

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Traralgon—Wednesday, 23 October 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

WITNESSES

Ms Deirdre Griepsma, Manager, Sustainable Environment, Bass Coast Shire Council; and

Cr Michael Leaney, Baw Baw Shire Council; and

Cr Sharon Gibson,

Cr Darrell White, and

Cr Darren Howe, Latrobe City Council; and

Cr Darren McCubbin, and

Cr Carolyn Crossley, Wellington Shire Council.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the Traralgon public hearing of the Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities. This is one of several hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee is conducting around Victoria to inform itself about the issues relevant to the Inquiry.

I will just run you through some important formalities before we begin. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by privilege. This means that no legal action can be taken against you in relation to the evidence you give. However, this protection will not apply to any comments you make outside of this hearing even if you are restating what it is that you stated here today. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so, and you can check and approve it. Corrected transcripts are published on the Committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you for taking the time to come to the Committee today. I will hand over to you to introduce yourselves and then you can make your submission.

Ms GRIEPSMA: I am Deirdre Griepsma. I am the Manager, Sustainable Environment, at Bass Coast Shire Council. Apologies from our mayor and CEO, who are otherwise engaged today.

Cr LEANEY: Cr Michael Leaney of Baw Baw shire, one of the East Ward councillors. Our Mayor sends her apologies for not being able to be here today.

Cr WHITE: Cr Darrell White, Latrobe City Council, South Ward.

Cr HOWE: Darren Howe, Deputy Mayor of Latrobe City Council. I am representing the Mayor, who is at another meeting, so apologies from him.

Cr McCUBBIN: Cr Darren McCubbin from Wellington shire.

Cr CROSSLEY: Cr Carolyn Crossley, Wellington shire.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Well, thank you for coming. I will hand over to you if you would like to make any introductory comments or any submissions.

Cr McCUBBIN: Do you want to start off, Darren?

Cr HOWE: Why not? I have got a couple of notes here. Latrobe City Council acknowledges the State Government's proposed and adopted policies and regulations to achieve a low emissions future for Victoria. The anticipated closure of the remaining Latrobe Valley power stations will significantly impact on the region's economy and employment growth, therefore a successful and well-planned diversification of Latrobe's economy and transition, supported by a low carbon energy technology, will be critically important to Latrobe city's future.

In our previous submissions Latrobe city has urged both the State and Federal Governments to consider the emissions reduction impacts on Latrobe Valley through reflective planning, engagement and support for Just

Transition to reduce the disproportionate adverse impacts on our region, to consult and collaborate with Latrobe city and community through all phases of the transition and to support low-emission technologies and alternate uses of carbon from brown coal, such as hydrogen production, as part of the region's economic diversification.

The Just Transition: at the core of the transition is a strong need to drive the region's employment and economic growth, given that the Latrobe Valley region has borne, and is expected to continue to bear, a significant economic cost of the structural change to a low-emissions source of energy. The contraction of coal and the electrical industry in Latrobe city has had, and is expected to have, a significant disruptive impact on the productivity, economic and social outcomes across this community. Latrobe city urges the Government to undertake thorough modelling of the impacts that the staged move to zero emissions by 2050 in Victoria will have on Latrobe Valley economically and socially. The council invites the Government to collaborate with Latrobe city and its community to introduce a strategic and staged transition plan, combined with a program of proactive and timely measures, to ensure that the investment in the region delivers value for money through targeted and prioritised approaches, that any interventions are appropriate and that all relevant parties, including Latrobe Valley community, are heard and engaged in this process.

The collaboration for transition: council invites all levels of government to partner with Latrobe City Council and its community in discussions, policy and program planning and design with regard to the region's continued transition, creating a long-term, considered plan for transition for the Latrobe Valley towards a future of economic and social prosperity that is achievable and can be best driven with involvement from the Latrobe city community.

Low-emissions technologies and alternate uses of carbon: Latrobe Valley's brown coal represents a significant resource which could be utilised for production of a range of value-added commodities manufactured through various low-emissions technologies. As part of its economic diversification Latrobe city strongly supports research and development on low-emission technologies and alternate uses of the carbon from brown coal, including hydrogen.

Latrobe city believes that carbon capture and utilisation could provide significant brown coal-fired power generation and product manufacturing opportunities. CCU is also critical to the hydrogen production, which has significant foreign investment interests. Latrobe city acknowledges that hydrogen provides a significant emerging economic opportunity not only for our region but also for Australia. Given the vast brown coal reserves present in the Latrobe Valley, council believes that hydrogen from Latrobe Valley brown coal could drive the transitioning of the Australian energy sector by supporting the region's new diversifying economic structures and economic growth. Carbon capture and storage is also a significant opportunity for Latrobe city and could achieve emissions reductions from the coal-fired power stations. The CarbonNet project investigates the potential for establishing a commercial-scale CCS network in the Latrobe Valley.

In an attempt to identify and secure these opportunities Latrobe City Council has been seeking support from both State and Federal Governments for the establishment of a regional carbon innovation centre in the Latrobe Valley as a hub for innovation, research and development; from an early technological stage to a demonstration of its pre-commercialisation stage. A feasibility study on the proposed centre has been recently commissioned by Australian Carbon Innovation.

Council also notes that other initiative technologies such as waste to energy—that is proposed for the Australian Paper thermal waste-to-energy plant—are imperative to Latrobe city's transformation. This project is expected to reduce pressure on existing landfill sites by creating a steady energy output and a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Latrobe's climate change adaptation: key anticipated impacts from climate change for Latrobe city include changes in rainfall patterns that pose challenges for water supply and agriculture, including reduction of water quality and increasing potential algal blooms; more common intense rainfall events which increase risk of severe flooding; high temperatures, which increases the likelihood of large and intense fires; increased numbers of hot days and heat waves, which will place substantial pressure on our health services and infrastructure; and biodiversity changes.

Latrobe city's *Natural Environment Sustainability Strategy 2014–2019* outlines the activities that the council has committed to in relation to climate change adaptation. We are building capacity to help respond to change, helping our organisation and our community to make better environmental decisions and respond more effectively to environmental challenges.

Emissions reduction and climate change adaptation: we participate in regional climate change forums and networks to share information and develop better strategies for emissions reduction and climate change adaptation, and offset council vehicle emissions. Council is working with the climate change network, the Gippsland Local Government Network, and State and Federal Governments on implementing various projects. We engage with schools, businesses and households to improve energy efficiency, reduce environmental impacts and maintain data on priorities and progress through a state of environment report, encourage, support and promote local community's sustainability initiatives and report progress back to the community.

We are improving resource use efficiency and water efficiency. We reduce and monitor Latrobe city's water use and support and promote water reuse and conservation within our community and industry.

Energy efficiencies: we reduce and monitor Latrobe city's energy efficiencies and support and promote energy efficiencies with the community and industry.

Sustainable procurement: we increase the proportion of environmentally sustainable products and services purchased by Latrobe city and reduce corporate consumption.

Waste minimisation: ensure socially, environmentally and economically responsible disposal of our municipal waste.

Protect our natural assets: we work collaboratively to better manage and increase protection for the waterways, air, soil and biodiversity valued by Latrobe city. Latest actions include the biolinks project that aims to strengthen wildlife corridors or biolinks to securing and connecting important habitat of the genetically unique Strzelecki koala population. Considering the impacts from climate change, it is likely that there will be an increasing need for connectivity to allow plants and animals to find new habitats as their old habitats become less habitable. That is all, thank you.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Thank you. That was a very detailed submission. I might see if there are any questions from my colleagues at this stage.

Mr FOWLES: There is, I think, a lot of guidance in there about what the highest priorities are for LTC—Latrobe City Council or LCC, I beg your pardon. Do you have a sense of what you consider to be front and centre the biggest challenges or the biggest asks?

Cr GIBSON: Jobs.

Cr HOWE: The low-emissions future of our carbon initiative research centre would be top of the line. We all agree that, moving forward, we have to do something about climate change, but we need to protect our economy as well, so that is where the low-emissions future for coal and carbon and the research centre would be probably at the top of our priorities.

Cr GIBSON: Up in New South Wales with the coal centre up there in Newcastle or the Hunter region they were suggesting that to transform their economy it is going to be \$3 billion. I suggest that ours is even worse than that. While governments as a whole have stated different things that they are going to do with Latrobe city, it is nowhere near what is needed. So often all the good intentions are there, but people from Melbourne or Canberra come down and say, 'That is what you need' without talking to us first. We are on the ground. We actually understand very well. We are very keen to work with everybody but you need to have our input into decisions before you make them. We are not saying no to any of it, but we are saying we need to be in that equation and that some of the methods that are being looked at, considered or put in place are not cutting the mark. There is a Peter Brain report that will be actually able to be spoken to and handed out very soon, and that shows the economy here, the effects of all of this and what it has actually done. We have been the centre that has actually made Victoria part of what it is today, so do not leave us out in the lurch now because we have an important role to play then just like we have in the future. We are happy to work, but work together with us.

Mr FOWLES: Sure.

Cr WHITE: From me, I guess, to support the deputy mayor in regard to the regional carbon innovation centre but also to highlight the hydrogen project that is in the pipeline. Thanks to the support of the State and Federal Governments, there is substantial support of \$50 million each. We are working with Kawasaki Heavy Industries on the idea of establishing a hydrogen facility here in Latrobe utilising the coal resource and for hydrogen to become the product for Japan going forward into the future as far as their vehicle industry is concerned. That is a significant new feature on our horizon. I suppose that is the critical thing here from Latrobe city's point of view—that we need to become more and more diverse in what it is we have on offer in terms of the job mix that we have, and this provides another element in that respect.

The other thing I also want to emphasise at any opportunity I get is this notion of carbon capture utilisation. That, I think, fits back in with what the deputy mayor did say in regard to the regional carbon innovation centre—that there just does not seem to be enough interest in Australia in regard to researching the idea of capturing the CO₂ and utilising it in a productive way. We know that it is happening in other parts of the world, and we know that right around the world there are efforts going into identifying ways in which we can productively use the CO₂. By way of example, in Germany right now there is an organisation there that has been able to capture the CO₂ with a chemical process to develop a polymer which means that the product that this creates replaces oil, and as well as that it produces products such as bed mattresses and synthetic surfaces for sports arenas. In fact the latest development is that it is creating a fibre that can be used in clothing manufacture as well. Why can't we do that here in Australia? We need to be on the front foot in this regard. There is an opportunity for us here to take full advantage of the product that we have here and to make our contribution to the planet in regard to reducing CO₂ and recognising that climate change does exist and that we really need to take proactive steps to help ameliorate that.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Thanks, Darrell. Do the other councillors wish to contribute?

Cr McCUBBIN: Yes, I am happy to lead things for Wellington. I would like to emphasise that I agree that transition is a key issue for our area. We absolutely understand the need to transition to a low-carbon economy—we absolutely get that—but it involves real people on the ground really losing their jobs and really transitioning. I absolutely support my colleagues here from Latrobe city. The idea of developing new innovations and new techniques and study centres is absolutely part of that thing. We are very optimistic in Wellington. We see the Star of the South offshore wind proposal and new proposals such as the Gippsland energy park, the Maffra solar farm and the Ramahyuck solar farm as being able to step up and create energy and employment. But we need supportive procedures and policies from the Victorian State Government in order to enable this stuff to happen locally. We need to recognise that transition is a key issue for our area. We have got local people with local jobs that need to be looked after through this process.

I will say that I think that the Government can be congratulated on some of its projects. Whilst they have not been entirely perfect, I think the way that we did the transition has been sympathetic to local needs. But more needs to happen. I absolutely agree with all of the councillors who are saying that we need to be on the ground talking to our communities and ensuring that we get workers and jobs into the future. So transition is a key for Wellington as well.

Another point I will make is in regard to the drought. Climate change is also about agricultural producers. A lot of our agricultural people are under extreme pressure; farmers are under extreme pressure. We appreciate the support from the Victorian State Government in the past, but we are going to need more of that as we transition to a low-carbon future. I actually think the agricultural sector is one in which there are tremendous opportunities as well—tremendous opportunities. You are looking at a sector which has increased efficiencies by about 40 per cent over the last five or so years, and it has been incredible the way that it has changed its agricultural methodologies. In fact they are even looking to become carbon neutral. I really applaud the Committee for going out to some of our farms down in Maffra and Newry this afternoon and having a look at just what the producers are doing. These are real people on the ground that are creating real changes which are helping our environment, and I think they should be supported through that.

A third and key point for Wellington is in regard to coastal policy and sea level change and planning policy in regard to sea level change. Right now it is up to individual councils to do individual planning on individual

coastal sites using a raft of data which is difficult to understand and hard to move forward on. Our communities, admittedly, are confused. They are obviously scared of that change. We are imposing more and more conditions upon them. It would be really great to get some consistency from the Victorian Government in regard to legislation along the coast to allow us to plan into the future.

Mr FOWLES: So would you see that as a universal coastal planning set of guidelines or a scheme—like scheme amendments right across all these LGAs?

Cr McCUBBIN: Absolutely. Whilst local government I absolutely think needs to retain the right to have input from our local people into planning law—I am not suggesting that that is taken over by the State Government in any way, shape or form—

Mr FOWLES: I am shocked.

Cr McCUBBIN: I am suggesting that what happens in Port Albert should be the same as what happens in Lakes Entrance should be the same as what is happening in San Remo. There is absolutely no difference in those communities in terms of the effect of climate change. Admittedly we understand individual differences in sea level rise occurring in different places. We get that. But there should be consistency of policy outlook, plus—

Mr FOWLES: Technically, do you see that happening by way of overlay—that there is a climate change or a sea level rise overlay? Or do you actually see it more as ‘These matters must be taken into consideration’ or an assumption that the sea level will rise by x centimetres or metres when factoring into decisions?

Cr McCUBBIN: Well, that is right. I see it that what is happening is individual communities and their local council are having debates, if you like, about the effect of climate change on their communities, and right now it is pitting us against our coastal communities, it is pitting coastal communities—what they were able to get is what they want. Everybody is looking around the room and saying, ‘Quite frankly, whatever Brighton gets is what I want’. It is ridiculous that we are having these little communities of influence all fighting amongst themselves as to what the effects are. It should be a consistency of approach, no matter where you live.

Mr FOWLES: So, again, are you after guidance as to what the likely scientific outcomes are or are you after a set of rules such that no-one—we sort of assume that the shoreline moves—

Cr McCUBBIN: My personal view is—and I will couch that—I think we need a uniform set of rules. My other insistence is that we also need support from our planning authorities to be able to deal with the changes which are occurring but also there is a need to deal with infrastructure changes which are happening along the coast. Our coastal communities are really important to Victoria, and right now they are under pressure because of sea level changes. Really councils are at the cutting edge of that and I think we need funding to be able to deal with it, both from a planning and infrastructure point of view.

I also say that it is very, very difficult. Climate change, particularly in rural councils, is a huge issue, but we lack the resources to be able to deal with things, and coastal planning is just one of them. It is just a huge thing that we have over the top of us. As you know, we have capped rates increases, which I am not arguing against, but at the same time we have limited ability to be able to take on board a lot of climate change changes that are occurring.

Mr FOWLES: Forgive me for not understanding the exact boundaries of all these councils, but how many of the councils here have coastal—

Cr McCUBBIN: We do.

Cr HOWE: We’ve got boggage!

Cr McCUBBIN: Yes, Latrobe’s got—

Cr HOWE: Got a few lakes.

Cr McCUBBIN: Yes, you’ve got lakes, haven’t you? Both ends of the spectrum.

Mr FOWLES: I am not sure that the lakes are going up; they are probably going down.

Cr McCUBBIN: But you will be talking to East Gippsland tomorrow and I am sure that will be a big part of their discussion as well in terms of their being coastal. We have actually got some coastal things which we have actually put on the table, awaiting some detail from State Government about where we should be going with them, because to be honest we actually ran through a whole set of planning changes to the coast and then the State Government overturned them, so we now do not know where to go.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask: is there a common set of data that the councils are able to access in terms of identifying—

Cr McCUBBIN: There is common source of the data from my understanding. You might know better.

Ms GRIEPSMA: Yes, I can add a little bit more to that.

Cr McCUBBIN: That would be nice.

Ms GRIEPSMA: What has happened across Victoria is that there have been a number of local coastal hazard assessments that have been done which talk about predicted sea level rise based on the best available data. There were five of those pilots done back in about 2010, and the Western Port coastline, which is part of Bass Coast, was one of those. Then often what happens is the council can introduce that into their planning scheme for a land subject to inundation overlay, which is what has been done at Bass Coast. But it does not cover the entire Victorian coastline; it does not cover the entire Australian coastline. So what is happening is there is an absence of scientific evidence-based decision-making going on around planning on our coastlines. Without that data and evidence base it is very difficult for councils to make good decisions around their planning schemes and where settlements and continuous building should occur. Part of the conversation along our coastlines needs to be around accommodating, adapting and retreating, and those three topics should be spoken about together, around where our settlement boundaries are. It was recently included within discussions around the *Marine and Coastal Act* and the formation of the marine and coastal policy by the State Government as well. It was a large topic of conversation within that. It should also then be considered when looking at climate change and having a planning scheme and a climate change act actually speak to each other, which is a bit of a gap that we have at the moment. The two pieces of legislation do not actually recognise each other in the way they should to assist in good decision-making.

Cr McCUBBIN: And I would absolutely agree with that.

Mr FOWLES: So in terms of the interaction you are saying that the *Climate Change Act*, which I guess is largely prospective, and the planning act, which is very much a set of micro rules about how things happen—when you talk about them interacting better, do you mean that the things that are countenanced in the *Climate Change Act* ought be reflected in the planning act?

Ms GRIEPSMA: Yes. At the moment current land use planning and building regulations and policy to improve efficiencies but also climate resilience do not actually speak to each other—the *Planning and Environment Act*, which was 1987, and the schedule 1 part of the *Climate Change Act*, which is 2017. So you have got two pieces of policy that were written in very different eras around our climate change conversations as well.

The planning decisions with regard to climate change are not considered within the *Planning and Environment Act*. The *Planning and Environment Act* is essentially silent. It is up to councils to introduce it in their local planning schemes. Hence Darren's comments around ensuring that there is some guidance statewide, then the next step would be obviously federally as well.

Mr FOWLES: So without in any way getting ahead of the decisions of this Committee, if we were to come back with something that said that all of those climate change matters ought be considered and spelled out within a revised planning act, that is something that—I am getting lots of nods.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask in terms of inundation: you might have a property. At the moment it is safe, if you like, yet the data and the science suggest that there might be a problem on that particular piece of land—let

us say in 50 years time. When councils are considering planning scheme amendments to put in place inundation arrangements, or modelling, or whatever the right term is, how far out are you projecting the problem? Is it 50 years? Is it 20 years? Is it more immediate? Is there statewide policy guidance around how that might occur?

Ms GRIEPSMA: Not that I am aware of. I am not a planner; I will put that on the table—

The CHAIR: Neither am I.

Ms GRIEPSMA: but the data that is available at the moment is some predictions around 2100. But what we are now finding too is that that data was put together a good 10 years ago. The acceleration of sea level rise and also coastal erosion that is occurring is at a greater rate than was actually predicted in that data. So the data needs to be reviewed and evaluated as we are moving in time, because the predictions are only the best available predictions at the time of the evidence.

Mr FOWLES: So functionally and practically how often do you see those revisions happening? It is hard. When you talk about settlement boundaries, if I was taking a 20-, 30- and 50-year-plus view on things, do you see us as needing to do it every five years?

Ms GRIEPSMA: I would suggest probably a 10- to 15-year horizon on a number of the scientific reports around sea level rise and coastal erosion issues. I say that purely because of the volume of work that is involved in doing those. But some of them do not actually exist at the moment to then be able to review, so the data needs to be established initially.

Cr McCUBBIN: If I can just fill in some of the things—and I absolutely agree with Deirdre in that—right now the catchment management authority has a lot of the carriage of that. So individual councils may have individual policies—I think we look at 2030 time line horizons and so on—but very much it is generated by the catchment management authority. We are required under the Act to take advice from the catchment management authority. We are not required any more to absolutely agree with them, but we are absolutely required to look at their recommendations moving forward, and the catchment managements have very particular horizons as to what they must look at.

Deirdre is absolutely right. The catchment management authority has a series of data that they get, sometimes that data is not complete or whatever. Anyway it sets up conversations between the local council, the catchment management authority and the local community. Say they do not agree with the data, and we are sitting in a council in Sale or whatever, in Wellington shire, trying to assess data on climate change prediction. You know, trying to listen to the catchment management authority but trying to listen to our local community as well. It is bunfights everywhere and we are a bit over it.

Cr Crossley, do you want to talk a little bit?

Cr CROSSLEY: Adding to that, the catchment management authority looks at prospective data, they look to the future, the community look at the past—‘Grampa said it never came up that far, so it is not going to do it now’. So there is a constant friction there as well, but also I think just with our experience we have had a conversation with our community every four years. The data has changed, so we have gone through this difficult conversation of what sea level rises will be, what the freeboard is going to be, for infill, for new developments on these areas, and then it comes around, new data comes in, and we have to go through those conversations again, and that creates—

The CHAIR: And they can be quite confronting conversations—

Cr CROSSLEY: Hell, yeah!

The CHAIR: because what you are planning schemes says you can do with a piece of land can materially change the value of that land.

Cr CROSSLEY: Absolutely, even the mere discussion of that leaves the community open. The community are telling us it leads to devaluation of prices because of that conversation, and the cost of insurance—every

time there is a new overlay, the first thing is the insurance are bleeding because of all these various impacts of extreme weather conditions. They try to mitigate their losses and their risk, so the premiums go up.

I was just listening to Radio National on the way in. They were saying that some of these areas will be uninsurable, so we will have people that cannot cover the risk that they are living in currently or into the future. So are we leaving these decisions to the insurance companies, instead of being proactive and making decisions at a Government level? We really need to have those frameworks that can enable our communities to plan and give it to a sustainable community, instead of a piecemeal bit where we are not best equipped to make these huge, long-term impacting and liabilities not only on individuals but on the risk of decision-making with the council as well.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask, so the council I presume—in both sets of councils you will be potentially the foreshore manager, is that right, at least in part?

Ms GRIEPSMA: Yes, in Bass—

The CHAIR: Do you make assessments with the infrastructure you might be putting on the foreshore around sea level rise and climate change and some of those challenges?

Cr McCUBBIN: You can probably answer that better.

Ms GRIEPSMA: In Bass Coast shire we manage 42 kilometres of foreshore. We are the Crown land manager for 42 kilometres, there are also other Crown land managers such as Phillip Island Nature Parks and some coastal committees, Parks Victoria as well. The policy is such that council protects public infrastructure; we do not protect private infrastructure. This is a conversation within our communities as well. Where there is a path or a road, council will protect that—in this case the Inverloch Surf Lifesaving Club is a prime example that has been in the media a lot. The council will protect that infrastructure, but say on the Silverleaf foreshore on Phillip Island, where there is no public infrastructure between the edge of the water and those private properties, council will not step in and protect those private properties without considerable discussion around economically how that might work.

Keeping in mind that we have some other councils here that do not have coastal areas, the catchment management authority and the issues that those councils face are also around flooding that comes from waterways. Where we are seeing climate events where we have got, for instance, perhaps less rainfall events but they are more intense, so the flooding issues that come through.

The insurability of properties is a huge concern moving forward, and we are seeing that already in the United States and in the UK as well where properties are just uninsurable. Therefore that affects the whole economy around housing sales and the like.

The CHAIR: In a practical sense, just fleshing that out a little bit, you might have an established community and not much has changed in that community. The infrastructure that has been in place has serviced that community very adequately for 40 or 50 years, but with climate change we are seeing perhaps less rainfall but more intense activity. That might mean that councils have to retrofit that community with bigger pipes to deal with storm surge.

Cr McCUBBIN: My personal view is that councils would be very reticent to enter into any new infrastructure upgrades for coastal communities unless it was absolutely crystal clear as to the climate change implications of that. I think all of us are aware of Byron Bay and other councils which actually did make infrastructure developments on the coast, who were then afterwards sued because those infrastructure developments were actually detrimental to some houses on the foreshore. So in other words, if you put a seawall in—everyone says put a seawall in so you put a seawall in—and that seawall causes damage to somebody else down the line or something else, the council is absolutely responsible and liable for that.

Mitigation and risk profiles are a key concern for local government, and I would suggest any infrastructure on our coastal regions—we would be nervous as hell.

Ms GRIEPSMA: I think the other consideration there is that councils generally plan and build their infrastructure, for instance, drainage to a 1-in-100 rainfall event. As an example, on 10 May there was an intense weather event in Cape Patterson, which is a coastal community, and there was significant damage done to that community including to the foreshore, the lifesaving club and a number of private properties. What happened in that case was that we got a microburst hail event and the hail blocked all the drains. It would not have mattered what size those drains were, they were not going to be effective in that particular instance. So the ability to actually plan around some of these events is not within councils' reach through their budgets for a start, let alone actually trying to get in there and retrofit old infrastructure.

Cr McCUBBIN: And once you make the change you own the change, so it is quite a problem for local councils. I am very much aware that we could spend all day talking about this, and I really appreciate your questions because it is a really important issue for us, but Michael has been sitting there quite good. I am sure he has emergency planning and other things he would like to talk about. Sorry, I just pre-empted something, but anyway, Michael, away you go.

Cr LEANEY: Thanks, Darren. Baw Baw shire is located to the west and the north of Latrobe city where we are. I suppose it is very different to other areas in Gippsland in that we have a very strong growth profile. We are running at about 3.5 to 5 per cent population growth. That is primarily through six townships within the shire—Longwarry, Drouin, Warragul, Yarragon and Trafalgar, with the odd one out being Neerim South—going through massive growth at the moment and becoming peri-urban suburbs of Melbourne. A lot of people are commuting out to Melbourne from those towns. Five of those six are all located on the railway line and on the freeway to Melbourne, so we have got a huge commuter base heading in. As a consequence it puts a real strain on the shire in terms of our ability to do much, because our population is increasing dramatically yet our rate base is not increasing; the pie is just been sliced into smaller and smaller slices as opposed to growing. There are some issues with that.

The state planning schemes require land to be developed at certain sizes: down to 300 square metres. As a consequence we are losing not only prime agricultural land but, more importantly, a lot of the properties that are being built are literally being built eave to eave with no opportunity for any kind of greening within those townships. We have an excellent group in the area called Friends of Drouin Trees. They do a lot of work trying to preserve the trees in and around Drouin. Unfortunately it is a bit of a losing battle given that there are often no planning constraints or offsets in relation to the removal of trees, and yet when new estates are built there is very little opportunity to create what they determine to be something like an urban forest to actually get trees into these urban areas. This is a real shame because we are actually losing not only the look and feel of the place but basically it is becoming, as a lot of people say locally, the Pakenhamisation of Drouin and Warragul which is a major concern.

The east of the shire is primarily agricultural and also involved in tourism which is a key part of the industry. Agriculture, obviously in terms of climate change and dairying, is very water intensive. We need our grass to grow at a certain rate in order for those large dairy farms to survive. And as Deirdre was saying, we are getting these changes. The rainfall in some ways is staying stagnant, but instead of it being consistent rainfall throughout the year we are getting nothing, nothing, nothing and then a huge downpour. That is leading to problems with not only operating farms but it also means in terms of the infrastructure for council we are having increased problems with roads—roads drying out and then when it does rain they are being damaged by the heavy downpours that occur. It also means in areas like the Strzelecki Ranges, which are on the southern side of the shire, we are having hillsides that are drying out during the dry periods and then once the rain is added on that causes landslips and major problems like that. So the changes in the pattern are causing as much difficulty as the changes in the actual rainfall.

Another issue I suppose is the complete opposite to the coastal areas. We have got a lot of mountain areas and one of our key tourism assets for the region is Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort, which obviously is reliant on snowfall, and snowfall levels have been consistently falling—excuse the pun—and decreasing over the last 20 or 30 years as a consequence of climate change. And it is something you can see happen before your eyes. This is a location that attracts over 100 000 visitors a year and has a key role in supporting the tourism economy in our shire, so obviously mitigating climate change is important just on that basis of having the ability to have snowfall on the ground. But it is not just the tourism; people have to remember that that snowmelt then runs off

into the rivers and then supports agriculture downstream in places like Wellington in the Macalister irrigation area as an example.

We are restrained in terms of our resources, and that is simply because, as I said earlier, with such a huge population growth most of our money is just spent on trying to keep up in terms of the new estates and the new people that are coming into the area. Just what is happening in terms of schools and kindergartens puts a real strain on the shire, which makes it very difficult for us to look at increasing our capacity in terms of climate change. We do rely on some of the volunteer organisations, but we offer really simple things, like we do provide a service—but it is a fee for service—for energy-efficient homes. Given the sheer volume of homes that are being built in our area, this should be something that should really be mandatory—that we actually go out and try and make the houses, the new buildings that are being built as efficient as possible—but at the moment it is a fee for service.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask, Michael, in terms of your shire, has the shire done any work in terms of population projections—where you are at now, where you are going to be in a decade, 20 years and 30 years? What support is available from the State Government or indeed the Commonwealth to help support that sort of work?

Cr LEANEY: We have certainly done that research and all of the research so far has proven to be dramatically wrong: it is under in a major way. Drouin, for instance, was predicted to have a population of 16 000 by 2030 and it is already over 16 000. It was done in 2006–07 from my memory, and in terms of population growth all those figures are dramatically under. So it is predicted that at the moment we have got a population of just shy of 50 000. Baw Baw shire will probably have a population in the vicinity of 60 000 to 65 000 within five to six years. That is how fast it is happening. You only have to drive down the freeway and look at the huge volume of estates that have been put in around Drouin and Warragul, continuing into Yarragon and Trafalgar, and they have an effect.

It should be pointed out in a discussion about flooding that three of the major towns that are being developed—Yarragon, Trafalgar and Longwarry—are all in flood zones. There is great risk there, and it is a concern to council that buildings are being put up in areas that potentially could be flooded into the future. Again there is this whole thing about where you are trying to restrain what is happening but of course the market is leading the way and quite often the State planning policy means we have very limited ability to actually stop some of the developments that are going in. We are finding that we may object or may refuse an application and that application just simply goes through to VCAT where it is approved. So it is a major problem that is coming up, and our population is skyrocketing. We are in this funny no-man's-land. We are not able to access a lot of the funding that Cardinia and Casey can get. We are not—

The CHAIR: That is because you are outside of the urban growth boundary.

Cr LEANEY: We are just outside the limit. I believe Matthew Guy, in a former government, actually designated Warragul and Drouin as being growth corridors, but then there was no allocation or ability for us to gain money to actually provide the services. So we are in this no-man's-land. We are encouraging Government, both State and Federal, to give us support, but it is very, very challenging for the shire at the moment, I can tell you.

Mr FOWLES: So why is it that the rate base is not increasing if the population is increasing?

Cr LEANEY: Because we can only increase our rates by 2 per cent a year.

Mr FOWLES: But if there are hundreds of new dwellings—they are all new ratepayers. Previously it was agricultural land, paying very low rates.

Cr LEANEY: Yes. It just means the cake is sliced into further slices. So, for instance, just say there are 10 houses in a street and they are all charged \$1000 each for their rates. That means there would be a \$10 000 rate from that street. The next year we can only increase the rates by 2 per cent, which means we add an extra \$200 onto the rate base, which is then split evenly among the 10. If we add an 11th house, it is not an extra 10 per cent, it means that number there is now divided by 11. The problem for us is that it does not increase the actual rates you get. You can only increase the total pool of rates by 2 per cent. You cannot increase the rates

overall per person. So the pie only increases by 2 per cent, but we are slicing the pie into smaller and smaller slices because more people are coming into the area.

Mr FOWLES: So you are saying the operation of the rates cap is effectively a cap on your gross budget.

Cr LEANEY: Correct. The challenge with that is—

Mr FOWLES: It is not a cap on the individual ratepayer, in effect.

Cr LEANEY: That is correct. It is a cap on the gross budget. So it means that, for instance—

Mr FOWLES: So you could be servicing an extra 10 000 people.

Cr LEANEY: Yes. And we have got to provide kindergartens with no extra money. We have got to provide roads with no extra money. That is the problem. Rate capping works in shires that are stable, but when you have a shire such as ours that has huge growth—and I think we might be the second or third fastest growing area within the state; I think we are only beaten by Casey and Cardinia, who are the two in front of us and we are number three—and we are not classed as a peri-urban shire, it is a major issue in terms of our ability to provide the services.

So if we add an estate of 300 people—or 300 houses, I should say, which happens; you can see it every day—that does not mean that for each of those houses we will get another \$1000 for each house and we get an extra \$300 000. It does not mean that at all. It just means that the pool is now sliced smaller and smaller. So the way I say it to people is that the pie grows by 2 per cent but the more people that come in just means you cut the pie into smaller slices.

Mr FOWLES: I understand that point better now. I will confess I did not realise it operated in that way.

Cr LEANEY: Effectively our rate in the dollar in Baw Baw, in three years, has fallen. Three years ago the rate in the dollar for a residential house was 0.0048. It is now 0.0032. So it has declined by 20 per cent as a rate of the dollar because the pie is being cut into smaller slices.

Mr HAMER: So this is happening at similar councils. All the three new councils who spoke—

Cr GIBSON: It will keep on going down the line. Once Baw Baw is filled up it will keep going, down to Latrobe and then Wellington. It will just keep on going. And we do not have the services to maintain that. And we do not have the infrastructure with the rail or anything like that to actually cope with that. You try and get on the freeway from either Baw Baw or Latrobe now, even at 5 o'clock at night, no, you are going to get collared with—

Cr LEANEY: The development of regional rail is a great thing—

Cr GIBSON: Yes.

Cr LEANEY: But the knock-on effect of regional rail is that people are making an economic choice to move into the area. You can buy a house in Warragul for about \$150 000 less than what you can purchase it for in Pakenham, as an example. Some people make that decision that, 'Look, for an extra 20 minutes on the train, 25 minutes on the train, I am going to save myself \$100 000'. So it is being very much driven by the marketplace. Also not everyone is commuting all the way into the city; they might be commuting to the south-eastern suburbs—Dandenong, in those kind of areas—but we do have a very strong commuter belt. I would say one of the things we did bring up in our report was recycling and recycling of plastics et cetera. I would encourage the Government to look at a bottle refund return—

Mr FOWLES: Bottle deposit scheme.

Cr LEANEY: A bottle deposit scheme. We were very strong on that within our formal discussion. But also really simple things should be looked at. We are about to embark on a major rail revitalisation program within Gippsland. It is happening in other areas in Victoria as well, but Gippsland is certainly getting there. We should be looking at products like recycled plastic sleepers, which are being trialled in Melbourne at the moment. They

have been trialled on some tourism heritage railways. Not only does that encourage the recycling of plastic materials but also both of the manufacturing plants for those at the moment, while not in Gippsland, are located in both Ballarat and Mildura, so it would actually help regional economies in other parts of Victoria to use recycled plastic.

The CHAIR: I just want to talk about planning schemes and the new estates that have been built in your municipality. Is there any way at the moment within those planning schemes that are enabling these estates to be built to ensure that the developments are taking account of climate change—making sure that there are adequate green spaces, making sure that those green spaces are having appropriate trees and the like planted? Are our planning schemes developed to that extent that those things are happening so that we are building new estates that are in effect more resilient to climate change?

Cr LEANEY: In effect my personal response is no. I mean, obviously houses that are built have to come up to a standard and they have to be built to a standard in terms of their energy efficiency et cetera in order to get their rating. That is the house side of it. How the estates are often laid out is that often a very small amount of open space is allocated or is required under the planning scheme. There is also that—I suppose this is purely driven by the market—the smaller the title of land, the more titles you can fit onto an estate, which means the more money you make, but then when people build on those titles there is generally no restriction as to how much land has to be left over.

Cr McCUBBIN: Can I say that one of the key issues is that the orientation of the house is not taken into account either, which is a key issue. You can talk retrofitting all you like, but if your house is pointing in the wrong direction it is ruddy hard to do.

The CHAIR: So I guess it is the public space I am interested in as well. I agree with you that there is a rating system for the dwelling and there will be certain standards about how much percentage of the block can be taken up, but what about the streetscapes?

Cr LEANEY: Streetscapes are often constrained. I mean, we have seen this with new estates. Again, we would prefer to have wider roads so we could put street plantings in the roads, but again the planning scheme only requires—I think it is—10 metres, 9 metres as the minimum. The balancing act is around minimising the amount of farmland and available land that is consumed by housing, so that means you have got to jam more into a smaller space, but jamming more people into a smaller space means that you do not have parkland, you often have streets that are narrow and that restricts their ability to have street plantings in them. And the actual properties themselves—I mean we have got estates going in where the front yards are 3 metres deep. That is tiny; that is really small. It just means that you also do not get—as Friends of Drouin's Trees would say—that urban forest. Look at the green, leafy suburbs of Melbourne. They actually contribute to mitigating climate change, but also, looking at pollution, they absorb the heat from the concrete and stuff around it, and that is not part of the planning scheme at the moment. I think there probably needs to be consideration going forward in terms of looking at the planning scheme to actually consider the climate and the microclimates we create in those new estates.

Cr GIBSON: Because we are part of the Victorian planning scheme, just because we are rural, it does not matter. We are all under the one planning scheme. You are right—they are small blocks and narrow streets; you cannot get emergency services down—but if councils say 'no' to it they just go to VCAT and that is it. It is overturned.

Cr HOWE: In Latrobe city we have just undergone a major planning scheme amendment review. We have got a maximum of 11 lots per hectare so you cannot be any more dense than that for new developments. We have a minimum of 5 per cent open space and our road width is 7 metres. That has gone up from 5 metres.

Mr FOWLES: Sorry, you have put that up to the Government and that has been approved?

Cr HOWE: It is done, yes.

Mr FOWLES: So is that route—that review of your own planning scheme—not open to other councils? Has the Victorian Government refused any amendments like that?

Cr LEANEY: From what I understand, there were precinct structure plans developed for both Drouin and Warragul. That was done by the former Government. They are very, very clear about what they can do. It was basically because Drouin and Warragul were seen as being commuter suburbs to Melbourne. From what I understand it was basically a case of, 'We're going to try and cram as much as we possibly can into those areas'.

Mr FOWLES: There is also an implication on housing cost too?

Cr LEANEY: Correct, yes. Obviously the area around Drouin and Warragul has some of the best soil and the best farmland and the best water fall, so I can understand the criteria for not having houses built on good farmland, and that was part of the premise of it to start with. The flip side of this of course is that we have other areas within the shire that are in decline. Part of the challenge with areas in decline—and I am thinking Noojee, Rawson, Willow Grove et cetera—is they are constrained by a whole range of other issues that mean people are stopped from building there. Bushfire overlays basically mean that anywhere that is not in an urban area, we do not want you to build in. So we are actually forcing people to go into very populous areas like Drouin and Warragul that become heat sinks and we are abandoning some of our country towns.

I think the balance is not right. I think that we should have the ability for people to live out in the bush at lower density and actually encourage people to plant trees, encourage people to have bushland settings. While yes, there is a risk of bushfire et cetera—and I have been through a few myself—I think we have got to weigh up that there is also a greater risk by having areas that are just abandoned and then pushing people into urbanised areas that have no kind of climate mitigation in them at all with trees.

Cr McCUBBIN: Without cutting across Michael too much, and yourself, Chair, I am very aware that Deirdre has probably come further than any of us today, from Bass Coast. Bass Coast really are there on the cutting edge with Totally Renewable Phillip Island and a bunch of other projects. They are involved in the roadmap to renewables with us. It would be lovely to have Deirdre say a few words too, I think.

Ms GRIEPSMA: Thank you, Darren. I would pick up on just a couple of points. We were talking before about the way that the *Planning and Environment Act* and the *Climate Change Act* speak to each other. If planning decisions were made with regard to climate change, it could actually be a really big catalyst to actually reducing emissions as well.

Heat islands, which are sort of those concrete blocks that absorb—if we had a little less concrete in our world, we could improve some of our green open spaces. There is a 5 per cent of development for public open spaces declaration by a lot of councils, but again it is for the councils to determine that rather than the State. So again perhaps some guidance from the State would be helpful in ensuring that those levels are continually increased, not decreased.

The other implication we have is around the 10/30 rule that came in after the Black Saturday bushfires. Not meaning to take away from the people at this particular table who went through those as well—it was a very traumatic time—but the ability for people just to cut down vegetation within a close proximity to their primary accommodation has made an impact on the greening of our communities and our towns. Certainly Bass Coast has been asking for that to be reconsidered. There may be some areas where that is still appropriate but certainly the fact that it has come in as a bit of a blanket opportunity for people to remove vegetation has been taken advantage of at times.

I think with respect to land use planning too, the driver at the moment is the economy, not the environment or the social aspect of the way that we live. The formula needs to actually change around placing better value on our agricultural lands as well. Bass Coast Shire Council support an increase in the land sector, particularly agriculture and land use, to provide an increase in carbon sequestration. We have been very busy planting a lot of biolinks and vegetation to improve the movement of flora and fauna and our adaptation to climate change, but it is certainly not enough. I think councils can play a role in land use in the potential establishment and revenue opportunities from a carbon offset market mechanism, which should not discount the spread of emission reduction opportunities—and this is something that has not been looked at a whole lot; it is new and emerging at the moment—and that public land, which is council and Crown land, and assets may be able to contribute to offset opportunities through carbon sequestration with increased funding, research and further

investigation into stimulating land use change and increased vegetation cover. So that might change the drivers in the economic situation that we have at the moment.

Michael also mentioned about commuting. Down in Bass Coast we do not actually have a rail line beyond Cranbourne, which is not in Bass Coast, and we understand that infrastructure cannot always be rolled out into every area. But what that does mean is people jump in their cars and they get on the roads and they drive to a train station in Pakenham or Cranbourne to go into Melbourne. So the emissions that are coming from our single car use are another thing with respect to climate change—I am going to move the conversation back a bit towards climate change. The electric vehicle manufacturing industry that has been put forward for Latrobe Valley to have a major part in—it will be great to see that happening, because one of the biggest issues we have is that we all want to try and do a better job but how do we transition our communities and what is the social impact of people then not necessarily having employment through the likes of some of the core industries that we have relied upon for many years? People who live in those other shires, such as Wellington and Bass Coast and South Gippsland, they also work in if not those industries then subsidiary industries that come out of those. So it is not about: should we adapt? We should; there is no question around that. It is: how do we adapt in a manner that actually brings our communities along?

Bass Coast, as Darren alluded to, has been leading the charge. I guess we have a slightly different demographic: we have a high tourism base. Our population increases from around—now I have got to try and remember what these figures are. It increases approximately by 80 000 over the summer period. That is a huge influx of people, whether they are day visitors or whether they come down and actually enjoy spending a weekend or a couple of weeks in Bass Coast Shire Council, either on Phillip Island or through those coastal communities such as Cape Paterson and Inverloch, Kilcunda. So there is the infrastructure that is required also: we cannot build to that high peak. Again that impacts the placement of coastal infrastructure as well for the high demand use that we have.

Look, Bass Coast Shire Council, we recognise climate change. There has not been any question around that from council. In 2014 we made a very clear statement around that—that the impacts are real and they are affecting our community. In 2017, through council's plan, Bass Coast shire committed to a 50 per cent reduction in corporate greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 compared to 2009–10 levels. We have achieved that—really proud of the work that has been done—and that is through the introduction of a full food and garden organic waste collection system. So that makes a big impact, and I know the other Gippsland councils are looking at that at the moment as a way of moving forward. Also some other actions which a lot of councils have taken up are around changing streetlighting but also looking at power purchasing agreements where they can purchase renewable energy as well, so there is a lot of action that has been taken by the community. But we are finding our own way. We are kind of stumbling through. State Government are assisting us in that as much as they can but there is no real clear direction. We would certainly welcome more assistance and guidance in that.

In August this year Bass Coast Shire Council declared a climate emergency. We are the first Gippsland council to do that—there are a number of councils. What that essentially means is business as usual, the way we are doing things, will not cut it any more. Our community want to see a more accelerated change to reduce emissions in our shire. So we have just done that and we are looking at going out to our community, including our businesses, to see how that can happen. We have also determined an aspirational target of net zero by 2030. Again, that scientific data at the moment is absent so it is an aspirational target rather than a science-based target. But our community is also very active. We have two particular groups which are very mobilised and very organised: the Bass Coast Climate Action Network and also the Totally Renewable Phillip Island group. They are actually pushing council along at the moment to be making decisions and making sure that climate change implications are considered in the decision-making that we have.

I think, in closing the statements I am making at the moment, it is important to realise too that that a one-size-fits-all solution is not appropriate. You have got different communities, you have got different demographics, you have got different social implications that come about by making change, so it is about looking at what is appropriate with respect to climate change action and emission reduction in those communities. But certainly a governing framework from the State would be helpful; from the Commonwealth it would be great as well. That is outside of the influence of this particular day, but we will keep lobbying and advocating in that direction as

well, because you can see in front of you today the diversity of councils that sit in front of you. We are only one part of the state, but we are a big part, and we think the most beautiful part.

Cr McCUBBIN: We are all one big happy family, aren't we? Yes, we are. We are different in Gippsland. We reckon it is a great place to live, and we all work together, don't we?

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Are there any other comments? Are there any questions from my colleagues?

Mr HAMER: I just had a question back on the research centre that you were proposing. You mentioned Germany briefly, and I was just wondering if there were international examples that you would draw from, or that you know of, that may be doing this work, because I know you talk about the hydrogen and that has been talked about for many years. I think the chemistry is understood, but actually making that into a commercial reality has probably proven somewhat more challenging. So I was just wondering: has that been explored as part of the feasibility study?

Cr WHITE: The examples I referred to were as a result of some research in relation to an organisation called Covestro in Germany. That is the organisation that is actually doing this work and has created these products. But if you are looking to broaden your knowledge and understanding, there is the journal called *Carbon Capture Journal* that is available online, which gives you the opportunity to understand what is going on in the world around us in regard to carbon capture utilisation. I think the momentum is growing, and I think that we really need to be part of this action. I think that the opportunity of having a research centre based here in Latrobe, in collaboration with Federation University, would be a very important move in the right direction in that regard.

Just while I have got the floor, I should mention that Latrobe city was, I suppose, trailblazing in relation to the establishment of a wood encouragement policy—probably the first one. This is about having wood as part of the specifications for any council buildings that we are looking at creating, and this is something that has been picked up by other municipalities as well as the MAV and beyond Victoria—Tasmania et cetera.

The other thing I just wanted to perhaps mention was that I think that it is important to understand that in terms of the CO₂ emissions that are produced, not only from the electricity industry but also from the transport industry and from the stationary industrial processes industry, even we the population are having a significant influence. That is where I think that in Australia we are very fortunate, as I said in my comments earlier, in the fact that the Federal Government and the State Government have been willing to commit to this hydrogen project that is going through a pilot phase. Hopefully the wheels are turning on that one, but I do not hear Australia talking about it yet. Whether we are just sort of sitting there to see how it all unfolds, but I think we should be proactive in that space as far as Australia is concerned.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask, Darrell—and I am certainly not an engineer or a scientist—

Cr WHITE: Neither am I!

The CHAIR: but with the idea of, obviously, carbon capture and storage, I am presuming that from your perspective that might see the existing coalmines, the life of those mines and the power stations attached to them, being extended. Is that the proposition of why carbon capture and storage should be considered?

Cr WHITE: Well, I think carbon capture and storage at the moment, to me, is a solution. It will have a positive impact. We know about what is happening down at Colac Otway at the moment in terms of what is going on there. So we are not saying, 'Don't do that'—we acknowledge that. I think particularly in relation to this hydrogen project the idea of carbon capture and storage is critical to that particular process as well. So from that point of view, it is not off the table. But the ultimate solution is to turn the liability into an asset. The CO₂—we see it as a liability. Why can't we turn it into an asset? And that is what this is doing. We need to build on that, I think, for the sake of the planet.

Cr McCUBBIN: I am on the CarbonNet community reference committee. I absolutely agree with Cr White in what he suggests. There is a way to go with sequestration. My personal view is that the existing energy industry is not a client for that. But certainly in terms of future industrialisation of particular things—hydrogen—if you are going to create hydrogen from coal it is absolutely essential that you have sequestration

in order for that to be generated. I have listened to Dr Alan Finkel, and I actually believe that there is a market for hydrogen, even in the conventional gas market. They are currently in South Australia doing trials on bleeding 10 per cent of hydrogen-produced gas into the existing gas structure, and that is working fine. So I think in the gas market there is huge potential, particularly in large transports—getting a ship from here to Japan. Japan is really interested in this technology, and Latrobe is working really hard with some Japanese partners. The only way to get shipping to work in the future could well be with hydrogen gas, so there is the potential there.

Our communities are concerned about sequestration. It is happening off the coast of Wellington. I should say, the Golden Beach community is concerned about the safety of it and otherwise, and they should be, because we need to make sure that the science is right. But in terms of the need, it is absolutely there, and the potential of hydrogen is absolute as well.

Cr HOWE: So the answer to your question is yes!

Cr GIBSON: Can I just add two things please? To keep on going from what Cr White was saying about the wood encouragement policy—it was not just the Victorian councils that took that on board, it was also the ALGA. That is across the board, because that is all about climate change—because it is renewable and it stores the CO₂. They have done research which shows that if you have enough in schools, it actually brings the behaviour up a lot and the stress down. So it has so many different properties that are of benefit. If you do the right harvesting and you actually have the plantations for the timber, it is renewable, so it is not, ‘Just cut it all down’—it is not like that. So we are trying as best we can to be on the page with climate change, and it is the same with the mine. Now, the Government is saying, ‘Just flood the mine’. Well, that is actually going to impact on Wellington and East Gipps because of the water and where they get the water from. Now, if you actually look overseas at the Eden Project, you actually have—

Cr McCUBBIN: I like the Eden Project.

Cr GIBSON: Yes. You actually have a benefit—it helps with your climate. It takes the carbon out of the atmosphere. It does all of that. But more importantly for the link, it will help stabilise the actual freeway, because we have already had the collapse with the freeway. There is a report out just recently that shows that if you just flood the mine, it is going to drop it, so the freeway will actually be in danger. So just saying, ‘Flood that’, you are going to impact right up the line with our Gippsland councils and you are actually going to put the freeway and the actual climate at all—

Ms GRIEPSMA: You would also significantly change the water budget. That water has to come from somewhere. There is not an infinite amount of water, so the environmental impacts would be significant elsewhere.

The CHAIR: Just on that note, I think we might finish up. Thank you for coming today and presenting to us the challenges of climate change from Gippsland councils’ perspective. We very much do appreciate it. As indicated earlier, we will get transcripts to you as soon as we can for you to have a look at, and we will certainly publish those as quickly as we can. Thank you.

Ms GRIEPSMA: Thank you.

Cr GIBSON: Thank you.

Cr McCUBBIN: Thank you very much. Much appreciated.

Witnesses withdrew.