

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

An inquiry into what urban, rural and regional communities in Victoria are doing to tackle climate change and how the Victorian Government could support these communities to the Environment and Planning Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 June 2020.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this important Inquiry. I make this submission as a risk management professional within the public sector with climate change/carbon emissions reduction as part of my portfolio; as one who has spent a 3-month secondment managing a state-wide public sector climate change mitigation and adaptation program; and as a trained climate reality leader (5 years). Thus, my experience is hands-on (operational), not academic. I also make this submission as an individual and note that my comments do not reflect the views of my organisation, which has intentionally not been named.

My observation into this topic is that community activities to tackle climate change are variable and depend on champions within those communities. Of the 79 councils, some are leaders in climate change action; some would probably like to do more, but lack the expertise; while others are seriously lagging, either through a lack of will, understanding or a motivator.

This is in contrast to the 19 Victorian water corporations that have clear instruction to reduce emissions and have worked together collectively, with DELWP as the parent department, with a common goal over the last few years. This has led to self-determined and now mandated emissions reduction targets, internal mitigation and adaptation plans, as well as a formal water sector pilot climate change adaptation plan, in advance of the mandated adaptation plans due in 2021. Thus, the water sector is well placed to tackle climate change, and is an acknowledged leader within the public arena.

I am aware of a large number of community-based climate action groups of varying levels of maturity and with varying levels of success – but it appears that these also rely on a core of champions. Some of these ‘champions’ may be very well intentioned, but perhaps not ‘well-schooled’ in taking effective climate action. Small steps are OK, but the bigger results will come from concentrated, concerted efforts – often led or strongly supported by a council. Indeed, I’d suggest that the level of success of the community-based climate action groups are directly related to the level of support from their council. In some rural locations, support is currently provided by DELWP regional offices – but the take up appears to be ad hoc. ***Perhaps a dedicated single-focused resource within each DELWP region may assist.***

The Victorian government is to be congratulated in taking strong leadership on climate action – but more is required. The Victorian Climate Change Framework 2016 is an excellent document, but seems to have low visibility.

Every decision must consider climate impacts / carbon emissions. This is clearly stated in the Climate Change Act 2017, but needs to extend to all economic, commercial and industrial decisions. A carbon budget must feature alongside a financial budget, and all commercial decisions must include the cost of climate action or inaction. Introduction of a carbon price would also assist in determining the cost of additional action or offsets to achieve net zero emissions.

Avoidance of extension to logging licences and establishment of national parks as recognised carbon sinks is a case in point. Including the emission reduction attributed to the new carbon sink (national park), the calculation of the carbon generated by the alternate use (whether for logging or clearing for other purposes) and the contribution toward meeting the state's emissions reduction target should help inform the decision.

While actions to reduce existing carbon emissions are one thing, the biggest challenge to most organisations, particularly in the public sector, is reducing emissions while factoring in population growth and increased demand for products and services. In my organisation (water sector), which is on a clear pathway to zero net emissions, we have introduced a carbon budget and each project is assessed on its carbon impact. Any 'new' infrastructure projects must aim for carbon neutrality, so the carbon price helps to factor in any additional emission reduction action that might be required.

Declaration of a climate emergency at state level may change the 'footing' on which climate action is viewed. Councils, states and countries are currently making this declaration. It is clear that the impacts of global warming will have severe impacts on the Victorian community, particularly at the current rate (RCP 8.5), and the absence of national leadership. ***The impacts are well documented and understood*** – but there is no evidence of clear, coordinated, imperative action at state level. To declare a climate emergency is one step – to take decisive action is the next.

A state government taskforce with a clear action-focussed emissions reduction mandate is recommended. The taskforce would examine and then oversee implementation of effective projects of state significance. This would include working with industry to ensure that the economic interests of the state are given due importance, but balance economic growth with sustainability – which can only exist in a stable 'climate' environment.

I would be happy to provide additional comment if considered of value.

Yours faithfully,

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