ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Bendigo – 27 July 2004

Members

Mrs A. Coote  Ms J. M. Lindell
Mr D. K. Drum  Ms W. A. Lovell
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Witnesses

Mr B. Gould, executive manager, economic development;
Mr P. De Araugo, project officer, strategic planning; and
Mr J. Pollock, environmental sustainability development project officer, City of Greater Bendigo
The CHAIR — Good morning everyone. I declare open the Environment and Natural Resources Committee inquiry into sustainable communities. I would like to welcome Mr Brian Gould, executive manager, economic development; Mr Philip De Araugo, project officer, strategic planning; and Mr John Pollock, environmental sustainability development project officer, City of Greater Bendigo.

All evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review; however, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being recorded by Hansard and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript in the next week or so.

Mr GOULD — First of all, can I take this opportunity to welcome everybody to Bendigo; it is great to see you here. I will quickly do an introduction, then I will read from my prepared submission and then take questions and answers. I thought it appropriate to bring two other people with me today. One whom you were alerted to in advance is Mr Phil De Araugo. The other person is Mr John Pollock, who is from our ecological sustainable development department and works in the economic development unit. This is to reinforce the fact that we see this committee’s inquiry as important, and to demonstrate the commitment that the City of Greater Bendigo has to sustainability. If you will bear with me I will read from our formal submission, which is entitled City of Greater Bendigo’s Response to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee Inquiry into Sustainable Communities.

First of all, to promote efficiency of water use and supply and use of energy, the City of Greater Bendigo recommends additional resources be provided to the following: increasing awareness surrounding our ecological footprint; increasing awareness surrounding regional water catchment issues; promoting the RRR principles of reduce, reuse and recycle; and encouraging water sensitive urban design in new and existing developments. Such principles could be incorporated into the planning and building regulations.

The City of Greater Bendigo is currently undertaking the following actions that are applicable to achieving the above objectives: Firstly, we are an active member of the Cities for Climate Protection program. Currently we have completed milestone 5 of that program. Secondly, we have developed a climate care partnership with Origin Energy to access energy and climate care skills, expertise and knowledge not readily available in Central Victoria. This partnership has facilitated the following programs as a result of funding provided through the greenhouse community action funds — and there are five of them: first, the energy efficiency in industry program, which is assistance to develop and implement an energy efficiency action plan and various workshops on energy management and expertise; second, retrofitting of City of Greater Bendigo buildings to identify and reduce energy waste and improve energy efficiency; third, providing an additional installation rebate to residents who install solar hot water systems between 1 July 2003 and 30 June 2004; fourth, conduct community workshops in relation to household energy usage; and fifth, conduct a community buildings energy management program (CBEMP) for eight high-profile community buildings to raise awareness of energy management and climate care opportunities.

The next major heading in our submission is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the City of Greater Bendigo makes the following recommendations on additional resources to be provided: Increasing awareness surrounding our ecological footprint; increasing awareness surrounding lifestyle choices and the adverse effects of inappropriate vehicle and electricity use; celebrating successes relating to greenhouse gas reductions, and promoting the economic benefits to individuals and companies; and implementing the five-star energy rating for all new buildings. The City of Greater Bendigo is currently undertaking action that is appropriate to achieving that objective. We are an active member of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance, which is a collaboration of municipalities, government authorities, educational facilities and major businesses. The CVGA has a target of a 30 per cent reduction in emissions by 2010 based on 1999 levels, and a zero net emission by the year 2020.

To increase the rate of recycling the City of Greater Bendigo recommends that additional resources be provided to increasing awareness surrounding our ecological footprint; increasing awareness as to what can and cannot be recycled, and the implications of contamination; and celebrating recycling successes. The City of Greater Bendigo is currently undertaking action that is applicable to achieving these objectives. Council recently implemented a recycling program using recycled wheelie bins that do not require recyclables to be separated. In addition, a significant promotion campaign was undertaken to ensure that residents were aware of what can and cannot be recycled. A recent survey estimated that approximately 80 per cent of residents supported the recycling program.

To foster renewable energy use, the City of Greater Bendigo recommends that additional resources be provided to: increasing awareness of the benefits of using renewable energy — cost-benefit analysis; assuring the community
that the use of renewables is reliable and not an impact on lifestyle; providing environmental incentives to use renewables, such as tree plantations and providing assistance to those who can least afford to convert to renewables.

The City of Greater Bendigo is currently undertaking action that is applicable to achieving these objectives, and that is providing an additional installation rebate to residents who install solar hot water systems between 1 July 2003 and 30 June this year.

To improve energy efficiency, the City of Greater Bendigo recommends that additional resources be provided for conducting energy audits and promoting outcomes. It is currently undertaking the following actions that are applicable to achieving the above objective: conducting an energy efficiency in industry program: assistance to develop and implement an energy efficiency action plan, and various workshops on energy management and experiences; retrofitting of City of Greater Bendigo buildings to identify and reduce energy wastage and to improve energy efficiency. We have conducted community workshops in relation to household energy usage, and we have also conducted a community buildings energy management program for eight high-profile community buildings to raise awareness of energy management and climate care opportunities.

The second major point was the identifying of barriers to increase the rate of participation by individuals and households in recycling and conserving water, energy and other resources, and improving energy efficiency. Council’s comment on this is that there is a lack of easily accessible and digestible information, including cost benefits, payback periods et cetera, that relates to existing buildings, retrofitting, and new dwelling design. This should be at the forefront of our minds when considering our housing needs. Consideration needs to be given to the costs associated with the initial purchase price, installation and payback periods for sustainable technology compared to existing, less sustainable ones — for example, photovoltaic cells compared to low-cost grid-connected electricity, solar hot water et cetera. Financial incentives are needed to gain the attention of the broader community. There is also a lack of interest shown by property developers and the building industry in promoting sustainability in subdivisions and building design.

In conclusion, the third point of the inquiry looked at identifying other low-cost opportunities for communities to participate in promoting and encouraging environmental sustainability.

Our response on this is to have a design competition for dwellings that embrace ecological sustainable development (ESD) principles. The City of Greater Bendigo is currently undertaking action that is applicable to achieving that objective. It is conducting a community-wide competition to design various types of dwellings that respond to local climate, lifestyle, and demographic changes. This is running in conjunction with the release of applicable ESD information.

Mr HILTON — Thank you, Brian. I have a couple of questions. When you were conducting the community workshops — forums — how many people attended those and how effective do you think they were.

Mr GOULD — I will get John to answer that. He is coordinating those.

Mr POLLOCK — We ran four workshops throughout the municipality: two here in Bendigo, one in Heathcote and one in Elmore. About 30 people in total attended them.

Mr HILTON — So there were 30 people across the four?

Mr POLLOCK — Yes.

Mr HILTON — That does not seem very many.

Mr POLLOCK — No, and we were very disappointed with the attendance. However, having said that, the meetings themselves were scheduled from 7.00 p.m. to about 9.30 p.m. and quite frequently they went on for almost an hour beyond that, so the interest was there for those who attended. I would have to say that energy management or reducing energy use, while people think about it it is probably not really a very sexy subject so it is quite hard to get people to come along to these things.

Mr HILTON — Following on from that, if it is difficult to get people interested in the subject I wonder about the value of these education programs in terms of improving or increasing sustainability and efficient use of
resources, and I wonder whether we should be looking at more cost penalties so that people are penalised if they are not adopting environmentally-friendly energy management practices.

Mr POLLOCK — Obviously that relates, perhaps, to externalities and trying to cost in the environmental and other non-tangible impacts of producing electricity or burning gas or whatever. That is something that is always being discussed, and it is very hard to put a figure on those types of impacts.

Mr GOULD — I think that we have always been of the view that education is a slow process, but it is the one that tends to get it across. It is difficult to get people to change their habits, and I guess the fact that we have looked at how we can do that by having an ecologically sustainable development team within the whole of the City of Greater Bendigo is an interesting example in its own right. Our team is made up of people from various units within council. It has people from corporate services. We have subject matter experts that you would expect from the environment, but some of the companies that we talk to employ 400 to 500 people, so the message gets across that we have made these savings in our business and the same savings can be made at home. It just gets people thinking about it as well.

Mr DE ARAUGO — In relation to community forums et cetera, one thing that we have found is that quite often with these forums you are preaching to the converted. So you are right — you are not getting the message across as effectively as you could. That is something we all have to work on: developing other forms of education to increase the awareness and the audience that we are targeting. Community forums are a really good way of getting information across, but that is only one part of the education process. I think it all stems from education.

Mr HILTON — Brian, you mentioned about retrofitting public buildings. Have you considered extending that to the residential household level?

Mr GOULD — Not specifically at this stage. What we have gone for here is an opportunity to identify some public buildings for which council has responsibility — again getting our own house in order — and also ones that have a reasonably high volume of people coming through so that we can use that as part of the education process. That is why we looked at places like the art gallery, and like the library that we have here. We also have Bendigo Tourism, our main visitor information centre; the main council offices and those sorts of places where there are thousands, and in some cases tens of thousands, of people going through per year. It gives us an opportunity to get that message across. That has been our primary focus.

Mr HILTON — Have you considered trying to communicate the savings that you would make with retrofitting public buildings in terms of the effect, maybe, on the council rates that are being charged?

Mr GOULD — What we are looking at — and John’s position has been funded again for this financial year — is recognition. We are forming a revolving fund which will identify the savings we have made from this type of activity so that we can use that for additional energy efficiency programs. It looks not only at the dollar savings, it looks also at what the CO2 savings are, and we want to get across the message that energy efficiency is not just about saving money. That helps everybody who has to pay a bill, but it is also about getting the message across that it is helping the environment. We talk in terms of those two things, we do not separate them. We are constantly talking about the fact that we have been able to save X number of dollars but at the same time we have talked about CO2 savings. We also try to bring that down to a level that the average person can understand, whatever that is, so that this amount of tonnage of savings is the equivalent to this number of cars on the road or something like that.

Mr HILTON — So you have hypothecated the savings into additional programs?

Mr GOULD — That will be the way in which we will do that for the next 12 months. Up until now we have funded that through either government grants or the council directly, or a combination of those.
The CHAIR — Brian, I suppose I want to look at how you measure success. As a council, what are your accountability measures? Can you talk to us about those?

Mr GOULD — There are a couple of things we do on that. Firstly, in terms of achieving milestones there is the Cities for Climate Protection program. The City of Greater Bendigo recently succeeded in being ticked off for both milestone 4 and milestone 5. We had done milestone 4 before, but we had not really got around to formally ticking it off. We have now done that to milestone 5, so in that context we are one of the few municipalities in Victoria to do that — and even on a national scale we are still up there. That is one way of demonstrating what we are doing and measuring our performance.

Having done that, one of the tasks that John is now charged with is to have another look at all those buildings that we used as the benchmark, check those out and look again at the potential for us to look at new targets. We have set targets not only as a municipality, but as part of our alliance with the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance, which is made up of about nine councils and other people. We want to say that these are the targets we want to achieve for our city — I guess we have a two-edged one there, we have got it as a commitment to the Cities for Climate Protection but also as a member of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance — and to encourage other municipalities to do a similar thing. It is measuring the CO2 savings but at the same time we are able to demonstrate that that has a cost saving in terms of budget as well. They are probably the two. If there are any other comments from John or Phil I am happy to look at them.

The CHAIR — Can you tell me the amount of the solar water rebate?

Mr GOULD — I can give you the pamphlets on it, and I am happy for members of the committee to have it. At the end of the day it works out that the easiest way to work it out is that it is about a 10 per cent rebate on the cost of installation. What we are saying is that people are eligible to get it, so it is $60 for solar hot water and $300 for the photovoltaic cells. I can finally say photovoltaic cells without stumbling every time. It is a recognition that, yes, you can get some funding for establishing those units into your house but I guess what we are trying to do is give that extra encouragement for them to do so. It also means that it can be done in existing homes or new homes.

The CHAIR — Is that funded by the City of Greater Bendigo?

Mr GOULD — Yes, but also we got some funding through the community action fund, so it is one of the things that we said between us.

Ms DUNCAN — You were saying that one of the problems in terms of trying to promote or have sustainable communities was the lack of interest shown by developers. I do not know whether that is new home buyers as well as their lifestyle systems, and that will change, but how can that be addressed? What role do you think councils can have in encouraging developers when they develop areas to develop them as sustainable areas? What sticks and carrots do you think you need?

Mr DE ARAUGO — I guess it starts right back to at subdivision design and making sure that it is all right. One of the things which we are in the process of organising at the moment in partnership with Coliban Water is to do a demonstration project — a site which they have which will have around 100 dwellings on it using best practice or leading edge technology incorporating water sensitive urban design and energy efficiency mechanisms to reduce energy consumption, so making sure the subdivision layout is right from the start so that houses can be built with the correct orientation and that sort of thing. I guess one of the things that we need to do is to provide an example for developers and for the community to be aware that there is a different type of development which is more environmentally sustainable. One of the things that we are trying to is to lead the way or help lead the way.

Ms DUNCAN — Currently though if you had developers looking at a particular area how much input can you have to, as you say, encourage them to make sure blocks have the right orientation and things like that?

Mr DE ARAUGO — Not a lot really other than what is in ResCode. We have just released a residential development strategy which has an additional component to ResCode. As Bendigo is basically surrounded by national and state forest we have issues with the interface between urban and public land. We have got some relatively strict guidelines on how you develop land adjacent to public land. That is one of the mechanisms which we are trying to use for land development in that area.
**Ms DUNCAN** — Do you have any particular by-laws for properties that abut any of those forested areas like cat ownership, dog ownership or lizard ownership?

**Mr GOULD** — I guess the one that is picking up a fair bit of local publicity is that we have just implemented a cat curfew, so there is effectively now a dusk to dawn curfew. Cats have to kept inside the yard. Anyone that does not do that faces the same situation as you have with stray dogs — they can be picked up and taken away. That is again just another part of the education process that we are looking at. That gets people thinking about it at least. You just have to keep doing it. One of the things that John Pollock does as well is to work with the Green Plumbers, for example. They are the plumbers that have got a bent on trying to encourage people to do not just the normal things that you do in the house but in fact to look at the sustainability. We have been working with them to also encourage ways in which we can get people to seriously think about how they might develop their houses. Obviously the five-star rating is another step in that direction. It is really about building on those blocks and saying, ‘Okay we have that. Some of it has got to be regulation, which is what your five-star rating does, but if you use regulation and encouragement like our subsidiary program, which is only a short term thing, it just gets that community education process started.

**Mr DRUM** — Firstly, congratulations on having so many programs and being such an active council. I am interested in the greenhouse gas alliance that you have with the other municipalities. How do you quantify how much the omissions are within the conglomerate of the areas? Is there scientific data associated with quantifying what our omissions are within the alliance?

**Mr GOULD** — Can I get John to answer that?

**Mr POLLOCK** — Basically what happens there is that through the Cities for Climate Protection team in Melbourne we are provided with information based on what I believe is state and national statistical information to work out where the emissions are coming from from a community point of view as best we can within the various municipal boundaries. With regard to what is called corporate emissions, which is basically council’s own emissions from the vehicle fleet and buildings et cetera, waste, we basically collect that from electricity and gas bills and also from the vehicle fleet cards. So that information *corporately* is quite easy to collect. To get information from a community perspective we rely on input from the Cities for Climate Protection team in Melbourne and nationally as well.

**Mr DRUM** — Is the goal of having zero emissions by 2020 a reality?

**Mr POLLOCK** — Yes.

**Mr DRUM** — It is?

**Mr POLLOCK** — I cannot comment on the target itself because I was not actually involved in the actual development of that target, but I understand that that was an agreed target whenever the CVGA was set two or three years ago in terms of its aim.

**Mr GOULD** — It is zero net emissions.

**Mr DRUM** — Which means that you are going to — —

**Mr GOULD** — You still have to recognise that there will be emissions. What we are looking at is how to do that as the most efficient way. Again I will use the fact that we want to encourage that for business as much as we want for the general community as well. All the things that we are doing with things like the house design again is another way of getting people to think about how you want to deal with the sort of house you need in an environment such as Bendigo, recognising that we are north of the divide. There is additional sunlight, so how do you use that effectively? How do you cope with the different extremes of summer and winter et cetera, and doing it to meet that sort of requirement considering the fact that we have to recognise that we are a city that has been around for 150 years plus. We have some magnificent buildings but they were designed at that time. How do you cope with those? It is about as much retrofitting as you can do taking into account all of the restrictions that are going to be on you in terms of heritage listing — I am not saying that as a negative but there are realities that there are some things that you cannot do — and trying to work out how to do the best you can, and in terms of what we are doing as a council about any new buildings that we do, how we may look at ways of making that happen.
Obviously with the industry side of things we are also encouraging businesses because they are often a huge consumer of energy and therefore the consequences; so how we work with them to make them better?

Mr DRUM — Just on that point Brian, and possibly to Philip, you spoke earlier about the 5-star rating for residential. Does the council have a similar control over a totally private enterprise that comes in in the commercial field, like a factory owner that wants to build a set of factories? Do we have any control over the design of those factories? Do we have any control over the energy use that those factories are going to draw on with both the electricity grid and so forth?

Mr DE ARAUJO — None that I am aware of other than what is in the planning scheme, which are state government rules and regulations. There are none that I am aware of.

Mr GOULD — However, what we are finding is that most companies now want to come in and they actually are looking for a total solution, so that is about finding the land and all the appropriateness of that. What we are finding is becoming increasingly interesting to them is the recognition that power, gas and water are major energy users and the fact that we have people like John Pollock working for council — we give them access to his expertise to look at ways in which they can do it. So there is a greater awareness of people who want to build a new facility to look at a whole range of issues and that helps us in terms of creating that sort of environment.

The food precinct that is well known here locally is a facility that is being purchased on about 70 acres. We are looking to bring dozens of small to medium-sized food manufacturers to that site. Underpinning that is in fact the environmental management plan that we want to put in place that we believe will be the best in the world — not just the best in Victoria or Australia but the best in the world. Recognising that you can use the environment as a way in which you protect it and getting the most energy efficient way of doing it, we are looking at everything from exploring opportunities for cogeneration and that can come in so you again minimise the amount of energy consumption and at the same time reduce greenhouse gas impact.

Now this is not just all about altruism. The reality is if you do that you save money for companies, and we have been able to demonstrate at least on the feasibility study that there are significant savings to companies if they do it that way as well. So it is about again doing both of those things. So you get the savings and you save the environment as well, and it is a marketing thing for companies. Again I go back to what I said earlier too — it is about the number of employees that these people could engage — are engaging — who are your local residents who live here who then suddenly remember that, yes, you can switch the light off and it does in fact save money. You do not have to keep your computer screen on. We have actually sent out a story to our own council employees about turning their computer screens off at night time. We would love them to turn them off, but even if they do not turn them off, if they just press the button to close the screen the amount of energy and dollar savings can be quite significant in an organisation of our size.

The CHAIR — Perhaps just one final thing: could you talk to us about council’s role in water conservation, wastewater management and stormwater management?

Mr GOULD — I am probably the person who can talk the least about that, other than to say that in terms of water management we certainly are looking at a number of issues with water use here in Bendigo. I am on a committee that is a stakeholder committee that has been looking at the re-use of water, so we recognise that we have to look at ways in which we can use the water that currently is available through the Epsom Wastewater Treatment Plant, the sewerage farm out at Epsom, the Coliban Water system. Another potential use of water that we are currently not having full access to is the Bendigo Mining operation, when that becomes operational. Those two facilities between them would expect to generate something in the order of 30 megalitres per day, which is a fairly large percentage of the current consumption so we are looking at ways of doing that. In terms of stormwater, no, I cannot answer at all. I would have to get someone from our engineering unit. But I can say that we work continually in conversations with people like Goulburn-Murray Water and Coliban Water, the two water and sewerage authorities for our area, to look at ways in which we can do that.

The CHAIR — Okay, thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.
CORRECTED VERSION

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Witness

Mr B. Whelan, manager, environmental services, Macedon Ranges Shire Council.
The CHAIR — We welcome you to the hearing, Barry. I just wish to remind you 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 given today is being recorded, and you will receive a proof version of the transcript in the next week or so. You obviously have a PowerPoint presentation for us, but please leave some time for questions at the end.

Mr WHELAN — Thank you. I am the manager of environmental services in the Macedon Ranges Shire Council. My role is to look after waste management, and our natural environment officer, Lachlan, looks after weeds, roadsides, biodiversity and all of those sorts of issues.

In terms of the wider picture, there are a number of other people at council. I worked in the physical and environmental services directorate, but there is also the sustainable development directorate, which includes the planners, and within that section there is a strategic planner and a conservation planner, and in the community services directorate we also have a social planner. All of these people impact on the sort of things we are talking about today.

In terms of policy, the council has a number of policies that impact on these issues, but the main one is the natural environment strategy. It has four key themes, which include soil, water and air, and global responsibility. Those themes overlap, but the soil, water and air and the global responsibility certainly cover the sorts of issues that we are talking about today. The other one we have, which was just completed last year, is the health and wellbeing policy, and in preparing that, council also prepared a 2025 vision statement that involved a lot of consultation with the community in terms of finding out what our community wanted. The points that came out of the vision are: awareness, the rich fabric, our home, and the deep connection with the environment. ‘Our home’ is about the community wanting to live within the environment and be able to rely on it for its needs without excessively depleting the available resources.

As well as the health and wellbeing policy there are also some guiding principals. As you can see on the overheads, one of those is looking after the beauty, tranquillity and biodiversity of our natural environment. There is also a need for sustainable living, managing our resources to meet our current needs, and preserving them for the future.

The council has a number of programs that relate to the sorts of things we are talking about today. There is the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) program; the Green Plumbers, which fits within that CCP; and also within the CCP we have a local energy efficiency demonstration (LEED) grant. We are also looking at weeds, tree planting, biodiversity and providing support to our community; and we did quite a bit of work in recording data in terms of biodiversity, weeds and so on.

In terms of the Cities for Climate Protection, the council achieved milestone 5, and we did that through carbon sequestration by planting 37 000 trees. We achieved that by giving money to Landcare groups to plant trees, and they were able to then use those funds to match government grants from other sources, if they were available. For example, if we had carbon trading we could strictly trade those carbon credits, but the trees are in the ground. We have also purchased energy efficient computers and photocopiers for all of our officers. They switch off automatically, they go to sleep, so that if people leave them unattended their energy consumption drops dramatically. We retrofitted the Kyneton town hall with fluorescent lights, and we have done energy audits for some of the larger council facilities — the Woodend offices had completely new heating, ventilation and cooling installed, the council purchased 20 per cent green power through our contract to purchase power, and Green Plumbers and the solar retrofit pilot program were used for the electricity hot water systems.

The Green Plumbers program is part of the Master Plumbers Association, and the thrust of it is to train plumbers so that they are aware of energy efficient supply appliances. When people ring them up and say, ‘My hot water service is busted. I want a new one’, a Green Plumber can say, ‘Well I can replace the one you have but there is a range of other options available. You could have a solar one or you could get a government grant’, and so on. They are able to inform them. So council’s input to that was initially to facilitate training for Green Plumbers providing a service and so on, and then we got involved in the solar retrofit pilot program, whereby people could use their existing hot water service tank, electricity storage tank, and add a solar panel that would reuse the energy that the hot water system used. In terms of actual units on the ground that was modestly successful, but in terms of community
education we attracted quite a bit of interest and publicity, so I think it raised people’s awareness of the general issues.

Another point of interest started up a few years ago and involves a couple of minibus cooperatives working in the shire. The council does not have much involvement into those at all, but they are run by cooperatives. They have these buses, they pick up people and they drive to work, not so much the city but around the airport. From Romsey there is no rail service, so it is an important advantage for people, especially for young people who need their cars to get to work.

Since we achieved our milestone on Cities for Climate Protection we have probably stagnated a little, but this year, through the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance, we have had some training for new councillors, and we will follow its recommendation and establish a financial loss control team within council, which will be cross-organisational. To date, the CCPs have probably driven from within the environmental services, and it really needs to get much bigger than that, so the City of Newcastle actually has 14 steps that it works through, and it makes it fairly simple. We will then revise our local action plan, which we have prepared as part of the CCP, and then start again.

Another thing we will be looking at is a revolving fund whereby money that is saved through energy efficient practices can go into a fund, and then that funds the next lot of activities. In terms of our local energy efficiency demonstration grant, we have $17,000 from the Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria, and we will do some work in the Kyneton office to improve the heating and cooling. That will save the council money in terms of energy costs, but it will also greatly improve the comfort for the people in that office. At the moment we are spending money on air conditioning and heating, but people still are not comfortable, so there are two ways to win there.

We will also look at low-cost double glazing. We have a portable room out the back of the Kyneton office and it is not particularly well insulated. Kyneton is a pretty cold place at this time of the year, and that office is very hard to heat, so there is a plastic film available to apply to windows which makes them double glazed. It is not as good as a bought double-glazed window, but it will dramatically improve the insulation. We will do some of the windows within the main Kyneton office as well.

Part of preparing those demonstration projects is having a strong component of community development, so we will be looking at press releases and advertising and those sorts of things. We will also send newsletters directly to our community groups, and with the low-cost double glazing we can actually have a static display of a window that has it on, and we will arrange a day where we get someone to do it so people can see that it is something that you can simply achieve yourself.

The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance. I think you are hearing from Peter Kennedy today so he will be able to tell you a lot more about that, but one thing that is happening there is street lighting. The councils involved have done an audit and inventory of the street lights, and we are looking to cooperation from SEAV again to reach a service agreement with the power companies for the provision of street lighting. Another thing which I do not have on the slide is that we are also looking at a program with the CVGA for the council to plant trees for the purposes of carbon sequestration.

Within the sustainable development directorate they are preparing development guidelines for sustainable communities, and they have some funding assistance from the DHS to do that. Through that we will be outlining the principles for development, and it will include those things such as water-sensitive urban design and making those developments into health communities with an emphasis on good and safe pedestrian access. Once again the planner is a strategic planner: we are also looking at water catchment model controls. A great majority of the rain is within catchments for the Coliban and the Campaspe; there are catchment overloads applying to large parts of the shire, but even the south of the shire drains to Jacksons Creek, Deep Creek and so they are important catchments, for example, for market gardeners down around Keilor. One of the things we are looking at as part of that is tanks and dams; they conserve potable water but they also take water out of streams, and so I think that is something we need to look at, especially dams which can actually trap a lot of water. They might save the amount of potable water that people use but not necessarily have a beneficial impact on our catchments.

With the recycled water irrigation we have arranged all recycled water irrigation at Gardiner Reserve, which is the main footy oval in Gisborne. The council has done this at its own cost, as I understand it. We were fortunate there that the recycle main happens to run from the treatment plant to the golf course it goes past, and that made it
economically viable for council to do that, but in other circumstances it is not. We have also installed a bore at the Kyneton Showgrounds for irrigation there. I guess we have been driven in these things partly by drought and water restrictions rather than trying to save water and save money, but that is the effect it will have.

At the toilet in the Kyneton Mineral Springs reserve there is currently a primitive sort of a treatment plant that discharges into the river. We are not allowed to do that anymore so we are looking at having an onsite treatment plant, and we are trying to get the water to a good enough quality to be able to put it back through the cisterns and not have to discharge anything to the environment at all. So that is something we are working on at the moment, and we have a grant from the Victorian Water Committee. Just in terms of waste, I think recycling is one of the things on the agenda — I think kerbside recycling is going okay in our part of Victoria, and I guess that is partly because we are reasonably close to Melbourne — and we have called for tenders for a new waste contract to start in October, and they are currently under evaluation. Certainly the indication from those tenders is that recycling costs will be much better than they were in the contract we are currently under. What this is showing is that recycling is actually going to cost less than taking material to landfill whereas going back a few years it was the other way around — you had to pay to recycle effectively. So I think that as far as kerbside recycling is going it is okay. The further you get from Melbourne though, the transport costs impact on the economics of it.

The packaging covenant is ineffective. That is a subjective statement by Barry Whelan, I suppose, and I think that if you read the reports there are things that are happening, but you know, at home I put the rubbish out and I cannot see any difference. Recycling is all very well, but we are dealing with the problem at the wrong end. Unless we actually deal with the issue of packaging we can recycle as much as we like but we are not really dealing with the issue.

As to our regional management groups, over the last few years the government has had audits and reviews, and I am not sure what the government is really trying to achieve but I cannot see that it has achieved very much yet. The regional education officer funding is one of the issues that has been raised through those reviews. Our regional education officer is a very valuable resource for the three shires in the region; a very capable person, but still not adequately funded from the government. There is funding there for the wages but not funding for transport, materials and various other things that officers need to be effective.

With the sustainability fund we have a situation where the state government requires local government to pay the EPA levy and then keeps some of that for the EPA, some for EcoRecycle, some goes back to the regional groups, and then they give it back to council as grants and council has to match it dollar for dollar. We are getting our own money back and then we are required to match it. I guess it helps the government set policy direction by focusing council on those sorts of things for which grants are available. It could be more effectively used in some places if it did not have to be matched. I noticed in the new guidelines for the corecycling restructure grants that it is possible to get more than a 50 per cent grant for certain projects.

This is a list of a few opportunities I thought of — there are probably hundreds more — in discussion with our strategic planner. In subdivisions we need to look at the densities and make sure that they have good pedestrian access and that they are accessible to public transport. I do not know whether there is something that can be done through the Subdivision Act to actually make that a more useful document which would help councils.

As to a third pipe system in subdivisions, I understand from our subdivisions engineer that it is economically viable to install a third pipe in new subdivisions to use recycled water. The hang-up again is actually getting the recycled water to the subdivision, and there are huge capital costs in that. Our water authorities are faced with the situation where they are no longer able to discharge as much water to streams as they once did, so that water has to be used for some other purpose, and one of the very good purposes that it could be used for is in new subdivisions. The economics need to be looked at in terms of getting the water there. The same things goes for council reserves, as I touched on earlier.

Carbon trading: we are in a situation where our federal minister for the environment said that the government accepted the greenhouse effect and that it had always accepted the greenhouse effect. Then the next thing you saw was the policy, and its response to that is that it is going to use geosequestration to deal with the carbon and to keep using coal as a power source. I do not think that is a very long-sighted policy, and unless there is some form of carbon trading there is never going to be the economic drivers to produce energy from more efficient sources.
Just touching on the grants again, I think the state government provides grants, and often it is dependent upon council having matching dollars. Council cannot always find those matching dollars. It is not just Macedon Ranges shire it is the fact that the smaller the councils get the less hope they have got of finding those dollars, so things just do not happen at all.

Another thing I think that government could do is actually provide extension and weed control services across our shire. There are really no services in the southern part of the shire and my environment resources officer spends a lot of his time helping people with things like weeds, which we feel really should be managed by the DPI under the CALP act.

In terms of the street lighting, the street lighting code as it exists at the moment requires the energy companies to provide street lights — and they have to work. I think that is the thrust of it. At the moment councils actually pay for street lights on a per-unit basis, if you like. We do not actually pay directly for the energy and so up to a point we do not have a financial burden if those lights are not working properly. But what happens is, part of the audit that we have done shows that one in eight street lights is actually on during the day and that is a terrible waste of energy. So I think the code could look more closely at performance and efficiency.

Another little thing is that subsidies for water efficiency are subject to people using a licensed plumber. My mother-in-law is a pensioner here in Bendigo. She did the right thing and installed a double-flush cistern in her house. It cost her a lot of money. She got the subsidy, but I think some of these things do not have to be subject to a licensed plumber. If you want to install a rainwater tank to put water on your garden I cannot see why you have to have a licensed plumber for that either. Now we have got the subsidy but people are not really getting any benefit from it because of that provision. That is the end of my presentation.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Barry. I might start the questioning. Do you think this regional group, the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance has actually been effective from your point of view? Do think it is a good model for other areas?

Mr WHELAN — The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance as I understand it — I was not involved in it — was initially established because the councils anticipated there would be federal government funding for carbon sequestration and those sorts of things and there would be a much better opportunity to use those funds if there was some sort of consortium. That actually has not arisen but the CVGA has continued to exist, and I think that is because the councils do see benefits from it. So some of the other things that have actually been happening is that there have been trials of what is called AMG diesel, which is where you add water and detergent to diesel and reduce the fuel consumption. They have been doing trials with the use of biodiesel, which is effectively using canola oil to run diesel vehicles. I think it has been a very useful networking, information-sharing opportunity for the councils that are involved and recently they had the Newcastle City Council come down and provide two days of training on how successful it has been in reducing its energy consumption — and at the moment we have got this street lighting agreement under way and there is a tree planting carbon sequestration project this year.

It is an organisation that has continued to exist despite its original reason for being created perhaps not existing any more. I think that reflects its value. Whether it is a model that you could replicate across the state — perhaps not necessarily — I think there are certainly things that you could look at there and perhaps apply to a wider area. I think Peter Kennedy will be able to explain in much more detail the things that they do. I am sure I have not covered them all.

The CHAIR — From your point of view just how effective has it been?

Mr DRUM — Are the major towns in your region, like Gisborne, Woodend and Kyneton, on natural gas?

Mr WHELAN — No. Kyneton is on natural gas, but the other towns are not. We are anticipating natural gas.

Mr DRUM — There is talk of it coming to Romsey, isn’t there?

Mr WHELAN — Certainly Gisborne, Woodend and Romsey.
Mr DRUM — Has the council worked out how much is likely to be saved both in dollar terms and also in the footprint of each of those households when they can change over from natural wood or electricity for heating to natural gas?

Mr WHELAN — I do not know if it has been done to that level of detail.

Mr DRUM — That is fine.

Ms DUNCAN — When a program is implemented either by state or local government how do you think it should be measured? With measures that are implemented to achieve sustainability, how do you think those programs should be or can be measured?

Mr WHELAN — I guess the measurements need to be built into it at the beginning so that you can actually keep the records required to do that. But there are some things, for example the solar retrofit program, for which there is a final report. It says how many people rang up, how many people actually contacted a plumber and how many services were installed. You can measure those things. What is perhaps more difficult to measure is how many people actually heard about it. There is a solar retrofit program, but they might have looked at it and thought, ‘I am building a new house. I will put in solar hot water service’. It is harder to measure those things. I guess you need to do some sophisticated surveying to know how effective that has been. I think the benefits of those sorts of programs are not necessarily the numbers things. It is the awareness. But as I said, you probably need some surveying to find out how effective that has been.

Ms DUNCAN — I know that the Macedon Ranges has conducted over many years a number of forums and information sessions and things like that. Anecdotally how many people attend those sorts of forums, and how effective do you think they are? For example, if the numbers at a particularly forum are relatively low what would you make of that?

Mr WHELAN — Community consultation is something that the council finds challenging. For example, recently we had budget meetings in each of the major towns within the shire, and I think the most people from the public who came to any of these meetings was four. Does that mean that the people are not interested in the budget? I do not know. At some of our forums we have much bigger attendance than others, and it is not always easy to find out why. I guess some of the things we have been successful at is that we have Landcare forums on a regular basis a couple of times a year. I would say they are fairly successful. Perhaps the secret of that is that they are actually fairly informal where we have people come along. We might have a guest presenter and each Landcare group gets a couple of minutes to say what sort of things they are doing, then they have something to eat and talk. The social aspect of it is perhaps more appealing than the actual forum itself, if you like. I do not know if I have answered your question.

Ms DUNCAN — That is good.

Mr HILTON — Thanks, Barry. I have some sympathy for smaller shires like Macedon in terms of the resources that can be brought to these types of programs and issues. Do you think it would help Macedon if there were a more centralised directive such as, ‘These are the programs that you should be implementing, and these are the ways you should go about it’? You did mention the Newcastle experience. You felt that had been quite useful.

Mr WHELAN — Yes.

Mr HILTON — I am wondering if maybe that can be made a bit broader, because of all the 79 shires in Victoria I suppose they would all be looking at these issues and there would be slightly different ways.

Mr WHELAN — Yes.

Mr HILTON — I also wonder whether the efficiency of these initiatives could be more effective if there was more of a methodology, a given methodology, rather than you having to determine it yourselves.

Mr WHELAN — There are certainly occasions where you are doing something at council and you think, ‘There are certainly seven other people trying to do this in Victoria today’. Sometimes I guess something in the way of a kit would be helpful, but at the same time all those councils are different and so they do do things differently. But in terms of things like the energy issue, through the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, which is the organisation that organises the Cities for Climate Protection campaign, on its web site is a...
range of success stories and case studies. So you can look at one of those and grab it and say, ‘Well, that is what we want to do and this is one way that it has been done’. Recently a couple of shires have had the walking school bus program, where parents organise to walk to school and pick up kids on the way to make sure they get there safely. Through ICLEI you can look at models of how that was done, perhaps in Whittlesea or Warrnambool, and you can apply it to your own shire. That sort of thing is useful, and it certainly is being done through ICLEI in terms of the energy things, but it probably has wider applications.

Mr HILTON — At the individual household level what do you think is the most effective way of implementing behavioural change in terms of energy conservation and waste management and water conservation?

Mr WHELAN — Once again it is something that is difficult. Through waste management the regional education officers certainly concentrate on schools. The anecdotal information we get from parents is that their kids actually come home and lecture them about how to recycle. Certainly anecdotally that can be effective where families have kids who are at school age. Schools can probably also be a useful means of getting information into the community. Parents perhaps might be more likely to read the school newsletter than the council newsletter. Another issue that we face is that people say, ‘We have never heard about this’, when council has an update newsletter that goes to every household in the shire a few times a year and covers the major issues, but that does not always work. I think schools are useful, but there must be other ways, because not everybody has schoolkids.

Mr DRUM — One of your neighbouring councils has spoken to me about the EPA levy and about how tough it is for them to make that levy, and it is going to get harder in the next couple of years, and you have mentioned it again. Is there any other way that we can look at funding the EPA? I know it is a tough question. I asked this question of the Environment Protection Authority chairman last fortnight, and he believed that it was reasonably fair, but I am just saying that the councils are undoubtedly finding it a very large impost on their financial structure.

Mr WHELAN — In terms of the financial impost, the levy is something that we in Macedon Ranges shire simply passes on directly to the community through the garbage and recycling charge and the fees that we charge at our tips and transfer stations, so it is an impost on the community as much as the shire. The question is: is it the government’s responsibility to fund the EPA or is it local government’s responsibility to fund the EPA? The other issue that I was touching on is that the money from the levy — —

Mr DRUM — As it comes back it has to be matched dollar for dollar.

Mr WHELAN — It is our money. We are forced to give it to the government and then it gives it back and says, ‘You can only have it if you can match it’. Generally in our shire we can match it, but I think it is a struggle. There are some things that probably get passed up because the council says, ‘We cannot match the dollars to do that’, and so opportunities are passed by.

Mr DRUM — Can I just ask the quality of the bore water that you were able to extract out of Kyneton? Was that successful?

Mr WHELAN — I do not have the details, but I understand that it was, yes.

Mr DRUM — I know for instance that Castlemaine was not overly successful with quality. It is interesting then you had some success there when up the road it was not so good.

Mr WHELAN — I think a large part of Macedon Ranges shire is actually sitting over pretty good quality ground water.

Mr DRUM — Do you know if there are any further plans to sink some bores maybe anywhere near our sporting reserves?

Mr WHELAN — No specific plans that I am aware of. I think that one of the other opportunities that could exist in Kyneton is at the Coliban Water treatment plant. For example, it is not all that far away from the Kyneton golf course. There is a large council reserve there which is fairly underdeveloped, but there is Rollinson Reserve. There is a racecourse just across the river from the treatment plant, so I think there is probably good opportunities in Kyneton to use recycled water. Again the water treatment plants do not want to give their water away, but there is an issue of who funds the trunk mains to get it from one place to the other.
Ms DUNCAN — How well used and how successful is the cooperative bus service?

Mr WHELAN — It is well used. There is a report I can get you about it. I have no involvement in it whatsoever now. Council had some initial involvement but now it runs by itself.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your time, Barry.

Witness withdrew.
Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Bendigo – 27 July 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

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Executive Officer: Dr C. Williams
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Witnesses

Mr P. Chudek, executive officer; and
Ms K. Fennell, regional education officer, Calder Regional Waste Management Group.
The CHAIR — I welcome you, Mr Peter Chudek, executive officer, and Ms Kerrie Fennell, regional education officer of the Calder Regional Waste Management Group. All evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of this hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being recorded by Hansard and you will receive a proof version of the transcript in the next week or so. Peter, we have got about half an hour or 40 minutes, so if you could make your presentation and leave perhaps just a little time for some questions.

Overheads shown.

Mr CHUDEK — We will change around for the slides.

Ms FENNELL — I guess I should start by saying the first slide is a representation of the challenge already. If you have a look, we have got the archaeology of waste and it shows how in the last 20 years that pile of rubbish is where we are at. So that is the challenge for us — to reduce that pile of rubbish.

Mr CHUDEK — You probably by now have had a look at the discussion paper that contains the map of the Calder region, so I will say to you that the Calder region encompasses three municipalities — that is, the City of Greater Bendigo, Mount Alexander shire and Macedon Ranges shire. Our goals and objectives for the group are established under the Environment Protection Act, which quite clearly delineates our responsibilities. I can say that the key responsibility for the group is waste management planning for the region, waste education research and implementation of government policy. That is it in a nutshell.

One other topic I want to talk about is innovative approaches to waste management. In the past we had a number of initiatives in place. These ones here are the key ones and the most successful ones. We have run successfully a waste exchange bulletin board for the industry in a local paper, the Bendigo business-to-business publication. We invited local businesses to list their unwanted material and we list it on the bulletin board that was going to the different industries and different businesses. They in turn when they saw some opportunities for them called us. For the six months of that program we managed to revert about 120 tonnes from landfill. It was a very successful program. Unfortunately in a change of the structure the Calder group is no longer responsible for industrial and commercial waste so we cannot run that program. We ran out of funds as well so we stopped that program after six months, but it was quite successful. At this point in time EcoRecycle is responsible for that waste stream.

We have looked into a different technology. We understand in relation to technologies for managing waste that in the future we need to implement state-of-the-art technology in order to achieve the reduction as set out in the Towards Zero Waste strategy that is in a draft form at the moment.

One of the key options we looked at was the bioreactor landfill, in-vessel composting, and pyrolysis and gasification. We are doing that in partnership with the City of Greater Bendigo. That has been advertised asking for expressions of interest. It is about to look at the options to pick up three contractors that will be able to deliver the best technology, and in the very near future we are hoping that the contract can be awarded for the establishment of a state-of-the-art facility in Bendigo that will provide an avenue for the waste in the region to be disposed of properly, and at the same time using the waste as a resource. There are a number of other initiatives. For example, we have trialled a baling twine collection pilot project. We are trying to recycle baling twine. In our region there are a lot of small farms that use quite a lot of small bales, so baling twine is an issue.

Ms FENNELL — Thirty-thousand tonnes of baling twine is used annually within this region.

Mr CHUDEK — It was quite successful, and we managed to collect quite a bit of that. Unfortunately the manufacturer, the company that offered us the avenue for disposal of that material, raised the stakes. During the game they raised the stakes and the specification for the material was beyond our reach, so we had to postpone that. We are still working with the industry to find an avenue for this material, but at the moment that project is on hold. It was quite successful, and it is a good avenue to remove farm plastics.

One of the other interesting things we did was to work with the Calder group, which was the only group in Victoria that applied successfully and developed, with the support of the federal EPA, or Environment Australia as it is called, waste oil recycling facilities. With the funds supplied by that organisation we were able to establish seven locations within the region for the recycling of oils and the overall capacity was established as 24 000 litres, which is quite substantial. The receptacles, or collection facilities, we have developed are the better ones in the state.
We have looked at turning recycled paper into egg cartons. We have done a pilot project, and it was quite successful. Probably the key program is the waste-to-energy, or alternative waste management technologies, because that will provide the region with significant improvements in the way we manage waste. At this point of time we have two landfills. The key landfills are the Eaglehawk landfill and the Castlemaine landfill that most of the waste is going to. We are quite mindful that Castlemaine will be closed within the next five years and the capacity at Eaglehawk is diminishing quite rapidly. We need to have technology that will manage waste and efficiently avoid using the available landfill space. Those are probably the key ones. As I mentioned before, there is waste-to-energy, gasification and pyrolysis, and probably in-vessel composting.

Ms FENNELL — The other thing we would like to touch on is the organics into agriculture. We did a study on that with a number of other regional-based management groups and EcoRecycle Victoria, looking at green organics for broadacre farming applications. Whilst it was possible, the cost of producing compost for broadacre farming was not comparable to the cost to a farmer for applying fertilisers and other things. Unfortunately at this point that has not gone any further. One would hope that as the process and collection etcetera improves and perhaps the costs reduce then that may be a possibility in the future, but at this point in time it is not cost effective.

This slide refers to waste education. Calder Regional Waste Management Group, with the Highlands Regional Waste Management Group, has an education trailer. That is quite a key resource for us to use for community and school education. The trailer goes to field days, farmers markets etcetera. It is an opportunity for us to engage with community organisations such as the scouts, farmers, community groups and other organisations to get the message out there about waste avoidance, waste reduction and litter issues. Last year the trailer had approximately — and it might actually be a little more — 70 000 visitors. We are able to record that because we give out information, and I always count how many brochures or pamphlets we give out, as well as people coming to the tent. So if 100 brochures have gone that day I know that at least 100 people have been there. That is how we have recorded the number of visitors to the trailer.

That also fits into our Waste Wise Community program. We have had workshops and forums and we are working with other organisations. That is the key thing about the education program: it is not just about getting the message out there about being waste wise, it is also developing networks with other organisations. Key organisations that I work with are the Beverage Industry Environment Council, my local member councils, Rotary, Lions, and a range of community organisations. A key part of the education process is developing networks those links with other organisations.

Another area that we have worked with is the Bendigo business excellence awards. We initiated an environmental category to encourage businesses to start thinking about waste avoidance and waste minimisation. Having that acknowledgment through an environmental award, an award that is esteemed in Bendigo, is one of the key links we have made.

Probably a lot of you would be aware of the Waste Wise Schools program. It is a fairly popular program state wide. Over the last 12 months in this region 38 schools have been involved in the program. At the moment not all but most of those schools have been primary schools, so my focus this financial year will be on trying to get some more secondary schools on board. Secondary schools mostly have a litter issue. Phone calls I get from secondary schools will say, ‘We have got a litter problem, come and help us solve it’, so my focus for the next 12 months is really concentrating on secondary schools. As you are aware a school term is roughly about 10 weeks. Usually about nine schools per term have the trailer for a week. I usually go in on the first day and conduct an in-service for teachers on how to use the resources in the trailer, run a program with the children for the day, then leave the trailer with them for the week and they use its resources. We do an evaluation of each school after they have had the trailer, and it is very positive. They usually say, ‘A week is not enough, we would like it for longer’. Once a school has had it they usually have it two or three times again. I usually confine it to once a year because there are not enough trailers to go around.

Litter education: I work with my local member councils on litter education and community organisations. We get grant funding through EcoRecycle for some of the projects. Some of the projects will be supported also by the local councils. I have put the Woodend one in there because that is an example of a partnership project. There was local council, Macedon Ranges shire, myself and the Rotary Club of Woodend, and we put the application into EcoRecycle Victoria for that funding. I also work with the Beverage Industry Environment Council for Don’t Waste Bendigo, and our groups developed a War on Litter Kit which consists of a curriculum CD, strategies on
what you can do to reduce your litter at school and a range of things like that. There is quite a bit happening there on the litter front.

**Mr CHUDEK** — I should have defined the group in the first place. I just wanted to mention that there is just the two of us who are employees of the group, so all the work is done between me and Kerrie. The other thing I would like to mention is that we are quite big on the waste wise education, and if you realise that the $60 000 we would receive towards that program does not even carry the expense of the education officer’s salary, you see that we are doing quite well on the little money that we receive from the landfill levy. That is one of the things that we would like to have improved in the future. We really need more resources. I always say that to reduce landfill waste in the future building new landfill or building new recycling facilities, or even waste-to-energy is not going to help. What we need to invest in is not infrastructure but in education. We need to change the mind-set of our community. That is one of the biggest challenges that we have got. We need to change mind-sets about disposing of waste. I think that we are beyond the recycling stage. We need to aim for something bigger. Recycling would not help us to the extent that we need to reduce waste and meet all the targets that are delineated in the zero waste strategy for Victoria that is in draft form at the moment. There are two areas where we work with members of council, and one is education.

**Ms FENNELL** — On recycling education, when Bendigo introduced their new recycling system we assisted with educating their local community and organising the education campaign for the implementation of that recycling service. I have been working with Macedon Ranges shire for public place recycling at Hanging Rock, and we have successfully received a grant from EcoRecycle to pilot a project at Hanging Rock. We are also working with it to develop a sustainable environment education kit for Hanging Rock, so that when schools and community organisations come and visit Hanging Rock they can get a kit and engage in a range of environmental activities out at the discovery centre.

Then Bendigo is having their Commonwealth Youth Games in November, so we are working with the City of Greater Bendigo and that organisational committee to implement public place recycling at all of the venues at the Commonwealth Youth Games, as well as looking at waste management options there. Bendigo are also keen to have a plastic bag-free town so we are working together with them to develop a policy and some strategies to help implement that program.

Stormwater education was another partnership project. We have worked with the Environmental Protection Authority and North Central Catchment Management Authority to develop stormwater education for Bendigo council. Each of the councils has a waste and litter education strategy, which we have developed.

**Mr CHUDEK** — In terms of the infrastructure development, we work very closely together with our member councils. We have developed the infrastructure development plan that spells out, for the next 10 years, what our infrastructure needs are. Then, on behalf of member councils, we look for the opportunity to finance those products. To date we have been very successful. For example, I have talked before about the waste oil recovery facilities. We have received $60 000 — this was a group initiative — from Environment Australia for that project. Every application for financing of the project goes through the group and is supported by the group. I think — no, I am sure’ — there was not even one year that we were not successful in getting the money for Bendigo. Bendigo received the money on an ongoing, year-by-year basis for this project. For example, there is this Eaglehawk recovery facility — a tyre rim removal facility — that was funded from our savings. We have managed to save some money in the task, and we funded that particular facility.

The Castlemaine and Maldon resource recovery facility is another one. We are building the new transfer station, including the weighbridge, in partnership with the council. The same applies to the Macedon Ranges resource recovery facility in Kyneton, where the group again from our savings — past savings; we do not have any savings any more — has funded a green waste management facility.

What are the challenges? I mentioned before the biggest challenge for our community is changing that mind-set from one of wasting, saying, ‘Someone will take care of our waste’, into avoidance. Not even recycling is enough because recycling in my opinion will not lead us to achieve those goals we have in front of us. We need to start reducing — avoiding waste in the first place. That is the biggest challenge, although there are a number of other challenges, for the group and the region, such as the implementation of the EcoRecycle business plan. Under the Environment Protection Act we need to take up the particular issues from the EcoRecycle business plan, which from time to time is a challenge to us considering the limited resources we have.
The other challenge for the community and us is to establish state-of-the-art facilities. Through our experience we have learnt that the community, while supportive of the establishment of waste management facilities, does not want them next to their homes or businesses. For example, Elmore. We battled I think for three years to get the town planning permit for the transfer station at Elmore. In planning to establish waste, energy or universal composting facilities the biggest challenge for us will be to actually get a permit — to manage community acceptance for establishment of these facilities in a particular area.

**Ms FENNElL** — In summary, a change of community behaviour from recycling to avoidance is actually the biggest challenge, because we are a consumer society. If you start asking people to stop consuming, that does not sit very well with them, so we need to encourage our community to think — to think about the choices they make, to think about what they are consuming, to try instead of buying something that might last six months, buy something, if it is something they need to consume, that is going to last. So that really, from an education perspective and, I think, from a regional perspective is the biggest challenge — getting community support to avoid rather than to consume. That is basically our summary.

**Mr CHUDEK** — How are we going to achieve our targets? I have a little graph, which I received from the EPA recently, showing the waste that is being disposed of in local landfills. We are quite well advanced in achieving the objectives — they are delineated in our waste strategy for the region. I will email a copy to you. We are doing as much as we can, and we are successful.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks, Peter and Kerrie. We will take some questions.

**Mr DRUM** — How do we stop using margarine? How do we stop using tins of fruit? How do we stop using plastic ice cream containers? The things that we buy every day and dispose of every day, we do not have a choice with those things. I am trying to think of some of the things that I can avoid wasting in the household, and I do not know what they are.

**Ms FENNElL** — I quite agree with you, and as I said to you, that is one of the challenges. You are probably aware of the national packaging covenant. I think that has a role to play in assisting the consumer. How those things are packaged impacts on how they are disposed of. I remember when I was a child I did not get margarine or butter in a plastic container; it was in a paper wrapper. You can still buy butter like that, so that might be a choice — that you do not buy margarine, you buy butter in a waxed paper wrapper and fold that up. It is the same with ice cream. I remember as a kid I did not get ice cream in a plastic container; it came in a tin. A tin can be reused; it can be recycled too. Those plastic containers can be reused too. So I agree with you that there are difficulties in avoiding that, but if you think about what you are buying, that can help. That is really the challenge; we need to get people to think before they buy.

**Mr CHUDEK** — How you can influence — we can influence — is by purchasing products that are wrapped in an environmentally more friendly packaging. Through community buying power we can influence industry. It will research and provide us with goods that are wrapped — and the biggest problem is the packaging — with material for wrapping and packaging that has a lesser impact on the environment. For some of them, because of health issues, this may not be achievable, but if we go towards that objective and make conscious purchases in order to support our environment, it will ultimately achieve that bigger objective.

**Ms FENNElL** — One of the projects that we have been looking at over the last six months — and it is currently running, I think, in the Northern Regional Waste Management Group — is Green Shop. The idea is asking supermarkets to actually identify products that are packaged in an environmentally friendly way. One of the things we did look at is having a labelling system, but we decided that there are that many labels on products at the moment that that probably would not work.

One of the things that we have examined is having a green iron, so that you have products that are themselves environmentally friendly but they have to meet a set of criteria so that they would be packaged in an environmentally friendly way, not just recyclable but with packaging that is minimal. That is one of the ways in which we hope to encourage consumers or make it easier for consumers to make that choice, to look at those products or have a key that says this product’s packaging is environmentally friendly, to identify them on the supermarket shelf rather than on the packaging. So there are a couple of the strategies we are looking at.

**Ms DUNCAN** — Thanks. We talk about the big impediment being to get people to think about it at the time of purchasing so that they do not buy the packaging in the first instance. What do you think is the best
approach to achieving that? Is it to target the industry and the packaging council and to use carrots and/or sticks at that end, or similarly with consumers, to put higher charges on things that are heavily packaged, or just through education?

Ms FENNELL — All of the above. I think you need multiple approaches. It needs to be done at the beginning with the packaging, with the industry, but also we have to take responsibility for our consumption, so it needs a multistrand approach.

Mr CHUDEK — If you look at what is happening at the moment, the high level policy and strategy and working with the industry is done by EcoRecycle in our state, but it is a significant role that we play and we like to, by working with the communities, go with our education trailer to different venues. Like Elmore, where we educate farmers how to properly manage and how to avoid waste by going to schools and teaching new generations that avoidance is the key solution to waste. I think that is where we play the role, and the role of working within industries lies with EcoRecycle.

Ms DUNCAN — Are you aware or do you have any knowledge of what might be described as world best practice in this area for what is essentially — I guess your focus is on — reduction in residential waste. Are you aware of anywhere in the world that is done particularly well?

Mr CHUDEK — One of the better ones is the Green Dot in Germany, where all the packaging has got a green dot, where industry contributes and it can be readily recycled. Packaging that has not got a green dot attracts a higher charge in the supermarket. People that are environmentally conscious can make an educated decision because they know that the green dot packaging is friendly with the environment but the others are not. That is probably one of the better ones, although it is difficult to implement.

Mr HILTON — Following on from Jo’s question, I believe the statistics say that in Australia we generate more waste than any other industrialised country in the world on a per capita basis. Has any work been done that you are aware of that has actually analysed what these other countries produce as waste and what sort of waste we are producing that maybe they are not?

Mr CHUDEK — I think the key issue is that in Germany — I will give you an example — the cost of disposal of one tonne of waste is $300. In this council it costs $32. That is the key driving force for wasting or not. If the company has to pay $300 a tonne to dispose of its waste it will be forced to think twice.

Mr HILTON — I am thinking more, Peter, of the household level.

Ms FENNELL — If you look at the composition of household waste, one third of it is actually green waste, so that is organic material that could be composted or reclaimed. A third of it is usually plastic or things like that, so I think we are the third worst in the world. America is no. 1, I think India is second, and we are third.

Mr HILTON — Okay.

Ms FENNELL — I think, if you have a look at the composition of the waste bin, which I have done on a number of occasions — unfortunately it is part of my job — you will find that a third of it is plastics, packaging plastic. Things like your biscuit wrappers and margarine containers and all that sort of stuff. That is why I think the national packaging covenant is really important and why they need a few sticks available to them. It is voluntary at the moment, and I think until it becomes mandatory and organisations are made to look at the life cycles of their products, to look from here to there and be responsible, plastic is going to continue to be probably 30 per cent of your waste.

Mr HILTON — Let me talk about that 30 per cent which is green waste which can be readily recyclable from compost bins or wherever. What is your view on charging people for that waste and thereby providing an incentive for them to recycle it themselves?

Mr CHUDEK — We have quite an extensive infrastructure. The number of compost bins that have been distributed throughout the state is quite amazing. Yes, through the charges you will force the community to recycle materials. It is best done at home. If you consider what is happening in Melbourne, where a number of councils provide an extra bin for the recycling of green waste, there is a problem in that the end product is compost. At this point of time it cannot be manufactured cost effectively in order to combat things like fertilisers that are
commercially available, so there is an issue, especially in our area. You can have a green waste collection in Bendigo but what are we going to do? The community is too small and applying that to farms is very costly. We have a struggle to manage that waste. The best way for us at this point is to manage the green waste in the residential premises where the people shred them and compost them in their own bins.

Mr HILTON — If I could just ask one final question. In your view is education enough to change behaviour or does there need to be either, as you said before, carrots or sticks?

Ms FENNELL — In anything you do I think you need multiple approaches. If you take, for example, a cigarette butt litter campaign, some people, when you educate them, understand the impact of those cigarette butts on the environment and do the right thing, but some people will not and they need the stick. That is why you have the fines for those people for whom it is all too hard, and who do not want to listen about it, but if it affects their pocket, all right, they will put it in the right place. In any strategy you need multiple approaches because everybody is different as well. Just on the green waste, we have run composting workshops because people do have difficulty with their compost bins. I have difficulty with my compost bins, and I think a lot of it is just because it is so cold in Woodend and in winter nothing works. You need multiple approaches. Also with the green waste you have a situation where people are in flats and that sort of thing, so a compost bin is not going to solve their problem. So, in anything you do education is important. Education is not just about the transfer of information, it is about engaging people in the process. If they are not engaged in what they are doing just telling them what to do is not going to get them to change. You can tell me how to do something three or four times but unless I have actually engaged in the process and have done it, I am not going to remember or do it. So education is important but so are all the other things because everybody in the community is different and has different priorities.

Mr CHUDEK — I think enforcing the positive behaviour is the key to any education, and whilst the penalising for wrong behaviour can have some significant impact, we think that doing it right and educating our children will provide the ultimate success.

The CHAIR — If I can just ask one last question, and it is to do with the fact that small and medium enterprises create as much waste as households: do you do any work with small business?

Ms FENNELL — That is where I do most of my community program work. We have Western Water currently becoming a waste-wise business, and we ran a workshop with builders because construction and demolition are a fair amount of waste, and in this area they make up quite a bit of the proportion of our small business, so yes, we have worked with them. One thing I will say is that with a lot of your smaller businesses — not medium businesses — they do generate collectively quite a bit of waste and that they are fairly efficient anyway. They have to be in order to survive, so a lot of those smaller businesses that I have worked with are fairly good at waste avoidance. It is more the medium-sized businesses that require more assistance, and the restaurant industry too is another area we need to work with. The problem that I face is encouraging them to talk to me because they have other priorities, but they are a key area, I agree with you.

Mr CHUDEK — I will give you some examples of the companies we work with, like the Bentink, that is the motel–restaurant in Woodend. It had a significant problem with bottles and plastics and cartons and did not know what to do about it. It had this one-bin solution from the council emptied on a fortnightly basis and it was really struggling to take that waste away. Everything was usually packed into one bin and taken as waste to the transfer station. They asked us for assistance through the council and we looked at it and I said, ‘There is a simple solution’. Why not get the council to supply you with more recycling bins and sort the waste into those bins and put them out’? No-one knew that it could be done. Neither the business nor the council was aware of the need. We managed to convince the business, however, that this was the best solution, and now there is the solution for that particular business. In a similar way, we worked with a bigger business, Castlemaine Bacon, where quite a bit of waste is generated, and where they had a huge amount of cardboard that was actually going to the landfill. Through our work with them and EcoRecycle we managed to procure a cardboard press and now all the cardboard generated in that factory is removed for recycling. This is the sort of area we work with in the smaller industries. As I have mentioned before the waste exchange bulletin board is aimed at these particular businesses.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Bendigo – 27 July 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

Mr G. Michell, chief executive; and
Ms D. Pendleton, executive manager, customer service and administration, Coliban Water
The CHAIR — If I could 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, any comments made outside the precincts of this hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being recorded by Hansard, and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript in the next couple of weeks.

Overheads shown.

Mr MICHELL — The way we thought we would do it is as a brief presentation. As you will probably appreciate, sustainability is an issue that we focus on basically most of the time, particularly in relation to water resources, so what I have proposed to do is talk about what we are doing at the moment in terms of providing water services to our region.

In the folder we have included a map that shows our region extends from Trentham in the south — down in Joanne’s area — and all the way to Echuca and Cohuna in the north, and from Tooborac and Heathcote in the east over to Wedderburn and Korong Vale. We serve a population of 130 000 people. We have 55 towns or systems through the regions. We have to deal with long distances between those towns. We have just under 60 000 residential properties and over 6000 businesses that we deal with, which range in size from basically corner shops to major food processing industries, particularly in Castlemaine with Castle Bacon — I cannot remember its new name — and to places like Echuca, where probably 80 per cent of the water consumption and waste generated comes from industry. Even though a place like Echuca has a population of 12 000, its demand on our system is the equivalent of a town of about 300 000 people.

We have nearly $600 million worth of infrastructure in place with 23 water treatment plants and 13 water reclamation plants. You can see there are various pump stations and numerous kilometres of water mains and sewer mains. We also have a feature which is somewhat unique in our system, and that is the Coliban rural system where we have just under 500 kilometres of very small channel compared to the major irrigation areas. I was at a forum the other day which was talking about flows down the Murray. At one point in the Murray the flow per day is the equivalent of what we do in the whole year across our region, so that puts things into perspective, I suppose.

What have we achieved particularly in terms of service and sustainability? We have put in world-class water treatment facilities across most of our regions, such that over 98 per cent of our customers now receive world-class treated water. Over the last six years we have sewered some 21 towns throughout our region, particularly small towns. We are a leader in the water industry in the use of public-private partnerships in that three of our water treatment plants and three of our wastewater treatment plants are owned and operated by the private sector. We have in place long-term consistent education programs.

An area in which we have put a lot of effort in recent years which has a big impact on sustainability is managing those major customers I talked about earlier. Demands on water supply and the waste that they generate often require quite significant infrastructure to treat supply take away. It has come about particularly where we have put new plan in place to negotiate with trade waste customers, to find ways of minimising their demands for water and to look for efficiencies in their processes to reduce the waste that they generate, that we then have to treat, deal with and hopefully reclaim in a lot of circumstances.

As Damian knows, we talked about this last week, the drought — and I am sure you are all aware of the very high profile water has in the community these days and the interest at all levels of government — has made it a very high profile issue in this particular community. We are always of the view that our system has some reserves in a non-drought period that would accommodate the projected growth of Bendigo and other towns within our regions.

Over the last 12 months we have developed a new strategic plan for Coliban Water and our customers, and elements of this plan are very much in line with the government white paper that was released a few weeks ago. To build on the reserves that we know we still have available to us, the key elements of our strategic plan are to introduce permanent water conservation measures by the end of this calendar year, to continue education programs, and we are looking at the use of reclaimed water to offset water that is used from our storages. It is interesting to note that five years ago reclaimed water or water from wastewater treatment plants was considered that — it was considered to be waste. We had a view even back then that this was a valuable resource, and it is extremely pleasing that in the white paper, and generally in the community now, there is an acceptance that reclaimed water has a role to play in the total water cycle. It is a valuable resource. However, there are issues in getting communities
to accept the use of reclaimed water in their backyards. That is something that will perhaps be a longer term issue but one that we will work through.

We are aiming to reduce water losses — in other words, improve the efficiencies, particularly in our rural channel system that I mentioned earlier. We are looking at alternate water sources, and a project that is extremely interesting at the moment is one we are working on with Bendigo Mining, the City of Greater Bendigo and a number of government departments, which is to evaluate the feasibility of using the water that will be generated from Bendigo Mining’s activity as part of our total water resource. We are extremely excited about that as an option and have recently made a submission to the Victorian Water Trust for some funding for that project.

The permanent water conservation measures, though, will have a fairly immediate impact and at a low cost. Again, they are consistent with the white paper recommendations and what is being put in place in a number of areas across the state at this point in time. We are looking at an option of taking the sorts of measures I am sure you are aware are being promoted — things like no watering between certain hours to avoid the heat of the day, not watering hard surfaces and the like. We believe there is a role for permanent odds and evens-type watering to be put in place to act as a strong water conservation measure. It is not new; it is a practice used in quite a number of towns throughout the country.

In some ways we are fortunate in our region in that we have access to other water suppliers — the Campaspe River system, and we have a capacity share in Lake Eppalock. We have the opportunity to purchase more water out of that system through the open market at a point in time when we deem it appropriate. At this point in time we really see it as our last resort. We have all these other steps in place initially.

In terms of sustainability for small towns, I suppose the biggest issue for sustainability in those towns and providing services is the cost of putting infrastructure in place. In our system Bendigo and the larger towns subsidise all the small towns. We basically try to put the same level of service into all of those towns with the exception of a handful of very small hamlets. I mentioned earlier that we have put sewerage schemes in place and the criteria for those was towns over 500 people, or where there was an environmental issue, and that has meant that in small towns like Tylden and Axedale, for example, sewerage schemes have been put in, but if those communities had to pay for it it just would not happen.

The unit cost for a place like Axedale is something like $20 000 per lot and the customers paying $800, so there is a significant shortfall there. I should also say we were a leader back in the mid-90s in terms of looking for innovative ways of changing putting sewerage schemes in place to these small towns, and we introduced some innovative practices back in those times that we have continued to apply with all subsequent schemes. So yes, as the slide says, we have nearly 100 per cent of our customers receiving Australian drinking water guideline quality water or better. We have only eight towns with non-treated water, and sewerage services in quite a lot of them. So the challenges for the small community as we see it is economies of scale. However, we see that the basic infrastructure, if it is in place, supports businesses and helps retain population and that has been particularly from a local government point of view. In a lot of these small towns it is their desire to have services like sewerage in place.

One of the other recommendations of the white paper is the introduction of block tariffs, which is seen as a way of reducing high consumption. Are you familiar with block tariffs? All right. I suppose a concern that we have, without having done a lot of modelling on this, is the impact on the large families or large residential water users. We have not done a lot of work on that yet.

Some barriers to getting more efficient water use by our communities are getting the time and interest of consumers to actually put a lot of water conservation measures in place. There are costs that people need to incur to put water efficient arrangements in place. With some of these costs, for new washing machines and the like, it probably might be a long-term thing because it will only happen when someone needs a new washing machine or dishwasher or whatever. An issue in our area is having a reasonably large rental population — in other words, people renting houses who really do not have that much incentive to invest in water-efficient infrastructure. On average it is about 19 per cent across our region, and obviously it varies from town to town.

I suppose the affluence of communities is also a barrier. A lot of our communities are definitely not in the affluent area. We have quite a number of sort of low socioeconomic towns and areas within our region, but there are still opportunities for innovation as we see it — making better use of water through things like implementing the white paper initiatives, and better and more efficient urban development and house design. We have in fact got a
reasonable sized block of land here in Bendigo that we are looking at developing with VicUrban to reflect good urban design principles and hopefully come up with a code of practice that other developers in the region can use. The City of Greater Bendigo and the Bendigo Advertiser have also recently launched an efficient house design competition. It is being launched tomorrow, where they will be seeking people to come up with designs for ecologically efficient houses. We are currently investigating how we will play a role in that. There are clearly opportunities for the efficient management of open spaces and community assets, parks, gardens and sports grounds. A key one I think is making sure that all of these planning initiatives and local government and CMAs and ourselves work together and are consistent in our approaches in terms of water efficiency. So that is the presentation. We thought we would do that first and then open up for any questions.

Mr HILTON — I have a couple of issues. You mentioned the step pricing which the white paper discusses. I was speaking with somebody from New Zealand at a conference we attended and they were saying that they were working towards a model where you have a quota of water and if you exceed that quota you pay extra, but you pay significantly extra. Now putting aside the practicalities of the number of children in a household or whatever, in your view, does that approach have any merit?

Mr MICHELL — My view is no. That approach is very similar to what was in place before the current pay-for-use pricing regime was introduced, where — it is slightly different — it ended up with people having an allocation of water and the allocations were based on a property value which then said that for that property value you could have X kilolitres of water. In my view that pay-for-use structure, whether it be as it is at the moment which is fairly flat pay-for-use structure or the stepped one, is the appropriate way to go because it focuses the water user on really every kilolitre of water that is consumed. The concern with a block arrangement is that there is no incentive to try and conserve water within that cap.

Mr HILTON — I think their model was not based on property value. I am not sure what property value has got to do with — —

Mr MICHELL — It might that for $200 you get so much water or — —

Mr HILTON — I was thinking more about the number of people in household, that each person would attract a quota, if you like, and that would be the family entitlement and then after that you would pay extra if you used it.

Mr MICHELL — We are doing some modelling at the moment to really understand what impact a block-type system might have. I have got a feeling that particularly low-income, large families are already fairly focused on conserving water because it has an impact on the dollars at the end of the day.

Mr HILTON — Now the initiatives of rebates for water tanks and shower heads and five-star washing machines, in your experience has that been an effective strategy, and would it have been more effective if the rebates had been higher?

Mr MICHELL — It is way too early to tell what the impact of those have been. I cannot remember the numbers of rebates that have been taken up in our region. Rainwater tanks are still an unknown quantity to me. If you look at the amount of money, even with the rebate, that is invested in putting a rainwater tank, it is some incredible amount of money per megalitre harvested. In other parts of the water industry I am getting feedback that it really depends on the climate that you are in whether a rainwater tank is a worthwhile investment or not. For me the jury is still out on that one. I think promotion of things like shower roses, the washing machines and the like is a good idea. I have a suspicion though that retailers are bumping up prices of those sorts of whitegoods to take account of that so at the end of the day I am not sure the customer is necessarily financially better off. But yes, I think it is a good idea to encourage those sorts of appliances.

Mr HILTON — But it is too early to say whether you see a reduction?

Mr MICHELL — Very much so

Ms PENDLETON — There were 1300 rebates last financial year processed so how long that is going to take to translate through to savings — —
Mr MICHELL — Dual-flush toilets were introduced probably 20-something years ago now, and really it is the standard. I think some of the things are quite long-term changes that we have to make.

Mr HILTON — Just one final question, part of this inquiry is to recommend low-cost, high-impact initiatives in terms of water conservation. If you could nominate one low-cost, high-impact initiative that you feel would significantly assist water conservation what would it be?

Mr MICHELL — I think it is those permanent water conservation measures.

Mr HILTON — Thank you.

The CHAIR — I want to follow up with one of Geoff’s questions. With the rebate for the whitegoods, would that be more effective if it were actually that amount of money off your water bill rather than off the purchase price of the item?

Ms PENDLETON — The rebate is applied back to the next account.

The CHAIR — That is right, it is too. Yes that is right, so it is off the water bill.

Mr MICHELL — Effectively, yes.

The CHAIR — Yes, that is right, but they have become more expensive than the others.

Mr MICHELL — I have that suspicion. Front-loading washing machines and the like have always been more expensive than top loaders. I am just suspicious about that one.

The CHAIR — Really we would want them to be cheaper.

Mr MICHELL — That would be the ideal.

The CHAIR — That would be the carrot, would it not, if they were cheaper?

Mr MICHELL — Or at least get them back to the same price.

Ms DUNCAN — I know that Bendigo is on stage 4 water restrictions. Can I ask — and maybe this is a question for Denise — when you introduced stage 4, did that come as a surprise to people and what was generally the response to that?

Ms PENDLETON — The response has generally been very favourable to restrictions. Our customers appreciate a very conservative, cautious approach to water resource management. In our feedback we have had some customers who would have liked them on sooner. There are other customers who are impacted more directly, perhaps financially, and concerned about restrictions and their impact. Generally a very cautious approach to restrictions is appreciated by all of our customers.

Ms DUNCAN — Has the current drought caused you to re-evaluate your trigger levels and things like that?

Ms PENDLETON — The trigger levels were developed out of experiences of the last major drought, which was over 20 years ago. We have a whole new bunch of people dealing with them and in a totally different environment. Yes, we need to review them on the basis of our experience of this current drought.

Mr DRUM — You mentioned in your presentation that one of the great local benefits we have here may be the water that is produced for Bendigo Mining, or the water that is caught in the structures beneath the city.

Mr MICHELL — Yes.
Mr DRUM — But that the arsenic levels and the salt levels create some concerns with the cost of treating that water.

Mr MICHELL — Yes.

Mr DRUM — I am concerned that it is not clear as to whose responsibility it is to get it up to an acceptable level. Is it solely Bendigo Mining’s responsibility to get that water up to an acceptable level, or is it something that would be shared with the council, Coliban, or government? Whose responsibility is it to get that water because it is going to be such a valuable commodity?

Mr MICHELL — And all parties agree with that. We have not sorted out the finer detail yet, Damian, but I suppose the way I see it in just a broad sense is that hopefully we will get some injection from the water trust. In terms of works, Bendigo Mining would put the pump in, the infrastructure in place, and we are probably looking at a private sector partnership for the treatment plant itself. But to treat the water to a standard equivalent to that which we get from our Coliban storages Coliban Water would probably pick up the infrastructure costs of then piping the water back to an appropriate point, say, somewhere along the Coliban main channel upstream of the Sandhurst water treatment plant. It is going to be shared, it is just a matter of who is going to pay for what part of it.

Mr DRUM — I asked Coliban the other day about the possibility of capturing stormwater, and the biggest impediment to that is where are we going to store it. Do you foresee any time in the future, maybe in 30 years, when Bendigo Mining has been through, finished and simply left an enormous catacomb of tunnels that we could possibly redirect our stormwater down into the depths of the Bendigo mine only to be taken up again to use at a later date? Could the catacomb of mines end up being a storage facility?

Mr MICHELL — That is, in effect, what will happen, Damian, because there will be a recharge into the mine. It will be a continuous process of pumping water out of the mine. When Bendigo Mining does cease — hopefully it will be a long way out — the likelihood is that the mine will fill up again but the infrastructure will be there for us to continue to use it. We are not looking at a short-term thing here, we are looking at long term.

Mr DRUM — And they will nearly be full on their own account?

Mr MICHELL — Up to a certain level, yes.

The CHAIR — Can I ask a question about the installation of permanent grey water reuse systems and the by-laws in some municipalities that prevent the installation? You have a lot of public support for them through the government rebate system. How might we be able to get around some of those anomalies at the same time obviously protecting the health of the end users?

Mr MICHELL — Yes, I think some of the designs that have come out in recent times of redirecting grey water used for flushing toilets and that type of thing have got a lot of merit, because the concern about grey water is that if it is put into a tank and sits for too long it becomes black water so it is a septic system. Whatever is put in place needs to be a system where the water is moving through it on a fairly continuous basis. Quite innovative work has been done to get that in place, and that is why the Bendigo house competition and some work that VicUrban has done on house designs have got those facilities built in.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.
CORRECTED VERSION

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Bendigo – 27 June 2004

Members
Mrs A. Coote  Ms J. M. Lindell
Mr D. K. Drum  Ms W. A. Lovell
Ms J. T. Duncan  Mr G. Seitz
Mr J. G. Hilton

Chair: Ms J. M. Lindell
Deputy Chair: Mrs A. Coote

Staff
Executive Officer: Dr C. Williams
Research Officer: Mr D. Fairbridge

Witness
Mr H Rasmussen, director, Energy Smart Design
The CHAIR — I welcome officially Mr Henning Rasmussen from Energy Smart Design. I need to 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, any statements made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being recorded and you will receive a proof version of the transcript in the next couple of weeks.

Mr RASMUSSEN — I will try to keep it nice and short. I could not help but reflect on what Brian Gould from the City of Greater Bendigo said. He was saying that they have had some workshops. Without actually being there I could probably tell you the names of those people who actually rocked up. As he said, he was speaking to the converted.

What is the problem? I think the problem at the moment is that we have a culture. People simply do not think about energy efficiency. The five-star rating is something that is a long way away in people’s minds until it sort of hits them when they have to build a house. It is certainly not an integrated part of the way the industry currently designs and builds houses. A number of them are slowly getting around to it, particularly the larger companies. What is needed is cultural change. You need to get people thinking that it is of benefit to them and that it is of benefit to the environment. If you can achieve that then you have come a long way.

I will give you some history with which you are probably familiar. Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria (SEAV) has been working on the five-star program since, from memory, 1995. Do not hold me to it, but I think it is around about that year. We are up here at 2004, and it has finally been regulated — from 1 July. I believe the Building Commission may have come in somewhere about the 1999, 2000 mark, and it has sort of worked its way up to here. It is very good it is coming into place.

I think it takes two things. IN regard to the regulatory information bulletin, when they started all these things here they asked for people’s response. My response to it, amongst others, was that it takes two things to do it: the first is regulation and the second is education. Information sessions in themselves are not going to do it. We have got to there, and I believe that is a big push in the right direction. However, I was talking to one of the developers for the software, the First Rate software that is going to be used. He has been working for SEAV for, I think, about 15 years. We have got up to this point here. The Building Commission and the SEAV have been working quite intensively on it at this time frame, now they have simply just passed the ball on and people are still not aware of what it takes to do it.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done to follow through, and I believe that there are a number of people who are in the middle of starting up an association for energy raters, together with a few other energy raters and this particular person who is a former employee of SEAV. We feel that we need to push through. For this to have an impact I believe we can go two ways. We can go to 2030 here, even if we do not do anything else but that. It will take a decade or more, probably three decades-a generation — before the building industry and the people in it start to realise how easy it is if you leave it with regulation only.

If you take education into it as well and you strategically go out and tell people, ‘This is how you do it the smart way’, that time frame can be knocked down to three years. You might think, ‘How are you going to do that?’. Once upon a time someone was given Saul’s armour but he could not fight — David and Goliath. I think it is a matter of you find a sling and find smooth stones and you go and do it. Rather than talking about it — having one meeting about it, another meeting about it, another meeting about it — you go out there and do it. You tell people how to go about it, and how to go about it in a cost-effective way, and they will get there.

That leads me to this handout, and I believe there is a copy for the record as well. I was sort of thinking that you could use this for a bit of a reference. It is actually coming out of the manual which is here. There is a 4-hour workshop that takes people through the elements of what you can see on this handout. It is in the body. For the record it is called ‘Session plan for energy-efficient housing workshop’. In that session plan you give a bit of an intro — I put that in the body — and you go through and you tell them that is a performance-based approach — that is, to take advantage of the sun; building materials; air leakage and draught proofing; windows and all the issues relating to windows; and insulation. We also touch a little bit on appliances and also landscaping in terms of the microclimate around the house, which does not affect the rating. The workshop then has a bit of a coffee break, which sometimes helps, then you have a bit of a buzz group for some interaction with people. If you could just turn over to the next page, page 2, you will see that it is a house plan. This house was open as a display home here in Bendigo. It is facing north, it currently has a six-star rating, and it has the features that are listed there on the
right-hand side: orientation north; concrete slab on ground; ceiling insulation is R3.5, R1.5 and foil; all sealed windows as per plan; no downlights; and entry not open to living areas.

If you turn over to the next page there is another plan. That plan that I just mentioned has a six-star rating. This is the same house plan with some of the features changed. It is now facing west. It has minimum insulation, it is not sealed. I might add that it is not on a concrete slab either. It is built on stumps and joists and bearers with timber flooring, which decreases the amount of thermal mass available in the house. Windows are as per plan. They are slightly increased compared to the other one. There are 30 downlights throughout the house and the entry opens into the living area. It is the same house but it rates one star. The other one rates six — same plan. The workshop then goes through a cost analysis of what it actually takes so that it ends up being cheaper to do the five-star scenario than what it takes to do the one-star scenario. Those tables are taken from the studies that are done by the Building Commission. I have simply related the cost of this situation to those. Bear in mind that these need to be updated.

If you turn over again to this buzz-group sheet entitled ‘Optimising the case study’. I am saying to people, ‘Let’s get this one-star house — you have heard in the body of the workshop how to go about things — and hear about how we are going to get that house back to five stars for little or no cost, or maybe even a saving’. I take people through that and once they understand it they think, ‘This is not rocket science’. I am thinking to myself, ‘Very good. Point taken’. There is nothing to it. It is not rocket science. It is a matter of people knowing it, keeping it in the back of their minds and having it there as a resource just the same as they would with a roof line or any other structural part of the building.

That is the education program, but you might ask how we are going to change a state. We have approximately 140 000 people involved in the building industry today. Going by ABS statistics we have 22 000 registered building practitioners and 700 accredited energy raters. We do not need to have any more accredited energy raters in my opinion. I might put that down for the record as well; however, I can explain that later. There are 22 000 registered building practitioners. Just say there are 100 000 people who need to know how to go about things. How do you do it? I believe you go out where they are, you sit down with them and you go through it the same as I have done here. You explain that this is how you do it: insulation, window sizes et cetera, the whole works. Before they come to the session their house should be assessed with an energy rating. They bring that in. You assess it by doing an energy rating. They sit through the workshop and learn how to go about it. They send in another plan, and hopefully from the first house plan that has been energy rated to the second one you will see that there has been a vast improvement in their understanding of how to go about things. This can be self-supporting. I am not asking for funds. We will need approximate seed funding of $10 000 or less to get it started, and it is quite possible we can get that from somewhere else.

What we have to do is go out to where people are and tell them how to do it. I am a great believer in going to the local council. They are the ones issuing the building permits. There will be a number of private building surveyors in towns such as Bendigo, Shepparton et cetera — anywhere you go — and you invite them as well. You target them. Step 1, you contact the local council and also include the private building surveyors. You tell them what the seminar is about and the benefits of it. You tell them the possible venue and the building activity and ask for their input or put out a covering letter from the local area government in with the seminar invitation so that you are targeting the actual builders — that part of the building industry. I have already talked to Jan Boynton, who I believe is still the economic development manager at the City of Greater Bendigo, about fostering this as a pilot program in Bendigo. Shepparton has also shown some interest in taking on a pilot program. Get it happening, get it out there and do it.

Arrange the venue, organise a mail-out, log the entries and evaluate. How you would evaluate that, as I said, is you would get people to send their first energy rating in. You put them into the workshop and hopefully by then they would have an understanding. They also have a 1300 number they can ring if they are in doubt or they need more information. There are a number of resources available from SEAV. By the way, all of this material is straight out of material which is readily available from the SEAV. They have been sitting on it for a number of years and doing a great job on a housing manual and a number of other things. All we have to do is take that material out to Peter, Paul and Mary out in the field and tell them, ‘This is how you go about it’. It is about a smart way of doing it, and it is about telling people about doing it in a smart way so that it is cost effective and it works for them and their clients.
You can see when you turn over to one of the last pages here — I have simply printed it off the Internet — it says ‘dwelling units approved 2002 calendar year’. You can see those in the various regions all over the state, and you may even be familiar with some of those statistics at this point in time. Here is a list, the Victorian Local Government Directory, and that is how you do it. You go out there, you contact them, you familiarise the local government in various places with what it is you are doing. Possibly first you train their staff — sometimes they will find it an advantage if you train their staff first — then you go out and get the builders. This shows how the figures are split up in Melbourne. There is a little bit of logistics to that, and I have set up a strategy to do it: a staged plan, a cash flow, and how to go about it. Ideally I would like to see that it would cost more than $100 per person to do, but I am just using $100.

For the sake of the exercise the builder sends in and says, ‘Yes, I am signing up for this one here’. He sends in his energy rating, he does the workshop, he does the other energy rating, and then we actually can see that the bar has been lifted and he is starting to understand what the whole thing is about, that the penny has dropped that it is not rocket science and it is starting to sink in. This applies not just to the builder but to his sales staff, engineers who are working with subdivisions in particular, and a number of other professionals such as building surveyors and the like. The building companies can take this and get the building permit. They can get their money refunded. Say it is $900 for a building permit, instead of paying $900 they show the receipt to prove that they have sat the workshop and it has raised their understanding and they get it for $800. The local council or the building surveying place locks it down and puts it into a state government fund that would then reimburse that revenue, which it is for the local government. That could even be a percentage, but ideally I see that the state government has an opportunity to put its money where its mouth is in a way that works. It is performance based, and people are actually learning what it comes to so they do not give any more money out than they can actually see the outcome for, dollar for dollar if you like.

Over to the last page, I have already got this pilot program happening. I had the general manager for the Dennis group at the time up there with his two senior sales staff. I had there Adrian Verrinder, who is a lecturer in environmental science at La Trobe University. I had Roy Costello, a local from Villawood Properties, which some of you might be familiar with. I had a building surveyor from Heathcote, Tom Rowe. He has been a building surveyor for years and knows his stuff. I had a structural engineer there. I had a couple of medium-sized builders, one smaller builder and just a couple of people who wanted to be there as well. Some of the university students whom Adrian has taken out through his environmental science — some of his engineering students — have been out to sit through the workshop. Here is his note, and I will leave you to read that. I believe you can change people’s thinking by showing them how to go about it in a smart way, in a non-condescending way. Just go out and say, ‘This is how you do it’. Once they click on to it they are on their way. Thank you for your time.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Mr RASMUSSEN — Could I just add, I have been through the usual channels with this, being the SEAV and my local member, Jacinta Allan. Jacinta has been very good. She opened up the display home for us. I am very thankful for that. However, the bureaucracy does not seem to accept individuals into its ranks trying to do something, and I have had a bit of difficulty trying to get people to listen. Thank you for this opportunity here today.

Ms DUNCAN — On this handout you have given us — the plan for the energy efficient workshop — you have here the north elevation and say that this would have a five-star energy rating. On the next page you have a different orientation and say that if this house was rated with the following feature it would only rate one star, but then you say that it does, however, rate five stars?

Mr RASMUSSEN — The house is rating six stars, which is the first one. For the sake of the exercise simply take this same floor plan and do some common features to it — I actually had people sitting in the house — such as take the house from here, shift it over there, put a timber floor in instead of concrete slab and downsize the level of insulation. That is a fictitious model.

Ms DUNCAN — What I am trying to say, though, is your point in the exercise to say you can use virtually the same building materials and get yourselves a five-star energy rating, but whether you put it this way or whether you put it that way is a huge difference? In other words, are you saying that a five-star energy rating on all of the various building materials in and of itself, while it may save some energy, is not going to nearly do the job as if you incorporated all these other parts of the design which are not regulated?
Mr RASMUSSEN — They are not regulated in the sense of you saying you choose to go with a timber floor?

Ms DUNCAN — Yes. It is not compulsory to have a slab, it is not compulsory to have a north orientation, and all these other things are not compulsory, but you could still have them with an energy rating — five stars — but with all those other things you get a lot more than five and would more than meet the regulation.

Mr RASMUSSEN — The point I am making is if you want to think about it cost effectively, the figures are actually more like a $5000 saving in this case, in capital cost.

Ms DUNCAN — The point you are really making to us is if we, the government, do nothing more with these regulations it is going to take a long time before all of these other principles that are above the five-star energy rating — —

Mr RASMUSSEN — Before people start to realise that these principles come into it, yes.

Ms DUNCAN — And your point is that we have 22 000 registered builders out there that we need to get to.

Mr RASMUSSEN — Who need to know.

Ms DUNCAN — What do you see as the role with the likes of HIA educating those 22 000 builders — or the Building Commission or some other existing authority?

Mr RASMUSSEN — I am speaking on what is my opinion. I guess I am free to do that?

Ms DUNCAN — You are — totally.

Mr RASMUSSEN — Because I cannot speak for other parties as well. The way I see it the Building Commission and the SEAV have regulated; that is their role and they have done it very well. They have had a lot of negotiations — a bit like what you are doing here — and listened to just about everybody they could think of. Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria is the same. To ask those two to follow through would probably cost a lot of money. They could do it — it could be done through government, no doubt about that — but they do not see it as their role. They are looking at it and saying, ‘Okay, now we have regulated this let us get on with the next bit’, which is fair enough. I think that is forward thinking.

As energy raters, and ours is an emerging industry and we are involved in setting up an association for energy raters, it will be our role to follow through with some of these things. However, to have the support from government, like I said with funding, we have to sit down and give the exact figures of what that would cost — I have those, and I believe it would be a minimal input — it would be a matter of having invested so much money into it up until now to make it work and to make a real impact that cultural change would have to happen, and it would have to be followed through on a performance-based approach. That is all.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Mr RASMUSSEN — Thank you for the opportunity.

Witness withdrew.
CORRECTED VERSION

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable communities

Bendigo – 27 July 2004

Members

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Mr D. K. Drum
Ms J. T. Duncan
Mr J. G. Hilton

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Witness

Dr M. Rogers, research fellow, Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities, La Trobe University, Bendigo
The CHAIR — All evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of this hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being recorded, and you will receive a proof version of the transcript in the next couple of weeks.

Overheads shown.

Dr ROGERS — I have been invited to come and talk to you about the work I have been doing under a project titled Small Towns Big Picture, and I have some summary information and some papers written out of that here. I only have one copy, so I will leave that with you.

I will just briefly give you a bit of an introduction to the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities. It was established in 1999. The specific task was of engaging directly with the community in the region and trying to build research around regional and relevant issues. I was one of the first employees at the centre, and one of the emerging issues for us seemed to be that small, rural communities, for example, in terms of indicators of economic and sociodisadvantage were not able to demonstrate viability of their own progress. So we were looking at indicators that were useful at the community level, and we wanted to engage directly with the community to help them to evaluate themselves in their own performance.

My background is in environmental economics so I guess I came to this with an appreciation of multidisciplinary issues of sustainability and measurement of sustainability. At about the same time that I was appointed one of the founding members of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance, which you are apparently going to hear more about today so I will not say too much about that. The work I did with small towns certainly dovetails with the work that the greenhouse alliance is trying to achieve. Its main aims are of course to develop a regional response to greenhouse, and so some of the key foci of that are carbon settings, retrofitting street lighting across regions, looking at biodiesel technologies and working with schools, so we have kind of narrowed the bundle to focusing our attention on those areas. At this point in time, and I will leave it to the next one to give it any more detail, we have financial members and they have been so now for four years — all of those shires, various government and non-government agencies and the Bendigo Bank are financial members. They are contributing up to about $3000 per year to be part of this alliance, which is really unique in its construction.

The two things that I am going to talk about here in brief are, firstly, the way in which the energy footprint works that I have been doing, which has sat both within greenhouse alliance work across the region and then more specifically at the community level in five small rural communities. Those towns that we worked with were Donnelly, Talbot, Carisbrook, Wedderburn and Maldon specifically in the small towns project. I guess for starters I will deal with the data that we used for the energy footprint. Are people here all familiar with the energy footprint? I have assumed you would be. The ecological footprint, of course, is the amount of land we need to provide for all our consumptive needs, and it is a very complex calculation. At this point we are only interested in doing the energy footprint, which is far simpler, and I will talk a bit about that in a minute. But because nearly all of our shire councils, at the time of starting this process, had joined the Cities for Climate Protection program they pooled their $4000 and employed someone, and they actually all got started on the milestones of doing their own internal audits; so we had access via this to CCP data.

I might just add it has been really difficult to access CCP data, with not being able to pool the data because CCP will not allow any of the shires to actually hand it over to any central place. So where we have been trying to do this at a region that is a real block to our ability to bring data into some central place for us. I do not understand what that is about, but it is a difficulty. We employed a couple of students from La Trobe, engineering students, who worked with the different councils, which at least meant that some common understandings about the order process were cumulative and helped the process get under way. Nearly all 10 of the shire councils in our region are into the milestone process. They are not all up to no. 5, but they have certainly gone through the first couple of milestones.

We used the CCP data, and by the time we got to the footprint for the region at least council had gone through their first round of audits so we had some primary data. We had to go through all of their fleet material, you know, all their records on vehicle usage and electrical energy used for power for street lighting, everything. So there was some primary data for each of the shires, and we were able to use that, although CCP data then for the rest of the community were rejigged national statistics, as you are probably familiar with.
For the small towns project we employed local people to gather household and business data, and that was interesting in terms of a community engagement activity and an information way of communicating with the community about what it was. What was successful about that was that people were photocopying surveys, and I got a 150 per cent response rate. That is pretty rare. Unfortunately the surveyors probably needed more time to learn how to do it and the data itself was probably not terribly useful, but it was an exercise in engagement.

We ended up using CCP data in terms of feeding back to the community the measurement of their carbon emissions. The energy footprint is a simple calculation and once you have got some estimate of your CO2 emissions per year you can divide that by your growth rates. Our region’s growth rate showed very low. We have a 2 to 5 tonne sequestration rate per hectare in this region, whereas if you go to Gippsland you will have a 30–tonne sequestration rate. So that means to sequester our carbon we have to plant more trees to cover a greater area. We would go simply with the carbon sink. If you divide that by your population in any small given area, you get your per capita footprint.

How much land do you need to absorb your individual emissions roughly? For the ecological footprint, the bigger concept, Griffith University has estimated that Australia’s per capita footprints are about 10 hectares per person, and on that global scale they say that at the current population if everybody had a 10–hectare footprint, we would need six more planets to provide for that consumption. So that is the sustainability measure and how it is used. As you will see, the energy footprints chew into a fair bit of that; and I suspect it is even bigger than that in reality.

With some of the regional assessments — and again this is old data, they have been busily acting, with things going on and there are probably better, more accurate figures now than what have you; this was done back in 2001 — we found that the Bendigo region — City of Greater Bendigo — produces about 1.2 million tonnes of carbon per year, and when we convert that into land area and go by 2 tonnes per hectare or 5 tonnes per hectare, we would certainly get different measures, so it depends on which one you want to look at. There are the footprints of the region. You can see that the City of Greater Bendigo would have to cover 85 per cent of its land area in trees if we just relied on carbon sink. This is very simplified because we are not talking about where the energy comes from or the different types of energy at this point. We have had discussions now around the fact that Melbourne, the City of Greater Melbourne has talked about their audacious zero emissions, and I know that the mayor of Melbourne a little while back — not sure if it is the same one — talked about how valuable the regions were and how interconnected we were, and to help Melbourne get its zero emissions, they would plant trees in their region. The City of Greater Bendigo has not got any room and the growth rate of trees in Buloke is a whole lot less than further down this line. Again it just opens up some discussion if you are going to follow the carbon sink path and the reality of that.

There also has to be a mix of approaches to this which I am sure we all appreciate. That is the concept, and it is useful in terms of communicating to people, to the community if not necessarily to the science community which already knows the stuff in greater detail. But it is useful for some people to understand what this concept of sustainability means. In our present environment of severe water shortages climate change is starting to become a bit more of a household word.

Back to Small Towns Big Picture, the work I did for the whole region was done with the CVGA focus. With the small towns project we developed a dashboard of indicators and the premise we worked on was that most of these small towns have zero to negative economic growth and very little opportunity for employment outcomes, if that is all you do. If all you focus on is economic measures you will find they are not performing very well and probably have little ability to change that in many ways. The premise was that if we actually focused on people — built capacity, engaged the community,stimulated the creative energies of the community, focused on some sustainable issue, and of course energy efficiency and the greenhouse alliance’s work dovetailed, I would say — and we focused on the energy footprint then the potential might be that we would stimulate some new economic outcomes. Of course the jury is out. Five towns have gone through this process, and I think it is a long-term view but that is the premise I have been working from, that we need to stimulate and engage people, focus on a sustainability issue and then see if we cannot stimulate some new kind of economic energy.

The dashboard idea is not mine. The committee may have heard of Redefining Progress in America; it has been talking about the dashboard instead of the three-legged stool because the dashboard means that all the instruments are working together — put your foot on the petrol pump and you get movement in other areas. That is the concept.

This slide shows what we got out of the five towns. It is an example of how the data panned out. We did a community cohesion index, and there is a method of looking at focus groups and at a whole range of issues there.
This community rated itself on average — across young people, old people, business people and others — at about 3.4 out of the 6, so that gives them some ideas and areas they need to improve. There was an energy footprint of nearly 4 hectares per person and an economic activity indicator. The aim would be to increase your community cohesion, reduce your energy footprint and see where that leads in terms of economic activity.

There are some underlying assumptions in that. Small rural communities need new ways to think about their own development, and sustainability is where that trajectory really needs to head. They need locally meaningful indicators of progress; they need ways to assess and be able to determine how to improve and how to change the circumstances. As I have said, if we build community cohesion and focus on sustainability we might get some economic change. That was one of the ways that was represented. Small Towns Big Picture was part of an arts program and we commissioned eight artists to work with us, to work with the community, and from that we have a ceramicist, a textilist, a print maker and a photographer working with the community on creative expressions of energy footprints. You can imagine we had footprints coming out of our ears. At the end we had five big major events where all the artwork was shown and a theatrical performance given around community cohesion, so a lot of creativity came together. The data and the art came together in five major events, which was what small towns became.

Just a brief intro to the engagement process — we have had kids, adults and all sorts of people engaging with us. As I said, we employed local people to do the survey work which was very successful. To see a gentleman like the one there in the middle of the slide painting a foot is interesting. It is hard to get men into painting anything other than walls, I suppose, so people often comment on the significance of our ability to get people involved from across the board.

Using the footprint as a planning tool is a means of calculating the efficacy of a range of energy initiatives. So again, from the greenhouse alliance, we can use this now as a benchmark. So if we take a bundle of initiatives we can say how that bundle of initiatives will impact on our footprint versus other bundles of initiatives. That is how we are looking at using it, and then at the local level — it is also yet to be seen, I guess — as a way of engaging householders et cetera to play a role in this whole transition. It is easily replicated across all shires. I do not know how many across Australia now are participating in the Cities for Climate Protection, but they will have this data. It is a simple calculation now. It is not complicated, so really every shire should have its energy footprint there. I think you would probably agree that the footprint gives a visual image, and I know lots of people are using imagery — lots of councils are coming up with happy faces, sad faces, rain clouds, all sorts of things to communicate progress performance. The footprint is one that lends itself to it.

The Sustainable Energy Authority funded some of this work, and of course it was interested in how the footprint as a visual worked, because its telling people about the equivalent of 600 swimming pools did not seem to be capturing people’s imagination, so it was interested in how this method might work.

That is all from that point of view. I have some more information here, including a summary outline of the whole project; also a paper I wrote about the energy footprint which was published in Sustaining Regions. I have also included the paper on the social sustainable work, the community cohesion work as well and the use of the arts, so there are three papers there. There was a video made, and it is an excellent video that covers the projects, so I will give you a copy of that; and the play had songs, so I will give you the songs.

**The CHAIR** — A show bag without the bag.

**Mr DRUM** — Thank you for the presentation. Are some trees better than others at absorbing the carbon?

**Dr ROGERS** — The local CMA and the department of sustainability have invested quite a lot of money in actually looking at that issue. I know Greenwich forestry is looking into it too. Yes, I think species are important, and also where they are located. You are not going to plant species out in our dry areas that do not grow very well.

**Mr DRUM** — Do lawns absorb carbon, or bushes and shrubs? Is it something we could be encouraging more work on?

**Dr ROGERS** — There is work being done on lucerne crops because everything that grows absorbs carbon.

**Mr DRUM** — The departments are in fact looking at this as we speak?
Dr ROGERS — Yes, looking at carbon sinks in various ways. If you are across any of the carbon sinks, it is very complicated in terms of if a farmer plants trees for carbon sinks — Peter has been working in this area a bit more than me lately, and he might have his head around it — trying to work out how you broker it: if a farmer plants it how long it goes for and if he will get paid within the first five years for that but if a bushfire came through and wiped it out he would lose, so it is quite complicated. A lot is work going on in this area to try to understand it and get it on the ground and happening.

Ms DUNCAN — Maureen, your work shows that basically the footprint for Bendigo, or at least for this area generally, is unsustainable. How well do you think this is understood generally by the community, and what do you think are the impediments to change?

Dr ROGERS — I am not sure, I suppose, in terms of the greenhouse alliance’s progress in communicating with the regional community about, firstly, its work, and secondly, the significance of it. Peter is about to come and talk to you, and he is now our communications person. We only recently got funding through the state government to enable us to start to engage the community in these issues, so in terms of how the community responds I think that from the Small Towns project point of view another point I might make is that I think they are aware but not sure how to act. They need information on how to act. After Small Towns the community in Dunolly — a small community north of here, which is very uptight about new legislation against harvesting of timber out of the forests up there — held a meeting on the gas pipeline and this whole idea of energy efficiency and 70 people came along. The guy from town who did the presentation said that he thought the minute he started talking about this greenhouse stuff the whole thing would just fall apart, but he said what was really interesting was that they sat and listened and it was almost just agreed that they would put one foot in front of the other and see where we went.

That community agreed to work with the Bendigo Bank to pilot a community power company. Where that is up to I am not sure, but I was talking to the bank not so long ago, and it said they were still trying to work it out because it was quite complicated. But that community was prepared to say, ‘Okay, let’s just see where this goes’. So to answer your question, there is a great desire but how do you do this? Even trying to get information about how to buy a solar hot water system is not easy. You think it is, but it is not. You have to do research, and the technology is kind of changing and there is a lot of work to be done to assist the community to make better decisions for sure.

Mr HILTON — Following up on Joanne’s point, Maureen, what this committee is trying to come up with is ways to change people’s behaviour so that we are more sensitive in the way we use energy — we manage our waste better, we conserve more water. What you have described is very interesting, but I would suggest that if you said to the average person in Bendigo that their lifestyle is unsustainable they might say, ‘What you mean by that? I am still here. My family is still here’. How do you feel that this can be made part of a chain of a behavioural change process? Do you think that presentations like yours are sufficient in themselves or do more prescriptive measures need to be applied as well?

Dr ROGERS — I suppose there are multiple prongs to that answer. For example, the street lighting retrofit across the region. If the alliance could get some major initiatives happening that were high profile and progressive then even the small people would start to think they could buy into them, but not while you are just an individual buying and paying extra for green energy. Some people do it because they feel ethically obliged to, but it does not feel the same as if business and government were both coming together to make some major initiatives happen, for example, like the street lighting one, if we could get it off the ground. It has gone a long way towards getting there. If that could happen it would create a build-up of interest and energy in shifting people’s attitudes. The attitudes are there. People want and can see that they need to change but not as individuals. I was listening to this chap I mentioned before, and he said that it is very difficult to find people who will give you the type of structure you want if you want to go down an energy-efficiency path. It is a wrestle, I would suggest.

Mr HILTON — Yes, I suppose that is what is behind my question, because it is not prescriptive that you have to build a house facing north or that you have to build a house on a concrete slab. The builders and developers have no real motivation to do that and maybe from their perspective they would say it is not economic for them to change their building practices unless they have to. That is why I was asking about making it compulsory to adopt a certain change of behaviour.
Dr ROGERS — I personally think that the notion of consumer sovereignty as being a driver for environmental change, meaning that it is all by the consumer to make the decisions that drives change through business, is flawed in lots of ways.

Mr HILTON — Right.

Dr ROGERS — While that might work up to a certain level, the ability of the consumer to even do that is quite difficult. The Bendigo Bank’s community power company is a good example of recognising that, because instead of every individual signing up with the power company of their choice, and they might have two to choose from — though in fact we have only got one anyway — they are saying that they will get bids from businesses and households to purchase a certain amount of power, therefore they can tender and say, ‘We want this type of power and a certain proportion of it to be green, and we want investment in the region of this nature. We will put out a tender for that and then all power companies can bid for it’. That is turning the table around so that consumers can actually get more ability to control those decisions. Government has a very important role in making the building fraternity sharpen up and not rely on the consumer to constantly have to force that pace. That is my personal view about it.

Mr HILTON — Just one final question on the role of government as an example to the community. I do not want to make a political point here, but given the fact that we have a federal government that is actively promoting the use of dirty energy, if you like, in your view what effect does that have on the community’s perception of the issues that you are trying to bring into consciousness?

Dr ROGERS — I cannot probably claim to be that connected to the community to know how that is affecting lots of people, because I am not necessarily out there talking to lots of people about such things, so I cannot really answer you in any knowing way or with any personal opinion. But having the drought that we are currently in I am hearing out in the small towns, for example, people’s receptiveness because they are starting to think, ‘What is going on here? The rain isn’t coming. Serious drought is setting in. Maybe this has something to do with climate change’. So I think that is having quite an impact on people’s thinking. I do not know how people are thinking about the government’s not signing the Kyoto agreement. The people I talk to think it is dreadful, but that is my view.

The CHAIR — It is interesting that it is the Bendigo Bank that is putting together the community power.

Dr ROGERS — Their model is very interesting, because the community bank is based on that same principle of the community owning the enterprise. They have done it with a community telco on the same principle, so the energy one is simply an extension of the same principle, except it is far more complicated because of the way the energy market is structured.

The CHAIR — I am not sure of it. but I would like to think that the work with the community — connectedness and some of the sustainable, environmental things like reduction of energy and let us all recycle and let us all do those things — is going to lead to some sort of economic sustainability for these small towns. But the jury is still well and truly out on that, isn’t it? Does the economic sustainability of these towns require investment in those towns for jobs or can they continue with having jobs within reach, or will we lose more and more families from those towns as young people move away?

Dr ROGERS — There is a book actually out at the moment, if you are interested, called Sea Change — Movement from Metropolitan Australia to Arcadian Australia. It is not just about coastal movement but regional movement. I think the issue there is that in Victoria, and particularly in central Victoria, we have mass population moving in, so even the small towns we have been dealing with were in 2000-01 when I first started working with them probably in serious decline. They were talking about who is going to turn the lights out — real recognition that things were very bad. But in the last two years I think we have all seen incredible changes in the direction of population movement, for whatever reason. Houses in Wedderburn have been selling for $280 000 and all sorts of bizarre things — I mean, you probably could have bought a house in Wedderburn for $50 000 in 2000. Sort of in answering that question, I think there is just so much movement going on at the moment. I do not think the towns in Victoria, particularly around metropolitan Melbourne, are really in any danger of disappearing, quite frankly.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.
Dr ROGERS — Can I also just leave you a flyer? We are hosting the second National Conference on the Future of Australia’s Country Towns in 2005, so I will leave you a flyer on that as well.

The CHAIR — We can all come for a weekend.

Witness withdrew.
CORRECTED VERSION

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Sustainable Communities

Bendigo – 27 July 2004

Members

Mrs A. Coote
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Ms J. T. Duncan
Mr J. G. Hilton

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Witness

Mr P. Kennedy, Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance
The CHAIR — We have Peter Kennedy. All evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of this hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is being recorded, and you will receive a proof version of the transcript in the next week or so. If you would like, give us your presentation, and then we will have some questions, if that is okay.

Mr KENNEDY — Sure, thank you. Firstly, thanks for the opportunity, and I do bring an apology with me from my executive officer, Terry White, who has been away on annual leave for the last two weeks and arrived back from central Australia last night to a frantic email from me. Terry would be here under other conditions. He actually has a commitment down in Melbourne today that he could not make it for anyway, so I apologise if we are not as prepared as we could be, but we will make the most of the opportunity anyway.

The central Victorian alliance’s origins go back to about June 2000, when Terry White, who is based in Maryborough, brought together representatives of three central Victorian organisations to plan a community-based response to global warming. The participants included the North Central Catchment Management Authority; the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, as it was then known; and La Trobe University, Bendigo. I am sorry if I am going to step on someone’s toes from a previous presentation, because there is an overlap there, for an obvious reason.

Four years later the CVGA is an incorporated association with 17 members, including 10 local government and 7 business, community and government organisations. Those members are — and I will just read them out so that you know — Bendigo Bank, Buloke shire, the Shire of Campaspe, Central Goldfields shire, the City of Ballarat, the City of Greater Bendigo, the Department of Primary Industries, the Gannawarra shire, Hepburn shire, La Trobe University, Loddon shire, Loddon Campaspe-Mallee education region, Macedon Ranges shire, Mount Alexander shire, the North Central Catchment Management Authority, Origin Energy and St Luke’s Anglicare. Importantly that is probably 350 000 to 400 000 people throughout rural and regional Victoria. I am not sure of the exact land mass we would take up as a percentage of the state, but within those 10 local government areas there is a fair spread, and the Loddon Campaspe-Mallee education region education region actually extends as far north as Mildura — and that includes, I think, 167 state schools.

The CVGA’s publicly stated goal is to ensure that this region plays its part in helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within the time frame that will allow our ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, and also to ensure that food production is not threatened and enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner. Probably when we come back for questions at the end I can pick up on some of the things you were asking Dr Maureen Rogers before, because I think we can probably make some more comment on that.

I do not think I have any need to tell people in this room why we have a need for things like the CVGA. The alliance has set itself a target of reducing central Victoria’s greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent below the levels of 2000 by the year 2010, and reducing that still further to zero net emissions by 2020. It is important, probably, to note at this point firstly that Macedon Ranges shire, I believe, was the first rural or regional shire to achieve milestone 5 under the CCP system, and two weeks ago at Ararat, Bendigo and Mount Alexander shires were recognised for achieving milestone 5 as well. Bendigo’s emissions have dropped, I think, 19 per cent in the last decade — sorry, since 2000 — and I think it had planned 13 per cent, so it is ahead of target. That is just for the council’s business use, not the actual community, which is the rest of us.

Rather than disadvantaging the community with these fairly ambitious, we will admit, targets, the alliance believes that the pursuit of these targets will attract external resources and generate jobs. It will reduce operating costs, force the modernisation of our electricity supply, diversify the economy and protect the environment — and actually enhance our quality of life. I know that you would have already received a presentation about the energy footprint. We just note that the Bendigo Advertiser put an interesting spin on it — of about 15 tonnes per person within our municipality each year. I might at this point just point out that the question was asked about whether or not people are actually aware of what this might mean and what it does not mean. I do not think they are. The Bendigo Advertiser ran two front-page stories starting with the energy footprint data that Dr Rogers provided, and I produced into a media release on behalf of the CVGA last week. It ran on the front page in, I think, Friday’s Advertiser, and the front page of Monday’s Advertiser as well, which also talked about harnessing wind energy in this area. The important thing for us is that it included 10 very short and precise tips on what the average Joe Blow can do around the house. To get it on the front page shows that it accepts it is an important issue. The story will be
running in other papers in this area today because lots of the papers of course only come out on Tuesdays and Fridays, but we are not sure where they have run yet. We will wait for a couple of days.

There are just a couple of things that the CVGA is actually involved in on the ground in this area. The central Victorian greenhouse alliance is involved in a carbon sink project with our partners Sinclair Knight Merz, a consultancy firm, and a local environmental consultancy firm called Greenhouse Balanced. This project is working on establishing the merits for creating plantations within the central Victoria region to offset our emissions. Yet to be officially launched is a discussion paper which will be in the post tomorrow to potential stakeholders in the central Victoria region. Greenhouse Balanced will prepare an actual case study of what it may or may not be worth to people involved in the project. All of this is being done with the view to having an investor-ready prospectus for release commercially — 24 November is the stated date of the project. So I guess in a couple of weeks time we would have a lot more information we could talk about. Terry certainly could anyway.

The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance was announced as the recipient of a $50 000 grant two weeks ago from the Victorian government for a climate-friendly schools project. This money is also being matched — we would like to note for the record — by a benefactor in Castlemaine who has put $10 000 of his own money into the project. It is a pilot study that will involve four schools in the Castlemaine and Harcourt region. An energy audit will be done by qualified Origin Energy staff. Origin Energy is one of the members of the CVGA. A video will be made about what actually the study determines, what it finds, ways to save energy and ways to cut back on greenhouse gases. That video will be made available to the 167 state and primary schools at this stage in the region. We have also commenced talks with the Catholic schools. There is an overlap of dioceses there — the Sandhurst diocese that we are in at the moment goes as far east as Wangaratta and the Ballarat diocese takes in the north-west of the state — I am not sure exactly how far.

Mr DRUM — St Arnaud, Warracknabeal.

Mr KENNEDY — I am not sure about Mildura.

So the major findings will also be shared amongst the department, architects and planners, and importantly schools’ PNF or PNC committees, whatever they may be, because we think there is a major need and requirement for people and students to actually take some of this on board and some of the responsibility for it themselves. I think anybody with children would know that they are probably more responsive about trying to do something about the problem than any of us.

We also hope that plans for energy saving actions will be included in the schools curriculum, as a starting point in the schools at Castlemaine and Harcourt, and will hopefully be rolled out across the board. The private schools are being approached to at least consider funding an additional roll-out of the video. We will see what happens. Importantly payback periods involved with the energy audit will be identified and quantified so it can actually be explained to people that this is part of the problem — how the savings are being determined and what actually might mean to an average school. It means a lot to everybody, and there would not be a school or there should not be a school or business around or a household that is not concerned about the amount of money it spends let alone how much energy.

Local government members of the CVGA are continuing to work towards achieving the milestone set by that CCP program, and other alliance members are all actively engaged in reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions and in raising awareness within the community. There are five working groups within the CVGA who have different responsibilities in different areas. All of them are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to raising this awareness. The first group is the carbon sinks group, which is actually actively involved in a project of the local area. The data management group looks to use the CCP data and any other information it can to try to spread awareness, particularly amongst the councils. On the energy efficiency group, I would like to talk about street lighting in a couple of minutes. The renewable energy group might look at biomass; there are couple of possibilities there in this region. The climate-friendly schools group is probably the one that has got the most traction at the moment.

When I was first approached about presenting to this committee last week I was also told I could have the opportunity to talk about a kind of broad-brush approach about what else is happening in other areas or with other groups within this central Victorian region. As the CVGA we move within that circle of groups and are quite happy to do so. Last Friday week we co-facilitated a meeting at St Luke’s Anglicare that brought the Sustainability Street
people to Bendigo. I think people around this table would be aware of that group. They actually have a Bendigo connection in that Ian McBurney is from Mandurang and his mother is a teacher at my kid’s school.

Sustainability Street is a must for this area. It needs to get into country Victoria. I think in the city it is a bit of a comfort zone. Probably local government in the city has been more proactive in its endorsement of things like Sustainability Street. I think that in the country there is a concern that things like Landcare might be encroached upon or threatened by bringing something like Sustainability Street into the country. As a personal example, I have just built a brand-new house, and I was never asked once about anything — and I will come to that as well if you like. But I live in the street where there is not one tree or one blade of grass because it is stage 4 water restrictions and we have all got brand-new houses, et cetera. I could see Sustainability Street would love to set up. At the end of our street we have a bushland reserve set aside and the opportunities are just enormous. I know it exists and the other side of town, Strathfieldsaye and wherever as well.

The City of Greater Bendigo wants to grow to 144 000 people by the year 2030. About an extra 45 000 people will move in, a lot of them into new housing and a lot of them will be in medium density. All of them need to know more about sustainability and ESD principles.

I turn to some things that other people are doing in this area. Access Employment, an employment services provider mostly for disability people in this area, have actually won the three-year right to call themselves the regional partner for the Sustainable Energy Authority of Victoria. I think that partnership is being officially launched here in Bendigo on Friday, 13 August. I would like to place on the record too that I think if the opportunities existed for people like Paul Kirkpatrick or Graham McDonald from Access Employment to address this committee at another opportunity they should be invited to do so the because they have a lot to talk about that they are just in the very early stages of getting into place. They have actually got a track record in this area which is one to be envied. For the last couple of years they have been working on — they have actually done — the retrofitting that I know you have been told about before in the Long Gully housing area. They have skilled people up in an area that has got enormous potential as a growth industry anywhere, particularly in this area with so much more housing on the way, and the people in those houses have learnt a hell of a lot about the energy bills and how to save money as well.

Access is talking about developing a CERES-type complex here in Bendigo at a place called the Peppercorn Park. It is the former Chinese market gardens from the last century in the North Bendigo. It actually sits adjacent to the tram route on the way to the Joss House. You do not have to be Einstein to work out its potential. This is part of their pitch to SEAV, which was a competitive one over the last few months, and is part of what they want to do. But I know a lot of the work that they want to do and need to do is reliant to an extent upon government funding. I have had casual, informal discussions with them about this, and they are talking about showcasing things like recycling, composting, mulching, water-saving devices, all of that. They are also looking at pulling other partners from the wider environmental field to do it. It will well and truly walk the talk in terms of its development prospects, and I think it is one to be applauded.

Sustainability Street actually came and spoke to a CVGA board meeting back in, I think May, this year. The problem was it was the same week that most councils were probably finalising their budgets for the next financial year. None of the councils who were at the board meeting were game to ask the question as to what it would cost. I was I think the only person there who was not from a council, so I did. The cost itself is not so much of an impediment; it is just the timing of the presentation. I would hate to think we would have to wait 12 months until it could be explored again. I know from our discussions with Sustainability Street a couple weeks ago that they are a fairly hopeful about securing some funding from the Department of Victorian Communities, which might actually help. We think what they can create in this area is something that this committee and this government or any government should actually latch onto.

My research tells me that Landcare was actually founded by the Labor government when Joan Kirner was minister and Evan Walker, I think, was agriculture minister back I think perhaps in the early 1980s. It was actually in central Victoria that the first Landcare group was formed. We think the time and the place for such a movement with an urban link into urban regional communities — to make that distinction — can happen, and we think it can happen now. I think slowly but surely the environmental argument is weaning its way over to the mainstream. That is part of my job with the CVGA. For two and a half years the group has had a plan but has not known how to talk about it or do things. If I have any skill, as I have a background as a journalist, I would like to think that hopefully that is it.
In the next couple of weeks we hope to have another meeting with people like the City of Greater Bendigo, Access Employment, St Luke’s Anglicare, some of the project workers who have worked in public housing in that retrofitting, people from Mount Alexander shire and possibly Campaspe and Hepburn shires who are actually bringing Sustainability Street — or Vox Bandicoot, as the company is known — back to Bendigo to tell them, ‘Yes, we want to do this and we want to do it in these areas’. That meeting was due to be this Friday, but we have just had to put it back because of a few other things that have popped up, including this.

Discussions are currently under way throughout Bendigo and central Victoria involving a lot of local agencies who have any thread of sustainability or environmental commitment in what they do to hopefully bring their activities together, under the banner of sustainability month in September. The CVGA has met with an organisation called the Alternative Technology Association, or the ATA, which would also be known to this group, about its solar house day, which I think it has state wide on Sunday, 12 September. We have talked quite openly about bringing the solar shuttle up here to Bendigo for a week. The trade-off for them of course is that more people might come and look at their house. From our point of view, we would get more people involved in raising awareness about things that can and cannot be done.

Later on Vox Bandicoot will be in Bendigo, Kerang and Boort, which are all member shires of the CVGA. During September they are doing children’s theatre, and part of the challenge I think is trying to explain the message to kids. Tomorrow here in Bendigo — am rattling off some of the things that are happening that might be of interest to this committee — a concept called Bendigo house will be launched. I would hope that when those from the City of Greater Bendigo spoke to the committee this morning they would have talked a bit about that. It is talking about designing a house that is ideal for Bendigo’s environment. There are about four classes of the competition, including schools. As I said, it will be officially launched here in Bendigo. There is a competition phase, including a professional category, which I think is even attracting a bit of interest from architects in Melbourne.

In the last couple of days of September the CVGA and the North Central Catchment Management Authority will co-host a major conference on climate, catchments and communities. I am not sure what it is actually called — I think it is the other way around. That conference will be here in Bendigo, and it will draw upon nationally regarded speakers. The invitations have now gone out, but we need to secure some government funding before we can be confident that we can put the show on. All the relevant agencies in Bendigo, including people like those at Coliban Water, Powercor, Origin Energy and councils et cetera will be invited to that. It will also include a lot more of the community groups so we can permeate down to the grassroots levels. Hopefully out of that will come some sort of plan that we might be able to spread further and wider.

Local schools have been or are about to be encouraged to sign up to produce artwork for a competition we want to run as part of the month, because we need to have some visual imagery to put around the place. It is another great way of reaching into the schools just on a wide open, generic environmental theme. We hope to also bring this to shopping centres, to public spaces like libraries and community noticeboards and, importantly, to the CVGA web site, which is under commission and construction as we speak.

In doing all this we are just trying to put all the activity together, if for no reason other than to add emphasis; we are not looking to coopt or take anyone’s thunder away from them. There is a heading here called ‘Barriers’, which rules off a pretty long list of things, but I think they are possibly the most interesting things I have to talk about. We would like to see minimum performance standards introduced in Victoria through our public street lights — similar to the national system that is in place for whitegoods. The current mercury vapour lights — of which I think anywhere between 10 per cent to 15 per cent are on all the time — whilst cheap to run use a large amount of energy compared to the more efficient alternatives like high-pressure sodium or T5s. There are some small trials being commissioned in the City of Ballarat in a new estate there, and in Hepburn, that I am aware of. They have only just been commissioned, so it will be a while before the results come in on that. We also need to state that the time has come when people should no longer look out the window, see the light on and think, ‘Oh well, it is too expensive to get Powercor’ — or whoever it is — ‘to come out to change it’, because they now have to think of what the energy cost will be if they do not change it.

The introduction of a performance standard by the Victorian government or a similar government, whether it is done nationally or whatever, similar to the national code for whitegoods would entice competition and would help cater for a gradual phase-out of the high-energy-use lights we currently have. What is happening at the moment is that the high pressure sodium or T5 lighting is only marginally, if at all, economically better off, and that is the argument the power companies will always accept. CVGA did make a presentation to the community cabinet at
Wedderburn last month — I think it was, on this issue as well. But we think leadership from the state government could help achieve this, and I do not think anybody would discourage it from doing so.

We would also welcome any move to introduce a carbon trading market here in Victoria now that carbon sequestration is alive and well. ‘Sequestration’ is a word I do not like; as a journalist I think we should say ‘storing’ or talk about carbon sinks. I think that is part of the problem. I understand Europe is scheduled to begin trading in carbon in the next year, 2005. I know the federal government has baulked at the idea, but I believe discussions are under way, certainly in New South Wales and a couple of other states, so at least the dialogue is under way about what can or cannot be done. The goodwill of the minority of people who pay more for green energy will never prevail unless something is done, and it is important to note that. People should not pay more for green energy. Terry White, my colleague from the CVGA, would call the brown coal and petrochemical energy that we currently use toxic energy. From my discussions with Terry White last night, New South Wales has also introduced air pollution fees, which I believe are auspiced by that state government’s department of energy and conservation. The fee is nothing more than an attempt to reflect the true cost of pollution. Again, we do not see that as a bad thing.

We think biodiesel has enormous opportunity in this region. Certainly the CVGA member, the City of Ballarat, has enormous interest in this. The CVGA has looked at what Newcastle does. Newcastle City Council is acknowledged as a bit of a leader in this area; I think it runs 20 per cent of its vehicle fleet on it. I am not sure what the actual quantified savings are, but I guess it would not do it unless there were some.

We would also welcome any opportunity to establish energy creation sources within this region. I am sure that this morning Brian Gould would have talked about transmission costs and losses. Manufacturers in this region have huge issues about price and the loss of energy before the power gets here along the grid. There are projects such as Olive Corp, which is based at Boort and is I think owned by the publicly listed company Timbercorp. It is about to have a huge opportunity with the biomass waste from its olive plantation. I think it is the biggest olive grove in the Southern Hemisphere, if not the world. There are rumours and talks around about it getting together with Hi-Cube — which is at least partly owned by Elders, which has a hay processing plant and an export facility at Boort — and about both of them making briquettes with their waste. It has enormous potential in this region, and it has not really been seriously explored. When you think about it, in a lot of ways it is not in the interest of either of those companies to want to do it, but there certainly would be interest if we could somehow get involved.

We believe there are also enormous opportunities for solar and wind power in this region. While we probably do not rate as highly on the wind atlas as municipalities to the south, our location to the grid in some ways can help offset that. Certainly in the Mount Camel Ranges to our east towards Heathcote is one area for wind that has enormous potential. We also took great interest in and have had a few discussions about the federal government’s white paper on energy and the $75 million it wants to put towards the solar cities proposal. That paper cites possibly Sydney and Adelaide as locations for pilot solar cities programs, but we think there are cities well placed in this area that should also be offered that opportunity, because the regional application is different and we would have more to gain by doing something like that here locally rather than waiting for the results to come out of the cities. It could not happen without state government support though, because we think we are too small a player to just put one of our cities up. Some sort of partnership approach might help secure something like that in this region.

I would also like to place on the record that our CVGA member agencies Origin Energy, Bendigo Bank, and certainly at least three of our councils, are very keen to pursue this option and would welcome any opportunity for further dialogue about it.

That is basically all I had prepared, because I did not have a lot of time to put this together. But I have been writing down some comments in response to some of the questions that were asked previously, so I might just expand upon those. These are from a personal point of view as a citizen and as someone who has just built a brand-new house here in Bendigo. It was with a nationally regarded builder who is very active and high profile. Not once were we offered the opportunity to or any explanation, information, brochure on or reason why we should even consider anything like a rainwater tank or solar hot water system or photovoltaics.

This was going back over the last 12 to 18 months. I would now put that approach down, having made some investigations of my own, to the fact that there is nothing in it for the building companies if they do it. For example, we explored the possibility of converting our cement tile roof to Colorbond, and it was going to cost us $3000 more because there was no deal done between the manufacturer and the builder. A lot of the heart of the incentives — and the reason they have not worked in a place like Bendigo — is that there is just not enough incentive for the
builder commercially for him to want to do it. I think that is a shame. I think that perhaps the media has a huge role to play in hopefully converting some people’s thinking around that. The economic benefit to the builder might need to be more widely legislated. I know that in July next near, when an even higher standard of energy ratings comes into play, some of these things will have to happen. I think you will find that people will strive to achieve the bare minimum at the moment because that is all that companies will want to do, in the main.

If I had a magic wand for things that we could do in this region, I would have liked to have seen a reconsideration about the lack of increase in the mandatory renewable energy target that did not happen in the May white paper. We would love to have wind and solar in this area, and we would like to see more focus on incentives. It is not necessarily about increasing the value, it is perhaps just telling people more about them. We think the legislation will impact upon some of that, but as I said, I think it will be to the bare minimum rather than the maximum.

Part of my role with the CVGA has been to try and take, essentially, what happens around a boardroom table a couple of times a month in an executive or a board meeting and put it into the community. It has really only started to have an impact in the last three weeks. Last Saturday’s Bendigo Advertiser had something like seven stories about the environment. That is probably seven more than were in it the month before. I was chief-of-staff at the Advertiser for about three or four years, and I know that the issue hardly ever raised its head. The people who work in this industry, in the main, are not media savvy. That might also be part of the problem. A lot of the language that surrounds the argument or the case for environmental sustainability complicates itself purely by the use of the language. There are too many big words attached to it. As I said, we try and avoid the word ‘sequestration’. Legally I think we will be required to use it in our prospectus, but we call it the carbon sinks project because we think people will more readily understand and accept what it may or may not mean. ‘Sequestration’ is just too big a word. That is basically it, and I would welcome any questions, or whatever, from now on.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Peter.

Mr DRUM — Outstanding. Peter, the 19 per cent reduction in emissions in the City of Greater Bendigo that has been able to be reached, has that been caused by actually reducing emissions or is it a net result which has been reduced because we have been able to grow more trees?

Mr KENNEDY — I think it has very little to do with the number of trees that have been planted at Heathcote or Huntly, it is more to do with behaviour. Every single one of us could probably save one-third of the energy use on our energy bill purely by adapting our behaviour and the way we use our energy — tomorrow.

Mr DRUM — You were going a million miles an hour, which was fantastic to listen to, but can you just go back through what you said about Access? You mentioned a couple of key names involved with Access. Also, is it those guys who are running a program or a development similar to the CERES one in Melbourne? Can you just go through that one?

Mr KENNEDY — Access Employment will sign on, or officially launch, their three-year regional partnership with SEAV on Friday, 13 August — SEAV being the Sustainable Energy Authority of Victoria. I am sorry, it is an industry that deals in acronyms. That is a three-year agreement. I am not sure how it is funded now. I think it requires matching funding, or in-kind from Access to what SEAV put up, over three years. SEAV have a physical presence at the moment, I think, in the Master Builders Association premises in View Street, Bendigo, but I think that ends and Access take that role on. I know they have advertised for somebody to work with them, at least part time, on doing that role.

Part of what they want to do is to rejuvenate the former Chinese Gardens site at Peppercorn Park in North Bendigo. It is on the right-hand side of the tram tracks, just near the Joss House. It borders the creek.

What was once a fairly rich, alluvial market garden in years gone by is now just a paddock. We want to turn it into a market garden again, but this time employing environmentally friendly principles. We would have hands-on exhibits, with all the buildings to be an environmentally friendly design, solar passive; there would be working displays of different energy. It would be similar to what CERES does in Melbourne, and similar to what is done in a few other places. The main thing is to make it approachable. Putting it on the tram line is a huge — —

Mr DRUM — Great idea.
Mr KENNEDY — Yes. We found that was important. From our own examination of the expression of interest and our own bid for it — CVGA did not win it — access to the community, not just Bendigo, was an important part of it because they are looking for somebody for a regional partnership, not just for Bendigo. It is for the wider, Central Victorian community, and they are obviously looking at bringing people into town to come and see it once it is up and running. They have great hopes that it will become a tourist attraction in its own right, not just for school kids. I am sure Paul, or Graham McDonald, could expand on that quite easily. Paul Kirkpatrick is the CEO of Access Employment. I know that some of the people involved in this field and in this industry have had not so much issues as concerns in the past about dealing with authorities like SEAV out of Melbourne because sometimes it can come across that things are not as well organised as they could be. This is perhaps regrettable because it is something that is so important. I have not necessarily had first-hand experience of that myself, but that probably might just be made as a comment.

Mr DRUM — That is fine. Tell us a little bit more about Sustainability Street.

Mr KENNEDY — Sustainability Street is a group of guys based in Melbourne who have done a fair bit of work with Moreland council, Werribee, and a few others. They basically come into a community — if you have a proactive community that wants to sort of make themselves sustainable, I suppose. It could be something as simple as a street; it could be a community group; it could be the Hargreaves Mall Traders Association in Hargreaves Street. They will come in, and they do charge a fee for it, which I think ranges somewhere between $7000 or $8000 a year. It is a three-year program. I know that they also help you find the money for that fee by going off to potential partners in it and different agencies — and they teach you to reap the rewards.

They have a four phase philosophy that escapes me at the moment: reap, sow, reward, mulch — something like that. They explore everything from what can be done at a household level. They help explain to people how to run a worm farm; how to mulch, how to collect the rainwater off the roof and why perhaps you should; and what you can and cannot put through your garbage. They help with community tree plantings. If people in a street want to get together and go to council about planting trees along the street, for example native trees or something in a new area, they can help Sustainability Street groups do that. They have had a fair bit of success in Melbourne, but I think the Melbourne people by and large are probably proactive and receptive to things like that. I think we are probably lacking in terms of embracing that here in the bush so far. They admit that it has not been perfect but nothing is, and there is usually a pretty good reason for that.

You do not need to have Sustainability Street to do that. They have given me enough information, and we could quite possibly do it on our own, but if you have ever sat through one of their presentations or one of their theatre workshops they do with kids you would pretty soon understand why it is probably worth getting them to do it. They are just so passionate and they are just brilliant at what they do. They are fantastic communicators. Obviously the government has recognised this if they are going to give them some more money.

Ms DUNCAN — Has the CVGA conducted an audit of programs that currently exist around either Victoria or Australia to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? There are lots of different projects. Have you conducted an audit of those, especially around regional Victoria?

Mr KENNEDY — ‘Audit’ is a very strong word to use because the audits are actually quantified and done independently by energy auditors or whoever is qualified to do it. For example, a lot of CVGA members took part in a financial loss control workshop up in Newcastle early this year, in January or February. There is a lot of data floating around at the moment within councils that I know of that talks about the amount of money that Newcastle has been able to save almost without having to spend any money purely by restraint and better control. I think it runs close to the million dollar mark over the last decade or so, just within their own council business.

At a local level, with things like tree plantings at Heathcote that the City of Greater Bendigo has done at the tree farm at Huntly, the carbon, the CO2, that has been offset there by those plantings I understand will be quantified as part of the carbon sinks project that is going on at the moment. A lot of what has happened needs to be checked to make sure it meets the accord of the Kyoto protocol. You would be aware that that land must have been cleared in, I think, 1990. You just cannot knock something down tomorrow and put a tree farm on it and claim credits under the Kyoto protocol even though it does exist in this country. It has to have been barren or at least untreed or unvegetated. That is my layman’s understanding of it. In terms of actual audits per se, I do not know of it, but I have only been involved with the CVGA for four or five months and I am not a scientist. There is a data management group that deals with a lot of the council’s internal data. They are more at this stage looking at
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One of the committee members made the comment before about the state of the world and sustainability. I think
people need to realise that when you buy a new car you expect it to be clean. When you buy or build a new house
or build a new house you expect it to not leak. You expect it to be clean and new. We should also expect the same
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manage things in a way in which we would like other people to manage it for us, if you are realistic about things.
Trying to leave the place in as good a condition as we found it. We probably need to leave it better, actually. If you
have a vegetable patch at home and you need to harvest the vegetables out of it and eat them yourself, I guess you
could say that is sustainable. If you put that into a sustainable region point of view you would be talking about
things like hopefully bringing in an opportunity to produce or transform our own energy in this region. We would
be talking about better relationships between the state, federal and local government areas. We would be talking
about better opportunities with industry and things like Bendigo Bank and community energy, which I think you
will find is modelled very closely on what they have done with Telco, which in itself is looking to be sustainable as
well, as is their whole community banking concept.

The CHAIR — Peter, I would just like to get your thoughts on wind power because of the planning
permit and the whole debate on where the turbines should be and communities generally. It seems to me that you
have got either community members who are not fazed by them or community members who are stridently
opposed to them. How do we actually manage this, because as you have alluded to, they are a very clean and
renewable source of energy that can bring lots of economic gains to the regions as well as providing that
sustainable focus? But if communities do not want them and they feel that they are being rammed down their throat
then that other sort of leg of sustainability where you want to empower communities to make their decisions, you
are breaking that, so how do you see that fitting? Is that a matter of education and just more understanding of the
issues we face or is it more than that?

Mr KENNEDY — It is a bit of that and it is more. I am aware, for example, that there are some
applications for smaller wind farms in the southern end of our CVGA region in the Macedon Ranges shire, where
the people who live next door to the proposed sites do not want it. I have spoken to some of those people and their
beef is not with wind. It is almost from their point of view quite literally on their doorstep, and I think they would
like to see some sort of industry code that would legislate how close to a dwelling wind farms can be. That is
certainly the local point of view. I spoke with Terry White last night briefly about some of the things we would be
talking about today. He told me about an application for a planning permit for a huge wind farm over in the
Pyrenees shire. I think it is 128 turbines. If you had more of those sorts of developments — and I know it has the
tick from Pyrenees shire; they are absolutely rapt about it, from my understanding — rather than the smaller ones
where you might find there is a bit of opportunism in play, I think you probably would not have the issue of ‘not in
my backyard’ or ‘they look so ugly’. I think the Mount Camel ranges to our east would also fit that bill. I am not
saying we could put 128 there, but I do not think there would be as much community opposition to putting a number of them there compared with the sample I am aware of around Cobaw, where in terms of real development they are fairly small properties and there are quite a number of people who have an exposure and feel as if their amenity has been compromised. I sympathise with them, that being the case.

I would hope that in the planning process the authorities would look at that and think that it is not necessarily a case of needing to put a few small farms around Cobaw if we can put more than 128 turbine sized developments in place like the Pyrenees or down on Gippsland or over Bridgewater way or wherever. That is probably a better use and a better application anyway.

Mr HILTON — Thanks for your presentation, Peter. It was most interesting. You did mention that the average person could reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by a third overnight. I would be very interested, not necessarily in this hearing, to have the information to our secretariat as to how that could be done. My main question is that, from a number of speakers that we have heard today and in previous hearings, we have been hearing a lot about education, going to the schools, educating the children and so on. The people whose behaviour we need to change are the parents. I can imagine that they may be getting a little bit overloaded with their kids coming home saying, ‘Look, you have got to do this because of the environment’. I am wondering how effective you think those programs are and whether they need to be supported by other measures. It is the same question I asked Maureen previously, but I am also interested in your view of behavioural change and how we go about it.

Mr KENNEDY — I will mention a couple of things. Firstly, by bringing it in and having school kids realise it and do something about it themselves. School kids probably plant more trees than adults, which is a shame when you think about it. If that generation can grow up already grounded in those principles at least we have done something positive. But the problem, say in terms of parents or whatever, is that it is an awful thing to have your child tell you something that you should have already known. We think that is where things like seven stories in Saturday’s *Bendigo Advertiser* can help to make a difference, and I know they will be in all the other papers throughout our region this week. I was really pleased that the local paper here in Bendigo did not just concentrate on a doom-and-gloom story because everyone has probably heard enough of that. It was important from our point of view to also provide proof that something can and is being done. The City of Greater Bendigo is no better or no worse an example of any municipality that can achieve something for itself.

Putting those 10 household tips on the front of the paper and a reference to the Australian Greenhouse Office web site should only be the beginnings of things. We have given brochures in the last couple of weeks to schools in Eaglehawk and North Bendigo and been invited to speak to those kids ourselves. That is a fairly daunting prospect — I would rather talk to you people than to a group of school kids — but we will do it and hopefully get something out of it for ourselves because we have a duty to do it. If the information process with all of this can be accepted as being for the mainstream need and being a mainstream issue I am not saying half the battle will be won but at least if it is on the agenda people will look at it. It is not just about planting more trees or whatever. People not only save energy but save money. Regardless of whether or not you classify yourself as someone who is concerned about the environment, I do not think there are many of us alive who are not concerned about the amount of money we spend.

Mr HILTON — We heard at a committee hearing a couple of weeks ago that in Sweden you can have an energy audit done on your house for nothing. I am not sure who pays, but in any way it does not cost the consumer anything. As a result of that you can always be given a range of recommendations as to what you can do to become more energy efficient, the cost and the payback period. What is your view on that Peter? Do you think it has some merit?

Mr KENNEDY — There is information that is a self-guide process, and it is available on the Internet. It can be done, but it involves a bit of work. I think the people who will do that themselves are probably by and large the converted. It affects 100 per cent of people and 100 per cent of people will not do it. For a start a third of them do not have access to the Internet in this area, and of the 70 per cent who do I would say that at least 70 per cent of that group would not bother. The difficulty is in getting people to cross that barrier. Local government and bodies like the CVGA have a role in this as well, but everybody does, from the federal government down, but we need more on things about the incentives that are involved. I heard Maureen Rogers say she would not even know where or how to begin to look for a solar hot water service. They are out there; there are something like 13 people in Bendigo are in the phone book under that listing.
Mr HILTON — There are a lot of interested groups who are under the heading of ‘Environment’ trying to improve people’s environmental awareness. Do you think in some ways the field is just too crowded, that people are getting confused by the various messages and the various messengers and the message could be communicated more effectively if there were one voice with a consistent message?

Mr KENNEDY — I actually think there is not enough — personal opinion only — because it has such an impact on so many things and on absolutely everything if you think about it. Everybody has an opinion. Everybody says what they think about who should be prime minister or who is going to win the grand final.

Mr HILTON — You have only got two choices there.

Mr KENNEDY — If you are talking AFL there might only be one.

But I think the problem is not that there are a lot of smallish groups talking about the environment. The problem from my point of view is that they are only small. Even local government themselves in a few of the cities in this area who have recently attained milestone 5 probably have not made as much of a song and dance about it as I would have.

Mr DRUM — Do you know much about any other sources of energy? I know you are not a scientist but you have spoken about wind, and I think we are all supportive of councils that have wind farms, but do you know much about photovoltaic? Do you know much about any of the other opportunities that we might be able to move into? Solar — is there a potential for solar to actually generate enough power and energy to run a small workshop? Say we take a business here and a business there out of the grid, are there potential power sources that we can work down that track?

Mr KENNEDY — It is very possible. The most prohibitive or the biggest inhibitor of that at the moment is the cost.

Mr DRUM — The start-up, initial capital?

Mr KENNEDY — Yes. It is a one-off cost but by its very nature it means you cop it all up front. Things like the east Bendigo food precinct has got enormous potential, and I know there has been some money given to them to explore ways to do that better in terms of supplying at least a portion of their own energy. There is absolutely no reason why it cannot happen except for the cost.

There are other things. For example, down at Ballarat there is a pig farm called Berrybank. It is an absolutely huge pig farm and a lot of its waste is used to — it is not produced, but it is transformed into energy. Olive Corp has an enormous potential up at Boort — they could produce hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste each year — and the hay processors virtually next door to them, they are kindred spirits with enormous potential. I know certainly when that olive grove was being developed there was a lot of state government money put into expanding the power network so that they could actually get a better quality electricity supply into that area simply because of the amount of manufacturing and processing that was going to take place. It would seem to us to be the logical step to look to actually accept some responsibility for it and use some of it locally now that they are actually producing waste.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for much for your time. It was terrific.

Committee adjourned.