

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Golden Point—Wednesday, 18 September 2019

MEMBERS

Mr Darren Cheeseman—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

WITNESS

Dr Mary Debrett, Vice President, Ballarat Renewable Energy and Zero Emissions (BREAZE).

The CHAIR: Welcome to the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities. I would also extend a welcome to the public and media.

All evidence today will be recorded and protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript of today's evidence at the earliest opportunity. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the Committee's website.

As is customary, we allow 5 to 10 minutes for a presentation and then the Committee will ask a number of questions. Having said that, our practice today has been if there is a salient point we particularly want to tease out, we will ask you through your presentation. Could you please state your name and title before beginning your presentation.

Dr DEBRETT: Dr Mary Debrett. I am the Vice President of BREAZE. I must apologise for Ian Rossiter not being able to be here. He is our secretary and former president and I have to say rather more informed than myself. So it is a bit of a shame, but I will take any questions on notice and get back to you.

The CHAIR: No problem.

Dr DEBRETT: BREAZE was founded in 2007 with the goal of promoting sustainability and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions across the region, with a view to meeting the zero emissions target by 2030. BREAZE serves this goal in various ways—by initiating community programs such as Social Solar to assist the adoption of renewable energy by social organisations otherwise unable to afford it; by working with Government and directly assisting the expansion of renewable energy across the region through initiatives like the Community Power Hub; by working with local government and providing information services about sustainable living, like Smart Living Ballarat; by working with other groups such as Boomerang Bags, Ballarat Farmers Market, the Buninyong food co-op and Ballarat Repair Café, and auspicing a range of groups; through community outreach, like the World Environment Day Children's Writing Competition across the primary schools of greater Ballarat, and an involvement in Sustainable House Day, which is obviously a national initiative. Also, through public action. We have organised a couple of walks against warming. We make submissions to council on things such as the climate emergency, which Ballarat City Council has endorsed, and the zero emissions action plan, which they have also unanimously endorsed. We have initiated quite a lot of media coverage through media releases, opinion pieces and interviews on radio and television et cetera.

You asked for suggestions for how the Government might support reducing emissions across this region. We are very appreciative of all of Government's endeavours in reducing emissions—the reductions targets and the subsidies for domestic solar, which help to drive the renewable energy sector. We would suggest that more could be done in the field of transport to help reduce emissions—support for electric vehicles in particular. It is a case of build it and they will come. I guess you know that. But more community charging stations would be, I think, a great thing for Ballarat. We currently have two units at Stockland, I think one at Sovereign Hill and one somewhere else in the city, but there really needs to be group of six or more, I would say, in the CBD if it is to become a viable thing for Ballarat citizens to own an electric vehicle. We also think that it would be great if the City of Ballarat could trial garbage trucks and buses, so support for that kind of initiative just to promote electric vehicles. If people see garbage trucks and note that they do not make much noise on their streets, it does help to promote the very idea of electric vehicles.

The other area in terms of where transport emissions could be reduced is in the field of biodiesel. We have businesses ready for biodiesel in Ballarat. In fact about 10 years ago the City of Ballarat introduced or implemented a regime of blended fuel for its heavy plant works trucks, but, as you are probably aware, we need a registration system for biodiesel suppliers, so we think that should be on the to-do list for State Government.

BREAZE has also identified potential in agriculture. Harvesters and tractors could be converted to biodiesel. I understand that the conversion system switches the fuel supply from diesel to biodiesel after the engine has warmed up. That would obviously be a good thing in terms of reducing emissions. Given the current global diesel stress, a registration system for biodiesel suppliers would seem prescient.

In terms of other resources that we would like to see, Sustainability Victoria currently has only one officer for West Grampians. We suggest you need at least one or two more to meet the growing demand across this region to assist in coordinating local initiatives to reduce emissions, to help in changing the culture and to keep abreast of community interest.

Another area where resources would be very gratefully received is an initiative that BREAZE has recently launched which has had some minor support from the City of Ballarat, from DELWP and from Federation University, and that is Climate Adaptation Forums. We believe these are very important given the changing climate reality that we are in and that the community needs assistance in adapting to that environment and in planning for further changes. The forums that we currently have scheduled are one that starts in November—more frequent and extreme bushfires. Future forums are planned for food security, extreme wind events, floods and threats to biodiversity. So, yes, we believe that that should be an ongoing thing. Maybe a forum every two or three months would be good to kind of warm people up to what they need to be doing to adapt. That is my piece.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Thanks, Mary. David, did you have anything? Paul?

Mr HAMER: Not at this stage.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask, we just had an earlier presentation and I am not sure how much you heard, but the Hepburn community has been very active in measuring its emissions profile. Has there been a similar piece of work undertaken within the City of Ballarat's boundaries about its emissions footprint and which parts of the economy are responsible for the profile that you have? Has that work been done? Has BREAZE been involved in any of those conversations?

Dr DEBRETT: Look, it may have been. I will get back to you on that one.

The CHAIR: Yes, if you could perhaps just let the secretariat know whether that work has been done, whether there was any support from any level of government around that and what level of support might be required if the work has not been done to enable that type of activity to be undertaken, I think that would be useful. For communities to be aware of their emissions profile I think is sort of the starting point of a conversation around what steps might be the most appropriate locally to reduce that particular profile.

Dr DEBRETT: I think it is likely that some work has been done in that regard around the zero emissions plan that the council endorsed.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. I do not have any further questions. Paul, you are fine. David is fine. Thank you for your time.

Dr DEBRETT: Okay. I have got a copy of our annual report if that is of any interest to you.

The CHAIR: Yes, if you could leave that for the secretariat that would be of some benefit. Thank you, Mary, for coming along today.

Dr DEBRETT: Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned.