

ISSUE 36 | SPRING 2021

# You vs the big polluters

Taking the EPA and coal  
companies to court

**PLUS**

Launching our new  
campaign to get off gas

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Front cover image: Loy Yang coal power station in the Latrobe Valley  
Credit: John W Banagan



Image credit: Julian Meehan



**Taegen Edwards and Laura Melville,**  
Organising Program  
Co-Managers

of our very first People Power workshop series.

Participants have been zooming in from the Latrobe Valley and broader Gippsland region, Ballarat and areas around the new Western Victoria Renewable Energy Zone, the Goulburn Valley in the central north and from Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs and Mornington Peninsula.

Through the workshops we're exploring power and social change, practising core organising skills aimed at building relationships and finding shared purpose with others, mapping our communities and planning new actions to push for Victorian climate action.

Beyond the workshop series we'll develop and support a team of local organisers – people who are committed to building people power in their own communities. We'll create spaces for them to connect with each other, foster their skills and grow the number of people engaged in their groups and in our shared campaigns. And during critical campaign moments, we'll combine our voices to show our power. Environment Victoria already connects more than 200,000 Victorians who care

about nature and want to see our state lead the way on climate solutions. But we must get bigger and more diverse by involving local organisers working in regions and communities on the frontlines of climate impacts.

That's the work we're tackling and we couldn't be more energised and inspired by the conversations it's generating. So far, we're focused on parts of the state that are most closely connected to our active campaigns, whether they involve supporting renewable energy projects, restoring natural flows to the Murray Darling or transitioning our state off polluting coal and gas.

But, with a double election year looming, we've got big plans to grow the network and show how powerful we are when we focus our efforts, build our organising skills and work together.

Stay tuned as we develop more ways to offer people power skills, training and connections across Victoria.

You can get in touch at:  
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## Editorial

**Jono La Nauze,**  
Chief Executive Officer



With the arrival of spring, snowmelt and rains are swelling Victoria's mountain streams. A thousand kilometres away the Darling-Baaka is flowing too, filling the parched Menindee Lakes and Great Anabranch. In the months ahead, wetlands and billabongs will fill and echo with the thrum of frogs, insects and waterbirds.

But sadly, too much water will still be taken out of the river and captured in vast dams upstream – cutting short breeding opportunities for threatened fish and birdlife, and depriving downstream communities like Wilcannia and Menindee of the water they need. While the situation on the Darling-Baaka can feel distant, it affects Victoria's rivers too. Turn to page 12 to find out how we're working with our allies to turn things around.

Wilcannia has been in the news for other reasons recently. As COVID ripped through the outback town, vital services were

stretched to breaking. Faced with food shortages, Barkindji native title holders set up "Operation Deliver Roo." Licenced Aboriginal hunters harvesting *wangga* – healthy wild meat like kangaroo – helped deliver it to locked-down families. The roo was hunted in Mutawintji National Park. Traditional Owners are only allowed to hunt there today because, after fifteen years of grassroots organising, the park was handed back to them in 1998.

Why mention this? Because it is an inspiring example of how organised people can take back control and force our governments to do the right thing.

With the support of our community, we're heading to the Supreme Court to challenge a decision by the EPA which prioritised the interests of power station owners over the health of the community and our environment. In 2017, we were involved in developing Victoria's nation-leading *Climate Change Act*. Our groundbreaking court case will be the first test on how it should be applied. Similar to the recent case brought by bushfire survivors in NSW, a win could force all Victorian government

agencies to weigh up the climate impacts of every decision they make. Get the details on pages 6 and 7.

This Spring, we also open a new chapter in our long history of grassroots organising, with the launch of a statewide Action Network. Over the coming months, we'll be training and connecting Victorians to lead campaigns from their own communities.

In other news, we're working with fishing and environment groups in the Latrobe Valley to call for an independent investigation into the major flood damage at Yallourn coal mine. Across Gippsland, we're also supporting local leaders who are helping carve out a new future beyond coal.

This edition of Environment Victoria News contains exciting updates on the gas front, and a reflection on both how far we've come and how far we still have to go on Victoria's emissions targets. But as the leadership in Wilcannia shows, we're most powerful when we link arms across communities and between movements.

### A snapshot of the 130 people who joined our first ever People Power Workshop!



### Starting with our People Power workshop series, we're creating new opportunities for training and building a network of Victorians organising in their local communities for state-wide impact.

In recent years we've built record amounts of clean energy, won record investment in energy efficiency, stopped AGL's dirty gas import terminal and pushed for ambitious state emissions reduction targets. All made possible because people like you have stood up for what you believe in.

But to prevent the worst impacts of the climate crisis we need to scale up our efforts and cut pollution with greater urgency. To do this – especially in a time of growing climate-fuelled disasters – we're going to need to work together. We need to create structures to support each other and grow our power as a movement for climate justice. We need to get organised.

In order to build the necessary political power, we need to connect, not just in our own backyards and regions, but with people across the whole state. That's why through September and October we've brought together more than 130 people from four different Victorian regions as part

# Slashing climate pollution this decade

New research shows that if Australia built all proposed offshore wind farms in the country, it would generate more energy than all our coal power stations combined.

Rampion Offshore Wind Farm, United Kingdom | Credit Nicholas Doherty

**Taegen Edwards,**  
Organising Program  
Co-Manager



**Momentum towards greater climate action is building, but just like the vaccine roll-out, this is a race.**

As the recent IPCC report reminds us, every fraction of a degree matters. Every tonne of carbon does damage, and the problem is urgent. Delay is the new form of climate denial.

We now have a smaller window to keep global heating within the safest limit of 1.5 degrees, but recent global climate target commitments show that momentum is building.

Action is what matters most, but targets are an important signal: to the community, to businesses, to our trading partners. They indicate whether we're taking climate change seriously. They set a trajectory for action and a standard to which we can hold governments accountable.



Our op-ed in The Age, explaining why Victoria needs to go further in its emissions reduction targets for 2030.

In May, the Andrews government announced Victoria's emissions targets for 2025 (28 to 33 per cent) and 2030 (45 to 50 per cent). When they were announced, we said the targets were politically bold but scientifically inadequate.

Bold because we are leading Australia (especially compared to the federal government's miserable target of 26 to 28 per cent by 2030) and cuts of around 50 per cent is broadly in line with world leaders like the EU and USA.

Inadequate because the government's independent advice made it clear that a 2030 target of 45 to 50 per cent is not consistent with limiting warming to 1.5 degrees. For this we need a target of 75 per cent.

To be fair, the Morrison government's obstructionism has made things harder for states who want to lead the way. But we can't wait for the climate deniers in the federal government to catch on. We need to push the laggards to hurry up, but we also need to push leaders like Premier Andrews and Minister D'Ambrosio to do even more.

The historically conservative International Energy Agency (IEA) recently joined the UN and leading analysts in emphasising the need for wealthy countries like Australia to phase out coal power by 2030.

But in Victoria, we have AGL and Alinta saying their Loy Yang A and B power stations will still be operating in the late 2040s. Whether or not anyone believes them, those are still the official closing dates. This must change.

As the November climate summit in Glasgow approaches, the media is speculating about the Morrison government's snail-paced shift towards a 2050 net zero target. But what matters much more is whether they keep Tony Abbot's embarrassingly low 2030 target, which would guarantee that Australia blows through its carbon budget well before 2050.

The focus needs to be on what we're doing to cut emissions now, not what we 'might' do in two decades time. And for us that means doing everything we can in Victoria to get off gas, phase out coal power by 2030, and support a community-led transition in the Latrobe Valley.

**The people-powered campaign for strong climate targets was huge. 33,000 Victorians signed our petition. Thousands of you sent personal messages to state MPs and the Premier. Bushfire survivors took their calls for strong targets to the steps of parliament. And business, unions and social agencies came together to show their support.**

**Thanks to all of you, the Victorian government has taken big steps – and we'll keep pushing them to raise the bar.**

# Yallourn mine failure demands answers

Back in 2012, a section of the diverted Morwell River flooded the Yallourn coal mine after heavy rain. It took nearly two years and \$150 million to repair.

**Nick Aberle,**  
Campaigns Manager



**Yallourn, Victoria's most polluting power station, is also the biggest risk to our power supply after heavy flooding damaged a key section of the mine. Together with Latrobe Valley community groups, we're calling for an inquiry into what has gone wrong.**

Remember Victoria's energy emergency? In June 2021, ferocious storms lashed Victoria, uprooting trees, knocking down power lines and leaving thousands of homes without electricity. But there was a broader threat to the energy system. The rains led to flash flooding in the Latrobe Valley, causing massive cracks in a crucial section of the Yallourn coal mine. The government was so concerned that the Minister announced special powers to approve urgent repairs.

The Morwell River is diverted by an embankment that splits the Yallourn mine in two. It collapsed catastrophically in 2012, spilling sixty billion litres of water into the mine. The collapse took two years to fix.

Obviously it wasn't fixed well enough, because it has now cracked again, and for a few weeks in June and July the situation looked dire. One plan being considered was to divert the floodwaters into the old Hazelwood mine pit, possibly mixing with existing coal ash dams and pre-empting plans to rehabilitate the mine properly. The

Andrews government assured us this was a last resort. The eventual solution was to temporarily divert the Morwell River into the Latrobe River via pipes along the embankment – probably the best way out of a bad situation.

Then in August, the operator of Australia's electricity grid confirmed what the government would already have known: the damage at Yallourn was the biggest risk to power supply this summer. More heavy rain could suddenly put the power station out of action for months. Together with a cluster of community, environment and fishing groups, we launched a call for an independent inquiry, making statewide news.

We need an inquiry for several reasons. First, if the threat of the mine failing is enough to trigger emergency powers, it's enough to warrant independent public scrutiny.

Second, given that this section of the mine has collapsed before, EnergyAustralia (the owner) and regulatory bodies should have foreseen that heavy rainfall could cause the same issue again.

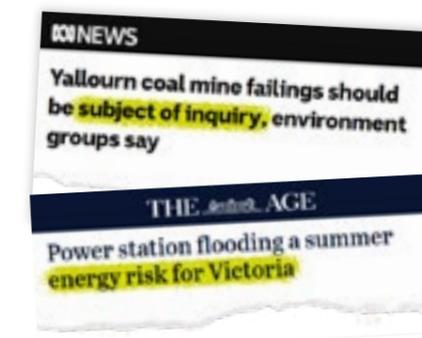
**In the news:** We're calling for an independent investigation into the failures at Yallourn, together with Environmental Justice Australia, Voices of the Valley, VR Fish, Friends of Latrobe Valley Sustainability Group, Great Latrobe Park, Gippsland Recreational Fishers Alliance and Environment East Gippsland.

Third, the damage affects the Morwell River, which supplies freshwater to the internationally recognised Gippsland Lakes downstream. That alone makes this a matter of serious public interest.

Finally, the Andrews government has a strong history of responding to crises in the Latrobe Valley, including establishing inquiries into the Hazelwood mine fire and implementing their findings. An independent inquiry into the failures at Yallourn would build on this legacy.

The situation highlights how vulnerable we are when our power generation depends on the Latrobe Valley coal mines.

We need to transition to a geographically diverse grid with more renewable energy and storage spread across the state. The Victorian government has made great strides toward this transition in recent years, without which we'd be in a worse position. But what happened at Yallourn is a reminder that we need to move beyond coal much faster for the climate, and in a way that's fairer for affected communities.



# Why we're taking the EPA to court



**Nick Aberle,**  
Campaigns Manager



**After a drawn-out review of coal power station licences, Victoria's EPA did very little about toxic air pollution and chose not to place limits on greenhouse gases. Now we're challenging that decision in the Supreme Court.**

In March this year Victoria's Environment Protection Authority (EPA) finally announced new licence conditions for the state's three remaining coal power stations. After a three year wait, a Freedom Of Information (FOI) request, and a public campaign to get the EPA to finish the review, the results were a bitter disappointment.

Coal power stations face NO limits on greenhouse gas emissions under the new licences, and there were only minor tweaks to toxic air pollution limits. They would be allowed to continue polluting at dangerous levels, far beyond what is acceptable in places like the US and Europe.

So, with legal representation from Environment Justice Australia, we're challenging the EPA's decision, which prioritises the interests of power station owners over the health of the community and our environment.

## What happens now?

Victoria's key climate legislation – the *Climate Change Act* (2017) – requires the EPA to consider climate change in their review of coal power station licences. It's hard to see how they could have done that properly and chosen to do nothing. So we're putting the question before a judge to decide.

This landmark case will be the first time the *Climate Change Act* (2017) has been

tested in court. It will also be the first to challenge the loose regulation of toxic air pollution from coal-burning power stations in Victoria.

If we win, the EPA will likely have to re-do their homework and remake their decision, this time actually complying with the law. The power station owners (AGL, Alinta and EnergyAustralia) benefited from the EPA's decision, so they're also named as defendants. And while it's likely to be



Our court case made headlines across the state, including on the front page of The Age.

several weeks before we face them in hearings, we're expecting them to come out hard against us.

But we've got something they don't. The support of thousands of Victorians like you! That means we can take on government agencies and big polluters, we can hold them accountable, and we can win.

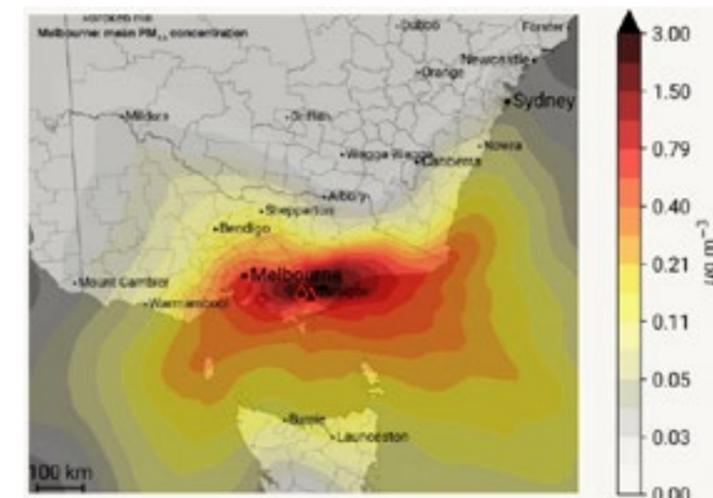
## How has the EPA failed?

Victoria's coal-burning power stations pump 120,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide into our atmosphere each day (that's about 40 percent of Victoria's total emissions).

**"Victoria's coal-burning power stations pump 120,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide into our atmosphere each day."**

They're also the biggest single source of toxic pollutants like sulfur dioxide, fine particles (PM2.5) and mercury.

Despite the dangers, Victoria's coal power stations have been described by experts as



Annual mean near-surface PM2.5 concentration due to emissions from Latrobe Valley coal power stations. From Greenpeace's 'Lethal Power' report.

"some of the more poorly controlled coal-fired power stations in the world". Their loose licence conditions allow levels of pollution far beyond what is considered safe in places like the US, Europe, India and China. This has a very real impact on our environment and health. The first peer-reviewed study of the health impacts of coal-burning power in Australia found that air pollution from Victorian coal power stations cause 205 premature deaths, 259 low birthweight babies, and 4,376 children with asthma each year.

As Victoria's environment watchdog, the EPA has the power, and the responsibility, to protect the community and our environment

from this pollution. They have the power to regulate greenhouse gas emissions through annual limits or emissions intensity standards. But they chose not to. They could have required the use of existing technology that reduces some toxic pollution by more than 85 percent and save lives. Again, they chose not to.

It's a remarkable failure for a review that took the EPA more than 3 years to complete. Victorians deserve an Environment Protection Authority that has the guts to put the health of our community and our climate above the interests of big polluters. That's why we're taking them to court.

## BACKGROUND TO THE LICENCE REVIEW

For years the Latrobe Valley community has been demanding cleaner air, and back in November 2017 the EPA announced they were reviewing the licences of Victoria's coal power stations. According to the EPA, their intention was to keep "up to date with changing science, environmental conditions and community standards".

Initially they only asked for input from the power station owners: EnergyAustralia, AGL, and Alinta Energy. But together with Environmental Justice Australia and community groups in the Latrobe Valley, we pushed them to open up the review

to public input. Unsurprisingly they heard a lot about climate change and air pollution as the top issues.

This was the first review of power station licences since the introduction of Victoria's *Climate Change Act* and there was a growing expectation that the EPA would finally tighten the historically weak toxic pollution limits and add limits on greenhouse gas emissions. They finally announced the new licences in March this year, more than 1200 days after they began.

## THANK YOU!

Having the support of thousands of Victorians like you means we can take on government agencies and big polluters. We can hold them accountable. And we can WIN!

Join our case and fight the EPA in court with a gift today: [envict.org/epa-donate](http://envict.org/epa-donate)

# Shaping new futures for the Latrobe Valley

Image credit: Darryl Whitaker

**Laura Melville,**  
Organising Program  
Co-Manager



**A new magazine created by the Gippsland community shows what's possible in the region as we move beyond coal.**

In 2018, Climate for Change and the Gippsland Climate Change Network came together to create Communities Leading Change (CLC), a training program to help upskill local Gippslanders to engage with their communities more effectively about climate change and energy transitions. For the past two years, CLC has been sparking important conversations with people across Gippsland about what climate change and a just transition mean to them.

All up, the program involved 33 participants and facilitated nearly 200 conversations with friends and neighbours. Now, these stories – from local farmers, nurses, coal workers, scientists and more – have been compiled in a new magazine that celebrates those carving out a new future for the region.

The Latrobe Valley Authority was set up in 2018 after the closure of Hazelwood power station and has established innovative programs to support the community in the transition away from coal. But its funding expires next year!

Add your name to our petition calling on the Victorian government to fund the Latrobe Valley Authority until the last coal power station closes, and to commit to a community-led plan for the region. Sign at: [envict.org/latrobe-valley-petition](https://envict.org/latrobe-valley-petition)

The magazine was launched at an online event in July this year with nearly 80 people. It was great to hear CLC members Steve Murcott and Ruth Harper speak about the project and everything it had achieved.

'Transitions: Stories of Gippsland Communities Leading Change' profiles people like Kate Mirams, a farmer who has developed more sustainable and regenerative ways of farming; Chris Barfoot, a clean energy worker who is helping drive investment in solar, wind and battery storage; and Bosede Adetifa, whose work shows just how powerful community leadership can be.

Volunteers helped analyse the transcripts of these conversations to identify consistent themes within the community. This formed the following intention statement, which ties each story together in the magazine:

**"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 if we work together, we can find a way forward."**

The next article is an excerpt from farmer Kate Mirams' story. To read more, download the full magazine at the Communities Leading Change website: [envict.org/transitions](https://envict.org/transitions)



## Profile: Kate Mirams

Kate Mirams lives and works on a farm in Newry, Gippsland, where she and her husband Pete are developing more sustainable ways of farming. In January 2021, she was named Wellington Shire Council Citizen of the Year, acknowledging her many years of work for her communities of Newry and Boisdale. This is an excerpt of her story, as told in 'Transitions: Gippsland Communities Leading Change.'

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.

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. 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 in the soil means that our soil will hold 17 ml extra rainfall.



Image credit: Darryl Whitaker

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.

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.

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.

This profile is based on a conversation with Belinda Griffiths and was first published in 'Transitions: Stories of Gippsland Communities Leading Change.' Find more inspiring stories of people building a better future in the Latrobe Valley at [envict.org/transitions](https://envict.org/transitions)



# What's next for the campaign to get off gas

**Rai Miralles,**  
Climate and  
Energy Analyst



**We're carrying the momentum of our huge win against AGL's gas import terminal into a new gas campaign that tackles the problem at its root.**

It's not often you get a major and decisive win against a big polluter, but that's what we achieved this year, working alongside the amazing Westernport Bay community. We stopped Australia's biggest polluter, AGL, from building a dirty gas import terminal in the middle of a Ramsar listed wetland! But unfortunately AGL wasn't the only corporation with plans to import dirty gas into Victoria. Viva Energy and Vopak are

still pushing ahead with their own import terminals, both near Geelong.

Viva's proposal is the most immediate threat. The Environmental Effects Statement (EES) process is underway, and we've been supporting 'Geelong Renewables Not Gas' to raise awareness and get ready. (You can learn more and get involved at <https://geelongrenewablesnotgas.org/>).

If this wasn't enough, the Andrews government has just given the green light for Beach Energy to mine for gas right next to the 12 Apostles, drilling a hole under Port Campbell National Park and 3.5km offshore!

What's clear is that unless we get off gas and switch to clean energy, we'll remain in a vicious cycle where growing

gas consumption underpins destructive projects like these. So we're now focusing on cutting the demand for gas. If nobody needs it, nobody is going to drill for it.

The Andrews government has already acknowledged that we can't keep burning gas forever, and it's developing a 'Gas Substitution Roadmap'. The big question is what we 'substitute' it with.

Victoria burns a massive amount of gas compared to other Australian states, almost half of it for residential heating and hot water. This means there's a big opportunity to upgrade homes with efficient electric appliances. All-electric homes are cheaper to run, healthier to live in and produce less pollution (and once we hit 100% clean energy, they'll be carbon neutral).

But the gas network companies are going to fight this tooth and nail. Their revenue comes from owning pipes that get gas to your home. If people stop using gas and start using electricity, the companies' assets become worthless.

One of their tactics is to talk up the potential of using clean hydrogen, but this is just greenwashing. Clean hydrogen could play a role for hard-to-electrify sectors such as steel production, but it won't be commercially available for years, it would require costly upgrades to the gas network and it's predicted to remain too expensive for household use

Compared to other states, Victoria burns a huge amount of gas. Almost half of this is used for residential heating and hot water.

Gas consumption in East Coast Gas Market 2020



AEMO, National Electricity and Gas Forecasting, online data portal [forecasting.aemo.com.au/Gas/AnnualConsumption/Total](https://forecasting.aemo.com.au/Gas/AnnualConsumption/Total)

and locking in future emissions.

Infrastructure Victoria, an independent advisory body, has recommended in its latest 30-year strategy that these regulations be changed. And 29 local governments are already stepping up, announcing their intention to work towards zero carbon, climate resilient buildings. It's only in the early stages, but these local governments are showing the way towards all-electric buildings – ready to be powered by 100% clean energy!

This is great local leadership. But we need the state government to remove outdated rules in our Victorian Planning Provisions and Plumbing Regulations and deliver a 'Gas Substitution Roadmap' that prioritises rapid and deep climate action over fossil fuel

industry profits and ensures that Victorian homes and businesses have access to affordable clean energy. That's exactly what we'll be working to make happen.

## THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who has already made a submission, filled out our survey or signed our gas petition. If you haven't added your name, you can show your support for getting off gas by signing the petition here: [envict.org/Vic-gas-free](https://envict.org/Vic-gas-free)

## Community spotlight: Phillip Island Conservation Society Inc.



**Victor Komarovsky,**  
Senior Organiser



Winning the campaign against AGL's gas plan for Westernport Bay was the result of huge people power from a broad coalition of community organisations and NGOs. Phillip Island Conservation Society Inc (PICS) is one of these organisations – and a key part of the campaign since its outset.

Over its 53-year history, PICS has notched up an impressive list of environmental wins. In the AGL campaign, it brought deep knowledge of the Westernport coastal and marine ecosystems, as well as first-hand experience campaigning against countless damaging proposals in the area.

PICS President, Jeff Nottle, emphasises that the AGL campaign was won on environmental grounds as much as by building an organised community who could mount political pressure on the state government.

"To me, the main forces behind the win were twofold. Firstly, and most importantly, was the people power. This was brought by the coordination of Environment Victoria and other groups in raising awareness and public displays, protests, social media, local papers and so forth, that led to tens of thousands of people being aware of the campaign."

"When the Minister recognised the groundswell, he then looked to find the most appropriate ground on which he could reject the proposal. And that was the ground that PICS focused on – the potential impacts on our marine ecosystem."

While Victorian Planning Minister Richard Wynne ultimately dismissed the argument that the gas import terminal would have negative effects on Phillip Island tourism, this was another key argument of PICS.

"With the understanding that the Phillip Island environment is our economy, it's clear that conservation and tourism are intertwined."

AGL's dirty gas plan has now been

stopped in its tracks, but PICS and the rest of the community will continue to stand up and protect the precious environment around Westernport Bay.

"Any future proposals that seek to exploit the natural environment of Westernport will face an extremely well organised community opposition. I think it's excellent that there's a good relationship between Environment Victoria, Victorian National Parks Association, PICS and other groups around Westernport. It's something to be cherished and used in the future."

"But PICS would only seek support from organisations like Environment Victoria when it really, really matters – like in the case with AGL. Because otherwise we're quite capable of managing the issues within our community."

And with a half-century history of protecting Phillip Island and helping turn it into a wildlife and tourism hotspot, the proof is in the pudding.

[picsvictoria.org.au](https://picsvictoria.org.au)

# How floodplain harvesting affects Victoria's rivers

Private dams at Cubbie Station in Queensland | Image credit: New Matilda

**Tyler Rotche,**  
Rivers Campaigner



**In the northern rivers of the Murray-Darling Basin, some water is taken for free and stored in private dams. This hurts downstream communities and ecosystems – but the damage even spans into Victoria.**

You might have seen pictures of massive private dams in Queensland or read stories about the NSW government's plan to legalise "floodplain harvesting". These practices are having adverse effects on the whole Murray-Darling Basin, including Victoria.

Floods are essential to river ecology. The Darling-Baaka, for example, meanders across flat country, sustained by heavy, unpredictable summer rains. When they come, the river swells over its banks. These flows break off into creeks, which reconnect billabongs, anabranches and wetlands. Fresh water flushes the system, preventing algal blooms and prompting fish and birds to breed.

The floodwaters ultimately return to the river and flow downstream – unless they are intercepted. Floodplain harvesting occurs when levees, channels and pumps are used to divert floodwaters into large on-farm storages. The infrastructure is expensive to build, but the water is taken for nothing.

The practice is a regulatory blind spot. It has never been licensed, measured or monitored. As a result, more and more private dams have been built. Their volume has more than doubled since 1995. Capturing floodwaters in northern New South Wales means people and fish downstream miss out on flows – instead of a healthy river, they're stuck with stagnant green pools. It also indirectly affects other parts of the system, including Victoria's Murray River tributaries.

Under the water-sharing rules between Basin states, if less water flows down the Darling-Baaka to Wentworth and onto South Australia, the Murray and its tributaries need to supply a greater share. In recent years this has meant that huge volumes of water have been pushed down the Goulburn River, scouring habitat and eroding banks to the point of collapse. It

has also meant water is forced through a narrow section of river in the Barmah forest, destroying river banks and flooding red gums at the wrong time of year.

While events on the floodplains of Queensland and NSW might seem far away, the river system is deeply connected. We need to stand with our friends in the northern states to reject floodplain harvesting. This damaging practice should be monitored and ultimately reduced, and Victoria needs to keep pressure on New South Wales for better accountability.

**THANK YOU** to everyone who wrote a submission to the Victorian Government to protect the Goulburn River from damaging high summer flows. Now, a limit is in place to prevent the extreme damage seen in the past few years. But we'll be pushing for more improvements to rule out destructive impacts into the future.

# Forever Green: Pip listens to her heart

**Camille Warambourg,**  
Key Relationships  
Manager



**Pip Ransome is a Merricks Beach resident and part of the Westernport community that helped fight off AGL's gas project. She is also a Forever Green supporter and part of Environment Victoria's new Action Network. We talked to Pip about what inspires her to protect the places she loves.**

We all have a place that we feel a special connection to. And for Pip, that's Merricks Beach in Westernport Bay.

"Every year since I was four, my parents took me on holiday to Merricks Beach. We all fell in love with the place, me particularly, and mum and dad bought a block in the 1950's. It's where I live now – thank you, universe!" So when AGL threatened to build a gas import terminal in Westernport Bay, Pip decided to join community group Save

Westernport to help stop this polluting project from going ahead.

"I wanted to fight for Merricks. I love this place and all the beings I share it with: trees, grasses, birds, bugs, fish – the place itself. I have no ecological knowledge; I just follow my heart." It was through this campaign that Pip first got involved with Environment Victoria. EV organiser Victor Komarovskiy was working together with the community to amplify the huge people-powered movement.

"I was very impressed with Victor and his professionalism. For me, what makes a campaign is the heart of the people involved, and he made me feel part of the EV family."

For Pip, heart means acting with honesty, simplicity, and with a connection to others and nature – wisdom she learnt during fifteen years volunteering beside Yorta Yorta Traditional Owners, and reinforced by her current practice of the Buddha's teachings.

"In Western culture, we see ourselves as separate from nature. We have lost that

oneness, which is why we often feel afraid, anxious, hopeless and greedy. Aboriginal people have a deep connection to Country, and they have been living at one with nature for eons."

Being part of a community is one way of restoring that connection for Pip. "Contributing makes you feel like you're making a difference," she says. "Environment Victoria is one of five causes that I support and have remembered in my will, because of its commitment, professionalism – and because EV gets things done!"

## Community Spotlight: Flotilla down the Darling-Baaka

When Echuca locals Tuesday & Carol saw the damage being done to the Darling-Baaka river, they knew they had to speak up. Starting in Menindee, they decided to sail a flotilla of handmade boats down the Darling-Baaka River to the junction of the Murray.

Their convoy became a powerful way to draw attention to the damage being done to our rivers by intensifying irrigation, climate change and the mismanagement of water. Learn more about their incredible journey in this video: [envict.org/tuesday-flotilla](http://envict.org/tuesday-flotilla)

Leaving a future gift to Environment Victoria in your Will is an exceptional legacy for future Victorians who will inherit this beautiful state from us. It's a simple change when you next review your Will. The wording below is a guide for your solicitor or trustee: "I give to Environment Victoria Inc. (ABN: 84 495 053 605) of Level 2, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, Vic, 3053 for the purpose of safeguarding Victoria's environment [the residue [or....%] of the residue of my estate] or [....% of my estate] or

[the sum of \$....] or [specified property....] free of all debts, duties or taxes and declare that the receipt of an authorised officer shall be a sufficient discharge for my executor(s)."

To find out more, contact our Key Relationships Manager (Acting), Camille Warambourg:

+61 (03) 9341 8108  
[c.warambourg@environmentvictoria.org.au](mailto:c.warambourg@environmentvictoria.org.au)

# Meet our new team members



Image credit: Sean Kelleher (flickr)

In the last few months, we've been lucky to have several new faces join the team. Learn a bit more about them and how they'll be helping to boost our campaigns, support our community and build up people power!

**Hayley Sestokas,**  
Latrobe Valley  
Community Organiser



We're so excited to have Hayley join the team as our new Latrobe Valley Community Organiser! Hayley grew up in Yallourn North and now lives in East Gippsland, where she is a core organiser with Friends of Latrobe Water (FLOW) and grows mushrooms at her family's urban farm.

At Environment Victoria, she'll be helping roll out the new Action Network and supporting folks in the Valley to protect local waterways, ecosystems and the health of the community. Before joining the team, Hayley was a key organiser with Frontline Action on Coal, working with communities in Central Queensland to stop the construction of Adani's Carmichael coal mine.

**Ingrid Wys,**  
Admin Assistant



Some of you may have already met Ingrid – she is the first point of contact if you email or give us a call. Ingrid loves getting to know our supporters and is always keen to help out (or just have a chat!). Working with Cate and Fiona in our Admin team, Ingrid makes sure everything in the EV office is running smoothly.

Before joining the team, she was a full-time mum, spending lots of time exploring green spaces, attending bush playgroups and visiting the local library. She is also a qualified yoga teacher and used to a run small business in Sydney!

**Paul Beaton,**  
Senior Energy  
Policy Analyst



Paul is bringing a wealth of experience to our Beyond Coal campaign. Originally from the Appalachian region of North Carolina, Paul spent almost a decade with the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. There, he was involved in assessing the impact of different energy policies and programs to accelerate clean energy solutions.

At Environment Victoria, he'll be supporting the team with research and analysis on the clean energy transition in Victoria. When not working, Paul stays busy helping launch Hydrogen Systems Australia (a net-zero solution for green hydrogen), practising and teaching mindfulness meditation, and getting outdoors.

**Lucy Marks,**  
Community Organiser



We snapped Lucy up after seeing her awesome organising skills in action on the Communities Leading Change publication! Volunteering with Climate for Change, she wrote a bunch of the magazine's great articles and was involved in bringing the community together for the launch event.

At Environment Victoria, Lucy will be working with the Organising team to kick off the new Action Network and co-facilitate a series of regional workshops. She will be supporting local leaders (via Zoom!) to connect with each other and build people power in their communities.



## Dear Jono, I want to help get Victoria off gas & move towards clean, renewable energy.

Please make this a donation by credit card:

(All donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

\$55  \$150  \$500  \$1000  Your choice \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make this a monthly donation

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

Or please debit my credit card: Visa  Mastercard  Amex

Cardholders name: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry \_\_/\_\_/\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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

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Please complete this form, cut off this page and return it with the reply-paid envelope enclosed, or to Reply Paid 12575, A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, VIC 8006 or visit [www.environmentvictoria.org.au](http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au) and make your donation online. Thank you for your generosity!

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

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



Image credit: Doug Gimesy

## Join us at the Environment Victoria AGM and Campaign Briefings

It's time for this year's AGM! Join us online on the evening of Thursday 28 October to hear directly from our campaigners about the incredible things we've achieved together this year and get the first sneak peek at our plans for next year.

We'll also have a special presentation on the successful campaign to stop AGL's dirty gas import terminal in Westernport Bay.

For more information and to RSVP, head to:  
[envict.org/agm2021](http://envict.org/agm2021)

## Who's who at Environment Victoria

Chief Executive Officer  
**Jono La Nauze**

### CAMPAIGNS & PROGRAMS

Campaign Manager  
**Nicholas Aberle**

Healthy Rivers  
Campaigner

**Tyler Rotche**

Senior Campaigner  
**Taegen Edwards**

Climate and Energy  
Analyst **Rai Miralles**

Senior Climate and  
Energy Analyst **Paul  
Beaton**

Community Organising  
Co-Managers **Laura  
Melville, Taegan  
Edwards**

Senior Organiser (Acting)  
**Victor Komarovskiy**

Latrobe Valley Organiser  
**Hayley Sestokas**

Latrobe Valley First  
Nations Organiser **Ange  
Chittem**

Community Organiser  
**Lucy Marks**

Data Support Officer  
**Chante Bock**

Communications Manager  
(Acting) **Cameron  
Wheatley**

Media and Content  
Manager **Greg Foyster**

Communications Officer  
**Isabel Kimpton**

### OPERATIONS

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Rogers**

Accounts Officer **Jing Lu**

Administration Support  
Officers **Fiona Ames,  
Ingrid Wys**

Office Manager **Cate  
Hoyle**

Fundraising Director  
**Jonathan Storey**

Fundraising Officer  
**Heather Bruer**

Fundraising Officer  
**Hannah Minns**

Key Relationships  
Manager (Acting) **Camille  
Warambourg**

Database Officer **Karly  
Rooker**

### BOARD

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Vice-President **Paul Brown**

**Emma Humann**

**Tim Watts**

**Paul Bailey**

**Elaine Montegriffo**

**Tabatha Fulker**

**Ralf Thesing**

**Tim Lo Surdo**

**Marina Lou**

### REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

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

### TALK TO US

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