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Designing Sustainable Distributed Generation Systems for Rural Communities

An Application of Optimisation Modelling and Decision Analysis to include
Sustainability Concepts and Uncertainty into Design Optimality

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Agricultural Engineering (Renewable Energy)
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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2005

Abstract

The deregulation of the electricity supply industry in New Zealand has led to an increased level of interest in the security of electricity supply to rural communities. This in turn has led to questions about sustainable alternatives to conventional methods of electricity supply. A solution may be the adoption of sustainable community sized renewable energy (RE) based distributed generation systems. However, choosing between the myriad of possibilities requires much data and analysis.

An accurate analysis of electricity load and RE resource matching is normally required. In most cases, this is an expensive and time-consuming assessment. In order to minimise these costs, and yet give due consideration to stakeholder preferences and technical uncertainty, a process incorporating the economic, social, environmental, and technical aspects of sustainable design in a relatively short timeframe will be required.

This study developed such a method through the integrated use of the wind atlas assessment and analysis program (WAsP), the micropower optimisation model (HOMER), and three methods of decision analysis using Logical Decisions for Windows (LDW) software, which formed the decision analysis framework, SPiRAL (Sustainable Power in Rural Areas and Locations).

The efficacy of the integrated use of the software in the SPiRAL framework was tested through two analyses using electricity load and RE resource data from a case study site. The first was an analysis using a full-year of data in a multi-method decision analysis process thus setting the framework in place. A further analysis then tested the minimum monitoring time required to obtain and analyse the data for modelling meaningful results.

In both analyses, the results were ranked based on stakeholder preferences between the economic, social, environmental, and technical aspects of sustainable energy systems. The clear representation of the uncertainty of the electricity loads and the RE resources was paramount in the results. The short-term analysis results differed in small ways from the full-term, but were essentially similar.

This study developed a decision analysis framework that delivered transparent results in a manner likely to instil insight and confidence in them, and this would provide the decision-maker with much valuable information on which to base their decision.

Acknowledgements

Sir Isaac Newton said “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”. It is in this same light that I would like to acknowledge the ever ready and willing assistance I received throughout this research and without which, it would not have been as rewarding, fun or as good as it has been. Therefore, my first thanks must go to my research supervisors – Professor Ralph Sims and Dr John Holland – as much for the benefit of their advice and patience, as for their friendship. My life lately has revolved around some of their decisions, knowledge, and wit. I have enjoyed it very much and am a better person for it.

A large portion of my time was in the field gathering data and so I would like to offer special thanks to the residents of Totara Valley, Mike & Prue, Mike, Geoff & Marion, Nick & Jan, and Craig & Pauline; the management and staff of Limestone Downs – Warwick, Alf & Carol, Don, Steve, James and the rest of the crew; the valuable technical assistance from the very able staff at the Institute of Technology and Engineering workshop, Leo, Russell, and Don. Mr Mark Wenborn, Dr Iain Sanders, and Mr Alister Gardner of IRL were also of immense help. The help and advice from Joan, Roanna, Gayle, Trish and Lisa over the years has made my academic life more productive and satisfying and has been much appreciated.

Advice, information and encouragement was received gratefully from: Mr George Horvath, who asked the question that set in motion the curiosity that led to this study; Mr Mark Carter and Mr Laurence Sherriff for their technical advice and encouragement; Dr Steve Reid (NIWA) for the benefit of his extensive knowledge of the wind and modelling it; Dr Tony Bowen (Canterbury University) for his time and advice given on WAsP; and Dr Peter Lilienthal and Mr Tom Lambert (NREL) for their time and energy in tutoring me on the many and varied idiosyncrasies of HOMER. Special thanks to Dr Martin Sullivan for encouragement and friendship, and to the research assistants – Geraldine, Rachael, John, Andrew, and Nihal. To those I have missed or inadvertently omitted, I thank you.

This research would not have been feasible without financial assistance and I hope I have given value for money. Assistance was gratefully received from: Meritec Limited (Jim Fletcher Memorial Scholarship); C. Alma Baker Trust, CentralPower Energy Trust, The Turanga Trust, Massey University for the Massey Doctoral Scholarship; and finally the consortia of electricity distributors – PowerCo, Transpower, Central Hawke Bay Networks, WEL Energy, Mainpower, CentralPower Energy Trust, and Dunedin Lines.

This has been a period of much change and growth for me and at times, it has been hard work and tough for those around me too. Therefore, very special thanks go to my mother and family for their encouragement and support, and my wife Bobbi, who has been there through the good times as well as the difficult times. Lastly, I have thought a lot about my late father while finishing this study, and how his pride and approval would have been expressed in a firm handshake and a comment about the time it took me.

It has taken a quite a while, and it has been done with the help, guidance, and support from many people, for which I am sincerely grateful, thank you.

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