

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Bairnsdale—Thursday, 24 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

Mr Peter Gardner,

Ms Rosemary Gooch, and

Mr Nick Blandford, East Gippsland Climate Action Network.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing. I will just run through some important formalities before we begin.

All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary 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 the hearing even if you are just restating what you have said in the hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so for you to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the Committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you for making the time to meet with the Committee today. Could you please state your name and title before you commence your presentation.

Mr GARDNER: Peter Gardner is my name. I think I have been described as a climate activist. I have done a written submission hurriedly because I will not have enough time to give you everything I want to say.

Ms GREEN: Thank you. That is really helpful.

Mr GARDNER: A resume of what I have done: I have lived in the bush for most of my life. I have lived in a solar and wind house since 1982. I have now retired to Bairnsdale. In that time, since 1986, I have socialised with members of the CSIRO atmospheric physics department and so have been familiar with climate change since those very early days. But like most of us I have been involved in making a quid and all these other things, so I have done nothing very much about it. Incidentally, on my block of land I planted about 5000 trees, including about 500 from Landcare, right in the middle of the drought. I was not able to water them, so the survival rate was about 5 per cent. Fortunately I was looking on Google Earth other day and quite a few of the trees have come on otherwise.

In 2008 I saw on the internet the summer minimum Arctic ice sheet and decided that we were in a climate emergency—in 2008. Since that time I have stood for public office seven times, including for State Parliament twice. I have lost my deposit every time. I have not stood to gain office; I have stood to get publicity, which was fairly minimal. When I look at the cost of it all, it was probably a waste. So I have been doing other things. In 2012 I got my own website, and I have been blogging twice a week. I write articles or I use other people's articles—500 words or a bit more—on various aspects of climate change, including farming, soil and land care, but also the negative side, and the conclusion I have come to is that our community here is madly informed about the severe aspects of climate change—the climate emergency. I will just read a little bit here: so what is being done regionally is hardly anything at all as the general population is yet to comprehend the climate emergency. Therefore there is need for massive, continuing public education on this. We are all experts on weather, but very few of us have the understanding of the complexities of climate.

So why is it a climate emergency? I have listed four things in my written submission. The climate inertia, or thermal inertia, just is not understood by very many people at all. In fact I have had a hard time grasping it myself. The common interpretation of 'inertia' is us sitting on our bums doing nothing, whereas 'inertia' in a scientific sense is a body moving forward. I have been doing PowerPoint lectures with U3A and privately, and the analogy I use for climate emergency is the story of the *Titanic*.

The *Titanic* is powering along through the Atlantic Ocean getting warnings all the time; it got six warnings. It kept going at full speed until it saw the ice—until the ice was spotted. By the time the ice was spotted and the engines were stopped it was impossible to avoid that ice. I forget what the statistic is, but from full speed to stop the ship takes something like 20 nautical miles.

The second one is tipping points. We can choose a tipping point in the *Titanic* analogy. The tipping point was when they were getting the warnings. By the time the ice was actually spotted, the tipping point was passed. The *Titanic* was doomed by that point.

There is another one called ‘positive feedbacks’, which is not understood. The common one that is used is: as the Arctic ice sheet melts, the albedo effect—the reflective effect of the ice—is lost. The darker ocean absorbs more heat and it becomes a circular thing. In some instances it would be quite possible, for what you get is a runaway greenhouse effect. It is most unlikely this is going to happen on Earth because I do not think there is enough carbon and greenhouse gases to make the runaway greenhouse effect, but it has happened. Venus, in our solar system, is a perfect example of a runaway greenhouse effect.

The fourth one, which I do not use very often, is what is called global dimming. The pollution put out in China and India and these other places is actually cooling the planet slightly, or it is making the warming less noticeable.

They are the four things that they talk about, and they are sometimes lectures of 2 hours, which can be pretty boring. So I want to emphasise the need for education at all levels. Our education for the general public now is through news media, News Corp, and it is no wonder that there are a lot of people out here—farmers, some of my neighbours—who not only do not recognise the emergency, they do not recognise climate change at all. So it is understandable I lost my deposits.

I think we have a local climate emergency. The thing that is most affected in East Gippsland is the timber industry. We have timber and we have farming. The offshore oil is on its way out; offshore oil and gas are probably on their way out now. I concentrated my written report on the timber industry. There is getting more and more scientific evidence that those logging coupes should not be logged, basically. They should be left preserved, protected. That does not mean less jobs, it actually means more jobs.

Another thing about our climate emergency is we have to go back in history to World War II when there was actually an emergency, a wartime emergency, and the thing that we have here now is we have councils and even governments, like the UK and Canada, declaring climate emergencies. But if they say something and then they do not do anything about it, it means they do not really understand what the problem is.

With the climate emergency, I talk about a just transition. It is applicable to the logging industry, it is applicable to the Latrobe Valley. If 700 jobs are lost at Yallourn because the Portland smelter closes down, for instance—and if the Portland smelter closes down, with its unofficial fossil fuel subsidies, Yallourn will be gone in two or three years. It will not last. It is going to go anyway. It will be gone by 2030, so what is needed here is a whole lot of planning, and it is going to need government funds and in the end it is going to mean bipartisan political action. Whatever your party is, the climate emergency is above party loyalties. You have your legacy to think about and you have your family too. Science is more important than politics. That is what it boils down to. It was a terrible mistake that the science was politicised. I better leave it there.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Rosemary and Nick, do you want to introduce yourselves and make any introductory comments?

Mr BLANDFORD: I am Nick Blandford. I am a farmer from Meerlieu and a member of the East Gippsland Climate Action Network. I am probably going to echo a lot of what Jenny has already said today. In March this year I was able to attend a masterclass presented by the Farmers for Climate Action on climate-smart agriculture. At this conference we heard from a number of different presenters, including Mark Howden from the ANU and the vice-chair of the IPCC, and Erwin Jackson, who is a policy director at the Investor Group on Climate Change, on the likely effects of climate change and the impacts this will have on agricultural production systems. The presenters outlined how southern Australia’s climate drivers are influenced by increasing global temperatures and that there is a general trend in the climate shifting south and how without any significant changes to greenhouse gas emissions the climate analogue of Bairnsdale will be Bathurst.

We also heard how there have been changes in financial markets as investors in large businesses analyse the risk of climate change and how they derive income and the probability of stranded assets increase. The one piece of information that really hit home for me though was that we have experienced 417 consecutive months

where the global temperature has exceeded the 20th century average for that month. The last month that was below the average temperature was February 1985, the month before I was born nearly 35 years ago.

Since returning to my family farm in 2016 I have seen and learned about the different techniques used to improve soil health and care for fragile landscapes. This has included the aims of avoiding overgrazing, maintaining ground cover, avoiding soil disturbance and increasing species diversity and the length of growing seasons. Susceptible areas, such as where water pools, such as Swanson Lake frontages, have been placed under environmental covenants and fenced off and allowed to vegetate, and extensive tree planting has been conducted for shelter belts. We have also undertaken numerous days of training to learn how to be better landscape managers. However, we are not perfect and many of the techniques we use are not best practice in maintaining landscape health and function.

Why these practices have been implemented, though, has little to do with adapting to or mitigating climate change. They have been implemented as good landscape management, and the benefit of drawing down carbon is only secondary. I do not think many of the agricultural production managers in our local area have a good understanding of what the carbon economy of the landscapes they manage looks like.

As agriculture is the third largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, between 10 to 12 per cent of global emissions—behind only energy and transport—it is one of the most vulnerable industries to the increasing frequency of climate extremes. It is impossible to ignore its role in adapting to the changes and mitigating the further impacts. If we are to achieve the Paris climate targets of keeping warming to below 2 degrees and reducing our emissions to net zero by 2050, then the agriculture industry and the production managers that oversee these landscapes need to know what the agricultural systems in a zero net carbon economy look like.

With over 50 per cent of Australia's land mass under agricultural management, these soils have great potential to become a carbon sink and draw down carbon from the atmosphere and oceans. To achieve this goal there needs to be a mechanism that evaluates how carbon is cycled in agricultural systems and places a value on that which is stored in soils. With conservative estimates, under optimum management, of about 15 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent stored per hectare in stable humic forms and valued at, say, \$20 a tonne, this could increase farm returns up to \$300 per hectare on top of any productive income.

The challenge this policy framework will have is that there is forecast to be a 60 per cent increase in the calories required from the global food system by 2050, so productivity of farming systems needs to increase while transitioning to a future carbon-neutral society. This is where leadership from both government and industry is vital, such as a plan from the MLA, or Meat and Livestock Australia, to achieve a carbon-neutral red meat industry by 2030. As we have seen with the recent protest in the Netherlands, when overly restrictive and punitive measures are placed on farmers without suitable time and justification to implement these changes to reduce the impacts on climate change and the environment, there can be significant pushback.

In summary, we need better education on what farming systems and best management practices will be applicable in a carbon economy and how to transition these systems. We need a policy mechanism to value the carbon stored in agricultural systems and the associated benefits such as improved landscape, water and biodiversity functions. One day we will say we have reached a tipping point. My hope is that it is a positive tipping point where we begin to see a reduction in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and we have saved our planet and the future of our children. Thank you.

Mr FOWLES: You referenced there a mechanism to do with getting more carbon into the soil, and ag practices. Do you have anything specific in mind?

Mr BLANDFORD: As Jenny has mentioned, basically maintaining ground cover, species diversity, having green roots in the soil for as long as possible—

Mr FOWLES: And how do you achieve it? If you were the Government, what wand, what lever, what mechanism would you apply?

Mr BLANDFORD: I think there are two parts: it is education—there are farmers who are doing it already. Last week we had Colin Seis, who is a farmer from Gulgong in New South Wales, come down. He is particularly keen on cover cropping and how that system works. He increased his soil carbon to a large degree.

Things like that, and it is probably not very well attended. There are a lot of people that are now coming over to it, but more things like that, that really helps.

The CHAIR: What percentage of a farm can be put under tree cover without affecting the economics of the farm? Can you do 20 per cent?

Mr BLANDFORD: Well, there is Mark Wootton. He is from over in western Victoria. His uses silvopasture, and he has increased his productivity while planting trees on his farm, like an agroforestry system—using that to derive income as well. So there is probably no limit; it is just making sure that you can find a balance in each environment that works better.

Mr FOWLES: So other than education, are there other—

Mr BLANDFORD: The problem we have got is that if you make it too restrictive on farmers, if you say you are not allowed to use nitrogen, you cannot use any fertiliser, you cannot do any of this, in 20 years time you go, ‘Okay, we’ve ticked off energy, we’ve ticked off transport. What’s next? Farming. Okay, you can’t do anything—basically kick farmers off the land’. That is not going to work so you have got to come back the other way and help people transition their systems so that they can adapt to a zero carbon economy. If that is a price on carbon that is buried in the soil that is stored for a long time, then so be it.

Mr FOWLES: In the more immediate term there is no prospect of a Federal carbon pricing regime and it is practically impossible to implement it at a state level, so what else would you do?

Mr BLANDFORD: I think the problem is, especially like Jenny mentioned, it is very expensive to start with, so maybe some kind of funding program to help with getting baseline carbon levels, because once people start saving money in return for storing carbon, that is fine. But to start it off, to have a market that is unclear about where it is going to fit and how it works, people are pretty reluctant to go and get involved with those sorts of things.

Mr FOWLES: Are you able to talk us through the lived experience on either your farm or others where the soil carbonisation has happened and what sort of improvements you have seen?

Mr BLANDFORD: Probably not. I am probably at the start of my career, and I think we are probably at the start of the journey. But I think the writing is on the wall that we are going to have to change and we cannot just expect that we are going to be able to do things the way we have been doing them because that is not going to work into the future because it will get to 20 years time and governments will go, ‘Agriculture is next. Can’t do anything’.

Mr GARDNER: Can I add that there are lots of examples that Nick is talking about. There is this SoilKee thing in West Gippsland which you may have heard of—Nick can describe it—using cover crop but sowing deep-rooting species. But on the ABC yesterday I read about a Western Australian farmer who feeds his cattle molasses and charcoal and then the charcoal in the effluent is taken by the dung beetles into the soil. Nick has probably got a dozen examples like that. It is happening with farmers experimenting all over the country; it is just that no-one knows about it.

Mr FOWLES: So they would be using the cows to spread charcoal across the paddocks in effect.

Mr GARDNER: No, no. It is to take the charcoal into the soil.

Mr FOWLES: Because the dung beetles grab it and take it down. Right.

Mr GARDNER: The important thing is to get it into the soil, and hopefully for it to stay in the soil a long time. At the moment the only credited carbon stores are trees, except for this SoilKee thing in West Gippsland. Nick could probably elaborate on a lot of these things if you wanted the details of them all.

Mr HAMER: I was just going to ask Nick. You mentioned when you had the farmer from New South Wales come down that it was not as well attended as you would have liked. I was just wondering if you have any ideas of how do we can get more farmers and more of that grassroots participation in the process. Is it just a

matter of time or a lack of time for these people, or is it that people do not feel that it is an important enough issue for many of them?

Mr BLANDFORD: It is a bit of both. Colin, he farms next to his brother who is an older brother. He is always asked why his older brother does not do the same practices as he does. He goes, 'Why doesn't your older brother do it?'. He goes, 'Because he's my older brother', and he is not going to do something that the younger brother does. Half the time you are going to get farmers that will do that. They will not go to these things because it is just against what they want to do, so you are not going to be able to change them. That is like butting your head against a wall and is really frustrating, but I do not have a good answer to say how we get people to get involved with these things.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask: if I was a global airline CEO and decided I wanted to have a competitive advantage over my rival airlines and decided a part of that would be that I wanted to have a commitment to offset the carbon footprint of my airline and wanted to do that by investing in trees on farms, how would I go about achieving that? Could Government help in creating some form of a, for want of a better term, market or a place or a portal or something so that that I can invest in trees on farms?

Mr BLANDFORD: I think there are some systems in place. There is not a lot of value in them anymore. VicRoads obviously does it, or Rural Roads Victoria does it when they have to replant trees, but we do have local farmers that got credits for the 2006 Commonwealth Games for the offset of carbon for that. But they do not feel there is a lot of value in that, or a lot of money. It is almost not worth doing it at the moment. But absolutely, if there was some kind of facilitation or a market to be able to provide that, that would be great.

Mr HAMER: Sorry, so just on that, you said many farmers do not see that there is enough value for money in that. What could be done to improve that?

Mr BLANDFORD: I do not know. I am not sure.

Mr FOWLES: Pay for it.

Mr GARDNER: The farmers could benefit. There are quite a few farmers in East Gippsland that have bush blocks, and they are of no value to them, really. I do not know what the situation is with the shire; they might get some rebate. Do they get rebates, Nick, from their bush blocks?

Mr BLANDFORD: I think there are environmental covenants. We are in a different shire, but there are possibilities that they are under environmental covenants—

Mr GARDNER: So I was at an East Gippsland catchment management meeting five years ago and that was one of the main complaints when they were talking about climate change—that these people have 100 acres of bush block and they could not do anything very much with it, yet it was storing quite a bit of carbon.

Mr BLANDFORD: I think the other point of value is that I think there is research coming out that something like 40 to 90 per cent of rainfall is derived from bacteria released from trees, so if we keep removing trees, we are going to keep damaging our water cycle, so—

Mr FOWLES: Sorry—40 to 90 per cent of rainfall is derived—

Mr BLANDFORD: From bacteria released from transpiration in trees. So the nuclei of bacteria—

Mr FOWLES: So they end up becoming the clouds?

Mr BLANDFORD: Basically, yes.

Mr FOWLES: Right. Bacteria?

Mr BLANDFORD: Yes.

Mr FOWLES: There you go. We have all learned something. So the more trees you chop down, the less rainfall there is and it is a vicious circle. You need more trees, and—

Mr BLANDFORD: Yes.

The CHAIR: Rosemary?

Ms GOOCH: Yes, I am Rosemary Gooch. I am a retired special ed teacher. My presentation is more about the group than about the science, as these two have done, but they are valuable members of our group, as you can see. First of all, thanks for inviting us to present. Our group only started in April. It started after a presentation by Jane Morton. If anyone saw the 7.30 report last night, she was actually one of the people on the show. She wrote this book. She came down and presented to us in Bairnsdale. We had about 70 people come. It was a public meeting. Of that 70 a significant number put their hands up to start a group. Since that time, we started at about 35, we have now got about 200 on our mailing list.

This is a typical response from around Gippsland. It is just showing the really significant and deep feeling people have and worry people have about climate change and what is happening to our area here and what is happening worldwide, really. There is deep concern in the community: that is the message we have got and the message I want to give you. What our group wants to do is be a forum for our community to discuss the issue, because we feel there is a huge lack of talking about this issue, not just, as Peter said, in our papers—in our local paper, in the mainstream papers. So we want to be a group that allows that to happen and encourages people to talk about it. We want to raise awareness in our community. Basically we are a pressure group. We want to advocate for strong and immediate action on climate change at all levels of government. We are big picture. We are an apolitical group. We want to encourage anybody and everybody who wants to come to make contact. We are not particularly green. We are not any colour. We want the politicians to do that (be bipartisan) as well, actually.

First of all, about the group—I will tell you a little bit about the group. The only requirement for joining our group is that we have a list of principles and values that you have to agree with, and you have to agree with human-induced climate change. We meet every month, and have developed a number of working groups. A working group can meet at any time. Our working groups consist of an IT group, a letter-writing group, a media group, a group working on a climate emergency declaration for the shire, and an action planning group. Those groups can change depending on the interest and of what comes up at the meetings.

What have we done so far? Just to give you an idea, we have worked a lot in our community. While we want to work in the community, we are also, as I said earlier, about the big picture and want to advocate for change at higher levels of government. We have given information talks. Peter has given quite a lot and I have, and we are planning on doing more—just to community groups about climate change. We have had information stalls at local markets, we have had one member making herself available outside the Safeway on a regular basis for people just to come and chat about climate change. We have had two successful die-ins. Do you know what a die-in is?

The CHAIR: Please explain it.

Ms GOOCH: Well, we gathered outside the Safeway. I do not know if you know Bairnsdale, but we gathered outside Safeway in the mall and we all pretended to die on the ground. We lay there for about 3 minutes. We had people skirting the edges with information to give to people as to why we were doing it. Then we had Peter read out part of one of Greta Thunberg's speeches, which was very moving.

Mr GARDNER: Because I have got a loud voice.

Ms GOOCH: And then it was all over in about 15 minutes. That was our first sort of public event as a group, and we had 70 people rock up. I have said this, so I probably will not say it again, but a lot of people are doing things out of their comfort zone. They are doing things they had never done before because of their concern about this issue. So we had people who had never been on a rally before come and lie on the ground outside Safeway supermarket pretending to be dead. We also did another one at the local farmers market, at which we had about 50 people, plus a dog.

Mr FOWLES: So how was it received? This is a very diverse community. You have obviously got people who are here because they love the environmental character of the place, and then there are the more traditional, well, conservative, elements as well. I am interested to know how it was perceived and received on the ground.

Ms GOOCH: On the ground, from my point of view, I had the feeling it was received really well. Outside the supermarket there were quite a few people who might have been embarrassed on our behalf—scurried away.

Mr HAMER: And how about in the media as well? Was that—

Ms GOOCH: We only get media attention when we write the article, take the photo and take it down to them.

Mr GARDNER: But the media is the aim.

Ms GREEN: What about social media?

Ms GOOCH: Social media? We get a lot of that. Great social media

Mr GARDNER: Very well. Just as an example, Nick presented to our meeting last week something similar to what he has done today, and through the media it went into the *East Gippsland News*. So it was in yesterday's *East Gippsland News*. We are really aiming at the media. It is publicity if you like.

Ms GOOCH: But also we wanted people to go home and talk about it, and say, 'What the heck? What are those people doing lying on the ground?'. So we want people to talk about climate change, bring it up in everyday conversation. And we want people to come and talk to us about it, but that is more difficult. The people who come and talk to us are pretty much onside, basically.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask: I am not sure if you were here earlier when we had the shire present to us some of the challenges that the Gippsland Lakes and the communities around there are experiencing in terms of sea level change and seawalls and all those sorts of questions. Were you here? Did you hear some of that?

Ms GOOCH: No, I wasn't.

Mr GARDNER: I wasn't, but I can comment on it if you like.

The CHAIR: Please do so, yes.

Mr GARDNER: I have got a shared holiday house down at Lake Bunga, which is right on Ninety Mile Beach, just past Lakes Entrance. So I have probably for a few years now done a bit of walking along there. My knees are stuffed from football so I do not walk very far now. There was severe coastal erosion east of Lake Tyers there for a while. I do not know what the situation is there now. If you go back historically, and that is what I am, a historian, you can find that at Lake Tyers beach there was actually a toilet block on the foreshore that completely disappeared. This was 30 or 40 years ago. The thing with the sea level rise is that it is variable of course. So the water sloshes around. In some places it is 3 or 4 millimetres, and in others—I think the average for Gippsland up to about 2004 or 2005 was 2 millimetres. But if you have not been in South Gippsland, then you are probably aware of the Inverloch situation with the severe coastal erosion.

There are a few other things not commonly understood. There is a thing called Bruun's law, and Bruun's law maintains that for every unit that the sea level rises, the coast will retreat by 50 to 100 times. So I think that the retreat at Inverloch is even higher than 100 at the moment. It is probably an exception. Nothing seems to happen evenly in climate. Sometimes we get good seasons. I mean, we are in the dry now, but who is to say that we are not going to get an east coast low and 10 inches in a week or something; it has happened before. But the sea level rise—I mark it down as not so important at the moment; it is something futuristic. But if we reach a tipping point, all of a sudden it might go. It is the doubling over time. For instance, if you double your 3 millimetres per annum every 10 years, all of a sudden you are over a metre.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask: how informed, from your perspective, are those communities in terms of the challenges? Sea level rise and the shared infrastructure that is required to attempt to manage that will no doubt inevitably put quite a bit of strain on the council and it will put a strain on the State Government, and that in a generic sense probably means less money to respond to other local government infrastructure challenges. There is only a certain amount of money that can go around. I am just interested to know, from your perspective, what level of education or knowledge do some of those communities have that very much are, you know, in harm's way?

Mr GARDNER: Yes, well—

Ms GOOCH: Can I just butt in?

The CHAIR: I am happy to hear all of you on it.

Mr GARDNER: Yes, we will break this open. I think there is \$425 000 to protect the Inverloch lifesaving club or something. I do not know where I read that, but to me that is a waste of money.

Ms GOOCH: Just on the *Conversation* yesterday, I read that there was a pushback from the people who owned the houses, because they did not want the value of their house to be dropped by being recognised as being in a vulnerable area. So there is a pushback and that must make it very difficult for the shire to put things in place.

Mr GARDNER: I think that the shire and Tim Bull are looking at about 0.7 of a metre by 2100. There are interactive maps on the internet. If you go into an interactive map with 0.7 of a metre on top of your high tide—or your spring tide—the Gippsland Lakes are wiped out, the Ninety Mile Beach disappears, Paynesville is flooded and Lakes Entrance is flooded.

Ms GOOCH: And Princes Highway in places.

Mr GARDNER: Yes, lots of—there are other things. The answer is that it is terribly complicated. I get confused and I have been studying it for 20 years.

The CHAIR: Of course. You know, it is—

Mr GARDNER: Simplifying it is very hard. It is very hard to say to someone that the sea level is rising by that much—2 millimetres per annum or even 4 millimetres per annum, which you cannot tell from the difference in the tide. You can only see it with the coastal erosion and all these other things. You cannot see it. But once we get, for instance, that 10 inches of rain and a spring high tide, Lakes goes under now. But there are things that they do. I think the shire recognises this, and I think that they have certain prohibitions. I know the Wellington shire has all these problems with the developments from Seaspray up to The Honeysuckles and all the way up through there. In a way they are more vulnerable. It is the sand dunes that are really vulnerable. It is the combination of a severe storm and the sea level rise where you will get huge erosion.

Mr HAMER: Can I just say: what you raised, Rosemary, about how some of the communities there might be reticent to actually go through a formal acknowledgement process because of what it might mean for their property value, but at an individual level, through interaction with your group, are you getting that consultation, particularly from Lakes Entrance or Paynesville or some of those places?

Ms GOOCH: No.

Mr HAMER: Not particularly?

Ms GOOCH: No. We have not gone down to that area, really. We have really been in Bairnsdale.

Mr HAMER: Okay.

Ms GOOCH: Can I continue?

The CHAIR: Yes, absolutely. And I know Danielle has—

Ms GREEN: Chair, I was just looking at our time and not wanting to cut people off.

Ms GOOCH: There are a few things I want to—

Ms GREEN: No, that is fine, but I suppose I am just trying to reiterate that you do not need to convince us of climate change. Our terms of reference are really that we want to hear about what communities are really doing to respond and how. We are from the Parliament, not from the Government—although as it happens we

are all Government Members. Everyone has got their opinions, but we believe it is happening. But we are really trying to tease out, particularly in this region, what communities are doing and how Government can support them.

Ms GOOCH: I guess what Peter was saying about the lack of awareness in this community—that is where our group has been working in a very soft way.

The CHAIR: Just on that, would you like to make a recommendation to us about how Government might best support local advocacy around this issue? Is there a model that we could potentially recommend to roll out across the state to ensure that more of our citizens are aware of the challenges of climate change and the steps that we as a community or a society might need to undertake?

Ms GOOCH: Well, it depends on what power you have, I guess. We really need a mass communication effort—government-run, well-thought-out mass information—because people need to know. It is like we are living in a parallel world. Our group meets, and we talk about what the situation is. We hear from Peter and Nick and other people who are really up on the science of it. And then you go into your ordinary life, and it is just business as usual—nobody seems to be aware of what is happening. It can be an emotional and quite a difficult issue to deal with, in a sense, because you feel like we are heading for disaster and nobody knows and nobody really cares.

Ms GREEN: It can be disempowering. So how do we try and get that power back? I suppose I am trying to take you away from the diagnosis of ‘We’ll all be rooned’, said Hanrahan’—and I do not mean that in a cruel way. I think it might be that the ship has sailed for those of us who are past our middle years. But how do we, rather than scare the bejesus out of the next generation and our kids, who can be really scared, empower them to actually be able to effect change and provide some advice about how we can do it? From my perspective at the moment, there is so much conversation. I am not interested in the naysayers who say it is not happening. There are very many experts who want to diagnose the situation, but we are here, going, ‘Give us some solutions; we’ll advocate to Government’. So try and give us that.

The CHAIR: Is there a toolbox?

Ms GOOCH: Okay. We want people to talk about it. That is the focus of our group. That is why we are doing the die-ins, that is why we are doing the information talks, that is why we are at the market stalls and that is why we have got someone outside the Safeway. We want people to come and talk about it, and if you connect with people on an emotional basis or about something that really matters to them, maybe they will listen. But there is a strong aspect in our community of people not really taking it on board, and if people are taking it on board they are doing it at a level where they do not think they can do anything about it. Actually, I personally think as an individual that I feel empowered if I am advocating for big change from the Federal Government, from you guys, from the State and from the shire, because we want, as Peter said, for you or Federal Government to declare a climate emergency and then act as if it is a climate emergency.

Just on the point that you made before about how there is not enough money to go around: well, if there is an emergency, we find the money. This is a real emergency, and we need to find the money. If we went to war, we would find money, wouldn’t we? If the Federal Government decided we were going to Syria or whatever, suddenly money would pop up from everywhere, and this is the same. This is an emergency. I am sure we can cope with it if we have our minds set.

I just want to say, answering your question, about our group: one of the surprising—or I guess if we had thought about it, we would have known—benefits is the group is a tremendous support for each other. It is a mental health issue, and our group is very strong on that. It is a fantastic group. Another thing: you were asking how our die-ins were accepted. Often when we are doing this thing strangers walking past will say, ‘What are you doing?’, and you tell them. They will say, ‘Oh, thank goodness, somebody is doing something’. There is a great depth of worry out there. People might not understand it, but they are worried. And the kids are worried. We have got a year 9 student who was going to be here and a year 11 student, and I am sorry they are not, but they just found they could not. They both go to school in Sale, so that when the nitty-gritty came, they found they could not do it. But they are very, very concerned. Kids are concerned. You cannot say, ‘Let’s not scare the kids’. To empower the kids, you have got to tell them the truth and you have got to trust. I think humans are very resilient. We have got to know what is happening so that we can help deal with it. I think Government has

resources to put that truth out there in a way that is balanced: what can we do? If people feel that the Government is behind them, if we are all working together, surely we can do something.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Peter, I know you had your hand up.

Mr GARDNER: I was just going to answer the question. In my written summary I have got about 20 proposals, all related to logging and timber, which I know that the governing parties are in a bit of a bind over. But from a climate perspective, a lot has to be done. So it may be happening already in the Government circles, of planning, of what is going to happen. What is going to happen when Heyfield closes down or eventually closes down? Now, I know there is a fair bit of union pressure, and I used to be a union member myself. The logs that they took out of the bush when I first came up here 50 years ago were monstrous: a whole log on one truck. When I first came up they were not doing the clear-fell coupe logging then. Now you see the log trucks going along here with a whole lot of spindly stuff, mostly going to Maryvale I think for woodchips. Occasionally you will see a massive log with a core in it, which is also going to woodchips. Now, if we had a value on the carbon stored in that massive log, 100 tonnes perhaps, that is a log worth \$3000 that is now going to woodchips, and some of the people are talking about a real carbon price of about \$125 per tonne. I think that the market price is something like about \$2 or \$3 or something. Anyway, I was trying to talk about logging mainly because it is in relation to the area, and I know that it concerns you and that it is an ongoing concern to you. Just to clarify my position, I have always stood as an Independent; I have never been a member of the Greens.

Ms GOOCH: Can I say one more thing?

The CHAIR: You can have 2 or 3 minutes to sum up if you wish.

Ms GOOCH: Well, I did have a list of what you could do but they are very big-picture, and I think, as you have said, you are on this page, so I will not—it is basically ‘Declare a climate emergency and act on it’. But what I wanted to say at the very final end is just to emphasise the emotions and grief I guess that people have about this issue, and it is a really important aspect across the community. People in our group are giving heaps to our group. They are giving up maybe doing some work for money. They are giving up heaps of time and they are working out of their comfort zone and doing things they do not normally do. It is a major issue. I have mentioned the dedication and importance that members of our group give to this issue, and also I have not mentioned we have got an Extinction Rebellion group up here as well.

It just cannot be overstated how important this. We are extremely committed. I also wanted to say that people in our group and groups in Gippsland generally, and probably all over the world, we are just ordinary, everyday people working for our kids, basically.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Thank you for your time. We very much appreciate it.

Witnesses withdrew.