island was oriented towards diesel generation, and therefore upgrading the engines was an "easier" option than switching to alternatives:

people here are used to diesel generation, we are comfortable with how we maintain that generation, how we fuel that generation. Reducing the fuel consumption in those diesels markedly, which would bring down the cost of fuel, and maybe the cost of power to the residents, to me, is a highly attractive option at this stage. It doesn't have the same degree of pain that the wind tower or solar for that matter would incur.

5.4.3 Wind energy

The most common view on the Island was that wind energy was an attractive form of energy generation for the Island, but had negative aspects associated with it in regard to aesthetic impact, noise and bird kills. Most participants viewed it as an environmentally friendly source of energy and felt that if it was proven to be a reliable and cheap, it would be a good option for the community. There was also a common acknowledgement that sections of the community would not support wind energy. Some participants were concerned about storm damage and the effects of turbulence on wind turbines, whilst a small number were concerned about the availability of appropriately sized wind turbines for the community.

Many participants favoured of wind energy development due to the availability of wind resources, and due to general observations that the wind was almost constantly blowing on the Island:

I think probably wind is, when you consider everything wind is probably one of the things that we've got all the time. It's very rare you get a still day so you would have to say that would probably be the one thing that stands out to be the most sensible to use.

Many participants were in favour of installing wind turbines, but held the view that a vocal minority in the community would object, and prevent its use:

... its that old story, no one wants them in their backyard. I mean if they want to put them in my backyard they're welcome, it won't happen, but you know, I would have no problem with the eyesore.

Others felt that the only way to determine the community's reaction to the idea of wind energy was to come up with a firm proposal:

I have spoken to a few people. There are some that would like to see [wind energy] tried, there are others that wouldn't like to see it at all. It's pretty much an even balance type of thing in that regard. You wouldn't really know, I don't think, until they knew that it was really going to happen whether they would be opposed to it or not.

Most participants regarded noise, aesthetic impacts, and bird kills as the three most significant objections the community would have to wind energy. Different participants made these comments:

I've had mixed reactions from different people when you start talking about wind turbines, and the biggest negative comment is noise, and also the aesthetic appeal doesn't appeal much to some people.

I have read somewhere too that one of the drawbacks of them is that they do chew up birds. Over here, particularly where most of the birds here are protected, and we do have as you know, a hell of a lot of seabirds at various times of the year, and things like that. I think there might be an unacceptably high kill rate too. It wouldn't look good in a World Heritage listed place if we are chewing up the local fauna at an alarming rate.

Some participants were cynical of members of the community who objected to wind energy development on environmental grounds, and viewed some of the reasons why people objected as spurious. One participant felt that the argument for wind turbines killing birds was unfair:

I think the considerations would be cost one, eyesight [sic], you know, the scenery two, and the birds last. Given the number of mutton birds' people run over, and kill on their barbed wire fences and so forth, I don't think people really care that much about it. They use it as an excuse if they want to stop someone doing something for another reason, but there aren't many people here who have a real concern for the birds. It's different from people taking in a chick as a pet. Concern for the species is fairly hard to find.

Some participants viewed wind energy as a trade-off between the benefit of having a “clean” source of energy, and the drawbacks of aesthetic impact, noise and effects on fauna:

a large wind generator here, I think to some extent might be out of context, which is what we have been trying to do for years and years, which is trying to hide all the buildings. So that's just a very interesting situation, where you could get clean energy, but at a price.

Some participants were concerned that it was not possible to buy wind turbines of an appropriate size for the Island:

I've heard that the drama with wind is that it's tried and proved, but the production models of those three bladed turbines are either too big or too small. They make little ones for yachts and huge ones for cities, but not intermediate ones for little Islands. But I don't know further technological ins and outs.

Several participants were concerned wind turbines may be damaged by extreme weather events, and recounted stories of severe storms that have hit the Island. A small number of participants felt that wind turbulence would be a problem for wind turbines and described how sometimes wind socks at either end of the local runway could point in opposite directions. One participant expressed his concern for the effects of turbulence on a potential wind turbine on the Island:

I don't really think a wind generator is an option here its just too turbulent. You know, we are surrounded by mountains and it's just savage on, well aeroplanes for starters, but you know the things have got pretty big props, and I think they would have trouble.

A small number of participants did not like certain aspects of wind energy, but saw it as the only realistic future option for the Island, and therefore acceptable:

The general feeling among the people that I've spoken to is that a) they don't like the idea of the noise, and they don't like the idea of the appearance, the aesthetics of it. But if there's no other alternative, then where do we go? We'll start paying three or four or five dollars a litre for petrol, which is quite possible. Then it becomes a non-viable proposition.

5.4.4 Solar Photovoltaics

Many participants were in favour of solar photovoltaics, and saw it as a proven, low impact source of “clean” energy. There was a familiarity with solar collectors from the long history of hot water systems on the Island, and general observations that the solar resource on the Island was good. It was seen as a non-obtrusive technology that could be installed on existing structures, requiring little maintenance due to the absence of moving parts:

Well, it is clean, it is not as visual, well, as I said, you will get periods well, you will get long periods where there is no wind, but you don't get the same sorts of periods where there is no sun. Initially solar may be a little bit more expensive to set up. I think there is less maintenance; there is a longer period of uninterrupted supply. You haven't got the problems that you've got with mechanical things. And, it has just been proven everywhere else in my view. Most of the ports around Australia use it for lighting systems and so on, I don't think there is any limits to it here. It could be either done on a private basis, or it could be done by the government putting arrays of solar on all their buildings around the Island, and it wouldn't be too unsightly either. There are lots of innovative things now, they have got sheeting that just looks like roofing but its solar. While it is a little bit expensive, I don't think with the cost of fuel and the way it is going these days, you would soon have your money back... So I don't know, I'd favour solar myself.

A small number of participants were opposed to solar photovoltaics because of the perceived high cost of the technology, visual aspects, land availability, and the fact that it would not work at night. There was concern amongst a small number that rooves on the Island would not be suitable for solar photovoltaics due to shading from trees, and also that solar panels have the potential to accumulate salt from the wind, and corrode rooves. Different participants made these comments:

No, I can't see - solar is all right for hot water. But for generating power, I don't think it is... you've got a cover such a big area to get it to work.

I think solar is more or less out of the question because not only will it fail on cloudy days to produce much at all, but at night it will produce bugger all. And if you are going to hang your hat on that, then you would even more need storage.

Rooves here are impractical. The Board itself with its buildings doesn't have the area to get that size of an array. So you would be looking for contributions by the public to have solar panels on their rooves into the grid. No, we wouldn't be able to accommodate it on rooves here. The other issue with the rooves, as you are probably aware, is that most houses are surrounded by trees. There is quite a lot of shadow, and that is the way we like to maintain the Island. We like to hide our houses and make the most of the vegetation.

A minority of participants were not in favour of solar photovoltaics because the daily period of high solar yield did not coincide with peak demand on the Island:

the sun is not out when we have our peak demand periods

5.4.5 Marine Technologies

Many participants described their general observations of the power of the ocean as a general stimulus to their thinking on marine energy technologies. Participants described the constant swell and the tidal flow that occurred through the lagoon on the

Island, and cited these as possible “limitless” and “predictable” (for tidal) sources of energy. Many saw this as a large untapped resource that could hold potential for future ocean marine technologies such as wave, tidal and ocean current. However, almost all of these participants believed that marine energy technologies were immature, unproven, and not suitable for the Island:

There is tidal and waves and all those sorts of things, but they tend to be in the early stages of development and because of our remoteness we are not a good site to trial those things. It is not easy to get here, and they are the sort of things that should be used where it is relatively accessible for installation and maintenance of all those sorts of things.

5.4.6 Nuclear Energy

A small number of participants were in favour of implementing nuclear energy on the Island. Amongst these participants it was regarded as an energy option that could have potential negative consequences, but if “done right” would be a small facility producing very little waste that could provide the Island with an almost limitless source of clean, cheap energy:

There's a very good article in the Reader's Digest. And I think after reading that, [nuclear] is the way to go. He said, the generator for Lord Howe, you would put it in a garbage bin - that's how big it would be. The amount of fuel it would use would be so small, you could carry it in your pocket. And the waste would be almost nothing, and the cost would be nothing once it was set up and we would have enough power, well, unlimited power for Lord Howe. And it would be a good test in place for those sorts of things. And with all the greenhouse gases and all the other problems that coal and oil and other generating things cost, and the problems they cause, nuclear is great. If it's done properly. You couldn't leave it to... it has to be done right.

Supporters of a nuclear energy option felt that the public perception of nuclear energy was poor, and that although this was a problem, it could be overcome with education and objective reporting of information:

public perception is the main [problem], and disposal of the waste, and I don't think any of those things are insurmountable. Public perception would be the main one.

Many participants were strongly opposed to the idea of nuclear energy on the Island primarily due to fears of an accident, and issues relating to the transport and management of radioactive waste. Several participants were also concerned about the efficiency and cost of energy from a nuclear facility:

Well, for a start, there is no way to dispose of the waste. An accident, and there have been a hell of a lot more accidents than the mainstream media will ever discuss, would be incredibly catastrophic here. From what I've read about nuclear energy, it's inefficient, and it requires massive government subsidies so we're not going anywhere. We are not generating greenhouse gases, but we are creating a whole different set of problems in spent fuel rods that are there with us for ever. They put them in drums and cover them in concrete. Great - that is sophisticated. I mean not to mention the chance of an accident.

5.4.7 Energy efficiency

Practical energy efficiency measures suitable for households and businesses were generally unknown to most participants, and efficiency did not appear to be a priority for many participants. Many participants said they made an effort to turn off lights and limit consumption by not using appliances unless necessary, but were generally not aware of measures that could be taken to improve the efficiency of their houses or businesses:

Ahh well you try to, we use more energy efficient lighting, and that's probably about as far as you can go, you know, well refrigeration, I guess they've got power aided refrigeration, but when it comes to the hospitality industry, I guess tourists don't care much about what its costing us, as long as they can have the luxury of their lights and their refrigerator and their washing machine and iron and all the things that they are used to over on the mainland. So what do you do? Say you cant use the iron, you cant boil the jug. So I don't think there's any energy efficient iron, there may be. Maybe the Island should be made more aware of energy efficient appliances. As far as I know there is a very limited number of energy efficient appliances. Like a washing machine is a washing machine as far as I am concerned or a fridge is a fridge.

Some thought that most members of the community were relatively affluent, and therefore energy efficiency measures would be successful on the Island only if they could be implemented quickly on a significant scale to show large decreases in bills. There was a sentiment that if they were introduced in a series of incremental programs, and residents couldn't see a dramatic change in their energy bills, then energy prices would be absorbed by the community and efficiency measures would not be widely adopted by the community:

If you could do something suddenly, if you could say change their house overnight for a period of three months and show them the difference in their bill, I think that would work. But it would have to be not a gradual thing and anything that happens will probably happen gradually because people are going to say to them well take all these bloody light globes out and put in LEDs or put in these fluoros or whatever, and that will happen over a relatively long time space. And they won't see the saving that they have achieved. If it could be done suddenly and they could see the saving maybe it would work.

Interview participants from the Lord Howe Island Board were keen on establishing systems to encourage energy efficiency, and at the time of study were embarking on a tender process to engage consultants to run an energy efficiency awareness program.

There was a general sentiment that the consumption of energy was an important part of any energy supply system:

I think it doesn't matter so much how you generate power, it's how people consume it that counts the most, because of people continue to consume a particular way, no matter what system you produce for them, they are going to put inappropriate demands on it, and that's why there needs to be some social shape at the end of it, so people decide.

5.4.8 Electric vehicles

Some participants reported that there was significant interest in the use of electric vehicles on the Island several years prior to interviews, but this had diminished due to increases in the pricing of electricity used for transportation. Since the change in price, electric vehicles had not been pursued as a transport option. Many participants felt that whilst the use of electric vehicles was dependent on electricity generated from burning diesel fuel, there was no advantage in using them. A small number of participants felt that other factors such as noise, local pollution and impact on roads were significant, and that the use of electric vehicles should be encouraged:

At the moment, of course you are burning diesel, but you are going to be burning fossil fuels anyhow, but electric cars are dead silent, there are more factors than just energy you know. Smaller, and quieter and lighter, so they have less impact on the roads, and it all gets back to energy

Short travelling distances was also cited as a reason to support their increased use:

Certainly the major advantage that we've got here, of course is that we don't have great distances to travel so that's the only limitation really with electric vehicles - the range you know, but it's not there to be an issue if you've only got 13 km of road. So technology, even at this stage is adequate, but getting better all the time.

5.5 Aspects of change

Energy issues were important to most participants. Most participants acknowledged that electricity supply was an essential service that was crucial for maintaining standards of living on the Island. However, there were many other issues facing the community, and whilst the diesel generation system was providing electricity, finding alternative energy options was an important, but not a critical issue. Nevertheless, many participants believed a change should be made, and saw the rising cost of fuel, system failures and a growing sense of environmental responsibility as drivers for change. Participants expressed views on a number of factors that they felt had inhibited change. These were the continuation of subsidies for the system of electricity generation, the lack of knowledge and understanding within the community of alternative energy options, recent negative experiences with infrastructure development and privatisation on the Island and the historical context in which energy development has occurred.

5.5.1 Importance of energy issues

Many participants described a “dynamic situation” of revolving political issues on the island where new contentious and pressing issues would often overtake existing issues. Old issues would only resurface if they were stimulated by new developments. They reported that the community typically reacts to changes implemented by the Lord Howe Island Board rather than setting the agenda.

The development of alternative energy options was an ongoing issue that had been “on the books” for many years. The importance and intensity of the debate would reportedly increase in response to developments such as the delivery of a consultant’s report, or the submission of a business proposal. A State Government led investigation of renewable energy options and a fuel shortage on Norfolk Island prior to interviews had stimulated debate within the community. However, at the time of interviews, issues

surrounding land tenure, the management and control of vehicles on the Island, and the implementation of sanctuary zones in the Marine Park (and its impact on fishing quotas) dominated the local political landscape. Most participants believed these issues were more important in the short term than finding alternative energy options. They believed finding alternative energy option was still an important issue, but it was not as critical and immediate as others.

Many participants thought that if there was no electricity supply it would become an urgent issue for the Island to address:

Well, if we didn't have any electricity, come tomorrow it would feature very highly - focus everyone's minds very smartly. It is one of those things you take for granted. You flick the switch and the light comes on. You don't think about it that much.

Some participants felt the Lord Howe Island Board was often busy with many other matters regarding the management of the Island, and while it was functioning, the electricity system was not a high priority for them:

[the Lord Howe Island Board have] got a lot of other things on their plate and if things are running well why muck around?

5.6 Drivers for change

Many participants thought there should be a change to the current system of electricity generation. These participants thought change would be driven by one or several of the following factors: increasing fuel costs and pressure from the community from increasing electricity bills, power failures, fuel shortages local noise and air pollution, and a sense of environmental responsibility. Not all participants were convinced these 'problems' were of concern, and in each case, some participants held contrary views.

5.6.1 Increasing fuel costs and electricity bills

Many participants saw the rising cost of fuel, resource scarcity and the cost of transporting fuel as reasons why diesel was not a suitable long-term form of electricity production:

Mainly the cost - getting the diesel here via a ship is expensive; the method of bringing it in in drums. And just in terms of world resources, it is going to get scarcer and scarcer, so if there is some renewable type of fuel that is available on the Island, it not only saves depleting the world resources, but saves that transport cost as well.

Many participants reported that electricity and gas bills on the Island were large, and that they were fearful of them increasing in the future due to increases in the cost of fuel. One participant reported:

Well I think that people are concerned about the present cost of electricity. I can't tell you exactly how much it is, but it's not cheap. And it wont get any cheaper, its going to get more expensive, particularly with the fuel cost going up, and I'd say that it will happen very shortly, and they'll start to think about some alternative, well that maybe there should be some alternative means of power generation. There's an ageing population on the Island, and they're not all that keen to see increases in their electricity costs.

Many participants were aware of the impact that higher fuel prices had on their way of life. One participant was concerned about its impact on fishing:

I mean, it is getting to the stage where with fuel its making fish very expensive, you cant go fishing, you know, it is all these things, and at all comes back to diesel, and I don't know. People will be going back to fishing off the rocks, and off the beach, because it's too expensive to take a boat out too far.

A minority of participants said they would be willing to pay more for electricity from a more environmentally friendly source. Many participants felt that if the community could be convinced that alternative energy options would provide cheaper electricity than established energy options, they would be readily accepted:

Well, the cost thing could be an issue if it is found out that it could actually be a saving. That will be a big driving force.

Whilst many participants were concerned about the increasing cost of fuel, some participants appeared to be resigned to the fact that their bills would be high. They viewed the expense as unavoidable. One participant explained:

[electricity] costs a lot of money, but you've got to use it. You've got to pay for it, its just one of those things. Where you can, you pass on some of the costs basically, but you've got to have it. You don't think about it, you just use it. It doesn't bother me; it's not something I spend all day worrying about. Its just you got to have it, you've got to pay for it.

A small number of participants felt that electricity was good value for the service it provided, and when equated to a cost per day, was not significant:

Generally, I don't think power is a huge component of a person's budget. If it works out at a couple of bucks a day, that is not, people when they get their bill, complain about the size of their bill, but when you relate it back to dollars per day, it is inconsequential. It is less than a middy of beer on the Island. And, I don't think that therefore in general, people are overly concerned about that, I think power in any area is value for money. It is good value for money. When they do get a high bill, everyone is concerned about it until they mellow out again and think to themselves well that only cost me two bucks a day and that is not very much.

5.6.2 Power failures

Much of the debate surrounding alternative sources of energy arose from poor systems of demand management and electricity distribution that resulted in a high frequency of blackouts during summer months. Many participants saw this as a reason to switch to alternative energy options. Most participants commented on power failures. Some described having several blackouts a day, whilst others reported having them every few weeks. Those living in areas remote from the central distribution ring appeared to have a high frequency of failures compared to those connected to the ring, and certain lines appeared to have more failure than others:

... some complain more than others, but some are affected more. We, down here are pretty close to the power station on a main line, suffer considerably less power outages than people out on the ends of lines. So even when we had the really bad outages that went on for a week or so, we were only losing it for a couple hours at a time, out for two on for ten, whereas some of the others were out for ten and on for two. If that was us, we'd have been squealing more.

Some participants reported that pressure to improve the electricity system has come from tourist operators who receive complaints from tourists:

the tourists complain to the lodge owners, and then it becomes an issue because they are so upset about it.

Tourist operators recounted experiences of serving dinner to large numbers of guests (upwards of 100), and having power failures that caused problems for lighting, cooking, water supply from pressure pumps and the general operation of restaurants and hotels. Some operators reported having multiple failures in the same night, resulting in tourists who were upset with the level of service for which they had paid.

Some participants arrived at the conclusion that reliability of supply and cost would be the ultimate factors governing change:

Why are we trying to produce more sustainable and cleaner power? It is very good question. I mean obviously there is a broader ethic involved where it is desirable. And if you could say it might be cheaper, that would be great, but it's not going to be, or I doubt it very much. So it is not about price. I think at the end of the day, it has got to be about, here, about efficient power generation so that people get a good smooth reliable supply.

Whilst many participants reported frustration at the power failures, they also reported that the reliability of the system had increased in recent years, and this had allayed concerns of members of the community. One participant explained that the improved reliability of the service had diminished the community's desire to pursue change on energy options:

I think [members of the community] were more concerned with having the power irregularly off for an hour or a couple of hours. I think that hurt. But now that is not happening and probably isn't likely to happen in the future... so I expect it has gone out of their minds. They are used to their power bill, okay so it has gone up by little bit, but it only ever goes up by little bits. They grizzle for a week or a month and then nothing. I think that will continue... I think it will become a non-issue for locals. I think it will be if anything, governments will want to push it rather than the locals. That is my gut feeling. I think the locals should push it.

5.6.3 The environment

Some participants who supported alternative energy for environmental reasons felt that there should be a change in the energy system to improve the environmental credentials of the Island. There was a sentiment that most other environmental issues facing the Island had been addressed and energy remained an outstanding issue:

Our waste recycling is a model system, and our environmental management, our permanent Park preserve, our marine parks will be model environmental Systems, but our energy system is just archaic at the moment and basically hasn't changed... And as you know, there has been an enormous amount of research, and none has actually grafted onto what is happening. So I think it is one, and I include vehicle transport on the Island. Because part of the energy problem - I think that's probably our one big remaining environmental problem to be dealt with, which is outstanding.

Some participants were motivated to switch to more environmentally friendly energy options in order to better align the community with World Heritage values, and also to address their concerns regarding climate change:

I think two things, well, firstly we're a World Heritage environment, and it would just be excellent to say we are running largely on renewable energy. And secondly, one of the consequences of global warming is rising sea levels, and we are an Island. So I think it behoves us to be seen to be doing everything that we can to minimise the consequences of global warming.

Participants involved in the tourist industry generally valued the environmental credentials of the Island. They felt that an environmentally friendly energy system would contribute to the Island's image as an environmentally pristine destination and provide benefits for tourism:

Basically we live off the tourist industry and we all know that if we wreck the Island we are not going to get as many tourists. That's an important economic driver as well. So everything that the Island can do to enhance its environmental credentials really is going to underpin that tourist economy. Because whilst visitors mightn't come here because we've got a waste recycling facility, if there was a news article to say that the lagoon was polluted because we were badly disposing of our waste, then people wouldn't come here. And the fact that we do dispose of a garbage carefully is just one small fact added in with the tourist literature. Obviously, if we were running this Island largely from renewable energy that would be something that would be widely advertised in our brochures and

things. And no single thing - garbage disposal, waste water management, renewable energy is really going to pull tourists in their own right, but the whole image of the Island as a clean and green, beautifully protected Island will pull visitors from all over the world.

In terms of environmental issues, some participants felt that energy supply was a less important than waste management because apart from local air and noise pollution, there were very few tangible effects of producing electricity from diesel. These participants felt that energy was a less “pressing” issue than many others such as weed control which has more visible effects on the local environment:

I think there have been more pressing issues with the environment, you have the issues of feral plant and animal work on the Island has been on the forefront for the last few years. The Board have done a great job there, and that has been a major focus. The issue of the settlement area planning has been very much a big issue too.

Some participants reported that older members of the community were generally less aware of and interested in environmental issues, and were not motivated to switch to alternative energy options for environmental reasons. One participant explained:

[attitude to the environment] is more [dependent] on age-group and we are a bit more informed perhaps than what [the older generation] were. And it has always been fine to them, and they are not as aware of the environment, or they haven't been. They are, but having said that, they have preserved most of the Island as it is. But with things like energy and waste, and things like that, and they are of the mentality that it is fine.

5.6.4 Inhibitors of change

Participants raised a number of issues that they felt inhibited change in decision-making on energy options on the Island. Awareness within the community of the level of the degree to which the system of electricity production was subsidised was low. Most of those that were aware of the subsidies felt that they “sheltered” the community from having to make decisions on alternative energy options, and development was unlikely to occur unless the subsidies were lessened or removed. Many participants felt the general knowledge and understanding of energy options within the community was poor, and there was a need to educate and inform members of the community on key aspects of alternative energy options before they could have an informed debate and make a collective decision. Some participants felt the lack of effective demonstration systems on the Island had inhibited change, and that if people could see alternative energy options working first hand, they would support their development. Some participants mentioned the troublesome history of infrastructure development on the Island. They cited the development of the Island’s waste management centre, and rebuilding of the Island jetty as recent examples of infrastructure developments that have caused financial and operational problems for the community. They felt these experiences weighed heavy in the collective consciousness of the community, and that some members would be hesitant to make a decision to invest in alternative energy options. There was opposition to the privatisation of Island assets among most participants, and many saw previous efforts to develop alternative energy options through private organisations as unproductive. They felt the community would not accept “outside” ownership of Island electricity assets. And finally, some participants felt that the humble beginnings of the electricity system, and the history of its development played an important role in contemporary discussion and decision-making on alternative energy option. These participants could remember times when energy services on the Island were very basic, and were grateful for the established energy

options, which provided generally good service. These participants were less inclined to alter or switch from established energy options.

5.6.5 Subsidies for electricity

Many participants were aware that the Island was heavily subsidized by the NSW State Government, but were not aware of subsidies awarded to the existing system of diesel generation. A small number were aware that the system was subsidised to some degree. A minority knew details of the different subsidies and their approximate amounts. Of participants aware of the subsidies, most viewed them as the biggest reason why there has been little change in the current system. They thought that alternatives would be investigated if the subsidy was removed. Different participants made these comments

the cost structure of fuel and the subsidy here has just made it the easy option just to carry on as it is.

if people paid the real price for electricity, they would very soon become very interested in alternatives. Again, not environmentally, you know the greenhouse emissions don't enter into it, just the price. And so I think that will be the driver, and I think the corollary is that it hasn't been the driver, so that's why nothing has happened. There's no real urgency to do anything while someone else is paying \$700,000 a year for your fuel.... More next year if the price keeps going.

Some thought the subsidies would continue into the future, primarily because it would be politically unpopular to remove them, and this would result in little change in the current system:

my feeling is that [the subsidies] will continue certainly into the foreseeable future, if not into the never-never. They will increase. The cost of fuel is a biting issue across the landscape, I can't see them doing anything to reduce the subsidies that we've got. My understanding is that the infrastructure we have on the Island has been updated fairly recently, sometime in the last two or three

years even. And as such, you would expect that it is going to last into the foreseeable future. The current attitude on development would suggest to me that demand is probably not going to increase dramatically. So I could foresee a situation where we could bumble along quite happily for the next 20 years, 25 years without too much drama as long as the Board did continue to get the subsidies and didn't push too much of a "user pay" back onto the community sort of like as you say - if you start doing that they will look at alternatives. And that may well be the best thing for everybody. But who knows, but I could see how it could continue on like it does for a long time.

Some participants were opposed to the amount of funding the Island received from external sources. They felt that this could cause problems for the community if it becomes too heavily reliant on funding. There was also an element of independence that some participants felt, and a sentiment that the more funding the Island received from abroad, the more beholden it was to the control of external organisations, thereby diminishing the Island community's ability to control its future:

We might get more grants from the government to do that, but it is not the way to go ahead. The government one-day is going to come along and say "hey, what are we doing giving all this money to Lord Howe Island?" And they are going to say "no we're not doing that". And it will land back here, and we won't be able to afford it. We'll be stuck. Or we will be on this government drip from the rest of eternity and I don't see it is the right way for the Island to go. We would just become more and more reliant on the government or the hierarchy of the Board.

Some participants felt the amount of funding the Island received was ultimately a hindrance to the Island's development, and thought removing subsidies may be beneficial by forcing the Island to become self sufficient:

Well you know I'd be really unpopular on the Island for saying so, but I think that the best thing that could happen for this place is to take the subsidies away, and then people would get together and would think "OK lets get sensible about it, the crunch has come. What are we going to do for now and for the future?"

5.6.6 Knowledge of energy options

Most participants were familiar with the existing diesel generation system due to the small size of the community and personal contact with the powerhouse and its operators. However, many participants felt they lacked sufficient knowledge and information on alternative energy options to be able to have an informed discussion or make decisions. Many felt there was a need to increase the knowledge and understanding of alternative energy options within the community.

Most participants had a good understanding of established energy options, and were generally aware of energy issues. Many had a good basic understanding of the system of electricity supply, and were familiar with the concept of burning diesel through generators to produce electricity at the powerhouse:

Well it's a different situation there I reckon, because we're sort of, I don't know, we're such a small Island we know exactly where our power station is, everyone knows where the power station is, we know the people who run it. We know that it's, every time a ship comes in we see thousands of gallons of fuel get put into the tanks and that. So we know where it's generated, we know when there's a blackout that [the powerhouse staff] or someone have to go up and fix it. So it's a lot more personal because everyone knows everyone on the Island so we're just more interested I guess. On the mainland no one would know where the power station is.

Many participants were not confident in their knowledge and understanding of alternative energy options. These participants felt there was a lack of easily comprehensible information on general aspects and impacts of alternative energy options. Participants wanted to see an “objective”, simple, comprehensive analysis of energy options. They wanted to see a comparison of the costs, impacts, advantages and disadvantages of different options. Some participants were critical of the type of

information that had been supplied to the community through newspapers, “householders”¹⁹ or specific reports. They felt the technical analysis was relatively meaningless, and did not really assist them in forming their opinions. Different participants made these comments:

... you need to know the efficiency and the running costs and I've never seen any of that. What are the costs of running a wind turbine? What is the maintenance program? How does it work? Does it need somebody to go out and look at it every day? Or what does it need? How big does it have to be? All those sorts of things. That information, that is what you need to be able to talk about whether it is suitable for the Island?

I think it is quite an interesting thing you are doing [interviews], looking at the sort of social aspect side of the energy whereas all the previous studies have been looking at the hardware, nuts and bolts, and figures and statistics. I think it may help soften the community's acceptance of an alternative energy system by having this project take place instead of a report saying the wind generator will provide so many kilowatt hours at ex dollars and be plonked on the Island.

Many participants explained that their knowledge and understanding of energy systems was based on information they had gained primarily from television and print media. Secondly it was sourced from talking to members of the community and tourists, or from the Lord Howe Island Board through the distribution of householders or articles in the local newspaper. Several interview participants cited an article in Readers Digest about nuclear energy that had been shown to them by a friend, and explained how this article had shaped their views on the subject. Some recounted stories of having informative discussions on energy issues with tourists professionally involved with energy operations such as diesel powerhouse operators or diesel mechanics.

¹⁹ “Householders” were short printed communications deposited in each of the centrally located post office boxes. There was no mail delivery service, and post boxes were the only method of receiving mail on the Island. Contacts reported that they reached every household.

5.6.7 Lack of demonstration systems

Some participants felt that there was a need for demonstrations of domestic sized energy production units to convince the community of their merits. They explained that the community is a “hands-on” type community, that learns from seeing things in action rather than reading about them. They thought that because alternatives are new technologies, people would need to see them working in order to accept them:

Might need an initial demonstration, I think, with new technology of that scale anyway, sort of household scale technology to get people to be enthusiastic about it. Because again, it is something totally new and people are just a bit reluctant I think to get their cheque-books, to write cheques, unless they can see that it's actually working. So a number of demonstration units, or a demonstration unit I think would be very helpful to try to get people to accept something.

A demonstration grid-connected solar PV system on the roof of the Island airport was well known to the community, but many participants explained that it has demonstrated very little because there has been very little information available, and there is no way of knowing how or what it is producing:

I don't think there's any problem there, except it just goes into the grid - I mean nobody knows what it's doing, or what it saving the Island. I mean, I'd love to see anything like that, it's good, but I think if it had been put on someone's house, and it had run the meter backwards and they'd had a \$50 power bill instead of a \$500 bill, it would have gone all around the Island. But when you don't actually know what that's doing... because I've enquired, I know that it puts out about seven or eight kilowatts at peak. But what tangible benefit is it to the total energy situation on the Island? I wouldn't have a clue. So it has never really been explained.

5.6.8 Recent examples of infrastructure development

Some participants felt that recent infrastructure development on the Island had caused problems for the community, and this coloured their views on the development of alternative energy projects.

The introduction of a vertical composting unit to the Island had led to financial and operational problems for the community. It was a relatively new technology and did not have an established performance history. Participants reported that when the waste management system was proposed, waste disposal fees were comparable to the existing tip fees. The system would supposedly not increase tip fees, and it was marketed with benefits such as production of compost, which would be provided for resident's gardens. However, at the time of interviews, tip fees had increased to five times their previous figure, and compost was not available due to health concerns regarding pathogens in the organic material. Some participants were therefore sceptical of the introduction of new technologies that were marketed with promises of increased amenity for reduced cost:

We got bitten with the dump, where they said you know you've got a grant to put it in, and then suddenly the dump fees went through the roof to pay for it. And after that experience I expect most of the community would be pretty sceptical of any plans to dump the diesel generators and put in a million dollar wind generator or something because they might tell you to pay separately... I'm not interested.

Many years prior to this study, the New South Wales²⁰ (NSW) State Government funded the rebuilding of the Island jetty. Participants reported that the project proceeded on the agreement that it was funded on a "permanent loan" basis, and that repayments were not required. Several years afterwards, there was a change in government in NSW, and the new government decided that repayments were required.

²⁰ The Australian State that administers the Island

A subsequent state government then cancelled the debt on the jetty. Participants reported that this series of events has destabilized the trust placed in the State Government, and left many residents sceptical of loans provided for infrastructure development on the Island:

I would want to see [a grant] in black and white signed by someone who has the ability to pay. Look! I listen to what you say, but we had this with the jetty! The jetty we've got at the moment! Someone who was sympathetic towards the Island said we will give you what is needed and build the jetty for you on a permanent loan basis. The next politician came along and he said you are not getting that for nothing! We want that money repaid. Now, I'm sorry but I have to say to you that there has been a history of this on the Island from time to time where governments of today do what they see fit, and will support you very strongly. But the next fellow who comes along, "Oh, I've got a lot more important things on my agenda than Lord Howe Island, and we want our money back". So how are you going to overcome that?... We have got to be very careful of committing ourselves to something like this because while it all looks very good, at the end of the day, somebody can come along who has got tight fingers in the Treasury and say we need to have the Island people pay for this. And then what would happen to us?

5.6.9 Privatisation

Many participants were opposed to the idea of privatising the Island's assets, including the Electricity Service. They were opposed to privatisation in general and cited examples on the Australian mainland and in Britain where privatisation had "failed".

Many participants resented previous proposals to privatisation of the Island's electricity supply system, and did not want to pursue the development of energy options in this way.

Many participants were opposed to privatisation primarily because they believed that private firms have a prerogative to cut costs, and consequently their service standards would diminish:

any private firm will look to cost cut to maintain profits or improve profits. And although they would go in with their hand on a Bible say "we won't", they would, in my view. Eventually.

A previous attempt to privatise the electricity service in 2001 failed due to a perception that a private company could not provide the same level of service as the Lord Howe Island Board. Participants reported that the proponent would not have staff on the Island, and therefore in the event of a breakdown, there would be delays whilst personnel were flown in:

the biggest drawback was that they were basically saying if there was a breakdown, well that was too bad, and they would fix it when they could, and then the Power would come back online. Well that is just not acceptable. I think that was another drawback that they had, if something went wrong they were going to fly someone in.

5.6.10 History of energy and electricity

Since the 1950s there has been significant development of energy options on the Island. The energy services progressed from basic cooking, water heating and lighting run from primary fuels to full reticulated electricity, gas and solar hot water heaters. The development of the electricity system in the 1970s was significant. Many participants were grateful for the improved standard of living that energy services provided, and some therefore did not feel the need to alter or improve established energy options.

Many participants who had lived on the Island before the introduction of reticulated electricity recounted narratives of the development of energy systems on the Island:

... when I was a boy [circa 1955], my Mum washed clothes in a fuel fired copper made out of a 44 gallon drum and a copper insert into the top of it. And she scrubbed things on a scrubbing board and she ironed with an old mother pot pie

type of iron, and eventually managed to get herself a kerosene fired iron. Wouldn't it be wonderful ironing clothes with a bloody blowtorch in your hand? Cooking was all on fuel stoves, lighting was kero lamps. And this puts me back 50 odd bloody years before mainland Australia. We were like 50 years behind them. So, no communications, very poor communications to the mainland, very poor medical facilities, very for poor practically everything. No refrigeration. It changed enormously in that time. Enormously! We are practically the same as our mainland counterparts today. Enormous change.

Some described the transition from lighting by candles and kerosene lamps to reticulated electricity:

My grandparents can still remember when we used to have kerosene lamps and lanterns. And I'm not sure what they call them, but they also had these petrol operated ones. You had to pump some up, and then they gave quite a big blow. I think they came after the kerosene lanterns, and I can even remember them using candles, way back then. Then we got our generator of course, that was the case with most people on the Island, had their own little generator. And they had their places wired, and had electricity for the first time. I don't suppose it was much more than the lights that we were probably able to have at first, and then I think it eventually got more sophisticated and we were able to have power points, and some kind of appliances, and then of course it got to the point where we had the general generator put in, and electricity became available to everybody.

Issues such as noise appeared not to bother some residents who had lived before electricity was available:

... people talk about the problem of the noise of the generators. Well I can tell you as one who lived here before there was ever generators, it is music to my ears. I don't regard it as a nuisance at all.

5.6.11 Who would make a change?

Almost all participants, whether in favour or change or not, felt that the Lord Howe Island Board would be involved in the possible development of alternative energy options. Almost all participants recognised that the Lord Howe Island Board was responsible for the generation of electricity, and they felt any change to established energy options would require its involvement. Some felt that members of the Lord Howe Island Board would or should take a leadership role to investigate and promote alternative energy options. Some felt that the long history of investigation of alternatives and very little change showed that the Lord Howe Island Board was unwilling or unable to instigate change and the community would have to pressure the Lord Howe Island Board into doing so. Some participants believed the development of alternative energy options would require intervention or assistance from the NSW State or Australian Federal Government.

One participant explained how he felt the Lord Howe Island Board was responsible for the investigation of alternatives:

Well I think [change] should come from our local government here, because they are responsible for the generators, they are responsible for the generating of the power, the maintenance of it, and therefore the cost and the management is all a cost to them. So one would think they would be always looking for better alternatives just to carry out their duty of servicing the community here. Having said that though, I don't think it hurts anyone to be involved as a citizen, or to have your say. But I do think that given that the Board runs it, and the Board at the moment calls the shots, the Board at the moment sets the price, the Board at the moment reckons they've got a commitment to try and keep living here as low as possible.

Participants managing financial resources at the Lord Howe Island Board reported that it is in a strong financial state due to its system of accrual accounting and the funds it has saved to account for depreciation in its assets. According one senior employee, it

is in a position to finance an alternative energy system with a cost of around one million dollars:

Well, in general, in general, yes, the Board would have the capacity to do that, the Board has a fair bit of money set aside, so I would think that most of that we could handle. Alternatively, a big capital outlay, we could probably do a deal with Treasury on either a loan as has happened in the past, or a 50-50 contribution type deal or something like that, say yes. I have no doubt that the Board has the financial capacity to fund a change in the energy source for the Island if it thinks it's the right thing to do.

Some thought the locally-elected Governing Board members²¹ would need to show leadership and initiate change:

it needs some leadership and that's where I see our elected members, our local Board members taking on some leadership and directing or certainly finding out, and then sort of directing or holding some community meetings and letting people know what is going on. Because I tend to think everyone has their head in the sand until suddenly it affects them. And if you have got local [Governing Board] members that are not prepared to take on some responsibility to inform us what is happening, I don't think you will see anything happening.

Some participants were disillusioned with the history of investigation of alternatives, and that the powerhouse had not significantly changed the way it operated since it was established in the 1950s. There was a sentiment that the Lord Howe Island Board was overly cautious about making a decision, and so addressed the issues by investigating options and writing reports rather than making a decision:

²¹ At the time of interviews, the Island was governed by a board consisting of seven members. There were four "elected members" or "local members" elected by the community, and three "mainland members", appointed by the New South Wales Minister for Environment and Conservation. For the purposes of this study, this board will be referred to as the "Governing Board".

We've got alternatives. I think its just a matter of someone making a decision to do it. And that's, I suppose, what it all boils down to. I mean someone's got to say yes, let's do it. Lets get the money and do it. Instead of saying let's make another report.

Some participants felt the Lord Howe Island Board would not act of its own accord, and the community would have to pressure the Board to instigate change:

I think the Board will be the ones who make the decision, but it will be the community that gets them cracking

Some thought that the Lord Howe Island Board did not act on developing alternative energy options because the community was not engaged with energy issues and did not make energy issues politically significant. These participants felt it was necessary to encourage the community the engage in energy issues as well as the Lord Howe Island Board:

I think it is often very difficult to get change simply from above, in a sense that you could have some brilliant sort of analysis, and technical solutions, but at some point, you've got to get people enthused about them, to actually take up this technology and support it. So, it has been a major problem here, but it hasn't filtered down into people's awareness and imagination as to what might be possible to improve the situation.

Some participants felt that the NSW state and the Australian Federal Governments should pressure the Lord Howe Island Board to instigate a change in the way electricity is produced:

I would just like to see progress, I don't care who it comes from. But I would have to say, the emphasis should mainly come from the mainland governments. It is in their interest for Lord Howe to be a bit of a showpiece, especially the Federal government. I mean they can make political mileage out of it. We would sit here

and smile and say how wonderful they are as long as we get something wonderful (chuckle), but they have got the resources, and I guess the State government is the one that is coughing up about a million bucks a year to maintain the status quo, so they have got a bit of an incentive there to look ahead.

5.7 The broader context

During interviews, topics of discussion often broadened to issues relating to the political and social landscapes of the Island. It became clear that issues relating to the development of energy options were couched in a much larger context. This context was influential at many levels to the discourse on energy options on the Island. In this section, I present participants' views and opinions on aspects of local politics and focus on the relationship between the Lord Howe Island Board and the community. I also discuss participants' views on a range of other issues. These include: outside involvement in the affairs of the Island, custodianship of the Island, its status as a World Heritage listed site, issues relating to land tenure, the standard and cost of living on the Island, social groups and networks within the community and voicing opinion.

5.7.1 Local politics

The political landscape on the Island was complicated and fractious. It was a highly regulated environment, and governance was based on *The Lord Howe Island Act, 1953*. For many years prior to interviews, these regulations had been poorly enforced by the Lord Howe Island Board, and the community had become accustomed to a relatively regulation-free lifestyle. In more recent years, the Lord Howe Island Board had begun to enforce regulations and this shift in the political landscape was poorly received by the community. Many members of the community reacted against the perceived increased control the Lord Howe Island Board had exerted over the community, and an adversarial relationship had been established. Many members of the community felt "over governed". Many members of the Lord Howe Island Board felt that they were performing a valuable function on the Island, and were obliged to do so by law. There were unresolved conflicting interests and agendas between the Lord Howe Island Board and the community. Many members of the Lord Howe Island Board felt distanced from the community and many members of the community felt disempowered. There were differing views on the transparency of institutions of

governance on the Island: some felt the Lord Howe Island Board was open and transparent in its activities, whilst some felt they concealed information from the community. There were differing views on the Island-elected local Governing Board members: some felt they acted in the best interests of the community, and some felt they furthered private agendas. There were differing views on the mainland appointed Governing Board members. Some felt they were motivated by environmental issues, beholden to NSW politics and approached governance from a fundamentally different perspective from most members of the community because they did not have to live with the consequences of their actions. Some felt they were better decision makers than the Island-elected Governing Board members because they were relatively impartial and had no vested interest in the outcomes of decisions. There was consensus among participants that communication between the Lord Howe Island Board and the community was poor, and many participants felt the Lord Howe Island Board should be proactive about communicating with the community. There were differing opinions on consultation on the Island. Some felt consultation was productive and were grateful for being able to become involved in governance processes, and some felt consultation was tokenistic, and the outcomes of consultation efforts were determined before the processes began. Most participants reported that public participation in governance on the Island was poor. In the following section, I discuss these issues.

5.7.1.1 Regulation

The Lord Howe Island Act, 1953 is the legislation that governs most activities on the Island. Amongst members of the Lord Howe Island Board responsible for administering the Act, it was regarded as an unusual piece of legislation, enabling far-reaching regulation of many aspects of life on the Island. It was also reported by these participants that the community's understanding of the Act was poor:

I have never been a community that has its own Act before. The legislation here is extraordinary. It has had its own Act since 1953, and the impact that Act has on people's lives is immense. And very different, and much more direct than many other acts on the mainland. It is theirs, and it affects their daily life. It affects the way they can live and build houses and do this, or whatever. The regulations are incredible. And I'll just come back to that point in a minute. I have never been in that kind of situation and noticed such a low level of understanding of that which affects them. It is like it is a separate thing, that is just the Board, that is what they do, and I will get on with life.

Some participants working for the Lord Howe Island Board spoke of how for many years regulation on the Island under the Act had not been adequately administered. They reported that for much of this time, regulations such as building codes and occupational health and safety regulations were not adhered to. They reported that now, due to increased risks of litigation and more stringent legal standards on the Australian mainland, much of the Lord Howe Island Board's work is to enforce regulation that has existed for many years.

There is a lot of overkill here of course because of the nature of the Island, but that doesn't stop us having to do it. It is very time-consuming for Board staff, very time hungry. Developing all these plans and policies etc to meet these legislative and regulatory requirements. But it has to happen. And the Islanders have a reluctance to accept that because they have been operating independently for a number of years, often illegally, and often without any support. So, if the proverbial hit the fan, they would be probably have a few problems over various issues. And that is why we're here. That is why the administration is here, to ensure that that doesn't happen.

Many participants reported that much of the reform from the Lord Howe Island Board in recent years had integrated the concept of "user pays", and much of the recent changes on the Island had resulted in higher costs for residents:

Our current Board in the last three or four years, has moved markedly towards a user pay system for pretty much charging for this and that. And a lot of people are complaining about it, or a lot of people have taken umbrage to the user pay system, because it is starting to hurt them in the hip pocket.

Some participants reported that the community in general has reacted against regulation, and has not recognised the role it could play in ensuring their autonomy, and protecting their cultural values:

what [members of the community] haven't done is flipped the switch. They still see it as a nasty imposition and is a regulatory kind of thing that sits heavily on them. What they haven't seen is the mechanism by which they can enshrine their right to autonomy, because it protects them. All they have got to do is understand how to use it, develop the capacity to interact with it in a positive way in their daily lives, and start sort of, I don't know, just flipping the button from one to the other. So you start using legislation as a tool rather than an oppressive thing. I think yes, there is facility in the act to do that and in particular the Islander provision.

5.7.1.2 The relationship between the Lord Howe Island Board and the community

Many participants spoke of an adversarial relationship between the Lord Howe Island Board and the community. There was a common narrative among many Old Islander participants that since the inscription of the Island as a World Heritage listed area, and growth in the tourism industry on the Island, the Lord Howe Island Board had increased its level of control and regulation over the Island. Many participants felt over governed:

We seem to be the most over-governed little community I can think of in Australia. Because for a population of 300 or whatever, we seem to have a big number of managers down here in our little Board office.

Some participants felt that the Lord Howe Island Board was exerting too much control and “driving the agenda” on the Island:

I don't think that the system should be running where the people who are here as public servants are driving the agenda.

There was a sense of disempowerment amongst some participants and a sentiment that they were powerless to the desires of the Lord Howe Island Board because they did not have the resources to fight against it. Different participants made these comments:

Well they are only going to do what they want to do anyway, so you can't fight them unless you are a big up-the-ladder sort of person basically. You can write letters and that, but it goes nowhere. It is just the normal stuff when you're fighting any sort of Council for anything. You've got to start going through solicitors and lawyers and at all costs money. So once you start fighting in that field it is all just downhill. So that is basically the crux of the whole thing.

They do play strong arm. It is difficult. You have really got to watch what you do and know your legalities. It's tough. You have really got to know a lot about the [Lord Howe Island] Act and everything in general otherwise they will tread on you.

Many Lord Howe Island Board employees felt that the community did not fully comprehend the role of the Lord Howe Island Board, and were resentful toward the Board's activities:

I don't think the Board staff are particularly valued by the community. And they see the Board's administration as being an imposition on them often as Islanders and the way they want the Island run... a lot of the community see us as a police force. A regulatory police force, making it hard for them to exist, not realising that that is what is required by legislation. We are only providing the legal safeguards required to operate on this Island.

Some were more moderate in their views, and felt there was a historical divide between the Lord Howe Island Board and the community, but it was essential to bridge this gap to enable productive community development:

I believe that the Board are a bit distant from the community, and they don't involve the community enough. And really, if the Island community is going to survive as a community, it does need to have more of a say in how the Island is run, otherwise it will just become... the Board will be a government department, and the Islanders will just have to toe the line. They won't have the incentive to be involved and be creative about how the Island is managed, and I think that is a shame. I think if it is going to thrive, it does need that. I think there is some gap or distance or lack of communication between the Board and the community.

Some participants felt there was ultimately a conflict between Island residents and their cultural attachment to the Island and the Lord Howe Island Board who are driven by shorter term agendas and political pressures to achieve results on specific projects:

[Islanders cultural attachment to the Island] has been a big part of the Island... I think that it does perhaps create issues with the bureaucrats that come here. The public servants may be here short term - they have a job to do, they want to get their job done, they want to get things through, they may be keen on promotion and want to have some stars against their name for promotion, and they probably... some of them, not all, some of them perhaps do push the community a bit hard and are not prepared to take on liaison with the community enough.

A small number of participants believed that the objective of the Lord Howe Island Board was to make money, and due to a decrease in its revenue caused by a decline in the palm seed industry, it was looking to make money in other ways, and was increasing Island charges and fees. They argued that whilst the Lord Howe Island Board had this prerogative, and it was making money from the current system of electricity supply, there was little impetus for them to find alternatives:

I think the Board's primary objective is to make money... Harvesting of palm seeds was the primary industry. And they netted millions of dollars, and also with the amount of people that lived here and everything, the Board was doing quite well in terms of Treasury funding, all sorts of different funding that they were getting for different reasons. But eventually a lot of the income stopped, or it wasn't income. It was the income from the palms, but their grants and stuff sort of dried up, and the Board became very determined to make money out of everybody that lived here. And so therefore it would not be a priority if you are looking at a way to save money. Electricity makes them money.

5.7.1.3 Transparency of institutions

Some participants believed that in general the Lord Howe Island Board was an open and transparent organization. They appreciated that information on most matters was readily available at the Lord Howe Island Board office and they were given the opportunity to be involved in processes of community consultation:

... the community these days are given every opportunity to comment on everything, and there are lots of public meetings on everything there should be. Our local government now is very accountable and open as they should be.

The Governing Board members met quarterly on the Island to have open (to the public) and closed sessions to discuss and vote on current issues²². Closed sessions typically involved information that was sensitive, personal, or commercially protected. Some participants were uneasy about the process of holding meetings in private, and feared that matters of importance to the community were discussed and decided upon in these “secret meetings”.

Some participants believed that for most matters the Lord Howe Island Board, the Governing Board and the NSW State Government are open and transparent, but for

²² Most decisions made by the LORD HOWE ISLAND BOARD are made through this mechanism. Issues must have a simple majority of votes to be decided upon. If there are equal numbers of votes due to members abstaining from voting, the Chair has the casting vote.

“important” matters, such as land tenure, there is a level of secrecy involved in what goes on “behind the scenes”. Different participants made these comments:

With matters such as land tenure, it should be open to the public here, but what happens is they have had all of these closed session secret meetings on the Island and on the mainland with departments and things like this, and it affects Lord Howe Island's future.

Day-to-day government issues go to the [governing] Board, and the process is open and transparent and everybody has a little debate about certain things, and then the members vote and so on. However, things of greater significance which may be controversial to the State Government are handled by the mainland Board members. The Chair²³ has got a fair bit of power, in consultation with the Minister, and the local members are left in the dark on issues of significance. That is my experience.

5.7.1.4 Island-elected members

Some participants complained that the Island-elected members did not adequately represent the views of the community, and were involved in the political arena to further their own agendas:

[Island-elected members] only do it for their own personal reasons. And that is a proven track record. It has always been like that. Every person is there for their own agenda, which is a shame. I mean, you get the odd one that does try but they get outvoted and the majority rules. It is sad because it is all too personalised which is a shame.

Some complained that having four representatives was problematic because it was both difficult to find four members of the community who didn't have business interests

²³ The Chair is always a “Mainland Member”, appointed by the New South Wales Minister for Environment and Conservation (hereinafter referred to as “the Minister”).

in the Island, and difficult to find consensus among such a number of members.

Different participants made these comments:

... while we've got four elected members it would be very difficult to have any four members without some kind of interest in a business of some sort, so I think the number four is not necessary, and I think it makes it a much more difficult situation than it needs to be.

As far as I am concerned we do not need four elected members for the size of our voting population on the Island. If you compare it to something similar on the mainland, its way out of proportion, and I honestly don't understand their reasoning for creating four positions, because it almost makes it impossible for anything to get through... It's a crazy sort of situation, we would be much better off either going back to the one or maybe a maximum of two where you would be able to keep them representing the population.

Some viewed the political arena on the Island as a hostile environment where one is subject to widespread community scrutiny, and criticism. Consequently, they felt the only reason residents would stand for election was if they felt they could personally benefit from such action:

I think a lot of them are there to gain, I mean they're there because they've got an interest themselves. I mean why else go on? Why else go and get abused by everyone and hated by everyone? (chuckle) You've got get something out of it haven't you?

5.7.1.5 Mainland-appointed Members

Many participants believed Mainland Members were fundamentally motivated by factors other than the welfare of the community. Many participants believed they acted in the interests of the State Minister responsible for the Island, and were more concerned about issues such as preservation of the environment. Many participants

felt they were motivated by different factors because they did not live on the Island, and therefore did not have to live with the consequences of their decisions:

We know that we have got to live here whatever happens. We have to live with it, and we want to make sure it's right. Whereas I think the mainland members don't have to live with it, they are going to make a decision based on dare I say a greeny attitude and blow the consequences for the community sort of thing.

Some felt that there was an inherent "conflict of interest" that Mainland Members held because they were accountable to the State Minister rather than the community, and therefore much more likely to act in the interests of the Minister:

... they are public servants and the only reason they are on the [governing] Board is because the Minister appointed them. Now the Minister can, at the flick of a pen, sack them. He can't sack the local members. They can only be sacked by election or wrong doing. But the appointeds don't even have to be given a reason, they can be dispensed with at the jot of Minister's pen. So they are there at the Minister's pleasure, and if they don't perform and produce a result that they perceive the Minister to want, they are not going to be there. So basically they do. And sometimes they don't guess him right, but they're basically trying to produce his will. "Thy will be done, Lord".

However, some participants felt the mainland-appointed Members served the interests of the Island better than the Island-elected Members because they did not have private agendas or vested interests:

... it something that I've discussed with quite a few people, and we feel more confident with the non-elected mainland people, quite often, than we do with the ones on the ground here. Because the ones on the ground here have got their own agenda, whereas I think people on the mainland may see the big picture a little more clearly, and they don't have... well we don't think they have any vested interest in developments over here.

5.7.1.6 Communication

Many participants reported a poor level of communication between the Lord Howe Island Board and the community on general issues affecting the Island. Generally, employees of the Lord Howe Island Board and others involved in the work of the Lord Howe Island Board were familiar with the avenues of communication the Lord Howe Island Board used to distribute information, and felt that information was freely available and readily accessible. There was an attitude amongst some participants that much of the community were reticent about collecting information, and unfairly critical of the Lord Howe Island Board because they were uninformed:

If [members of the community] want to access information, they can, but a lot of them don't bother and then they complain because the decision has gone contrary to the way that they feel it should go. And a lot of it is just complacency – just the fact that they haven't got all the information, studied up on it, and come to some opinion that way. It is all just all spur of the moment type stuff.

Some participants felt the Board did not communicate enough information to the community, and sometimes assumed too high a level of understanding of general issues:

I think there is a tendency for the Board office workers being so tightly involved in everything down there, they probably believe in their headspace that the rest of the community are just as aware as them. That is probably not the case. I think generally as a statement the Board should be a bit more proactive in putting information out to the community.

Some participants thought the Lord Howe Island Board should circulate information freely, and were unhappy about having to buy the local newspaper to find out about issues affecting the community:

They do send out householders occasionally, but if they have got information that they want the community to know, it is usually in the [local newspaper], which irks me to some degree because I tend to think they should send out a newsletter and we shouldn't have to pay three dollars you know, to support some else's business.

Some believed that information was deliberately withheld from the public. One participant was unhappy the information from a program of wind monitoring on the Island to quantify the Island's wind resource was kept "secret":

They should make reports available to the public. For instance, they erected the tower for the wind generator near the airstrip. The electrician monitored it every day, but we still haven't heard whether there is enough wind in that area there to sustain a wind generator. Maybe the Board is aware of this information, but the general public is not.

5.7.1.7 Consultation

Many participants reported that in the few years prior to this study the amount of consultation on the Island had increased, and now it was a common and regular occurrence. Every Development Application on the Island was available for public comment and participants reported that there were consultation processes for most changes to the way the Island was managed.

Some participants reported that there was a poor general understanding of the basic concepts of consultation within the community, and that these concepts were often misconstrued:

I think a fair few people misconstrue the idea of consultation. They feel its whether they like the whole deal or not. And if I say "I don't like anything to do with this", then it should go away, and "if they were listening to me", it would go away, and if there were enough of us saying that, then it definitely would go

away. But often the consultation is not on that basis. It's not "Is it a good idea to manage your waste?". It's not what the authorities are asking, it's, you know, "there are a number of options for doing this, we've decided to do it, we've got a mandate to do this, you know it's the proper thing to do, we're not asking anyone whether we should manage waste or not, we're beyond that, we're asking how it should be done". A lot of people misconstrue that and say, "no it shouldn't be done, it costs us money and we don't want to do it". And then when that's not taken into account they feel that it's Mickey Mouse consultation... no one has really sat down and said this is how the consultation is working, and some things really aren't negotiable. We're not asking whether you want to be part of NSW, that's not this consultation. And that's not really explained, and so some people misconstrue that.

Most participants were not happy with the processes of consultation on the Island. The two largest criticisms received were that there was too much consultation, and that findings are rarely incorporated into the outcomes in any significant way:

There are times when [community members] are probably over consulted. And there are times when the consultation process is done simply to say that you have done it when you were going to take a particular decision anyway. Because it probably is the right decision, but you would go out and consult because it is politically the right thing to do.

As a result, many participants were despondent with consultation processes, and had disengaged from participating in them:

I'm getting to the stage now where I don't bother about going to any of the meetings, I've had enough of it all.

Most consultation processes were open for comment from the general public including the Australian Mainland, and many participants held the view that everybody in Australia has just as much "say" as to what goes on as the local residents. Many

participants felt that their opinions were “washed over” by the greater interests from the mainland, and the lobbying power that they exerted:

You see the thing is everybody in New South Wales or Australia really has just as much to right as us Islanders to say what is going to go and happen. Regarding the Marine Park or National Parks or anything can write in and have their opinions valued as much as anyone who lives here. And there are 20 million other people out there with organisations behind them that have a greater impact and lobbying ability than any of us as individuals here. We have very little knowledge or ability to lobby. We just talk to whoever is on the Island here. And they take our notes and say they will try and do that, and then the people and lobby groups go higher up and it's what they want. They feel the pressure because of an election coming up and 100,000 people are represented by that person talking to them as against 300 little people on Lord Howe Island. And so we are washed over.

5.7.1.8 Public participation

Many participants reported a low level of voluntary public participation on the Island.

They reported that there is no shortage of people in the community willing to complain about issues affecting the Island:

There are squeaky hinges in the community, and they do a lot of squeaking if they don't get oiled.

Many participants reported that most people were only motivated to take action if they were being negatively impacted as individuals. Participants explained how the general discontent in the community regarding poor quality of power supply was expressed by individuals as they were affected rather than as a group of residents concerned about supply in general:

Well, there's not really a lot of public debate, as I say, simply because unless you are being affected, I don't think people really have a point of view. And for example, we have had a lot of input because we have been affected by outages

up until this very current time, but I honestly believed a lot of people other than us haven't really have a lot of public debate about it at all. They may have done just with their closest friends or something mentioned something about the price going up or whatever, but it certainly not a major talking point.

Some participants described how they were proactive in discussing issues relating to energy, and advocating change, but most of the community were more reactionary. Most participants felt that the community would only discuss the issues and form opinions when there was a firm proposal that required a decision to be made:

There is a small group of people on the Island, friends of mine, and we often discuss energy proactively. Like what would be possible to improve the situation, but I don't think in most people's lives they would do that, unless something actually presented itself - some issue or situation, something either strongly positive, or they might perceive it as negative and they would discuss it.

Some participants felt that while the Lord Howe Island Board had made efforts to involve the local community and encourage participation through the creation of committees on general issues such as vehicle use, there were human resources on the Island which were unutilised:

The Board to have committees that they set up with the purpose of involving the local people, and there are certainly a lot of very talented, intelligent, well qualified and experienced people on the Island that the Board just don't draw upon.

Some participants felt there was a low level of public participation because of general apathy within the community, and the “relaxed lifestyle” extant on the Island:

I think there is apathy here too, I think it is unfair to single [the community] out in that way, I think they are no more apathetic than your average community. If you ask these kinds of questions of any other community, you would probably get

similar results. People are fairly apathetic, because I think people have a view of their life, and a shape of their life, and that is a powerful thing. It flows on from day to day and it involves family, and friends, and beach, and environment, and stuff that has such a powerful impetus that it just runs along everyday, particularly in a place like this. Those kind of bureaucratic... the regulatory environment that you operate in almost seems superfluous, surreal, or separate from you. And I think that is a shame.

5.7.1.9 Disempowerment

Some participants appeared to be disillusioned with the Lord Howe Island Board in relation to energy issues. They described a long history of studies, reports and environmental monitoring that had resulted in very little change. Some believed that the Lord Howe Island Board could afford to be seen to be ignoring issues surrounding energy options, and so attempts had been made to address a few issues with no firm intent or policy to instigate change. Some felt this tactic was designed to keep people satisfied that something was being achieved whilst there was little change in the status quo:

It's simple. There has been no driving force from the [governing] Board – the [governing] Board members. Whether they be Island members or mainland members, there is just no policy. Like I said with the wind one, you put up a post, say you are carrying out a study, forget about it for 18 months, pull the post down, say you are analysing the data, forget about it for another 18 months. Let's talk about it a bit more, but you can always say look we are working on it, it is there in the pipeline. And it has been like that I'm sure it has been like that right through because there has been no drive to have anything done with it... We are all just so happy behind our white picket fences and just sitting back. What would you want to change?

Amongst these participants there was a general sense of disempowerment, and a sentiment that very little could be done to change the way the Island was supplied with

energy because the Lord Howe Island Board was not in favour of alternatives, and the “bureaucracy” of the system impeded change:

It is never going to be given out. I can just feel it. I can just feel that we want change, but as much as we do, you can go to the government, and you can come back just browbeaten and disappointed. The bureaucracy of the system can just bog you down so badly that in the end, you just turn around and walk home. You want to go any further. You go home and you can flick a switch and your lights still come on, and the old diesel generator is still working and in the end that is where you end up. Because they won't let you have what you want. Don't want you to have it. Not yet... People just become disillusioned when you follow things up and get nowhere. And you follow them up and get nowhere, and many just say okay it still works when I flick the switch, so fuck them. Let the fucking diesels keep running, I don't care any more, and that is what happens. That is where people end up - disillusioned, because they tried and got nowhere.

5.7.2 Outside involvement in the affairs of the Island

Outside involvement in the affairs of the island was an important issue to many participants. The Island was in a position where it was heavily dependent on the outside world for survival, and its attitude to and relationships with outside institutions were relevant to many issues facing the Island. There were conflicting views among participants. Almost all participants stated that they “accepted” that Lord Howe Island was “part of” NSW, and was dependent on the NSW government for its survival. Some were happy with this arrangement, and others were not. Many participants felt that values of independence and self-sufficiency were deeply ingrained in the cultural identity of some inhabitants of the Island. They felt this identity and these values underpinned much of the public opinion on general issues. Some believed these values were no longer relevant to contemporary society on the Island, and that notions of independence were irrelevant when the Island was heavily financially dependent on mainland Australia. Some held moderate views on outside involvement and felt that there would always be outside involvement, and so it was best to work within that

framework. Some welcomed external expertise on issues such as energy options, and valued the involvement consultants and “experts” had in the discourse on energy options.

Many participants felt that the community was part of NSW, and should act in accordance with relevant statutory frameworks. However, the island was culturally and geographically distinct from mainland Australia, and deserved different treatment:

I mean technically and legally its entirely part of NSW, but... if you're a lawyer that's the way you see it, but the rest of the population doesn't see it that way. And you know, sure, legally its part of NSW, but its quite obviously distinct. It's 700 kilometres away, there's a population of people who have lineage, there's an Act written specifically to give them certain land rights, they're constrained in other ways... you know there's all sorts of social formula that mean its not just another part of NSW, and they feel very strongly about that. There's a very strong identity on the Island, fierce parochialism in some ways.

Many participants valued independence and self-sufficiency, and felt it was deeply rooted in the cultural identity of many inhabitants of the Island. These participants spoke of the early “pioneering” history of the Island, and how experiences of the early settlers establishing the community in often difficult circumstances shaped their opinions on more contemporary issues:

...that is the way the Island has evolved. We all descended, or most people are descended from the few families that have been here for over a hundred years, and everyone is conscious of their history and how we were quite independent because we had to be. The government didn't help us out too much in the early days. They would read the reports, and well, it would have been like western New South Wales, pioneering times, but even more so here. So as a result, people developed a sort of independence, suspicious of mainland bureaucracy type of attitude. You see it in small places anywhere, but I think it is probably a bit more pronounced here. People are a bit reluctant to have solutions imposed on them; whatever happens there has got to be a bit of community support.

Some participants spoke of a generational divide where older Island inhabitants held values of independence and self sufficiency more tightly, and hence were less accepting of outside involvement in Island affairs. Younger Island inhabitants who had had more contact with the mainland were reportedly much more accepting of external advice and expertise:

... my generation and younger is more accepting of outside advice and assistance because the majority of us have been to the mainland probably to school or have spent time on the mainland, the next generation down from me has probably spent more time on the mainland than my generation. But the older people just don't want anything to change. And they don't realise that it is. It's changing really quickly and there is nothing we can do about it. And we have to accept outside help because we get a lot of government funding for the Island, and it wouldn't survive if we didn't. And if we don't embrace outside help, we are not going to get the funding. And the Island would just go down. But some of the old people, they are just living for today, they don't think to the future.

Some felt that the Island could not be independent while it was receiving financial support from external bodies. They felt that the more subsidies received by the Island, the less power the local community had to influence its future:

People will crap on about "we are being over governed", and "we should be independent", I mean how can they live with themselves? We are subsidised extremely significantly from the mainland, but by the same token, we don't really have a lot of say. That's the way it works in the world I reckon. The more people pay, the more say they have. So the [governing] Board will never overrule the State Government

Some participants felt a productive approach to the governance arrangements was to be more accepting of the relationship with NSW, and to work within the existing "system":

We have a [governing] Board that is made up of outside members, so obviously we have to take that on board, and we are part of New South Wales, and we answer to the Minister. So we have to take that on board. It is no good fighting against it, you have got to look for your positives if that's the way the system is and that's the way we work, it is no good fighting against it. You've got to make it work for you.

Some participants welcomed external expertise and advice and felt it was needed to assist the Island to make decisions. There was also a degree of cynicism towards external expertise and a sentiment that sometimes external advice was not based on expert opinion:

Well I think sometimes we have to have people from outside helping us make decisions. Not actually making the decisions for us, but helping us make decisions because they are the ones with the expertise, we are not. We live here, we think it's a great place to live, but we don't have that knowledge that experts from the mainland have. And not everybody that puts their two cents worth in is an expert. Do you know what I mean? You get people who think they know what's best for Lord Howe and they have got no idea. But, there are those who can and do have a lot of knowledge and can really help the Island.

5.7.3 Custodianship of the Island's environment

Central to the Lord Howe Island Board's involvement with the Island was the issue of custodianship of the Island's environment. The Island's marine and terrestrial environments are unique and fragile. The biodiversity of the Island environment is particularly high, and is the habitat for many endemic and endangered species. The environmental values of the Island led to its inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1982.

Many participants reported that much of the change instigated by the Lord Howe Island Board, and the reason for their involvement in the affairs of the Island had been for the purpose of managing the local environment. Many “Old Islander”²⁴ participants felt the Island’s environment had been well managed before the increased involvement of the Lord Howe Island Board (which coincided with its inscription on the World Heritage List). They felt Old Islanders had preserved the Island’s environmental qualities and that if they had not done a good job, the Island would not have been awarded World Heritage status. However they felt since the Lord Howe Island Board had assumed responsibility for the custodianship of the Island, the knowledge, experience and role of the Islanders had been disregarded and was not valued.

Since the increased involvement of the Lord Howe Island Board, programs funded by the NSW and Australian Federal governments had eradicated feral cats, goats and pigs, reintroduced the woodhen, and were targeting the eradication of weeds. There was an attitude among some employees of the Lord Howe Island Board that the Lord Howe Island Board was conducting useful work that ultimately benefited the community, and this was not widely recognised by the community:

I value the experience of Islanders. They supposedly looked after this place. This place is covered in weeds. We are spending a couple of million dollars now eradicating weeds. The Board didn't import them to the Island, residents did. So there are major activities that are involving the Board staff at the moment to try and return this Island to what it should be.

Some members of the community viewed the influence of the Lord Howe Island Board as detrimental to the environmental quality of the Island:

²⁴ “Old Islander” was a term used to describe residents of the Island who had genetic lineage on the Island, or in some cases, residents who had lived on the island for most of their lives. “New Islander” was a term generally used to describe residents who had acquired “Islander” status by having lived on the island for 10 years or longer.

Well I think you can see it right now. The national parks are taking over the place and running it the way they want. And they have caused a lot of frustration and friction because if you look at the place, I think you'd agree that it's in a pretty healthy state and the people who were here doing it before National Parks were doing a pretty good job. The place didn't have scotch scrubbers²⁵ all over the beaches and buildings and signposts everywhere. In the last 10 years since the national parks have taken over all the signposts are turning up everywhere and all the city influences are showing up everywhere. It used to be very natural before.

5.7.4 World Heritage listing

Many participants were critical of the impact World Heritage listing had had on the Island. Some felt it had increased the profile of the Island as a tourist destination, and attracted national and international attention, but in the long run had been a burden on the Island community. Some participants felt there should be more financial compensation for the restrictions that the status had imposed on the Island:

I think [World Heritage status] is about as useful as a hip pocket on a Singlet. Personally. I think that it is, I think some of the guest lodges will say that it is wonderful because they can sing: "this is a World Heritage Island". I think it has caused more pain than gain. I think it is probably a good thing for the world that Lord Howe is protected in a heritage way for the rest of the world to enjoy. But, for the community, for the local community I think it has been more of pain than gain. Maybe if you look at it in the big picture and say well it is World Heritage. Great that is what it is, and it probably ought to be protected in that way, but the world does bugger all to support it. When we are not mining our rocks and we are not generating something or we are not doing something because of World Heritage, do they come to the party and say we will soften the blow here is a couple of bucks? No they don't. So I think realistically no, as a community we are losing more than we gain.

²⁵ Scotch scrubbers are a brand of cleaning pad

5.7.5 Land tenure

Almost all participants cited land tenure as one of the controversial issues currently facing the Island²⁶. The issue has arisen due to the production of a Regional Environmental Plan that recalled some Special Leases and allocated them as perpetual leases for new properties. There was a ballot system for allocating new properties to applicants. There was a sentiment amongst some participants that land that has been “in families” for, in some cases one hundred and fifty years, was being taken from them unfairly. This was a divisive issue that was the source of much contention between the community and the Lord Howe Island Board. One member of the community expressed his view on the subject:

It is just inherently unfair I think. I can think of one particular example where there is a family that has got a significant amount of Special Lease, and there are children in their family that want to build on it, and they will just have to go into the ballot system. People will say it is only a Special Lease, it can be taken off you. That is true, that is all fair and true however before 1953, that was someone's family's land. It's still the family that has got it now, but it was their ancestors. I mean it is only since the act has come in that it became so-called “Special Lease”. I mean if they were on the mainland, if they were like John McArthur or some other member of this autocracy, it would have been bloody freehold, and they would be millionaires on their land. Do you know what I mean? I'm not saying that we should have gone down the old path at all, am not saying that at all. I'm just saying there should be a little bit more recognition and respect for people's attachment to the land that has been their families for that long, whether it is Special Lease or not. I just think it is unjust, and they are just sort of stomping on any cultural or historic attachment that we have got to the place. And I think it is really important, and mainland bureaucracies don't understand and don't care. I can really understand when aboriginals talk about their spiritual

²⁶ At the time of writing, all land on the Island was crown land and was leased to residents as perpetual lease, special lease, or permissive occupancy. Perpetual leases were smaller blocks of land dedicated to residential purposes. Special leases were larger blocks that were typically used for small scale grazing, growing of vegetables, or other “special purposes”. Permissive occupancies were leases for blocks used for boatsheds, the golf and bowling clubs, churches, and community based organizations. Permanent Park Preserve was land similar to National Park, and development was heavily restricted in these areas.

attachment to the land... I can really understand that coming from here. When your family has been here for so long, and there was no one else here before us, you do, you really feel part of that. For that sort of thing as I was saying before to happen to me, I think that is so unfair. I mean it is within the law, but it is just in the wrong hands. It is immoral.

5.7.6 Standard and cost of living

Many participants talked about the cost of living on the Island, and complained that it was high and had been increasing significantly in the previous few years. Participants complained that the cost of freight was high; therefore the cost of everything brought in from the mainland was high. They complained that the cost of sending children to boarding school on the mainland was high, and the increases in rates and general fees and charges from the Lord Howe Island Board were unreasonable. There was a sentiment among some participants that many of the increases in the cost of living had been imposed on them by the Lord Howe Island Board in order to increase regulation and bureaucracy. Many of these participants felt increases in the cost of living were creating a community where one had to be affluent in order to be able to afford to live on the Island:

Because the whole idea is that the Island should be preserved and the primary objective of Lord Howe is World Heritage. So therefore people... it is really odd because it encourages affluent people to live here. Whereas it is really weird if you're just a normal person and end up here, it becomes almost, it gets too expensive to live here.

Some participants were concerned about a general disparity in wealth between members of the community with business interests relating to tourism (lodge owners in particular), and the general community:

In general [people] are pretty well off. I mean, some of the people interested in it own lodges or are children of people that own lodges, and you know it's the

lodges that make the money. The rest of us make a living, but the lodges make the money.

Some felt that an increase in the number of tourist beds²⁷ would increase the number of people who could be involved in the tourist industry, and thereby reduce the disparity in wealth:

Another hundred tourist beds wouldn't go astray... Have a piece of the pie so to speak. Which is very limited. It is divided down pretty fine. Or pretty broad, depending on who you are.

There appeared to be an undercurrent of tension between Old Islanders and New Islanders on expectations of standards of living. There was a sense of resentment amongst a small number of participants towards inhabitants of the Island who had a “mainland mentality” to electricity consumption. Some participants felt those who had not grown up on the Island and learned to appreciate the electricity system in its infancy, or those who had lived for a long time on the mainland and become used to a limitless and reliable electricity supply tended to be over consumers who did not obey the service rules²⁸, and put unreasonable demands on the system.

Old Islanders have always done it hard and I wouldn't dream of using a clothes dryer. Yet the lady down the road from me, she's a person who has only lived here about three years, she never hangs her clothes on the clothes line. She uses a clothes dryer every single day. And I just can't believe it. And that is the difference between people who have been raised on the mainland and come over here, and a lot of them come to Lord Howe because it is special and it is different, but when they get here, they want all their mainland trappings with them like the clothes dryers and all that sort of stuff, and the car. Whereas they are

²⁷ This was limited to four hundred beds

²⁸ The Service Rules forbid the use of electrical appliances with power ratings greater than 2.4 kW. Most clothes dryers and some dishwashers are above this rating.

only new things to us really, and you can do without them. And the majority of the Old Islander people think the same way.

5.7.7 Social groups and networks

Many participants spoke of the importance of social groups and informal networks to the general functioning of the community. They reported that the community was highly interconnected through kinship and friendship ties. They felt that in such a geographically small and isolated community with such a small population (three hundred people), social networks played an important role within the community. Some felt that life on the Island was “not about what you know, but about who you know”. They felt social networks were an important part of communication within the community and decision-making on the Island. Some talked about the value of social networks, and gave examples of how members of the community helped and cared for one another. Some talked about the negative ways in which social networks operated within the community and the gossip and rumour networks.

Most participants felt the informal networks on the Island were strong, and played a pivotal role in communication on the Island:

I think the Island operates on informal networks. The exchange of information and the natural process of the enhancement and the entertaining-up of information is really important too. And I think it is the principal form of communication on the Island.

Some felt instigating change on the Island was difficult due to highly connected networks, and the fear that taking action would negatively impact on friends or relatives. They felt that in such a small community, the personalities of the individuals involved in a particular decision-making process had a strong impact on its outcome.

Some participants talked about nepotism, and felt some members of the community made decisions to favour members of their social network:

It's a small community, and it tends to get down to personalities in the end. You can't help but say "oh well he is related to this one" or "he's a friend of that one", so "these things will go ahead and those things obviously won't". So I hate to sort of talk about things on those terms, but that's what it is very much on this Island, because we've got such a small population and we have got so many people related one to the other.

Some felt that the informal networks were an interesting and useful part of life on the Island, but could be potentially very damaging:

I suppose everybody enjoys talking about everybody else and whatever else is happening or emanating from the Board and so on and so forth, but it is one of those areas that you have got to be very careful with. That you don't sort of act on something that you might have heard at the bowling club or whatever. Or you don't act on it, or if you are going to act on that you check the validity of that before you go any further. But then some people just run with it and make it even more dramatic as it is passed on to the next people. So you end up with the most hilarious, well sometimes the most hilarious, but sometimes quite dangerous sort of network.

5.7.8 Voicing opinion

Some participants raised issues relating to voicing their opinions in public. These participants felt that due to the small size of the population, and the high level of interconnectivity, most members of the community were hesitant about doing so. The main reason cited to explain this phenomenon was that in a small community of relatively permanent residents, voicing an opinion that was contrary to the "consensus" could lead to social stigmatisation and ostracization. There was also a reasonably common perception that this may occur if sensitive topics were broached with members of the community, and one's comments were misinterpreted or

misrepresented through the informal communication networks on the Island. As a consequence, some participants reported not discussing many topics with general friends and associates on the Island, and instead speaking their mind only to close circles of friends and immediate family. Some participants did not make their opinions known to others within the community for fear that they would be “labelled” in a certain way, and this would permanently affect their social interactions within the community. These people thought it was better to keep quiet than to voice an opinion that may be controversial.

Different participants made the following comments on this topic:

[members of the community] will complain to each other, but when it comes to something where someone is trying to actually do something about a problem here, they don't like to air their differences in front of each other, for some reason, at a formal occasion.

Some people are very reserved in their judgement. They won't tell you what they think. And I think in a large part, you have to do that on a small Island.

Everybody's civil, and you know, you drive past people that you might have had a raging argument with the day before, and they will wave and all that, so it's quite... superficially everybody's quite civil and friendly, and to preserve that ambience, I think a lot of people will hold judgement on something that they don't feel tremendously strongly about, they think its not worth causing a ruckus

You've got to clone yourself to whatever the popular opinion will be because you don't want to make waves. Or you've got to adhere to whatever.... The approval rating here is all out of whack. The people that rise to the cream of the crop on this Island could really sink in other environments. But that is what works in small town places – Non-threatening, adaptable people. If you push and challenge or if you are different, it is like “whoa!”. And that is hard to live with sometimes, that you don't have that spontaneity and accepting everybody just as they are, which you can in a larger environment because people nestle. But here it has really got to be everyone has that opinion and that label and you get stuck there and you are either in or you're out or insignificant.