

# **TRANSCRIPT**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**

### **Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities**

Bendigo—Thursday, 19 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**

Ms Karen Corr, Executive Director, Make a Change Australia.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities. All evidence taken 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 those 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 will allow 5 to 15 minutes for a presentation from you, and then the Committee may ask a number of questions. Could you please state your name and title before beginning your presentation.

**Ms CORR:** My name is Karen Corr. I am the Executive Director of Jumpleads, but I am representing our community division, which is called Make a Change Australia.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic. Over to you; the floor is yours.

**Ms CORR:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here and to be heard. Just to give you a little bit of background context to the submission, my background is actually as an engineer and I worked in the water and environmental sectors for 10 years. I was then the inaugural president of the Bendigo Sustainability Group, which grew to 500 members and has been instrumental in large solar grants and community education and engagement. Then I was the chair of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance, which at that time was instrumental in getting the Lighting the Regions project off the ground.

Then after all of that work I went on to create Make a Change Australia, and that has been operating for eight years, to fill a gap which I observed during that previous work—which is the need to inform, educate and bring people along in ways that connect with them and support those who are already working on solutions. This is across health and wellbeing, social disadvantage and environment. Part of that was the creation of Ramp Up Resilience. We created Ramp Up Resilience following work we did for the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. This was post the Lancefield fires. We worked in the community to help turn the conversation around from a negative one to a more positive one and to what they wanted to achieve for the future.

We also worked on the review of the community-based emergency management framework for Emergency Management Victoria. At that time both organisations highlighted to us the need for communities to create their own solutions. As government knows, they do not have all the resources to achieve what is required, particularly in relation to addressing the impacts of climate change and the risk of increased extreme weather. They asked us to develop something that would support this, and we did: Ramp Up Resilience was created. Although they originally said they could fund this, after two years of going around in a circle from person to person and department we realised it was not going to happen in a hurry, if at all. So we launched the concept in 2017 through funding we achieved from the CFA and other local partners. This was highly successful, so we pulled together other partners, including the CVGA, Coliban Water, North Central CMA, the Bendigo Sustainability Group and three shires—Loddon, Campaspe and Bendigo—and we rolled out this initiative as a pilot across the three shires, and we have been doing that this year.

What we have heard, learned and activated through this pilot is—we have been going out to talk to local communities in the whole region about climate change and what they think about that and what they want to do or are doing about it. So through strategically designed communications and creative engagement we have been able to connect with people who would not normally engage with climate change, simply by starting with the question, 'Do you notice the weather?'. We have heard lots of things. We have heard the scepticism that exists in regional communities—those sceptical about climate change and not wanting to be seen as political—but a general awareness that weather patterns are changing. Some people do not think anything can be done and are hoping and banking on that it will rain or the weather will work in their favour soon. Others are extremely concerned but do not think they can do anything about it. Others want to know more; they see there is a lot of misinformation in their community and want opportunities to educate them more. Others are starting to form

ideas on what they want to do, both mitigation and adaptation. Others are already working on solutions and are keen to get on with it. We have also heard of a lot of frustration with government, a lot of talk asking for input into strategies et cetera, but not backed up by real, on-the-ground support.

The thing that we have been able to achieve through the work that we have done is the generation of a lot of interest. We have been able to build trust very quickly and build relationships with local people who want to and are doing something about it in their communities. The face-to-face conversations we have had across the region and the events and training we have delivered, including in Rochester, Inglewood and Raywood, have demonstrated that there is a lot of commitment, passion and goodwill in this community to take on the challenges and develop and implement local solutions.

We have helped to generate new connections, share knowledge, provide new skills and enable solutions to grow. With extremely limited funding and resources, we have only been able to take this work so far and have just really touched the surface of what is possible. As a pilot we see there is an enormous potential to keep going.

Our recommendations for the Victorian Government as part of this Inquiry—in a previous role at the BSG I was in roundtable discussions with John Brumby and his advisers back then on this exact topic, and the message is still the same as it was back then: leverage from existing efforts; do not think that you need to do it all and do not reinvent the wheel; acknowledge and respect what is already happening in these communities; and create partnerships that support and enable the local people to implement their solutions, utilising and supporting existing efforts. When I say partner, I mean ensure this is mutually beneficial. It has got to be of benefit to the organisations who you are partnering with as opposed to, I guess, picking their brains and using them for their volunteer time. The experience often is that government are asking for input of community and volunteer time to create strategies or submit grants in near-impossible-to-exceed funding. This is just based on what I am hearing, so I am just saying this.

**Ms GREEN:** All right, keep going.

**Ms CORR:** Governments appear to spend a lot of time creating frameworks and plans but not necessarily backing them up with support for real implementation on the ground. So the opportunity for this Inquiry is that if we can invest in existing work and trusted organisations to generate, activate and implement community-led solutions for long-term viability and invest in initiatives that educate and bring others along that may be still on the sceptical path—if you do that—you will get me more achieved than you ever thought possible.

In terms of our next step for this work, it is following our pilots, taking into account the relationships we have built, the momentum we have created and the learnings we have gained. We now aim to take Ramp Up Resilience—ramping it up—to another level, and this is called Ramp Up Resilience 10/10 Towns. Rather than implementing this model in a broad way, which is what we have done this year, it is enabling us to take the model, at a much deeper level, to individual towns with a focus on adaptation and emergency management. We will be able to demonstrate a relatively fast and efficient approach to educate, engage and generate action in building resilience for several communities at once. We hope the Victorian Government will support us in our efforts and the efforts of the people in communities that we work with, because if given the opportunity we will—in partnership with the Government, the local organisations we partner with and the communities we work with—be able to truly ramp up the resilience for this entire region and beyond.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic. Thanks, Karen.

**Ms GREEN:** Great presentation.

**The CHAIR:** I can tell that Danielle is itching to ask a question, so why not start there?

**Ms GREEN:** I wanted to know: which of the 10 towns? I loved that ‘leveraged from existing effort’ question. And then probably where I went with the previous presenter was specific examples of involvement with the business community.

**Ms CORR:** So the first question was about where are the towns?

**Ms GREEN:** Yes, the 10 towns.

**Ms CORR:** We are just finishing the implementation of this broader pilot this year, and we have only just submitted a grant application. So we have really only just created the 10/10 towns. We definitely do not want to tell communities what to do. That is not our approach. It is about working with communities that want to take this on, so we would go through an expression of interest or conversations to find which towns are interested in being a part of this. So we are not sure yet, but it would be in the central Victorian region. Did you have another question?

**Ms GREEN:** I just think that your footprint is great, because you have areas that have been impacted by fire but also flood. I thought that was interesting with those roundtable discussions that you came up with. As you would be aware—if your in-laws have said anything—I have got a lot of experience in emergency management and response. Did you find a diversity of view across the three towns that you have had your round tables with?

**Ms CORR:** So each of the roundtables, they were not necessarily just focused on the town at the time. So with, say, Rochester, we had people coming—actually, for all of them we have had people coming from lots of shires. So rather than hearing specifically about what one town's view was, it was more that people got to find out what other people were doing in other shires because at all these events everyone in the region was invited.

Then in response to your question about the businesses, just as an example, the Inglewood tourism development committee have come to every event because each event rather than just a general discussion went on a process of broad discussion. Then it was, okay, starting to develop ideas or share your ideas and then really nutting out in the last session with mentors and local supporters to take it even further. The Inglewood example—they have been developing a project called Cooling Inglewood. So they said that actually one of the biggest impacts for them is what they have noticed already: people do not stop over summer in Inglewood because it is too hot and it is not very inviting. They want to green their town and make it more inviting because then it impacts the businesses. So they are looking at ways that they can green it, and they have been evolving their idea this year through this program.

**Ms GREEN:** Is the business incubator still going in the rail shed there?

**Ms CORR:** There is a rail shed project developing, yes.

**Mr HAMER:** I was just wanting to ask about some of the mechanics in terms of, I suppose you could say, the funding model or if there was funding available. So you talk about the funding to the organisations—existing community organisations. So the intention would be: you might have a solar farm or it could be the power hub or something, and then your organisation is partnering with them to maybe grow support or get other buyers or actually make it viable. How would that actually work in practice?

**Ms CORR:** So our program is set up to build connections and share resources and share knowledge and help those projects develop. So it is really taking a community and development approach. There are two areas where I think funding would make a big difference. So one is to continue that kind of initiative that supports in the capacity-building side and the bringing of the different towns together, because just through our work we have seen how valuable that has been in terms of them coming up with new thinking that they have not thought of before, or together they can work on their solutions more effectively. But then the other funding is, yes, in the implementation of their actual solutions on the ground. Just as an example, in the recent grant round, the climate adaptation grant round, I think there were 70 projects that submitted for that grant round, and I think one or two might have got funded. Then there is work going into an adaptation strategy. But if you have got 70 projects ready to go, there is a huge opportunity already to fund the implementation of those as well—so a funding pool to implement projects that are ready to go and funding to continue to help the greater effectiveness of those projects, and the whole region sharing that knowledge and inspiring more projects to happen, more implementation.

**Mr HAMER:** And the role of Make a Change Australia would be in, say, building community support and sort of educating the community more widely?

**Ms CORR:** Yes. It is in that facilitation and engagement and skills-building role.

**Mr MORRIS:** Karen, you talked about specifically one of the things that came out of the Inglewood meeting. First of all, were there any common themes between the three, and secondly, were there other specifics that came out of it?

**Ms CORR:** Okay. So because we only just ran the last event on Tuesday—

**Mr MORRIS:** I understand.

**Ms CORR:** we have not quite had the chance to analyse it all yet. There is actually quite a diversity of what people are working on. People are interested in the mitigation side, so people are thinking about reducing waste or renewable solutions. Then there are some that have been thinking about education. Some people are concerned about young people because they are worried about the future, and they are developing projects that are supporting young people to go, ‘No, we can proactively do things’, and getting them on side. So there are youth projects.

There are some people who are thinking about regenerative agriculture and then the ones that are talking more about the adaptation to the extreme heat. One not so much at the actual events but in conversations in community there is also a lot of concern about water, but I do not think people really think they can do anything about it. That is really interesting. But it is more in those other fields of renewable energy, the building of the towns, making stronger connections so that the community is supported in terms of hardship as well is a big one.

**Mr MORRIS:** Just following on from that, there is obviously a broad range of issues or a broad range of desires for action. If all of those are accommodated, it obviously dilutes the effort, but the strength of it is that it comes from the community, so are we better to encourage more focus and perhaps be not quite as responsive to what the community is broadly saying, or are we better to say: that’s great; there is engagement on all these things, so we will try to follow the whole raft of things through?

**Ms CORR:** That is a good question. I think the way I look at it is there is a bit of both. I think you do need to bring people along, so you do need that education and engagement component, and I think towns can work out themselves what their priorities are for what they want to achieve too. In terms of the pool of the projects, I do not know if each town got to nominate the one project they really wanted to focus on you could do it that way, as an example, but you would not want to not then do the other broader engagement, because that actually inspires action and brings other people along. But also not everything has to be about funding.

**Mr MORRIS:** I agree.

**Ms CORR:** Funding makes a big difference and is needed, but there are also some basic simple solutions. We have heard of one town, and this is not in our area but someone has shared it with as an example from elsewhere, where they all got together and talked about, in the case of a fire, ‘If I’ve left, I’ll put my wheelie bin in the front of the driveway so people know that I’ve left’. You would not want to not have those simple solutions, so that town really knows when they need to help someone in a time of fire. I think that is why you still need to keep building the conversations, sharing the stories of what people are doing and encouraging more people to think about their own solutions too. But you could have some flagship projects in each town too.

**The CHAIR:** Just thinking in terms of your presentation, you talked about social disadvantage and building community resilience, and I am sort of reflecting on that in terms of what we know the science is going to be saying in terms of the impact of climate change on our landscapes and the potential for more floods like we had a decade or so ago, more dust storms, more fires—those kinds of things. I was thinking about how we might educate the community around those things and the steps that might be taken to mitigate against those things. I was wondering what you were thinking in terms of the role of existing community structures, so neighbourhood houses, Landcare groups, the CFA fire stations, the SES stations, the football clubs, the netball clubs, the bowls clubs, the tennis clubs—all of those ways in which the community come together—and what your thoughts are around: is there an opportunity in these small towns? It might only be the CFA shed or the football club or the tennis club. That might be the only way the community actually does come together in any real meaningful way and how we might support those entities or organise through those entities around how we respond to the

challenges of climate change, particularly in a very local context like a Rochester or a Boort or whatever other towns might be in this region. What are your thoughts?

**Ms CORR:** I have got a lot of thoughts on that, because that is exactly where the 10/10 towns component of Ramp Up Resilience is heading. The work that we have been doing in the communities is having the conversation. Let us take Lancefield as an example—previously. We met with the CFA, we met with the footy club, we met with the netball clubs—we met with all of those groups and the neighbourhood houses, because they all are the connectors and influencers in that town. So it would include engaging and having those one-on-one conversations with all those key groups, bringing them together in an information community meeting discussion and bringing the partners from the sector. So DELWP have said that they would be able to provide spatial data, and then we have got the North Central CMA, who have the flood data, and all of those organisations would get maps out and all of those groups would come together and have those kinds of conversations. It is a way to get them to think about what are the risks for the future and what we can do about them. Then they would come up with what to do, because they will know who is connected to whom. I know the CFA have their own phone tree things as well, and they are already doing some of that work, but some of those other organisations are not necessarily linked in with that.

**The CHAIR:** And the presidents, the secretaries and the treasurers of these types of groups are naturally usually the community leaders, aren't they?

**Ms CORR:** Yes, that is right.

**The CHAIR:** So if they come on board, they will bring others on board just by the nature that people follow the leaders of their communities.

**Ms CORR:** Yes, and some of our work also is giving them skills on better communicating and engaging with other people in the community so they can be brought along, because one of the things we find is that when you are sort of passionate about a particular area, you have got your own jargon and terminology that you are using, and it does not actually include everyone. So what we bring and support with those groups is a better way to communicate, and then it gives the opportunity to bring the others along. That is where also the social disadvantage comes, because there are some people that would never necessarily engage with the CFA. So it is like: who are the other groups that should be included in the conversation?

**Ms GREEN:** Just a suggestion, actually, because after the floods in early 2011, between Daniel Andrews and me, we visited 25, I think, flood-affected towns at the time, particularly because so often sporting clubs are set up on flood plains and things like that because that is not where you were building, there was just a lot of damage there.

In Diamond Creek, where I live, which you might be familiar with, the town has flooded twice in the last 10 years—a one-in-100-year flood. The first one completely cut the town in half, but by the time the second one came around the sporting clubs, council and a few of us had all got together and thought—it was during the water crisis—let us have a dam, and it is now a lovely wetlands. That water is also used for irrigation of the sporting fields, but then it is also a mitigation flood basin for when Arthurs Creek floods into the Diamond Creek. So the next time we had a flood of similar magnitude the sporting ovals were still inundated, but the clubrooms were not and the road was not either, so the town was not cut in half. Things like that can just make a huge difference. Then you get a lovely wetland. For people in dry areas to have that little bit of wetland can just be really good for their mental health as well. It attracts waterbirds and it is a nice place to walk your dog and all that.

**Ms CORR:** It sounds good.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic. I have certainly run out of questions. Thank you, Karen, we very much appreciate it.

**Ms CORR:** Thank you very much. Good luck with the rest of this.

**Committee adjourned.**