

CORRECTED VERSION

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Reservoir — 27 September 2004

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Mr R. Posner, deputy director, communications and stakeholder relations for, Department of Sustainability and Environment.

The CHAIR — I declare open the Environment and Natural Resources Committee on Sustainable Communities. I note an apology from Damian Drum for today's hearing and that George Seitz will be arriving later. I welcome Rupert Posner, who is the deputy director, communications and stakeholder relations for sustainability of the environment, Department of Sustainability and Environment. Mr Posner, all evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, if you make comments outside the precincts of this hearing, you are not covered by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being reported by Hansard, and you will receive a proof transcript in the next week or so.

Mr POSNER — Firstly, I would like to apologise for my colleague, Linda, who could not make it. She is ill this morning. Linda is the one who has all the technical knowledge, so if you have lots of specific questions, she is the one who normally has all those details. If I cannot answer any of your questions, I apologise for that and will take them on notice and get back to you with the answers. I thought today I would make a presentation that would give a useful oversight to how the campaign has worked.

Overheads shown.

Mr POSNER — I will give you an overview of the campaign. I am sure all of you have seen parts of it — I certainly hope you have! Then I will outline what we know, some of the research findings as a result of that and then where we will go from here.

If you cast your mind back you will remember that the months from June 2002 to June 2003 were the driest 12 months on record since records began in Victoria and that our storage levels were very low — 40.2 per cent were the storage levels we had in 2003 and that was the lowest we had had for almost 20 years. One of the challenges with that is because the storages are so low, one year of good rainfall will not necessarily bring us up to the situation that we want. We need at least four to six years of average rainfall to recover from that sort of position, so that is something to keep in mind at this time of the year when we start seeing a little bit of rain.

The other issue as well is that Melbourne's average water use is among the highest in the world; so not only are we a dry place but we also use a lot of water. The population is likely to continue to grow; the forecasts are that we could have another one million people in Melbourne by 2030, and that is just as a result of regular population changes. So if we are going to have more people here and our water resources are already stretched, clearly we need to take action to reduce the amount of water we are using. As a result of these situations the government set a target to reduce water usage by 15 per cent by 2010, and when you look at the facts above it is pretty obvious why that sort of a target was set. Part of the way of achieving that was to embark on a wide-scale behavioural change campaign to encourage people to use less water so we could save our water resources, and Our Water, Our Future is that behavioural change campaign.

Ms LOVELL — Was that 40.2 per cent level for all storages, not just metropolitan Melbourne?

Mr POSNER — That was just the storages for Melbourne. So to deliver this we had a multifaceted campaign and we will run through some of the elements of that shortly. Basically it is a call to action to every Melburnian to become water savers and to make it a lifelong habit, not something that you do just now but something that you incorporate into your behaviour and take through for the rest of your life; and also to remind and encourage people that if they do something it does contribute to a bigger impact and that every small bit that somebody does can make a difference.

The first phase of the campaign was launched in September 2003 — last weekend a year ago — and the budget for the campaign was about \$6 million. To all accounts it has delivered a high-level awareness of the campaign, and the idea of being a water saver has successfully been communicated, using a variety of techniques. It is also showing that Melburnians are beginning to heed the call to save water in their homes and in their gardens. When we go through the research you will see that it is having a positive impact, but this is not something that will happen overnight. One campaign will not deliver the sorts of changes that we need. It is certainly heading us in the right direction, we can see real results from it; but it needs to be an ongoing campaign for many years to come, I would think.

Running through some of the things that we incorporated into the first phase of the Our Water, Our Future campaign, the first one was the Premier's launch ad which was setting the picture for the campaign. That was screened during the AFL Grand Final last year and that hit it off, showing that the government considered it to be a

very important campaign. It was a very unusual advertisement which generated a lot of interest. That was then followed up with some pre-match scripted interviews and live telecasts during weather segments. There was also a direct mail-out: the Premier wrote letters to Melburnians about the campaign and even got quite a lot of replies — I think more than 200 people wrote letters back to the Premier in response.

There was also a 30-minute documentary on channel 7 which featured the Premier, the Minister for Water, guest reporters and a lot of Water Saver Heroes. You may have seen that; if you have not, we would be happy to get a copy of it to you. It was hugely successful. We also had a series of reality-style TV ads which depicted Melburnians in their homes using video recorders to show how they are saving water at home. Hopefully you have seen a few of those as well. In addition there were press advertisements, there were things on the radio, we had outdoor signs and transit advertising, stuff on the web — it was all over the place. We also supported special events and sponsorships. If you have been to the home shows, our Our Water, Our Future display regularly wins awards for the best stand. It is proving to be a hugely popular stand at various shows. It was also at the Royal Melbourne Show recently. We have also had community consultations. To round out the first phase of the campaign it was decided to get the Premier to report back. In September he said, 'Okay, this is what we need to do'. The idea then was that Melburnians have heeded the call and he is now reporting back on how things are going, and we can now close that first section.

I would like to show a few of those ads. It should not take too long, you may have seen them already. It starts off with the first Premier's ad which launched the campaign. We then showed two of the water saver ads, and then the final ad where the Premier reported back. The quality is not spectacular because they are only on the computer here, but hopefully they will give you a reasonable idea.

Videotapes shown.

Ms LOVELL — I have never seen any of these ads.

Mr POSNER — We had a range of different advertisements and we used them at different times of the year. You might have seen the one where there was a little girl saving water in the tap in the kitchen. There was another one with the couple in the shower changing the shower head over. There was also the older guy playing golf because he saw that it was about to rain in a few days time so there was no point in watering the garden. Basically, all the ads target different people. They show different ideas about how they can do something. They all fit in with the original advertisement from the Premier that sort of said, 'We are going to show you some ideas about what people are doing'. They link together.

The final advertisement which I will not be able to show you but you may have seen was the Premier reporting back a couple of months ago. It goes back to the original advertisement and shows him watching it on television and saying, 'Nine months ago I encouraged all Victorians to save water, and the good thing is that everybody has been doing it and this is really good, but we continue to have low levels of rainfall so we need to keep saving water'. It also addresses the issue that building a new dam does not create water because all it does is take water from somewhere else. That is certainly an area that it has been shown people do not understand. They think that if you build a new dam, water will just fall into it. They do not understand the idea of catchments. The reality is that if you build a new dam it is just going to take water from somewhere else, which is either water that is coming from farms or rivers. That is an area that still needs to be addressed.

As a result of that campaign — which of course was not just the television advertisements, it was all the other things that were mentioned before — more than 96 000 water saver kits were requested by Victorians, so a lot of the promotional material that was done encouraged people to phone up for water saver kits. Nearly 100 000 people did that. More than 80 000 people called the 136186 customer service centre line — that is, the DSE telephone number. We had lots of people calling in. We also had 20 000 visits to the Our Water, Our Future web site. As well as that, more than 68 000 people took up the domestic rebates in the first 18 months of the scheme and 700 megalitres of water per year were saved through those initiatives.

When we look at some of the research we did, back in February 70 per cent of the public were aware of water conservation advertising compared with 61 per cent when the campaign was first launched. To give you an idea of how we are doing the market research on this, we have done four sets of market research. We did it back in August last year to set a benchmark so that we had some idea of what awareness levels were like. We did it again in

November, in February and in May of this year. We can therefore compare how people are behaving and how they are responding to it.

We have seen that people's awareness has been raised considerably since the campaign was launched, and 67 per cent remembered seeing, reading or hearing about the Our Water, Our Future campaign, which was good. Eighty-one per cent who were aware of the advertising said that it was relevant to their life and 90 per cent said it was believable, which is obviously very important as well. Mass media also had a significant affect in reaching the public on water conservation issues. When people were asked where they had seen water conservation advertising, 92 per cent said they had seen it on television — up from 71 per cent in November. Even though there are many facets to the Our Water, Our Future campaign, obviously television needs to be a very significant part of that because so many people watch it and it has such an impact. The campaign message of being a water saver is resonating strongly with 54 per cent of people — that came through in the second wave of the market research.

With respect to how that impacts on people's behaviour and what they are doing, we saw that people were taking an average of one minute off their average shower time, from the benchmark in August through to February. More people are pouring laundry water on their gardens, more people have water-efficient washing machines, 70 per cent turn off the tap when they brush their teeth — up from 65 per cent. When you consider that when you have the tap on you are losing 9 litres of water a minute while you are cleaning your teeth, if you do that for a couple of minutes by turning it off in between there is a big saving there. There is also increased use of water conservation devices such as mulch and watering cans and drought-resistant plants. More people have water-efficient shower heads.

The thing is there is a little bit of fluctuation throughout the year — the seasons have a little bit to do with it and also the amount of advertising that is on at the time. We have seen that when the advertising is not as dominant there is some movement backwards in those areas. Unfortunately we do not have the budget to run TV all year round constantly. You do see a little bit of variation from time to time but certainly the trend is absolutely heading in the right direction. This represents those figures in a way in terms of how we are achieving the goal of changing behaviour. In terms of the first level — whether the campaign is reaching its target — 85 per cent of people say it has gained their attention. Is it convincing — 90 per cent of people think it is believable. Is the campaign on strategy — 81 per cent of people think it is relevant to their life. Attitude and knowledge change — 77 per cent feel more positive about water conservation.

One of the important things in this campaign is to get people to feel positive about doing something, that they should do something, that they want to do something and they expect to do something about it. That is the only way we are going to get the significant long-term change. If it is all linked with the idea that we have very low storages at this moment and that we have not had much rain at the moment then it will be harder to maintain that when we start getting a little bit of rain. Like we saw before, we need to get sustained levels of rainfall to really address those issues. When you think about potential impacts of climate change and the like, there is going to be continued pressure on our water resources. Up the top, am I more likely to consider conserving water — 64 per cent of people said that. That is a very positive outlook.

This here just looks at some of the details in terms of have households improved their water usage in general. We are seeing an improvement. There can sometimes be a little bit of fluctuation. It is showing significant improvement but it also demonstrates that it is not something that is going to happen overnight — we are not going to go to 100 per cent of people overnight doing all the things they should do. However, we are seeing significant increases in the people who always try to install water-saving devices, the people who use permanent grey water systems or have water-efficient shower heads. You can see the targets on the far right-hand column. We are not there yet but we are certainly heading in the direction we want. This is looking at what people are doing in their gardens and you can see that there are improvements in all of the areas. Sometimes we see a little dip — tap timers went down, for example but they have gone up again. There can be some changes. This depends a little bit on the season as well. It is a little bit harder to get people excited about saving water in the garden when it is raining. It is obviously more front of mind during summer when it has not been raining. Certainly we are seeing the trend in the right direction there.

As I mentioned before, we obviously need to continue this campaign — it is not all going to be solved by the first phase of it so there is a commitment to continue it. That will continue throughout 2004–05. The next stage of the campaign is being developed now. We will continue with the idea of 'Are you a Water Saver?'. It will build on the strengths of the campaign that ran in the first bit. It will provide a context for water conservation and look at some of those big picture issues. We need to remind people why things need to happen and even if we do get a little bit of

rainfall we still need to do it anyway. You might have seen the print ads which ran in the newspaper with the little girl by the window when it was raining and basically saying that even though it is raining now we still need to be saving water. That is an important message we need to get out. However, we also need to recognise and reward people for doing the right thing. We want people to feel good about doing the right thing and to make that a part of their lives. That is one of the outdoor display ads that we had running during the campaign.

That is a run-down of where we have been with the first stage of the campaign and some of the results. I think it is all very positive. There is very strong community awareness of the campaign. They also understand what it is about and they are changing their behaviour. You cannot really ask for too much more than that from a campaign. Obviously it is a pretty important issue which will continue to be an important issue for Melbourne for many more years to come. That is why the campaign will need to continue and develop. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much indeed, we will open up for some questions.

Mrs COOTE — I found that very interesting. The behavioural change element is something I think is important for us in this committee, it is an aspect of this committee's reference. I know you acknowledge that it was just for the campaign and you were monitoring the campaign. Have you put into place any longitudinal studies to look at these changes that might have come out of this particular campaign? Into the future — two or three years down the track — to see whether there has been a behavioural change because of this particular campaign.

Mr POSNER — We are going to continue with this research. As the next stage of the campaign gets under way, we will continue to do that and keep monitoring that against what we did in that original benchmark survey. The market research and analysis is not stopping — it will continue and it will measure the same things we were measuring before so we can see whether we get that ongoing behavioural change.

Mrs COOTE — One of the things you did not specify in that presentation was — I know you mentioned it in one line — about children. Is there particular market research being done about the impact on children? Children have been so instrumental in this country for seatbelts and smoking and a whole range of things. Has there been something specific in your market research to target the children?

Mr POSNER — We have put together a kit for schools. We have targeted it in terms of providing information for children. I would have to check but I am not aware that we have done any market research that looks specifically at the changes in attitude of children. Certainly we are well aware that one of the key issues is that children take things home from school and they raise them with their parents. That is one of the reasons we put the Water: Live It, Learn It campaign together, which is designed for teachers so they can work on these issues. It has classes and lesson plans and the like on these issues so they can do that at school.

Mrs COOTE — That was the actual program I was referring to. You do not have specific market research looking at the ramifications of that to see whether it has — —

Mr POSNER — I am not certain on that, I will have to check for you. Linda is the one who has been working specifically on that. I will have to find out for you.

Mrs COOTE — Just one final question, I am not sure whether you were referring to the population in general or whether it was just specifically for business but you talked about recognition and rewards. Could you elaborate on what those rewards were? Were they just for business or were they for the community as well?

Mr POSNER — The rewards are the rebates. For example, there are rebates if you buy water-efficient appliances and if you buy mulch and the like. Basically, if people do the right thing, there is a financial reward for them as well. It is also about the sort of language we are using in the campaign. For example, the Premier not yelling at people and saying, 'You are doing the wrong thing, we need to get better', but recognising the fact that improvements have been made — acknowledging that but saying we need to keep doing more. It affects the tone of the campaign and also in terms of issues such as rebates. We also have competitions run in papers in the like. We will probably see more of that happening in the next stage of the campaign.

Mrs COOTE — Recognition? Are you going to have the water saver of the year award or something?

Mr POSNER — There are water saver awards already that work for industry.

Mrs COOTE — This is targeting people about homes?

Mr POSNER — There is also the comparison of suburbs. You can see how your suburb compared against others. I think that is the one which showed that Toorak — —

Mrs COOTE — Yes, don't worry, that's my electorate — I know all about that.

Mr POSNER — Whereas Fitzroy — where I live — was rather good.

Mrs COOTE — I am sure it will get better.

Mr POSNER — Absolutely, and one of the things you need to look at is improvement. It is also not just comparing one suburb against another and seeing if suburbs can improve. That is one of the things we are working on with water businesses, to see what sort of information we can get out so that people have some idea of what is going on. The other issue is the changes in the water bills that will be coming out shortly, and the idea is to give people — like we do with our electricity bills — a little bit more information so they actually have an idea of the impact of what they are doing.

Ms DUNCAN — Thanks for that, Rupert. I was pleased to see the level of awareness people have of the campaign and that 90 per cent said it was believable. My experience is that people still believe there is a drought and they do not believe that an extra dam will not create new water — in other words, they believe that an extra dam will create new water. I live out of the Melbourne area so our water restrictions are even more severe and our water capacities are even lower. Every night I hear from weather reports complete contradictions to what I think is the real message. About two weeks ago I actually heard a guy on the radio saying, 'And farmers are calling out: stop the rain! stop the rain!'. Now I do not know of anywhere where farmers are calling out, 'Stop the rain!'.

Ms LOVELL — Not in our region.

Ms DUNCAN — Or there might be a small pocket in very high rainfall areas. I see a lot of things that I think contribute to undoing the message that you are trying to get ahead of. The question is whether or not you think some of these things could be achieved just through sticks — costing of water and water restrictions — and how much of it could we achieve through those measures. Also, is there any evidence about which jurisdictions — and I know we have suburb by suburb — are most progressive with regard to residential water conservation?

Mr POSNER — Yes. In terms of the carrot-and-stick approach, I think you need to have a combination and you need to give people information — for example, the government released its white paper on water recently, and one of the elements in that was the change to prices. It has had incredibly positive support from the communities, and I think that was because they understand what is going on. Providing this information and background on why we need to do things makes it easier to implement some of those sticks you are talking about, so that people understand why they are there. It is important to have a combination of the two. You need to encourage people to do above a base standard, and that is the reason you put regulations in place such as the minimum standard we need to be meeting. But sometimes we need to encourage people to do better than that. So while you might have the regulations to set that minimum standard, you need to have things in place to encourage people to go beyond that, and that is what this campaign does. Also, I think there is very strong awareness in Victoria that a lot of work needs to be done on water, and the government has done a lot on that. This campaign makes it easier for these sorts of things to take place because people understand. We need to be providing more information. The issue about the dams is certainly one where people are uninformed. It is a good Australian mentality to think we will just build some big thing and that will fix whatever the problem is. We can build a new dam but it will take water from somewhere else; it will be incredibly expensive; and there are probably more efficient ways to deliver water security for Melbourne.

Ms DUNCAN — But I guess people will see then the action that is required on their part and the action that is required from government. People are generally more accepting of governments taking action than themselves taking action.

Mr POSNER — Yes. Certainly in Australia there is a stronger view than say in the US that governments should do things, but at the same time people recognise they need to do something as well and that it is a combination. They see that they need to be doing something and they expect government to do something as well. That is why this has been reasonably successful, because everybody is playing their part and that is what people expect. They understand that. They want to play their part but they also want to see government and business play their part as well.

Ms LOVELL — Rupert, some of the indicators were quite impressive during the water saving campaign. Is there any adjustment made for the fact that we were actually on water restrictions?

Mr POSNER — That took a comparison back with the benchmark in August. Certainly it is reasonable to expect that there would be fluctuations depending on what is happening with water conditions and the like, but the challenge for the campaign is to make sure they become permanent habits. We have had below-average rainfall for eight years now. Certainly it is higher in people's minds, but because of the challenges of climate change, extra population, a growing economy and the like, we need to make sure we make them permanent behavioural changes.

Ms LOVELL — Like Jo I am a country representative, and those ads were foreign to me. I had seen the helicopter one once when I was in the city but had not seen the other ad at all.

Mr POSNER — We are looking to how we can take the campaign out to regional Victoria.

Ms LOVELL — Has it been run in any of the larger regional areas?

Mr POSNER — Some of them have run those commercials. This campaign was initiated because of the Melbourne water businesses getting together and doing it. Then that was coordinated through DSE. That is how that started up. Obviously there is a need to take this message out to the rest of Victoria, and that is something we are looking at doing. But because of the nature of how the businesses are set up it means we have to go about that through a slightly different process. It is certainly something we are looking at. Those advertisements have run in some regional areas and we are going to make sure it is able to happen in the future as well.

Mr HILTON — One of the statistics that surprised me was that only 65 per cent would actually consider changing their water-use behaviour after the campaign. That means that 35 per cent would not. Did that surprise you? How would you go about targeting that 35 per cent who in spite of all the campaign information either still do not believe, are not interested or do not care?

Mr POSNER — I do not know that it necessarily assumes that because within that percentage of people are those who probably think they are doing enough already. Some of them will be doing enough and some will not be doing enough. I would argue that I am doing close to enough in my own home because I do all those things and I am aware of them already, so there would be some people in that category who are very efficient water users and think they are doing enough. Then there will be others who are not doing enough but think they are. I have not got a breakdown of what those numbers are for you. I can see whether they are there, but I am not sure if they are or not. This is not a campaign that will be completed by the end of the year. We are not going to have 100 per cent of people doing that immediately. What we are seeing is a much greater level of people understanding the campaign and changing their behaviour. There is certainly room for more, and that is why the campaign is going to and needs to continue.

Mr HILTON — A witness at one of the committee's hearings said he could reduce water use or water consumption overnight by about 15 per cent by making stage 2 water restrictions permanent. That would seem to me to be a far more effective way of making that step change in behaviour than spending \$6 million on an education program.

Mr POSNER — I think it is a combination. Once the current water restrictions are over the government will introduce those permanent water saving measures, but part of these changes is that you need to take the community with you. They need to understand why these things are happening. With the government just introducing regulations and controls, quite often you will get a section of the community that does not understand why, and they do not know that it is important. If they do understand, then you will get them to be happy with it, and then in future expect even greater changes to take place. It is really important that the community goes along with the government's views on these matters. That is one of the great successes of this campaign — that we have seen Victoria now introduce the most comprehensive water reform that Australia has seen, and the community has embraced it and said that it is a good idea. That is what is really important. I think this campaign has played a small part in enabling that to take place.

Mr HILTON — In terms of communicating to the community, particularly through schools, a number of organisations have programs which they are promoting to the school communities. In your view is that a positive thing or is it perhaps confusing? And if you think it could be confusing, is there a role for government to determine

what these programs should contain and to monitor whether a consistent message is being given to the communities?

Mr POSNER — It is important for the community to get consistent messages. The information in this is made available as widely as possible, and we certainly encourage people to use the information. That is why we have the Water — Learn it! Live it! campaign, so that there is information available for people to use. Certainly you want water awareness to be even bigger than just what the government is doing. You want everybody to embrace it. So you want anyone who is interested in sustainability to be factoring water into what they are doing. I do not think it is possible to completely control every message that comes out about water conservation, but I do think it is important to have useful information available that people can draw upon and incorporate into what they are doing. That is what we are trying to do with this information.

Mr HILTON — Thank you.

Mr SEITZ — My question is probably slightly off the track, but has any thought been given to using the State Emergency Service? They are already involved in the campaigns for changing the batteries in our smoke alarms. Has any thought been given to involving them in spreading the message within the community — for example, things like installing little strainers in showers to reduce the water pressure? They see people in the neighbourhood, and they could be part of the water conservation campaign.

Mr POSNER — I am not sure whether that has happened in that area. We are certainly looking at things like bringing in plumbers who are working with the water businesses.

Mr SEITZ — That is why I asked the question, because I am aware that as soon as you mention plumbers, the pensioners shudder at the cost. They will not let them in the door. Just to have them park out the front and knock on the door costs a fortune. However, the State Emergency Service has developed that rapport with the community, particularly as I said with pensioners and elderly people, by bringing along a stepladder and changing the batteries in their smoke alarms. They could encourage water conservation.

Mr POSNER — I am not certain about that, but I am happy to follow it up.

Mr SEITZ — Thank you.

The CHAIR — My one question is about the water companies, which have a responsibility to invest soundly, make a profit and all of those things, but at the same time we are asking them to make people reduce water use. Is there a risk that directors could be looked at as being not economically responsible?

Mr POSNER — We have worked very closely with the water businesses to develop this particular campaign, and they have absolutely been on board. In terms of the overall reporting and requirements of the water businesses, I do not think I am the right one to speak to about that. There was a very interesting presentation last week by the Premier to public servants about the role of the public service, in which he talked about putting the public back in and the idea that government enterprises should look at not just economic but also social and environmental requirements. I suggest that that speech might be a useful thing to look at in relation to how the government might be looking at the requirements of the water businesses.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. And thank you for your time this morning.

Mr POSNER — It was my pleasure. I brought a few copies of that presentation for you.

Witness withdrew.

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Witnesses

Ms M. Parker, president; and

Ms T. Day, education and development officer, Victorian Association for Environmental Education.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Meagan and Teresa, for coming today. We have Meagan Parker, president, and Theresa Day, education and development officer, from the Victorian Association for Environmental Education. Before we start I will just let you know that all evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, if you make comments outside the precincts of the hearing they are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being recorded by Hansard, and you will receive a proof transcript within a couple of weeks. Were you going to talk to us briefly and then take questions, or were we going to do a question and answer session?

Ms DAY — A question and answer session.

The CHAIR — All right. I will start with a fairly broad and general question to get us going, and that is: what do you think are the key barriers to increasing the rate of individuals and households involved in managing waste water and energy?

Ms DAY — I do not know where to start, really.

The CHAIR — That is our problem as well!

Ms PARKER — That is a major question. There are lots of elements that contribute to it.

Ms DAY — The first thing really is relevance. With most environmental education it is a matter of people understanding the position and the actions they need to take to make a difference. They need to understand that, firstly, the environmental issue is relevant to them; and then secondly, that their actions are going to make a relevant contribution and make a difference. That is one of the major barriers coming across in environmental education. People do not understand that their positive actions actually make a difference.

Ms PARKER — Coming from our perspective, our association was developed in the first instance as a subject association, and it has now developed into a professional association for both community educators and school educators, so we are always going to have environmental education as a focus. I have worked in community education overseas as well as here in Australia — it is the same with health and wellbeing as well — often education is left behind when it comes to funding. They do not look at proactive responses; they are always looking at reactive responses and coming up with solutions to clean up messes to do with waste, for example, as opposed to the long-term proactive response of education and trying to re-educate people in terms of their behaviour or management of the environment.

I work in a schools capacity — this is a voluntary position — and I work with a number of schools. When I try to implement it, I find that although things have gotten hugely better, and also in households, some of the more environmentally friendly methods that are around are prohibitive in terms of cost. I was looking at a solar energy rebate, for example, for schools and other businesses and so on that is available; but just the outlay in the first instance is quite prohibitive, so that has a lot to do with less people taking up the opportunity. If we look at even waste management, that has gotten hugely better, but I had to make about 70 phone calls recently. The Little River Primary School wanted to do recycling; however, because there are not that many businesses in the area and the schools come at it like it is hugely complicated. Not many people would hang in there for 70 phone calls but finally I convinced them to put some domestic recycling bins there in order to keep the waste. So children were wanting to, but it just demonstrated to me that we are still not wholly supportive in terms of the infrastructure that has been provided to support these people. There are many myths around. I have also tried to implement the use of grey water, and there are a lot of myths around that. I find there is a very conservative response from government departments in terms of supporting those sorts of initiatives, so I still think we have a long way to go in smoothing out the infrastructure, but there is a little bit of prejudice or reluctance to develop environmental education as much as we could to help ease the way in the implementation of all these initiatives.

Ms DAY — There are a lot of myths as well about what happens. Waste is a good example, because when I speak to people about waste they say, ‘What is the point of putting it in recycling bins? We know the infrastructure is not there and it just gets put into the landfill anyway, so it is just a complete waste of time’; so people have that sort of attitude. I have often seen it happen where people have put plastic bottles into plastic bottle tubs and glass in the glass tubs and the cleaner comes along and just puts it all in one bin in front of the public. There is that element as well. There are these myths and people cannot get over them.

Ms PARKER — And that is where the environmental education comes in; in order to get accurate information out there to the public.

Mr HILTON — Have you done any studies as to the effect of educational change in behaviour?

Ms PARKER — Recently we were asked by the Department of Sustainability and Environment to carry out a review of environmental education across Victoria. That is currently sitting with Minister Thwaites and they are deciding what to do with it. About nine recommendations came out of that. To give you an idea of the kind of research we did, it was based on the last environmental education strategy that was written in about the early 1990s by the Victorian Environmental Education Council. That was disbanded once the Kennett Liberal government came in, so they were unable to follow through the implementation that was written into the strategy which was foremost in its time. We were a leader throughout Australia in environmental education but we have slipped back since then.

We looked at what was written in there and how we have gone since then. Just so you understand the breadth of experience of those involved in this review, we firstly interviewed about 30 experts across 18 different sectors, because we are talking not just schools, not just councils and other government bodies but what sort of environmental education is there within media, within leisure activities, within unions; so all up it was about 18. We asked experts in those fields, and that helped frame the work that we did following that. We then constructed an electronic interview and we had a huge response to that, getting about 300 responses within a very short time. As you know, some projects have very short time lines so we had only about three months to conduct this review and minimal resources with which to do so. We managed to get the 300 responses from across Victoria — that was regional as well as metropolitan — and we then conducted focus groups in the Melbourne metropolitan area, in the Central Highlands-Wimmera area and also in Gippsland. We also ran information sessions in Bendigo and in Melbourne so it would include more people. From those results we got quantitative data and we also got qualitative data in the form of anecdotes. We have not been given permission to talk to you about those now: I would love to be able to present them and say, 'Here it is and these are our findings and here are the recommendations'. However, you could probably get access if you approached Minister Thwaites.

Mr HILTON — So those 300 electronic surveys — you sent out a number of surveys on a random basis, or were they targeted?

Ms PARKER — We used our networks because that is one of the things that the VAAE provides: it networks networks, so to speak. That was emailed, and the nature of the survey is very simple. All the information is gathered by a central web site and all they have to do is create a link; they just press on a link, it is as simple as that, so it was very easy to email it to people and for people to access it if they had electronic access.

Mr HILTON — Is there a danger that you are sending the surveys to the already converted?

Ms PARKER — Yes, there is that possibility because it would be people who are connected to that who work — —

Mr HILTON — So you are not really sampling randomly the population of Victoria?

Ms DAY — No, it is not the population; it is people who are involved in this sector because we are trying to find out — —

Mr HILTON — So really, what basis would you have for saying the education program has actually affected people's behaviours?

Ms PARKER — This is more looking at how environmental education fared in terms of its implementation, which is different from what you are talking about in terms of — it is a very tricky question — how behaviour changed as a result of the education that is going on.

There is another program, and we are curious to know what you are linking in with what the commissioner is doing, because within the legislation that was established the commissioner has been asked to do an audit and an evaluation of environmental education. He has approached four groups of people to develop a scoping brief, and we were one of the groups to be invited. We are the only Victorian organisation, I might add, that has been invited; the others are — you may know who they are — interstate people. We are just in the process of developing that,

and it is actually different and it is a tricky thing. We are looking more at how you evaluate the different programs, because a media campaign will have a different impact from, say, a much more intense training program that is conducted over several weeks where we have people on site and so on. So varying degrees of education occur; hence we are saying you need different evaluation tools to then measure. One of the things we as an organisation are very interested in is professional standards, so we are very interested in the outcome of this because we are all about the same thing: maximising the resources that are out there to increase the effectiveness so you are achieving, without too much wastage, the outcomes that you want. That was not in the scope of our review, but we have had some feedback on how it has been implemented to some extent; not so much the results.

Ms DAY — So your question is about the next step. What we are pushing for with the question is to actually identify best practice and the different types of programs that are being delivered. Obviously, it is still under negotiation.

Ms PARKER — Just as a background, leading up to that we were also asked to do a literature review for the Department of Education and Training of systems and models of environmental education within formal education across the world. There are not many examples of very successful programs, so — and you are probably familiar with the fact that the Department of Education and Training has developed a blueprint of their strategy for change or reform in schools — we used those as the parameters and then made some comparisons with New Zealand, England, South Australia and America. We looked at what has been successful in those countries as a pre-emptor to the development of a strategy within the Department of Education and Training.

Mr HILTON — I am struggling with the concept of what is successful with respect to education — that is, whether success is restricted to increasing awareness or whether success really needs to go a bit further than that so that people do things differently to the way they did before. What you are saying to us, as I understand it, is that we have not really got to that second stage to be in a position to judge whether these programs are ‘successful’.

Ms PARKER — Individual organisations have carried out evaluations. I do not need to tell you how important self-evaluation is in respect to being able to monitor the success of programs. Some people have put a lot of thought into them. Water Watch is an example of one, EcoRecycle and the Waste Wise Schools program is another one where they have conducted evaluation programs and decided what their measures are going to be with respect to success. However, there are a whole host of others who do not even know what evaluation is and are just carrying on without feedback on whether they are being as effective as they could be. So before you even start talking about effectiveness, there is no evaluation in most instances.

Mr HILTON — Are you suggesting that before these programs are presented to schools they need to have some sort of quality assurance, and part of that quality assurance needs to be some evaluation of the technology — if that is the way it works — of the technique, before they are allowed to promote the programs to the targeted audience?

Ms PARKER — That gets into very muddy waters, but as a professional association that is certainly something that we are interested in promoting, and in cooperating with government in implementing. Certainly, the North American Association for Environmental Education has what it defines as being the elements of effective environmental education. But it is not going to be such a simplistic formula here because it is going to vary. For example, you have your friends group that is also carrying out an evaluation, as well as well-organised and well-established programs that are out there.

Ms DAY — A really good point to remember when you think about evaluation is that we are talking about a journey; it is not like a final destination. It takes a long time for a person to develop an awareness and an understanding of their actions, so it is two steps. The final step is when those actions become a part of their everyday life. It is something that could take 2, 3, 10 or 15 years. It is quite difficult, so there needs to be evaluation on different levels.

Ms PARKER — We also have to be very careful that it is not just quantitative data because we have seen — and I notice that a few of the committee members have worked in education — what happens when it comes to quantitative measures and so on. This information can be misused and schools, and teachers and students ultimately, can be abused in the name of that quantitative data. We are much better off getting qualitative data. The method that they are using within one of the initiatives — which is the initiative within which I work — Schools for Innovation and Excellence — uses action research as the feedback mechanism. It then supports what Teresa is

talking about with respect to it being a journey, and watching people grow; monitoring it that way. You are also able to develop a knowledge bank by gathering research, as opposed to just having a yardstick by which you measure people.

Mrs COOTE — Could you please tell me how many members your organisation has?

Ms DAY — There are 170.

Mrs COOTE — How long has it been operation?

Ms PARKER — Since about the 1970s. It was one of the first environmental education organisations; certainly the first one within Australia.

Mrs COOTE — Could you give me an outline of two major achievements that the organisation has had? You have obviously done a lot of analysis and a lot of pulling down of some of the things everyone else has done, but what have you actually done in that time. Can you give me two positive examples of what your achievements have been? Given that it is a long journey, given all these other things, but since 1972 there must have been some sorts of achievements.

Ms DAY — As an organisation itself that is quite hard to answer because basically, considering the industry, we are actually quite a small organisation. We are driven by the thing; for example, Australia, generally, is quite a leading country in environmental education — 10 years, 15 years.

Mrs COOTE — I am speaking about you specifically. There must have been some achievements in the almost 30 years since you have been operating.

Ms PARKER — It is more about creating relationships between organisations so that we are working in a cross-sectorial way, therefore it becomes very hard. The way we operate currently means that you would not see a product, as such. Often people want to put money into organisations in order to see some sort of — and I have experienced this when I work with government — result for their money such as a product or an outcome, whereas we are an ongoing provider of information. People are always ringing the office to find out who they need to contact to find information, so we network networks. This is a very important role because there are a huge number of networks out there, a huge number of stakeholders, and a huge number of providers of environmental education.

Mrs COOTE — Exactly; so why would they come to you and not go to somebody else?

Ms PARKER — Because we are a professional organisation.

Mrs COOTE — I think the others would probably say they are too.

Ms PARKER — But we are the peak body, and have been the peak body.

Mrs COOTE — But you have not been able to tell me what you have actually achieved in that time.

Ms DAY — All the networks.

Mrs COOTE — Networks. All right. Let us go to the next five years. What are your aims or objectives for the next five years?

Ms PARKER — I think you are underestimating the importance of relationships and the coordination across them. What is certainly coming out through the review we have done is that that is a very important role, and one that has been underestimated by government over the last 10 years. We provide — and we can send you a copy of this — a contacts directory through which people, including schools and communities, know who they can contact. People hang out for that document, and it took us 18 months just to update it because so many organisations spring up. We respond to government education initiatives by developing educational materials. We have a web site that people can access for information. We run professional development programs with up-to-date information on how to implement them. For example, we will be running professional development to do with evaluation because we see that as being very important for organisations in order to operate and improve on what they are doing. We also run forums; we do a lot of lobbying with government. Obviously, we must be of value if the commissioner comes to us as the only Victorian organisation in order to come up with a scoping brief to do

with an audit. Obviously, we must be seen as a professional body if Mr Thwaites asks to do a review of environmental education. Obviously the Department of Education and Training values our professionalism because they come to us in order to develop a literary review and do contrasting and comparisons between other countries. We have access to a huge amount of expertise. When Theresa said we have 150 members, some of those are organisations not just individuals.

Mrs COOTE — I gathered that. A number of those organisations are providing web sites and education kits to schools as well. In the next five years what do you hope to be your major achievement?

Ms DAY — Over the next five years we want to further develop those networks. What is coming out of different forums that are going on at the moment is the fact that there isn't any coordination. I know we said our organisation is about developing networks, but we are talking about one person for four days a week in an office. Clearly the limitation is quite huge. What we are trying to do over the next five years is develop our membership base so we can increase our income and actually really start mapping out what is going on within Victoria and start putting people in contact with each other. What I mean by 'putting people in contact with each other' is putting environmental education within the local community, to the formal education, to the business sector. The business sector has generally been left out of it over history. What we are trying to do is basically develop the links between us at a local level, develop local networks so people can learn from each other about their local issues, whatever they may be. For example, if the local community wants to create a green space, they can go to their local school and perhaps talk about what type of interpretation they want on there, how the kids are going to use it, talk to local businesses to find out how they could use it and learn about biodiversity and incorporate it into the plans. I know it sounds like quite a simple thing but for an organisation like ourselves it is quite a major project. It is one we are looking to try to develop over the next year. We do not know how long it is going to roll out — we are still looking at certain areas to find out how much work would be involved to pull all that information together. We are talking to our partners as well to try to coordinate it.

Ms PARKER — One of the things we are looking at is doing research into what is effective environmental education and actually conducting professional development to do with that and develop professional standards to assist government.

The CHAIR — Can I jump in?

Ms PARKER — Sorry, can I just ask Andrea Coote, what is your background in terms of environmental education?

Mrs COOTE — I do not think this is the time and the place.

The CHAIR — We have a break scheduled after this, so I am sure that can be answered at that stage.

Ms PARKER — I just picked up a lot of hostility and I do not understand what her background is or why she has formed — —

Mrs COOTE — I do not think this is the time for you to be asking me questions.

Ms PARKER — Okay.

The CHAIR — My electorate is down around the Edithvale-Seaford wetlands. Four or five years ago one of the teachers at the local primary school, who is very much an environmentalist, and a person from the wetlands friends group got together and developed an education resource around living next door to the wetland, which is basically what my community does. It was school focused, it came with a CD and learning kits. I am not a teacher, I do not have a background in education but from what I saw it was absolutely wonderful information. However, I am not sure how that was developed, whether it was just the two of them. Could they have gone to you for assistance with that? Would they go to you to say, 'We have developed this resource, can you let other people know?'. Is that the sort of thing you provide? Would that be the membership source you provide?

Ms DAY — I think there has been a bit of confusion. We do not actually do environmental education ourselves — we help environmental educators do whatever they need to do to do their job. That might be developing the resources, it might be developing a local network that they can pull in certain skills to develop an action or an activity that they want to do. That is the sort of work we do. If people want advice on incorporating

biodiversity in some interpretation in their school, how do they do that? We would say, 'Right, these are the issues you need to look at issue. Greening Australia is a fantastic organisation to talk to because it does this, this and this.' We are actually putting people into contact with each other.

The CHAIR — Would most of your members be environmental educators? Is that where your membership comes from, and then some organisations?

Ms DAY — You would be surprised. We have individuals and organisations and then we have government organisations, schools, community education. We even have a few businesses who have an environmental interest as members also — I would say generally environmental educators but also people who are interested in environmental issues. We actually produce a journal three times a year. Not all that is based on environmental education even though that is what we do — some of the issues that are fleshed out, people find quite interesting.

Ms PARKER — And then you have people who are much broader than just environmental education, such as schools or local councils.

Mr SEITZ — I gather your background is in policy development and lobbying. One of the points in your written submission was about the gap in the senior years of high school. Having been a teacher myself, I know it is all fuzzy warm in primary school but once you start to get into secondary education and the last two years before a career, mud bricks, gardening and all that sort of thing is forgotten. I was in the secondary system, so I know. What can be done to change the policy and the curriculum without taking autonomy away from the school to run its own curriculum? I think the senior years are the most informative before they go out to university and out into the world. What they learned in primary school was kids play and this would maintain the consciousness of the environment in the minds of a number of people. What suggestions do you have there in the lobbying or the process about how to overcome that gap?

Ms PARKER — I guess we raised a concern there in terms of career development and new careers that have evolved recently — the environment is one of the fastest-growing areas. We want to make sure that students are skilled and equipped for their future and develop the competencies necessary. One of the obstructions we have established exists is that universities do not have environmental science. There is a VCE subject called environmental science but the universities do not have it as a prerequisite. It is really about educating the universities to change some of the admissions to support that subject. Children select their subjects depending on what the universities say is needed as a prerequisite. Often it comes down to the individual within schools as to whether they pick up and run with these subjects. We have found that if that individual leaves that school, that subject is dropped. I want to follow up with another one in another direction. Many witnesses that we have spoken to have said a demonstration site would be a good idea to encourage behavioural changes — where people can see, feel, touch and all the rest of it. What do you think of a cluster of schools? Obviously you cannot have one on every school site but if you have some parks or designated areas, clusters of schools, primary and secondary, could be involved plus the broader community. Any thoughts on that?

Ms DAY — That is what I have been talking about with developing local networks. As you can tell, I am English so I am quite new to Australia but from what I can see in Victoria there are networks but they are quite sporadic. Some areas are very close, some areas are not. Some people way out in the regions rely on contacts in the city to get information. When we say 'develop networks', and we want to continue doing that, we are going to do more like clusters so they are more hands on, more useful and more relevant. When we say 'networks', that is what we are talking about and we want to develop those types of instances where people can group together and actually learn about one thing or perhaps use one resource that they could not afford to purchase individually, that type of stuff.

I just want to go back, we were talking about education within the secondary years. I think there are two elements to that: there is educating people for the environmental education industry, which is growing hugely, but also educating other people. Basically we are talking about new work forces, and one of the major pushes for the UN over the next 10 years is to make people who work in work forces a little bit more sustainable in their methods of delivery. Where is that going to come from? The universities do not do it. So what we will try to do is hopefully fill out the essential learning framework to have learning about environmental sustainability, cultural sustainability and social sustainability.

We should not think about sustainability just with regard to the environment. We want to incorporate that as part of a person's development. When they get to the secondary years, especially in the latter part, obviously they switch from what I call personal learning to getting ready for university, a trade or whatever. People concentrate on the topics they need to, and personal development seems to be forgotten. I would be keen to see some kind of module, maybe one session a week or one session a month, where they can actually learn and continue to learn about themselves, what they think about certain issues, who they are as a person and what their values are, because that seems to get lost. As I say, it does not happen in universities because the curriculum is precious. They have to do a certain number of modules to pass their course at the end. There is nothing in there to make them develop as a person. It is more basic knowledge that they need, if that makes sense.

Mr SEITZ — Which organisation do you think would be best placed to push for that sort of policy? You seem to be backroom people. Could Planet Ark or any of those up-front environmental groups be pushing some of those issues? Are you working with them in this sort of discussion?

Ms DAY — They are a different type of organisation. Basically they are environmental organisations that have an education arm. For example, they might have an objective of getting rid of plastic bags throughout Australia, and part of that objective would be education. Obviously another element of that would be working with industry to do that. It is a completely different organisation. But if they decided they wanted to do something with the workplace together with us, then we would. The environmental sector does that, but the problem is the lack of knowing what other people are doing. We need a body to help coordinate it, because although you know roughly what an organisation does and what their aims are, you do not really get to know the nitty-gritty of it all. Basically because of the way the industry is funded — and this occurs not just in Australia but worldwide — people are quite protective and they are quite nervous. They will come up with a good idea and they will want to get it done, but they do not want to go externally to do it. Rather than adding value by sharing things and saying, 'Right, we're going to do this. What else can we do? Who else wants to come on board?', they get very protective.

Mr SEITZ — Thank you.

Ms PARKER — I will just add that our strength is in mobilising other organisations so they come to us. For example, we are currently corresponding with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority in relation to the development of the essential learnings framework, which will be the framework of the curriculum for the next 10 years, and environmental education has been marginalised within the curriculum standards framework. I do not know if this means anything to people, but in the curriculum framework for the last 10 years, environmental education was dissected into science and studies of society and environment. You will know what I am talking about, Ms Duncan, because you have been a teacher. But now they have the essential learnings framework. We see environmental education as being essential for people to develop behaviours from an early age that are complementary to the needs of the environment, and so we have looked at where that is coming out in terms of the essential learnings, and it has been squeezed out altogether. Hence it has come down to us; nobody else has been interested in having that conversation. We sent out a letter, and within three days we got 200 responses from different people. The letter even went interstate to people in Sydney and Canberra. So our strength is in being able to rally people as opposed to being just an individual voice, so to speak. That is where we are coming from.

Ms DAY — Just to add to that, I have been with the organisation for six months, and I work a little bit differently. Basically I have worked for other organisations in the UK, and I believe in cooperative working. I am not the sort of person who is protective about our strategic plan and who says, 'We own it and we want to do it by ourselves'. I do not really work like that, and the council is backing me in my suggestion that we work collectively with all the different partners within the industry. We are in the situation we are in at the moment where there is a lot of stuff going on because people do not really know what is going. We have lost direction and we have no coordination because people have been quite sheltered and totalitarian about what they are doing. I do not want to work like that, and I have been working with the organisation for six months and we are turning that around. We have been sitting on quite a lot of committees. I do not know if you have heard about the sustainable education round table. We are sitting on that, and we are sitting on quite a lot of different networks to try to open it all up, because there is confusion out there about what is going on.

Ms PARKER — Yes. And just to answer the question, once upon a time — it was not that long ago — when Joan Kirner was Premier she used to meet with the education officer individually and get briefed on what was happening in terms of environmental education. That was when we were in our heyday in terms of being a peak body. All sorts of other people have just sprung up in the last 10 years, and there has been a lack of coordination in

that time. More and more people got enthused and, as we said, it is a growing industry, so that is partly the reason for that as well. There is now a need to come up with new methods to coordinate that activity, and that is where we see our role.

Ms DUNCAN — You pre-empted my question, because part of it was whether you believed that the curriculum standards framework did address environmental issues at the senior secondary level. I know they are under review. In a sense you have answered that, because you think they have not been covered in the new framework?

Ms PARKER — Can I just get clarification on that, because the curriculum standards framework is only from prep to year 10.

Ms DUNCAN — Yes. So when you are talking about seniors, are you talking only about VCE?

Ms PARKER — We are talking about VCE. But certainly if you want an opinion on the CSF documents, we can give you some background on that as well. We did feel that environmental education was marginalised through the documents and segmented — which is not how it operates, because it is cross-curricula in its implementation. I was actually on the writing party for the very first CSF document and was brought in as the environmental spokesperson for the studies of society and environment. We found that it was really meant to be reflective of good practice. However, the problem occurred in the implementation, because there was not the funding to educate people about how to use the document. Once again, they saw the outcomes there and they just thought that was what they had to do. They did not understand that that was just an example and that they could use their own creativity and imagination to implement it.

Ms DUNCAN — So you would say there is definitely a need for increased coordination of environmental education and that that would be part of your role?

Ms PARKER — Definitely.

Ms DUNCAN — Are you aware of the New South Wales education plan to add to that framework?

Ms PARKER — Yes, very much so.

Ms DUNCAN — What is your view on that, and what jurisdictions around the country do you think are the most progressive with regard to environmental education? Who does it the best?

Ms DAY — Okay. I will start with New South Wales. Because there has been a lack of coordination in the last 10 years, Victoria has done a lot of real grassroots activities — some fantastic stuff — so I do not think that walking in with the New South Wales model and plonking it down in Victoria would necessarily work. It is quite a top-down approach, and I think there would be a clash, basically. There is a lot going on at grassroots level, and if you start shouting from the top it might not marry up in the middle.

Ms DUNCAN — You would see that part of the problem with the New South Wales model is that it is from the top down?

Ms DAY — I am not saying it is a problem. It is fantastic that they have direction and that people are singing from the same hymn sheet. What I am saying is that bringing it over here would not necessarily work, because there are lots of good projects here now and you would need to make sure that those projects are recognised as being good and that their delivery would fit into a national strategy. When you are developing a framework you would need to make sure that you took that into consideration to shape the top. If you go and shape the top without looking at the bottom, what you might end up with is a complete mismatch, so I think you would probably need an approach that would take that in consideration rather than just saying, 'This is what we are going to do; this is our aim, let's go for it'. It is a bit too late for that now, but I think it is a good model.

Ms DUNCAN — Just quickly, Meagan, you made the point about the primary school that you were trying to get some assistance for. Where would a school like that, for example, fit into the sustainable schools program, or why would a school like that be one of the places to not be part of that program?

Ms PARKER — It was precluded from being in something like that because they could not follow their guidelines in terms of becoming a Waste Wise school because they could not recycle, and they could not recycle

because the local council suggested, 'Well, Meg, if you really care about it' — after about the 60th phone call — 'you can get a trailer and deliver it to a recycling depot yourself'.

Ms DUNCAN — So that council per se does not recycle and they were not able to provide recycling bins?

Ms PARKER — Oh, they do, it is just that this was a school that fell between the cracks and because there were not a lot of commercial businesses in the area they did not run a commercial business service to that area, therefore they would not pick up from the school. It is just part of their guidelines, so it was precluded from something like sustainable schools. But there is a whole lot of other programs running in schools apart from sustainable schools. That is just one example.

Ms DUNCAN — Yes, I know.

Ms LOVELL — You mentioned you had between 150 and 170 members. What sort of interaction do you have with that membership? Do you have a newsletter? How do you disseminate information?

Ms DAY — We have a newsletter that goes out once every three months and that is a practical form of communication, so within that newsletter there will be a list of events that are going on within Victoria and sometimes nationally as well — it all depends on the event itself. That is not just events organised by us but events organised by all sorts of environmental organisations — organisations that are doing environmental education. Also within that as well there is a battery of resources of people, obviously all getting information of what we are doing as an organisation. We then do a journal that goes out three times a year, and that is more of what I would call a highbrow publication where people write articles about what they do and what they have learnt. It is more reflective, so they say, 'This is what we have done and this is we have learnt; this worked, this did not, and this is what we are going to do in future', so other people can learn from each other. That journal receives some very good comments; people really like it.

Ms LOVELL — Could you give us a couple of copies of newsletters or journals so we get an idea of what you do?

Ms PARKER — Definitely.

Ms DAY — Do I send it to this address here on the letterhead?

Ms LOVELL — Yes. You also said that you lobby government; that is one of your key roles. Where does the criteria for lobbying government come from? Does it come from your grassroots membership? Does it come from you as the news officers? What sort of things have you been lobbying government about?

Ms PARKER — I understand that you want to challenge that we are a peak body in terms of environmental education, but we did have a forum where we discussed this with a number of stakeholders across environmental education — this was going back two years — because we were willing to be quite introspective and say, 'Do we need to exist any more? Has our role been usurped by other organisations?', and there was strong support for us to continue in that role. So they often look at us, not so much as lobbyists as such but as providing a collective voice in terms of being able to talk with government and what is lacking in the coordinating body. Certainly there are opportunities like this inquiry and it is fantastic that this amount of resource is allocated to having a conversation with people, but it is not practical to do it all the time because as we said, you are forever needing feedback on changes that occur such as the essential learnings and so on. Therefore we often run forums and gain a collective voice that way or through email, or surveys, or just whatever fits the circumstance.

Ms DAY — For example, with the recent review, the members said, 'Look, we do not have the time to sit and read all of the gumph that you are sending us. We need a presentation or something to help us see what is going on. So we organised a forum for someone to come in, do a presentation and tell us about what they were proposing. We then had a discussion about what we felt, and I think that is quite valuable because I am a great believer that more heads are better than one. I might have something that I do not understand and how I think this or that should be done; and by giving my views somebody can then say, 'Well, that is a good idea but why don't we add this to it?'. This then has an add-on effect, so I think that is quite valuable service that we provide. That is one element.

Another element is people contacting the office and saying: 'I have read this: this is outrageous. Can you find out more information about it? How can we get more involved?', and that is how things start. We have been doing this for quite a long time so we know what our members want us to get into and help develop. For ages they have been saying, 'We need an environmental education strategy. Can you help us start pushing that?', so that is what we have been doing.

Ms LOVELL — Just one more thing: can you tell us about the structure of your organisation? Are you an elected board?

Ms DAY — Yes. The organisation itself is a not-for-profit incorporated association. We have a council of — well, it depends — normally 12 or 15 people, and they are elected through the AGM every year. I am the office worker; I work four days a week so obviously I make decisions. I have to run the office and the way to push it. Basically what we have done over the last year is get down together as a collective to develop a strategic plan for the next two years; so I now know what we need to do for the next two years and what we are pushing for. Obviously I take certain decisions to the council and get them ratified to go ahead.

Ms LOVELL — Will we also be able to have a copy of your strategic plan?

Ms PARKER — Certainly, yes. Even though there are about 15 members who sit as the board, there is a huge number of people involved. There is a lot of historical knowledge out there because there are people who were there from its beginnings back in the 1970s who are still around and who are still very passionate about the environment. We have found that on the whole people tend to have a fondness for the Victorian Association for Environmental Education because they see us as a parent body, therefore we find it is very easy to ring those people and run something past them in their area of expertise. There is just that goodwill that exists and a lot of goodwill, we understand, in relation to VAEE.

Ms DAY — Can I just say I am the only paid person, and all the rest are volunteers?

Ms LOVELL — Is that just funded through your membership?

Ms DAY — It is funded through the membership, through sales of products; and we also get a small grant from the Department of Education and Training — a department-teacher partnership.

Ms PARKER — We did find through the review that a lot of work in each of the organisations would not continue if it were not for the voluntary work that goes into the running of it.

Ms DAY — Absolutely. We have five volunteers who come in and help us — in the office, not the council.

Ms PARKER — The same is true for any of the organisations. It is just huge.

The CHAIR — Meagan and Teresa, can I thank you very much for your time today. It really is appreciated. As you can imagine our terms of reference are huge. One of them is certainly to identify the barriers, which means we need to talk to everyone involved in environmental education. So thank you very much for your time and your input this morning.

Ms DAY — What happens next?

The CHAIR — You will get a transcript. We will keep talking to people and considering the issues that come before us for probably another couple of months and then at some stage we need to sit down and decipher all the information that we have received. Our report will be tabled in Parliament, and obviously a copy of that report will be sent to you. If Caroline, who is our executive officer, and David, our research officer, have any further things to follow through, can they follow them through with you just over the phone?

Ms PARKER — Absolutely.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Reservoir — 27 September 2004

Members

Mrs A. Coote

Mr D. K. Drum

Ms J. T. Duncan

Mr J. G. Hilton

Ms J. M. Lindell

Ms W. A. Lovell

Mr G. Seitz

Chair: Ms J. M. Lindell

Deputy Chair: Mrs A. Coote

Staff

Executive Officer: Dr C. Williams

Research Officer: Mr D. Fairbridge

Witnesses

Mr J. Grant, chief executive officer; and

Ms P. Armstrong, deputy chief executive officer, Gould League.

The CHAIR — Can I welcome Jim Grant, the chief executive officer, and Pat Armstrong, the deputy chief executive officer, of the Gould League. All evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, if you make comments outside the precincts of the hearing, they are not protected by parliamentary privilege. Hansard is recording and reporting all evidence taken today and you will receive a proof transcript in a couple of weeks or so. I will get out of the hot seat and sit behind you so I can have a look at the presentation. If you can leave us some time after your presentation to take some questions, that would be really appreciated. We will look at trying to finish by 12.15 p.m. or 12.20 p.m., if that is okay.

Ms ARMSTRONG — Just to establish how we want to speak about this today, ours will be a very informal presentation. We only have about five slides. We did want to overburden you; we understand you get hit with many presentations. These are just the key slides that we believe are important.

Overheads shown.

Ms ARMSTRONG — We put a couple of quotes in here. Just to start things off, you asked us a series of questions and we thought we would respond to those. During our presentation we would be happy to take questions rather than wait until the end and you all forget the questions. Would that be okay? Are you happy to do that.

The CHAIR — Yes, within reason. It just makes it very difficult for Hansard.

Ms ARMSTRONG — We understand that. Before we start this presentation we thought we would talk about the barriers you asked us about that households might face. I am sure you know the answers to all this now but in our impression and our experience barriers to households are really people in households would like to do the right thing but their lives now are so busy. I am sure you have heard this many times. There are so many things happening in people's lives that it is making it difficult to change. We thought the sorts of barriers people are facing is they have habits — they have always done it this way and it is very hard to change. People are busy and there is the time aspect. There are norms, this is what society expects them to do. You have seen an example with the shopping bags. So many people are using green shopping bags now. Before it was almost uncool to have green shopping bags or the calico ones but now more and more people are using them. It has almost become socially acceptable to take them to the shops. If you do not take them, it is almost as if you are going against the norms of society. It is an example of how societal norms can change and change quite quickly. Then there is the general culture which is occurring within our organisation that we just accept these sorts of things. Finally, there is a cost factor. Often there is an expense to change. We have experienced this with schools — many schools would like to put in a water tank but they cannot because they cannot afford it, they would like to put blinds over the windows facing the sun and they find that they cannot do it. It becomes difficult because they do not have the money to pay for the retro-fitting they would like to see. That is just dealing with the barriers.

Mr GRANT — The second question was really about the role of education in overcoming those barriers. You have probably heard all this as well from different people but really that quote up there sums up our experience — there have been so many education programs over such a long time transferring knowledge and we have got to a point where most people know the situation now but most people's behaviour does not match what they would like ideally to do; I put myself in that category as well. We know the problems, we know what needs to be done but it is very difficult to do. You have probably had Doug McKenzie-Mohr introduced to you and possibly Stephen Stirling over the time.

What we have worked with, with the schools in particular, is the idea that changing the entire culture is necessary because having individuals with knowledge does not seem to do the job. That sort of sums up our experience, which is that in schools we really work with whole-of-school change so that the people who are not behaving environmentally are the odd ones out rather than the people who are. We have aimed to have not just awareness and not just engagement but actual interaction between the people so there is constant interaction around environmental behaviour.

We actually had a bit of a soul search about six years ago where we looked back over 90-odd years of work and felt that we really had not changed cultures particularly. We realised that we were taking little bits and pieces from schools and other organisations. We might get a few Gould League members headed off in the right direction, we might take some kids on an excursion and head them off in the right direction, we get kids using our materials for a unit of work but eventually they all flicked back to normal behaviour. In other words, there were lots of dead

vegetable gardens in the schools, there were lots of failed compost bins et cetera. We found that we have to put the effort into changing the whole school — not just one class, not just one passionate teacher but the whole school. What we have found is that when we do that we really do seem to get not only longer term change — we can say that after six years with some schools — but also much more effective change. With Waste Wise there are schools which have reduced waste to landfill by 98 per cent which has surprised us. We have also found that it affects the families. With the schools we have looked at, up to 50 per cent or even more of the families have changed their behaviour due to the programs. We have embedded in the school rather than just focusing on individual behaviour change.

We have tried to model what we have done or work out a strategy from it. What we look at traditionally is transmissive — that is, awareness, engagement, personal action. I worked at zoo education for many years and that was the model we used constantly. What we feel happens is people do get involved in personal action but that action ceases because there is no feedback. We have added interaction and leadership to this in our schools program. I think in schools in particular leadership is quite a big issue, as you probably know. We have found that that involvement and interaction is what is bringing it all together. We have interaction between curriculum areas, the parents, the local business community. Schools always say they are stunned at how involving this is.

Ms ARMSTRONG — The question that we were asked to consider was environmental education in Victoria in the schools and beyond the setting of formal education. We are speaking from our experience of education programs that we have been conducting at the Gould League going back to 1988. The research from that shows that the programs the children are undertaking have changed their behaviour back at school. However, that is almost that traditional end, that transmissive end where we are running student education programs. When we have involved schools in programs such as Waste Wise Schools and Sustainable Schools we have gone beyond that — we are in that purple zone, that involvement, interaction and leadership area. What we have observed is that sort of approach is changing the culture of the school by involving them, by allowing them to interact with members of the whole school community and beyond the community. By providing a framework we are changing the culture within the school. Everything is changing. They will say to us things like, ‘We do not do that anymore, this is the way we do things in our school’. We are also finding that this approach is sustainable over time. That is interesting in itself — it is not just an activity that they will do for a year. We have research that shows the program is sustained over four years or more. We have evidence of that, which we found quite astonishing. So 80 per cent of the schools that started back in 1998 were, four years later, still undertaking that program. That really shocked us, to find there was that sustainability in the program. But the other interesting thing we found from this was that the effect was flowing on from the families to the communities. We found that in a school up in Rutherglen, and we thought it was an isolated community and may be was just a one-off, but it has been repeated in other schools. We are beginning to see that not only is this sort of approach changing the behaviour of the children and changing the culture of the school, but it is also changing the behaviour of the families of the children from those schools.

The children are also becoming involved in their local communities — for example, at Rutherglen the children are involved in a forum run by their local council. We are beginning to see the spread from the change of culture within the school, which is perhaps the formal setting, to the informal setting beyond the school. That is the essence of our message today, that in order to bring about long-term change we need to bring about a culture change, and that culture change is in many ways using this sort of model. The key to that culture change is the involvement, the interaction and leadership.

Mr GRANT — The work we have done with councils is in its infancy, but we have analysed council work in terms of this same spectrum. We have found that a lot of councils do a heap of awareness raising and they have some very good personal action programs, and typically a small number of people, like friends groups, are heavily involved in interaction. But we feel there is a real gap in engagement-type programs and involvement programs, and particularly leadership programs. We would really like to work with friends groups and build leadership in friends groups, for example. Environmental groups tend not to be good leaders or engagers or involvers, and we probably include ourselves in that to some extent. It really is a difficult area.

We have found with Sustainable Schools it is actually the structure of Sustainable Schools that allows people to come in and out rather than trying to hold ourselves up as leaders, which has allowed it to work really well. Different people can be involved — for example, the zoo can be involved in awareness raising, DSE can be involved in planting plants et cetera; so people can come and go into that interaction. We think with councils it is the same sort of thing — we need some more involvement interaction programs and more engagement programs. If you drew a graph of awareness down to leadership you would have tens of thousands of people up in awareness

going down to very few leaders. We would like to raise that graph so it is a bit flatter by building engagement programs, involvement programs and leadership programs.

Ms ARMSTRONG — Just to add to that whole concept, what we are beginning to understand now is that essence there of involvement and that process area of interaction. We have worked with councils on many awareness raising programs over a number of years, but we now know that the shift has to be in those three areas on the right-hand side. We are saying that people are intelligent; people want to change; and we have to give them the ownership of their programs. I think this is the key. You have to accept that the population wants to change, they are intelligent and with guidance and facilitation they can change. This is what shocked us when we started running Waste Wise in schools — that they did not always do it the way we suggested. This was the key. We would say, ‘Why don’t you do this and this in this order?’, and they would say, ‘No, you have us inspired now, let’s go and do it our way’. What they achieved was beyond our wildest dreams. We need to be moving our society in this direction and not necessarily imposing a method or strategy on them but facilitating the process. It is hard because we cannot give you a recipe, but what we are giving you is a framework, which is what we give to our schools now. We give them that support, that encouragement, the guidance and the framework.

Mr GRANT — Also I guess one of our big changes was actually asking the schools what they wanted to achieve. When we went to the school, instead of saying, ‘Here is what we have for you’, we would say, ‘What do you want to achieve?’ That is why I think Waste Wise is working quite well. A typical school would say: ‘We have a problem with litter; we do not have very good science results; we are having trouble doing real life maths and we know we should do real life maths; our school grounds look pretty ordinary’. We would say, ‘We have a program that can solve a lot of your problems’, and we would match the programs to their needs rather than saying, ‘We are from the Gould League; we will reduce your waste to landfill’, which is not really a very appealing thing to say at all. It is really asking the schools what they want rather than coming in with our transmissive program.

Ms ARMSTRONG — This is also very consistent with social research as well, where the advice from the social researchers is that you do not start from the policy, you start from the needs of the people and you design the approach by matching up the policy with the needs of the people. You are addressing their needs and in the end if they understand what you are trying to do you will get your outcomes, but you are responding to their needs first.

Mr GRANT — The committee also asked a question about community-based social marketing. We think community-based social marketing is fantastic methodology, and it asks all the right questions. We think it takes people a fair way down that track, particularly to personal action. But we have some questions about whether community-based social marketing actually results in that long-term culture change. It can easily result in very effectively changing personal behaviour, but we think the jury is out on whether it actually creates culture change because it still is a transmissive process rather than what we would see as a questioning process.

Ms ARMSTRONG — You also asked us about evaluation of environment education, short term and long term, and the Gould League, in its programs for students and Waste Wise schools and Sustainable Schools, allocates something like 5 per cent of its budget to evaluation. That allows us to understand whether we have been effective and whether we can modify our programs and allow for this continuous improvement, which is essential.

In terms of conventional evaluation, often they will just evaluate how many came to the workshops or participated in programs or how well they liked the program. We have gone deeper into that, and sometimes it is a bit of a challenge and sometimes a risk when you ask people, ‘Is what we are doing changing the approaches to teaching and learning in your schools?’. When we ask these sorts of questions it opens up the possibility that we could fail — do you understand what I mean? — because it is asking the really hard questions, and we think in evaluating environment education we need to ask those hard questions, and also ask the sorts of questions the community wants — for example, are they getting what they want from these environment education programs? Is it helping to reduce discipline problems in schools? Is this what the schools want? Are the programs we are offering helping to achieve that? Certainly in terms of short-term changes we can measure those, but we would also be recommending in environment education that we start to look longitudinally at change over a long period of time. We have started to do that in a few schools, but we could be looking at long-term changes in schools and community groups and local government.

Mr GRANT — I would like to emphasise that. We do not just want to measure the changes in our message, the change we got across, but we also need to measure whether the school or the community got out of it what they were promised in the first place, which is reductions in litter et cetera. It is no use just measuring our

outcomes because if we go away, we are pretty sure they will disappear again. The last one is really coordination. We think the New South Wales policy is definitely better than it was. It is great to have a real policy and structure. We would like to see Victoria's education department and the Department of Sustainability and Environment working together, which they are, to really come up with something that is world best practice and is not really transmissive where everyone is saying, 'How do we get our message across through this?', but really starting to ask the community what it is about their environment that they want fixed and trying to show them that there are social benefits to them from that change. So what we would hope for is some strong leadership from government and across departments.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Pat and Jim.

Mrs COOTE — That was really interesting. Could you tell me two things? Firstly, what is the greatest change that you have seen in the last five years; and secondly, what do you envisage are the biggest challenges into the next five years? You spoke about government framework, Jim, supporting and giving a framework of support, but could you just give me a bit of both ends of the scale?

Mr GRANT — I can give you the first one first. The biggest change that we have noticed is the willingness of people to undertake environmental behaviour. There has really been a move from talking about it to really wanting to do something. You can see that almost everywhere you go, even in what is for sale in shops, and those supermarket bags et cetera. I think we are definitely heading down the track that perhaps Europe is headed where people are conscious of it all the time. That is very encouraging. The challenge is allowing them to do it easily, quickly and inexpensively. That is really what we see as the challenge. I could be a bit more definite in saying that we do not see the challenge as transferring more information to them.

Mrs COOTE — There is so much information out there and we need to make it work.

Mr GRANT — We really think there is a lot of information available, especially among young people. As you know, they access information very easily all the time and it is just gratuitous to provide more information. Although there are things like advertising campaigns that Melbourne Water has done which have obviously had a great effect. So there is some valuable information but not all the information is valuable.

Mrs COOTE — When you go to a school and talk about, for example, the fact that there might be a lot of rubbish, obviously they can see the difference because you can see that there is not as much rubbish around. But when the problem is something that is not quite as tangible a problem as rubbish, are you able to get the feedback as to whether it is being collected? What is a concern to me is they can talk about megalitres and turning the tap off when you are cleaning your teeth and all these things, but how does that add up to a change that I can relate to? Is that something in the feedback you give to these children about the actual collective nature of the changes they make to their own behaviour?

Ms ARMSTRONG — Sometimes I think we make things a bit complex. Children do these things in schools because it is fun, because they enjoy it, and because they know they are doing good. Children, particularly young children, cannot understand about megalitres and many of them do not see the connection between turning off lights and saving greenhouse gas. That is quite an abstract concept and really something only adults and older can understand. Younger children cannot understand that. We are saying that it is about changing the culture: we do not leave the lights on in our school, we do not leave taps dripping. These are small things that children can take responsibility for, but the schools themselves can see the bigger picture and they will make the bigger changes. What the children do is part of that bigger process of the way they do things in the school: they do not waste water, they do not waste electricity, they do not waste, they do not produce litter — because they do not do that in their school. That same principle applies to the household as well, so little kids will say, 'Mum, I do not want gladwrap on my sandwiches. We do not do that at school'.

Mr GRANT — It is a bit like the shopping bags, except that you can shut the door, of course, when you get home, but it comes down to cultural stuff like not having dripping taps around the home, for example. I know that if people from an environment movement come around and you have dripping taps, they go, 'Tut, tut'. I guess that would be a more general thing that people are aware of; like smoking I suppose, that has become unfashionable. It is fashionable not to smoke so we would like to see it become fashionable to just do simple straightforward environmental behaviours, which is very possible.

Mrs COOTE — Thank you. That makes a big difference. That is tackling it at a very easy level. Without being really profound, you stop cleaning your teeth with so many litres of water going down the sink. It is actually thinking, 'We do not do that in our house'. I see what you mean. I imagine that approach would have much more longevity.

Ms LOVELL — My parents must have been the original environmentalists because it has always been the rule that you are not allowed to have the tap dripping or the lights on.

Mr GRANT — It is to do with the abstract. We do not try to teach the abstract. To make three jumps between turning off the light and making greenhouse gas and killing a coral polyp is just too much for most people.

Mr SEITZ — Where have I met this before — about demonstration sites? Has this theory been tested in Victoria? Do we have more or do the ones that exist influence the change in the behaviour of people — not on one visit, but having different things around? Would it be an idea to have a cluster of schools they could use in their own district? Mum and dad could be part of it on the weekend at times, almost like Little Athletics.

Ms ARMSTRONG — I think that is an excellent idea, George. We have already seen the impact of schools that are outstanding in changing the way that other schools behave and develop their own programs. Rutherglen has been an example of that. It could not be in a more remote part of the state. Teachers come from the local area to that school and are influenced, and we know that they have been influenced because we see their applications for Waste Wise school awards and they say, 'We used the Rutherglen model', so clearly they have been influenced by them. We know that teachers will travel from schools as far as the western district all the way to Rutherglen to see that model school, and to find out how they do it. Clearly, models work and peers can teach peers. That school runs workshops: teachers for teachers and children for children. Getting that right balance you will find they will make a very big impact. The same thing applies to households as well: examples of model houses, model schools, even model communities. What we are now trying in sustainable schools is to establish clusters of schools, primary and secondary, that are working together. They are getting that synergy and that collective effort to bring about major change, and then they start to work with the community and bring other people in. It is a very powerful model for bringing about change very quickly.

Mr SEITZ — Out my way we have a few community gardens — you mentioned about compost things being left out; not re-used, and things like that. What role do you see them playing in this scenario? If there was a facilitation by local government with community gardens, you could extend them as demonstration sites.

Mr GRANT — Community gardens are something that we are very keen on and we would like to see cross over with parks, with community gardens, and with schools and community gardens. It is a very engaging thing for people, and what we are talking about is engaging people rather than transferring knowledge, as we have said. Community gardens are an incredibly powerful way of doing that, and you can see it at Collingwood Secondary College. It allows the diversity of people. If you just say, 'We are teaching about the environment', you will get a few hundred people putting up their hands, but if you talk about gardening you will obviously get many thousands of people involved. We see those community gardens as having enormous potential.

Ms DUNCAN — If I can paraphrase what I think you are saying, you are saying that people have a willingness to do the right thing?

Mr GRANT — Most people, yes.

Ms DUNCAN — They have a fair bit of knowledge, and you do not think lack of knowledge is necessarily a big problem, and we have done a reasonable job over the years of educating people. We know that to do the right thing or to reduce energy use is generally cheaper than not reducing it, so there is a cost benefit for people. Therefore, if all of those things are basically right, why do you think we do not see more changed behaviour? If you look at that having all developed over the last 20 years, why do you think we have not seen — other than recently with plastic bag usage — any sort of sustained change in behaviour?

Mr GRANT — I think we were seeing it with recycling and waste., and now we are seeing it with packaging around supermarkets. As someone was saying before, I think the less tangible it is and the more steps there are, the harder it is for people to change their behaviour; so energy, for example, would come after water. I think there will be some sort of flow-on effect from waste to water, and energy being the least tangible thing will probably be the last one off the rank unfortunately, because it is one of the most important ones.

Ms DUNCAN — Just on the issue of waste I see things in supermarkets now that did not even exist five years ago — yoghurt containers that have two teaspoons of yoghurt in them that cost a fortune, and they are incredibly popular. These are new products that are continuously being developed. You do not have answers, we don't have answers; but they are some of the things that we are facing. What I struggle with is how we see some things getting worse, like more packaging and things like that. Anyway, let us leave that. I was going to ask if you were aware of that New Zealand report from the commissioner for environment on learning and education. What are your views on that report?

Mr GRANT — I am quite familiar with it. I think it is a brilliant report. I was at the launch of it in New Zealand and the commissioner said he did not have any teeth, so I do not think there are any recommendations on the report, but he also said that he had powerful gums! I think that sums it up. If there were recommendations, it would be tremendous. If we could do something like that but also have some policy recommendations at the end of it, it would almost be the best of all worlds.

Ms ARMSTRONG — May I go back to your earlier question? Your question was if we do not want to lose things, why aren't we getting change in the community? I think we are. We can only speak from our experience with schools and our local governments, from speaking to our colleagues and from our readings; but we are beginning to detect this shift in community attitude. I think you will find that reports coming out from EcoRecycle Victoria on attitudes to waste bear this out, that people do want to change. I spent Saturday afternoon at the Royal Melbourne Show selling water-efficient shower heads through Rotary, and a number of people came up there and the dads would say to the kids, 'We need to buy one of these because we should not waste water', so clearly those messages are getting through and people have now moved from awareness to action by buying a water-efficient shower head. If you can give them the reason and tell them that they will save water and they will save money each year then it is usually not an issue. We need simple, clear messages to people to reinforce the awareness that is already there. People are changing.

Ms LOVELL — Obviously it is fairly easy for us to educate children. For a start, we have them all in the school environment, they are fairly receptive to change and willing to learn; but there is a greater challenge in educating the adults in the community, and to a certain extent some of the good work we do at schools is undone when the kids get home. What is the best way to go about educating the adult community to speed up the process so we do not have to wait 20 years for the outcome?

Mr GRANT — Our work has been in schools, and I guess the common thing that is said is that waste is easy and schools are easy, therefore Waste Wise schools has to be the easiest one, but what we have found with our work in sustainable schools is that we are getting very similar results for energy and water as well. So the idea that waste is easy — the fact is that EcoRecycle has had the best environmental educators and they have given the best environmental education and they have got the best results. The people who are dealing with water and energy have not had the same expertise, that is my feeling. It will be interesting to see how that would work if our experience with sustainable schools is similar. From the point of view of adult education, the engagement question arises again and again. There is plenty of behavioural change — people saying, 'You should do this or that'; there is plenty of awareness raising — people saying, 'The reservoirs are only half full, you should turn off the tap'. But there is not a lot of stuff in there to engage you in that process and also there is not a lot of involvement. You do not go to the pub and talk about how much water you have saved and those types of things. We think that engagement would be a key thing to put a bit of effort into — getting people engaged.

Ms LOVELL — And the best avenue for delivering that? Naturally we have advertising campaigns but does that need to be reinforced through the workplace or through sporting or other organisations?

Mr GRANT — I think it is for more at a local level. In sporting organisations you do not see many footballers talking about the environment or something like that, but that type of thing; and also local government seems from our experience to be the way forward rather than highly branded corporate-type advertising, although there is a place for that, of course.

Ms ARMSTRONG — I will also respond, just to step back slightly, to the impact of children changing parents' behaviour. I have talked about that at length already, but there is a lot of research on what is known as intergenerational influence. People like Jon Faine and Rob Valentine have done this sort of research. If you look at the impact of programs on changing parents' behaviour there are some key success factors. It has to be interesting, and it has to engage the parents in actually measuring things at home. Just to have the children taking home a

brochure saying, 'We need to reduce water' is not enough. We need to get the parents involved in those sorts of measuring-type activities within the home that will demonstrate that they can make savings. It is only when they become involved — that is that interaction almost — that they will then proceed to take that change, and it will become a permanent change over time. That is the theory. We will get to see this and the research for this apart from the other work I have just spoken about. But I can send you those papers, so that will be helpful. We tend to think that just giving information will change the parents' behaviour, but it is really about engaging them, it is making it interesting and fun and involving them in activities that allow them to measure things in the home.

Mr HILTON — What you have just said in some ways tends to contradict what you said about Rutherglen. As I understood your presentation, you said that by being so influential in the Rutherglen schools this had got out into the parent community and into the general community. My original question was going to be: what empirical evidence do you have that there is more water saving behaviour going on than previously, and how can you say that that is directly due to the fact that the children in the Rutherglen schools have been educated in this approach to using water?

Ms ARMSTRONG — The only evidence we have at the moment is from Waste Wise Schools. As you can understand, research like this needs to be done thoroughly and independently, so we have not had the money for that. It needs to be done, and I agree. With Waste Wise Schools it was done independently, and it was done in several schools, and the parents were asked the question: what impact has the program had on changing your behaviour?

Mr HILTON — That is different from asking: are you using less water? I can understand how this awareness would have been raised, but I am still, I suppose you could say, sceptical that that is what produced the change in behaviour.

Ms ARMSTRONG — They did ask them about the behaviour, and the parents are quoting examples. I have reports here I can leave with you that state they have changed their behaviour in both recycling and reduction and reusing in composting, so they are giving examples of how the program has helped them to change actual behaviours in the home.

Mr GRANT — That is what we had measured in the report.

Mr HILTON — And that is demonstrable in terms of volume and so on?

Mr GRANT — No, we did not measure the volume, but we asked them what changes in behaviour had they made, and they were quite big.

Ms ARMSTRONG — There is sufficient indication here that programs such as this are changing behaviour to warrant much further and much deeper research across more schools and to ask those sorts of questions — and they are very good questions. With Sustainable Schools we need to be asking questions about water reduction and energy reduction as well, but we have not had the money nor the time to do it.

Mr HILTON — If you are right, what we as a committee can recommend is that more money and resources be put into these school-based programs based on the knowledge that the effect would cascade throughout the community. But we are not really going to be in a position to do that unless we can produce empirical evidence that that is the case.

Mr GRANT — I think we have got it, and it is very independently and carefully measured. It is certainly a big dream of ours to look at one of those clusters of schools and measure the actual inputs of water and energy and the outputs of waste from that community. That would be something we would really be confident about.

Mr HILTON — I have one other question. We visited the CERES group a few weeks ago. Do you in any way see yourselves as being in competition with what they do?

Mr GRANT — No. We are full partners in Sustainable Schools with them and we are full partners in Waste Wise Schools with them. Yes, very close.

The CHAIR — Pat, this is probably a matter of perception, but do you already see a greater level of awareness in the new schools that are coming in? Are they more aware of some of the basic problems than they were 10 or 20 years ago?

Ms ARMSTRONG — This is purely an impression. We first started to run Waste Wise Schools workshops back in 1998, and we are now running them in 2004. The change in the knowledge and awareness over that period of six to seven years has been quite enormous. We have had to change the program as a consequence. We do not have to start with information about the problems of waste and litter. Now we can just go straight into what to do about it and the benefits to the school.

The CHAIR — And the program has changed in that time?

Ms ARMSTRONG — Yes, very much so.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Reservoir — 27 September 2004

Members

Mrs A. Coote

Mr D. K. Drum

Ms J. T. Duncan

Mr J. G. Hilton

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Chair: Ms J. M. Lindell

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Executive Officer: Dr C. Williams

Research Officer: Mr D. Fairbridge

Witnesses

Cr R. Perry, mayor;

Ms L. Hynes, general manager, environment and amenity;

Ms E. Hopkins, sustainability education officer; and

Mr A. Tzikas, community power officer, City of Darebin.

The CHAIR — I formally welcome you. All evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, if you make comments outside the precincts of the hearing you are not covered by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being recorded by Hansard, and you will receive a proof version of the transcript in the next couple of weeks. We thank you for the use of your venue this morning and for your time today.

Cr PERRY — I just want to say thank you very much for coming out to the Reservoir Civic Centre. I want to compliment the committee for meeting outside the sphere of where you would normally meet. We are very proud of the centre, so I am pleased you are going to have a look at it later. I have looked at the committee's terms of reference, and a lot of the areas you cover are areas that the local government is actively working in, so I look forward to the outcomes of the committee and hope that local government and state government can work even closer together.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. We were very happy to come out and have a look at the facility. We have heard lots about it, so we are looking forward to having a look around when we get through our business.

Overheads shown.

Ms HYNES — Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today. I wish to introduce some of our officers who are sitting at the back of the room: Emma Hopkins, our sustainability education officer, Christian Shaw from our strategic planning area, and Alex Tzikas, who is our community power officer.

I will begin by talking to you about Darebin and by giving a brief snapshot, which I think some of you got at lunch. Basically we are located between two creeks: the Darebin Creek on the east and the Merri Creek on the west. We cover the suburbs of Northcote, Alphington, Fairfield, Thornbury, Preston, Reservoir, Kingsbury and Bundoora. I will give the committee a little bit of information about our organisation. We are a relatively large organisation for a local government. We are one of the largest employers in Darebin, I think pipped only by La Trobe University, and we have environment amenity as a specific department of Darebin. Our community is very diverse. We have one of the most culturally diverse communities in local government areas within Australia with over 30 per cent of our population speaking a language other than English at home. At the moment we have about 128 000 residents. Ageing is a particular issue in Darebin, as it is over a lot of Australia, and that will impact on lifestyle choices as well as housing and social needs.

We have been lucky to be recognised for our environmental performance with a number of awards this year. As well as winning the Banksia award category for sustainable buildings with this building, the Reservoir Civic Centre, we have also been recognised with the United Nations Australian World Environment Day awards for excellence in overall environmental management in the local government category. We have a fairly comprehensive environmental policy which you will get as part of the pack we are giving you today. We want to be both a sustainable organisation and to be able to promote sustainability outside our organisation, and we have a framework of guiding principles and stretch goals: zero waste, zero climate damage, zero habitat destruction, zero pollution, zero soil degradation. We recognise those goals really are stretch goals in that they will be difficult to attain, but in aiming for them we know that we are aiming for the best possible sustainable solution.

In response to your brief, we thought this was a good avenue to talk about joined-up government and joined-up policy legislation and pricing mechanisms. We have energy and greenhouse measures as a particular area and that can really make a difference. At the moment consumers pay a premium of around 20 to 30 per cent to take up green power in order to reduce greenhouse emissions. This reflects the fact that renewable energy technologies currently cost more to produce than fossil fuel. However, the cost of fossil fuel-based power sources are not currently reflected in the market price; otherwise they would take into account the cost of greenhouse emissions, air pollution and clean-up costs. Something like a carbon tax would really ensure the market price of fossil fuel actually reflected the true cost and would facilitate greater production of renewable energy.

Darebin council, in partnership with the Moreland Energy Foundation and the cities of Melbourne and Yarra, currently has implemented Community Power, which is Australia's first aggregated electricity purchasing project for households. We have triple bottom line objectives: competitive prices, greenhouse reductions and fair and reasonable contract conditions. We offer a proportion of green power at prices cheaper than standing offer tariffs of 100 per cent conventional electricity, which makes green power very accessible to our communities. We are also

delivering energy management programs to Community Power customers to ensure a holistic approach to energy use and greenhouse gas reductions.

Currently large-scale renewable technologies are far more cost effective than single dwelling options, so we think green power should be promoted much more strongly by all levels of government, including the uptake and promotion of green power in government facilities; supporting high-profile promotions of green power to the community, and investigating incentives and rebates for green power uptake. A number of initiatives are required to ensure Victorian energy generators, retailers and consumers are conserving energy and are using it as efficiently as possible and are aware of and understand green power. These have to include price signalling that encourages energy efficiency and conservation and discourages excessive use.

I know you have had the water strategy presented to you today and one of the things recommended in the water strategy is that the more water you use, the more it costs you. Electricity is completely the reverse. Electricity gets much cheaper the more you use. We do not think that sort of pricing mechanism sends the right messages to consumers. Also, the rollout of interval meters would remove cost subsidies and also send signalling for the use of appliances such as airconditioners that can drive up demand spikes and lead to the need for additional power stations.

Generators really should have mandatory greenhouse reduction targets and incentive measures for both generators and retailers to ensure that energy efficiency becomes core business throughout the supply chain. The federal government's current mandatory renewable energy targets really do not go very close to attaining what we really need to attain for sustainability. There need to be incentives for the electricity retailers to upgrade their billing system capacity to be able to offer demand management services for targeted customers. A big energy bill is something that energy retailers can pick up and actually target the people who really do need some demand management education. There need to be requirements and incentives to ensure energy retailers and contractors can provide appropriate energy management advice and services to consumers that meet required quality standards. Currently these services exist, but they are not very well advertised and they are quite expensive.

There is also a mandatory requirement for retailers and other relevant authorities to provide aggregated household and business consumption data for local government areas so that we can collect accurate data and know what the City of Darebin is doing for greenhouse gases, and the state of Victoria knows what is happening with greenhouse management initiatives. There also needs to be investment in a public education campaign and support of projects that increase awareness and outcomes of green power, as I stated before. Other things that can be done in the energy efficiency line, which have been done in other states, include mandatory energy efficiency disclosure for rental houses, so if you rent a house you know that it is 3 star or 4 star, or it costs this much per year to run the energy systems.

The next thing that I want to talk about is planning for sustainability. The committee specifically asked for a copy of the sustainability check list developed for Darebin households and our capital works check list. These will be included in the information packs which we will hand out a little later.

Another example of joined-up government and regulation is in the area of sustainable building. Regulatory structures that promote sustainable building in all sectors are necessary to ensure that we have cost-effective and available technologies incorporated. The regulations really should be consistent across the whole of Australia, which would create a bit more security for the building industry and be flexible enough to take into account local conditions. The BASIX system, introduced in New South Wales, is an example of such a system. In Victoria the measures we have used to ensure more efficient use of energy and water in new homes through the Victorian building regulations need to be applauded and we need to do a little bit more.

We also need comprehensive planning legislation. When energy and environmental targets are regulated they are a really effective way to ensure that our existing knowledge and technologies are well applied and that our overall environmental performance is improved. Our municipal strategic statement, which we are going to give to you today, includes a line that in the absence of statewide policy Darebin will develop an ESD policy. We have been watching other local governments spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on local policies and they have not got them through yet. It would be much more cost effective to have an overall state policy such as something like the BASIX framework in New South Wales. It includes nine basic areas: site, social, transport, water, stormwater, energy, waste and recycling materials, and indoor amenity. It basically shows developers how their projects rate on a systems integrated sustainability index. Developers are then required to score an overall index in order to achieve

planning approval. It allows a lot of flexibility. Local authorities can modify the weightings where appropriate; stormwater may rate higher in flood-prone areas. It weighs off sustainable measures against each other, which is something that is quite difficult to do as a stand-alone system in a specific council. I know that you are looking specifically at residential areas. It is important to recognise that commercial developments need exactly the same type of planning as residential developments.

Education: I do not know whether the community-based social marketing has been presented to the panel before. It has — I will go through it quickly then. That is certainly something we are interested in at Darebin. We have listened to the key proponent of this, Doug McKenzie-Mohr, give presentations on the success of things. It is about changing attitudes and awareness and about changing behaviour. Environmental education cannot be just about information, it has to be about changing behaviour as well. It requires us to specifically identify the behaviour we want and then to design a program around that. What we have found is that knowing is not necessarily doing. We can educate people all we want, but unless they are doing it, it is not achieving the sustainable result that we are after. Basically we are looking at identifying barriers — which I know you have identified in your brief — designing a strategy to use behavioural change tools, piloting, rolling it out and evaluating the program's effectiveness. Doug McKenzie-Mohr's tips are to use commitment, use prompts, create and develop new social norms, be effective in your communication, use incentives and remove significant barriers. I am sure you have heard about all of those already. Environmental education at Darebin: we have a Green Travel program going which is running in conjunction with the state government's TravelSmart program. That is looking at changing travel behaviour for 30 000 households in Darebin, which is great.

I might just spend a little time on the new green waste service because we have not talked much about waste yet. Unfortunately people tend to focus on the green part of this and not so much on the waste part. They think green waste is good, but, as you may be aware, we have major difficulties in metropolitan Melbourne at the moment with processing green waste. It is definitely something that we are going on the first step of the waste pyramid and saying that reduction is much better than reuse. For starters, with our green waste system we have put a price on using the system which in the past was a free system. We have advertised compost bins at the same price. We are also delivering the compost bins to the resident's door because we identified this as a barrier. Even though we have advertised the yearly price for the green waste system and a one-off price for the compost system delivered to your door, so far we have about 800 or so people take up compost bins and worm farms and we have had 22 000 residents take up green waste bins.

It is much easier to throw the stuff out and get rid of it than it is to deal with it on site. Of course you cannot compost everything. I know that people have prunings that they do need to get rid of, but that is something we are going to be taking some time to address. We have also developed a sustainable gardening booklet which we are going to be handing out — every green waste bin will have a sustainable gardening booklet attached to it. We are aiming this at our higher green waste producers, if you like, so that they will get a bit of information about how to be a bit more sustainable in their gardening. At the end of probably a year we will be evaluating the composting and green waste tonnage being collected to determine whether our program has been very effective.

Our schools recycling program: this is basically an opt-in program — if schools become waste wise we give them a recycling bin. It is operating on the incentive. I talked a little bit about Community Power before. One of the incentives for Community Power is that we have been running free energy audits and giving really good value energy kits with draught stoppers and compact fluorescent light bulbs and basic energy advice. One of the things I always find really amazing is that if you replace one light globe with a compact fluorescent it saves about \$15 a year and reduces about 80 per cent of the greenhouse gases associated with that light. It is amazing that compact fluorescents are not more common in Australia. I know that in developing countries like Brazil and Thailand they are much more evident; it is strange that they are not in Australia.

Green purchasing is something we are running more organisationally through EcoBuy, through the green purchasing system there. If you have not talked to them, I recommend you do at some stage. We are running one of three pilot neighbourhood environment improvement plans at Edwardes Lake, which is just up there basically (points North) — you can go past it on your way home. That is looking at overall catchment management issues in relation to a major recreational facility in Darebin. Capacity-building projects like the home energy action program empower residents to audit their own homes. We also have a composting program called Earth Matters, which is basically a train-the-trainer program around composting.

Lastly I just wanted to say a little bit about this building. As I said before, Reservoir Civic Centre has been recognised as one of Australia's most sustainable buildings. Its design, construction and operation are based on the principles of environmental sustainability, building social capital and financial responsibility. We have used our learning in the project to create an environmentally sustainable development check list for all our council buildings. That incorporates mandatory and optional measures depending on the type and size of the project. Mandatory measures would be triple A energy and water-efficient appliances, compact fluorescent light globes, siting it correctly, and recycling waste during the project. The centre has been designed and built not only to demonstrate Darebin's commitment to sustainability and addressing resource use, but also to influence our wider community. It was our aim to be able to inform other councils and the sustainable building industry about this project. We do this through our web site, tours and our video. It provides a tangible example of what sustainability might look like in community and commercial buildings as well as in people's homes.

Emma will take you through the whole building a little later, so I will not talk too much about it. Basically the materials and technologies adopted in the design and construction of this building were deliberately chosen as ones that could be transferred to other community, commercial and residential buildings. It is important we have a lot of people go through this building. We have a captive audience. We do not have the usual sort of environmental suspects so we really want to capitalise on our leadership in this building and get people to know about what we have done here. To support this we have brochures, tours and a touch-screen information kiosk which gives information on an ongoing basis. As Rae said before, we are very proud of this building and we are very proud that you have come to visit it. I will open up to questions now if there are any and I will pass over to Jenny.

Mr HILTON — I found that very interesting and I commend those at Darebin for the work that they do. I suppose the question I have is that there are 78 or 79 councils in Victoria, and probably all of the people like you have methodologies, procedures, schemes to improve environments, waste-water usage. I think you mentioned yourself that some of these organisations are spending a lot of money and maybe not getting as far as you have. Would it be better in your view if the state government or any authority said, 'This is what you are going to be doing and this is how it is going to be done', so that there were not these various organisations all trying to get the same result, perhaps spending lots of money which they could spend on other things if they were trying to do it together?

Ms HYNES — That is a very interesting question. I was talking to Jenny before and I understand that you people talked to Mike Hill about the sustainability accord between the Australian and Victorian governments, and they are some of the questions that they are grappling with. The assumption that 78 of the councils have someone like me is probably true for about 10 metropolitan councils, but as soon as you get out to councils whose big sustainability issue at the moment is the economic one, less of their resources are available for environmental issues. That is certainly a concern of the whole industry, that big local governments like Darebin have been able to put money into these sorts of things but a rural local government has a lot more trouble in doing this and they do it much more by the seat of their pants — not that we do not do it by the seat of our pants as well!

To be told to do something would not be the correct approach. Local government is recognised as a government in its own right. Certainly we follow and implement a lot of state government legislation in local government. The current building controls that have been brought in this year for four star and next year for five star are really good, and I think they are great ways of making the whole thing less costly, but there has to be some room for innovation in local governments. We are representing our communities, and Community Power, the energy aggregation model, came from our community. A member of Rae Perry's ward came up with that idea. There has to be some room for innovation, but where you can get the biggest bang for your buck by overall legislation there should definitely be some sort of thinking exercise that incorporates what is the best to tackle at an overall statewide policy level and what is the best to tackle at a local level. I think there are lot more things that could be tackled at a statewide issue than are currently tackled as a local issue at the moment.

Cr PERRY — Perhaps I could add something to that. Darebin puts a lot of money and effort into the environmental stuff, which is really an expression of the commitment of our community to that, and there would be only about 10 councils that would equal that commitment. For local governments to be told to do things would really negate the involvement of the participatory part of the community. When you look at the issues of waste, litter — all that — if you do not involve the community you do not get good outcomes. The MAV plays a very large role, I believe, in supporting rural councils that do not have the money to be able to do some of the thinking work behind the policy development, and the support of the MAV to do some of the grunt work that local

governments can take and then have the local applicability is a really good way of working. Big local governments like ours work very effectively with our communities, and we are starting to get some good outcomes.

Mr HILTON — I suppose my other question is about this community-based social marketing. I think you have a slide which says that knowledge does not equal doing. We have had presentations from many educational organisations who said that without education you do not get ongoing change because people do not accept change. Do you have a problem with that?

Ms HYNES — No, I definitely do not have a problem with that, but I think that just giving information to people does not seem to work in isolation. If it did, everybody would have compact fluorescent light globes in every room in the house.

Mr HILTON — And they do not. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Can I just jump in for a moment with a question about the green waste service you have? Given the numbers you gave us, which were that 800 have picked up the composting bin and 22000 have opted for the green bin, are there thoughts of reworking that? I can see why some people might want both; they might need the green service, but would be quite happy to have the compost as well. Has there been some discussion about maybe having a hybrid — you can have the compost bin supplied, but you can also have a smaller green waste bin for \$X, or making the green waste collection twice as expensive as the composting bin?

Cr PERRY — There is a plan for a graded introduction of that. We have two bins; a small bin and a big bin. We grappled with the issue of whether to have only the small bin, because if you have a big bin you might then be encouraging them to put out more green waste. But they have had a service which they have not paid for before, so we need to take them one step, which is actually paying for that service. That has caused a few ripples, but it gives us an opportunity to talk with your community about why it is that we actually want you to reduce. We do not want you to keep throwing stuff out because we do not have enough holes in the ground or places to use it. The plan is — and we are going to evaluate it in 12 months time — to see if we can move to one small bin, so I think it is about bringing the community with you, having a service that they can use to start with. A lot of people obviously already have compost bins, but maybe they do not use them properly or still need some help with some of that work, so that is why we are doing it hand in hand.

Ms HYNES — Can I just add to that also that you are entitled to get a compost bin and a green waste bin, although I think a lot more of the people who have got it recently have not had the green waste service. Is it Doug McKenzie-Mohr or Les Robertson who calls it a change space? It is Les Robertson who says that you need a space for change, so our change of the new green waste service is a space for change. We want to optimise that.

Mr SEITZ — Did the people in the high-density units and flats that you have all go for a green theme automatically, or did they have a choice to say yea or nay?

Ms HYNES — No, I think 95 per cent of Darebin households have a garden. Although we are reasonably medium to high-density in the north, certainly in this area everybody has a garden. One of the reasons for putting in a pricing incentive was that we did not want to pay \$50 for a green waste bin to put in a unit that nobody was going to use, so in most cases where there is a block of units they have one between the whole lot of them as a body corporate issue, or they have not got one at all.

Ms DUNCAN — You put out your little magnets for each household, the Top 12 — —

Ms HYNES — Yes, the Top 12.

Ms DUNCAN — What are you hoping to achieve by doing that, and do you have any way of evaluating it?

Ms HYNES — We produced earlier this year — and you have it in your information packs — a state-of-the-environment snapshot for Darebin which looks at all the environmental issues in Darebin and how we are going with them. The Top 12 was basically a promotion for that process, if you like. It highlights particular areas in the state-of-the-environment snapshot and gives a little information about what each household can do, as a simple thing, to respond to that. We have not evaluated it. I suppose this is mainly because it is a fair bit of

information and we find that evaluating large information things does not give us very good results, as I said before; otherwise everybody would be using compact fluorescents.

Ms DUNCAN — Do you provide energy audits?

Ms HYNES — Yes, we do, through our Community Power program. We were also funded through Cool Communities this year, and also through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Victoria. We have conducted how many, Alex?

Mr TZIKAS — Nearly 70 now.

Ms DUNCAN — People make a request for an energy audit and you then respond to that request?

Ms HYNES — That is right, through Community Power. We have advertised that to our Community Power customers in Darebin, Melbourne, Moreland and Yarra. We ran two systems. We had energy information seminars where we gave people a self-audit so that they could go back and do it themselves. We have also run full audits where Alex goes out to a household and goes right through their energy bills. We are actually getting results from them as evaluation for that program. It is a very effective way of getting people on board with energy management. It is also quite an expensive way. Sixty-seven households out of 55 000 households, and Yarra and Melbourne as well.

Ms DUNCAN — So only 60-odd people have requested — —

Ms HYNES — Sixty-seven. No, we have actually had limits.

Ms DUNCAN — So you have had heaps more than that ask for it?

Mr TZIKAS — We have, but there has been a limit, a financial restriction on what we can provide.

Ms DUNCAN — I am just trying to gauge the response because we have heard elsewhere that where have been free energy audits the take-up rate has still been quite low, which is amazing when you think that someone will come to your home and effectively point out all the things you are doing incorrectly. How can you make something like that more palatable — making it free? How else could we drive that sort of demand for more people to be interested in having audits done?

Ms HYNES — I do not know whether Alex has anything to say. Free stuff is always a little bit hard; people do not trust free stuff. That is just from a general community angle. Doing it in line with a program like Community Power where you have a target audience that you already know are interested in environmental and financial issues is a really good way of doing it, but it is also about community norms. If not many people are getting these energy audits and you are the pathfinder for this whole thing you feel a bit uncomfortable, whereas if everybody in your street was getting it, it would not be hard at all. It is a bit like recycling systems: once everybody is doing it is just the norm, but to get up to that mass of people doing it is sometimes quite hard.

Cr PERRY — It is also something about inviting someone into your home and looking at your house and seeing whether you have gaps in your floor, is your house well-maintained, should you have — —

Ms DUNCAN — Done the carpets this morning.

Cr PERRY — Yes. Do you know what I mean? I think there is something around whether you invite someone into your home; and then having the money to be able to undertake the requirement to upgrade. If there was some way to say we know what the issues are and the reward is you can actually get them fixed — that might be the incentive.

Ms HYNES — It is interesting. With the water campaign you have had big ads on the television and in the newspapers about how to reduce water use in your home. You could do exactly that sort of thing with energy. Perhaps once you start giving information about how to reduce energy use you might have more take up of things like audits because people do not feel so dumb about it, I suppose.

Cr PERRY — I have a little old lady who lives to me who says, 'I do not waste much energy, I live in only one room in the winter'. She only has one light on and she has her little heater. That is how she saves energy.

Her energy bill would not be very high, but she could probably cut it in half if she got rid of that little blow heater. I could not bring myself to tell her not to use it because I would not be able to help her to change her behaviour.

Ms LOVELL — You mentioned that you have a Green Travel program. Can you explain a little bit about how that operates, if it has been evaluated at all and how it sits within your integrated transport plan?

Ms HYNES — The Green Travel plan is basically an organisational program. It targets Darebin staff and offers incentives to sustainable transport. We have a computer program where you can log in your Green Travel points. If you carpool, if you ride your bike, if you take public transport or if you walk into Darebin you put a point in. As soon as you have accumulated — is it 50 points? It is 92 points now, and when you have accumulated those you get a \$100 voucher. That operates across council. We have done some really good evaluation on that and I can table that for the committee later.

Cr PERRY — We reached our 2005 target in 2004.

Ms HOPKINS — I think we have more than 160 people participating in the program. It started in August last year.

Ms HYNES — It also incorporate loans for bicycles so you can take a loan out with fortnightly payments through your pay for bicycles and Met cards. We have also incorporated things like making sure Met cards are available for trips into the city for meetings and stuff like that. That has been a popular part of the travel program as well. TravelSmart is separate. It is being run by the state government and in Darebin it has targeted 30 000 households. They have sent out information, rung up 30 000 households and then they have followed up with specific advice people have asked for on timetables or bike paths and they have given incentives for being in the program like — —

Cr PERRY — Pedometers, umbrellas.

Ms HYNES — And monthly Met cards. I know it was evaluated when they did their pilot program in Glen Waverley and it did actually produce some really good figures in terms of getting people onto public transport and using less sustainable single-occupancy car trips. The TravelSmart program is something the committee should get a presentation on if it has not already.

Cr PERRY — The other issue with Green Travel is the application to our planning permits. We have had a number of big organisations apply for planning permits where there is an issue around car parking and traffic management, and part of the planning permit is that they actually develop a Green Travel plan — for example, the Westgarth Theatre wanted to put an extra three small theatres on and make it into a multiplex. We will work with them to develop a Green Travel plan for that cinema centre so that patrons can actually, hopefully, change modes of transport.

Ms LOVELL — That will be a challenge because it is not just working with their actual employees to re-educate them, it is the public.

Cr PERRY — No, it is with their patrons, so we will work with them to do that because it is in our interest. We want to upgrade the theatre, but that brings with it some problems. We are thinking of things like the back of the tickets showing how to get there by public transport, so the people actually have some knowledge of the number train or tram or whatever. We are looking at having better signposting so people who actually go past the Westgarth station know the Westgarth Theatre is not far away. They are very simple things but are quite effective. We put a lot of secure bike facilities into a lot of our medium-density dwellings to try to improve the uptake of people riding bikes in Darebin.

Mr SEITZ — Many witnesses have said that demonstration sites are the most beneficial so that people can see how they can save on all the environmental issues, whether it is recycling, garden compost or saving electricity. What is your opinion on that?

Ms HYNES — I think it is very important that people can see and touch and have experiential-type learning, I suppose, so that is an important aspect of this project, as well as taking it out to people who would not necessarily come to a demonstration project, so they are coming to pay their rates or going to a community meeting or coming to do something else. It is really important that government takes leadership in this area. It is about

norms. If governments start having their normal buildings as environmental buildings, then that will flow into other areas like the residential sector, not only with technology. A lot of people learnt from this project. We learnt, the architects learnt, the builders learnt, the individual trades people learnt, and we are taking that learning out to all areas. We have architectural students coming here. It is good to have a venue that people come to that is not necessarily just a sustainable building, but it is where they come to pay their rates.

Mr SEITZ — What age groups do you see and what feedback do you get from the demonstration side of this building? Does the senior citizens club have half a day out just to come and look at it as an educational thing so they can see what can be done?

Ms HYNES — They do not have to have half a day. Our tours would run under 1 hour, but certainly we have had senior citizens groups, students, scouts, a whole diverse range of groups. It has crossed all ages. We have lots of senior citizens groups meeting here so we have probably had more senior citizens go through than other age groups, but that changes from day to day and year to year.

Mr SEITZ — Have you got a sustainable street program as well within a neighbourhood or a court?

Ms HYNES — No. The City of Darebin has not done that as yet, but the cities of Moreland, Yarra and Manningham have, I think. Have you had a presentation on a sustainable street project yet?

The CHAIR — Yes. Thank you very much for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Reservoir — 27 September 2004

Members

Mrs A. Coote

Mr D. K. Drum

Ms J. T. Duncan

Mr J. G. Hilton

Ms J. M. Lindell

Ms W. A. Lovell

Mr G. Seitz

Chair: Ms J. M. Lindell

Deputy Chair: Mrs A. Coote

Staff

Executive Officer: Dr C. Williams

Research Officer: Mr D. Fairbridge

Witness

Ms E. Hopkins, sustainability education officer, City of Darebin.

Ms HOPKINS — I am going to start with a short video because it takes us back to the demolition of the old building that used to be on the site, and then the construction process. It takes about 14 minutes. I am the sustainability education officer at Darebin and part of my job is to take people on tours. As Libby said before, a significant component of this building has been to try to use its capacity to educate and increase awareness around what you can do at home and in other buildings. Lots of the ideas are simple, but they just do not seem to have been brought together in many cases.

Ms LOVELL — What was the building that was here before?

Ms HOPKINS — It was also a civic centre.

Video shown.

Ms HOPKINS — Are there any questions about the video? If not, we might go for a bit of a wander now.

Ms DUNCAN — You referred briefly to paying a little more for the building. Do you have in percentage terms what you paid extra to get something like this?

Ms HOPKINS — It cost quite a lot more than what was expected. It is probably a bit hard to pinpoint which were the sustainability features. There were other issues in terms of the project management costs. I was not actually at Darebin then. There is a lot of evidence to look at, things such as the photovoltaic cells which we put on — the solar panels — which cost a lot. It is not necessarily a cost-effective option at this stage, but energy efficient design is definitely a cost-effective option. You could argue that the 70 000-litre rainwater tank is not a cost-effective option at the moment because you do not have to pay enough for water and electricity for it to be cost effective. But fitting AAA-rated water appliances is pretty much cost effective. I do not think they have pulled down all the individual components and looked at which ones were cost effective and which were not, but definitely there is a lot of evidence and research out there now to say that some sustainability options will be very cost effective and others will incur a cost, and the payback time will be a long payback time. It does not really answer your question.

Ms DUNCAN — That is all right, but it would be a useful exercise. I think people expect to pay more because they are getting good design, they have in the long term a cheaper building to run, apart from anything else, and knowing that they are doing the right thing and using best practice. It would be interesting to know. There are always cost blow-outs on any project, but even if it was like 10, 15 or 20 per cent, it would be quite a useful exercise to do a blow by blow on what was cost effective.

Ms HOPKINS — They had quite a few issues with project management. It was outsourced and there were a lot of complications with contractors and the like which probably contributed more to the cost blow-out.

Ms DUNCAN — Were they anything to do with the sustainability issues?

Ms HOPKINS — No.

Ms DUNCAN — They were just normal cost blow-outs?

Ms HOPKINS — Probably the general manager, Kevin Breen, would be the best person to speak to if you wanted that advice. We are obviously in Decibels recording studio at the moment. We do not have to spend too much time in here because you have been here all day. This is the only section of the building that has a refrigerated airconditioning system. The rest of the building has an evaporative cooling system. Evaporative cooling systems are much more efficient in their energy use. In many aspects of this building the council is looking at what it can do to reduce energy, water and waste. This section was airconditioned solely because of the recording issues and because the equipment needed to be kept at a constant temperature. If you are in here in the summer and the evaporative cooling system comes on, you do get the sound of the air coming through, which would be an issue if you were recording. That also added a lot to the cost. The soundproofing of this room and the practice room added a lot to the cost as well. There were a few things that were non-standard in terms of the building. I will now take you through the rest of the building.

Committee adjourned.