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Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change by Victorian Communities.

This submission has been prepared by Malcolm McKelvie, President of BBSN and has been endorsed by our committee of management.

Our organisation

BBSN is an independent, not for profit community group taking action on sustainable living. We focus on two main areas- helping people to reduce their energy use at home or in small businesses and promoting health through local food and gardening. We have operated as an incorporated association since 2007 and have a registered environmental organisation with DGR status, the Baw Baw Sustainable Environment Fund. We have approximately 100 financial members and another 600 on our email list and a growing social media presence.

We work cooperatively with other Gippsland based organisations including Gippsland Climate Change Network (GCCN), Latrobe Valley Sustainability Group, Energy Innovation Co-op and others. Together we formed Energise Gippsland which operates within GCCN. We also have strong links with local government at Baw Baw Shire. With no external funding, we are able to employ a project officer one day a week.

Reducing energy use in homes

Over the last few years we have developed expertise and experience in providing home energy assessments and doing draught proofing retrofit work. Using our own funds plus grant money we purchased a blower door and a thermal camera. We've completed some industry training in home energy assessment, business energy auditing, air infiltration testing (we are accredited through the Air Tightness Testing and Measurement Association (ATTMA- UK) and also Air Infiltration and Ventilation Association of Australia (AIVAA), have completed Level 1 Thermography accreditation and we have three accredited Victorian Residential Efficiency Scorecard assessors.

We can help households solve their home energy or comfort problems with either our own assessment service or use the Scorecard. We have chosen to add the draught proofing service as it is almost always the biggest bang for buck retrofit

people can do plus we have the ability to accurately measure the problem and our effectiveness in solving it safely using the blower door. These services are offered privately and also through programs when we are able to access grant funding and we have started to offer free energy advice to volunteers and users of the combined churches food relief service in Warragul.

As well as the direct assessments and retrofits we run monthly information sessions, some of which are related to home energy, each year we have some houses open on Sustainable House Day and we regularly answer phone enquiries from people seeking independent advice (often about solar).

So far, we have completed approximately 100 assessments, a drop in the ocean compared to what is required as there are over 71,000 households in Gippsland. We have done the air tightness testing for some of the homes at The Cape, a showcase new housing development at Cape Paterson that is demonstrating new housing that is very low energy using and very comfortable to live in.

Local food and gardening

We have a regular crew of volunteers that gather every Wednesday morning to maintain two community gardens in Yarragon. The produce grown is used in local cafes, taken home by the volunteers or left at a table inside the Yarragon Medical Centre where the public can take it with or without a donation. We are demonstrating that it is easy and enjoyable to grow fresh, healthy food close to where it's eaten.

The group is diverse and welcoming to new people. It fosters community, volunteering and friendship as well as skill sharing. Within the group are some men who prefer "projects" to gardening with creative and useful results.

Each year we run Creative Harvest- an open garden weekend where a range of locals open their productive food gardens to the public, combined with local artists attending and working at each garden. It is very popular and once again demonstrates the joy, beauty and practicality of growing food and eating it locally. We have members who are experts in organic growing, soil health and regenerative farming and these form topics for some of our monthly information sessions.

Other activity

In partnership with Beyond Zero Emissions, we developed a transition plan, Baw Baw Zero Emissions with a target date of 2027 for our local government area to be emission free in stationary energy use.

Waste is a very topical issue locally and nationally and we have run sessions on living plastic free and if we have more resources and volunteer support this would form a third area of focus for our group.

This has not been an exhaustive list of our activities as there have been many workshops and one off events.

How can BBSN and the Victorian government help each other?

BBSN could do a lot more. We'd like to be able to employ one or more young people to help do the draught proofing work and to train to become an energy assessors but our work is so sporadic that we can't offer secure employment. What we do is done well and with motivation to act on climate change as the primary focus rather than making money. It relies on a few of us volunteering our time so the income received can be used to pay our project officer and buy materials for the retrofit work. We

could focus entirely on the private market and charge more but we are acutely aware of the need for low income households to manage their energy bills and make their homes more resilient to hot and cold conditions.

In short, we have the knowledge, equipment and skills to make a massive difference to the energy use in homes but we need support to make it happen.

- Almost always, government and private funders will not offer money to pay for positions like our project officer, whose role we think is crucial to keeping our network functioning. That would make life much easier.
- Government could spend more time and resources advertising the Scorecard to improve community awareness and to unlock the latent need in the market. People are simply unaware of how poorly built their homes are and how much better they could be.
- Consider making a Scorecard assessment compulsory for people receiving rebates through Solar Victoria. This would unlock greater efficiency savings for households than just adding solar, would drive the market for more accredited assessors and would unlock the home retrofit industry.
- There have been recent changes to minimum rental standards and there are moves to increase the energy efficiency standards of existing homes as well as new homes but there is a desperate need to hasten these changes if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Home energy efficiency is, after all, the low hanging fruit for action but it doesn't feel that way on the "coalface".
- State government could provide resources to enable local governments expand the current Environmental Upgrade Agreements which are used to help businesses make positive changes with repayments being made through the council rates, to the residential sector. We find there is resistance to this suggestion in our area from the council.

The climate change mitigation opportunities in the food area where we would like to see more government action include:

- Provide support for a network of local food hubs where growers and consumers can meet.

Our members are very concerned about the ongoing logging of native forests and see this as a key action that state government could take. End the contracted sale of native timber to the Maryvale paper mill and protect any remaining native forests. We need to transition to plantation timber and to increase our forests to protect water resources and to act as carbon sinks.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute and we wish the deliberating panel well in their efforts on this inquiry.

Yours truly,
Malcolm McKelvie
President, BBSN.

