

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Renewable and Affordable Energy for Apartments

Melbourne – Tuesday 24 March 2026

MEMBERS

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Wayne Farnham

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

WITNESSES

Danae Bosler, Assistant Secretary, and

Dr Colin Long, Just Transitions Organiser, Victorian Trades Hall Council.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearings for the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Renewable and Affordable Energy for Apartments. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I welcome Danae Bosler and Colin Long from Victorian Trades Hall Council.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website. While all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

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I invite you to make a 3-minute opening statement, which we can then follow with questions. Over to you.

Danae BOSLER: Fantastic. Thank you so much. I am one of the assistant secretaries at Victorian Trades Hall Council, and I am joined by Colin Long, who is our Just Transitions Organiser. I will be making the opening comments for Trades Hall today. I just want to say thank you to the committee for your work. Committee work often goes unrecognised and unseen, but we see the work that you do behind the scenes, so we appreciate it.

I also just want to acknowledge the significant amount of work that has already been done in this space by the state government. It is really wonderful to see, and we are almost nation leading, I would say, in terms of our minimum standards. We have not put it into our submission, but we are already starting to think about how we communicate that better with young renters, who are often young workers, who are overwhelmingly renters. And just in the last week, I have had a box delivered to Trades Hall; we have got some materials that we have just printed, which is going to be with our Young Workers Centre, talking to them and their young workers that they engage with: 'Are you a renter? What are you going to need help with in energy efficient appliances and getting ready for the minimum standards that are coming in, and how are you going to be able to communicate that with your landlord in a safe way?' The first step in that is educating renters about what they are entitled to. We are excited to be starting to roll that out over the coming weeks and the coming months. We do these great, significant changes, and we need to make sure that we are communicating them to workers and particularly to young workers.

I am just going to take our submission as read. We have got a couple of unique ideas in there that I am sure that you will have questions about, but we really want to think about what the next step is. We have done a couple of years of some pretty amazing work in this space, so let us think big picture. I should note both Colin and I are apartment dwellers – we are here on behalf of Trades Hall, but we are both apartment dwellers ourselves. The only two things I just wanted to add really quickly are, from a trade perspective, the job opportunities in this space are obviously endless and many, and we want to see the work done locally, with qualified tradespeople – all of those sorts of things that we would love to see happen. And the only thing I would flag is, if you have not already, have a conversation with the ETU. The ETU have been really up-front about the need for more electricians in this state and making sure that we have got a pipeline of work, a pipeline of electricians coming on line through TAFEs and being trained up on the job. ETU have done a mountain of work in that space, and we can share reports that they have shared about mapping how many electricians we are going to need into the future. But overwhelmingly, this is a really exciting opportunity. We ask you to think boldly about what we can do next to ensure that there is equitable access to renewable energy and affordable energy for apartment dwellers in this state. Thank you very much, committee.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you very much. Who would like to kick off?

Wayne FARNHAM: I will kick off. I am going to go straight to the tradies.

Danae BOSLER: Straight to the tradies.

Wayne FARNHAM: Straight to trades –

Danae BOSLER: I will do my best, otherwise we will call in ETU.

Wayne FARNHAM: being that me and the Member for Morwell are the two tradies on the panel. I do want to go around to the shortfall we have with electricians, but not just with electricians; our completion rate of apprentices is a challenge at the moment. There seems to be, depending on which report you read, about 50% completing their apprenticeship. How do you think we can better that as a government for not just electricians but trades across the board? How do you think we can best improve that percentage and get more great tradesmen, like the Member for Morwell and me, that are not in it anymore into the system?

Danae BOSLER: There are two things that I would say. There is the carrot-and-the-stick end, which is that we need to have more mentoring programs to make sure that people go through. The Young Workers Centre engages with a huge number of apprentices through the TAFE system to educate them about their rights and their entitlements on the job. We need to have great career pathway planning with the teachers at school to be encouraging people to come into the trades sector. The other thing I would say is that historically we have had some of the lowest rates of women and girls participating in trades, and that is turning around in the most incredible way. We have been running programs for a number of years now, but a lot of the evidence shows that you have got to bring women and girls in in bunches, in groups. So having them come through in a cohort of 10 or something like that – do you know what I mean? – where they come through in a batch, that really helps to bring in big groups as well. All of those sorts of things can help with bringing in tradies. The other thing I cannot not say – I have to say it as well because we have been advocating for a long time – is about lifting apprenticeship wages. I have just seen everyone nod so I will not repeat it, but apprenticeship wages need to be tackled as well.

Wayne FARNHAM: Do you think that is a direct correlation as to why we are not getting the completion rates we are with our apprentices in Victoria?

Danae BOSLER: Absolutely. That is what apprentices say to us as well. It is insane that you start and no matter what age you are, you are kind of locked into that wage. We are seeing how cost of living is going absolutely through the roof. Workers on full wages are struggling to keep up – do you know what I mean? For apprentices it is next level as well too, so we absolutely need to be looking at the minimum wages for apprentices and setting beside that junior wages as well for people that are not necessarily in an apprenticeship or traineeship role but maybe want to move into that area.

The other thing I would just say as well is that at the Young Workers Centre we deal with a lot of apprentices who have had issues of bullying and harassment. They are younger workers less equipped to deal with that, so having mentoring programs, having really great TAFE teachers that can support them through that and having the Young Workers Centre and legal centres that can give them industrial advice also helps to keep them in the industry, because we want to tackle that problem before it happens as well.

Wayne FARNHAM: Just really quickly – the Chair is going to get angry at me.

The CHAIR: No, I am not. I never get angry at you, Wayne.

Wayne FARNHAM: Do you think there should be a bit of reform around our apprenticeships and the timeframes they take to do them, being that the industry has become more specific in what they do? Like in carpentry, for example, we have framers, fixers and lock-up carpenters. What are your thoughts around that?

Danae BOSLER: I would urge having conversations with the unions around that, because I would just urge a tiny bit of hesitancy. The sector is booming, right? There are so many more new skills you need to have and new technology you have to deal with. We would be hesitant about anything that reduces the time that it takes to complete an apprenticeship if it is going to reduce the skill and the qualification. That would be the only thing that I would warn about – just making sure that it does not reduce the quality of the education and reduce all the skills that have been learned through that process. As you would know, tradies and people that have a qualification take that really seriously. They are really proud of it and would not want anything to diminish the quality of the work that is being done. When you get a tradie in, you know you are getting a qualified tradie in Victoria who is going to do the best job that you can get in the country.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thanks.

The CHAIR: Would you like to go?

Martin CAMERON: Following on from the Member for Narracan, I hear in the renewable space we are opening it up for our tradespeople, both male and female, to get involved in that sector, which is fantastic. My question is: do you feel there is enough hands-on opportunity for the apprentices to learn – like, take wind turbines, wind generation and stuff like that – and to be able to actually get that hands-on ability to go and work on the wind turbines?

Danae BOSLER: I feel like I am hogging the microphone. Colin actually sits on our skills and training committee to deal with this. I do not know if you want to take it.

Colin LONG: I think there are opportunities. I think one looming really big opportunity would be offshore wind. If we can get that over the line, there are huge opportunities there for trades of all sorts. We still need to build a huge amount of renewable energy to meet our renewable energy target, so there are plenty of opportunities there. The ETU has been good at this, requiring apprenticeship targets on projects. That is the sort of thing we need to achieve. Some of those targets were reduced in previous years. Of course, as you probably know, one of the great providers of apprenticeship opportunities used to be the SEC, but when it was privatised a lot of that opportunity was lost. I still think there is a huge amount of opportunity. As I said, it is requiring a certain number of apprenticeships on projects.

Martin CAMERON: Is the work coming? Offshore wind, as you said, is not coming on as quick as what we had hoped for. Have we got to put the cart before the horse? Have we got to have the infrastructure of the students trained up, even though it is not here at the moment? What are your thoughts on that? Do we need to wait until we get to a certain timeframe of ‘Right, it’s going to go ahead now; now we can train up our workforce’? It is going to be a specialised workforce.

Colin LONG: We need to train people now. We need to start now. It is specialised, but you will need a lot of A-grade electricians for offshore wind. We have got a shortage of them now. So we need train as many as we can, and we have got to start now.

Danae BOSLER: I will just use it as an opportunity, because I cannot let it go past, to put in a bid to continually fund and support TAFEs, particularly in regional areas. Down in Gippsland, absolutely, there is a huge potential there as well.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Can I take us down this path: in your submission you talked about this idea of a state-owned solar farm being preferable to solar for individual apartment buildings, the role of the Victorian government – with an investment of \$400 million – and the benefits that might have. Why is that a good outcome for Victorians or for renters?

Danae BOSLER: I will let Colin kind of explain the model, and the way we came up with the \$400 million investment was just numbers, so open to you guys to vary that as well. We just think that, as you have heard probably all day about the challenges with accessing solar on rooftops, absolutely we should continue to fund it and support it. It is still a wonderful piece of work and there is still room on rooftops. But you have spent the whole day hearing of the challenge, and so having another model that sits with the SEC where renters feel in one part like they are buying into the system – but really it is just about equitable access for people that cannot get it any other way. We do not want a whole cohort of Victorians missing out on the opportunity to be involved in the renewable energy transformation, and this is the most equitable. Well, this is one equitable model we were thinking of.

Colin LONG: It is not entirely dissimilar to, I think, Mr Cameron’s suggestion that you could have solar panels on a roof in Morwell that provide power for an apartment in the city. It is a very similar proposal in a sense. There are similar things that exist now called solar gardens, which you can invest in and then get the amount of generation capacity according to how much you invested, and you get that reduction in your electricity bill wherever you live, and you take it with you. So the big advantage for everyone is the government is not subsidising landlords to put solar on the roofs of their properties, and then there is the risk of them raising

the rents accordingly. The benefit goes to the tenant, and they can take it with them wherever they go. We came up with \$400 million by using the \$1400 rebate that homeowners get, and so it is a matter of equity and justice. We say: give that amount to renters, invest it on a large-scale solar farm, put it behind a battery to improve storage and grid functioning, and it has huge benefits for everyone. It would make serious improvements in cost-of-living expenses for renters, it would help to provide more renewable energy across the grid and it would improve grid stability and all sorts of stuff.

The CHAIR: Terrific.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Can I ask a technical question?

The CHAIR: Go for it.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Our transmission lines that have a lot of land and go all the way to Morwell and all the way into the city – are they sites that could be solar farms?

Colin LONG: It is a really interesting thought. Whenever I am travelling anywhere around the country, I think, ‘Where could you put solar panels?’ I am not sure if necessarily putting them under transmission lines is a good idea, but I have seen it in Japan, for instance, along railway lines – huge. I mean, think about the distances in our railway lines, and the reservations that are very often next to the railway lines are pretty crappy land anyway. But also if you go out to the airport, have you seen the scale of the car parks out there? Why don’t we cover those car parks with solar farms? We could generate so much power out there, and we do not need transmission lines there. They are in the city.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Actually, apparently they are doing great things for farmers with sheep, because they are getting shade. So there is actually this beautiful cohabitation of solar panels and livestock.

Colin LONG: And grass grows under them better too.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Grass grows under it, it gives better food for the animal and they are sheltered from our harsh Australian summertime sun. Yes, go for it, Jordan.

Jordan CRUGNALE: I have got another question just around supporting owners corporations. What education, advice and resources do you think they need to pursue sustainability upgrades?

Danae BOSLER: I think we put in a few recommendations in there about the SEC being able to provide independent, objective advice. I think being able to put together case studies as well, so that the SEC could actually provide advice directly to homeowners who are in body corporates too, anything like that would be great. I have heard a lot of conversations as well about where they are struggling to get the majority of support on body corporates. But actually for some people the challenge has been, like in my case as well, it is actually just the body corporate or strata manager just blocking it till death do us part, even though the whole of the committee is overwhelmingly in support. There really needs to be some extra level of, I do not want to say intervention, but an extra level of support from government to back in to be able to provide evidence to the body corporate or strata managers around the expectations about what you need to do at this moment, because they are very resistant. I do not know if there is something else to add on that as well?

Colin LONG: No, I think that is good.

Danae BOSLER: Does that answer the question?

Jordan CRUGNALE: Yes.

Danae BOSLER: Okay.

The CHAIR: I am looking at the time, and it is suddenly 3:10. Is there anything else that people pressingly need to add? We are speed dating again; it is amazing. Martha is putting her hand up. Hi, Martha. Jump in – last question.

Martha HAYLETT: Hello. This is probably one for Colin, with his Just Transitions Organiser hat on. Do we have a sense of the shortage of electricians and tradespeople to make this transition and have more

renewables for apartments and, more broadly than that – I do not know if you have a sense of this – also of how we upskill current electricians, not just apprentices, to do this work?

Colin LONG: I am not sure if I could give you the exact number of how many we are short, but it does vary as well. It depends what other competition there is for electricians at any one time. Big infrastructure projects require electricians. When they are completed, then potentially there are more electricians available. I might just say continuing to expand fossil fuel extraction is not a good use of the workforce when we need those skilled workers, very often, to be available for renewable energy. So that is an issue. There was one other element of your question, which now I have forgotten.

Martha HAYLETT: How will we support current electricians to upskill? Do you think that there are things that the Victorian government can do to support them? It is not an easy question, but I am sure you have got thoughts too.

Colin LONG: It is not just electricians, to be honest. We do a lot of work supporting energy efficiency in general, and we do a lot of work with some organisations that actually do installation. One of the things we have heard reported is that, say, on hot water heat pumps, a lot of plumbers do not really know what they do and how they function properly. You still have plumbers setting hot water heat pumps – the timers for when they are working – according to when the old SEC tariffs were, which was when you used to heat your hot water overnight, which is not a good idea with a heat pump. So there is a fair bit of training still required. The Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre is doing that training, but one of the challenges for tradies is having the time off their jobs, especially if it is just one or two of them running their own business. How do you get the time off to go and upskill your training and learn the latest technologies? It is very hard for them because every minute off the job they are losing money. So we have to provide some means, I think, of helping tradies to upskill and get new skills without losing income.

Martha HAYLETT: Good idea.

The CHAIR: Good suggestion. Thank you very much, Danae and Colin. It has been a big day for you today. Thank you for being here with us.

Witnesses withdrew.