

Submission to the to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's *Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities*.

The inquiry covers:

- actions being taken by community members and organisations to mitigate the severity of climate change, including actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- actions by community members and organisations to adapt to the current and future impacts of climate change;
- ways in which the government can best support communities in their efforts; and
- interstate and overseas best practice models that could be implemented in Victoria.

City of Darebin

Darebin City Council welcomes the invitation to provide input into how we can best tackle climate change in Victorian communities.

We are already experiencing the impacts of climate change. The science shows that unless we act to rapidly eliminate and drawdown greenhouse gas emissions, our communities, environment, and economy face catastrophic impacts. We need to act now to avoid dangerous climate change and provide maximum protection for people and nature.

Our best hope of avoiding catastrophic climate change and restoring a safe climate is to move into emergency mode. Business as usual and incremental improvements will not effect change quickly enough. To do this we need a coordinated response which involves state and federal governments rapidly decarbonising our economy.

To restore a safe climate as fast as possible will require action by all levels of society: residents, businesses, schools, council and other levels of government must work together.

Darebin City Council, in our Climate Emergency Plan, acknowledges the significant role communities play in addressing climate change, and the need to mobilise and engage with our community. Communities across Victoria will continue to have a key role in mitigating climate emissions, as well as adapting to the impacts of climate change.

However, it is also clear that policies and actions at a state and federal level which will have the most impact on mitigating climate change. We therefore urge the Victorian Government to declare a climate emergency and take urgent action to restore a safe climate.

In 2016, Darebin City Council made a formal recognition that we are in a state of climate emergency, and that this requires urgent action by all levels of government. Around the world over 850 jurisdictions have now announced a climate emergency, including several nations.

All levels of government need to take responsibility to ensure that our communities are protected now and into the future. The Victorian Government can do more to work with and support communities across Victoria in the actions they are taking, while at the same time taking stronger action which should remove the burden from communities and councils.

Community climate action across Victoria – leading the way

Community groups across Victoria have been undertaking amazing work in responding to the climate challenge for many years, often with minimal support from government.

Community emissions reduction and mitigation

Communities have been taking leading action to reduce or eliminate emissions in their region. For example, community groups across Victoria, such as in Nillumbik, Baw Baw, Hepburn Shire and Philip Island, are part of a Zero Carbon Communities program run by Beyond Zero Emissions, and have targets of zero net energy or zero net emissions for their region.¹

Hepburn is also home to Australia's first community-owned wind farm.² There are many other renewables projects being driven by communities or organisations, such as CORENA funded renewables projects³.

Businesses are also leading the way in emissions reduction. For example, in Darebin many businesses have installed solar and undertaken major energy efficiency upgrades.⁴

Individual actions are also fundamental in climate action and reduction of emissions. In Victoria over 400,000 rooftop solar systems have been installed, and over 320,000 solar hot water and air source heat pump systems.⁵ Darebin Council's award winning Solar Saver program seeks to install 500 residential solar systems on household roof each year. These systems are paid off through instalments on the council rates notice over 10 years so that solar energy is accessible to all not just those who can afford the up-front capital costs.

In regional areas, farmers are undertaking a regenerative agriculture approach which increase soil carbon sequestration and decrease in fertilisers (and emissions), such as the Otway Coast Regenerative Farmers network.⁶

Just transition

Organisations and community groups have been working to support a just transition in communities which will be most heavily impacted by the phase out of fossil fuels. In the La Trobe Valley, Voices for the Valley is a community group which has been working to protect and inform the community in the face of coal fire power closures.⁷ Earth Worker Energy Manufacturing Co-operative is a community co-operative established to create alternative jobs in the La Trobe Valley.⁸

Advocacy

Many groups across Victoria, e.g. climate action groups in different areas, have been campaigning for stronger action on climate change and mobilising their communities.⁹ For example, in Darebin, an ongoing community campaign from several groups – Darebin Climate Action Now¹⁰ and Council and Community Action in the Climate Emergency¹¹, resulted in Darebin Council announcing a climate emergency. School groups have been striking for climate action and are an inspiring story of the empowerment of our youth.¹² Another important example is a coalition of Victorian groups which is advocating for the creation

¹ <https://bze.org.au/zero-carbon-communities/>

² <https://www.hepburnwind.com.au/>

³ <https://corenafund.org.au/>

⁴ <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/en/Building-and-Business/Business-in-Darebin/Business-Events-and-Support>

⁵ <http://www.cleanenergyregulator.gov.au/RET/Forms-and-resources/Postcode-data-for-small-scale-installations#Summary-of-postcode-data>

⁶ <https://otwaycoastregenerativefarmers.com.au/#home>

⁷ <https://www.votv.org.au/about>

⁸ <https://earthworkercooperative.com.au/>

⁹ <https://vcan.net.au/>

¹⁰ <http://www.darebincan.org.au/>

¹¹ <http://www.caceonline.org/>

¹² <https://www.schoolstrike4climate.com/>

of a Victorian Great Forest National Park, as it is vital to protect this carbon sink and end native forest logging.¹³

Education and engagement

Community groups, such as Climate for Change¹⁴, have been helping Victorians have conversations with their peers to spread awareness and understanding about climate change. Psychology for a Safe climate run workshops on dealing with climate grief.¹⁵

Examples of best practice that Victoria can draw on

Around the world there are many examples where communities, and community-government partnerships, have led significant work to mitigate or adapt to climate change, which can serve as models for Victoria to learn from.

- Community renewables have thrived in other countries, particularly in Europe, and have significantly contributed to emissions reduction. One of the best known case studies is the Island of Samsø in Denmark, where the community switch to 100% renewables and is now net carbon negative.¹⁶
- The role of community energy has been driven by supportive regulations and policies¹⁷, for example:
 - The Scottish Government implemented financial support mechanisms and set a target of 500 MW by 2020 for community energy.
 - Stable feed-in tariff schemes in Germany have enabled and encouraged investments from communities and individual citizens.
 - Tax credits, net metering and small-scale incentive schemes have helped support community renewables in the United States, Latin America and Asia.
 - Project developers in Denmark are legally required to offer 20% ownership of schemes to local communities.
- Communities have run successful programs to reduce meat consumption and associated emissions, such as Ethical Vegetarian Alternatives in Belgium which has supported entire cities to have official vegetarian days once a week, including Ghent, Brussels, Sint-Niklaas, Hasselt, Mechelen, Kortrijk, Evergem, Ostend and Eupen.¹⁸
- Stockholm city has a large scale biochar facility, which utilises people's garden waste, reduces emissions and produces biochar which can sequester carbon.¹⁹
- Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union is a classic case study of responding to food insecurity (and a lack of fertilisers), with the solution of a mass roll-out urban farming across backyards and other urban areas.²⁰

Ways Victorian Government can support communities

Key things the Victorian Government can do to support Victorian communities include:

¹³ <https://www.greatforestnationalpark.com.au/>

¹⁴ <https://www.climateforchange.org.au/about>

¹⁵ <https://www.psychologyforasafeclimate.org/>

¹⁶ <https://energiakademiet.dk/en/>

¹⁷ <https://www.ren21.net/gsr-2016/chapter07.php>

¹⁸ <https://www.evavzw.be/pagina/geschiedenis>

¹⁹ <https://mayorschallenge.bloomberg.org/ideas/biochar-for-a-better-city-ecosystem/>

²⁰ <http://www.fao.org/ag/agp/greencities/en/GGCLAC/havana.html>

- Remove the burden of action from communities and councils by committing to and taking climate emergency action at a state level – this means rapidly transforming our economy to zero emissions and beyond as quickly as possible.
- Increase the RET to 100% and develop policy and programs to transition to a 100% renewable electricity system as quickly as possible, including:
 - Funding renewables projects.
 - Develop enabling policies such as streamlining grid connection regulations and costs; ensuring fair solar feed-in-tariffs; regulations to enable peer-to-peer trading; and changes to the grid to support de-centralised energy.
- Develop enabling policy and regulations, and remove barriers, to support community renewables projects, e.g.:
 - Mechanisms to apply small technology certificates or other solar rebates to community solar models such as solar gardens.
 - Support community groups with resources and training.
- Commit to ruling out any new fossil fuel developments, and extend the ban on unconventional onshore gas development to a complete ban of onshore and offshore gas.
- Drive a just transition and diversification of economies in coal communities, including:
 - Support community initiatives such as the Earthwork Cooperative.
 - Increase funding to affected communities.
 - Develop timely and well thought out plans for the closure of coal fire plans which ensure the closure date is appropriate and well communicated.
 - Support people to transition to different work well before the closure date.
- Increase the frequency, convenience and quality of public transport services, and facilitate high-speed rail services, to enable Victorians to use low emissions transport.
- Transition the public transport system to electricity and 100% renewables.
- Lead the development of bicycle routes and infrastructure to increase bicycle use and safety.
- Develop policies that enable energy efficient buildings so that Victorians can live in thermally comfortable dwellings and reduce their carbon footprint, including:
 - Introduce mandatory disclosure of energy performance for all buildings at sale or lease.
 - Mandate minimum energy efficiency performance standards for rental properties.
 - Provide incentives for low-income home owners to upgrade their homes;
 - Introduce obligations on energy companies to achieve annual energy efficiency reductions.
 - Introduce minimum energy performance standards to at least a 7-star NATHERS equivalent and the introduction of an energy usage budget (whole-of-building) for new builds and major renovations of homes.
 - Increase the resources that the Victorian Building Authority has to address non-compliance.
 - Provide additional funding to ensure all new social housing complies with minimum energy performance standards and that energy efficiency in existing social housing is improved.
- Expand and improve the Solar Homes program, including:
 - Increase the number of solar rebates available and ensure greater social equity in access.
 - Improve the implementation of the program to make sure the program is administered sustainably, and that the current issues are addressed, such as capacity and demand issues, and impacts to solar providers left without work.
- End native forest logging to ensure our forests can act as an important native sink.
- Reduce the urban heat effect by funding and developing enabling policies to increase the amount of urban vegetation, including green rooves and walls.

- Develop funding mechanisms and other supportive policies to enable farmers to undertake lower emissions farming techniques, such as regenerative agriculture which can improve soil carbon and reduce the use of fertilisers.
- Fund and develop policies to increase urban food production as a way of ensuring food security, e.g. recognise urban agriculture in the State Planning Policy Framework so it can be integrated in the Metropolitan Planning Strategy.
- Fund an investigation into the potential for biochar facilities produce biochar to be used in agriculture as a carbon sequestration technique.
- Establish a \$1 billion dollar fund for councils to build the resilience of climate change vulnerable communities.
- Undertake adaptation initiatives that ensure resilience to climate impacts, including:
 - Infrastructure improvements and upgrades e.g. roads, sewerage.
 - Increase funding and capacity of our health services.
 - Increased capacity and funding of emergency services.
 - Ensure the electricity grid is equipped to deal with changes in demand, increased hot weather/heat waves, natural disasters etc.
 - Ensure houses are better equipped to deal with heat waves.
 - Policies to ensure food security, including supporting regional farmers; increasing urban and backyard farming; and programs to ensure access to nutritional food by those affected by homelessness or poverty, and by people in times of extreme weather events.
- Fund essential repairs to infrastructure as they are impacted.
- Work with councils and other levels of government to pre-emptively understand key economic costs and impacts and take responsibility to address these.
- Respond to community advocacy requests in relation to the climate emergency, and meet with community groups regarding climate policies.
- Engage with first nations to understand the risks and opportunities to protect country, and the need to provide culturally relevant education programs.
- Run education campaigns for community to understand the climate emergency, including providing knowledge about local impacts and how to prepare.
- Support community groups to be more effective.
 - Funding through grants programs to support communities.
 - Provide education and training to community groups to be more effective in their work.