

Submission to the Victorian State Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities (Victorian Government Environment and Planning Committee) – August 219

Dr Colin Hocking


Overall

My submission is in two parts. In part 1, I outline a number of major ways in which the Victorian Government and Opposition Parties can support community action to tackle climate change. In part 2, I make a more detailed submission on how the Victorian Government and Opposition Parties need to support communities to more fully transition to ways of working and living that effectively tackle climate change, in particular transition out of logging of public native forests.

I have a 25 year old daughter. I cannot imagine the challenges she will face in the world, even if rapid action is taken now. Australia's Great Barrier Reef is dying, probably now mostly unrecoverable. Extreme weather, major increases in fire frequency, and increasing frequency and intensity of droughts are already locked in for Australia. Increased food prices and availability are inevitable, and the options of importing food will decrease rapidly, as other countries face food challenges and using fossil fuels for transporting food become expensive and untenable for many. Just over a week ago, Infrastructure Australia warned that the supply of water to Australia's major cities will be at risk, due to a lack of adequate planning and infrastructure. No matter how much we might like to pretend or procrastinate, these changes are upon us. They will affect my lifetime, for however long I am here, and will affect my daughter's future across her entire lifespan. The extent to which we take action now will determine how bad these future conditions will be.

I urge the Victorian government and all opposition parties to take courageous action, and to support communities to do so, including transition out of climate-damaging ways of working and living. I believe the Victorian electorate will be behind any government in taking courageous action, and as more of the effects of climate change emerge, even more people will be calling for immediate and urgent action, as many already are.

PART 1 of my submission

There are a variety of ways in which the Victorian State Government and Opposition Parties can support Victorian Communities in their actions to tackle climate change. These include:

1. Fully recognizing what climate scientists (Australian and International) are telling us about climate change, and the need to establish and actively pursue

targets that keep global warming below 1.5oC. This means that Victoria needs to have targets of at least 43% below 2005 levels by 2025 (as identified recently by the Combet Report), to give us a chance of meeting the 1.5oC goal.

2. Bipartisan support for the Climate Change Act 2017, so that the target of net zero emissions for Victoria by 2050 is made part of our Victorian Law.

3. Establishing a dedicated Victorian Climate Change fund of at least \$70 million, based on the community response to previous, more minor round of funding.

4. Formulate and support an integrated, whole of government, climate budget that implements and adequately funds the objectives of the Climate Change Act 2017.

5. Scale up and coordinate support for transition to climate safe work and living for workers and communities currently dependent on climate damaging businesses and ways of living – this includes workers, industries and communities currently dependent on logging of native forests in Victoria – this forms the substance of the second part of my submission.

PART 2 of my submission

The challenge of responding adequately to climate change is now huge, and the window for effective action is closing fast. Already municipal councils in Australia and elsewhere, along with some national governments, including the United Kingdom, have declared a Climate Emergency (including most recently the City of Melbourne). These Climate Change Emergency declarations are recognition that we have no more time left for a moderate transition to a stable climate, and our carbon budget for doing this is not just limited, it has run out.

Adequacy of the current targets

The Combet Report considers two sets of targets for reducing emissions so that Victoria makes a contribution to keeping overall world temperatures below 2oC. or below 1.5oC. Given the emergency status of the climate change challenge increasingly recognized in Australia and internationally, I ask that the Victorian Government plan for and take action that targets 1.5oC rather than 2oC. It is clear that any increase in global temperatures will now lead to significant changes in every aspect of our lives, so taking a moderate approach to the problem is now no longer an option.

Transition planning, strategies and actions are key

In whatever ways the Victorian State Government chooses to reduce greenhouse emissions, there will be major disruption to the work and lives of many people in the state – this is the nature of major changes of this type, and is going to be particularly the case, given the urgency of action required.

I join others to propose that the Andrews Government appoint a Minister for Transitions, along with a Transitions Authority, to coordinate the plans, strategies and efforts required across multiple government departments, portfolios and major businesses.

Any transition process should have as an underlying principle that there be a just transition for those most affected by the changes, so that the burden of such changes are shared, and not fall heavily upon an unfortunate minority.

I make comment on some types of transition in the areas I have to focus on, in the sections below.

Key greenhouse gas emissions opportunities for Victoria

The Combet Report has identified most of the key opportunities in Victoria for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and is to be commended for this.

However, some opportunities are fleshed out more than others. Two key opportunities in particular require more intense development than identified and outlined by the Combet report. These are:

- A. Emissions reductions and potential high level sequestration afforded by forestry in Victoria – in particular the cessation of native forest logging and repair of native forests
- B. Action to re-start and re-vamp energy efficiency initiatives, in housing, the building sector more generally, and in industry and business.

A. Emissions reductions and reversal (sequestration) by native forest protection and repair

While Victoria is at the forefront nationally of action on climate change, to date this has focused primarily on reducing Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions via replacement of fossil fuels with renewables in the generation of electricity. So far, there has not been a strong link between the reduction in Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions and the management of forests and other wood reserves or tree-based resources. The outcomes of the recent Combet report (2019 Climate Change: Reducing Victoria's Greenhouse Gas Emissions <https://engage.vic.gov.au/climate-change-reducing-victorias-greenhouse-gas-emissions>) puts the two together directly, and is suggestive of ways in which forest management, forest repair and afforestation can be included as part of Victoria's strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting forests and water supplies, and providing just transition for workers industries in decline.

Native Forest Logging is a Source of Greenhouse Emissions

Contrary to some misleading reports, native forest logging in Victoria is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. This is because the contribution of native forest logging to emissions is hidden by having it included in overall

emissions from land use (Victoria's Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry, or LULUCF). However, there is existing research from the Fenner School of Environment (Australian National University) of the contribution of Victoria's forests to emissions, and potential reduction in emissions in each of these scenarios (Lindenmeyer & Mackey, 2015). This research has already noted that "Native forest logging results in significant greenhouse gas emissions, because, typically, less than 5% of the biomass carbon of logged forests ends up as long-term timber products" and "logging of several thousand hectares of Victoria's Mountain Ash forest each year produces emissions equivalent to about one-third of the annual greenhouse gas emissions of Yallourn power station."

By putting a stop to logging of native forests, these carbon emissions for Victoria are saved, along with a large number of other benefits to water, communities, wildlife and reduced fire risk (see below).

Native Forests Have Other Values That Are Being Affected by Climate Change

Cessation of logging to help reduce Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions are not the only reason to stop native forest logging. A recent report by Infrastructure Australia has pointed out that supply of water to Australia's major cities is at risk due to a lack of planning and infrastructure, high levels of urban growth and the increasing effects of climate change on water supply (Age Newspaper, August 13, pg 5). In parallel with this, a major study was released this week by the Australian National University Fenner School of Environment and Society (Chris Taylor, David Lindenmeyer & Others – Journal of Science of the Total Environment, Vol 688, October 2019) has found that logging is causing a reduction in Melbourne's main catchment area (Thomson catchment) by around 15 billion litres per year, and if logging in the catchment continues as planned, this loss will more than double.

Carbon Sinks –Native Forests Can Become a Carbon Sequestration Machine

For emissions reduction in Victoria, the 2019 Combet report points out (pg 9) that

"... decarbonising electricity generation is by far the largest opportunity.. [and] There are also opportunities to substantially increase the carbon sink provided by Victoria's land sector ..."

Pg 10. "The next largest opportunity (beyond electricity generation) is Victoria's land sector with significant potential to increase the carbon sink from on farm forestry and changes in forest management on public land. Unlocking this opportunity is highly dependent on strong policy action."

Pg 6. "The Panel strongly encourages the Victorian Government to work with affected communities to develop clear plans and measures to support local economic transition. The Panel and many stakeholders participating in the Panel's public consultation process identified the Latrobe Valley community as a key focus for government support, as the coal-fired power stations that have

been a foundation of the region's economy reach the end of their operating lives."

It is worth noting that the La Trobe Valley is also key to the question of native forest logging in the Victorian Central Highlands. So a government-auspiced transition plan for the La Trobe valley arguably should include transition for workers in forest based industries in the region.

The Combet report makes extensive reference to the opportunities that rethinking native forest management can make towards Victoria's carbon emissions reduction.

For example, on pg. 33 "The Panel believes that the IPCC special report on 1.5°C of warming points both to the need to start reducing emissions as quickly as possible, and to the importance of investigating options to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This could involve supporting research and development for carbon dioxide removal technologies and, more immediately, developing policies to support increased emissions sequestration through reforestation and forest management, where appropriate, alongside other policy priorities such as biodiversity protection, water, food production and regional jobs and economic development."

Transition, Skills Transfer and Regeneration For Forestry Workers

A part of the work of the proposed Transition Victoria authority would be to map out pathways for transition for forestry workers with funds drawn from development of carbon emissions reductions strategies, and establishment of parks and reserves. This would include:

The Government should support development of the Great Forest National Park (Or Equivalent) and Emerald Biolink. A major independent report by the Nous economic evaluation group clearly contrasts the minimal value of continued logging against those of preserving forests and creating a Great Forest National Park – or equivalent

https://www.greatforestnationalpark.com.au/uploads/1/5/5/7/15574924/great_forest_national_park_-_economic_boon-press-medium.pdf.

Skills training required for existing native forest workers for this type of shift will depend on how the protection and enhancement of native forests is framed. If the frame is primarily around creation of national parks for recreation, there will be jobs, with appropriate skills training, for those building tracks and trails, and maintain these, those managing fire, and interpretive services. If the frame is widened to include protection, management and re-forestation areas for a combination of carbon capture, water production, and biodiversity protection per se, as well as for tourism, then the likelihood of transfer and re-purposing of existing skills is likely to be much larger.

The Government should also actively and urgently support development of new plantations and on-Farm plantation lots. Transfer of workers from native forest

harvesting to plantation type industries, for wood production, and for carbon capture and biodiversity enhancement (for example on private land and in existing plantation-oriented holding) is likely to require mapping of new areas some skills training, but not extensive. A recent report from University of Canberra for Forest and Wood Products Australia concludes (pg 50): “Businesses operating in different forest types (softwood plantations, hardwood plantations and native forests) reported similar skill requirements in many competency areas ... [with] some exceptions ...”

https://www.fwpa.com.au/images/OtherReports/Vic_Report_FINAL.pdf

There are already examples of where diversified on-farm development can combined with other farm-related activities to reverse carbon emissions and enhance biodiversity at the same time – for example, see Jigsaw Farm at www.jigsawfarms.com.au . In the La Trobe Valley there is now strong emphasis on a just transition for the existing coal-oriented workforce – for example, see <https://environmentvictoria.org.au/2019/06/05/moving-beyond-just-transition-towards-transformation/> .

The government should actively invest in repair of existing native forests. Transfer of workers to jobs repairing native forest areas, primarily for carbon sequestration, within newly established parks and reserves, and in state forest areas, in combination with biodiversity protection, would generate some or even many jobs that could also allow reasonably easy transition from existing logging jobs.

A similar approach could be applied to those working in the existing native forest logging industry, and with good planning *this could be folded into the existing La Trobe Valley transition plans*. This work could be facilitated by a future State Labor Government having a focus on skills training, transfer and regeneration, via the revitalization of the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and Higher Education systems.

The government should support diversification of industry at Maryvale Pulp & Paper Mill and rapid transition out of using logs from native public forests. The cessation of logging will require a renegotiation of the government Resource Supply Agreement with Maryvale Pulp Mills (Nippon). This could be achieved by replacing the existing native trees that feed the mills at Maryvale with the mountains of recycled paper that are currently stored across Melbourne, and more widely in Victoria.

A major reduction in use of native forest timber for wood production can be achieved by collaborative developing strategies between the state government, Nippon and the NGOs and communities of Victoria. This would be aimed at increasing (again) Victorians’ use of paper made from higher component recycled paper, along with supporting a re-fit the pulp mills as appropriate for producing greater amounts of paper from recycled material.

Summary: How Forest Protection Can Contribute to Victoria's Reduced Emissions

In summary, there is a future for workers in forestry related industries in Victoria, based on a rethink of what these jobs look like, and what they are producing, with appropriate transition of workers into these new types of production (repairing forests for carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, and new economic activity based on new reserves; producing paper from recycled resources rather than native forest wood). State government funds for emissions reduction can be combined with funds for establishment of reserves and protection of forests, as an investment to build a protected forest system that will be a major contributor to Victoria's emissions reduction, and one that will operate effectively as a way to continually reduce emissions over the next hundred years and beyond. As the economics show, after an establishment period, these reserves and protected forests will be self-funding, via the economic activity and tax base generated from the range of businesses that can be established as part of these reserves.

Reducing emissions by stopping logging, further sequestering emissions over time, and making this a self paying economic proposition – what is there not to like about this?

B. Revitalising Energy Efficiency Initiatives for Houses, Businesses & Community

Victoria was once at the forefront of energy efficiency, making major contributions to reduction of emissions, and the costs of living and doing business. Since the 'pink batts' incidents, the focus has gone off energy efficiency as a major way of reducing greenhouse emissions. The entire scheme has settled into a comfortable, and ineffectual, process of meeting a low star rating for new dwellings. The benefits associated with reducing emissions via energy efficiency, of reducing power bills and living and working more comfortably, have effectively been put on the back burner.

I propose that the Victorian State Government revitalize energy efficiency, by appointing a Minister for Energy Efficiency, perhaps as a junior minister in association with the current Minister for Energy, working in association with the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. Funds for this work could be generated in part by a levy on businesses (including energy generators) emitting greenhouse gas emissions, and directing this funding through a dedicated Energy Efficiency section of Sustainability Victoria, in a similar way to that in which Victoria's Waste Levy is generated and put to use to reduce Victoria's waste.