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A critical moment for the Murray

PLUS Clean Energy For All:
big wins in the Victorian election
campaign



A critical moment for the Murray

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Front cover image: Male Australasian Darter in Middle Reedy Lake, Kerang. Credit: Doug Gimesy

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Editorial

Jono La Nauze,
Chief Executive Officer



I'm excited! It feels like the winds of change are picking up. The next few years will be a time to lock in some big wins for nature and communities.

In the Murray-Darling there is growing momentum to fix the crisis gripping our nation's biggest river system. Changes of government in South Australia, ACT and NSW have brought renewed promises to restore environmental flows, leaving the Victorian government increasingly isolated. On p3 you can read about our work to ensure these promises are turned to action with more water flowing to rivers and floodplains.

The Victorian government's historic promise to end the burning of coal means we can finally leave behind the tired old

debate about this antiquated technology. There's plenty of work to be done – renewables and storage to be built, coal mines to clean up and shifting our homes, businesses and transport system off polluting fossil fuels. All of which must be done in a way that delivers for everyone, not just the fortunate. On p12 you can read about our new campaign to wean Victoria off gas.

For years we've worked with Latrobe Valley locals to pressure coal power stations to take responsibility for the damage they're causing, including our recent court challenge to their pollution licences. Ultimately we didn't get the judgement we wanted but the media attention in the run up to the election helped shine a spotlight on the need to shift to clean energy (see p6).

That work continues with our groundbreaking campaign to ensure the rivers, lakes and communities of Gippsland have a bright future and are not saddled with the hidden costs of cleaning up after

coal. The Gippsland community – and the Gunaikurnai in particular – deserve no less than world's best practice which is why we're excited to have achieved an Australian first in having our national environmental law applied to scrutinise the impact of mine rehabilitation on rivers, aquifers and the internationally recognised Gippsland Lakes.

Finally, I'm excited because this year it feels like momentum is really building for First Nations justice and self-determination, both here in Victoria and around the country. You can read about why this matters for all of us and how you can get involved on p9.

A critical moment for the Murray

Tyler Rotche,
Healthy Rivers
Campaigner



Genuine solutions to make sure the Murray-Darling has enough water to survive have been off the table for years. In 2023, we have a chance to change that.

The last 12 months have seen big changes in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Drenching rains have brought both relief and destruction. Some wetlands received their first decent drink in years, spurring on a breeding boom for waterbirds. In other places, rising floodwaters have devastated towns and caused millions of dead fish to wash up, suffocated by toxic blackwater. It's a reminder of how dynamic and sensitive rivers are.

The political landscape has also shifted. After winning the federal election last year, the Albanese government committed to getting the Basin Plan back on track, reviving genuine solutions like water purchases to make sure rivers have the water they need to survive.

Why is this significant? Because for years, too much water has been taken away from the Murray-Darling, pushing river and floodplain ecosystems to the brink of collapse. While the mechanics of the Basin Plan can quickly become confusing, its key purpose is simple: to set aside more water for the environment and ensure it can flow to the places that need it.

Purchasing water from farmers who want to sell is the cheapest, most reliable way to set water aside. It's one of the few solutions that could address the historic over-allocation of water that has seen rivers sucked dry for irrigation – but since 2015, it's been off the table.

This was when Barnaby Joyce's National Party and the Victorian and NSW governments rejected straightforward water purchases, destabilising the Basin Plan. The first result was a drastic slow-down in water recovery. The second was a pivot toward options that were notably less open and aboveboard: inflated handouts for corporate agribusinesses, secret backroom deals and dodgy offset accounting.

This past decade, the job of setting water aside for our environment has become slow, ineffective, convoluted – and exorbitantly expensive. Critically, it's been a shift toward recovering 'paper water' instead of the real thing, and it's the rivers of the Basin that have paid the price.

Victoria has played a central role setting up roadblocks and detours – like the world-first water 'offsetting' experiment they are trying to push through right now on the Murray River (you can read more about this on page 4).

For years, the Victorian government has been able to hide behind the scandals of Barnaby Joyce and the NSW Nationals. But now, Victoria's difficult disposition is being laid bare. The new federal Water Minister Tanya Plibersek has signaled the government is ready to start purchasing water again, but she needs more cooperation from the states.

Unfortunately, the Andrews government has doubled down on opposition to purchasing any water. This would leave Victoria's preferred option – dodgy water offset accounting – as the core remaining proposal to deliver ecological outcomes along the Murray River. Again, it's an attempt to provide 'paper water' for the wider floodplain instead of the real thing. It's not a legitimate solution. At the last Minister's meeting, Victoria and NSW proposed further delays to Basin Plan deadlines. When they meet later this year, one question will be at the center: When will real water be set aside for rivers?

Continued >>>>

>>>> If we want more than clever offset accounting – if we want real water to flow through the rivers and overbank onto the floodplains of the Basin – we need action and ambition from the Victorian government. Simply, we need reliable options, like water purchases, to get water for rivers.

In the coming months, we'll be confronting the Andrews government with the importance of this moment. Ecosystems have suffered so many dry years that their ability to rebound in wet years is dramatically reduced. Our work now is to bolster their resilience before the next long drought.

This is a chance to finally get the Basin Plan back on track, but we know it will take more than one policy shift to win the really big changes we're fighting for.

Safeguarding our rivers as the climate gets hotter and drier demands that we're able to restore natural flows to the wetlands that need them. We need to make water management fair, returning water to support cultural traditions and community development. We need to make sure First Nations Peoples have a say over how rivers and Country are managed.

And we need to find ways to support resilient regional communities, including a diverse agricultural sector that doesn't depend on bloated handouts to wealthy corporations or condemning Australia's largest river system.

The questions are difficult. But our job now isn't to provide all the answers. Our job is bringing together the community, up and down the river, from the city to the country, with the ambition and patience to work through the questions together.



JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

The next few months will be critical if we're going to get the Victorian government to support purchasing vital water for rivers. To shift their position, our government will need to hear from thousands of Victorians like you – who care about a healthy Murray-Darling!

Thank you to everyone who has already donated and signed the petition. If you want to get involved, add your name here > envict.org/vic-buybacks

Barmah National Park
Credit: Erik Peterson

UPDATE: DODGY WATER OFFSET PROJECTS ON THE MURRAY

Right now, the Victorian government is pushing ahead with the world's first water offset program.

They're planning to re-engineer a handful of wetlands along the Murray River to see if they can survive with less water. They then want to use these "water savings" to justify withholding water from other parts of the river system that need it consistently. Basically, our river red gums, turtles and birdlife will foot the bill so more water can flow to the deep pockets of corporate irrigators instead.

There are nine projects in total, branded as the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP). While the government

is trying to spin the projects as "climate resilience" that will benefit the wetlands, they simply don't stack up. The science behind them has never been tested, and it's been slammed by experts. But our government is trying to rush these projects through without proper scrutiny.

Environmental assessments for all nine projects are happening this year. Together with Environmental Justice Australia and Victorian National Parks Association, we're working to hold our government to account and expose these projects as the greenwashing they are. Importantly, we need to make sure they're not used as an excuse to justify depriving rivers of water they desperately need!

Find out more and get involved > envict.org/water-offsets



Australasian darter pair at Gunbower Forest Wetlands.
Credit: Damien Cook (Wetland Revival Trust)

A short history of the Basin Plan... and Victoria's disruption to it

2008-2013

Water purchases start reviving the river

Under the Rudd-Gillard federal government, more than 1000 GL of water is set aside for rivers. This water starts reviving wetlands, birds and fish populations after the devastation of the Millennium Drought.

2010

The Guide to the Basin Plan is released

Science says up to 7,600 GL of water may be required to restore the Murray-Darling to health. Victorian government lobbies hard against these targets.

2012

All states sign on to the Plan

Its target of 3,200 GL falls far short of scientific recommendations. Victoria also pushes for 650 GL of this water to be kept for irrigators, with a promise that certain projects (water offset projects) will be able to achieve "similar" environmental outcomes using less water.

2015

The federal government stops straight-forward water purchases

Prime Minister Tony Abbott stops purchasing water on the open market and legislates a cap on the amount of water that can be bought. Water recovery slows down dramatically.

2018

Victoria and NSW threaten to leave the Basin Plan

The two states threaten to leave after the Greens try to block a further reduction to water recovery targets in the Senate. The Greens' move is defeated.

2018

Victoria helps develop a bogus "test" to limit water recovery

The so-called socio-economic test places strict limits on how water can be recovered for a specific 450 GL portion of the Basin Plan – an idea initially proposed by Barnaby Joyce. It successfully stops all but 2 GL being recovered.

2018-2019

Thousands of Murray cod die in Menindee Lakes

A report later confirms it was due to too much water extracted upstream.

2023

Victoria doubles down on opposition to water purchases

They argue against water purchases to meet Basin Plan targets, pushing for extended offset projects instead.

2022

Victoria tries to push back deadlines

Reports show many of the water offset projects promised by Victoria and NSW are not on track. After delaying progress for years, the states ask for even more time.



Ballarat Action Network at a local climate rally.

Clean Energy For All: big wins in the Victorian election campaign

Sarah Rogan,
Climate Campaign
Manager



Future generations will look back on 2022 as a turning point in Victoria towards solving the climate crisis.

In August last year, we launched our Clean Energy for All election campaign – calling for a fast and fair transition to clean energy. A few short months later, the vision we'd been calling for was within reach.

For the first time in Victoria, we saw a race to the top on climate action amongst the major parties – with the Coalition reversing their previous anti-renewables rhetoric, stepping up with promises to match and legislate Victoria's 2030 emissions reduction targets, and put solar and batteries on a million Victorian homes.

Then, the Labor government made a giant leap forward.

For decades, environment, health and community groups – including many in the Latrobe Valley – have been calling for the end of coal-burning power stations in Victoria.



Our Clean Energy for All billboard in the key seat of Caulfield.

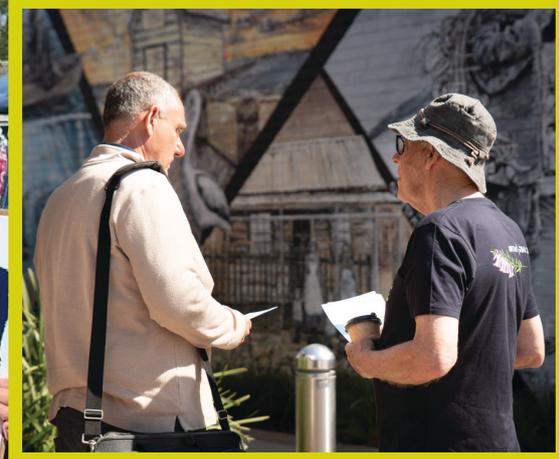


And in October, Daniel Andrews announced a re-elected Labor government would transition Victoria out of coal-burning power by 2035, replacing it with renewable energy. This is game changing, given Victoria currently relies on coal for around two thirds of our power.

Labor also increased their Renewable Energy Target – to 65% by 2030 – and introduced a new target of 95% by 2035. These targets are backed by plans to massively expand renewable energy generation (including a new offshore wind target), battery storage, and the transmission infrastructure needed to power every corner of the state.

Our new and improved Emissions Reduction Targets (cutting climate pollution 75-80% by 2035) represent some of the most ambitious in the world – raising the bar and putting pressure on other jurisdictions here and overseas to lift their game.

Labor's plan to revive the State Electricity Commission (SEC) was the centrepiece of their campaign. Re-establishing the SEC means putting significant new power generation back in public hands and gives a massive boost to clean energy investment and generation. With an initial \$1 billion investment, it would deliver 4.5 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy.



Our Action network having conversations with the community in Gippsland (above) and Melbourne's South East (right).

Taking Clean Energy for All to the streets

Our Action Network has been growing in communities across the state. The Victorian election was a chance to build on this momentum – and to ramp it up!

With eleven volunteer local organisers supporting teams in their regions, we hosted regional strategy roundtables, community launch events and conversation sessions to bring people together and talk about what Clean Energy for All means for their communities. We showed the public support for switching from coal and gas to renewable energy, collaborating with other groups with candidate forums in Morwell, Hastings, Caulfield, Kew, Hawthorn, Malvern and around Ballarat. Hundreds of people attended these forums and heard firsthand from their local candidates where they stood on our climate and environment.

We ramped up the pressure with more than fifty face-to-face meetings with local political candidates, set up colourful Clean Energy for All stalls at markets and local shopping strips to speak with more than a thousand people in the Latrobe Valley, Ballarat and Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs.

The election campaign showed what passionate people working together in their communities can do. And with our Action Network continuing to grow and evolve, we'll keep building the long-term power we need for a fast and fair shift away from polluting coal and gas.

The Guardian

Victoria's bold emissions target could be a turning point. Now here's what we have to do
Jono La Nauze

9NEWS

Victorian Labor to build publicly owned renewables, revive electricity commission if re-elected

The corporations that own Victoria's dirty coal-burning power stations have profited enormously whilst actively delaying the transition to renewables. We'll be working to make sure the SEC can reshape our energy system and show Australia what a good energy company looks like – one that acts in the public interest and delivers clean affordable energy for all.

Now, with the election behind us, we've got a big opportunity to make sure our energy system is not only cleaner, but also fairer.

It's crucial the clean energy transition benefits everyone – including First Nations People on whose Country every wind turbine, solar panel and transmission line will be built. We will push the government to embrace the opportunities a revised SEC presents, for example by returning a share of profits to First Nations People and control over where and how renewable energy infrastructure is built.

Meanwhile, we know the gas industry will resist the transition to cleaner, fairer energy every step of the way to protect their profits. While they ramp up scare campaigns to stall the shift off gas, we'll keep exposing just how bad polluting gas is for our climate, energy bills and health.

Of course, there's still lots of work to do to ensure the government delivers on their election promises. And with native forests still being logged and an extinction crisis threatening many of our iconic plants and animals, it's clear our government needs to seriously step up to protect nature.

Alongside our allies and powerful communities on the ground in our Action Network, we are ready to hold the government accountable every step of the way.

THANK YOU! This would absolutely not have been possible without the DECADES of hard work by people like you, all over Victoria and the country, demanding action. Together we've changed what is possible.

Taking big polluters to court matters – even when we don't win

Bronya Lipski,
Policy and
Advocacy Manager



The outcome of our EPA Court Case was disappointing, but we'll never stop speaking out for the health of communities, wildlife and our environment.

Last year, with the generous support of the Environment Victoria community, we took the Victorian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and owners of Victoria's coal-burning power stations to court for failing to limit greenhouse gases and toxic air pollution from coal.

We did so because despite the worsening climate crisis and community demand for meaningful action to address it, the EPA amended licenses with no limits on greenhouse gas emissions and only minor tweaks to toxic air pollution limits.

Under the amended licences, coal-burning power stations would be allowed to continue polluting at dangerous levels, far beyond what's acceptable in other countries around the world including in the US and Europe.

In our view, by not thoroughly considering the health and environmental impacts of burning coal the EPA prioritised the interests of power station owners over the health of the community and our environment – and this was something that needed to be challenged in court.

Many of you will have already heard the news that despite the best efforts of our legal representatives at Environmental Justice Australia, we lost the case.

We argued that the EPA had failed to properly consider the law in making its decision on the amended licences, including on climate and pollution levels.

So, we were naturally disappointed when Justice James Gorton ruled the EPA didn't act unlawfully in making its decision.

The case was particularly important because it was the first test of Victoria's Climate Change Act (2017) and the first time decisions about pollution levels from Victoria's coal-fired power stations had been challenged in court. The outcome has made us question whether Victoria's environment and climate laws are up to the task of protecting us.

While the outcome was disappointing, it's important to note that in his judgement, Justice Gorton emphasised that he didn't weigh up the facts to conclude that the EPA had made a good decision, only that the EPA acted within the law in the way it went about making the decision. The case was a 'judicial review' – not a broader judgement of the EPA's actions, just its decision-making process.

The key implications from the decision are that the EPA's weak toxic air pollution limits still stand. Moreover, the ruling didn't address our concern that the EPA should consider the impacts of climate change on how our power stations operate under the old 1970 *Environment Protection Act*, and what those impacts mean for the health and wellbeing of people, plants and wildlife.

Despite the case outcome, we are proud of our decision to challenge the legality of the EPA's decision to amend the power station licences. Challenging the EPA's decision in court is an important part of holding them to account for their actions. And we will always hold environmental decision makers to account for their actions.

We would like to sincerely thank Charley Brumby-Rendell and Nicola Silbert, our solicitors at Environmental Justice Australia, and our barrister team comprising Ron Merkel KC, Rupert Watters, Matthew Albert, and Chris Lum.



Members of the Environmental Justice Australia team with Bronya Lipski outside the Supreme Court.

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US TO HOLD DECISION MAKERS AND POLLUTERS TO ACCOUNT.

While there's no point sugar-coating our disappointment at this result, we're certainly proud that with your support, we were able to take significant action against our state's biggest polluters and our environmental watchdog.

Together we successfully raised the issues around the impacts of harmful pollution from coal-burning power stations in the mainstream media – including a front page in *The Age* and wall-to-wall television and radio news coverage.

This sent a clear message to environmental decision makers and big polluters that Victorians will hold them to account for their actions on climate, and with your help, Environment Victoria will fight for our community every time.

In response to the verdict, EPA CEO Lee Meizis acknowledged this point, saying "scrutiny from organisations like Environment Victoria can only make us better."

Voice, Treaty, Truth and Self Determination

Jono La Nauze,
Chief Executive Officer



As the Environment Victoria community, we come together because we want to build a just society living in harmony with nature. To do that we need to change how power is distributed across society, so communities impacted by environmental damage and inequality have the most powerful voice in creating solutions.

Australia's worst environmental problems today are inextricably linked to the disruption of a sustainable land management system developed over 60,000 years. And putting First Nations people back in charge of land and sea management is proving hugely successful in protecting landscapes from Arnhem Land to Gippsland.

Restoring the rightful place of First Nations in caring for country is part of the bigger picture of confronting our history and taking meaningful steps to address it. The goal of First Nations self-determination is about much more than protecting the environment. It's about First Nations communities being in control of their own destiny.

This year, the stage is set for all of us to play a part in delivering First Nations self-determination and stepping closer to that just society we all long for.

In recent decades, nations like the Gunaikurnai in Gippsland and the Yorta Yorta in the Goulburn-Murray have negotiated historic agreements with the Victorian government recognising rights over country and delivering jobs and better

outcomes for nature. But there is so much more to be done.

Victoria's Truth and Treaty processes are an opportunity to progress this unfinished business. The government intends to negotiate one overarching state-wide Treaty as well as local Treaties with individual First Nations, covering matters as diverse as political representation, land and water, and economic development. Each First Nation will choose if and how they want to engage in this process. Negotiations for the state-wide treaty will commence in the second half of 2023.

At the same time, the campaign to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart is hotting up, including the push for a First Nations Voice to federal parliament. Environment Victoria is talking with our First Nations allies and supporters about what this moment means for them. So far, we've heard a few clear themes.

First, a yes vote would be a vote of confidence in First Nations to take charge of their own destiny. But a no vote will be interpreted as the opposite. Secondly, the Voice alone cannot deliver self-determination – it can only be a step on a journey. So it's critical we show Australia is hungry for deeper change.

This says to me that the best outcome is a yes vote accompanied by the demand for even greater change. So the Voice has a mandate to drive Makarrata, the treaty and truth-telling process proposed in the Uluru Statement. So the Albanese government feels compelled to implement the full recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. And most importantly, so that every campaign for justice being led by First Nations around the country is lifted up on a tide of public support.

Over the coming weeks and months there will be many opportunities to help build power and momentum for First Nations justice. As allies, we see our role as creating the space for respectful dialogue, backing First Nations voices, and building support for the fundamental principle of self-determination. Following are a couple of ways you can do that.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

All of us can be part of the journey to address Victoria's colonial history by following the Yoorrook truth-telling process that is connected to the Treaty negotiations and will deliver a final report by mid 2024.

The Yoorrook website yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au contains powerful testimony from inspirational Elders and First Nations people.

If you are First Nations you can vote or run for election to the First Peoples Assembly that will negotiate Victoria's statewide treaty. Visit firstpeoplesvic.org/enrol or call 1800 TREATY. Nominations are open from 3 to 24 April and voting will take place from 13 May to 3 June. If you are a First Nations person we'd love to hear from you at action@envirovictoria.org.au or 93418100.

Environment Victoria collaborates with First Nations in our campaigns as well as turning up in support of First Nations campaigns when we're asked to. We'll keep you informed of how you can get involved, whether it's through backing Treaty, local campaigns to protect country and achieve self-determination, or the campaign for the Voice.

Transition in the Latrobe Valley

Hayley Sestokas,
Latrobe Valley
Organiser



Decades of community campaigning for a just transition from polluting coal to clean energy is picking up pace – but there's still work to be done on fixing the damaging legacy of coal mining.

In October last year, when the Victorian government announced coal mining would close in 2035, something important happened: people from across the political spectrum called for a transition plan for communities and workers in the Latrobe Valley.

Nationals leader David Littleproud spoke to press emphasising the need to support workers through the transition. The Mayor of Latrobe City Council called for renewable energy jobs. Meanwhile energy giants AGL and Ausnet are putting forward plans for renewable energy infrastructure at the power station sites.

Together with Latrobe Valley community members, we've been standing up for a plan for a future beyond coal for more than a decade, and we're starting to see some real momentum. Our Action Network and local community groups have been having the vital and sometimes difficult conversations with local communities about what the future can look like.

And there are plenty of opportunities for the community to shape our future together, from the upcoming Festival of Big Ideas in the Valley, which celebrates new ideas, to The Next Economy's work

**RENEW
ECONOMY**
Clean Energy News and Analysis

Can an old coal pit be turned into a lake? Hazelwood plans set off "water trigger"

For the first time, the EPBC Act's 'water trigger' was applied to coal mine rehabilitation.

to review existing transition plans in the region and take stock of where we are at.

The Victorian government is also taking steps, with the release of a draft transition plan for Gippsland. It's the first time the government has set out a clear vision to guide policy and investment in the region as we transition to net zero – something the community has been calling for, for years.

There's a lot of good stuff in the *Latrobe Valley and Gippsland Transition Plan*, including a commitment to creating a more inclusive society with an energy transition that carries everyone along. It highlights the need to retrain workers and deliver new skills for the fast-growing clean energy workforce, as well as the need for more housing.

A just transition, however, depends on ensuring the damage caused by a century of mining isn't left as a burden for future generations. While the plan acknowledges the need to clean up old mines, it doesn't go nearly far enough.

Mine rehabilitation must be part of a transition beyond coal. Decades of brown coal mining have left the Latrobe Valley with enormous mine pits and toxic coal ash contaminating the land and groundwater. We've been working with local community groups such as Friends of Latrobe Water (FLoW), and Environmental Justice Australia to ensure the mining companies are accountable for cleaning up their mess.

Hazelwood, which closed in 2017, is the first mine to be rehabilitated and its owners, Engie, are seeking approval to fill the pit with water – a plan that could have serious impacts on our rivers, wetlands and wildlife.

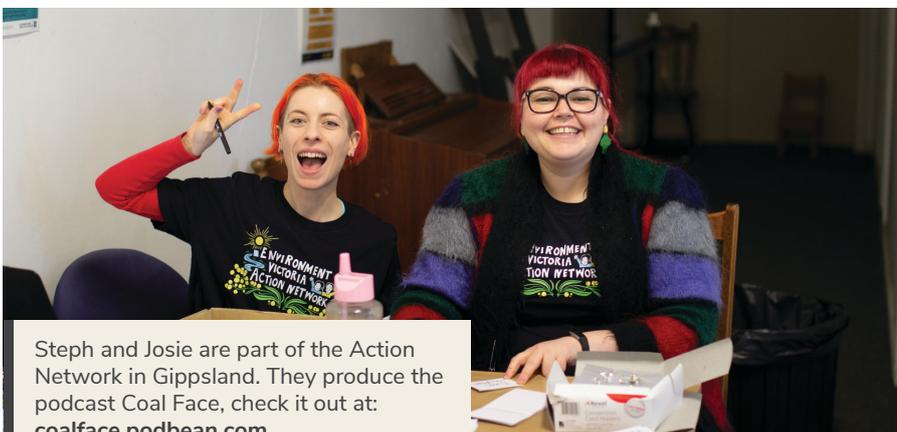
The mine pit is bigger than Melbourne CBD, and filling it would take a staggering 638 billion litres of precious water from the local river system. That's the equivalent of all the water in Sydney Harbour sitting in a toxic pit.

We've already exposed serious issues with where this water would come from in a hotter, drying climate. And concerningly, Engie are already filling up the mine pit using water diverted away from the Yallourn mine, without approval!



A drone shot shows just how close the Yallourn mine is to the township. For the local community, the impacts of digging up and burning brown coal go beyond just climate emissions - it can also pollute the air and waterways.

Credit: Friends of Latrobe Water (FLoW)



Steph and Josie are part of the Action Network in Gippsland. They produce the podcast Coal Face, check it out at: coalface.podbean.com

"I'm hopeful that the transition provides an opportunity to expand our vision of the area, from being a power-generating area, which is great - to being so much more. I'd love to see more creative opportunities and other industries encouraged in the region."
 – Josie

"The people of the Latrobe Valley have sacrificed so much in terms of health and the environment has been ravaged to provide energy to the whole state of Victoria for so long. I really hope that is not forgotten as the transition takes place, that there are diversified job opportunities and training, affordable housing, further investments in the health and care industries, and that mine rehabilitation goes beyond being safe and sustainable to create an environment which is vibrant and biodiverse."
 – Steph

THANK YOU!

We've been working together for many years for a future beyond coal in the Latrobe Valley and to make sure the mines are cleaned up properly. Together we're making real progress.

It means Engie will have to properly investigate its plan's potential impacts on the region's precious water, our internationally recognised Gippsland Lakes and local threatened species such as Australasian Bitterns and Green and Golden Bell Frogs. But it also sets a hugely important precedent as remaining coal-burning power stations close in the coming years – and sends a clear message that coal companies cannot get away with cheap band-aid solutions without scrutiny.

This is a huge win for the Latrobe Valley community and all the people and wildlife who depend on a healthy environment.

It's also a testament to the strong community leadership that continues to hold coal mine owners – and our government – to account. We still have a long way to go to make sure the community's concerns are heard. As we write this, we're awaiting the release of the scoping requirements for the EES into the rehabilitation plans. Stay tuned for how you can help hold Engie accountable and ensure we get the best rehabilitation solution, not just the cheapest.

Find out more about the Hazelwood EES process here > envict.org/hazelwood-faq

On top of this, any water they take would come at the expense of rivers and wetlands, and outflows of water and seepage into groundwater could release toxic coal ash into local river systems.

That's why we've been pushing for more scrutiny of this plan – and we've already had a few big wins. Firstly, the Victorian government has improved rules that inform how coal mine operators in the Valley must clean up mine sites after they close. The Declared Mine Rehabilitation Regulations set the standard for the future rehabilitation of all the Latrobe Valley coal mines – which is why it's excellent to see big

improvements for community consultation, transparency and accountability. Thanks to community pressure, last year the Victorian government also ruled that Engie's rehabilitation plans would have to go through a full Environment Effects Statement (EES) process. And just last month, we got good news that the plan will now be scrutinised under federal environmental laws through the "water trigger" of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC).

It's the first time the "water trigger" has been applied to mine rehabilitation.

Gas could be the biggest source of climate pollution in Victoria by 2035

Greg Foyster,
Media and
Content Manager



Without a bold plan to help homes and businesses electrify, gas could become Victoria's largest source of emissions – and push our climate targets out of reach.

Last year the Andrews government announced a world-leading climate target to cut emissions by 75-80% by 2035, including a promise to close all remaining coal-burning power stations and reach 95% renewable energy.

Having an end date for coal-burning power is a vital step forward for climate action – but what about gas?

Our latest report shows gas is a BIG problem and contains two shocking revelations:

- 1. If the gas industry gets its way it could be responsible for a whopping 45% of Victoria's climate pollution by 2035!**
- 2. Failing to reduce gas demand could also put the state's climate targets at risk.**

The gas industry is hoping Victoria will keep burning gas at the current unsustainable rate until at least 2040. And they're hoping that, after decades of greenwashing and clever marketing, Victorians will let them get away with it.

But the truth is, gas is expensive and polluting and it's a HUGE problem – especially in Victoria, where we use more gas than any other state.



Our report on gas and climate pollution had extensive newspaper and TV news coverage. Images above shows Premier Andrews responding to journalists' questions about the report.

So what's the solution?

61% of Victoria's gas demand comes from homes and small businesses (mostly heating and hot water). That's more than industry and power generation combined!

That means replacing old gas heating and hot water with modern, efficient electric appliances needs to be one of the highest priorities for cutting pollution in Victoria.

The biggest barrier for many households is the upfront cost, which is why urgent government action is needed to strengthen the policies and incentives for electrification.

Right now, the Victorian government's *Gas Substitution Roadmap* lacks the strong targets, timelines and incentives we need to help millions of homes and small businesses shift away from gas.

We urgently need a new government program to support all households – especially renters and people on low incomes – to reap the benefits of cleaner, affordable home heating and efficient electric water heaters.

Get the detail and access the full report at envict.org/gas-pollution

Winter gas bills and community conversations

As winter bites this year, thousands of Victorians will be switching on their gas heating and dreading the extortionate bill to come.

While households with poor insulation or older appliances will suffer the greatest burden, multinational gas corporations like Origin, Santos and Shell will rake in massive profits at our expense and contribute almost no tax.

There has to be a better way. And that's why this winter we'll be reaching out to communities to hear their stories.

Volunteers in our Action Network regions will brave the cold and chat to locals, host community events and raise awareness about the harms of gas to our health, wallets and climate.

We'll mobilise communities to share with each other their stories of getting off gas and creative solutions to electrify together. We'll also be drawing local media attention to the barriers people face in switching to efficient electric heating and hot water.

And finally, after hundreds of conversations, we'll compile the results and take the stories to local MPs to call on their support to get Victoria off gas!

Find out how you can get involved at envict.org/winter

Forever Green



Image credit: Doug Gimesy

Camille Warambourg,
Key Relationships
Manager



For more than 50 years, Environment Victoria has played a vital role in safeguarding our precious environment.

Thanks to you, our supporters, the Little Desert, Gariwerd (Grampians), and East Gippsland forests are today treasured national parks. Together, we stopped dirty industrial developments from going ahead in Westernport Bay in the 1970s, 1990s and 2020s and have fought long and hard to get water back into our stressed river systems, including the Snowy and Murray-Darling.

For decades Environment Victoria has played a leading role in addressing climate change, from stopping new coal-burning power stations being built in Latrobe Valley to securing the commitment to close all coal in Victoria by 2035. Today we're pushing for an end to gas in Victoria, a better plan for the next Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and a clean energy future for everyone.

All these, and many wins in between, happened because caring people like you wanted a better future for our climate and environment and decided to do something about it. Some of those people gave us a bequest in their Will – a gift that lasts beyond their lifetime.

Writing a Will might sound daunting, but it is something we all need to do. You can write your Will using a solicitor, or Environment Victoria supporters can write

“Our natural environment is the most precious thing we can leave to future generations. We need to protect, enjoy, cherish and preserve our forests, mountains, rivers, native animals and birds. We need to stop mining coal. We need to stop cutting down native forest.

Environment Victoria is doing valuable work to protect our natural environment and I want to support them.”

– David is leaving a gift to Environment Victoria in his Will

a simple online Will with Gathered Here free of charge.

If, like some of our supporters, you wish to leave a small percentage of your estate to Environment Victoria or any other cause close to your heart, Gathered Here will help you ensure your Will reflects this. There is, however, no obligation to leave a gift to Environment Victoria or any other cause to use this service.

Thanks to people like you, we've achieved many great wins for Victoria's environment in just over fifty years. Imagine what you could help us do in the next fifty years and beyond.

Visit envict.org/online-will to create your free online Will

If you would like to find out more about leaving a gift to Environment Victoria in your Will, please contact our Key Relationships Officer, Belle Poole, on 03 9341 8131 or email bequests@environmentvictoria.org.au



You did it! Viva's proposed gas import terminal suffers a huge blow.



Viva Energy's polluting gas import terminal has faced strong community opposition.

Credit Geelong Renewables not Gas.

In a huge win for the community and climate, Viva Energy has been sent back to the drawing board to do further research into the environmental impacts of their proposed gas import terminal. The decision vindicates community concerns and will delay the project by at least 12 months.

Since mid-2021 we've worked alongside the Geelong community to fight Viva Energy's polluting Corio Bay gas import terminal proposal. And in early March this year, we had the biggest win of the campaign so far.

The Victorian Planning Minister, Sonya Kilkenny, revealed that Viva must do an additional Environment Effects Statement (EES) for their project, because their first one simply wasn't good enough.

So Viva has been sent back to the drawing board to do more research into

a range of issues, including the impact of chlorinated water discharged into Corio Bay, the effects of dredging on seagrasses, how their gas terminal project could impact endangered and migratory birds, industrial noise pollution, air pollution, and Indigenous cultural heritage.

The marine environment studies alone will take at least 12 months. There'll be another public hearing, and the whole process could set them back years, costing them many millions of dollars.

Throughout the process Viva has tried to downplay the colossal climate impacts of this project, but their own modelling makes the alarming assumption that Victoria will still be burning the same amount of gas in 2040.

Our analysis shows that if gas consumption follows the forecasts in Viva's proposal, then the gas sector could be responsible for nearly half of Victoria's emissions in 2035 (see the full story on page 12).

As we face the urgent challenge of cutting climate pollution, the last thing we need is a new gas terminal that will lock us into polluting gas for decades to come.

Instead, Victoria needs to get on with the job of upgrading millions of Victorian homes away from gas to efficient electric appliances powered by clean energy.

We don't yet know if Viva will push ahead with this dirty project, but it's clear the requirement to complete another EES is a huge setback. And this has only happened because of sustained community pressure from local groups like Geelong Renewables not Gas and concerned citizens right across Victoria.

It's taken thousands of hours of volunteer work over years for the Geelong community to build this momentum. They've held rallies and events in packed town halls, commissioned studies, released films, blitzed the media and more.

We're proud to have stood by them the whole way – and you should be too!



Credit Geelong Renewables not Gas.

THANK YOU to the more than 2000 people who made a personal submission to the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process. Your contribution was incredibly important to this win. The committee's report recognised the "vast majority" of submissions opposed the proposal, and "most raised concerns about climate change".

THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN WAS MEANT TO STOP THIS

March 2023: Millions of dead fish found on the Darling-Baaka River in the biggest fish kill yet.



Dear Jono, I want to urgently help save the precious Murray-Darling and all the life it supports.

Please make this a donation by credit card:

(All donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

\$50 \$100 \$250 \$1000 Your choice \$ _____

Please make this a monthly donation

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

Or please debit my credit card: Visa Mastercard Amex

Cardholders name: _____ Expiry __/__/__ Signature _____

Card number

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

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

PERSONAL DETAILS

Title: _____ First name: _____ Last name: _____

Address: _____

Suburb: _____ State: _____ Postcode: _____

Email: _____

Mobile: _____ Home: _____

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

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

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



Image credit: Doug Gimesy

Why we've joined CoPower - and how you can too!

CoPower, in partnership with Energy Locals, is the only 100% community owned and democratically managed energy retailer in Australia.

Their mission is fighting poverty, tackling the climate crisis and supporting communities — and we are now an official member!

By law, CoPower is not allowed to make a profit. Instead they re-invest money in organisations and campaigns working for a fairer society and a safer climate.

By switching your energy retailer to CoPower, not only will you be helping to put power back in the hands of communities, you'll be able to vote for projects and campaigns that will receive CoPower's support.

Read more and find out how you can switch here
envict.org/copower

Who's who at Environment Victoria

Chief Executive Officer
Jono La Nauze

CAMPAIGNS & PROGRAMS

Climate Campaign Manager

Sarah Rogan

Policy and Advocacy Manager

Bronya Lipski

Healthy Rivers Campaigner

Tyler Rotche

Community Organising Co-Managers

Laura Melville, Taegan Edwards

Senior Organiser

Emma Horsburgh

Senior Organiser

Victor Komarovsky

Latrobe Valley Organiser

Hayley Sestokas

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Sylwia Sierkiewicz (on leave), **Belle Poole**

Database Administrator

Karly Roolker

BOARD

President

Conor Costello

Vice-President

Paul Brown

Ralf Thesing

Tim Lo Surdo

Michaela Morris

Jane Campton

Jed Gilbert

Aaron Lamb

Bethany Koch

REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

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

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