Environment Victoria News

Issue 34 Spring 2020

Communities leading the way

PLUS Westernport Bay: Community stopping a new fossil fuel project

environment victoria

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Editorial

Jono La Nauze,
Chief Executive Officer

Someone asked me recently what inspires me about Environment Victoria's campaigns. After twenty years in the environment movement, my answer is the same: people linking arms to protect their community and the places they love.

The people who love Westernport Bay are in the thick of one such fight. AGL, Australia's biggest polluter, wants to construct a hulking gas import terminal in the middle of an internationally recognised wetland. They famously asked the local community to "take one for the team", but the community has refused.

In August we broke the record for the number of people participating in an Environmental Effects Statement process, with over 10,000 unique submissions. In coming months, our team of lawyers, experts and passionate locals will put AGL on trial, and I'm confident we will win.

In the Latrobe Valley, generations of workers have proudly powered the state but everyone knows coal's days are numbered. We're a proud partner of Communities Leading Change, a new alliance making sure the local community, not corporate boardrooms, decides the Valley's future beyond coal.

Global energy giant Engie demolished the Hazelwood smokestacks earlier this year, but that's just the start of the clean-up. We're working with Friends of Latrobe Water to make sure Engie rehabilitates the old mine without draining local rivers. We're also keeping an eye on AGL and Energy Australia, who will do everything they can to avoid paying for a proper clean-up when their mines close.

In most of regional Victoria the latest drought has broken, but the next one is never far away. Communities that depend on healthy rivers are suffering because of the short-term thinking of Australia's powerful irrigation lobby. We're changing that by building a network of rural leaders who understand there are no jobs on a dead river.

This has been a year of challenges, first with a bushfire disaster and then a pandemic. The impacts will be with us for decades. We can't undo the damage, but we can make sure that we rebuild the economy and society we need rather than reverting to the old one. It has been amazing to see the Environment Victoria community's determination to achieve this.

The results are already showing. The Victorian government has announced it will shift the government to 100% renewable power, including all schools, hospitals and Melbourne's train network. Throughout this dark year, the power of people and the spirit of community have shone brightly. It is a comfort and an inspiration to be here with you all.

River as commodity or community?

Tyler Rotche,
Healthy Rivers Campaigner

Irrigation rights used to be tied to ownership of land, but in the past 30 years these rights have been "unbundled". Water from one farm can now be sent elsewhere, temporarily or permanently. It became a commodity that people could trade, even if they didn't live in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Recently the price of water has skyrocketed, and there have been allegations of speculation and secret deals. When the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission stepped in to investigate, it found that the market had outgrown its system of regulation. At the same time, shifts in supply and demand had led to high water prices.

The supply side is dictated by climate change. Water flows into the Murray over the past twenty years are nearly 50 percent lower than the twentieth-century average. Meanwhile, on the demand side, big irrigation industries – enabled by free-market reforms – are using more water.

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan was meant to bring irrigation to a sustainable level while compensating farmers by buying back irrigation entitlements. But in early September, federal Water Minister Keith Pitt announced the Morrison government would take water buybacks off the table.

At the same time, Victorian Water Minister Lisa Neville is pushing offset projects that theoretically support fish and frogs while using less water. Rather than connecting river channels with floodplains, water would be pumped into isolated wetlands. In a warped kind of accounting, damage in one location could be traded off against benefits to wildlife somewhere else.

The core problem is how we value water. Today, every thousand litres in every valley has a price tag, and new frontiers have opened for speculators to grab the value of the water flowing by.

Our rivers need a new approach. Communities who rely on healthy rivers need to have a stronger say in how we manage them. So, in partnership with our state conservation colleagues, we're developing a new long-term strategy to support local leaders to build the power we need to protect the Murray-Darling.

Over the next few months, we'll bring people together to tell the story of water in their communities – a story about how our communities depend on rivers, and how we are responsible for the changing landscapes that sustain life.

The river storytellers program begins on Wednesday 28 October. It will include training on pitching stories to the media, writing opinion pieces and using social media and video.

If you live in the Murray-Darling Basin, join us. At the end of the program, you'll have published an opinion piece, media story or social media video you're proud of – alongside a new network of river storytellers in your area. Sign up at **envict.org/rivers-stories-2020**

West Coast Sentinel

Murray-Darling announcement ignores true drivers of regional decline

Tyler Rotche

The Canberra Times
TO SERVE THE NATIONAL CITY

Time to give the Murray-Darling river system its own rights

Tyler Rotche

Our opinion pieces on the Murray-Darling Basin plan and how we can restore the Murray to health were published in 150 regional papers across the country.

Victorian climate action in the middle of a pandemic

Image credit: Doug Gimesy

Taegen Edwards,
Senior Campaigner

Leading institutions around the world are calling for governments to make climate solutions central to pandemic recovery efforts. Although the Andrews government has deferred crucial climate policy decisions, it has taken some positive steps, including a big boost to renewable energy.

The coming months will reveal more about whether state policies will deliver the climate action we urgently need.

Just as the Coronavirus pandemic hit Victoria in March, Premier Andrews and his cabinet were due to make Victoria's biggest decision on climate action for a decade, setting targets for the state's emissions reductions to 2030.

For months they'd been hearing calls for strong state climate action from thousands of community members, hundreds of businesses and organisations, and leading voices from across business, union, investor and community groups.

The smell of smoke was still in the air, and many Victorians had fresh memories of a summer from hell.

Bushfire survivors were fronting up to the Victorian parliament and featuring in full-page newspaper ads calling for new state emissions targets in line with giving us some chance of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees and limiting the impact of summers to come.

But the dramatic spread of coronavirus from mid-March brought a new reason to worry. Leaders were swept up in responding to the crisis, and it wasn't until July that the Victorian government confirmed it had missed its own deadline from the *Victorian Climate Change Act* to set 2030 targets.

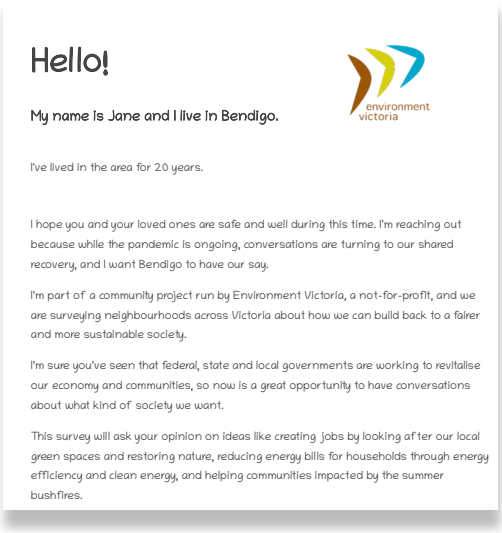
We have also seen delays to the Environmental Protection Authority's review of the licences for Victoria's three remaining brown coal power stations: Yallourn, Loy Yang A and Loy Yang B. The review, which started way back in 2017, could provide a framework to limit emissions from these giant polluters and tighten controls over the toxic cocktail of chemicals and particulate matter being pumped into the air and water of the Latrobe Valley.

There have been backwards steps too. Between March and July, the Andrews government lifted the ban on onshore conventional gas exploration (not fracking) and gave the green light to gas exploration off Victoria's coast.

We understand the Covid-19 crisis has consumed a lot of the state government's attention. And we are heartened to see they are listening to expert advice to guide their response.

But we can't afford to let one crisis overwhelm our response to another. Voices around the world are pointing out that we don't have to. We can tackle the need to support people, businesses, jobs and livelihoods through the pandemic while tackling the climate crisis. We can do this with jobs-rich decarbonisation programs to speed up the transition to renewable energy, electrified industry and transport, sustainable agriculture and so on.

Together we've made sure the Victorian government receives this message. We've pulled together policy papers full of great ideas for how Victoria can build back better. Thousands of you called and sent personal messages to your MPs and key decision-makers over months, calling for jobs-rich climate solutions to drive the Victorian government's pandemic response.



Hello!

My name is Jane and I live in Bendigo.

environment victoria

I've lived in the area for 20 years.

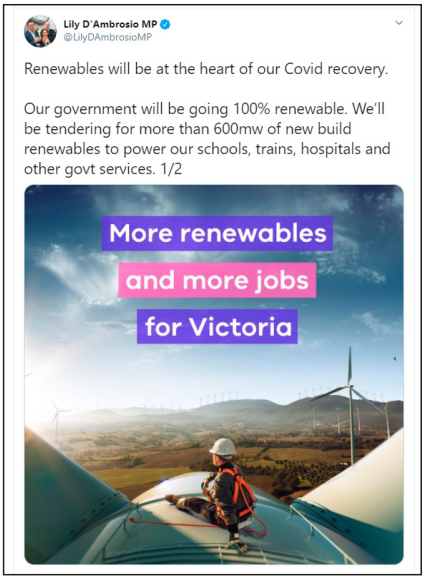
I hope you and your loved ones are safe and well during this time. I'm reaching out because while the pandemic is ongoing, conversations are turning to our shared recovery, and I want Bendigo to have our say.

I'm part of a community project run by Environment Victoria, a not-for-profit, and we are surveying neighbourhoods across Victoria about how we can build back to a fairer and more sustainable society.

I'm sure you've seen that federal, state and local governments are working to revitalise our economy and communities, so now is a great opportunity to have conversations about what kind of society we want.

This survey will ask your opinion on ideas like creating jobs by looking after our local green spaces and restoring nature, reducing energy bills for households through energy efficiency and clean energy, and helping communities impacted by the summer bushfires.

Thousands of you took part in online surveys about how Victoria can build back better. These personalised flyers were produced for surveying local neighbourhoods.



Minister for Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio tweeted that renewable energy would be "at the heart of our Covid-19 recovery".

In September the Andrews government announced 600 megawatts of new clean energy projects – that means every hospital and school in the state as well as Melbourne's train network and much more will all be powered by clean wind and solar.

THE AGE

EXCLUSIVE

Victoria backs clean energy in bid to fuel COVID-19 recovery

A renewables-led recovery for Victoria?

Your efforts have had a big impact. In September, the Minister for Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio, announced the government was calling for 600 megawatts of new renewable energy projects - our schools, hospitals, metro trains and other government operations will be all powered with renewable energy. She said, "Renewables will be at the heart of our Covid recovery."

This is a fantastic sign. It's another step in the shift to clean energy that many Victorians have worked towards for years. Thanks to everyone who took action to help make this happen.

It's also a welcome contrast to the federal government's disastrous promotion of gas, which makes little sense for jobs and electricity prices, let alone our climate.

There is much more to be done, and we'll keep pushing for jobs-rich climate solutions to ensure Victoria's response to the immediate crisis also helps us deal with longer-term challenges and future climate-fuelled disasters.

Ultimately, the test for the Victorian government is to follow expert advice. In the pandemic, this has been the advice of epidemiologists. With the climate crisis, it's advice from climate scientists. When a decision on state climate targets is made – and it's now expected before the end of 2020 – it must drive action consistent with what climate scientists say will give us the best chance to avert catastrophic global heating.

Like all of you, we'll be watching closely and keeping the pressure up to get the strongest climate policies we can from the Victorian government in coming months.

THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who called on the government to put climate solutions at the centre of Victoria's economic recovery. Thousands of you made calls, wrote personal messages to your MPs and donated to our "Build Back Better" campaign. Many more of you have been working with us and other groups for years to promote clean energy.

Together we can build back better to create a fairer, more sustainable Victoria.

Energy efficiency, a winning solution

Homes in Victoria have poor energy performance, on average rating 1.8 stars

Nicholas Aberle, Campaigns Manager

Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit, an unprecedented consensus amongst non-traditional allies has emerged on the importance of making our homes and businesses more energy efficient.

Until recently, energy efficiency was often relatively neglected by policy makers who tended to focus on its more glamorous cousin, renewable energy.

While the construction of new renewable energy is vital to shift from fossil fuels, ignoring energy efficiency will make our transition to net zero emissions more costly and wasteful.

If we don't reduce demand for energy through efficiency, we could end up building new energy supply facilities we don't need. We need to address both at the same time. Home energy efficiency upgrades make for the perfect economic stimulus from the COVID pandemic – in both urban and rural areas.

Upgrading homes to use less energy helps people save money on their energy bills which then allows them to spend this money in other parts of the economy, especially if they've lost income during the economic downturn.

Research is now emerging demonstrating that home energy efficiency upgrades are one of the best ways governments can spend their money to create jobs and kick-start our economy.

Beyond Zero Emissions' recent report, the One Million Jobs Plan, maps out a comprehensive home energy efficiency program as by far the most effective and jobs-rich stimulus measure state and federal governments could undertake to steer us towards economic and environmental recovery.

The report proposes a five-year plan to provide deep energy efficiency retrofits to 2.5 million homes across Australia over five years (500,000 homes/year), creating 430,000 jobs.

In terms of job creation, this is by far the most significant stimulus measure proposed, followed by the construction of renewable energy projects.

State and federal governments must urgently commit to a transformative home energy efficiency retrofit packages which would create much-needed jobs and stimulate local industries, as well as make our homes more comfortable, efficient and sustainable.

A version of this article appeared as an opinion piece in the Canberra times. As this Environment Victoria News goes to print, we are waiting to see if the Victorian government will announce energy efficiency measures in the state budget.

> ***If you're looking for consensus - broad-based support for something - I've not seen anything like what we're seeing in terms of support for investment in energy efficiency.***
>
> Cassandra Goldie, CEO of the Australian Council of Social Services

THANK YOU!

In recent months, with your help, we've surveyed real estate agents to highlight the utter lack of information about the efficiency performance of houses up for sale and rent.

The resulting report gained media coverage and helped push for energy efficiency disclosures at point of sale. And in September we ran home energy efficiency webinars attended by more than 500 people to engage more Victorians in this important issue.

Hazelwood's smoke stacks were demolished in May this year.

Hazelwood's final chapter

Greg Foyster,
Media and Content Manager

Winter 2020 marked the final chapter for Hazelwood, previously the oldest and dirtiest power station in Australia. In May the owner was fined nearly $2 million in the Victorian Supreme Court over the 2014 Hazelwood mine fire, and a few weeks later the iconic smokestacks were demolished.

Now a new book on the topic – previously suppressed due to the court case – has been released.

In intimate and eye-opening detail, Tom Doig's Hazelwood spells out the decades of poor decisions, negligence and lack of maintenance that led to this environmental disaster. Members of the local community emerge as heroes, telling harrowing stories of the health impacts and becoming politically active to hold the company and government to account.

The book also reveals the role Environment Victoria played in the closure.

On 5 August 2015, just three months before the Paris climate summit, the Environment Victoria team brainstormed a 'postcard petition' calling on the French president to retire Hazelwood. The French government was majority shareholder in Hazelwood's owner Engie, so they had a big say in its future. Thousands of Victorians signed the postcards, but the team needed to get them to France.

Enter Jean-Baptiste Renaud, a leading French TV journalist. He came to Australia to film a story about Hazelwood, interviewed Environment Victoria Campaigns Manager Nicholas Aberle, and took a bag of postcards home with him. The postcards were then handed over to the French Climate and Energy Minister Ségolène Royal on national television.

Doig writes:

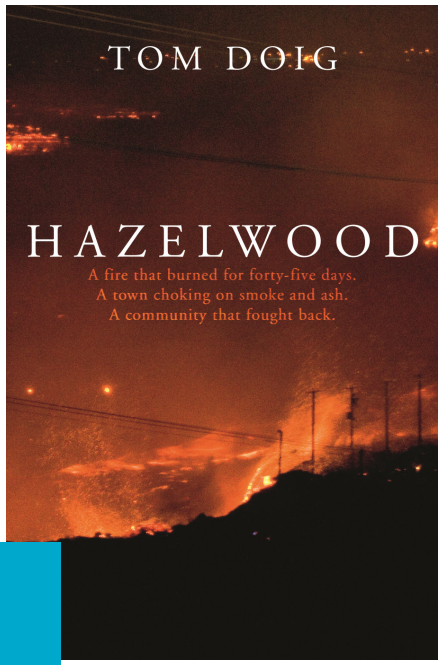
As Royal started reading a postcard, her smile froze. She kept reading, nodding grimly. Royal had just been pranked, on French national television. She told Lucet that she had spoken to Engie about Hazelwood before the show.

> *'I don't want to pre-empt a closure,' Royal said, 'but I think Engie will disengage from that process [of operating Hazelwood]... Engie made that commitment to me. So I'm announcing it now.'*

The following day the CEO of Engie told a French Senate committee they were "studying all possible scenarios, including closure". This was news to everyone in the Latrobe Valley, writes Doig.

In the epilogue, the book mentions the plan to rehabilitate Hazelwood mine by filling it with up to 740 billion litres of water, raising further questions. How long would it take to fill? Is that a responsible use of the Latrobe Valley's precious water resources, especially in drought? Would the 'lake' be swimmable, or poisonous? How stable are the mine's walls, and would a collapse cause a mini-tsunami into Morwell?

Recently Gippsland residents have formed a coalition called Friends of Latrobe Water (FLoW), calling for greater scrutiny of this "pit lake solution" and raising concerns about the clean-up of the site. So while one chapter has closed, the story of Hazelwood's impact is far from over.



READ THE BOOK!

Pick it up from your local bookstore or visit envict.org/HazelwoodBook

Image credit: Lisa Schonberg

Building opposition to AGL's dirty gas terminal

Victor Komarovsky, Community Organizer, and **Rai Miralles,** Campaigner

Even in lockdown, communities have come together to stop AGL's proposed gas terminal in beautiful Westernport Bay.

Hundreds rallied online and we helped 10,000 people to make submissions to the Victorian government's environmental assessment of AGL's dirty project.

Holding AGL to account

Through local organising and coordinated work on social media we supported the Westernport Bay community to demonstrate that AGL does not have a social licence to build a gas import terminal in an internationally recognised wetland sanctuary.

Save Westernport, our campaign partners, ran market stalls nearly every weekend last summer to inform local people and visitors about AGL's polluting plans. More than 5000 people pledged to boycott AGL if it perseveres with the project. We held our first ever virtual AGL Day of Action, which was attended by hundreds of people. We supported thousands of community members to hold AGL to account on social media, made phone and email complaints, and helped the energy giant's customers to switch to more ethical energy providers. We contacted AGL staff to complete a survey about their views on the project and apply internal pressure on AGL to abandon it.

Though we couldn't gather in person, supporters across the Bay made signs opposing the project for their front yards and community spaces. We also created and shared art on social media to make it clear AGL doesn't have a social licence to proceed with this project.

10,000 submissions against AGL's gas terminal

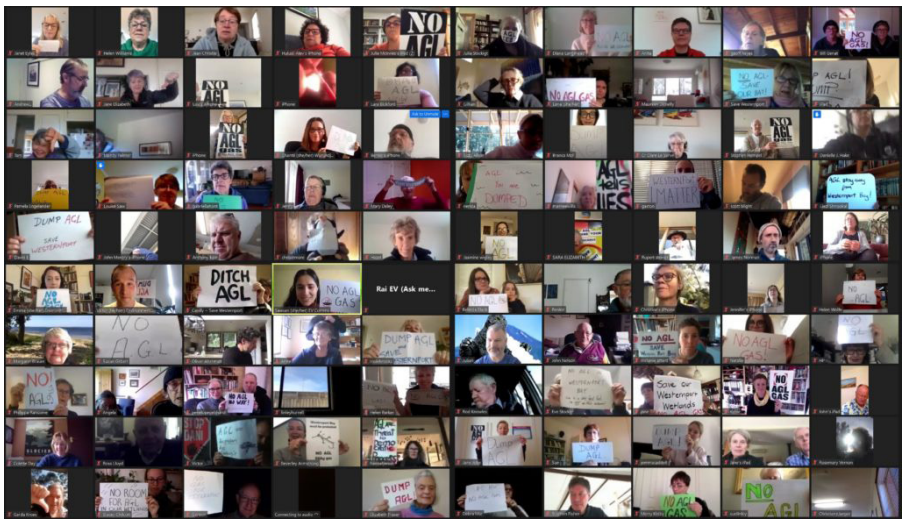
In July, AGL took the next step, submitting 11,000 pages of technical reports, which formed the company's Environment Effects Statement. We built alliances with environmental and community organisations around Westernport Bay, who collaborated to review, critique and respond to these documents.

To help the volunteers deal with this complex technical information, we ran a series of submission-writing workshops attended by hundreds of people. We also built a submission tool that automatically turned people's responses to an eight-question survey into a full, unique submission. When the deadline ticked over, we had mobilised more than 10,000 people to make submissions against AGL's proposal. This is five times the previous record for community opposition in a Victorian government environmental assessment process.

Why we don't need more polluting gas

Gas is a polluting fossil fuel. Instead of allowing energy giants to lock in new supplies of gas, Victoria should be phasing out our use of gas. Over the past year we've been pointing out to the Victorian government that we can use electrification and energy efficiency to eliminate the need to pursue new sources of gas.

We commissioned energy efficiency experts Northmore Gordon to produce an influential report on how the Victorian government can plan a transition away from gas. We organised briefings to share the report's findings with state bureaucrats, local council staff, energy industry people, and allies from environment groups.



Hundreds of people joined online rallies against AGL's gas import terminal.

Yard signs have been popping up near Westernport Bay in a colourful demonstration of community opposition.

More than 10,000 Victorians created submissions against AGL's dirty gas plan.

While some commentators continue to view gas through a supply-only lens, our efforts have started to shift the debate by showing that reducing demand is a cleaner and smarter solution than finding new gas supplies.

The fight isn't over

Thanks to everyone who's helped us get this far by making submissions, rallying online and donating the resources that make this work possible. It's amazing to see how many people love Westernport Bay and will stand up to protect this unique wetland sanctuary.

But the fight is far from over. It's critical we keep up the momentum you've helped build.

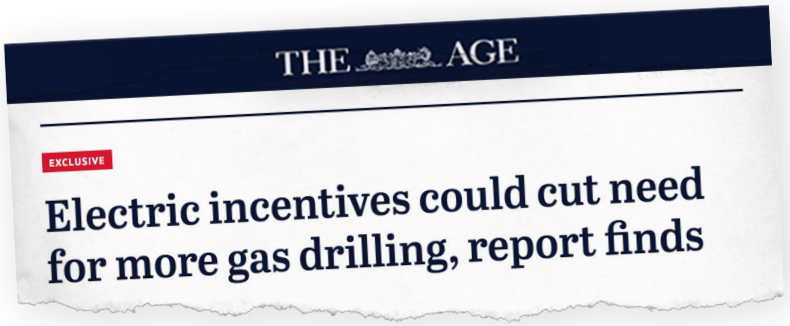
The upcoming public hearings are our next opportunity to stop AGL before it brings in the heavy machinery. This is one of our best opportunities to expose the true impacts of AGL's dangerous gas plan on Westernport's precious wetlands.

Our team of experts have found that AGL's Environment Effects Statement downplays the project's impact, using inadequate preliminary studies, far-fetched comparisons, and plain omission of risks – some of them catastrophic. Together with our allies Save Westernport, the Victorian National Parks Association, Environmental Justice Australia and volunteers from across Victoria, we will fight tooth and nail to ensure AGL is subject to one of the most rigorous environmental impact assessments on record.

THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who has donated, volunteered and taken action to stop AGL's polluting gas terminal! And an extra special thanks to the local groups like Save Westernport fighting to stop this polluting fossil fuel project on their doorstep.

We're getting down to the wire, but together, we can make sure Westernport Bay remains a sanctuary for the wildlife and the people who live near or visit this special place, now and into the future.


THE AGE

EXCLUSIVE

Electric incentives could cut need for more gas drilling, report finds

Our report demonstrating Victoria can meet its gas needs through reducing demand for gas is changing the conversation.

Communities leading change

Coal power station worker Steve Murcott. Image credit: Esther Lloyd

Coal power station worker Steve Murcott is part of a conversation about building a vision for the future of the Latrobe Valley.

I grew up in a quiet region of South Gippsland with clear skies and clean, fresh water. My days between schooling were spent going from one farm job to the next and playing with farm and native animals as pets. I grew to be very connected to the natural world and the land around me.

At times the environment could be harsh. I remember living through severe drought on the farm, which meant limited showers and baths as the preservation of water was required for survival. I remember being envious visiting my friends who lived in built-up regional centres and were allowed to have deep baths at the end of the day - although I was also somewhat perplexed as to why they would want to waste so much water!

The practical mindset that growing up on a farm provides, combined with a desire to make better farm machinery, led me to study mechanical engineering. During this time, it was necessary to live in the city, but I couldn't wait to escape back to the countryside once my studies were completed.

My wife was born and bred in the Latrobe Valley. After we were married and our attention turned to raising a family, we decided to settle in the Valley to be close to her family. The Latrobe Valley also promised good work for a young engineer due to the presence of large industry. After several years working as a design engineer, I took up an opportunity for a secondment at the Loy Yang B Power Station.

The workers at the power station were intelligent and friendly members of the local community, and I really enjoyed getting to know them. In 2016, I took up a secondment to the Hazelwood Power Station as a project manager. However, in November that same year, Hazelwood announced its closure, and I found myself locked out of the job market for some time.

The closure of Hazelwood was a wakeup call for me. I began to connect the dots between the closure dates for the remaining power stations, the Paris agreement, and Victorian Government policy on renewables. It hit me that the power industry currently underpins the Latrobe Valley economy, and I worried that the closure of the industry would have a devastating impact on the Valley. It worried me that I would see businesses close, house prices plummet, and the jobs for us and our kids disappear entirely.

At the same time, I understood why the world was and is still committed to reducing carbon emissions. Even a relatively small average temperature increase could have devastating impacts. And so, I found myself wrestling with the conflicting notions of worrying about current and future jobs while not being able to escape that there was no point worrying about having a job if the planet dies because we didn't reduce our carbon footprint in time. So what to do. . . . ?

I started to wonder about the opportunities for the Latrobe Valley that could come with a planned energy transition. Investing in renewable energy and low emissions projects could create more jobs than a business-as-usual scenario. Locally I became aware of organisations such as the Latrobe Valley Community Power Hub, farmers doing great work reducing emissions and other commercial businesses uptaking renewables and other smart innovations.

Globally I could see that the world was changing, and I worried that if we didn't take a proactive role in the energy transition, then new infrastructure and opportunities would be built elsewhere. And the Latrobe Valley will suffer as a result. I looked for a path forward, and I found Communities Leading Change.

The program equipped me with a suite of leadership tools and skills to facilitate conversations on transition and climate change. I made many friends and network connections that I never expected. I hope to use these skills I developed to break down the taboo and awkwardness around conversations relating to the changes our world is undergoing. Despite the great work many people are doing, there is no coordinated plan of action for a 'just energy transition' for the Latrobe Valley.

Yet I think one of the superpowers country-folk have is their ability to come together in times of challenge. We are facing huge challenges and changes, but I believe we can come together to develop an action plan for our energy transition.

This excerpt was first published in Gippslandia. Find more local profiles at Gippslandia.com

in the Latrobe Valley

Laura Melville,
Latrobe Valley
Organiser

It's vitally important to our climate that coal power stations close as soon as possible, but it's also important how that happens.

We're building relationships across the Latrobe Valley to foster a fast and fair transition. Here are two groups who are building a vision for a future beyond coal and ensuring that the mines are rehabilitated to benefit health, the community and local environment.

Making sure coal companies clean up their mess

As the Latrobe Valley transitions away from coal, what happens to the mines as the power stations close has become a focus of the companies, community and state government.

Friends of Latrobe Water (FLoW) was launched in April this year and grew out of community concerns about the potential impact of mine rehabilitation on water sources including the Latrobe River and Gippsland Lakes. FLoW argues that rehabilitated mines need to leave a positive legacy in the Latrobe Valley and for Victoria more broadly. Ensuring the best outcome is crucial to ensuring a just transition for our region.

To date, there has a been a lot of talk about filling the pits with water and turning them into lakes. But water in a drying climate is a precious resource. If all three Latrobe Valley mines filled their pits with water after they closed, we'd be talking about 3000GL, roughly six times the volume of Sydney Harbour. There are also concerns about how taking water from the Latrobe River could affect cultural sites, downstream users, the environment and the Ramsar-listed Gippsland Lakes.

During their brief existence, FLoW has already built local coalitions to shift the narrative about freshwater being used for mine rehabilitation, and has pushed the EPA to launch an investigation into groundwater contamination from coal ash at Hazelwood.

Fortunately, the Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy released in July reconfirmed that fresh water from the Latrobe River system is not the best option, and mine operators have been asked to come up with alternatives.

A vision for the Valley's future beyond coal

Communities Leading Change is another organisation providing opportunities for Valley communities to discuss what the future looks like as we adapt to a changing climate and a future beyond coal.

CLC will host a free webinar on Sunday 18 October for people across Gippsland. Guest speakers include Jen Natoli from E tū, New Zealand's largest private sector union, which has been involved in transition planning for Taranaki, a region previously dependent on offshore oil and gas, and Dan Coleman from Hunter Renewal, a project bringing together local people, businesses and organisations to envision a diverse, resilient and thriving future for the Hunter Valley.

If you live in the Latrobe Valley or Gippsland please join us! Eventbrite link via **tinyurl.com/OurVoicesOurFutureEvent**

Latrobe Valley Express

JUNE 15 2020

Groups unite to voice concerns over plans to fill Hazelwood mine with water

Friends of Latrobe Water have successfully publicised the issues of mine rehabilitation and water use.

Stopping Victoria's ecosystem decline

Nicholas Aberle, Campaigns Manager

Our supporter-driven assessment provides a valuable contribution to an important inquiry.

Report after report reminds us Victoria's ecosystems are in decline. The government's 2018 State of the Environment report was the latest in this sequence. A new parliamentary inquiry, called by the Victorian Greens, is looking into what can be done to reverse this trend.

To inform our submission, we surveyed you, our supporters, on how you think Victoria's natural environment is changing and what should be done about it. We received an incredible 1400 responses, enabling us to provide the Inquiry with a state-wide snapshot of concerns and solutions.

We asked you to think about a particular part of our natural environment and tell us whether you think its condition is getting better or worse. The chart below paints a grim picture of observable deterioration.

Those who felt that the condition was improving, mostly identified the following reasons: community-led revegetation, clean-ups or removing invasive species; reduction in local industrial activity; upgrades to facilities to improve amenity and/or accessibility; and good maintenance by Parks Victoria rangers.

Where people saw it getting worse, they mostly identified reduced water flows in rivers, new industrial developments, vegetation removal, encroaching urbanisation and logging.

Many of you agreed we need a range of solutions: better legal protection, more funding for revegetation programs, invasive species management, stop inappropriate industrial developments, greater involvement of Traditional Owners in land management, and

In your opinion, is the condition of that place getting better or worse

Getting much better	20	1%
Getting a bit better	105	8%
Staying about the same	246	18%
Getting a bit worse	507	38%
Getting a lot worse	469	35%

Image credit: Doug Gimesy

climate adaptation plans. Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning were seen to need more funding and powers.

Inquiry hearings are expected later in 2020 and it is due to report in April 2021. This is an excellent opportunity to get commitments from the Andrews government to scale up its efforts in environmental protection and nature restoration.

Here are a few of the many statements from the survey we included in our submission:

"Our wilderness and natural areas are precious and once they are destroyed there is a cascading effect on other systems."

"We need to protect the uniqueness of our stunning land, fauna and flora for future generations."

"We must immediately stop interfering with any remaining old growth forests. They must be preserved at all costs."

"It would be so wonderful to see our native animals return to these places where they have disappeared. We need strong protection for them. Once they are gone there is no way to get them back."

"After the catastrophic bushfires, many flora and fauna species which were threatened are now endangered. We must do all we can to protect them and help them recover."

"Forest protection, management and restoration must be planned with the legitimate & funded involvement of Aboriginal custodians."

Forever Green: Planting seeds of hope

Lena Herrera Piekarski,
Key Relationships Manager

We spoke to Meg Montague, about how people in communities give her hope for the future and why she has left a gift to Environment Victoria in her Will.

Before lockdown Meg was already part of a thriving local neighbourhood community, championing sustainable living. Over the years they bulk bought water tanks, solar panels, did energy audits and planted native gardens around the local station and on their nature strips. Now, during Covid, they have grown even closer, exchanging seeds, vegetables, gardening tools and tips and are looking out for each other.

While the impact of the pandemic is devastating for many, Meg has witnessed the power of communities banding together and responding collectively to an emergency. "It's time for building a better Victoria, with strong climate action, social justice, healthy rivers and protected old growth forest!"

Meg is deeply concerned about climate change. "If we do not act now and cut our dependency on fossil fuel, there will be no forest, flora or fauna to safeguard in the future. I am deeply distressed at the federal government's inaction on climate change and false belief that gas can be a transition fuel."

But she's hopeful that communities can lead the way on climate change and a more sustainable Victoria. Her local council Darebin for example declared a climate emergency in 2019.

Meg believes we all have a role to play in protecting our environment and becoming a more sustainable and just society. Be it by living more sustainably, taking collective action, getting involved in your local government activities or by leaving a gift in your Will, we all need to focus and support the next generation.

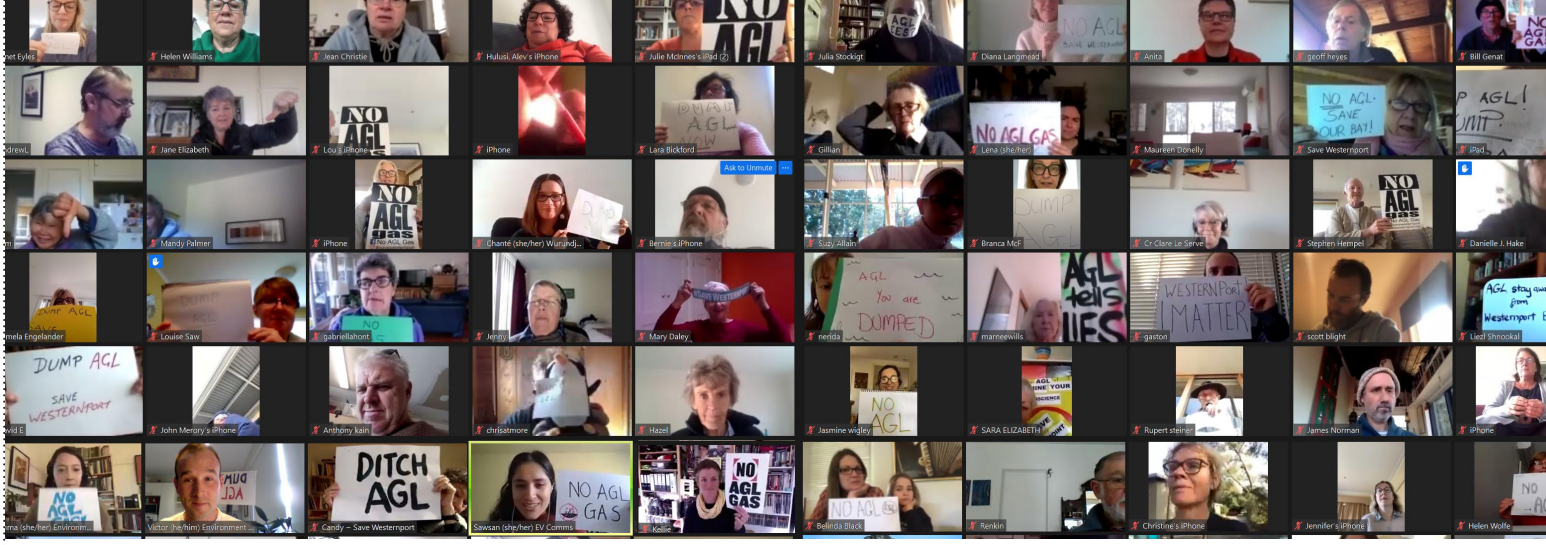
She has decided to leave a gift in her Will to Environment Victoria, as a seed of hope. "I wanted to make sure the little I had would go towards the next generation and protect our gorgeous state."

Dr Meg Montague is a policy, research and evaluation expert, a passionate gardener and born community organiser. She is on the board of 3000acres, Foodbank Victoria and HANZA, and is a member of her council's environment reference group, several choirs, and has been an Environment Victoria supporter since the 1970s. She received the Darebin's council Sustainable House and Garden award in 2014.

Leaving a future gift to Environment Victoria in your Will is an exceptional legacy for future Victorians who will inherit this beautiful state from us. It's a simple change when you next review your Will. The wording below is a guide for your solicitor or trustee:

"I give to Environment Victoria Inc. (ABN: 84 495 053 605) of Level 2, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, Vic, 3053 for the purpose of safeguarding Victoria's environment [the residue [or....%] of the residue of my estate] or [....% of my estate] or [the sum of $....] or [specified property....] free of all debts, duties or taxes and declare that the receipt of an authorised officer shall be a sufficient discharge for my executor(s)."

To find out more, contact our Key Relationships Manager, Lena Herrera Piekarski, on 9341 8108 or l.herrera@environmentvictoria.org.au



Dear Jono, I want to join the team protecting our wetland sanctuary of Westernport Bay in the next crucial months.

PLEASE MAKE THIS A DONATION BY CREDIT CARD:

(All donations over $2 are tax detuctable)

$50 ☐ **$100** ☐ **$250** ☐ **$1000** ☐ **Your choice $** _____

Please make this a monthly donation ☐

Please find enclosed Cheque ☐ or Money Order ☐ (payable to Environment Victoria Inc.)

Or please debit my credit card: Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Amex ☐

Cardholders name: _____ Expiry __/__ Signature _____

Card number ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐

Please send me info about how I can make a gift to Environment Victoria in my Will ☐

Are your personal details correct on your letter? Are you moving soon? Please update your personal information if neccessary

PERSONAL DETAILS

Title: First name: Last name:

Address:

Suburb: State: Postcode:

Email:

Mobile: Home:

Please complete this form, cut off this page and return it to Reply Paid 12575, A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, VIC 8006 or visit **www.environmentvictoria.org.au** and make your donation online. **Thank you for your generosity!**

Personal information is collected to process donations, issue tax receipts and keep you updated about our work. Please contact us at the address below if you wish to limit the use of your personal information or stop receiving direct marketing material from Environment Victoria. Our privacy policy is available at environmentvictoria.org.au/privacy and outlines how you can access or correct your personal information, who we disclose your personal information to (including overseas recipients) and how you can lodge a complaint .

☐ Please tick if you do NOT want to receive communications from other organisations. Occasionally we allow like-minded organisations to contact you with information that may be of interest to you, including organisations outside Australia. Those organisations allow us to do the same and this way we can reach more people with vital information.

Image credit: Doug Gimesy

Join us at the Environment Victoria AGM and training workshops

We're doing our AGM a little differently this year. Do you want to recruit and engage more volunteers? Have a bigger impact in the media? Run online events during COVID19? Fundraise with few resources? Or are you simply wondering what the government is up to on climate or nature, and looking for an insider briefing?

Sign up to attend our online AGM and training workshops. The workshops will be free for all members and member groups. envict.org/2020-AGM

Who's who at Environment Victoria

Chief Executive Officer
Jono La Nauze

CAMPAIGNS & PROGRAMS

Campaign Manager
Nicholas Aberle

Healthy Rivers Campaigner
Tyler Rotche

Senior Campaigner
Taegen Edwards

Campaigner
Rai Miralles

Sustainable Homes Project & Policy Officer
James Conlan

Community Organising Program Manager
Emma Horsburgh

Latrobe Valley Organiser
Laura Melville

Community Organiser
Victor Komarovsky

Network Organiser
Lavanya Pant

Data Support Officer
Chante Bock

Communications Managers
Alex Merory

Media and Content Manager
Greg Foyster

Communications Co-ordinator
Cameron Wheatley

Digital Campaigner
Sawsan Alfayadh

OPERATIONS

Finance Manager
Kate Rogers

Accounts Officer
Jing Lu

Administration Support Officers
Angela Nicopoulos
Fiona Ames

Office Manager
Cate Hoyle

Fundraising Director
Jonathan Storey

Fundraising Officer
Heather Bruer

Key Relationships Manager
Lena Herrera Piekarski

Database Officer
Karly Roolker

BOARD

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Emma Humann

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Tabatha Fulker
Elaine Montegriffo
Ralf Thesing
Paul Bailey
Paul Brown
Tim Lo Surdo
Conor Costello
Marina Lou

REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

Environment Victoria would like to thank our amazing crew of regular volunteers, who are now too numerous to mention.

TALK TO US

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