Locust latest

Locust activity is expected to heat up along with the weather this month, according to the Department of Primary Industries.

Tatura incident controller Rob Walker said locusts had been spotted all across Shepparton in recent weeks.

He said that although DPI employees would be out monitoring sites across the region, farmers should remain vigilant and report any locust activity to DPI.

● See page three of today's *Country News* for the latest on the locust situation in our region.

Solar bulk-buying push

By Adam Vaughan

Shepparton residents are being offered the chance to buy cheaper solar energy systems through a community organisation.

The Eko Community group is seeking to generate enough interest from residents hoping to buy solar panels.

It was cheaper to purchase panels through bulk-buying, Eko Community co-ordinator Rhondda Boer said yesterday.

Solar proponent: Eko Community co-ordinator Rhondda Boer.

After successful programs in Wangaratta and her home town of Benalla, Ms Boer said she wanted the offer of discounted solar panels to be available to home owners in Shepparton.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to do something positive towards preserving our planet," Ms Boer said.

"With prices now at an all-time low and with summer nearly upon us, there has never been a better time to invest in solar panels."

Ms Boer said the not-for-profit organisation's successful past campaigns made her believe Shepparton people would show strong interest.

"I love doing it and there have been plenty of people that have been keen," she said.

"I attended an exhibition, which there was a lot of people who showed interest.

"I guess that made me decide to go into Shepparton."

● Anyone wanting more details about the Eko Community program can phone Ms Boer on 5762 4167.

Opinions come out

CANDIDATES SPEAK ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

By Jordan Oliver

Opinion was divided yesterday when *The News* asked the seven Victorian election candidates from the Shepparton District for their views on the controversial topic of same-sex marriage.

Greens candidate Lachlan Slade declared the Greens were the only major party that supported marriage equality.

Mr Slade said he was disappointed with the stances of other parties, particularly the Labor party, in restricting marriage to unions between men and women.

"Labor have come out with some mixed messages — I wish they'd just come out and support equal marriage rights across the board," he said.

"It's hard to say what they think."

Labor candidate Anthony Fullarton said his party was supporting the gay and lesbian community with $215 000 a year pledged to Shepparton Uniting Care's Cutting Edge for four years to run support programs.

However he stopped short of calling for the legalisation of gay marriage.

"I personally applaud all couples that are willing to make a lifetime commitment to one another," he said.

"In purely legislative terms, the Marriage Act is a federal Act . . . (but) issues surrounding same-sex couples will be discussed at the next ALP national conference to be held in December, 2011."

The Nationals incumbent member Jeanette Powell also cited legislation to outline her stance.

"Marriage is a union between a man and a woman as defined in the Marriage Act 1961, whereas de facto relationships and same-sex relationships are recognised under other laws," she said.

"I do not support same-sex marriage as I believe that a marriage is a union between a man and a woman.

"The issue of legalising homosexual unions is not an issue that has been raised with me by my community, therefore I will not be lobbying for it."

Country Alliance candidate Dennis Patterson said the issue had been brought up as a smokescreen by the Greens to hide their other policies, but still gave his thoughts on the topic.

"I believe the institution of marriage is sacred and between men and women," he said.

"(But) I also feel that gays should be allowed to commit to their partner in a legally binding contract — everybody deserves the right to be able to commit to the person they love."

A spokesperson for Family First candidate Malcolm Moore said homosexuals were a minority but the larger population was being pressured to accept same-sex marriage for fear of being seen as intolerant.

"If you get down to the root of the problem, I think the majority of people would be against it," the spokesperson said.

"Family First doesn't support homosexual marriage and I think the majority of the community would agree with us."

Mooroopna independent Shannon Ross Pitman Smith said people should be free to marry who they like, as long as it conformed to their belief systems.

"I'm perfectly okay with it," Mr Smith said.

"Churches have their own beliefs which I think should be respected, but, from a state perspective, I don't have a problem with it."

Fellow independent candidate Paul Wickham declined to comment, opting to speak to his family regarding the controversial issue overnight.

Divisive issue: Greens candidate for Shepparton Lachlan Slade says his party stands alone in supporting "marriage equality". Picture: Bethanie Sessions

"LABOR HAVE COME OUT WITH SOME MIXED MESSAGES — I WISH THEY'D JUST COME OUT AND SUPPORT EQUAL MARRIAGE RIGHTS ACROSS THE BOARD."

— Greens candidate Lachlan Slade

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