



Transitions

Stories of
Gippsland Communities
Leading Change

We wish to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this area, the **Gunaikurnai people**.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, their emerging leaders, their Country and their practices.

The Gunaikurnai people have **protected** and cared for the local **lands and waters** for thousands of years. We commit to working alongside them and all Traditional Custodians for a **Just Transition to a zero-carbon future**.

Communities Leading Change in the Latrobe Valley

After a century as the hub of Victoria's coal-fired power industry, the Latrobe Valley has been in a state of uncertainty for a decade or more, facing the closure of its old plants as Victoria transitions to renewable energy. In many parts of the Valley, the prospect of change was greeted with fear. Would the region still have a role to play in a zero-carbon economy?

As the prospect came closer to reality, however, the response in the Valley confounded the pessimists. With its extensive infrastructure, cheap land and unique skill base, the region has seen a boom in renewable power generation and the beginnings of an industrial rebirth.

After the closure of the Hazelwood power station, for example, unemployment in the region actually fell as power and mine workers found work in the new industries. This book tells the stories of Latrobe Valley people who are creating these opportunities for a bright and healthy future for the communities and places dear to them.

In 2018 Climate for Change joined with the Gippsland Climate Change Network to create the Communities Leading Change program, which supported people in the Latrobe Valley to discuss what transition meant to them and what their vision of the future looked like. Thirty-three local people were trained to facilitate compassionate conversations, and more than 200 members of the community joined these and other conversations over two years. The conversations have helped motivate people to become personally involved in energy transitions and climate action.

Participants also learnt about climate change in general and found out more about existing renewable energy projects in the Valley. They feel more connected to the community and more supportive of climate action. The facilitators have gained confidence to talk about climate change and transition with their local communities, and they report that sentiment in the region is shifting toward optimism about the future. But there is more work to do.

In this publication, Communities Leading Change (CLC) facilitators talk and write about the outcomes of their conversations and their community-based projects. We have also included quotations from people who joined in the conversations, highlighting the common themes they raised – *themes of hope, uncertainty, connection and community*. We have collected many uplifting stories of business and community leaders in the Valley and beyond who are working to support a Just Transition to a zero-carbon future.

Communities Leading Change is grateful to the organisations that sponsored the project, to the many interviewees who gave their time to tell their stories for this volume, to all those who participated in the conversations, the program coordinators, Serena Davies, Angela Merriam, Esther Lloyd, and Belinda Griffiths and in particular the conversation facilitators:

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We hope you enjoy reading these stories and we encourage you to share them with others. Through stories, conversation and action we can clarify our vision and transition together to a fair, sustainable, clean and prosperous future in the Latrobe Valley.

Credits

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We have taken great care to ensure the information in this publication is as correct and accurate as possible. We apologise for any errors. Please get in touch if you spot anything that is incorrect.

For more information and discover how you can get involved, visit:
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Project achievements

“You can’t force change; you can’t assume people will accept change. You have to have a direct conversation about it.”

Darren McCubbin, Chair GCCN Board

Communities Leading Change beginnings

In 2017 Katerina Gaita, the CEO and founder of Climate for Change, approached the Gippsland Climate Change Network (GCCN) about collaborating on a new project, which would come to be known as Communities Leading Change.

Ten years earlier, Katerina had become aware of the seriousness and urgency of climate change and had started doing everything she could to make a difference. She soon realised that effective solutions needed community action and support, but there was a shortage of resources and organisations to help mobilise opinion. So she created Climate for Change to support people like herself to have more frequent and effective conversations about climate change.

The conversations

Changes in the Valley

The Latrobe Valley community has been experiencing the impacts of climate change and transition directly. Most of the region’s coal-fired power stations have closed or are slated for closure, and in 2015 the Hazelwood open-cut coal mine caught fire and burnt for four weeks, showering residents in nearby Morwell with toxic fumes and ash. When Katerina approached the GCCN board, they agreed that it was vital for people in their region to have constructive and meaningful conversations about climate change and transitioning to a new economy.

Darren McCubbin, the chair of the board, emphasises the importance of making these connections: “These sorts of raw conversations, local to local, sitting around the table within the Latrobe Valley, are vital to



The first conversation I convened, some people who came along and participated found the experience to be one of profound relief and release. A couple of people, but one in particular, said she finally felt she had a place to talk about her concerns and her fears with people she hadn't realised felt very much the same as her.

She'd found climate change to be a taboo subject – one she'd never felt comfortable, or able, to bring up in general conversation without worrying about what the social fallout might be. After meeting with the other seven people in the group, she now realised there were others in town she could meet and talk with and, most importantly, people she could go on planning and expanding the conversation with.

Soon after, she organised a weekend event designed to look forward 20 years to the type of community the attendees might want our town to be. She also organised a climate conversation with about ten local children and became one of the principal organisers of the local schoolkids climate strike in September, which attracted 400 adults and children in a town of 280 people. The climate conversation opened her up to a world of possibility and action, and she grabbed it and magnified it, to the point where our small rural town is now having what could be called a climate action moment, which seems unlikely to go away.

Tony Walker, facilitator

developing the understanding of the need for change. You can't force change; you can't assume people will accept change. You have to have a direct conversation about it – about climate change. That is why, when Kat rang me and asked us to be the local sponsor and promote the project, we quickly agreed."

GCCN and Climate for Change worked to empower local residents to:

- **Skill Up** and improve confidence and skills through training in communications, collaborative group work, community engagement and adaptive leadership.
- **Reach Out** to facilitate small-group conversations with other residents of the Valley about transitions, climate change and air quality.
- **Get Active** within their communities and beyond.

Climate for Change and GCCN won a *Climate Change Innovation Grant* from the Victorian state government's Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. With this funding, they hired a coordinator based in the Valley to work with stakeholders in the region to design, promote and deliver the training program.

Outcomes for facilitators

People wishing to be involved submitted an application to undertake the free training on offer, and 33 people, most of them Latrobe Valley residents, joined the program. The training was co-designed by GCCN and Climate for Change and consisted of weekly workshops, with each participant committing to facilitate at least one conversation and deliver an individual or group project.

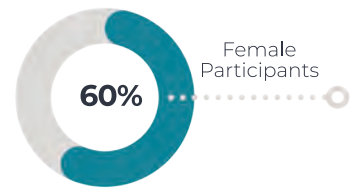
The training supported participants with knowledge and skills to facilitate constructive conversations with groups of up to ten local people. Facilitators learnt about what motivates behaviour change and the things that can prevent people from changing. They learnt first-hand about the power of listening and the tools that can support dialogue, including sharing their own personal stories and exploring shared values. In addition, they heard from local business leaders already driving emissions reductions in the Valley, including renewable energy projects and regenerative farming practices.

Participants in the program reported being more confident in their ability to facilitate constructive conversations with their communities about climate change and a Just Transition. They were inspired by connecting with people who, like them, were passionate about creating a sustainable future for their community and they have a deeper awareness of the power of conversation to drive behaviour change.

Conversation outcomes

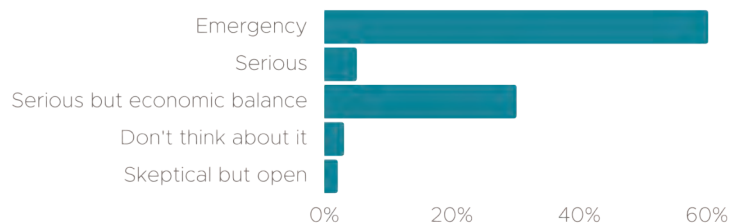
185

Total attendees across the Valley and wider Gippsland from a variety of backgrounds and communities joined group conversations facilitated through Communities Leading Change



Even before the conversations, participants from the Latrobe Valley were concerned about climate change

“Climate Change is an emergency that threatens life on earth as we know it within the lifetimes of people alive today.



Whatever the costs of acting, they are less than the costs of not acting. We must do all we can to stop then reverse it, before it's too late. If people are impacted by climate action, we must find ways to look after them rather than not act.”

Response to progress of energy transitions in the Valley



Through the conversations, people shared their thoughts and feelings about climate change and transition. While people were concerned and wanted action, there was some anxiety about the impacts on jobs and the economy.

“More support for renewables installation would provide employment for power workers looking to transition.”

“Transition away from fossil fuels needs to happen as fast as possible. Along with this, there needs to be competitive job training/income support for all workers previously involved in coal-fuelled power.”

“There is no action on climate change at a Federal level of politics. This has caused uncertainty for business and energy markets - no energy policy!”



“It's necessary for the environment, but it's detrimental to the economy (jobs availability) if transition occurs too quickly.”

“Discussions need to be turned into actions, not just kept as discussions.”

“The region's future requires action.”

Inspired change after conversations

Participants told us they valued the conversations for a variety of reasons:

“The information, the hope.”

“Knowing there are people in Gippsland that believe in climate change and want to make a difference.”

“Being with others who are like-minded.”

“Getting to listen to the viewpoints of others and talking with like-minded peers about our concerns and hopes for the future.”

“Discussing opportunities.”

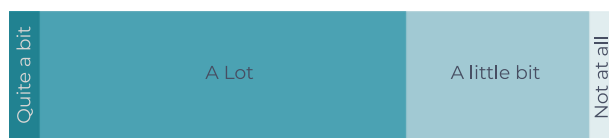
“Listening to other like-minded people. Empowerment is still around with this small group.”

“Hearing other people's perspective on Climate Change.”

“Having a conversation with like-minded people and understanding people's values and why they think.”

Conversation participants felt more:

Connected to the community & More supportive of climate action



motivation



Motivated to take action on climate change



Motivated to take action on energy transitions

awareness



More aware of the impact of climate change



More aware of existing initiatives

What's next?

A number of CLC facilitators have formed an independent group with other locals to drive the next phase of Communities Leading Change. Their mission is to bring together people representing multiple sectors of the Latrobe Valley and broader Gippsland community who will develop and advocate for a concrete proposal for a Just Transition in line with climate science. The steering group of six locals includes CLC facilitators Steve Murcott and Ruth Harper, whose stories of hope and resilience are published here. They invite everyone to get involved in the next phase of the transition to a zero-carbon economy and creating a vision for the Latrobe Valley.

They can be contacted via facebook: @CommunitiesLeadingChange website: communitiesleadingchange.org.au



1.

Climate Couch

Robin Dawson



2.

Coal Hole

PollyannaR



3.

Our Voices, Our Future

Katie Leech
Arfa Khan
Belinda Griffiths
Esther Lloyd
Laura Melville

Images by: 1. Esther Lloyd 2. PollyannaR 3. Esther Lloyd - Gippsland Climate Change Network

Project aims:

Robin's inflatable Climate Couch is designed to break down divisions and bring people together, allow people's concerns to be heard, build trust and create space for people to delve deeper into conversations about climate change. The Climate Couch also provides an opportunity to have fun!

Project outcomes:

Robin and his couch travelled to Moe, Traralgon and the Boolarra Folk Festival and had around 30 conversations with residents about climate change and transition. Unfortunately, Covid 19 restrictions meant that several proposed Climate Couch dates had to be postponed.

Project aims:

To make art about mine rehabilitation in the Latrobe Valley and create employment opportunities for young artists who can play a part in addressing the problems surrounding rehabilitation.

Project outcomes:

Local artists were employed over a six-month period to facilitate art-based workshops and events to explore the critical elements of mine rehabilitation.

For more information about this project, read "The Art of Rehabilitation" in *Gippslandia* magazine at gippslandia.com.au/articles/the-art-of-rehabilitation or visit the Coal Hole project's Facebook page @coalholeproject

Participant projects

Project aims:

To create a space for the Latrobe Valley community to listen to one another and hear positive stories of energy transition from the Valley and beyond, to inspire action and connection. This event was initially designed to be a luncheon in Traralgon, but was moved to webinar format because of Covid 19 restrictions.

Project outcomes:

Held on Sunday 18 October 2020, the webinar attracted 85 attendees. Ten CLC facilitators were trained and supported to facilitate online conversations for small groups. Panellists were Chris Barfoot from Gippsland Climate Change Network, Jen Natoli from E tū in Taranaki, New Zealand, and Danielle Coleman from Hunter Valley Renewal.

Chris Barfoot spoke about numerous positive projects already underway in Gippsland, including the Frasers Lane Solar Farm, Earthworker Cooperative and Star of the South. Jen Natoli shared stories about how unions, workers, community members and businesses had come together to develop a roadmap to transition as the Taranaki region moves away from its traditional offshore oil and gas industries. Dan Coleman told us the inspiring story of Hunter Renewal's community engagement, which has successfully pressured the NSW government to commit to an inquiry into life beyond coal.

Participa Stories

Steve Murcott



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 about 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.

After several years working as a design engineer, I took a secondment at the Loy Yang B power station. The workers at the power station were intelligent and friendly, and I really enjoyed getting to know them. It was there that I gained a new appreciation for the complexity of operating a power station.

In 2016, I took up a secondment to the Hazelwood power station as a project manager. However, in November that year, Hazelwood announced its

Story by: Steve Murcott Image by: Esther Lloyd

ant

The following 7 chapters focus on participants in Communities Leading Change, highlighting their connections to the region. Coming to Gippsland from diverse backgrounds, they have arrived at a shared commitment to promoting constructive dialogue about the threats of climate change and the need for Gippsland to achieve a Just Transition to renewable energy

The first 5 stories have previously appeared in the quarterly magazine, Gippslandia

closure, and I found myself locked out of the job market for some time.

The closure of Hazelwood was a wake-up 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. I found myself wrestling with the conflicting notions of worrying about current and future jobs while not being able to escape the fact 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 taking up 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 would 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.

“While transitions can produce mixed feelings, they also represent significant opportunities for growth – opportunities for us to celebrate our shared values and to bring the best of who we are into a new future.”

I hope to use the 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.

While transitions can produce mixed feelings, they also represent significant opportunities for growth – opportunities for us to celebrate our shared values and to bring the best of who we are into a new future.



Bosedede Adetifa

Bosedede Adetifa moved to the Latrobe Valley from Nigeria when her husband took up a nursing job in the region.

She says there are many things she loves about living in the Latrobe Valley, but mostly she likes being close to all the amenities her family needs, and she appreciates the friendliness of the people around her.

“When I came to the Latrobe Valley in 2000, the people I met were very accommodating and comforting. Where else do you want to be other than a place where you can easily connect with people, and they’re very supportive, readily available to offer assistance? And I guess I just thought, this is where I want to be.”

She says, “Being a nurse myself, I realise we need to support the youth, as well as the elderly people in the community. We need to look after the environment, our health, and empower people with education and research.”

When it comes to the local economy transitioning towards a zero-carbon future, Bosede says it is important to consider how people are impacted in different ways. “There have been a lot of people who have been impacted by job losses and others who have had health issues from living near power stations. So this has definitely affected different

people in different ways, and we need to find solutions that address all these impacts,” she says. “To find these solutions we need to involve the community. We need to create awareness by sparking community conversations, so people know the impacts of climate change on the environment. People need to know. I think some people are aware, but they do not know the gravity – how significant it is. And they won’t know until we actually start the conversations.”

“We need to look after the environment, our health, and empower people with education and research.”

Bosedede says she generally feels hopeful about the future of the Valley as people come together and become more educated about the issues.

“I believe that charity begins at home. If every family, every individual can have that little conversation and create that awareness within their own home, then it will translate to the whole of the community. Then everybody would be able to have a safe and healthy environment. So that is my hope, that it will happen as a community.”



Ruth Harper

Ruth Harper and her family moved from Ocean Grove to the small town of Boolarra in the Latrobe Valley in 2011.

"We decided we wanted to give the kids a bit more of a country upbringing. And we also wanted to have a bit more land so that we could grow more vegetables and have chickens and all that sort of thing," she says.

Ruth is a scientist and wanted to live in a location that offered good soil and rainfall and was more resilient to climate change impacts. "So we started looking, and we found a block in Boolarra."

She now works in the renewable energy sector on a proposed wind farm, focusing on community engagement and environmental approvals.

"I've always been very motivated by preventing climate change and protecting the environment," she says. "For the Latrobe Valley to get out of coal is pretty massive. We need to transition to where we utilise the skills and knowledge that we have in the Valley, directed towards building a healthy, happy, vibrant community that protects the environment."

Although she's very concerned about the impacts of climate change we are witnessing now, Ruth says she draws hope and inspiration from the many active people she sees in the community. "I've met some absolutely amazing people and heard about and

been involved in some really inspiring projects in the region. There are a lot of people for whom making this energy transition is front of mind, who are working so hard and passionately to implement this across our communities. So to me, that's really helpful."

"One of the most important things in navigating the energy transition is listening to others' perspectives rather than sitting in judgement."

Ruth says one of the most important things in navigating the energy transition is listening to others' perspectives rather than sitting in judgment.

"You've got to be very respectful of the fact that this is a massive change. It takes people time to come to terms with it," she says. "You've just got to work through that process with people. The more people who can help others work through that process and have these conversations, the better we're going to be as a community rather than judging people."



Arfa Khan

Arfa Khan moved to the Latrobe Valley with her husband in 2012 after moving to Australia from Pakistan in 2009. Arfa says that when she first moved to the region, she wondered why she was there – but she was soon won over. “I soon realised it is one of the most beautiful areas of Victoria and Australia,” she says. “The natural environment was the first thing that attracted me.”

She began with no social connections. “When you just move in, you don’t know anyone. It was just my family, my children. Then you start exploring, and you start making friends, and then you see that this part has so much to offer, and we can offer this place a lot of things too.”

Arfa says she believes the region should make the most of its natural advantages. “The coastlines are beautiful here. Just walking around the area, the mountains and scenery are breathtaking. Many of these beautiful walks on the coast and the high country can be used for tourism rather than building mines or other developments.”

As the transition away from mining and manufacturing accelerates, Arfa says we need to focus on what will be best for our children. “It is time to ask: ‘What do we want our culture to be? What sort of investors do we want to see invest here? Do we want to see a good future for our children?’”

Arfa says she became involved in Communities Leading Change because she realised the older generation had made a lot of mistakes, and that it was now up to the community to develop a better plan for the future.

“We need to educate our children and the younger generation about where we’ve gone wrong in the past. We need to admit to it, learn from it, and start making the changes from there.”

“I realised that this is about our future. We need to start talking about it because there are many people out there who care – but they may not have even been asked. I think the small steps we make are going to make a lot of difference also. We need to educate our children and the younger generation about where we’ve gone wrong in the past. We need to admit to it, learn from it, and start making the changes from there.”



Jordan Nabulsi

Jordan Nabulsi was born in the Latrobe Valley and has spent most of his life in Traralgon. He enjoys the sense of being a local in a small, friendly community. He says, "I've always liked how you get to know the people that you went to school with, and you'd see them around forever. So when you go out in town, you see the people you know."

Jordan has completed his electrician's apprenticeship in the power industry, including a stint at Loy Yang B. Despite this experience, he's now focused on working in renewable energy.

"I'm applying to solar companies and trying to find work in more renewable energies. That's where I'm focusing my career. I think it's an emerging industry now," he says. "I'd love to see investment in renewable energy sources in the region."

But he still experiences opposition to renewables. "I think there's a lot of people who are quite negative towards the idea of renewable energy. They probably see it as challenging the region's traditional economic basis. There's vested interests, including people who live in the region, who want to see the continuation of Loy Yang and even its expansion. And that's where their motives and where the financial and ideological interests lie."

Jordan thinks that one reason people in the Valley resist being part of a clean energy transition is that they remember how the government-owned power industry provided secure employment, and they aren't confident that renewable energy can provide the same opportunities. It will certainly be different.

Despite these hurdles, Jordan is hopeful about the future of the region. "From my understanding, we are in a good location for renewable expansion, because this is the grid's injection point for a large portion of Australia. It's an optimum location for setting up renewable projects. I just think it'd be positive from all angles to invest in renewables."

"I think people in the Valley, especially young people, need to find projects and groups in this community that reflect their values and vision for the region."

But change will only happen from the grassroots. Jordan says, "I think people in the Valley, especially young people, need to find projects and groups in this community that reflect their values and vision for the region. So I would say to everyone, get out there in the community, make the effort and help be a part of the change you want to see in the Valley."

Robin Dawson

I grew up in Glengarry, just north of Traralgon. I moved away a number of times, but in the end I came back because I felt a certain sense of duty and responsibility to my community. I realised that I have the opportunity to connect with people and have a positive influence, so I wanted to stay here and contribute.

I joined Communities Leading Change because community and climate change are a big focus of mine. I wanted to learn how we can combine the two to ensure positive community development in the Valley. I want the Latrobe Valley to be a positive place with people living well, and I figured that the CLC program would help me to understand how I can work with the community to transition smoothly.

One thing I've learnt from the CLC training is that not everyone needs to hear my opinion. Listening and building empathy are such important skills! I know what I know, but I don't know what others know. When you're told something you don't agree with, it's easy to let your ego get in the way, but I now recognise that if I'm truly listening to people and they feel respected, they're more willing to respect and listen to me. I've noticed that climate change comes up in conversation with my dad a lot more now. We used to have heated debates, but now he's more open to different possibilities, because he's been able to speak his mind.

I had a very diverse group of people attending the Conversations for Change I facilitated, but they all got along well. The initial conversation was between a local farmer, my father, a local parks worker and a mechanic that sometimes works at the power stations. The farmer and the parks worker were more aware of the opportunities, but didn't really understand how serious and urgent climate change is. They were all positive about being involved in the conversation. They certainly weren't dismissive.

It was interesting having people in the room who were older than me. Being the organiser and the facilitator, I was respected and listened to. I had their attention, which I wasn't used to. That was a difficult thing to accept, and being a leader was a bit daunting. But I sat with the discomfort and trusted myself to succeed and I gained confidence in myself. The following conversation involved another farmer, a lady who works in the local information centre and is also a teacher, a mother, my younger

brother, and a boilermaker. That conversation was even more diverse, and it was juicier. Most people still weren't aware of the urgency of the issue, but they all recognised local impacts that they hadn't previously attributed to climate change. They connected the dots in the conversation and had a lot of ideas about what we could do.

I think people are concerned about climate change but are feeling alone and helpless. Bringing people together through common concerns and desires strengthens and empowers.

“One thing I've learnt from the CLC training is that not everyone needs to hear my opinion. Listening and building empathy are such important skills!”



Story told to: Esther Lloyd Edited: Lucy Marks Image by: Esther Lloyd
Katerina Gaíta and Robin Dawson on the Climate Couch

I've lived in Boolarra for most of the last thirty years and raised my boys here. I've worked and volunteered with a variety of conservation and community groups such as Friends of the Upper Morwell River, Yinnar Community Garden, Latrobe Valley Sustainability Group and the central and regional Gippsland Greens. I've worked as a teacher, an environment officer with Latrobe City and a stewardship officer with the Trust for Nature. I enjoy the arts and am a long-term member of Arc Yinnar, an artist-run non-profit that supports creative activities in the region.

A love of nature and birds and people has been with me since I was a child. It's always been my motivator for caring about the planet and its people. Sustainability is an earth-roots experience for me. It's the way I feel about the planet – that we are all connected in the flow of life, and that ecological wisdom has so much to teach us. Where that comes from, the respect for nature, is hard for me to describe, but my parents often took us kids on bush picnics and camping holidays where we'd learn survival skills and observe the wildlife.

I am currently the co-chair of Strzelecki Sustainable Futures with Trevor Hoare. We are a grassroots community group supporting a Just Transition to a sustainable, low CO2 future. We support the development of renewable energy generation to replace the old coal-fired power stations in the Latrobe Valley. We wanted to be a community voice for those who support the proposal and present peer-reviewed science.

We profile our support in the media and have held events supporting renewables with other organisations like Friends of the Earth. It's easy for people to level criticism at the proponents of renewables. That's why a community advocacy voice is critical.

Leadership takes strength, resilience and a commitment to people and places. I enjoy learning in a group because you can share your experiences and learn so much more about people. A crucial ingredient to change is understanding how to engage with people. That's why I wanted to be part of the Communities Leading Change program.

Many of us in the program were already active on climate and the environment. In fact, between us we had decades of activism. This program gave us confidence. It helped us know that there was an over-arching support group of people that we might not have been aware of before. And through the conversations we met even more people – people who are concerned about climate change but not saying much.

While I was doing the course, I felt there was division in the community, especially around Delburn Wind



Catheryn Thompson

Farm. There were strong advocates in the anti-renewables group. It was like, if you support the wind farm, you're anti-community. But now they've gone quiet. Now I feel people are more confident to speak out in favour of renewables and climate.

It's easy for people to level criticism at the proponents of renewables. That's why a community advocacy voice is critical.

I've been active for a long time and I'm tired! I want to go into more artistic, creative work with the community. Being a facilitator at the Yinnar Community Garden is a great space for this, and we are currently building a reflective bush garden in consultation with Aunty Doris, a Gunaikurnai elder.

The garden is a testament to people in the heart of the Strzelecki Ranges who have come together and through hard work and a strong community spirit, turned an ambitious vision into a wonderful community space. I'm thinking of doing something with wind, flags, flying theatre ... something beautiful and experiential. I'm excited about doing something new with others in the community.

Intention Statement

All the conversations held by CLC facilitators were recorded and transcribed. A team of volunteers then helped analyse the transcripts and explored the themes that emerged as people shared their thoughts and feelings. We have brought these themes together in the agreed intention statement. Throughout this publication, we have shared quotes from the conversation transcripts to exemplify the themes identified.

Through listening and sharing our intention statement, we hope we can help shape a fair, sustainable, clean and prosperous future in the Latrobe Valley.

These conversations were held in 2018 and 2019 before the devastating bushfires in East Gippsland.



We can see climate change happening. It is increasing inequalities, and we are concerned for our future. Fossil fuels are hazardous for the environment and our health. Change is hard, and our community sometimes feels divided. But the world is responding, and change is inevitable. We don't want to be left behind. We need a plan for our future, and leadership from businesses and government. With change there will be opportunities. We value our community, and we can find a way forward if we work together.

We can see
climate
change
happening.



Image by: Doug Gimesy - gimesy.com



“Summer is no longer summer – it’s the fire season.”

“It’s becoming more usual for things to be more extreme.”

“It seems like the last half-a-dozen years have been progressively getting drier and drier. We’ve had less and less rain through the winter.”

“In Wellington last year, the creeks dried. There was no water. And there was no water for fighting the Rosedale fire.”

“I’ve never seen [the creek] dry to the extent that it was this drought. There was not one drop of water anywhere, not one.”

“We’ve got friends that are farmers, and even during the winter they’re struggling for rain. Is this the new normal that we have to get used to dealing with?”

“Bushfires are getting worse.”

“We have fires for twelve months of the year now.”

Stories from Wellington Shire Farmers

In 2020, students at the Massachusetts-based Worcester Polytechnic Institute collaborated with the Gippsland Climate Change Network to record video interviews of farmers in Wellington Shire about their opinions and perceptions of climate change. Many of the farmers live in the Macalister Irrigation District, in areas that use water from Glenmaggie Dam for irrigation. Most of these farmers were sceptical of man-made climate change, but were responsive to climate variations, with many using renewable energy and regenerative farming practices. These investments and practices have helped the farmers respond to shifting and less reliable weather.

Farmers living in the irrigation district were mostly optimistic about the sustainability of their future. However, those living outside the irrigation district were generally much less confident about the long-term viability of their farms and community. These stories are intended to help others understand the farmers' perspectives and actions on climate change.

The stories were originally part of the YouTube documentary *Climate Stories: Wellington Shire*, created by the Worcester Polytechnic Institute students. They have been transcribed by Lucy Marks with permission from the farmers and Gippsland Climate Change Network.



“A lot of things we’re trying we think will be good for the environment, good for our business and improve our natural resources.”

Sandra Jefford

Sandra and her husband Wilco Droppert are organic dairy farmers who moved from West Gippsland to Wellington Shire in 2011. Sandra contributed to CLC facilitator training, sharing her perspectives on transition in the region.


I've noticed that in this area the temperatures seem to be getting higher and the rainfall is becoming less reliable. We are largely a farming community here, and if rainfall becomes less reliable, we're going to have a real problem. If we haven't got water available, our farms become less viable, and that's really going to affect our community.

Climate change is a touchy topic of conversation. Some people don't believe in it and some people don't care about it. However, I'm quite passionate about doing what I can to reduce my impact on the environment. It can be frustrating when people don't share my enthusiasm. But then I've also met other people who are just as interested in sustainability, and we can learn a lot from those people!

There's a lot of things we're trying on the farm that we think will be good for the environment, good for our business and also improve our natural resources. At the moment, we're using multiple species of

crops. We have planted at least twenty different plants. Some would probably be regarded as weeds, but the cows will eat them and still milk well. We're trying to put more organic matter and carbon into the soil. That will help the soil hold moisture and allow us to irrigate less often so we can make better use of our water.

We would eventually like to try and become carbon neutral. We are developing an alternative energy project, because the farm uses a huge amount of electricity and diesel every year to pump irrigation water from bores. Hopefully, we will get to install 200KW of solar panels, two small wind turbines, which will equal 30KW, and some batteries. The irrigation control system can then be integrated with that alternate energy so we could be taking very little power out of the grid. That's good for us financially, of course, but it will also reduce our carbon footprint enormously.



“The whole process is working with nature rather than against it to sequester carbon and keep the land cooler and more resilient and productive.”

James Troedel

James is a sheep farmer with a property outside the Macalister Irrigation District. He shears Merinos for wool and raises lambs for meat. Here he describes how he has changed his farming practices as the climate has become drier and hotter.

I've owned my farming property for forty years, and I've been sheep farming all that time. Something that I have noticed is that the summers around here are getting hotter and drier and the wind is not as cool as it once was, which has affected how the pastures behave.

I used to practise what was commonly known as industrial agriculture, using high levels of fertiliser and herbicides as a way of controlling the environment. Recently, I've changed my farming practices towards a more regenerative approach, which is quite different. It includes things like rotational grazing, where you move your sheep around from paddock to paddock rather than just leaving them spread evenly over the whole property.

The most important aspect of regenerative farming is nurturing the soil. Healthy soil retains more moisture and is alive with fungi and bacteria that feed the plants. The healthy plants sequester more carbon, which also improves the soil. By maintaining ground cover, we can keep the land cooler and prevent water loss.

We've massively cut back on the use of chemicals. We use organic fertilisers and feed the soil rather than fertilising the plants. Tree planting is also important, as the deeper roots bring up nutrients and the shade and windbreak is beneficial for the soil and animals. The trees are also a home for bird life, which helps keep insects under control. Having greater biodiversity means healthier sheep contributing to the improved grasslands. The whole process is working with nature rather than against it to sequester carbon and keep the land cooler and more resilient and productive.

I think that the farming sector has a huge role to play in climate change. It's possible to sequester up to ten or twenty tonnes of carbon per hectare in the soil, and if you take that over the whole of Australia, it could be a huge contribution. Soil sequestration actually mines carbon out of the air, which could do something meaningful about reducing carbon. I think that it is amazing and has an incredible role to play in the future.



“Change is really hard, and it’s not going to be a straight line. But to me, the economic, societal and environmental benefits make combating climate change worth the effort.”

Jonathan Ryan

Jonathan is a dairy farmer who has lived in Wellington Shire for ten years and owned a farm there for five.

Climate change is very obvious at the minute. The fires and the prolonged dry period we’ve had have been unprecedented. We’ve experienced fires along here most years, but nothing like the intensity we saw this year.

The other thing that we have noticed on this farm is increasing hotter days and the increasing stretch of hotter days. Plus, the hotter days seem to be happening earlier in spring. There’s also been two years of not getting any additional irrigation water, which has been a significant cost to our business.

To me, climate change impacts are visually perceptible with all the droughts, floods and fires here and right across the world. Fifteen or twenty years ago, the science was telling us that we’d see all of these impacts, and they are happening right now. I sometimes wonder if climate change is actually happening more or we are just seeing it more

because of the media. But I think it certainly is happening.

A lot of my peers are concerned for their future, because the recent changes in the dairy industry have driven the prices of dairy down and made production less profitable. A lot of farmers have significant debt, and we have young families. So to make changes to our farming practices is not an easy decision. You could go down a path and balls it up and lose a lot.

There’s a lot of negative thoughts around climate change because there’s a lot of unknowns. How do you get from here to there? Change is really hard, and it’s not going to be a straight line. But to me, the economic, societal and environmental benefits make combating climate change worth the effort.



Bob Semmens

Birdwatcher

Bob Semmens, known locally as "Bushy Bob", has lived in Mallacoota since the late 1970s. He grew up on a small farm at Sedgwick just outside Bendigo in central Victoria, where there were always birds coming and going. Ever since, Bushy has been interested in what birds are about, and he has dedicated his life to bird surveys, wildlife and bush conservation.

The silent bush

I've been surveying six habitats in this area over the last few years, and I've noticed the numbers of birds are well down. I put that down to climate change drying out the bush and the lack of insects.

Since the bushfires, there's just about as many birds in the town as there ever was, but once you get in the bush, they would have been incinerated in the fire. The second day after the fire at Mallacoota, I went down to Bastion Point and walked about half a kilometre down the beach. There were dead birds everywhere. They were overcome by heat and smoke – they would've just dropped from the sky.

As you've probably heard, 3 or 4 billion wildlife were killed in the fires. Not all here, but up the coast. We're looking forward to some more birds happening in the bush, but it'll take a while. It'll be a few years.

At the moment it's still pretty silent in the bush. There's not a lot of bird noises. There's not the feed.

The glossy black cockatoos with the red tails only eat casuarina seed, and the casuarinas were all burnt. Same with the yellow-tailed black cockatoos. They eat the banksia and hakea seeds, and get wood grubs out of melaleuca trees. Well, all the banksias and hakeas were burnt in the bush, and when they burn they open and throw the seed out. So the birds go to the tree and there's no seed.

The cockatoos have been getting nectar off grass-tree flowers, which are everywhere, millions of them. A local took a photo of a yellow-tailed black cockatoo getting nectar off a grass tree, which is odd for them. They had to resort to getting nectar when seed's hard to come by.

If the bush keeps drying out as it has been over the last few years, another fire could easily happen, because a lot of these grasses will die off and go to seed. And there's a lot of dead trees around as well, so it makes it easier for fires to get another hold.

“At the moment it's still pretty silent in the bush. There's not a lot of bird noises.”

Hope for recovery

The birds will return when there's food for them. In a couple of the bird sites that I surveyed, there was nothing for a start, but now you get half a dozen birds. You've just got to be lucky. Over the next two or three years, we'll find out what's coming back into the bush.

About five kilometres out of town, there was a rufous whistler preening, and I was trying to take a photo of it, like I do with all wildlife, when it came another one, and they mated. So there is nesting and breeding happening out in the bush. Along the beaches, some of the little hooded plovers have been nesting and some young have grown up. Some of them get taken by various birds of prey.

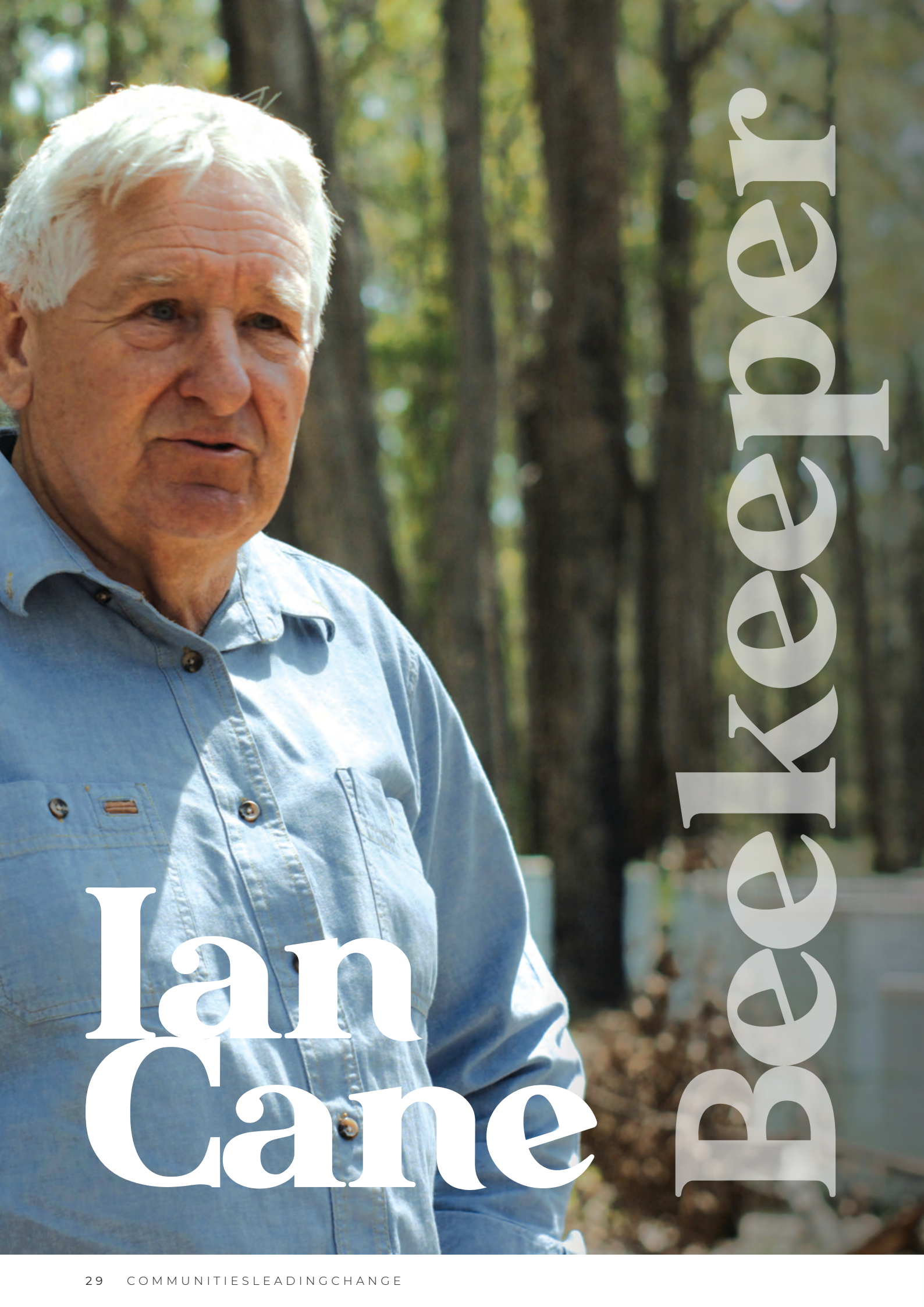
In the town, there are kookaburras feeding young, and I've heard that the lyrebird had young. You might hear a koel calling somewhere. There's been two or three in the town. They usually lay eggs in the red wattlebirds' nest. There's a few red wattlebirds around.

I was at a meeting last Saturday when a big channel-billed cuckoo flew over, calling. They're the biggest cuckoo of the lot. They lay eggs in magpies' or currawongs' nests. The odd one comes here most summers. In fact, most of the migratory birds have been seen. I don't know about rufous fantails, though. There was the odd one still about after the fire, but they must have gone north.

A lot of the honeyeaters were dead on the beach after the fire, but numbers are building up in the town. It makes my day to see these local birds homing in on my bird bath. A yellow robin will come in, have a look and dive in. He'll go, "Oh, that was pretty good" and dive in again.

I'd like the government to put more effort into addressing climate change, because I think that's behind all these tornadoes, fires and floods. They're more severe than they used to be. It's happening more right around the world. So it's time that more is done to counteract it, to just stop climate change.

This story was first told in Environment Victoria's documentary 'Beyond the Burning' about the 2019-20 East Gippsland fires. Visit: envict.org/bushfiresfilm



Ian Cane

Beekeeper

Ian is a highly regarded beekeeper who has been in the industry for more than fifty years. He has lived in East Gippsland for most of that time and operates a 1000-hive apiculture business out of Bruthen in the Tambo Valley.

My family have worked these forests here in East Gippsland for a hundred plus years as beekeepers. I have spent most of my life working in these forests alongside my father and grandfather, listening and learning how these ecosystems react to drought, fire and various timber harvesting methods, so they hold a pretty special spot in my heart.

We license the use of public land for the purpose of accessing and placing our beehives. It creates a beautiful honey unique to East Gippsland, something we prize very highly. The honeybee industry and the honeybee pollination-dependent industries rely heavily on the public land estates for floral resources.

Turning forests into kindling

If you look at the rainfall records, there's been a significant decline in rainfall over the last 40 years in East Gippsland compared to the 100 years before. The three in a row in the lead-up to the bushfires were excessively dry.

In a nutshell, we're suffering from climate change, so the forests are naturally drier. But the major impact by far is the way we've managed these forests. Through timber harvesting the wrong way, we have changed the structure of these forests to be less resilient around fire.

I like to say we've turned our forests into kindling, because when a forest grows back after excessive harvesting, all the stems are really close together. These forests here were traditionally open-space forests that you could gallop a horse through, but now they're more densely packed. They ignite more readily and they carry fire at a higher intensity. Coupled with that, you've got a lot of dead wood left over from harvesting operations that adds many tonnes of fuel per hectare.

“We must build more resilience into our forests and our ecosystems to cope with a changing climate.”

Excessive harvesting totally changes the reproductive capacity of the forests. A normal forest with structural integrity would have a reproductive capacity to bud, flower and seed every four to eight years. But if you look at forests that were harvested, have grown back five or fifteen years later and then are subsequently burnt, these forests aren't recovering as they should. For these forests, it will be decades at best before they will recover a sound reproductive capacity and add any value to our industry or for any of the nectar-feeding insects.

Of the changes I have seen in my lifetime, the change in forest structure and in the forests' reproductive capacity from poor management will have the greatest impact on future generations. Just blaming climate change will not correct this situation.

The world's most important pollinator

Over the summer of 2019/20 we were impacted by the fires. Many of our beehives were affected and burnt. But the biggest loss to us was the forests. It will be a long time before they recover and have an ability to produce honey and keep our hives healthy enough to pollinate food crops.

We must not forget that the bees that we manage are probably the most important insect on the planet as far as human survival goes. Without bees and the food security they provide through pollination, we humans wouldn't exist the way we do.

We have to learn to manage the landscape for all its values and uses in perpetuity. We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past forty years. We must build more resilience into our forests and our ecosystems to cope with a changing climate, which will also assist our industry and support its role in food security for generations to come.

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Wildlife carer Susie Pulis

Saving the Animals

In the Black Summer of 2019–20, the fire started north of us at Martha Vale in November. It ran straight down the side of us, and we had to do quite a massive evacuation of animals. It came within five kilometres of us. Sadly, most of the animals that we did rescue after the fire passed away from the stress.

We actually didn't know if the property had been impacted at all until 1 January. The CFA rang me at about 7am and told me our property was still standing, but there was a lot of active fire around it and that I needed to get up there. It took my son and me about three hours to get there, with trees falling and active fire everywhere. The scene was quite haunting.

But when we finally got there, my tears went from devastation to, "Oh my gosh, this place is green and lush!" It was just incredible. I think we were OK because we hadn't allowed any burning or clearing. There was a lot more moisture content from all of the trees and less oxygen to fuel the fire. This, along with the topography of our land, meant the big fire front went around us, with fire only trickling through parts of our property.

The Future is Renewable

After the fires, our solar was damaged, but we were very lucky because the insurance company covered the costs to replace it. East Gippsland Solar supplied and replaced all the panels, batteries and inverters.

That's how I met my partner Grant, who's the founder and owner of East Gippsland Solar. They're a local company servicing Central and East Gippsland who pride themselves on providing the best quality products available in solar power and renewable energy. They have done an amazing job helping people in the community rebuild who were directly affected by the bushfires.

Susie runs the Waterholes Wildlife Sanctuary, specialising in the care of koalas and kangaroos. She has been a wildlife rescuer and carer for more than ten years. Having originally built the sanctuary on Raymond Island in 2013, Susie has since relocated to Waterholes, northwest of Bruthen, to expand her work and provide a sustainable area for rehabilitation and release.

The sanctuary is fully volunteer-run and relies on donations from the public via their website: koalashelter.org/help/donate

In Clifton Creek, the local primary school was fully burnt down. East Gippsland Solar have partnered with REC Solar and Fronius to donate solar panels and inverters to the school, and they'll be installing the new solar energy system once it's rebuilt. It was quite an old school previously, without solar, so this helps the school go fully renewable.

It is one of four big projects East Gippsland Solar are working on in the community, including at the Mallacoota Hall and Recreation Reserve, the Buchan Valley Gold Club and the Bruthen and District Citizens Association.

"I try to act proactively, educate people and show them why we need these things and to do the right thing by nature. That's my philosophy: be positive. If you're negative, you can't really get anywhere."

I think renewable energy is really important. It's the way of the future. We need to be going with solar and wind. We've got that much here in Australia, we really need to be utilising the sun. And the amount of power we can generate is incredible. I can run a whole household here. I run everything as if I was on grid. There's no restrictions.

I do worry about the future for the animals and the environment in this region, but I don't let it consume my mind. Instead, I try to act proactively, educate people and show them why we need these things and to do the right thing by nature. That's my philosophy: be positive. If you're negative, you can't really get anywhere. You've got to do something actively that's good.

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Kate Mirams spoke from her farmhouse in Newry outside Maffra, where she was sitting on the veranda in the shade of a muscatel vine that she said was "absolutely loaded with grapes". From the veranda, she could watch the calves grazing, see the tractor being loaded and listen to a rooster crowing, or look across the family's vegie garden and admire the new trees growing since the recent rain. In January 2021, she was named the Wellington Shire Council Citizen of the Year, acknowledging her many years of hard work for her local communities of Newry and Boisdale.

I would like to acknowledge that the land and water on which I farm here at Newry are the traditional lands of the Brayakaulung clan of the Gunaikurnai nation.

I grew up on a farm in NSW, between Eden and Bombala. Then I spent fifteen years with the Victorian state government, working with dairy farmers from Traralgon to the border. It's always been my desire to grow stuff myself and be a part of the food chain. My husband Pete and I have been on this farm since 2003. We decided that farming was going to be a great enterprise to bring up a family and spend time working together.

There's something magic about working in and with nature that is almost indescribable – the constant, daily, incremental changes, but then the sudden overnight change of a flood. The rhythm of the seasons, the connection to landscape speaks to me viscerally. I feel it.

We farmed fairly conventionally to start with. But if you're watching what happens, you can see paddocks that must be holding more water than other paddocks. Why is that? The more you delve in, the more you understand that soil health and soil biology is the key to driving everything else on the farm.

I've seen figures that show if we can draw carbon dioxide out of the air into agricultural soil, where it used to be, that will have the biggest impact on reducing climate change. The main thing we've been doing here is to grow multi-species cover crops. We've also been growing winter crops very big, so they'll grow a big root mass underneath and go deeply into the soil.

We've been so lucky that the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority has been providing assistance, testing for carbon down to 60cm to see if there's an increase in soil carbon over that period. This autumn we'll have the first set of carbon results to know what we've actually achieved.

My husband Pete has been the main instigator of the tree planting on our farm over the seventeen years. He has been quite on board with the regenerative process of getting more carbon in the soil – not just because every 1 per cent increase in organic matter



Farmer Kate Mirams

in the soil means that our soil will hold 17 ml extra rainfall. Our kids have been really interested in the journey. One of our sons has started a regenerative agriculture Instagram page, and our second child is very interested in the philosophy behind caring for the earth and how it relates to caring for people.


I'm seeing people planting more trees specifically for shade and exploring different species than just the traditional ryegrass and white clover. There's a lot of interest about what else we can grow that will cope with more days of heat. There's so much stuff that we're not doing that we could and should be doing!

More recently both Peter and I have been embracing the idea that everything's political. It's not good enough to say, "Oh, I just buy green power, but I don't engage with the conversation with my friends because I don't want to ruffle their feathers." We're waking up to the fact that if we want the change to happen fast enough to prevent any more degrees of global warming, we've got to talk about it everywhere. We've got to learn ways to talk that are kind and generous and calm and enriching to people's lives. Not ways that scare and panic them.

"If we want the change to happen fast enough to prevent any more degrees of global warming, we've got to talk about it everywhere."

I really want people to understand that whatever they're involved in is an opportunity to embrace life-affirming behaviour. You can be the smallest, youngest child in an organisation and yet your behaviour changes the organisation.

I feel that, in living a purposeful life, I need to embrace the same philosophy across every area of my life. Rather than think "Oh, I'm just about agriculture", you can take this stuff into every sphere of your life, showing up with your best in whatever you're called to do.



**Climate
change is
increasing
inequalities,
and we are
concerned for
our future.**

Image by: Kristin Rule

“People with the most have the least to lose, and the people with the least have the most to lose.”

“There’s still gonna be those that are left behind.”

“People on low incomes will be very disadvantaged.”

“To see these fantastic, optimistic young people sitting there and going ‘What can I do for them?’”

“I worry for my daughter.”

“It can be a worry that some people might not have jobs any more.”

“The ripple effect with the drought goes right through from the farmers to the local businesses.”

“It’s hard enough in the existing circumstances for people who are unskilled or perhaps have a disability or are perhaps older.”

“I think we’re all vulnerable.”

“Not dealing with the climate change problem is going to be far more dangerous in the long run.”



Firefighter Charmaine Sellings

Charmaine Sellings and her team at Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust are the only all-Indigenous crew in the Country Fire Authority. Her team of Gunaikurnai women protects sacred sites and more than forty homes across about 1600 hectares of bushland.

The banana women

I'm a Kurnai woman. I've lived in Lake Tyers practically all my life.

About twenty years ago, there was bushfires here. The police were involved, the CFA was involved, got the fires out, and they came to have a talk to the manager. I was working here at the time, and I said to Mark Reid from the CFA, "What if we got our own crew up and running, would that help?" and he said, "Yes, that would help."

We had an all-women's crew within the next day, ready to go. I rang Mark, and we started our training up then. We were called the banana women because of our bright yellow outfits.

Probably a year later, we went to work with the trucks at Toorloo Arm and Lakes Entrance, and after that we got our own slip-on firefighting equipment and our shed built. And we've been going since then.

The bushfires of 2019

It was devastation. A lot of people lost their houses. Up in one of our laneways, there was five different areas where you could see a big ball of smoke. At night, you could see where it's all red. It got very close to Nowa Nowa and a few houses burnt down at Wairewa.

It didn't hit Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, but it had a big impact on the elders here and the families with children, because they had to be evacuated. We had two CFA members come out and say, "You've got to evacuate." There should have been more training with that. It was hard trying to get people out. Some of them didn't want to leave their houses. A lot of elders were angry.

I was thankful for the GEGAC, the Aboriginal co-op in Bairnsdale, who on Monday or Tuesday rang up the health centre here and said to the CEO, Suzie, "Send all the elders and families up here, especially families with children, and we'll organise accommodation for them."

So it was hard on a lot of people here, and not only here. You got Nowa Nowa, you got Lake Tyers Beach, all along there, they were told to evacuate. You've got people with pets and their livestock – cattle, sheep, people with horses. I messaged a friend of mine in Lakes Entrance that people needed places to put their horses. She had a paddock at the back of her house, so she put up a few horses.

I got separated from family members. Most of my family were in Bairnsdale but I had to stay in Lakes Entrance. My dad, who is on oxygen, couldn't leave his room at the motel. He couldn't go anywhere.

Cultural knowledge and planned burns

Back in the days, we had elders here that did cultural burns. But then there was a mission established here, and the elders and our ancestors weren't allowed to

speak their language. They weren't allowed to teach their culture. So we lost a lot of our culture, and that's made it hard on the next generation.

Around 1967, the trust was handed back to the elders. After that, I started getting taught by my grandmother, my uncle, my aunts and my mum, and then went to uni.

But the cultural burn, we lost that altogether. If we had to do cultural burn, we'd have to bring other people in to do that. That's what makes it hard. So the CFA ought to help now, to do the planned burns. A few people from CFA head office have been trying to get that back, the cultural burns. Which is really good. I've worked with one of the CFA members, a lady from head office in Melbourne, and Angela Cook, who is CFA as well, and that started the ball rolling in trying to get cultural burns up and running.

But a lot of people still don't believe our instincts on when to burn and when not to burn.

It's hard when we have got that instinct, but white people don't understand it. They don't know ... they've got an idea: "Yeah, we'll burn off here, we'll burn off there, on this day or that day." But they got to look into it a bit more. We want to say things but we can't, because we all get shot down. And that's the biggest problem between white and black.

"We've got politicians that don't want to hear. You've got those sitting in offices saying, "All right, we can do this and we can do that." And it never gets done."

We've got politicians that don't want to hear. You've got those sitting in office saying, "All right, we can do this and we can do that." And it never gets done.

There's a lot of conflict with gender too. A lot of men turn around and say the women should be home doing dishes and raising kids. I can swing a chainsaw as much as a man can. So I'm there to encourage women to get out there and do the job.

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Neighbourhood House

Tracie
Lund

Tracie lives in Traralgon and works in Morwell managing the Morwell Neighbourhood House. In the last local government election, she was voted in as one of the Central Ward councillors for Morwell.

I'm from the Hunter Valley. Coming from a coal community, I understand what the challenges are. I'm acutely aware that those who are most vulnerable are often left behind. We know that climate change is going to impact them more immediately and they're not financially equipped to respond. They're dealing with day-to-day issues like "How am I going to get my kids to school today?" I've got a voice in that space, and I can stand up for them.

I come from a family with high levels of poverty and family violence. Both of my parents were gamblers. Over the years, I've come to realise that this is probably the reason why I do what I do now, because I understand what people are going through.

Putting trust in the neighbourhood

What I love the most about this region is the people. There's such generosity and compassion for one another, and a real desire to support each other. I get to see that and be part of that every day.

One of the first things I did with the Morwell Neighbourhood House was organise a lawnmower share program. The department of health and human services had sent out letters to people in the housing site saying "Your lawns are too long. Either cut your lawn or you'll be evicted." People wanted to mow their lawns, but they didn't have access to a mower. So we worked with Morwell Vinnies to buy a lawnmower, and we stored it here. Honestly, people were so shocked that we would trust them to bring it back. We had people borrowing it, mowing their lawns, and then even mowing their neighbour's lawn, because their neighbour had a sore back.

Challenges on the road ahead

Unemployment is a big issue in Morwell. After Hazelwood's closure with only six months notice, the community was scrambling. Even though we knew it was coming at some point, to have it pulled out from under us like that was devastating. With the closures of coal-fired power stations, we really need renewable energy jobs. I can't wave a magic wand and make it all happen tomorrow, but I also think that a lot of the skills in the mining workforce are transferable, and we absolutely need time to retrain.

What we really need is a bipartisan political approach to this transition. We need the state and federal governments to make some short-term, medium-term and long-term goals to achieve so that we can get there. I am worried that there is not a clear vision for the future of Australia, not just Latrobe.

A shared vision for a transition

I would like to see a prosperous Latrobe in the future. I'd like it to be a place that people want to come and live and they want to raise their families. I've got a daughter who's 17 and she's already saying to me, "I'm going to go to uni in Monash. I want to get out of here." It just breaks my heart that the youth don't see a future here. I want them to stay connected to their families and their roots. I think we'll all be better as a society if we can do that better and provide those opportunities locally.

“What we really need is a bipartisan political approach to this transition ... I am worried that there is not a clear vision for the future of Australia, not just Latrobe.”

I was pretty pleased to see they're giving the community notice with the Yallourn power station. In terms of the closure this time around, I feel like the narrative has been very positive. Business owners around Yallourn North have been saying things like "We feel like the workforce will transition to something else and we won't have to close our doors." So there's a truckload of work to do for this transition, but at least we're on the way there.

**Fossil fuels
are hazardous
for the
environment
and our
health.**



“We can see that it’s not sustainable.”

“Coal-fired power stations don’t do many favours for people who work in them or around them.”

“We have got to the stage where it’s normal to have so much smoke hanging around our communities and our homes.”

“The digging of the open cut has caused a lowering of the water table. We don’t have the water that we used to have. We’ve put 60 years of water into a bloody open-cut mine.”

“We currently pump a lot of pollution into the air, and we’re breathing that in. Surely if we go to renewable sources of power, we’re not going to be breathing in all this”.

“At the moment, the coal-fired power stations impact on the health of everyone.”

Wendy Farmer

Community activist

I was born in the Yallourn hospital, which was where the Yallourn Open Cut is now. I have always lived in the Latrobe Valley. My family are here. Our roots are here. Imagine a tree – you can remove the tree, but you will always leave some roots. I couldn't imagine living anywhere else. It's my community, and I love it.

Our health in the Valley

I became quite active advocating for the community alongside many others during the Hazelwood mine fire.

First we saw the little animals dying, then people dying. I felt anger at a government that ignored a dying community. The Chief Health Officer at the time said, "We know that there's a lot of smoke, but we don't know what is in the smoke. Stay inside if the air is bad. Just don't breathe the air."

Well, that seems to be a pretty important human right to me – to be able to breathe air.

I trusted the government to look after the people, but they failed Latrobe Valley. They have failed our community over the last 30-plus years.

While the Hazelwood mine fire was still burning, my partner and I went over to China. I remember sitting on a bus where the tour guide was talking about the smog in the air. She said, "We don't call it smog, we call it fog. That's how we're taught. That's how we're educated." It felt like a light switch being turned on in me, because living in the Valley we'd always been told that it was only steam coming out of the power stations.

Now that we understand what pollutants do to our health, the science is clear. We must start to do things differently. We've actually known for a long time. There have been many reports about the health deficit in the Latrobe Valley, but nobody really looked into it that much. It feels like it is easier to blame the people: "They eat bad, they smoke, they drink" and so on. The environment isn't taken into consideration.

But people are becoming very interested in their environment. They want to know the health impacts. Because when it comes to it, most people want a healthy family; they want the best for their kids.

Health reform

We're seeing a massive movement of people asking questions who have never considered pollution and climate change before. We're seeing people now question decisions that can impact their family's health.

While the Hazelwood mine fire was a terrible disaster, it gave us the opportunity to look at what we had through the fire inquiries and address what the future might be for Latrobe Valley. Latrobe Valley was made a Health Innovation Zone – Australia's only Health Innovation Zone. We have a health advocate and we have a health assembly. Companies are coming to communities asking us what we think, asking what we want. We're having that conversation. The EPA has undergone massive reform, and I've been able to input into that. Emergency Management Victoria changed completely after that fire – they now know they must work with communities, not just tell communities what they need.

This didn't just happen. It came out of grassroots communities stepping up and saying "We need change" and demanding funding for the change to happen.

"Now that we understand what pollutants do to our health, the science is clear. We must start to do things differently."

Latrobe Valley is known for the power stations. We're proud of our history – we created Victoria; we've made Victoria what it is through the power industry – but it is changing and we know differently now. Our industry is changing, energy is changing, and we know what pollutants are doing to the environment. Latrobe Valley needs a Just Transition. And I believe transition is not just about those in work now – it includes the whole community.

Creating the future we want

While things are changing, Latrobe Valley could continue to be that energy hub of Victoria with renewable energies and new technologies. With innovation, we can create the future that we want for our community. What we don't need is more industry that is going to impact on the health of our community, which still suffers health impacts from large industry and the Hazelwood mine fire.

We can create the future and the vision that people in Latrobe Valley want. Latrobe Valley people have to be in charge of that future. We can't afford any longer to rely on governments or outsiders to come in and save us or tell us what they think we need. There's an amazing amount of people in Latrobe Valley that have got extraordinary ideas and who are prepared to put their time and energy in to create, to be part of the changes that are coming.

These people are connected with our community.

They are on the ground with the people. We need to create the opportunities, support and funding to get the work done. It's up to all of us to work together. The Latrobe Valley Authority has given some of these ideas legs, and we are seeing lots of changes.

Yes, we need government support, but we don't need government imposing on our community. We will not be government's dumping ground. Together we make change.





Craniosacral therapist Heike Weber

Before I moved to the Valley, I had no idea what it was going to be like. Coming from Alice Springs, it honestly felt like a bit of a culture shock. I noticed the coal-fired power plants straight away. The community here was also very different from anything I've ever experienced.

Now, in Moe, I feel that I have friends and a growing sense of community. People in the Valley know and care about each other and feel a sense of belonging. There's also a lot of areas where you can walk and experience beautiful scenery. The variety of different natural settings is just mind-boggling. There's the Strzelecki Ranges, remote beaches, and so many other gorgeous landscapes. It's very special. I have a deep relationship to the natural world.

Working for the community

I'm retiring from remedial massage, but over the years I've gotten to know many people in the area through treating them. I've also treated a lot of people from the power stations. The hard work they're doing really takes a physical toll on their bodies.

I have been told many stories of workers developing cancers and inhaling coal dust. They feel betrayed by the power companies for the lack of regard for their health. I believe that we live in a world where the so-called "little people" have little protection from use and abuse by industry and power structures.

I think it's important for fossil fuel workers to engage with unions, and for unions to actively take part in the transition away from fossil fuels. Nobody should be left behind.

Workers and unions could really benefit from taking part in a conversation about a transition process. It could give workers hope that future clean energies can sustain their needs in the same way that the coal industry has. We need all parties on board, especially in this area that has a deep identification with the coal industry.

Heike Weber practises craniosacral therapy, a non-invasive technique that uses gentle pressure to relieve compression in the bones of the head, sacrum and spinal column. She grew up in Germany and moved to Australia at the age of twenty-eight. After living in Alice Springs for a couple of years, she moved to Haunted Hills in Newborough and now resides in Moe.

Change is happening

The transition is no longer about the will of only a small percentage of people in the community. It's part of a market force moving towards renewables. Our transition mirrors what is happening globally.

Here in the Valley, we could be leading in renewable energy production from solar and wind energy. There are exciting projects like the Star of the South, which will take advantage of the strong winds on the Bass Strait and will be Australia's first offshore wind project. I would also like to see strong transition programs, funding and convincing actions from the government being invested into the transition process.

"I think we are starting to imagine a different kind of future that is possible to achieve – a greener future. We need to stand up for things that we believe in and know that together we can make a difference."

I see so many positive things happening. People in the community are really banding together and focusing on the values that touch us deeply in our lives, like the health and well-being of our family and community.

My aim at the moment is to be involved with local groups so I can get to know more people and feel more integrated here in the Valley. Recently, I attended a meeting with Healthy Futures, which is a health promotion charity taking action on climate change, made up of health professionals, students and community members. There were about twenty of us there, and we spoke about sources of pollution in Victoria and what solutions are available.

I can feel the passion in these groups and see that people feel empowered to voice their opinion and to work towards change. I've always liked to be where passion and commitment happen, where people play an active role in the life of their community.

It's not the end for the Valley. It's a fascinating new beginning. We don't want toxic industries here any more; we want clean, healthy jobs. I think we are starting to imagine a different kind of future that is possible to achieve - a greener future. We need to stand up for things that we believe in and know that together we can make a difference.



What happens to all the coal holes?

“The rehabilitation of the Latrobe Valley mines must leave a positive post-mining legacy in the region.”

Story by: Laura Melville Image: supplied Environment Victoria



What happens to the mines in the Latrobe Valley has become a central question to resolve if we are to ensure a just and sustainable transformation of the region as it moves beyond coal.

As coal power stations in the Valley close, power station owners have a legal responsibility to “rehabilitate” the mine sites to reduce the risk of future environmental disasters. The 2014 Hazelwood mine fire showed the dangers open-cut coal mines can pose to the local community’s health.

What does rehabilitation involve?

Mine rehabilitation involves repairing the damage done by mining activity. This can simply mean making the site safe and stable, but global best practice strives to create a landscape that can support future uses of the land by returning it to agriculture or identifying new beneficial uses.

At a practical level, coal mine rehabilitation typically involves flattening the steep sides of the mine, covering exposed coal with soil and clay and revegetating the area with trees and grasses. In the case of the Latrobe Valley mine sites, the government’s Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation

Strategy (LVRRS), released in June 2020, sets out a number of principles for how to achieve “safe, stable and sustainable” outcomes. Currently, each mine operator intends to fill their mine pit with water. However, many concerns have been raised about water availability, particularly in a drying climate.

The government’s own reports have shown that in a drying climate there is not enough water in the system to fill all three mines while supporting the local environment and other industries such as agriculture.



This image shows the Hazelwood mine overlaid onto central Melbourne. The mine is on average 100 metres deep.

What will the pits take to fill if water is the only option?

Hazelwood:

638 GL

uninterrupted fill time 15–20 years

Yallourn:

725 GL

uninterrupted fill time 20–25 years

Loy Yang:

1420 GL

uninterrupted fill time 20–30 years

With the Hazelwood mine already closed, work on mine rehabilitation is well underway, but there are still unanswered questions about what the final outcome will look like. The rehabilitation of the Latrobe Valley mines must leave a positive post-mining legacy in the region. This means rehabilitation must contribute to the region's future social and economic prosperity. It needs to be done in a manner that safeguards people's health and protects the surrounding environment, including waterways such as the Latrobe River that contribute vital freshwater flows to the Gippsland Lakes.

Community groups have advocated various solutions for this enormous challenge. Here are three local groups that have adopted different approaches to the issue.

Great Latrobe Park

The Great Latrobe Park project team believes that the Latrobe Valley mines can be repurposed to become the building blocks of a new future for the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland as its economy transitions from mining to tourism.

The people behind the Great Latrobe Park want to see useful, visually attractive spaces created in the mines. Just to be "safe, stable and sustainable" is not enough. They envisage forming a park out of the Hazelwood and Yallourn mine pits, with lakes, gardens, forests and open spaces, interconnected recreational spaces, cycling and walking trails, fishing and water sports. They want to see wetlands, wildlife sanctuaries and education and training areas, as well as mining heritage trails replacing the mine voids we now see in the region. The team says that sensitive use of the space would enable generations who grew up in the age of coal to reclaim their heritage.



Yallourn Wetlands



FLoW on the banks of Latrobe River

Friends of Latrobe Water

Friends of Latrobe Water (FLoW) advocates a full clean-up of the Latrobe Valley coal mines and sustainable use of the region's water. FLoW believes that after powering the state of Victoria for decades, the Valley deserves the best possible outcome from mine rehabilitation to secure the community's personal, environmental and economic health.

FLoW works with community members and groups in the Latrobe Valley and beyond. It is especially concerned to ensure that mine rehabilitation will include the proper clean-up of pollution, including coal ash and groundwater contamination, as well as sustainable use of the region's water resources.

Latrobe River Irrigators

Bringing together irrigators along the Latrobe River from Yallourn downstream to the Gippsland Lakes, Latrobe River Irrigators oppose the diversion of water from local rivers to fill the disused mines. They advocate the long-term sustainability and economic prosperity of the Latrobe River irrigation system.

The group has pointed out that Latrobe River flows have dropped 25 per cent since 1997 and are forecast to drop the same amount again by 2060. In a climate that is becoming more variable with droughts, fires and floods, the group argues that the expansion and development of the irrigation system along the Latrobe River will provide long-term economic security – an opportunity that cannot be passed up.

They want to see fresh water primarily used to grow food and fibre, creating jobs, attracting investment, and servicing demand for Australia's premium produce.

Questioning ENGIE's proposal


In spite of their different approaches, on one issue the three groups are united: they have unanimously opposed Hazelwood's French owner, ENGIE, when it proposed in June 2020 to fill the mine with water from the Latrobe River system. The three groups were also joined by others, including Strzelecki Sustainable Futures, Voices of the Valley and A New Power.

Hayley Sestokas, a spokeswoman from Friends of Latrobe Water, said, "Mine rehabilitation must result in something that is safe, equitable and transformational for our region. The clean-up of coal mines shouldn't come at the expense of our health, ecosystems and water security."

The groups sent a joint letter to Planning Minister Richard Wynne calling for any plans for the mine to be subject to an environmental effects statement. All parties are clearly bunkering down for a long battle.

Change is hard, and our community sometimes feels divided.





“People are feeling disempowered by changes they don’t think they’re a part of.”

“The fear is another Hazelwood scenario, where [the closure is] very sudden and people don’t have time to adjust.”

“Change is scary for some people.”

“We’ve got so many workers that we need to protect.”

“We’ve had this big gap between the haves and have nots, and that’s caused all sorts of issues.”

“I think if we could get a sense of community back in the community, that would be good.”

Just Transition South Gippsland

The idea of a “Just Transition” as a way of responding to the economic and political imbalances driving climate and ecological instability is gaining traction in communities all over the country.

Just Transition South Gippsland (JTSG) hatched out of the belief that the community needs a new form of politics to address the threats of climate change, environmental degradation and societal inequality. It began in 2019 with a small group of people from several South Gippsland communities who started talking about responding to these problems through democratic self-determination and community engagement.

Early meetings settled on the principle that any transition to a low-carbon society could not just be about mitigating the effects of climate change, but also had to be about creating a fairer society that serves the interests of all, irrespective of wealth, contacts, gender or skin colour.

As the 2020 Covid lockdowns ruled out public meetings, the group started the online journal *Just Community* to develop ideas and discussions around community and change. It became a vehicle for exploring the meaning of a Just Transition, and it helped grow community interest and engagement.

To get more focus and a plan of action, a day-long strategy planning workshop was held. It produced the following statement of its vision:

“To transform South Gippsland into a sustainable, democratically empowered, culturally rich and prosperous community that is better positioned to respond to the challenges of climate change, one that is more resilient, driven by mutual support and the common good, with a strong commitment to fairness and justice, and a commitment to reconciliation with the indigenous community.”

A set of shorter-term goals also emerged. These included promoting the election to South Gippsland Shire Council of councillors supportive of a South Gippsland Just Transition and the declaration of a climate emergency.

The pandemic-induced suspension of business-as-usual economic and political activity encouraged many people to hope for government-led recovery strategies to improve the planet’s prospects. Alas, in Australia, this isn’t the case. The break in “normal” operations is not seen as a chance to shift direction away from our dangerous climate trajectory, but

rather as an opportunity for fossil-fuel capital to double down with a “gas-led recovery”.

It is hardly surprising to see vested interests and vision-impaired politicians brushing aside what citizens might want. But this cannot discourage political engagement, which is the only thing that can change our shared societal architecture for the better.

With that in mind, JTSG committed to holding a series of community assemblies that would begin the work of designing a Just Transition plan for South Gippsland. The plan would essentially be a redesign and remake of the South Gippsland region through infrastructure and policy-building for a low-carbon economy.

“In aiming to facilitate a redesign and remake of the South Gippsland economy, all the groups involved realise they have embarked on an enormous project.”

Story by: Tony Walker Image: Stock photo



Assembly One was held via Zoom in October 2020 and attracted around 50 people to discuss and design a way forward. They settled on founding a series of working groups looking at elements of the local economy and how they might work to sustain people and place in the face of climate change.

The working groups are now looking at Farming and Food, Energy, Housing, Business and Tourism, Health, Transport, Arts and Community, and Work, Education and Training to see how they might be shaped into a transition plan for a low-carbon, sustainable and just economy and society. They are also looking to connect and work with the many other groups across the region engaged in remaking the world differently.

The immediate aim is to come up with a South Gippsland Just Transition Plan Version 1 in time for local government elections in South Gippsland in October 2021. It is hoped potential councillors will emerge from the community assemblies, with a movement of democratically engaged residents behind them. Having an impact at local government level is, however, only one part of what a Just Transition might involve, and the point and the efficacy of the assemblies extends beyond issues of council to a broader vision for South Gippsland for generations to come.

It's not a small project, you could say. In aiming to facilitate a redesign and remake of the South

Gippsland economy, all the groups involved realise they have embarked on an enormous project. They see the work done so far as only the beginnings of a decades-long process. It will be the work of generations to reduce the energy and carbon intensity of our economy and society, to stop environmental degradation and deal with resource limitations, whilst creating new jobs, achieving biodiversity in the environment and delivering socially just and equitable outcomes.

The ultimate goal for all these groups is to transform South Gippsland into a sustainable, democratically empowered, culturally rich and prosperous community that's well positioned to respond to the current and future challenges of climate change. And if South Gippsland can become a model for similar actions in an expanding network of other communities, then the real change we need can begin to happen. That is a big idea, but it is what we all have to do.

South Gippsland Just Transition group holds ongoing meetings and actions. You can get involved or find out more by emailing: contact@jtsouthgippsland.org



**But the world
is responding,
and change is
inevitable.
We don't want
to be left
behind.**



Image by: Gippsland Solar

“The government isn’t closing down the power stations. The power stations are simply uneconomic.”

“Hazelwood closed because it was no longer viable.”

“It’s a pretty constant shutdown of coal-fired baseline, power stations. If they don’t prepare, it will be a really dangerous thing for the Valley. That’s the big concern.”

“We’re going to see that change happen a whole lot quicker than what’s happening now.”

“We’re going to be left behind, and then that transition is going to be so abrupt that there will be job losses and a whole heap of issues.”

“If we wait too long, the opportunities will go to other places.”

“The biggest risk I often see is that the kids are not going to stick around. There’s not going to be the jobs available, and so they are going to go elsewhere.”

“Outside of Australia, everyone just seems to be accepting it’s moving on.”

“For a country that can make changes to not be making changes is very embarrassing.”

“I just think we need to really get on with it as a nation.”

“If we come to terms with [transition] now and try and innovate, we will be back in the global markets and we won’t be shunned.”

“I’m really scared that we’re falling too far behind. But it’s not too late.”



Printer Charley Daniel

I'm probably one of the luckiest people in the world. I live in paradise. This country, my local area, the beauty of it, the glory of it, gives me so much. I'm very grateful for the love, nurture and care that the Gunaikurnai people have given this country for thousands of generations.

It doesn't matter how bad things seem, I can look out, see this beautiful place and it gives me the strength I need. My dad's great-great-grandmother arrived in East Gippsland from England in 1851. Now we've got 25 beautiful acres at Mount Taylor, and we run Black Rainbow Sustainable Printing from here.

I always had a passion for the natural world. I grew up in the southwest suburbs of Melbourne, and I used to go down to the beach just about every night. I started surfing at age ten and diving and looking at the reef and the fish. I suppose these passions took me up to Cape Tribulation in north Queensland in the early 1980s, camping on the beach in the tropical rainforest there. The richness and diversity of that forest, it was absolutely pristine. Everywhere you looked was saying, "Look at me!" And I did. It was limitless. It was such a journey. A spiritual awakening.

The paper problem

When I got back to Melbourne, I was working as a printer at a company I'd been working in for years, and I started thinking about the paper that was going through my printing machines. I realised, "Hey, you know, it's coming from Maryvale paper mill in East Gippsland, which has come from the destruction of old-growth forests. Here I am, an environmental activist, while I make money by using paper that comes out of forest destruction." It was something I had to remedy.

A group called the Environmental Paper Network in Sydney were importing recycled paper from

Germany at the time, so I started buying from them. At that point I also started lobbying the Australian paper manufacturers. If they could make this stuff overseas, why not make it here? Eventually they sent me a letter with a sample and not long after that they started producing 100 per cent post-consumer recycled paper and within months it comprised over 10 per cent of their paper sales. Recycled paper is an absolute no brainer and I believed in it very strongly.

There are more jobs in looking after those forests than in cutting them down, and we've got to see that it's for our children's future. After the disaster of the Black Summer fires, what it did to the forest and to the animals, everyone knows we have to give it a rest. It's time for everyone to come together.

I've got a 22-year-old son who's studying climate change in the media at RMIT, and they get a warning before they start: "What you're going to learn here can be traumatic." He believes his generation is ... like, the last. Sending your kids into that ... it's very hard to get your head around.

Getting intimate with the forests

We've got to put the time and the work into understanding the forests, what they need, what we can do to rehabilitate them, and at the same time create infrastructure in the forests, whether it be for tourism, research or clean green agriculture. That's what creates jobs, sustainable jobs. We need to get smart, get intimate with the forests, get to know them. We can do this. It's a massive university out here and everyone can get paid for going.

"There are more jobs in looking after those forests than in cutting them down, and we've got to see that it's for our children's future."

So, whether it be spiritual fulfilment or a decent wage, that's what East Gippsland offers anyone. We've got to look at the future and be pretty radical in the way we turn this ship around, because it needs to be turned around pretty fast. And it would be great to have the leaders with the insight to be able to do that. I'm pretty positive that things can happen.

We were the original environmental printers in Australia. We use solar power, recycled papers, non-toxic chemicals and inks. Now there are dozens of companies doing it. We've started something that is unstoppable. The main thing is doing it. If one person can give that little initial push using their own creative intellect and their own passions to do something, I think we should be right.

Toby Rawson grew up in Moe. In March 2018, he moved out to Boolarra in the foothills of the Strzelecki Ranges. At Boolarra he began getting involved in climate action. He joined the School Strike for Climate movement and the Australian Youth Climate Coalition. Toby is currently in junior high school.

We've got bush on our property. We have lots of native animals around here like wombats, wedgetail eagles, echidnas and stuff. We've set up our property to be eco-friendly. We've got a nice veggie garden and the horses on rotation in the paddocks so they don't destroy the place.

My journey to action

I got started with all this after Mum told me about the Adani coal mine in Queensland. I looked into what coal does to the atmosphere: how it's becoming a thick layer of carbon dioxide and methane and terrible gases that trap the heat in.

I joined the School Strike for Climate because I wanted to join a group with kids my own age, because it's OUR future. It won't affect the older people, because they'll be gone by the time climate change is seriously affecting us. Us younger generation, we have to deal with the side effects. So I have to stand up, and hopefully other kids will join.

I was a bit scared when I first did my first protest. I was still in primary school. I told my principal that I was doing a strike, and he got the entire school into it. We all went for a walk down the street and did our protest. I wanted to tell the high school about it. Their principal didn't really want me to, but I still got a bunch of kids from over there involved.

Seeing the amount of people that joined my first protest was so inspiring. It feels good encouraging others to care about this and not just sitting around doing nothing.

I was super shocked at the amount of media attention I got compared to another protest I had done before. That one was on a weekend, and it got pretty much no media attention at all. But because I did mine during school, I got heaps of media attention. I was even talking to a local MP. I told him about why I'm doing it and he's replied "Go back to school." There's no point going to school if I can't use my knowledge in the future, because there won't be any future.

We can make them change

I feel like we've sort of made our local politicians listen now. They're having to acknowledge that climate change is real. They still don't want to act, but with enough people, we can make them change and start doing the right thing.



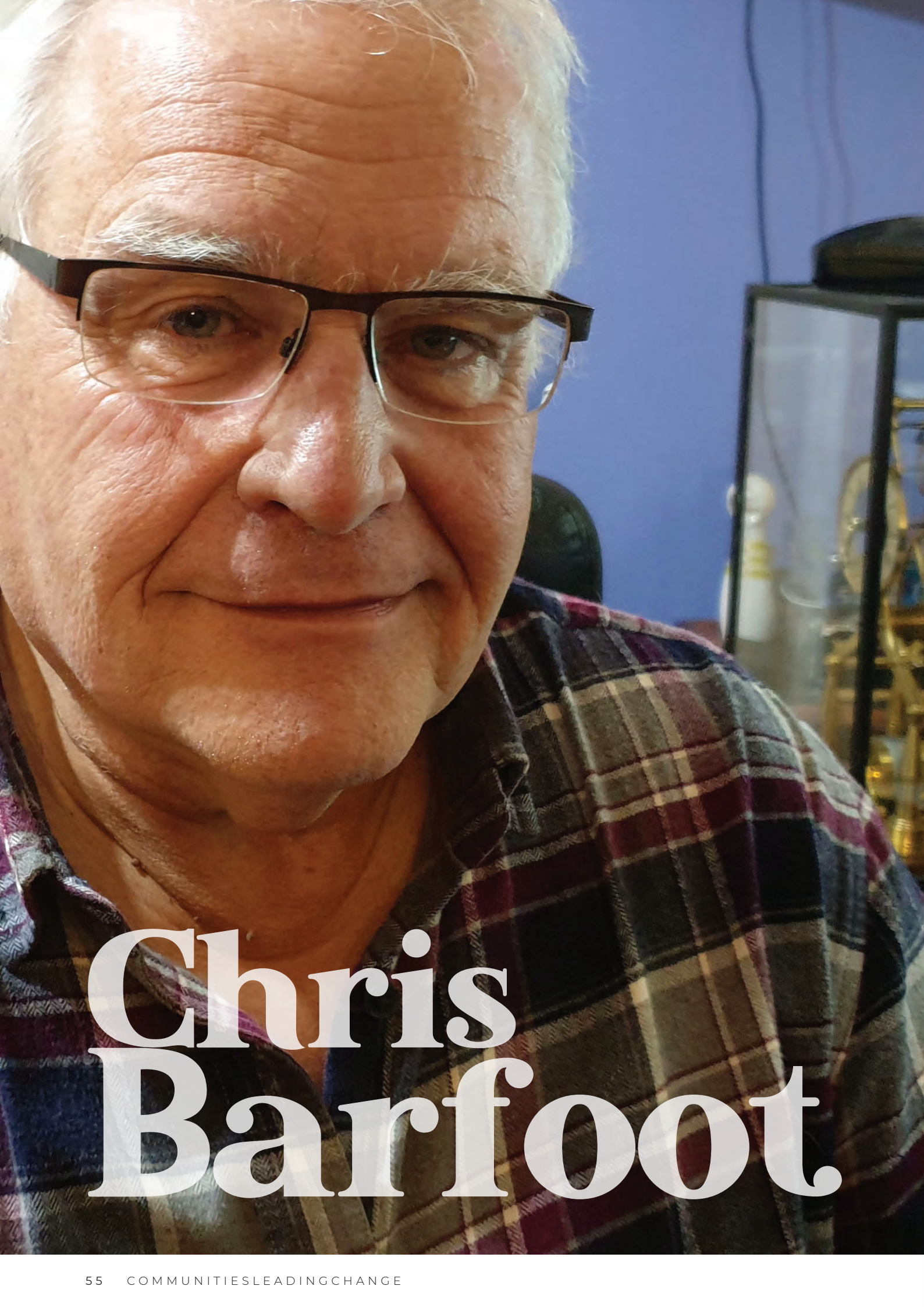
School Striker Toby Rawson

I've learnt that even people that think they don't believe in climate change, you can inspire them to start acting. I had someone who told me Hazelwood shut down because of the greenies – his dad was a coal miner. But after talking for a bit, eventually, he got to the point where he actually started researching climate change. And then I was excited because I got someone to look into this stuff and start caring a bit.

"I was a bit scared when I first did my first protest. I was still in primary school. I told my principal that I was doing a strike, and he got the entire school into it. We all went for a walk down the street."

My hope for the future would be to have a transition from the coal industry to the renewable industry. I want the coal workers to be able to have jobs in the new renewable industry. We could start making the infrastructure for wind turbines now, because that would provide jobs for people.

It's going to be OK, because there's more people like me who will get other people to make the politicians care about the environment and move money towards renewable energy. I just want more people to join in. All I want is for people to tell their friends, who tell their friends and keep going on until we get everyone involved.



Chris Barfoot

Chris Barfoot is a scientist-engineer who lives in Morwell. Formerly station chemist at Hazelwood power plant, he now works for the Gippsland Climate Change Network (GCCN). He is an expert on floating solar. He shared his experiences of transition with the CLC facilitators as part of their training.

I'm a third-generation Morwell boy. My grandfather and father were both SEC employees, and I spent my working life at the brown-coal mines and power stations in the Latrobe Valley. As a station chemist, I had to check emissions, ensure environmental and health and safety regs were met, and above all, make sure the water in the boilers was very, very pure – you can't afford to have chemical deposits on turbines!

By 2000 it was obvious that change was coming to the Valley. We had all these ageing power stations, well beyond their use-by dates, but there was no plan for the future.

Around 2000 I read a book called *The Sceptical Environmentalist*, which used masses of data to disprove many [environmentalist ideas] but could not disprove climate change. It was a wake-up call for me. I started noticing that people weren't taking this seriously, and that the impact on local communities in the Valley would be profound.

What can I do in my back yard?

There was a group inside ENGIE, the French company that owned Hazelwood, that included experts from Chile, France, the UK. We said, "What can we do and how?" I added, "What can I do in my back yard?" The group generated all sorts of ideas.

I could see that closure was coming for Hazelwood and decided to follow my soul for a change and go into green industry. I started looking around for industries and people to connect with, and this was when I found GCCN.

I chased around the world looking for options, and found a French company working on floating solar. This made sense. Here was something I could do in my back yard; filling old mines with water was an obvious thing to do, and floating solar was more efficient than land-based solar because of the cooling effect of the water. I collared my colleague Dr Baher Zaghlool, a genius in civil engineering, and together we made a YouTube presentation for an organisation called Beyond Zero Emissions.

Naturally we adjourned to the pub afterwards, and I met a guy there called Peter McKernan, who had mates specialising in making floating docks. (Never underestimate the power of a conversation in the pub!) We connected to Gavin Hodgkins, CEO of Floatpac, and the designing began.

Floatpac now makes floating solar arrays as well as marine salvage equipment, live fish transport systems and under-house bladder tanks. I'm an adviser and advocate but have no commercial arrangement with them.

The shift to solar

At Hazelwood, ENGIE closed the plant down in March 2017. Later, I won a job as project officer in the Gippsland Power Hub – it meant a big drop in salary, but I didn't care.

GCCN had won a grant to deliver community energy projects throughout Gippsland. One highlight was at Licola, where the project involved 165 kilowatts of solar with batteries and no grid connection. It replaced a diesel generator, and the day after it started there was a queue of complaints that people couldn't get to sleep without the noise! They probably felt better when they found they'd save over \$100,000 a year in diesel and maintenance.

"I used to be a big pessimist, seeing the Valley as a region facing utter devastation, but now I can see a practical future, and I'm optimistic."

Now there are numerous other renewable energy projects of 30, 50, 75 megawatts in the pipeline and a big one (500 megawatts) at Stratford happening. Combined with the Star of the South project, the Marinus link and the declaration of Gippsland as a Renewable Energy Zone, there will be even more coming.

A word of caution here: large-scale solar alone doesn't deliver long-term jobs. You'll have jobs during construction, but after that not many. What it does do is give you cheap local energy that you can use for green industries, and that is really exciting. If other countries start applying carbon tariffs, we will need to look to the development of these green local industries.

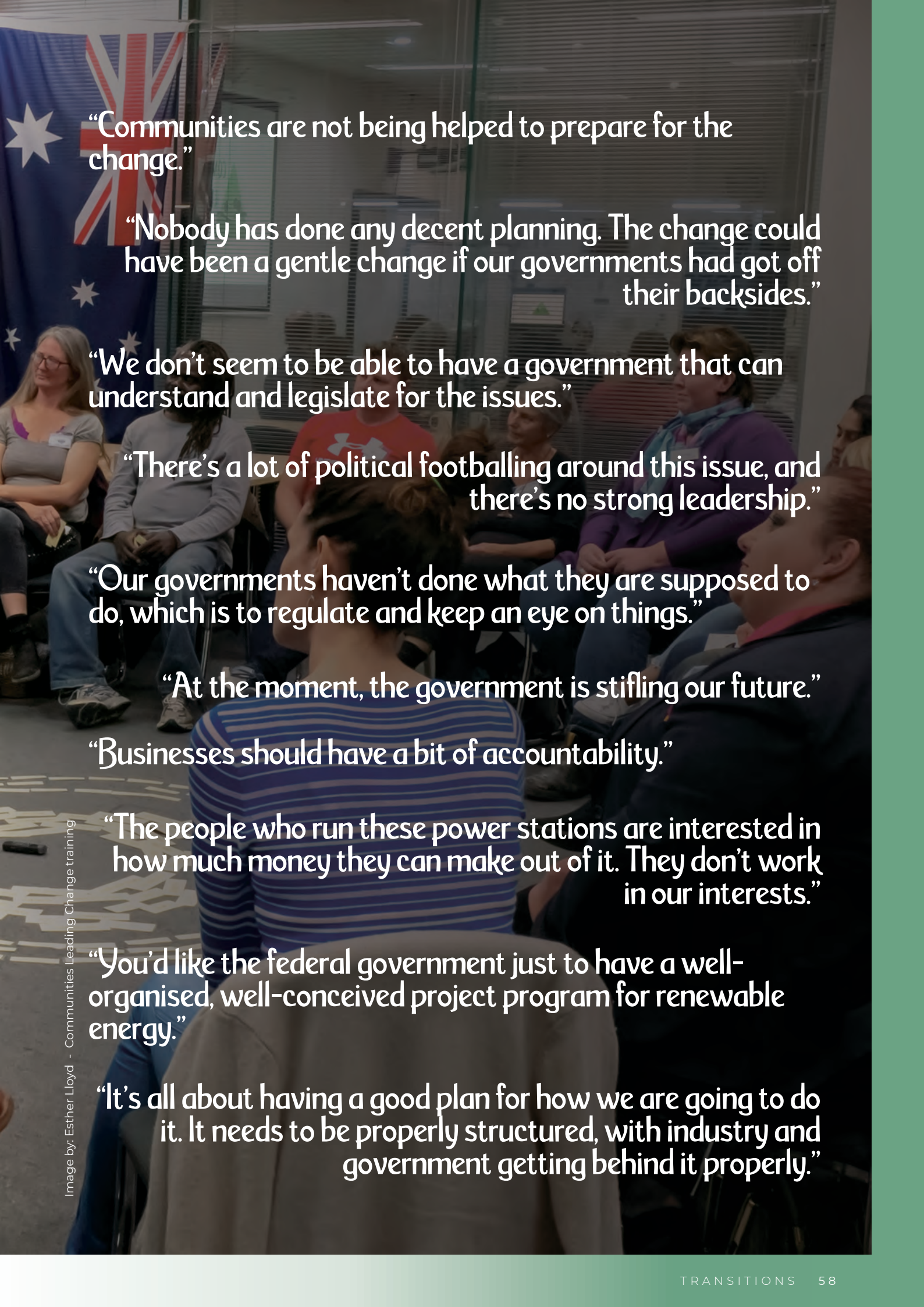
I used to be a big pessimist, seeing the Valley as a region facing utter devastation; but now I can see a practical future, and I'm optimistic.



6pm	Arrive + Settle
6:10	Welcome
6:15	Getting to know you
7pm	Getting to know us
7:15	CLC Overview
7:30	BREAK
7:50	Discussion - Barriers to Change
8:10	Discussion - Barriers to Change
8:40	
8:50	



**We need a plan
for our future,
and leadership
from businesses
and government.**



“Communities are not being helped to prepare for the change.”

“Nobody has done any decent planning. The change could have been a gentle change if our governments had got off their backsides.”

“We don’t seem to be able to have a government that can understand and legislate for the issues.”

“There’s a lot of political footballing around this issue, and there’s no strong leadership.”

“Our governments haven’t done what they are supposed to do, which is to regulate and keep an eye on things.”

“At the moment, the government is stifling our future.”

“Businesses should have a bit of accountability.”

“The people who run these power stations are interested in how much money they can make out of it. They don’t work in our interests.”

“You’d like the federal government just to have a well-organised, well-conceived project program for renewable energy.”

“It’s all about having a good plan for how we are going to do it. It needs to be properly structured, with industry and government getting behind it properly.”



Mental health nurse Veronique Hamilton

Veronique is a mental health nurse and a volunteer for Healthy Futures, a group of health professionals, students and community members taking action on climate change. She lives in Mirboo North with her husband and five-year-old daughter.

I remember growing up in Mirboo and thinking "I can't wait to move away." Then I had a child of my own and I thought, "Well, there's no better place than Mirboo to raise my own kid." So I moved back.

What's so good about Mirboo North is that people are really friendly and willing to help. There's such a strong sense of community here. I also love that when I look out my window I have a view with big gum trees and mountains. In winter I can go bushwalking, and in summer I can go to the beach.

Unseen impacts of bushfire

I work in mental health promotion at the moment. It puts me in a position where I get to know people on a personal level and they really open up to me.

After the bushfires in East Gippsland, people's mental health really started suffering. We know that experiencing natural disasters increases the risk of mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse and family violence. There are still programs and resources being provided to East Gippsland to try and assist the communities in emotionally recovering from such traumatising experiences.

From powerless to empowered

When I started reading about the impacts of climate change, I had this devastating moment where I thought "How can I leave this future to my daughter?" I thought about this whole generation that will be left with a mess if we don't do anything. I cried a lot. I grieved for a long time for myself, for my daughter and for everyone else's children. But then I thought, "Okay, well, I can't just sit here and keep feeling sorry for myself. I need to do

something." So I decided to get involved in different local groups like Healthy Futures and other groups working hard to try and create a better future for the generations to come. These groups focus on Just Transitions, involving a transition away from fossil fuels that is community-led, addresses social inequalities and leads to a more fair and just community.

Workers matter

I have friends and family who work in power stations. I care about the people working in that industry and I worry about what will happen if we don't have a plan. Recently, I had a family member tell me that he had started working in the local power station, but he was worried about telling me. I said to him, "If that's what work is available, then that's what you need to do."

It would be great to see the unions, peak bodies and local governments working together with the community on developing robust plans to transition our workers and the whole community away from fossil fuels. Preparation is the key to ensure we don't have local community members needing to move themselves and families away due to lack of work opportunities. We know that fossil fuels are no longer the way of the future (as seen around the world), so we have no excuse to delay working on this transition. We need to ensure our community isn't left behind.

"It would be great to see the unions, peak bodies and local governments working together with the community on developing robust plans to transition our workers and the whole community away from fossil fuels."

A bright future ahead

I would love to see communities that are working towards preparedness for the challenges that climate change poses on us. Not only being practically prepared, but also mentally and emotionally prepared and resilient to these challenges.

What I think will really make a positive difference in our community is simply having compassion for one another. Throughout my time volunteering with local groups, I've learnt how beautiful the world is and how amazing people can be. The dedication, motivation and selflessness of the people I have met along this journey is so inspiring. I really love people, nature and our world we live in, and that's why I keep doing what I'm doing.

I have my up and down days. Sometimes I feel really disheartened, upset and frustrated. But what keeps me going is my beautiful daughter. I can't afford to give up on her.

Hunter Renewal

Hunter Renewal is a project based in the Hunter Valley of NSW, on the unceded lands of the Wonnarua people. The project brings together the people, businesses and organisations of the Hunter region in order to envision a diverse, resilient and thriving future. Hunter Renewal is largely driven by community members who volunteer their time and expertise to the project.

A big part of life in the Hunter

In the Hunter Valley, there are 41 coal mines, four power stations and the world's biggest coal port. Here, thousands of families are reliant on the income from thermal coal mining, and the coal industry contributes \$12 billion annually to the regional economy. Most of the coal mined in the region is exported to overseas buyers, but demand for coal is suffering from competition with renewable energy and global emissions reductions commitments. China, one of the biggest buyers, has also placed a ban on Australian coal, causing Australia's coal trade to plummet from more than \$1 billion a month to just \$30 million a month.

The Hunter Valley is showing the effects. Mines are being sold or temporarily closed and workers have been laid off. Global demand for coal is likely to continue to decline, placing thousands of people's jobs at risk. Businesses are likely to close down and communities to suffer. In the last mining downturn of 2014, the unemployment rate in the Hunter rose by an estimated 16 per cent.

A plan for life after coal

Clearly, there is a need for a plan to increase resiliency and diversification of the economy in the Hunter region, but before the creation of Hunter Renewal there was little political or business support for a community-driven plan. The Hunter Renewal group is filling this gap. It has begun planning for a new economy that is ready for a changing future. Its main focus is engaging the local community to join the call for a robust roadmap and future vision that is responsive to the needs of the Hunter. This shared vision should provide opportunities for young people and coal workers, nurture new industries such as renewable energy and advance sustainable industries such as agriculture, vineyards and tourism.

The project involves getting out into the community, talking to locals and building consensus around the need for a transition and the solutions available to assist. Initially, organisers doorknocked more than 3,000 households and established that 90 per cent of the people contacted wanted a plan for the coal industry in the future. The Hunter Renewal project is also stimulating conversations and alliances between different community groups, including unions, environment groups and universities, necessary for developing a just roadmap for a transition to a low-carbon economy. As the community bands together, there is increasing pressure on governments to implement the policy framework and funding that will solidify a Just Transition.

“It can't be community versus industry and government. To have a successful transition, we need to work together.”

Danielle Coleman

A resilient future

The councils of the Hunter Valley, with community backing, have begun planning for the transition and are now approaching the state government for funding. Speaking at our webinar on “Our Voices, Our Future”, Dan Coleman, a Hunter Renewal coordinator, suggested that firm commitment and timely action from the government is the “missing piece”. “It can't be community versus industry and government. To have a successful transition, we need to work together.”

The Hunter Renewal group has been asking local governments directly, “How can we help you to get on with the job?” This has resulted in invitations from local councils for the group to attend meetings around the transition. Although there is still work to do, the Hunter Renewal project is driving a more resilient, prepared and empowered Hunter Valley every step of the way.

Taranaki

The Taranaki region on New Zealand’s North Island is home to 2.5 per cent of the country’s population and has the second-highest regional income per capita in New Zealand. Alongside a very profitable dairy farming industry, 28 per cent of this regional economic output comes from the energy sector, fuelled by its rich on- and offshore hydrocarbon resources. In order to fulfil its Paris Agreement commitments, however, in 2018 the New Zealand government announced that no further offshore hydrocarbon exploration permits would be granted.

This announcement has a huge impact for the future economy of Taranaki, and prompted a dramatic response from stakeholders and policy makers in the area.

In 2019 Venture Taranaki, the region’s development agency, decided to confront the shift to a low-emissions economy proactively rather than wait for the impacts to be felt. They engaged a Lead Group of relevant organisations, as well as communities, iwi (First Nations representatives), local and central government, businesses, educators, unions and workers to create a new 2050 Roadmap for Taranaki. E tū, the largest private-sector union in New Zealand, one of the Lead Group organisations involved in the process, championed the use of the roadmap to pursue a Just Transition – that is, a transition that is fair, equitable and inclusive, where workers don’t bear the brunt of structural adjustment to the world’s economy.

In total, more than 700 people took part in 23 workshops in the initial drafting stages of the roadmap, with over 1000 people providing further input on the draft document before the final version was published in July 2019.

Wide, rapid and direct engagement

One of the key successes of the discussion process, according to Jen Natoli of E tū, was to engage a wide audience, and to do so quickly. Jen explained that to do this, they created a “direct line of sight for people in our industry” by linking the government’s announcement directly to impacts on industries that rely on oil and gas, such as manufacturing and engineering. Within a month of the announcement, E tū held a union meeting fronted by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, which built awareness and encouraged stakeholders that might otherwise have ignored unions to reach out and engage. Jen says they also “built relationships with stakeholders quite early, including local government, community and



environmental activist groups, vocational education, iwi and hapū groups”. In particular, engaging groups that had been disaffected by the status quo was something E tū took very seriously.

Jen explained the workshops were designed to embrace and discuss divergent views about “what Taranaki would look like in 2050 if we had a blank slate”, as well as brainstorming ideas about how to get there in a just way. Language and communication were the key here; linking big ideas to personal experiences was helpful. For example, “tying the concept of a Just Transition not just to climate change but to all disruptions and to the future of work and automation” helped people to understand the concept.

In discussing what the future might look like, they found that more engagement came from asking “what does justice look like for our region – for your kids and their kids into the future?” than “what does justice mean to you?” She says, “That’s when we got more creative ideas from our members and our delegates.” For Jen, the confidence that workers and delegates displayed in meetings with big players such as company CEOs was one of the greatest rewards of the process. Enabling real and positive communication between diverse stakeholders is key to real community ownership and investment in regional plans such as this.



“The confidence that workers and delegates displayed in meetings with big players such as company CEOs was one of the greatest rewards of the process.”

A roadmap created together goes further

The final roadmap created from these discussions is publicly available online, along with twelve “Transition Pathway Action Plans”, which have been devised and published based on the goals outlined in the roadmap. These action plans outline specific targets as well as opportunities for businesses, workers and communities in transitioning to a low-carbon economy. The next stage is to secure additional public and private funding for the region to move forward with these action plans.

The new roadmap is also being integrated with Taranaki’s current economic development plan, so community voices will continue to play a large part in all aspects of future development. Speaking with us in October 2020, Jen Natoli said that this success “proves the theory of what justice looks like in a Just Transition” and will allow Taranaki to “not see a spiral down but instead spiral towards a more positive economic future”, as long as the ideas and plans are funded in the near future. There are certainly many parallels to the situation in the Latrobe Valley, for which Taranaki’s engagement success provides true inspiration.

For more information go to:

Taranaki 2050
www.taranaki.co.nz/vision-and-strategy/taranaki-2050

E tū
www.etu.nz

E tū’s Just transition training video
www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8iuSm8Bdx8

Venture Taranaki’s website
www.venture.org.nz



**With change
there will be
opportunities.**

Image: supplied Environment Victoria

“All of the industries associated with power can be repurposed. Skills are transferable and industries are adaptable. We’ve proved that throughout history.”

“I think we have great natural resources and a great future to embrace renewable energy.”

“In this region, carbon farming and carbon drawdown is a really exciting opportunity.”

“People that are trying for solar and wind energy will be able to get more jobs.”

“I think that this transition will create loads of innovation and give people the opportunity to develop new ways of thinking.”

“There will also be some fantastic opportunities in terms of electric vehicles, electric tractors and electric cars.”

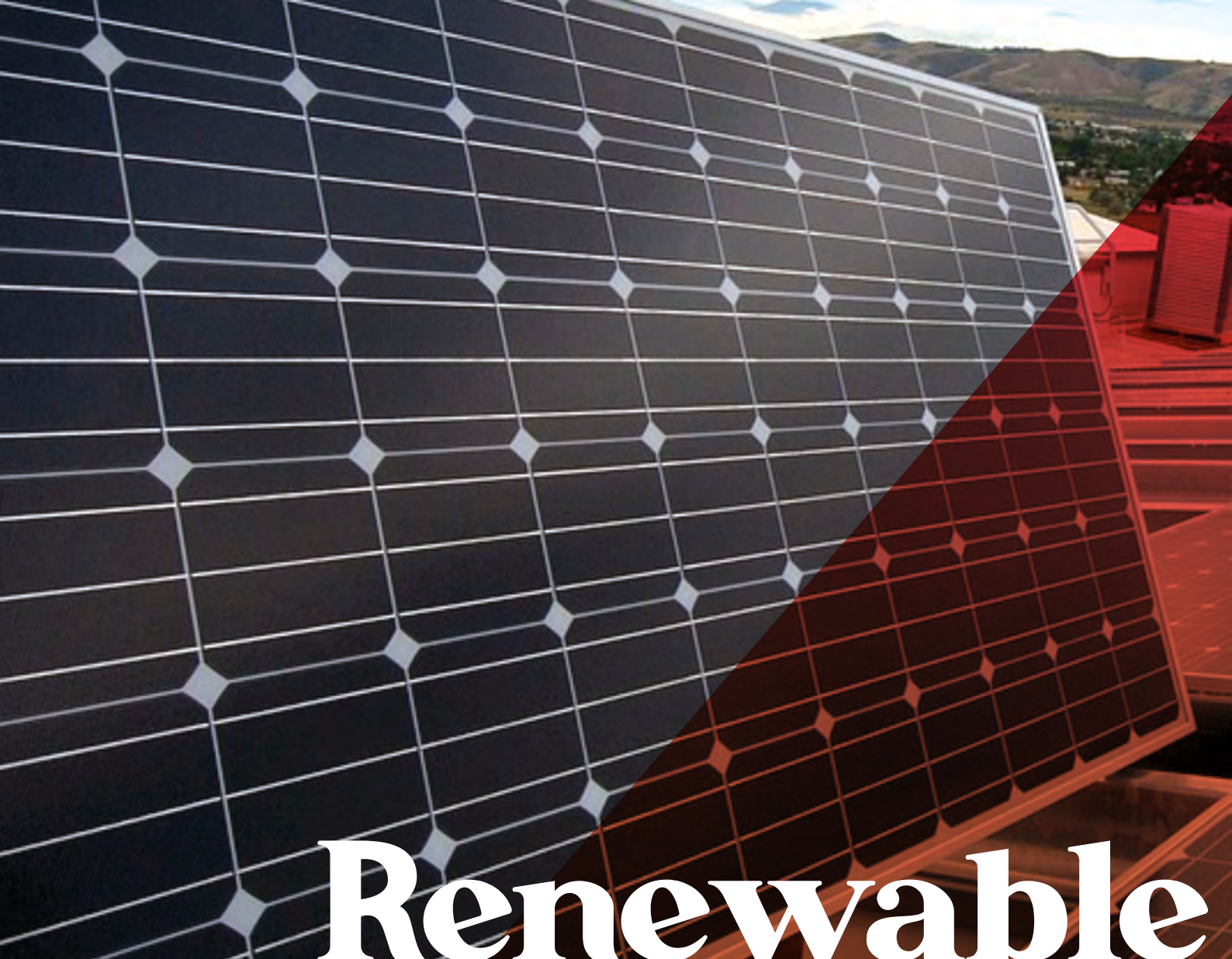
“There’s a whole industry out there waiting, and we’ve seen it already.”

“Aside from being better for the environment, the cost of renewables will be a lot less than coal.”

“It could be an opportunity for the Valley to give themselves a new branding. There’s a lot of other communities that will be faced with similar challenges. This is the chance for the Valley to be a good-news story and show that it can be done.”

“If we are seen as a leader, it could be a world standard that people come to look at.”

“We just need to seize the day and act on these economic opportunities instead of sitting on our hands.”



Renewable projects Gi

Hazelwood power station, built over ten years from 1959, was attached to a huge open-cut coal mine. When they were privatised in 1996, the power station was expected to operate until 2030, but events proved otherwise.

On 9 February 2015, two rapidly moving bushfires sparked a huge fire in the Hazelwood mine. It burnt for 45 days, blanketing the Morwell community with toxic smoke. Confronted by this disaster, the French owners of the plant, ENGIE, announced that its future was under review, and two years later, the mine and the plant were closed.

Story by: Lucy Marks Image: Stock photo



energy Gippsland

The changing energy scene

Ten years ago, it was cheaper to build a new coal-fired power plant than to construct a solar or wind farm, but this has changed drastically since then. In the past four years, Victoria's state energy regulator has seen applications from renewable energy developers quadruple. This surge in new renewable energy projects has driven down power prices and put pressure on ageing coal-fired power plants, which are much more expensive to operate. Energy Australia has announced that it will retire the Yallourn power station in mid-2028. New renewable energy projects have made coal-fired power less competitive.

This article describes some of the exciting new renewable projects that will ensure Gippsland remains a dominant force in power generation.

Solar farms

Wonthaggi

This 30MW solar farm will be located on the site of the old St Clair abattoir in Wonthaggi and will be leased to ARP Australian Solar during its 30-year lifespan. The project would power 7200 homes, enough to supply the whole of Wonthaggi and also potentially Inverloch, some 15 kilometres away on the coast. It will involve the construction of 100,000 solar photovoltaic panels built on aluminium supports so that the property can easily resume sheep grazing after construction finishes. It is estimated that the farm will take six months to construct and create up to 100 local jobs.

Maffra

The Maffra solar farm will consist of approximately 100,000 solar panels, which will stand off the ground in order to allow cattle to graze underneath. The permit was approved by the Wellington Shire council in 2018 after extensive community consultation. The farm is estimated to have a generation capacity of up to 75 megawatts. It is expected to boost the local economy, provide employment, and supplement Victoria's energy supply. The solar farm will also reduce the burden on the grid and help reduce power supply and voltage issues in the region. During the construction phase, approximately 200 jobs will be created. Once the farm is operational, a smaller number of jobs will continue. It will be the first solar farm located in Wellington Shire, and it aligns well with Council's commitment to develop renewable energy technologies.

Perry Bridge

This proposed solar farm will deliver 44 megawatts of power to the region and will feature a battery with storage of 40–50 megawatts. It will be located on 232 acres of farmland of low agricultural value at Perry Bridge, just inland from the Gippsland Lakes. The battery storage will ensure consistent energy supply to the electricity grid during times of low solar input. The project was developed in response to the need for additional electricity and increased reliability in the eastern Latrobe Valley.

The farm is expected to lead to more solar energy investment in the Wellington Shire to increase future economic and environmental prosperity. The facility will provide electricity to stabilise the power supply between Sale and Bairnsdale. The project also aligns with Wellington Shire council's current land use policies of "advocating for the facilitation and greater use of renewable energy supply and technologies in appropriate locations". It is forecast that the solar facility, made up of more than 100,000 solar panels, can power approximately 13,000 homes. Furthermore, it is estimated there will be 88 jobs during the construction phase.

Fulham

This project is a proposed solar farm of 80MW, with battery storage of up to 80MW, helping to ensure consistent energy supply to the grid in times of low solar energy output. The farm has an estimated cost of \$100 million, excluding batteries, and is to be located on 400 acres of low-value agricultural land in Fulham, west of Sale. If the farm is approved, it will provide enough electricity to power 25,000 homes and help deliver reliable power to the local community. The farm is backed by local people and on completion of its construction, is expected to return 85 per cent of the seed investors' investment. It will also provide added certainty to the development of the Gippsland renewable energy park.

Morwell

In August 2020, ARP Australian Solar lodged a planning application with the Victorian state government to build the Morwell Solar Farm. If approved, the farm will include a 70MW solar farm, consisting of 230,000 solar panels situated on a 157-hectare piece of land that is used for grazing. The project is expected to create 100 jobs during the construction phase and 20 ongoing maintenance jobs. The site is close to existing electricity infrastructure, making it ideal for ensuring a strong grid connection when coal-fired power stations are switched off.

Frasers Lane

South Energy's solar farm, located just off the Traralgon-Maffra Road, represents an exciting opportunity for "vertical farming", which involves multiple layers of economic production with a single footprint. For example, with solar panels at the top, sheep can graze in the "middle" layer and enjoy shading and protection provided by the panels. The farm's estimated capacity will be up to 75 megawatts, providing power for 29,000 homes. South Energy hopes to begin construction in 2021 and have the farm fully operational by 2022. The company also has four more solar projects in the works for Victoria. The farm was a part of a raft of planning permits fast-tracked for approval in order to create jobs and stimulate economic growth in a post-Covid economy.

Gippsland Renewable Energy Park

The Gippsland renewable energy park in Giffard, near the Ninety Mile Beach, will begin with a 50-megawatt solar farm accompanied by a 50-megawatt battery storage system. Next, it will focus on constructing wind turbines, and then it aims to explore other exciting power alternatives such as hydrogen. It is estimated that 1200 local jobs will be created during the development of the park.

The Gippsland area currently suffers from power supply and voltage issues, but this integrated renewable energy hub will firm up power supply in the region, with the ability to provide power 24/7. The project will help fill the gap left by the phasing out of coal-fired power stations. The Gippsland renewable energy park will also make a huge contribution to the Victorian government reaching its target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030.

Star of the South

The Star of the South, located off the coast of South Gippsland, will be Australia's first offshore wind project. The location was selected in order to take advantage of the Bass Strait's powerful winds. Its proximity to the Latrobe Valley is also a huge benefit, as the Valley provides one of the strongest connection points to the grid. If developed to its full potential, the project will generate a whopping 2.2 gigawatts of new capacity, powering 1.2 million homes and supplying 20 per cent of Victoria's electricity needs. This project will ensure Gippsland has a more reliable energy system and will help deliver cheaper power.

After Energy Australia announced the early closure of the Yallourn power station, Star of the South released a statement reporting that they will work with the company and the Latrobe Valley Authority to support workers from Yallourn, retraining them for a future career in offshore wind. The local people's existing skills will be essential to the Star of the South, as the project will require about 5200 construction jobs and 740 ongoing roles.

Offshore wind is a rapidly expanding industry and is a large contributor to the energy mix in other Western nations such as the UK, Germany and Denmark. It can produce more consistent power than onshore wind and can also perform well in summer, helping to prevent blackouts.



Founder Gippsland Solar Andy McCarthy

Andy McCarthy and his wife Kelly McCarthy founded Gippsland Solar in 2010. Gippsland Solar went on to become the largest supplier and installer of solar power systems in eastern Victoria, with over 1000 projects delivered every year. Andy and Kelly now have three sons and Andy is the CEO of Gippsland Solar.

Back in 2010, the Latrobe Valley wasn't exactly the best place in Australia to start a renewable energy business, but we've seen a real shift, particularly in the last five years. People have recognised that the jobs, opportunities and environmental benefits of the renewable energy transition are positive things for the Latrobe Valley and for the Gippsland region.

There's nowhere else in the world I'd rather live. It's just paradise here. We're a business, of course, but we're local people. We care about this community. We feel the pain when the community feels pain and it hits us on a very personal level. So when the 2019 bushfires hit Gippsland, it was a very challenging time.

The 2019 bushfires

I still remember exactly how I felt at the time when the fires came through. It still feels difficult to talk about. We had just installed a small battery system at the Mallacoota-Genoa radio station, the emergency broadcaster. At 6:30 in the morning, as the fire front was tearing through town, I got a message from our regional manager to say that the battery had just run out and the station had lost transmission. That feeling in my guts when I got the call still stays with me.

There was barely a town spared by these fires in East Gippsland. The intensity is rising. Every area of regional Victoria is bushfire-prone now. We really need to think about how to rebuild better than what we were beforehand. I think the key to improving the resilience of these towns is to make them more self-sufficient.

Building resilience

The first thing we did in the recovery was reach out to the radio station and say, "We're going to find you funding and we're going to increase the size of this battery." In late 2020 we installed a 30-kilowatt-hour battery with a generator. So now, if anything ever does happen again, they're well protected.

Throughout this whole rebuild, renewable energy has been at the centre of the recovery. We're seeing over 60 per cent renewable energy in the Victorian grid through the middle of the day in spring and summer 2020 and 2021. If you had told me that in 2010, I would have thought you were crazy, but here we are.

We set up a Bairnsdale store to expand into East Gippsland in 2017. Then, we had zero market share. Three years later, we're installing six or seven hundred systems a year in East Gippsland. We're seeing thousands of apprenticeships and new jobs across the entire supply chain.

A bright future for Gippsland

The renewable energy industry can really benefit Gippsland. We're creating good jobs, sustainable jobs, and new pathways for the entire economy. That flows on to people building new houses, having babies, staying in regional Victoria rather than moving to Melbourne for work opportunities.

Now we need to make renewable energy smarter, more flexible, and allow consumers to put storage behind the meter and use their solar at night. I want to get to the stage where people can trade energy with their neighbours, feed it into an electric vehicle and drive around on sunshine during the day. The renewable energy industry can really benefit Gippsland. We're creating good jobs, sustainable jobs, and new pathways for the entire economy.

"The renewable energy industry can really benefit Gippsland. We're creating good jobs, sustainable jobs, and new pathways for the entire economy."

I am flooded with a sense of optimism. We still have thousands of jobs in the Latrobe Valley in traditional coal-fired power generation. Those jobs have been the bedrock of this region for 60 or 70 years or more. But if we can keep investing in building thousands of new jobs in this new economy, through the renewable energy transition, then we can also start building the jobs of tomorrow. So let's take this opportunity to rebuild our economy and our region to be better than what it was before the fires came through.

This story was first told in Environment Victoria's documentary 'Beyond the Burning' about the 2019-20 East Gippsland fires. Visit: envict.org/bushfiresfilm

Ramahyuck Solar Farm



From Left: Andrew Dimarco & Mark Munnich, General Managers of Ramahyuck

Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation

Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation is a leading provider of primary healthcare, social and family support services for Aboriginal people in the Gippsland region. It was established as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation in 1992 and has been providing culturally appropriate health and wellbeing programs ever since. Its services include GP consultation, mental health counselling, drug and alcohol counselling and women's and men's health programs. In delivering these services, Ramahyuck aims to improve social, financial and health outcomes of Aboriginal people in Gippsland, raise awareness of health issues, increase screening rates for diseases and increase vaccination rates.

Australia's first solar farm on Aboriginal land

At the beginning of 2019, Victorian Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio announced funding for four local businesses to develop alternative energy technology. One of those grants was given to Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation to research the financial feasibility of installing a solar farm on an underutilised 16ha piece of land they own in Sale.

Ramahyuck found that it would be practical to install

a 5MW solar farm – enough to power 2000 households per year. It would be one of the first grid-connected solar farms in Australia on Aboriginal land. The Ramahyuck Solar Farm would provide a long-term income stream for the organisation, allowing it to further develop the many services it provides. In an interview with *Gippslandia* in 2020, Chief Executive Officer David Morgan stated that the project also aligns “with what Aboriginal culture is all about, which is working and living on the land”,

If the solar farm goes ahead, it will provide self-determination to the broader Indigenous community in Gippsland through increased sovereignty and control over income. It will also create opportunities for Indigenous employment in renewable energy and provide a template for a process that could be developed in other First Nations communities in Australia. Australia is well placed to harness energy from renewable sources like sun and wind. Through their initiative, Ramahyuck is demonstrating the wealth of opportunities that are available to Gippsland to support Australia's inevitable transition towards a zero-emissions economy. The Latrobe Valley is at the forefront to take full advantage of innovation and the transition to new energy technologies.

The Heyfield Microgrid

In February 2021, a ground-breaking community sustainability project was launched in the small town of Heyfield in Wellington Shire. The MyTown energy project will determine the feasibility of a microgrid, which would allow households and businesses in Heyfield to generate electricity and share it with each other, improving the reliability of local power.

The project is being led by the Heyfield Community Resource centre and Wattwatchers, a Sydney-based digital energy company. It is managed by the Institute of Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney.

The project involves collaboration between the local community and businesses, and involves the Community Power Agency, the Latrobe Valley Authority, AusNet, Federation University, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre Ltd and RMIT. These groups will all work together over a period of three years in order to uncover an optimal local energy solution for Heyfield. Hundreds of households and dozens of businesses and schools will contribute to the study via energy audits, monitoring and data sharing.

Funding for an outstanding community

MyTown is funded by \$1.8 million from the federal government's Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund and a further \$100,000 from the Latrobe Valley Authority. Heyfield was chosen as a trial community because of its history of passionate citizen participation and its interest in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Heyfield and its surrounding areas have one of the highest proportions of businesses and homes with solar panels in Australia. Two-thirds of businesses and one-third of households in the town have rooftop solar installed, generating about 2.5 megawatts each year.

Heyfield's history of sustainable innovation

In 2012, Heyfield's "sustainable smart town" program was recognised by the United Nations for encouraging citizens to conserve energy. The program's objective was to reduce participants' carbon footprint, save money on utility bills, and create a healthier lifelong living environment. The program included categories for water, waste, safety, sustainability and disability access as well as energy.

The program used a three-colour flag system. In the White Flag stage, participants would choose eight actions from a list provided, for the Blue Flag stage six actions and for the Green Flag four actions. Examples of energy actions include:



- White:** energy-saving light globes, ceiling fans, outdoor clotheslines
- Blue:** outside awnings, roof vents
- Green:** solar hot water, insulation, solar panels

In an interview with the Latrobe Valley Express in 2020, Julie Bryer from Heyfield Community Resource Centre said that conserving energy is "something our community is passionate about".

Devoted to technological advancement

So far, there has been strong community demand to participate in the data collection phase of the microgrid trial. Consenting participants in the project will have a Wattwatchers Auditor 6M device fitted to their switchboards by a licensed electrician. The device has its own 4G mobile phone signal and collects real-time data, refreshing every 30 seconds. It monitors both energy consumption and input to the grid if the participant has a solar system. This data will be crucial for determining the feasibility of a shared microgrid.

The Heyfield microgrid project aims to provide a benchmark for other communities in Australia to set up their own microgrids.

The project will help devise a process that is fast, easy and cheap so that other communities can follow suit. The tiny town of Heyfield is on track to become an important role model for other regional communities in Australia.

Julie Bryer from the Heyfield Community Resource Centre at the launch of the MyTown Microgrid project on 25 February 2021

Image: supplied MyTown Microgrid project
Story by: Lucy Marks

The Delburn Wind Farm

The developer OSMI, an Australian-owned company, has proposed building a wind farm at Delburn in the Strzelecki Ranges. Construction is set to begin in 2022 and finish in 2023. The wind farm is expected to create 186 full-time jobs during construction and 24 ongoing jobs afterwards. The wind farm will give approximately \$500,000 per year annually to the local neighbourhoods in the form of Neighbour Profit Sharing Agreements, and will establish an annual community development fund. During its 30-year life, it is estimated that the project will contribute \$106 million to gross regional product, a measure of the net wealth of the local economy.

Innovation in wind-generated power

The Delburn wind farm will be located less than three kilometres from the Hazelwood mine site. It will be one of the first windfarms in Australia to be built in a plantation forest. The forest will simultaneously host plantation forestry and produce wind energy, providing power for 125,000 houses. A 50MW battery may also be installed in order to guarantee a consistent, reliable power system.

Just a few years ago, a wind farm required 100 turbines to reach this capacity, but with cutting-edge technology, it now only needs 33. Newer designs allow wind turbines to be built well above choppy wind and forest canopy, reducing fire risk and making use of powerful winds. These bigger turbines not only generate more power but also turn slower and are no louder than older models despite their larger size.

Maximising opportunities in the Latrobe Valley

The site in the Latrobe Valley has many advantages, including its proximity to the nearby grid connection from the Hazelwood power station. By utilising this existing infrastructure, the Delburn wind farm will be able to avoid the problems experienced by some other renewable power stations, where long transmission lines limit the amount of power that can be delivered to the grid. The wind regime at the

“After the closure of Hazelwood, there were fears of mass workforce dislocation in the Latrobe Valley, but the Valley’s unemployment rate actually fell.”

proposed location is also different from other wind farms, which should allow Delburn to generate when other wind farms cannot. This will increase the stability and reliability of the power grid. Furthermore, 90 per cent of the required roadways already exist for the plantation forest.

After the closure of Hazelwood, there were fears of mass workforce dislocation in the Latrobe Valley, but the Valley’s unemployment rate actually fell from 8 to 5.7 per cent between 2017 and 2019, partly because some reskilled workers gained employment in the Valley’s booming solar sector. The resulting job opportunities will be boosted by upcoming wind and solar projects such as the Delburn wind farm.

Story by: Lucy Marks | Image: supplied OSMI

This image is an accurate representation of what the Delburn Wind Farm would look like generated in True View Visuals technology. It uses real photos of the existing landscape and inserts a life sized model of the project into the photos.

The Sustainable Cape

The Cape is a sustainable community situated in the quiet coastal village of Cape Paterson. When completed, the Cape will comprise 230 homes, a cafe, a community garden, a conference centre and a population of approximately 720 people. The project's director, Brendan Condon, has created one of Australia's first sustainable residential projects. Every house is designed to be operationally carbon neutral and gas-free, and the homes average 8-star energy efficiency. They are fitted out with efficient all-electric appliances and are powered by a minimum of 2.5 kilowatts of solar energy. The residents are also paid for exporting surplus energy to the grid. At just over 40 hectares, the Cape's site would typically fit up to 500 houses, but it was decided that only 230 would be built in order to leave a large amount of open communal spaces for ecological restoration and for the community to enjoy.

From opposition to advocacy

During the planning stage of the project, Cape Paterson locals were apprehensive, but many have since changed their minds. Tony O'Connell, a builder who helped construct many of the homes, told *Domain* that he initially planned to oppose the housing development until he attended the community consultation for the project. "To be honest, I went along there to lynch Brendan Condon," he said. "I didn't want to see another developer in my town. But over the course of an hour or so when I heard about the concept ... it was really a light-bulb moment. I went from thinking it was not a great idea for the town to thinking it was one of the best things along the coast." The project has inspired some local plumbers and painters to take sustainability training and also influenced an electrician to only install LED lighting.

Homes of the future

In an interview with *Domain*, Mr Condon said that people entering the homes for the first time often ask whether the heating or cooling is on. The answer

“The Cape is a blueprint for affordable climate-adapted housing in Australia.”

is “No.” Excellent insulation, shading, double-glazing and thermal mass all maintain year-round comfortable temperatures and provide protection against weather extremes. All the houses also have rainwater tanks with at least 10,000 litres of water to use in gardens and toilets. Excess stormwater is redirected to collection ponds and then filtered through vegetation back into groundwater and natural wetlands. The carbon-neutral estate is highly energy-efficient, allowing residents to decouple from fossil fuels and expensive energy bills by switching to renewable energy.

Story by: Lucy Marks Image: supplied courtesy of Brendan Condon

Hope for affordable housing

Pep Salce moved into a house at the Cape in August 2020. "It's actually quite cheap to live in a sustainable home," she says. "In the summer, we don't really need to use any air conditioning." She feels the best things about living at the Cape are "the sense of community, the sense of freedom and not having overhead cost of heavy bills." The starting price for a home is \$280K and the median price is around \$350-450K. Mr Condon says the aim is to make the houses more affordable and provide a template that can be replicated in other communities. Ultimately, if volume builders in Australia follow suit, they could achieve economies of scale that would then reduce prices for sustainable housing. The Cape is a blueprint for affordable climate-adapted housing in Australia.

the Cape

Aerial photo of the Cape

The Soilkee Renovator



Apply more fertiliser?

The Soilkee Renovator is the brain-child of West Gippsland farmer Niels Olsen, who has been farming on his property near Drouin for 30 years.

Following in the footsteps of his parents, Niels started dairy farming at the age of 20, often working both days and nights. After a couple of years, Niels then set up an agricultural earthmoving business and began buying and applying large amounts of fertiliser to his farm. The first year, the fertiliser led to a huge increase in yield. The next year, he repeated the fertiliser application again. When summer rolled around, his farmland turned brown, while his neighbours' properties were healthy and green.

Niels contacted the fertiliser company for advice and they told him "You need more fertiliser." But Niels had already applied three times the amount of fertiliser as he had the previous year. More fertiliser was not the answer. Instead Niels embarked on a study tour of biological farms across the world and enrolled in soil chemistry courses.

A solution ticking all of the boxes

Niels' newfound passion for learning about soil biology gave him the knowledge he needed to invent the Soilkee renovator. This machine is a cultivator with the main goal of increasing yield, but it also enhances the performance of soil and pasture through building topsoil, improving soil fertility, water infiltration and nutrient availability. This technology is the first of its kind. It seeds while aerating and mulching to regenerate the soil, increasing yields by about 23% in only a few months.

The Soilkee uses rotating blades to plant seasonal crop and pasture seeds in existing pasture, while leaving around 80% of pasture undisturbed. The

undisturbed portion acts as a cover to protect the crop and the soil from the elements, reducing soil erosion. The aeration of the soil via the increased fungal population improves drought resistance, as it increases the water-holding capacity of the soil. The system aerates the soil while providing a green manure crop within the worked-up portion of soil, which activates soil fungi, bacteria and earthworms.

The power of earthworms

Mechanical disturbance softens the soil underneath the blades, causing the cycling of nutrients that are usually locked up in rigid soil. The Soilkee renovator increases earthworm populations by burying approximately 20% of the plant matter that breaks down, thereby creating a food source for them. Soil processed through worms increases the nutrients available in the soil for plants. By improving soil fertility, much less fertiliser is required. In one year the Soilkee system was found to increase plant available nitrogen by 122%, phosphorus by 34%, sulphur by 51% and soil carbon by 24%.

Normally, the conversion of plant stubble to carbon would take about 20 years, breaking down slowly with fungi and bacteria. However, the worms fast-track this process and turn plant matter into carbon as soon as it passes through them.

Carbon credits and co-benefits

The Soilkee system increases the amount of carbon stored in the soil (carbon sequestration), which directly increases yields. This carbon sequestration earns soil carbon credits for farmers who use the product, creating an extra income stream. On the Olsens' 100ha farm, the Soilkee system increased soil carbon by 12.2 tonnes in one year. In the second year, soil carbon increased by 13.7 tonnes. The federal government guarantees at least a \$15 carbon credit per tonne of carbon sequestered.

Using the Soilkee System, there is ample opportunity for farmers to improve soil carbon stocks, improve yields and earn money while they're at it. Niels says that dairy farmers have reported that their input costs have halved, and found a \$300-400,000 increase in profit after using the Soilkee renovator. Agriculture and farming has led to reduced soil carbon in many cases across Australia over the years. In an article published in the *The Land*, Niels stated that the Soilkee system provides "an opportunity to turn that back around and make farming more efficient" and reverse decades of soil depletion in agriculture.

Data in this article is from the Soilkee Renovator, Soil Pasture Demonstration Trial managed by the South Gippsland Landcare Network from 2015-2018. For more information see the WGCMA website or visit: soilkee.com.au



We value our community, and we can find a way forward if we work together.

Image by: Esther Lloyd - Communities Leading Change participants engaged in a facilitator training workshop



“We should be working as one Gippsland with a vision and supporting each other.”

“People here care for and value each other.”

“As individuals, what we can do is have conversations and build momentum.”

“We need to come together.”

“If we all talk to [the politicians], we’ll annoy them, and they’ll do something.”

“The ripple effect is huge ... Greta Thunberg was just one person who just sat on the steps of the Parliament. Now across the world there are groups of schoolchildren taking action.”

“If all the little countries like Australia get together and say, ‘We’re going to do this’, we’ll make a huge difference.”

“The [coal workers have] done a fantastic job building the nation. Now it’s time to move on and build the nation in another way.”

“The way [the transition] is done has to be fair, and the decisions that have to be made along that line have to be made by the local people and the government.”

“It shouldn’t need to be ‘them vs us’. We should be talking about us all together.”

“If we can get enough voices to stand together, that’s where you get a good thing.”

Sharing meals to build community

The idea of holding potluck dinners involving climate action groups and community members from across Gippsland was floated by local community leaders Joh Lyons and Jessica Reeves in response to a screening of the film *2040* in Traralgon.

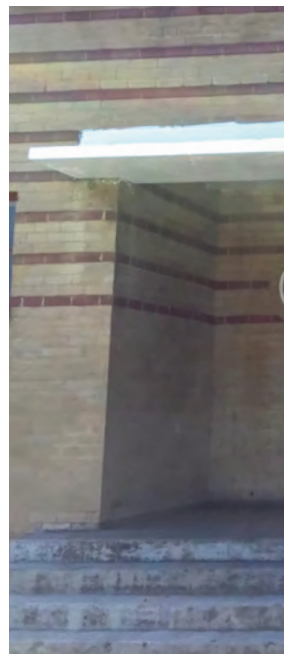
Potluck dinners are events where each attendee brings a dish to share. This makes event planning easier, distributes costs among participants and reduces waste. The events also provide opportunities for us to discuss our local responses to global warming and sustainability.

Communities often come together through these meals, talking and sharing food. Throughout 2019 and when we could in 2020, we held potlucks where people from across the Latrobe Valley and beyond could talk about social change, community building and environmental issues. Those attending included local sustainability group members, climate activists, teachers, power-station workers and community members.

“The events also provide opportunities for us to discuss our local responses to global warming and sustainability.”

We held five potlucks, which were attended by more than 100 people. Among them were the CLC facilitators, who celebrated their achievements with a graduation potluck dinner at the Morwell Multicultural Centre in December 2019.

The potlucks provide a regular space to build relationships, trust and capacity amongst people in the region who care about sustainability, environmental issues, and the energy transition beyond coal.



The Victorian Railways Institute

Powered by the community for the community, the Victorian Railways Institute (VRI) has become a treasured part of life in the Valley, a creative meeting place in which to share skills, explore ideas and learn from hands-on experience. In its present form, it is something of a sustainably minded love child born of the union between Traralgon Community House and ReActivate Latrobe Valley. It can host up to twenty community activities and classes at any one time. Whether your passions lie in social media strategies, blacksmithing or the art of Japanese fermenting, there is something there for everyone.

With its flexible spaces and extensive community gardens, including 200 planter boxes, ground planting, green walls, fruit trees and solar panels, the VRI strives to be environmentally sustainable. Solar panels provide up to 16KW of power per hour, and any excess power is fed back into the grid. Five 5000-litre water tanks ensure there is enough rainwater to run the centre's bathrooms and keep the grounds watered all year.

“a space where people can solve problems by learning, by doing.”

With a passion for connection and collaboration, the VRI has hosted more than fifty local businesses, organisations and individuals, including our own Communities Leading Change potluck dinners. A hive of community connectivity and engagement, VRI project manager Joh Lyons describes it as “a space where people can solve problems by learning, by doing.”



Earthworker Cooperative

Founded by a country-wide alliance of trade unionists, environmentalists and community members, Earthworker Cooperative is a community-led initiative helping to empower local people by providing sustainable, wealth-creating jobs. With a strong belief that climate change, job insecurity and inequality need to be tackled together, Earthworker's mission is to establish a national network of worker-owned cooperatives committed to sustainable enterprise.

Its pilot project is the Earthworker Energy Manufacturing Cooperative (otherwise known as Eureka's Future), Australia's first worker-owned green manufacturer. Producing solar-powered hot water systems from a factory in the Latrobe Valley, the cooperative aims to redeploy skills from the coal industry into new clean-energy jobs.

Leading the way for a Just Transition

When Victoria's coal-fired power stations were privatised in the 1990s, the Latrobe Valley suffered massive job losses. Since this time, the community has continued to be affected by high levels of unemployment and growing uncertainty around the future of coal mining.

Earthworker was created as a grassroots response to this situation, designed to enable new ways of living and working. Formed through a partnership between the trade union and environment movements along with broader civil society organisations, the cooperative brings together hundreds of diverse members concerned with creating a more just and sustainable world.

While Earthworker has been around for about twenty years, the cooperative's first big milestone came in late 2017 with the opening of the Earthworker Energy Manufacturing Cooperative in Morwell.

Establishing this factory was a massive community effort involving years of fundraising and business planning, and countless volunteer hours. This included Earthworker members and supporters walking 100 kilometres from Melbourne to Morwell, showing solidarity with the communities of the Latrobe Valley and providing "a demonstration of vision and a declaration of hope".

Earthworker Energy began commercial operations in 2018 and currently has five workers. Its aim is ultimately to have 50 workers across manufacturing, sales, installation and servicing, supporting the redeployment of local skills as the Latrobe Valley shifts away from fossil fuels.

The business is wholly owned and operated by its worker members, with no boss or external shareholders. This means that all profits from the business



are shared equally and locally, everyone is invested in creating a safe workplace and quality products, and all decisions are made in the interest of the local community.

“While worker-owned cooperatives are still a relatively new phenomenon in Australia, there are many successful examples overseas ... Earthworker has a vision for Australia to catch up.”

Cooperation not competition

While worker-owned cooperatives are still a relatively new phenomenon in Australia, there are many successful examples overseas. It's estimated that there are approximately 2.6 million cooperatives around the world, with 1.6 billion members collectively.

Earthworker has a vision for Australia to catch up. The cooperative is focused on building awareness around worker-owned cooperatives and the important role they can play in supporting a just transition for communities like the Latrobe Valley. Since the foundation of Earthworker Energy, the cooperative has also successfully started Redgum Cleaning Cooperative, a Melbourne-based green cleaning service. Launched in 2018, Redgum now has ten members.

As well as continuing to grow its existing network of cooperatives and members, Earthworker runs 10-week online courses to equip others with the skills, resources and support to launch their own worker cooperatives.

For Earthworker, the future of the Latrobe Valley is bright. By addressing the issues of economic inequality and climate change together, we can build more resilient, sustainable communities – one worker cooperative at a time.

Rhonda Renwick is the owner of Latrobe Valley Bus Lines. She is also a psychologist, a teacher and a mother of three. Raised in the north Victorian village of Yackandandah, in 1971 she moved to Traralgon and made it her home. In 2008, she set up the Kindred Spirits foundation, a humanitarian community-focused organisation supporting local projects that address social and environmental issues affecting local communities.

The Latrobe Valley is unique in so many ways. This town used to be owned by the State Electricity Commission, and when the government sold the power stations to private enterprise, a lot of jobs no longer existed. It was a really, really tough time for the families in the Valley. After that, people had a low opinion of the Latrobe Valley. It was kind of the end of the world, and it felt as if nobody wanted to come here. The media didn't report on how the communities supported each other or write about the beautiful landscapes, our access to the sea and the mountains and the Valley's great climate for growing for agribusiness.

The transport issue

My first appointment was as a primary school teacher, where I worked with children that had learning challenges. From there I went into community psychology. In that capacity, I came to appreciate the value of transport and connections for people who were disadvantaged in the community – in particular, for single mums, mums escaping domestic violence, Aboriginal families and recently arrived migrant groups.

Many disadvantaged people don't have access to cars, and transport can be very difficult for people who need assisted walking apparatus, but public transport enables all of these people to stay connected. They often greet and get to know each other on the buses. I'm very passionate about public transport because it allows people to access community, health and education.

A one-of-a-kind bus line

Over fifty years ago, I bought shares in the Latrobe Valley Bus Lines along with some other people. The bus company was a public unlisted company and was sought by corporate raiders in the 1980s. The corporate raiders would have sold the assets, but I believed the assets were there for public transport. So we got together as a group and ended up being the highest bidder to maintain the operation as the bus company. In about 2007, I became the sole director and owner of the company.

We're an aberration in the bus industry, with me being a sole female owner and managing director. Latrobe Valley Bus Lines was also one of the first companies to introduce hybrid buses. They are wonderful. They contribute hugely to a reduction in particulate matter and carbon dioxide. Public transport just has so many positives! In 2015, Latrobe



Bus line owner & philanthropist Rhonda Renwick

Valley Bus Lines were recognised as 'Best for The World' by B Corp for our work in caring for community and our environment.

Looking to the future

I'm actually selling the bus company, because it's my best insurance for it to be continued. We've currently got about 100 buses, and we're being acquired by a family group that has about 800 buses. They can achieve economies of scale that we currently don't have the capacity to achieve. This will allow us to go the next step and put research and resources into alternative energies in public transport. We're keen to investigate hydrogen and fully electric buses, particularly as trials in the community transport sector.

"I truly believe that individuals and groups have the knowledge and the ability to solve our problems. Empowering them is the way forward, rather than relying on some big company to come and save us."

I've always felt that we have great opportunities in our community, but we have to believe in ourselves. It's us who can make the difference. I truly believe that individuals and groups have the knowledge and the ability to solve our problems. Empowering them is the way forward, rather than relying on some big company to come and save us.

My vision of the future for the Valley is the strengthening of the fabric of our communities and the offering of support for initiatives for people that want to make a difference. If we look after all of our people, we're going to have a strong, healthy, vibrant community.



Jane Oakley

Committee for Gippsland

Jane is a founding member of the Committee for Gippsland and was appointed Chief Executive Officer in July 2019. She has held senior executive positions across the region in both the private and public sectors.

Story by: Laura Melville Image: supplied

I moved to Gippsland in 2001. I was attracted to the region's nature, access to the Ninety Mile Beach and welcoming community. I live on a bush block in Buln Buln East, which is getting a bit busy for my liking now!

I've been working in the region for the last couple of decades, first for Telstra and then at Regional Development Victoria. In my current role as the CEO of the Committee for Gippsland, I'm very aware of and involved in the transformation underway across the region and wish to acknowledge the business and industry leaders driving that change.

Gippsland is an amazing region with so much to offer. A lot of the time we're underestimated; we need to better inform people outside of what we bring to the table. During my time at Telstra, I saw the impacts privatisation of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria had on communities like Moe and Morwell, setting the region back for a number of decades. It's taken a lot of time and effort to recover socially and economically from that significant economic restructure.

Representing many sectors across Gippsland

The Committee for Gippsland represents business, industry and community across the whole of the region. We advocate for better outcomes for a sustainable economic and social future. We believe good healthy business and industry leads to vibrant communities improving the health and wellbeing of people.

The traditional industry operators, the power generators, are making major decisions about the future of their businesses at the moment. The success of Gippsland's transition will depend on a clear plan outlining actions and initiatives on how we transition beyond our traditional industries and over what time frame. That's why at the Committee for Gippsland we are working with experts to work out what a clean energy future means for Gippsland and how we get there, while maintaining the social and economic health of the region.

The beauty of Gippsland is that we already have a social licence for producing energy. When you think of it, it's in our DNA. What I am seeing now is that there's an appetite for transition to a cleaner energy future right across the board. The Gippsland energy industry is working collaboratively, which demonstrates a commitment to secure the region's reputation as an energy powerhouse, which is really awesome to see. But the new industries cannot just be in clean energy. There are huge opportunities in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, health and the circular economy as well.

Growing new industries in Gippsland

What we're advocating for at Committee for Gippsland is the infrastructure that will enable these new and existing industries to grow. Like rail and road infrastructure, access to ports, and social services like hospitals and schools. The timing of investment to enable this type of infrastructure will be a critical piece to the transition.

The challenge for all of us is how to tap into the smart collective intelligence we have here and put it to good use, really pave our future and be in control of our own destiny. I think previously we were probably a little bit guilty of relying on government to come up with the answers on how we manage this transition well.

Transitioning together

It is important that we take it on ourselves to educate and build our awareness about what this transition means. What does it look like, and how do we understand it? The survival of our region will depend on a thriving business economy, providing future jobs, leveraging the full capability of our region and translating to healthy communities. It's up to all of us how we get there.

What gives me hope is that we have really smart business leaders and other people across Gippsland. We are used to adapting and working through disruptions. I'm constantly inspired by the resiliency of the people who live here. It's kind of a prerequisite for living in Gippsland, adapting to natural disasters and continuous change.

“What I am seeing now is that there's an appetite for transition to a cleaner energy future right across the board.”

We have an amazing capacity to work collaboratively, and we have parts of the community engaging strongly in the discussion around what the future looks like. I really encourage and welcome the broader community and industry to participate, because at the end of the day, the transition is going to impact all of us.



GCCN board members visit the Bendigo Power Hub

Gippsland Climate Change Network

Founded in 2007, the Gippsland Climate Change Network is a not-for-profit organisation powered mostly by a group of committed volunteers and members. We are driven by the shared vision that Gippsland can be carbon neutral by 2040 and enjoy thriving communities, new industries, a resilient economy, healthy habitats and sustainably managed resources.

One of our biggest challenges so far has been how to engage our communities about the real and present threat of climate change impacts in ways that understand the science and our local expertise but also promote partnerships and generate hope.

Three core initiatives contribute to achieving GCCN's vision. These are:

- Engage Gippsland***
- Energise Gippsland***
- Regenerate Gippsland***

Engage Gippsland focuses on connecting and collaborating with local communities, businesses, and government organisations around climate change awareness and solutions. Through this platform, we aim to generate conversations and opportunities that will inform Gippsland about local climate change challenges and possibilities.

The Communities Leading Change was one of these valuable programs developed through partnership that we have been so excited to see grow and develop. We hope to see the momentum of this work continue for years to come.

Energise Gippsland is focused on community energy projects and various partnered initiatives with other organisations through its flagship Latrobe Valley Community Power Hub program with support from Sustainability Victoria. Through this work we hope to deliver practical energy assessments through the scorecard program, supports community energy initiatives with local communities and makes available advice and services that improve access to renewable energy for both households and small businesses.

GCCN leads and supports sustainable agriculture through our growing focus on Regenerate Gippsland. We were stoked to work with international students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) we initiated the project Storying Perceptions of Climate Change in Wellington Shire, which produced several of the stories included here. But we are also excited about leading the Gippsland Biomass Audit our current and upcoming work which includes partnering with the Latrobe Valley Authority as part of their on two biomanufacturing projects through their innovative Gippsland Smart Specialisation Strategy.

By building partnerships and engaging, energising and regenerating local communities, the GCCN intends to support Gippslanders to adapt to climate change impacts while exploring ways of becoming leaders in sustainable practices and renewable energy generation.

We invite you to engage with us via our Facebook page @GCCNVic and new inquiries and memberships are always welcome via our website: gccn.org.au



Bank Australia

RESPONSIBLE BANKING

In 2018, Bank Australia provided a grant to support the Communities Leading Change program, which promoted meaningful and constructive conversations about climate change, its impacts on the Latrobe Valley and the options for locally led solutions. Bank Australia has also supported other Climate for Change projects.

Bank Australia began in 1957 as the CSIRO Co-operative Credit Society and has since become Australia's first customer-owned bank, made up of 72 credit unions and co-operatives. Its name was changed to Bank Australia in 2015. The bank established its national lending and contact centres in Moe in the Latrobe Valley, bringing many jobs to the region and demonstrating their support for Australian workers.

Bank Australia is also 100 per cent Australia based. Bank Australia runs entirely on renewable energy, with 110 solar panels on the National Contact Centre in Moe and 88 on their head office in Melbourne. Bank Australia has also committed to reduce its emissions by 25 per cent by 2025 and has been carbon neutral since 2011.

Bank Australia does not lend money to fossil fuels, live animal export, gambling, arms or tobacco industries. It invests in projects that help to build a strong, fair nation and a healthy planet. The bank lends to community renewable energy projects and participates in programs to help low-income households put solar panels on their roofs. One of its projects is a 927-hectare conservation reserve in Western Victoria that is home to 225 native plant and 270 native animal species. Bank Australia is the only bank in the world with a conservation reserve, and has protected the property from development forever.

“Bank Australia does not lend money to fossil fuels, live animal export, gambling, arms or tobacco industries. It invests in projects that help to build a strong, fair nation and a healthy planet.”



About Climate for Change

Our mission is to create the social climate in Australia for effective action on climate change.



Story by: Lucy Marks & Belinda Griffiths Image: supplied Climate for Change

We aim to create a social climate where our leaders can take the action we need to stop and then reverse climate change as quickly as possible, with sufficient support from the public.

Our theory of change is based on social research that tells us that social change happens through conversation. People are most likely to process information, commit to ideas and take action when they are in dialogue with people that they trust. Our work therefore enables people to have better, more constructive conversations about climate change and climate action.

The Climate Conversations Program (CCP) uses the party plan model, made famous by Tupperware™, to facilitate Climate Conversations among peers in people's homes, where a host invites friends to their home.

Climate for change (C4C) was founded by Katerina Gaita in 2014. It is an incorporated association and registered charity based in Melbourne, powered by a small, dedicated team and a strong army of more than 200 volunteers who have facilitated Climate

Conversations across Australia, engaging more than 10,000 people.

We are the only organisation in Australia specifically focused on helping people to have better discussions with their peers on climate change – something that is now being recognised by experts as key to building public support for the action we need.

Four out of five Australians are worried about climate change and want stronger action from our leaders. These sentiments, however, have often failed to translate into effective action because many concerned Australians are uncertain of what to do about climate change. These are the people C4C wants to empower. The Climate Conversations increase the climate literacy, skills, confidence and motivation of everyday Australians to take action in ways that will make a systemic difference.

Communities Leading Change is a key program supported by C4C, based on the same conversation model to enable people to have more constructive conversations about climate change.

**With change there is
opportunity ...**

So, get involved!

Website: communitiesleadingchange.org.au

Facebook: @CommunitiesLeadingChange