

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Mildura—Thursday, 12 March 2020

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 Emma Walmsley, Writer and Founder,

Mr Carl Young, Vegetable Grower, and

Ms Sophie Appleby, Writer and Researcher, 350 Mallee Climate Action Group.

Mr FOWLES: Well, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the public hearing. We are just going to run through a couple of formalities. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard, and it is protected by parliamentary privilege. That means you can speak freely without fear of legal action—for defamation, in particular—in relation to the evidence that you give, but please remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside of the hearing, even if you are restating what you said during 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 come in. Sorry, we are running a little late. If you could please each state your full name and title before giving your evidence. Over to you to proceed as you see fit.

Visual presentation.

Ms WALMSLEY: Thank you. My name is Emma Walmsley. I am a writer and a mother of two, and I am a founder of the 350 Mallee Climate Action Group. I started the 350 group in January last year, and we have achieved a lot in a short time. We have been focusing on community education and discussions and getting people together who are also concerned about climate change here. Our first meeting was with four other women, and we organised a launch event for February to see what our community was looking for in a climate activism group. We also showed a preview version of 350.org's documentary called *Accelerate*, which featured Bill McKibben when he came to Australia. It was attended by a number of interested people, and there it was suggested that we hold a forum for our federal candidates to present their climate policies to the community ahead of the election. We planned that for April, and with great feedback about the documentary, we also organised a cinema screening in March for the full-length version of *Accelerate*. The cinema screening went really well, with almost 50 people coming along, and many stayed afterwards to chat with our team about the themes and our group.

The candidates forum was even bigger, with 80 people coming to hear what the five present candidates had to say. We accepted questions from the community before the forum and asked the candidates to speak for 10 minutes as well as to respond to the questions and other questions on the night. By that time only two of the original members of our group were still active, although another three had come on board to help us. After the forum there were only two active members of the 350 Mallee Climate Action Group, apart from me, and together we organised a family-friendly showing of the documentary *2040* when it was screening here in June. We also provided some activities afterwards and had just under 100 people attending. During that time I was also involved in planning Mildura's winter ECOfest, which occurred in July, and I organised for *Accelerate* to be shown there as well as suggesting some other documentaries for their pedal-powered cinema.

After that, personally I was pretty burnt out and a little disheartened that our group was just three of us, and it had become a very time-consuming part of my life. Before all of these events, except for the ECOfest, I spoke with local media and advertised online and with posters widely around town. Especially before the candidates forum there was a huge amount of media more broadly around the Mallee region and a lot of organising. I led all of these events. I did have some help, but I remain the only person in contact with 350 Australia and to have done training with them. At that point I was the only media contact and the face of our group.

Carl, here, got in touch with me in August to see if I wanted to help organise something for the upcoming international climate strike in September. The other two group members and I had spoken about it, but none of us were able to put in the amount of effort it would require. But when Carl said he was keen to help, we met to discuss it further. I also put the call out to our wider group that we would be meeting about the strike and was happily surprised that many others wanted to be involved. Carl and his father led the preparations for our march through town and our rally in the mall, and our team came together to get many tasks done for the day. It was a really good event, with a band leading over 300 people marching down our main street, and students, local politicians and community members spoke to the crowd. After our debrief on the march we had not planned

any further events for the year, but when the bushfires were hitting hard in November, Sophie and another member of our group organised a show of solidarity in front of our Federal Member's office. It was pulled together in a week, and that included Sophie and Kia doing some training with the School Strike 4 Climate group. Thirty people came along, which was more than we expected, and it was very positive for such a quickly organised event.

It is great that our team has grown and that others are willing to take the lead in organising projects now, because I cannot continue putting in the hours that I have been doing. All of the work I did last year was at the expense of my own business, and it involved about 200 hours of volunteering. No-one is keen to take on the lead coordinator role from me, and I understand why. No-one has the time to continue that. Most of us have young kids and all of us work in other positions, so this climate work is on top of all of our other commitments. Most of us are also not trained managers, including me. My skills are in writing and organising, which has helped with this group, but I am not great at delegating tasks, keeping momentum going or managing a team.

Another issue, which I am sure is everywhere on the topic of climate action, but it seems to be very prevalent here, is the extreme negative responses to all of our events. Nasty letters in the paper, comments online and even derogatory personal messages to me have made the work harder. I felt very exposed by putting myself in the public eye for this work, and especially after the candidates forum and the climate strike I was pretty anxious and depressed in the following weeks. It has also taken a toll on my family, and I personally found last year to be my busiest and my most challenging and stressful year yet. Still, I am really proud of all that the group has achieved in only a year, but how we do things has to change because I cannot afford to put in these hours, financially or emotionally, and I will be leaving Mildura later this year anyway. We are working towards a better structure as a group, and it will be fantastic to have some more support to ensure that it does not become such a burden on any other member of the group. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I have a couple of questions. Climate change and the science behind it in terms of how the Victorian community and the Australian community have reacted has been different in different parts of the state. In fact as a concept it has only really been broadly known about, I think, for perhaps 30 years now. The climate scientists themselves probably knew a decade or so prior to that, but it has been a slow evolving journey, and depending on where you might live in Victoria that journey might have been relatively quick or it might have been somewhat slower. How have you found it here in Mildura? I am assuming you are all reasonably long-term residents; is it becoming a popularly understood issue, or is the community coming to terms with it slower here than in other parts of the state? What are your observations?

Ms WALMSLEY: I think slower. I think this group has helped to bring a lot of people together. I think we all sort of felt like there were not many people concerned about it here, but there are. We are still in the minority, and there is still a lot more negative backlash, I think, than positive after most of our events.

Ms APPLEBY: Yes. It is a little bit tricky too, because the backlash that we see—and I think I will speak a little bit more on this—is definitely online, and therefore you wonder whether it is a small group of people making a lot of noise. On the whole this mainly pertains to Facebook and specifically the local papers' Facebook pages and people's reactions to articles, and they are often flooded with incredibly negative comments.

The CHAIR: Okay. It is a journey that your community is going on. I am guessing from what you have said that there is a broader understanding of it now in comparison to 10 or 15 years ago, but there is still a long way to go.

Ms WALMSLEY: I think so.

The CHAIR: Carl and Sophie, do you both have submissions that you wish to also add?

Mr YOUNG: Yes. My name is Mr Carl Young. I am a vegetable grower from Wemen; it is an hour away from here. I am first and foremost a farmer from a family farm, but I consider climate change to be quite a threat, so that is why I have been in association with these guys to help bring a bit of change.

The local horticultural industries are dominated by very enterprising commercial businesses. Generational organisations have mostly only succeeded where thorough investment decisions have been weighed up and taken and strong managerial skills have been maintained. Significant increases in land and water values,

alongside increased competition from imports and changing markets, have reduced some of the founding industries of this region, such as dried fruit and citrus. Citrus, however, has recently seen a bit of a surge from growing export markets. The region has been very attractive to table grape, wine grape and almond investment due to its arid climate, relatively cheap greenfield land and reliable water supply. An arid environment is preferred for these industries as it reduces costs associated with disease and delayed harvest, while improving crop quality and value. Water has become expensive at times, but it seems to be economically sustainable for the current major industries, assuming all other things are held even.

The Mallee contributes nearly 30 per cent of Victoria's grain production, but this number is highly likely to significantly fall as climate change impacts the region. Northern Mallee grain growers are especially vulnerable to a reduction in rainfall. The difference of 40 millimetres of rainfall and its timing during the season can be the difference between a dust bowl—which you can see there—or an average yield. We are on a knife's edge, which has been the way for a long time. It does not take much to reduce that. In the last 30 years rainfall in the Mallee has reduced by 7 per cent, based on available records; it is mostly in autumn and spring. This trend, along with higher temperatures, is likely to continue. I believe soon cropping in this region may become an opportune activity rather than one that has historically been fairly reliable. Mallee broadacre farmers, however, could transition to grazing production rather than cropping. I am uncertain of the regional economic implications associated with this, but I suspect it will be a reduction. This is without adding a likely higher future cost associated with policy that aims to reduce meat-related emissions.

The CHAIR: Can I just interrupt you there?

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

The CHAIR: In the Mallee, what size farm has been considered economically viable from a grain perspective? What is typical?

Mr YOUNG: These days it is probably 10 000 acres, whereas before—

The CHAIR: Right, 10 000 acres, so that is from a grain perspective. What about from a sheep perspective, how many?

Mr YOUNG: I cannot be certain, because I am a vegetable grower and not a broadacre farmer or a livestock farmer, but from my understanding it is in that same region of 5000 to 10 000 acres.

Carbon farming is currently considered unprofitable in areas with rainfall below about 600 millimetres, but if and when we start to see a more appropriate carbon price there could be potential for landowners to transition to earning carbon credits alongside grazing, especially if credits for preserving genetic diversity could be coupled with that. While horticulture is booming in this region, without a clear vision of how Australia will transition to a low-carbon economy, the recent high level of investment could be misguided and left stranded as markets change. Agriculture is very dynamic, and this trait along with the inevitable transition to a low-carbon economy makes it extremely difficult for confident business decision-making, especially in the absence of Federal leadership. This is a key limiting factor currently hurting and costing industry today as it prevents investment in innovation. The Government is promoting a false sense of security by being unambitious, but nearly all industry bodies acknowledge that this is not in their best interest. Nationally, the dynamic nature of agriculture will mean many winners along with many losers in a new market environment. With the likely change in cost factors associated with transport, climate, consumer preferences, water, policies et cetera, the future horticultural sector of the Mallee will likely look very different from that of today.

Transport is already a significant cost to our business—my family business—which is the production of leafy salads in the cooler seasons. As carbon becomes priced into the economy, we will likely see these costs rise. Hopefully electric- or hydrogen-powered trucks are a viable option. We may find some exploration into how trains could be managed to help reduce those emissions associated with getting our products to the market could have merits. Without advances and innovations, though, our business will likely become priced out as we will become less competitive. While water is expected to become more scarce, investing in the region is attractive to investors as there is transparency in the water market system, which allows economic levers to be pulled appropriately. The Murray is a reliable source of water, as long as your set of numbers can make it feasible. We may find regions further upstream become more favourable for certain horticultural industries as the climate there becomes warmer and drier and as they are located closer to markets.

The most beneficial outcome that our region could have, along with the rest of the world, is that we have a firm plan on how aggressive emission reduction policies will be. It is critical to the world that emissions are reduced. While the Federal Government hesitates, significant costs to the economy are being incurred as industries stall waiting for ambitious policies to boost confidence.

Improved climate education in regional electorates like ours is vital. This is so that we can support our MPs to offer the rope necessary to back the Federal Government in becoming more ambitious. In summary, Federal policy is blocking innovation from blooming. If this continues, our region is very likely to incur significant economic costs due to climate change in the near future.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Carl. Sophie?

Ms APPLEBY: My name is Sophie Appleby. I am a writer, researcher, activist and mother of two. My current work explores climate anxiety and the use of myth and storytelling as tools to reconnect with the natural world. As a group we wanted to look at the future of climate action in Mildura, so we consulted with the climate action group through a short survey. From this we were able to gain an insight into the ideas that our volunteers would like to see implemented in Mildura going forward. While there was not a group consensus on some of the following ideas, it is important to note the enthusiastic, thoughtful and creative responses shared by group members. It was evident through the responses that the main action members are passionate about is quality education for the Mildura community regarding climate change and its impacts on the region, as well as on mitigation and adaptation strategies. The group noted that as a regional city we do not have local access to appropriate and up-to-date resources, science communicators or educators on climate change. This limited access to trusted organisations has led to issues with misinformation and denialism within the wider community. Therefore the foremost request from our group is Government support to offer climate change education locally, including targeted information sessions run by subject experts from respected organisations for farmers, community leaders, businesses and the wider community. While providing vital information and resources, these sessions could also impart to community members the skills required to best utilise their voices wisely and efficiently. Additionally, to reach community members at a household level and to build on the positive momentum from the council's recent declaration of a climate emergency, group members would like to see locally run workshops on topics related to climate action, including but not limited to renewable energy, permaculture and waste-free living. These workshops would aim to inspire the community to upskill and to recognise the meaningful impact of individual and collective actions.

Members were also interested in effective networking and continued collaboration with organisations across a variety of sectors, including local government, the arts, health, business, schools and environment groups. As Rob Hopkins, the founder of the Transition Network, notes, collaborating with others is key to the transition process. And as Emma shared previously, one of the group's effective collaborations in 2019 was the ECOfest with Arts Mildura held at the Eco Village. This festival demonstrated the positive effects of uniting community in an inspiring environment through film, food and music. Some members would like to see the continuation of these kinds of gatherings as well as collective action through rallies and demonstrations. To properly facilitate these collaborations, support for group governance, network leadership training and funded coordination roles would very likely encourage further communication, community participation and engagement that could also lead to better outcomes.

Future collaborative art and media projects were also highlighted in the survey. Members suggested a range of inspiring and creative ideas, including public art murals, posters and respected scientific information delivered in a succinct and meaningful manner through local media channels and through the council's *Community Matters* newsletter. These collaborations would aim to educate, empower, promote civic imagination and encourage behavioural shifts such as divestment from the fossil fuel industry by local businesses, organisations and households.

On a personal note, I would like to further Emma's comments about mental health and the urgent need for mental health support services in the region. I personally suffered multiple anxiety attacks surrounding the backlash and the negative comments that stemmed out of the organisation of the climate strike and the solidarity sit-down, which affected not only me but also my family. I feel it is vital that if community members stand up and organise and participate in these climate actions, there needs to be support from the local council and from the wider community.

In summary, the 350 Mallee Climate Action Group survey feedback is asking for Government support to deliver a variety of education methods to promote positive, inspiring and achievable actions for broad community behavioural adaptation and transformation.

The CHAIR: Thank you for the three of you presenting as you have done. I was just thinking through the challenges that each of you presented and thought about the entities within the region that we have either heard from or I have read about over the years. So you have obviously got catchment management authorities within the region, and I assume within that group there will be a sustainability or climate change-type person that has got responsibility for that; you have got, obviously, local government, and we have heard from local government earlier today; you have got, I think, a TAFE sector who no doubt will have some courses that are aimed at farming groups to teach them about, you know, their industry and some of the challenges that might arrive; you have no doubt got solar installers who are assisting individuals to put solar panels on their roofs; you have probably got community veggie gardens or orchards and things like that; and I would assume you have got active Indigenous communities up here as well. Have you thought about whether there might be an opportunity to set up a sustainability shopfront or something—I am thinking out loud—where all of these different groups might lend one of their people on a semiregular basis, maybe on a roster basis, where they can continue to do their work but in a kind of shopfront context where people can come and go and learn about, you know, sustainability?

I know climate change, depending on where you are, has been demonised in some quarters, right? But it just occurs to me that the concept of sustainability is something you can get a much, much broader group to buy into. You know, if I was a farmer that denied climate change—just as an example—I still want to know how I can have a productive farm going forward if there is going to be less rainfall and how I can cut costs out so that my business is more sustainable. Maybe having some kind of sustainability shopfront, for want of a better term, or maybe a local initiative that could be pulled together—I do not know, I am just thinking through what you have kind of broadly presented. And if so, is there a need for some form of a State Government grant to perhaps help with that? I do not know, but what are your thoughts around that?

Ms APPLEBY: Yes, absolutely. I think we are all at the moment working in our little separate areas, and I think one of the most important things is a network that brings together all of those people and all of those ideas. There are definitely things that are going on. I think people do not even realise, and there is no discussion between them. What that network then does, whether it be something like a shopfront or regular workshops or better use of the Eco Village, I do not know if you guys are going to go down to—

The CHAIR: We are visiting there this afternoon.

Ms APPLEBY: I thought you were. I spoke to Matthew about that. So it is a fantastic resource that I personally feel is being underutilised. And absolutely I think it is imperative that all these groups start to talk to one another and work together.

The CHAIR: With ultimately a benefit of a broader understanding and education around climate change and sustainability, but actually also the economic opportunities that might exist in our own homes and in our own communities and the opportunities to just be more sustainable.

Ms APPLEBY: Yes, absolutely.

Mr HAMER: I will probably direct a question about mental health, and I am very saddened to hear about your personal experiences in relation to just the campaigning on the issue. I am probably interested in your perspective, Carl, as someone particularly at the coalface in terms of within the farming community, whether that is your experience as well in terms of your involvement and then also more broadly. We have heard evidence before about the mental health issues particularly facing members of the farming community that are in relation, I guess, to the changing climate and having to deal with a lot of the implications of that, so I would be interested in hearing what you might add on that.

Mr YOUNG: Sure. So personally, our business is not as affected by climate change as what dryland farmers would be, so I cannot speak on their behalf. But I can imagine it would be extremely tough with consecutive years of not much rainfall. You know, you can tolerate a few years, but when they all fall together I can imagine how that would be the case. Horticulture is a little bit different because we irrigate, obviously, so if you

can afford to pay for the water you do it. If you cannot, you do not do it or you change your ways and do something else.

I will just add to that that I try to tread quite a fine line between being an advocate for changing our economy to a low-carbon economy, but I do not want to push it too far. I want to remain to be seen as a farmer, because I can communicate with farmers. A lot of groups may not be able to communicate with them—the greenie-type groups.

The CHAIR: You have got to maintain your farmer street cred to help educate?

Mr YOUNG: Yes. We are all on the same page and we all think the same thing, but to be honest I do not want to be too closely aligned with these guys because I will lose my farm credit—not street cred. Is there a word for that?

Mr FOWLES: Paddock cred.

Mr YOUNG: Paddock cred, yes. What causes that—whether it is a lack of education or people just do not like change—I do not know, but anyway I try to remain a voice as a farmer. It is a bit of a balancing act, I suppose.

The CHAIR: Can I just pick up on that point? So you obviously are aware of the consequences of climate change. I am assuming you have introduced innovation on your own farm to ensure its economic survival under a changing climate. Have you been able to, or have you chosen to, invite some of your neighbouring farmers onto your farm to see some of the innovation—some of the sustainability things—you might have implemented yourself, so that in a sense you are demonstrating what it actually practically means without kind of preaching the science of climate change?

Mr YOUNG: So it is quite difficult to grasp, but horticulture is that dynamic that every set of circumstances is so different to your neighbours. We grow leafy veg in the winter; there is one other grower in the region—or major grower. So it is different. That exists, what you are talking about, in broadacre—where some people have, you know, transitioned to different cultural methods. And that has paid off big time over the years. They might not believe it initially, but then they see a couple of years down the track they are pulling in a good crop and these guys are not. But it does not really apply to our industry.

The CHAIR: Because it is so diversely spread through the state, or country really?

Mr YOUNG: Because we are on our own really. There are some regions, like Werribee for instance, that have got lots of growers there who are doing a similar thing, but it is a very competitive industry and so everyone is fairly tight lipped.

The CHAIR: But in that Werribee area and that south-east area sort of around Cranbourne, there is obviously a lot of competition for that land. There are some State Government protections, but I think that competition is going to exist for a long time. Those industries might be looking to move somewhere else, and maybe there is an economic opportunity to move up here if there is security of water. So maybe you will end up with some neighbours down the track that are doing the same thing.

Mr YOUNG: Yes, I guess what I tried to explain at the start of my speech was that horticulture in this area is very commercial. So policy determines everything, as does the cost of everything. It is not a lifestyle-type area, so as long as you are more competitive than your neighbour then you will win and you will survive. I am not sure if that—

Mr HAMER: Can I sort of ask a related question? You raised the direction of climate education to provide the community with more information. I was just wondering what that would look like in a community that might not be potentially as open to change or what direction you would have to frame that in. So there is the competitive nature of the farming, and you do not want to set up the field days and only get the people who are already the believers. How would you envisage that, to actually provide that broader education to the community?

Ms WALMSLEY: At that ECOfest we were at last year they had a workshop on regenerative farmer there, and that did get—I do not know—20 people or so from around the region come in. And there was a quite

famous author in that field who came to speak at that. I think some bigger events like that might get some people from further out, I do not know. I do not know what sort of farmers they were even.

Mr YOUNG: One of the things that Sophie mentioned earlier was, I forget what you termed it, but say a hearing or presentation.

Ms APPLEBY: An information session. But I think that what is most important—and this is what Carl raised with us—was that they are subject experts. It is the organisations these people are delivering from, whether in person or via teleconference or whatever it is. It is about the respected nature of those organisations. And I think that from Carl's point of view—and you can speak more to this—those people, those farmers and other business people that may be on the fence or feeling a little bit like it is too green, may come to things or we hope would come to things where there are people that they respect that are delivering that information rather than it coming from something like a workshop or a community event which our group feels is equally as important but at a household level of people who are already starting to make those changes. I think, Carl, you can speak to that.

Mr YOUNG: Yes, I think you explained it quite well. So if we want to tap into those people who do not want to listen, we need to deliver it not from us, because they do not want to listen to us. They will listen to whoever they want to listen to. So if we can bring them in and create another avenue of education and persuasion then—

Ms APPLEBY: You started to put a list together of some of those groups.

Mr YOUNG: Yes. I guess I am coming from a farming point of view, but the Birchip Cropping Group, GRDC, CSIRO, Bureau of Meteorology—all those types of trusted and long-term foundations, ones that have been there for a long time and people know and understand. I think if the message was coming from them and presented directly to the people that need to hear it then yes, it would have its benefits.

Mr FOWLES: The CSIRO is a good example. They have been very consistent for a really long period of time that climate change is real, it is coming and we need to respond. But even as one of the trusted organisations it would appear that they have not had great levels of penetration, particularly within the farming cohort. We have certainly had the full spectrum of views from the farming community. We have had people either in hearings or outside say, you know, 'There was a drought in 1914'. So how specifically would you address reaching that cohort? If you were us, or if you were the Government, how would you go about making sure that we can actually start to move the needle on some of those attitudes?

Mr YOUNG: I think if you guys could help create a travelling roadshow from not just the Bureau of Meteorology but from the likes of I think the GRDC, the Birchip Cropping Group—

Mr FOWLES: Sorry, who are the GRDC?

Mr YOUNG: The Grains Research and Development Corporation. They have done a lot of work locally, and the organisation has been around for a long time, so I think they would have a lot of persuasion around here, and industry bodies too.

Mr FOWLES: If I could just ask a question around mental health. I want to echo my colleague's sentiments in relation to the experiences you have had. There is clearly a combination of fatigue, I am hearing, and some issues with dealing with those attacks. As someone who is quite publicly suffering mental ill health and who has also been subject to a range of attacks, I can sympathise absolutely with your perspective there. Specifically you say, quite rightly, that we need more support services. How do you envisage that happening and how do we build climate-grief capability into those services, do you think?

Ms APPLEBY: I am not sure that I have the answers, but it is something that I am now really passionate about. I went to seek support and was told, 'Well, you will have to wait four or six weeks', or whatever it was. There was just nothing.

Mr YOUNG: A lot of that anxiety would be alleviated if there was ambitious leadership. If they could see something was being done about it, everyone would feel a lot better about it. Maybe we are not going to stop climate change, but at least we are not just walking off a cliff.

Mr FOWLES: So do you think there is a perception that there is leadership at the State level, in terms of the State Government, and it is just the Federal piece that is problematic, or do you think it is a general distrust of governments generally not doing enough?

Mr YOUNG: I think Federal—

Ms APPLEBY: I feel like here—and I will speak specifically to the reaction of the declaration of a climate emergency by council, and I am speaking about online—it was disgusting, the reaction that people had. The people that responded had no faith or any thought that that would be of benefit to anybody. If anyone went to look at that information, the moment you start reading those comments it felt like it completely undermined what was, to me, an amazing achievement for this community to take that step forward.

The CHAIR: I think, as I say, it is not the same consistently across Victoria. It depends on where you go, and people's attitudes will change—often depending on the landscape and all of those things. But it just sort of occurs to me that the take-up of solar panels has not been dependent on that particular community's view about climate change. In fact, I would say the take-up of solar panels across Victoria has more to do with the economic profile of the household than their belief or otherwise in climate change. So it might well be that there are different ways to achieve an outcome that is good for the household, the individual, the community, the economy and the district that they live in.

Mr HAMER: I would add to that for the farm as well, because the farmers are going to be looking at it from a commercial basis and the productivity or enhancement of the farm is going to be paramount. It may have other sustainable or environmental outcomes, but that will be a key driver to any decisions.

Ms APPLEBY: Just to maybe summarise, the local council's declaration of a climate emergency, maybe my optimism or my hope is that that will lead the wider community to see that they have stepped up and that something is being done or there is the start of some momentum that I think is happening in this community that really needed to be that first action.

I was there at the council meeting, and it was very interesting to hear the range of opinions, but the room was packed. The people that were there were just desperate to see this go through. So there are people in this community that are maybe just sitting on the sidelines, sort of a bit like we are, teetering on the edge of wanting to do things and make change within the community. But there has been and there seems to be this barrier to kind of coming together which—I do not know—I feel has to do with how it has been seen or how it has been portrayed, perhaps also within the local media and online.

The CHAIR: This is going to be my last point, and it is a point, not a question, which is contrary to my normal approach. It may well be now a worthwhile conversation to have with your local government body: 'Okay, they've declared the climate emergency. Here is a proposal'. And that proposal could be, you know, a sustainability shopfront or something where the council and the CMA and a TAFE and solar installers and all of that come together in a location to show the economic benefits of sustainability. Maybe that is kind of the next step? They have declared an emergency; maybe this is one of a number of things that they might do as a consequence of declaring it, and maybe that then provides that opportunity for people who want to see our community put on a more sustainable, climate-friendly trajectory.

Mr FOWLES: And they are already involved in maternal health services, so why not get involved in mental health services and build some capability there? Clearly four to six weeks in your case was not catastrophic, but for some it clearly could be.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Colleagues, I think we are done. Thank you for your time and for your evidence.

Witnesses withdrew.