

19 August 2019



Committee Manager
Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

SUBMISSION: Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this critically important Inquiry.

We feel immensely proud to live in one of the most pro-actively progressive states in the world. The Victorian government was re-elected with a clear mandate to proceed with ambitious policies to make our state cleaner and fairer. As critical ecological and societal crisis (arising from unacceptable levels of inequity) converge, this is an incredible opportunity to actively demonstrate what a truly socially and ecologically sustainable transition—based on what is best for all—looks like.

While renewable energy has made enormous gains and is now cheaper to install than new fossil fuel systems, data in [REN21's Renewables 2019 Global Status Report](#) clearly shows the need for far more ambitious policies and regulatory frameworks to create favourable and competitive conditions for a clean energy transition. In Australia, fossil fuel subsidies currently receive about [US\\$29bn](#) of taxpayers' money. That's a lot of public money going towards destroying our country. Meanwhile, reports show that just a fraction of that funding would [green energy revolution](#) with enormous benefits to human and planetary health. Expressed another way, it's the government's job to lead.

Just a glance around our state reveals many socially and ecologically pro-active communities that could be radically transformed to become inspiring case studies to demonstrate how to rapidly transition local economies to be more fair and sustainable. As you say that you stand for putting the interests of communities before unconscionable windfall profits for destructive and polluting industries, communities like the Latrobe Valley, the Toolangi State Forest region, and Anglesea—that have been at the mercy of entrenched toxic industries for decades—deserve your government's full attention.

Preserve Carbon Sinks

Victoria's precious wild places desperately need protecting and nurturing. Time and again VicForests proves itself to be a rogue operation. Meanwhile, with its intolerable culture of bullying and intimidation, the CFMEU continues to demonstrate itself to be a toxic breeding ground for "[thugs](#)", which across multiple indicators comes at a high cost for greater society. It is beyond intolerable that Victoria's state forests, including gravely endangered ecosystems, continue to be ['stolen'](#). To be clear, Victoria hosts 'the world's most carbon dense forests', which are also gravely endangered wildlife habitat and absolutely fundamental for Victoria's water security, becoming even more precarious by the climate emergency. Yet they continue to be destroyed for a quick buck, in the form of wood chips, building products or paper. Most people are shocked and appalled to discover that Victoria's iconic forests are being destroyed and mismanaged by a state-owned-for-profit native logging company. As an immediate priority VicForests must be shut down, and those responsible for abusing their power and the people's trust must be brought to justice. The long-proposed plan for a Great Forest National Park in Victoria's Central Highlands—'[home to the world's tallest flowering plants, the Mountain Ash, and one of Australia's most endangered mammals, the Leadbeater's Possum](#)'—must be acted on now. Not only is it economic madness to destroy what could be one of our State's most important tourist attractions for pulp, it's wilful ecocide.

Green New Deal for Victoria

Meanwhile, major advances in ecological science and sustainable technologies are enabling us to create everything we need to meet basic food, water, power, shelter and education needs necessary for healthy and happy lives in fair and sustainable economies at the local level on a global scale. And we well understand how a network of public banks could finance community driven, self-funding socially and ecologically sustainable projects throughout Victoria; projects that effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions through site-specific renewable energy infrastructure projects that will generate resources and fees capable of repaying the loans required to realise them while empowering local communities on all levels.

Regenerative Farming

Supporting the uptake of [Regenerative Farming](#) systems in rural communities that heal nutrient depleted and degraded soils by building organic soil carbon. As a result, the water holding capacity, nutrient density and overall resilience of soils improves along with its capacity to draw carbon down from the atmosphere. And naturally the food grown in healthy soils is healthier and tastier. This is another area where the Victorian government could play a role in assisting urban communities seeking to offset carbon emissions and improve food grown in our state; to help fund rural communities to draw down carbon while enriching soils. An exciting development was West Gippsland farmer and inventor [Neils Olsen's carbon farming project](#) receiving soil carbon credits through the Australian government's Emissions Reduction Fund—a world first. Rapidly phasing out animal agriculture would also radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions while ending a deeply inhumane industry that has no place in a modern world.

Transport

While the ground transport industry moves to renewable energy power electricity systems, the aviation industry could move to sustainably produced algae-biofuels (grown in vertical, closed-loop aquariums). When burnt algae-biofuels are carbon-neutral but given their immense capacities to draw down carbon they could be produced to fill giant holes left in the ground left by the mining industry.

Petrochemical Waste

Meanwhile, to help address the recycling/rubbish crisis, technologies that convert plastic waste to energy could be adopted in socially sustainable models that do not enable private corporations to profit from the serious problem and/or offer a lifeline to fossil fuels. Given that nearly all of the [feedstock for plastics is fossil fuels](#), it's the same companies that have created the climate emergency that are responsible for covering our world in petrochemical waste. Those who have profited from creating this terrible, long-foreseeable plastic crisis—the petroleum companies and the companies choosing to package their products in [toxic plastic](#) instead of biodegradable options, and the major retailers stocking their shelves with plastic laden goods—must pay the full cost of fixing it.

Local Solar

On the ground in the City of Port Phillip, LIVE has been a tireless advocate of rooftop solar energy in particular; having driven several bulk buy schemes resulting in 250 installations. To unleash the renewable power in rural communities and all the local jobs and economy that will flow from socially and ecologically sustainable industries, along with local councils, the Victorian government could play a leading role in fostering mutually beneficial partnerships between urban and rural communities to build renewable energy projects. Combined with smart energy efficiency, distribution and storage systems, Victorian wind and solar farms with co-generation capacities (ie pumped hydro) could meet our State's power needs while enriching local economies.

Ending the deeply unfair '[Game of Mates](#)'

Logically, there is no room for socially exploitative and extractive industries in a progressive economy. "Political donations" and "consultancies", and the revolving door of lucrative industry appointments for government decision makers are entirely incompatible with a healthy democracy and must be banned. Transitioning to a clean and fair economy capable of 'delivering for All Victorians' requires electoral funding reform and measures to stamp out the covert and highly corrosive influence from mining and other heavily polluting industries (as well as from banks, weapons manufacturers, gambling, junk food, chemical and pharmaceutical companies, and developers). [Game of Mates](#) by Dr Cameron Murray and Paul Frijters provides a highly useful guide to cleaning up our woefully failing socio-political-economic system.

Progressive Mandate

With an electoral mandate to pursue a progressive agenda based on fairness and sustainability, the Victorian Government is uniquely placed to take bold action to address the climate emergency.

In addressing the climate emergency, the Victorian government must acknowledge that:

1. The paramount duty of government is to protect its citizens from grave threats
2. Rapidly accelerating anthropogenic climate change places the very future of human civilisation and the ecosystems upon which it depends at dire risk
3. Urgent action is required to avoid further damage and to restore a safe climate
4. The necessary action will require society-wide mobilisation of resources at a scale and speed never before seen in peacetime
5. Failure is not an option

We call on the Victorian government to declare a state of climate emergency and to create a body in the nature of a war cabinet comprising cross party representation and eminent climate experts to address the threat.

The steps required to address the climate emergency at the State level include:

1. The rapid phase out of all fossil fuel extraction and combustion and petrochemical usage
2. Reduction of Victoria's carbon emissions to zero as soon as possible coupled with measures to draw down the excess carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere
3. An urgent transition to [100% renewable energy](#) for all buildings, manufacturing and transport
4. An end to the profligate waste of resources via mandatory standards which ensure energy efficiency and [sustainable agriculture](#), manufacturing, recycling, transport and waste management
5. An immediate end to all land clearing and commencement of large-scale re-forestation and re-vegetation to restore natural ecosystems and sequester more than a century of legacy carbon trapped in the Earth's atmosphere

6. Acknowledgement that:

- disadvantaged developing nations have done little to contribute to climate change and bear less responsibility than advanced economies
- people displaced by climate change are properly recognised as climate refugees and are entitled to the protections that refugee status affords
- as a leading state within a nation that has fuelled the climate emergency, Victoria should strongly advocate for Australia to provide disadvantaged developing nations with fair assistance to implement the changes required and to cope with the impacts of the climate emergency

7. Laws that facilitate demands 1 to 5 above including:

- the imposition of absolute caps on fossil fuel extraction and combustion to ensure that fossil fuels remain in the ground save where extraction is absolutely necessary
- a requirement that polluters must pay for the true costs of the pollution that they emit
- an end to all subsidies that support fossil fuel extraction and use and pollution intensive agriculture, manufacturing and transport
- monitoring and legally binding enforcement mechanisms
- carefully tailored just transition programs to support and retrain all workers who are impacted by the necessary changes
- the rapid creation of a substantial sustainability fund via an equitable levy to assist disadvantaged developing nations to make the necessary changes and to cope with climate related disasters
- a requirement that all Victorian commercial lenders make at least 20% of their loans in the form of micro financing for environmentally and socially sustainable projects proposed by and for local communities, and
- the immediate amendment of all free trade agreement ISDS clauses to which Victoria may be a party to in order to ensure that they do not compromise the above steps.

A safe climate and healthy environment are the **foundations** on which all else we know and value depends. The most cited argument for slow and inadequate responses to the climate emergency are driven by a combination of ignorance of the current science, greed by those with vested economic interests, fear of change and the failure to recognise the bountiful economic opportunities that are ready to be taken up. Climate deniers all fall in to one or more of the categories above. At this advanced stage of long predicted climate meltdown, the remaining supporters of an energy system that relies on trawling the planet in search of fossil fuels to dig up and burn regardless of the unimaginable costs should be viewed through the same lens as war criminals. It's not like their crimes against humanity and the natural world have not been well understood for decades.

For more than a decade our group has made [submissions to Inquiries](#) addressing the terrifying urgency of the climate emergency while with each season we've witnessed further '[unprecedented](#)' collapse of the Earth's basic climate stabilizing infrastructure. In addition to calling for policies based on the most credible, up-to-date science, our submissions have consistently included discussions of the enormous benefits to be gained from transitioning our economy away from polluting industries towards more socially and environmentally sustainable industries based on meeting the reasonable needs of people and the natural world that all lives depend on.

In concluding we wish to emphasize that this submission (as with all previous ones, located at <http://live.org.au/submissions/>) has been prepared to voice the deep climate concerns of private citizens associated with LIVE (an independent, non profit climate change action group representing thousands of Victorians). In other words, we have no vested interests, nobody is paying or compensating us in any way and there is nothing covert about LIVE's access to our democratically elected representatives.

Thank you for your attention to this submission. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any part of this submission with you.

Yours faithfully

Deborah Hart

David Robinson