

28 February 2017



An open letter to Ms Inga Peulich, Member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region.

CC Victorian Opposition Leader Matthew Guy
Shadow Minister for Environment Brad Battin
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources David Southwick

Dear Ms Peulich,

As CEO of Environment Victoria, I am writing in response to questions you asked of the Special Minister for State and comments you made about Environment Victoria in the Legislative Council on Thursday 23 February 2017.

I welcome your interest in the work of Environment Victoria, because we are working on behalf of the majority of your constituency. Research released by Sustainability Victoria last week found that 93 percent of Victorians want state government action on climate change, and four out of five Victorians are willing to take action on climate change. These are the people we represent, and we do so independently, openly and transparently.

The volunteers outside your electorate office last week live in your electorate and are representative of this 93 percent, because for them action by the Coalition and all political parties on climate change is a priority. While there were no Environment Victoria staff present, I can assure you that if the Coalition continues to oppose environmental measures and lacks its own environmental agenda, we will continue to inform Victorians this is where their alternative government stands when it comes to protecting our environment.

Since 1969, Environment Victoria has worked with all sides of politics for policies that protect and restore the environment and reduce greenhouse pollution. Since the Coalition lost office in 2014, we have met a number of times with your Shadow Ministers for Environment and Energy, Brad Battin and David Southwick. Both assured us that despite differences of opinion in the past they are keen to work constructively to develop stronger environment and energy policy.

In November 2016, I wrote to the Opposition Leader, the Hon. Matthew Guy, on how we hoped to work with the Coalition to protect Victoria's environment and reduce our climate pollution. I received no response and since then the Coalition has:

- Voted against the Climate Change Act;
- Voted against fairer tariffs for solar energy;
- Campaigned to keep the dirtiest power station in Australia open for longer; and
- Signalled that it intends to scrap the Victorian Renewable Energy Target if re-elected.

We want to work constructively with you and your party. Unfortunately, the absence of any current Victorian Coalition environment policies and the Coalition's general opposition to recent positive initiatives by the Andrews Government raise questions about your commitment to good environmental and climate outcomes.

I am happy to answer any questions you have about Environment Victoria and our work, and in return I would appreciate answers from you or one of your colleagues to some of our questions about the Victorian Coalition and its environment policy:

- Does the Coalition plan to develop or release a positive environment policy any time soon? The last formal environment platform the Coalition released was in 2006 – more than a decade ago.



- Why is the Coalition not representing the 93% of Victorians who want state government leadership on climate change?
- Given that the Coalition voted against the Victorian Climate Change Act, what is the Coalition's plan to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and to respond to the impacts of climate change?
- Given that the Coalition argued in Parliament last week that responding to climate change is largely a national responsibility, is the Victorian Coalition satisfied with the current approach of their Federal colleagues under which Australia's emissions across most sectors of the economy have been rising?
- Given that the Victorian Coalition pledged to scrap the Victorian Renewable Energy Target if elected, what is the Coalition's alternative plan to support renewable energy projects and jobs in Victoria beyond 2020 when the Federal Renewable Energy Target ends?

I have responded in full to each of the comments and questions you raised in regard to Environment Victoria in the Legislative Council last week, and welcome the opportunity to discuss these, along with the questions I have raised, with you or one of your colleagues at any time.

I want to work with the Coalition to build an environmental platform that will serve Victorians for generations to come, but until I see any Coalition action on the environment I will not apologise for informing your constituency that this is where you stand.

Yours sincerely



Mark Wakeham
CEO, Environment Victoria

Attachment one: Response to questions and comments raised by Ms Peulich MP, 23 February 2017

Excerpt from Hansard, Thursday, 23 February 2017:

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Special Minister for State in his role as the person responsible for Victoria's integrity regime. It follows a campaign outside my office today involving Environment Victoria. I noted that they had some fairly large posters and billboards mounted on a trailer pulled by a car and there were three or four people there. I also note from their 2015-16 annual report that there were government grants they were beneficiaries of and want an assurance that no taxpayer or public money is being used to fund this particular activity either directly or as a cross-subsidy from other grants they may have received, with public resources being used to design the material, pay for the material and develop and implement the campaign. In addition I would like to know whether the protesters were paid or if indeed they are volunteers. If they are volunteers....

I would like to know whether the protesters involved were paid or whether they were volunteers and, if they were volunteers, whether there were any public funds used to recruit them or to organise them. I note also from reading their annual report that Environment Victoria is claiming to be heading to financial independence, but there is still at least 16 per cent of funding from governments. I would be concerned that this would be a misuse of funds. In addition to that, they have \$2.6 million in members reserves and \$1.8 million in the Green Future Fund. I am not sure exactly what that means. Whilst it claims to be from donations, I would want to know the source of those reserves, which are a substantial source for their campaigns. They are spending approximately \$1.2 million of their income on campaigns, \$600 000 is invested in raising funds and \$600 000 is spent on essential administration and organisational leadership. I think organisations of this nature, which ultimately play a very political role given their activities during the recent federal election and obviously their ongoing activity targeting members of Parliament, need to be open and transparent with their donors and supporters, but also

there needs to be an assurance that the funds from the public purse are not being used to fund these political activities or cross-subsidise them from other programs.

I will deal with your points and questions sequentially:

You said: "It follows a campaign outside my office today involving Environment Victoria. I noted that they had some fairly large posters and billboards mounted on a trailer pulled by a car and there were three or four people there."

- Yes, a team of Environment Victoria volunteers from our south-eastern suburbs group (based in Frankston) did park a billboard and hold a short demonstration outside your office on 23 February 2017. This is freedom of speech and democracy in action, which regardless of the issue is something we can all be proud happens peacefully in a state like Victoria.

You said: "I would like to know whether the protesters involved were paid or whether they were volunteers and, if they were volunteers, whether there were any public funds used to recruit them or to organise them."

- The constituents outside your office were volunteers and no Environment Victoria staff were in attendance, because we trust our volunteers to operate respectfully and with integrity – as they do.
- Environment Victoria does employ paid community organisers to help train and support our volunteers, but no government funding is used to run our campaigns or community organising program.
- I can proudly say that in 2016-17 Environment Victoria will not receive one cent of government funding, so there's no need to worry that government funds are being used to encourage the Coalition to develop an environment plan or challenge your opposition to legislation designed to limit global warming.

You said: "I note also from reading their annual report that Environment Victoria is claiming to be heading to financial independence, but there is still at least 16 percent of funding from governments. I would be concerned that this would be a misuse of funds."

- The 16 per cent funding you refer to (from our 15-16 Annual Report) was from the final year of a three year program funded by the Federal Government to train 400 people to become energy efficiency assessors. These assessors conducted more than 4,300 household energy assessments across Victoria in more than 100 different languages.
- We're really proud of our work on this program, which was nominated for a Premier's Sustainability Award in 2016. This program was part of the Low Income Energy Efficiency Program, which has since been scrapped by the Federal Coalition, despite its success in assisting low income households to reduce rising energy bills.
- Our project has now been fully acquitted with the Federal Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. It was subject to and passed the usual necessary audit to ensure that all expenditure was consistent with delivering the program, not delivering the organisation's advocacy campaigns.
- This financial year, we are fully independent of local, state, and federal funding, and proud of it.

You said: "In addition to that, they have \$2.6 million in members reserves and \$1.8 million in the Green Future Fund. I am not sure exactly what that means. Whilst it claims to be from donations, I would want to know the source of those reserves, which are a substantial source for their campaigns."

- Our Annual Report shows that we have disclosed all of the Green Future Fund patrons. That is, the entire amount in the Green Future Fund was a result of donations from generous Victorians who care about the future of our environment and climate. This capital fund was established to be spent over a period of 20 years and provide the organisation with the independence and resources to run effective campaigns, which is exactly what it is doing.
- Our cash reserves have been accumulated over our 48 year history and are the result of sound financial management and the strong support we have from the roughly 7,000 Victorians who make a donation to us each year.

- Any government funding received historically was the subject of detailed grant agreements and financial audits to ensure that funding was spent on program delivery rather than campaigns, and in all cases this was independently assessed as being done.

You said: I think organisations of this nature, which ultimately play a very political role given their activities during the recent federal election and obviously their ongoing activity targeting members of Parliament, need to be open and transparent with their donors and supporters, but also there needs to be an assurance that the funds from the public purse are not being used to fund these political activities or cross-subsidise them from other programs.

- We agree on the need for openness and transparency, hence our immediate response to your concerns and willingness to discuss these with you and your colleagues at any time.
- Since 1969 Environment Victoria has worked with all sides of politics for policies that protect and restore the environment and reduce greenhouse pollution.
- Since the Coalition lost office in 2014, we have met a number of times with your Shadow Ministers for Environment and Energy, Brad Battin and David Southwick. Both assured us that despite differences of opinion in the past they are keen to work constructively to develop stronger environment and energy policy.
- In November 2016, I wrote to the Opposition Leader, the Hon. Matthew Guy, on how we hoped to work with the Coalition to protect Victoria's environment and reduce our climate pollution. I received no response.
- I welcome the opportunity to discuss and advance the Coalition's environmental policy at any time.



Mark Wakeham
CEO, Environment Victoria