

Response to Victoria's Climate Change Green Paper

Committee for Ballarat facilitates economic and social development within Ballarat and its region to leave a notable and sustainable legacy for the entire community. We are not party-political and work closely with the three levels of government. Membership is drawn from a wide range of business and community leaders from Ballarat and across the region. We identify and work through projects that target priority issues in key areas. Projects are driven by expert task teams. Please see www.committeeforballarat.com for more detail.

Committee welcomes the Victorian Climate Change Green paper and the opportunity to comment on it. We believe the sentiments expressed in the Paper are welcome and positive. Climate Change is already having serious negative impacts on Ballarat and its region, as it is on the globe, and urgent action is required. We believe the Green Paper is presently lacking enough concrete proposals for action that will make big differences, quickly. Some suggestions for how it can be strengthened are:

1. Coal-fired electricity generation in the Latrobe Valley (and elsewhere in Australia) is both an important asset and a very significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. It is not sufficient to leave solutions to a national response. We must seriously, multilaterally tackle reduction of this source of greenhouse gases if we are to make inroads into these emissions, locally and globally. We advocate spending much more State money, in collaboration with the Commonwealth, on R&D to develop clean coal technology, and share the results internationally. Victoria has most to gain of any state and by doing this it can lead the nation and make a major contribution to the national and international challenge.
2. Similarly and concurrently, we advocate a more serious effort with significant financial resources being put behind R&D into more efficient solar and wind energy generation, which are starting to establish themselves around the State. We believe further investigation of the potential early contributions 'renewables' can make is warranted because we are aware there are competing claims. We also believe the Green Paper is contradictory in wanting to increase penetration of solar while advocating a net feed-in tariff, which does not allow consumers to reap any rewards for their investment, or make a contribution to obviating the need for additional generation capacity. Gross feed-in tariffs are in place around the world but governments, including Victoria, do not provide sufficient financial incentive for households to help reduce the State's reliance on coal-generated electricity, thereby delaying significant greenhouse gas emission reductions.
3. In discussing the impact on geographic regions it seems that there is little consideration of the impacts except for those on Melbourne and the Latrobe Valley (and Portland, to a lesser extent). There are other regions, including Ballarat's, with manufacturing industries that would be exposed to carbon costs and sudden changes in electricity cost. The Western Victorian region is concerned about much more than farming and households, and includes businesses and industries in high-value-added manufacturing, transport, construction and many other exposed sectors. We ask that the policy positions and responses address impacts and capacity to contribute to improved circumstances in more even-handed ways.

4. Water supply and use are areas where climate change impacts are particularly severe and worsening as Victoria suffers significant rainfall and run-off damage in climate changed settings. Ballarat is in its thirteenth year of significantly below long-term-average rainfall. A number of those years have been record lows. We understand that the Government is paying some attention to storm water harvesting and recycling. We welcome this and hope it will go much further. Yet the major emphases have been on securing water from heavily contested and vulnerable sources (such as the Goulburn Valley), and investing in energy intensive technologies (desalination).

We recommend that significantly more investment be made in local storm water harvesting from paved urban areas. This would allow better localised sustainability, even though it will be in a rainfall- and run-off-reduced context.

We are also convinced that we must prepare now for worsening times by investing in recycling water for potable supplies. Safe technologies exist and we must use them with encouragement and proactivity from the Government.

Also in this context of rapidly changing circumstances, the Central Victorian Sustainable Water Strategy is seriously dated. An update is required urgently, and the timescales or general mechanisms for reviews and risk management need to be revised to provide better for our increasingly volatile climate.

5. Committee for Ballarat has earlier initiated a suggestion (e.g. to the Joint Ministerial Task Force in 2008, and other forums) to proactively encourage a greater proportion of the State's growth towards regional centres, such as Ballarat. Hence, we support the more recently developed proposal by Regional Cities Victoria to provide the support and infrastructure for this to happen. We note the substantial contribution this would make to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, as well as the greater potential contributions that would come from regional Victoria to the State and national economies.

6. On transport and freight systems, we believe:

government incentives will assist in a rapid move to more efficient and less greenhouse-gas-costly freight systems, much as passenger vehicles have recently become rapidly more efficient through very worthy local Victorian and other internationally focused efforts;

freight hubs, as appropriately proposed for Ballarat in Freight Futures, will assist with more efficient distribution systems across the State;

appropriately targeted (and regenerated) rail freight systems have the potential to reduce emissions for some freight applications; and

more inter-linked regional roads systems (such as an upgrade to the Midland Highway around Ballarat, and less focus on radial roads to Melbourne) will assist with minimising Melbourne's road congestion and maximising regional value-add to Victoria's economy.

7. Other potentially significant contributions to ameliorating climate change are:
 - reducing red tape and compliance costs for those with proven proposed actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This applies particularly with a (national) policy and planning authority for clean energy - implemented urgently - and early approval of local clean energy projects;
 - acting to facilitate significant vegetation offsets, particularly ones that will make large differences to greenhouse gas emissions and protect indigenous environmental values including biodiversity;
 - providing local government with policy instruments through which they can encourage more rapid movements towards reducing emissions in households (supporting the move to higher energy efficiencies); and

investing more in R&D for low-methane-emission livestock production in recognition of the significant greenhouse emissions involved, Victoria's significant production, and the likely role of meat consumption in our diets.

8. The implementation of energy-efficient, comprehensive materials recycling systems, including support for municipal and region-wide systems, will help reduce waste and greenhouse contributions to production and distribution systems for new materials.

Committee for Ballarat's broad membership base and annual priority review leaves us well placed to comment on these issues. We also have a good record of discussing related issues using nationally and internationally renown keynote speakers at our regular Round Table Dinners, including themes on water sustainability (Mr Rob Gell), carbon neutral energy generation (Dr Ziggy Switkowski) and climate change (Professor Ross Garnaut). Our project profile, including on Secure Sustainable Water, Greening Ballarat and the region's businesses, and Leadership Ballarat and Western Victoria, also leave us well placed to have more detailed discussions in the lead up to the final policy position.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss the ways forward in more detail.

D Lloyd, CEO