

Inside the community campaign to electrify Victoria



PLUS
A way forward for rivers
... without Victoria?

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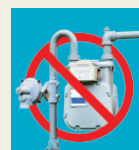
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Front cover: Staff and volunteers gather at parliament to present our 'Briefer' on methane gas to MPs.

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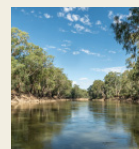
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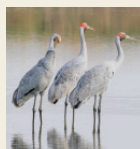
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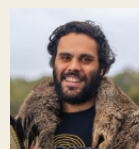
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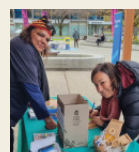
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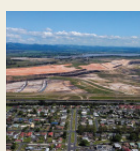
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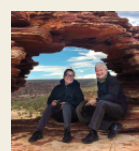
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Editorial

Jono La Nauze,
Chief Executive Officer



Sometimes it feels as if change is too slow and the challenges we face in protecting our environment and preventing the worst impacts of climate change seem almost insurmountable.

But then suddenly the momentum built through years of hard work pays off. The last few months have been one of those times.

Let's start with gas. In response to years of campaigning, community organising, local door-knocking, report writing and speaking up, the Victorian government recently announced a ban on new gas connections to new homes and public buildings in Victoria from next year.

This vital step forward marks the beginning of the end for methane gas, and it wouldn't have been possible without you. On page 4 our climate campaign manager, Sarah Rogan, unpacks how this victory came to pass and where the campaign will go now.

Another big victory came earlier this year with the Victorian government announcing an end to native forest logging. On page 3, policy and advocacy manager Bronya Lipski looks back on this huge victory and the grassroots movement that made it possible.

The news for our rivers campaign is more mixed. The federal government's new Murray-Darling deal is the best sign of progress we've seen in ten years, but still way behind what's required, and Victoria has refused to sign up. The Andrews government is still clinging to the delaying and blocking tactics that marked the Barnaby Joyce-era of water policy, placing

hundreds of species of birds, fish, frogs and plants at risk of extinction. Find out more on pages 6 to 8.

We've also watched with dread as severe climate impacts unfold across the northern hemisphere, fearing what they portend for the approaching summer in Australia.

But our challenge is to take that anxiety and, emboldened by our recent victories, translate it into renewed energy for faster climate action and better solutions for our rivers and waterways.

Because now more than ever – if not us then who?



‘Joy and relief’: Reflecting on the huge win for our native forests

Bronya Lipski,
Policy and
Advocacy Manager



When the environment movement has a momentous win, it's important to take a deep breath and reflect on the amazing people and groups who contributed, and what it means going forward.

On budget day in May 2023, the Victorian government unexpectedly announced that native forest logging in Victoria would end by 1 January 2024. When the news was confirmed to me, I sat quietly on the edge of the Birrarung and shed a few tears of joy and relief before heading into the budget lock-up.

My heart was exploding for all the incredible people who fought to protect our native forests over such a long time, and for the role that Environment Victoria played.

I thought of all the hard work Environment Victoria contributed to creating the Grampians-Gariwerd, Errinundra and Alpine National Parks, and people like Marg Blakers, Peter Christoff, the crew of the East Gippsland Coalition, Linda Parlane, Peter Durkinand and Janet Rice.

I reflected on the incredible work of Jill Redwood and Environment East Gippsland; the Friends of the Earth Forest Collective; the Victorian Forest Alliance; Ellen Sandell; the lawyers at Environmental Justice Australia and Lawyers for Forests; and groups like the Friends of Leadbeater's Possum, whose legal cases in the federal and Victorian courts proved that VicForest's operations were illegal.

Then there were hardworking and diligent citizen scientist groups like Goongerah Environment Centre (GECO) and Wildlife of the Central Highlands (WOTCH), who gathered crucial data on the location and numbers of endangered critters. Their data stood up to the intense scrutiny of court proceedings, in stark contrast to the Victorian government's horribly inaccurate desktop assessments.

And finally I thought of people like Sarah Rees and Professor David Lindenmayer, who were illegally stalked by the government for just wanting to protect our forests.

This is a long and by no means exhaustive list of people and organisations whose work has embodied altruism in its truest sense. They had nothing personal to gain from their actions and simply wanted our unique biodiversity to survive and thrive.

While the announcement was joyous, there is still a lot of work to do. In spite of the new policy, “community forestry operations” are still permitted. That means VicForests can still log places like Wombat State Forest and Mt Cole, even though they contain important habitat for many threatened species. They're also undertaking “salvage logging” in places like the Dandenong Ranges National Park.

The ban should mean that VicForests is abolished and held up as a prime example of how not to run a government corporation. In court cases costing the Victorian taxpayer tens of millions of dollars, VicForests has repeatedly been found to operate illegally. The Victorian Forests Alliance has now complained to the ACCC that VicForests is greenwashing its environmental credentials.

Finally, on the brink of another potentially catastrophic bushfire season, we need to make sure our forests are protected and cared for to be resilient in the face of climate change.

We must keep vigil over what we have left and ensure we have fit-for-purpose policies and legislation to keep our natural carbon sinks intact and stop our threatened species becoming extinct.

The beginning of the end for methane gas in Victoria



Sarah Rogan,
Climate Campaign
Manager



Victoria has become the first Australian state to end new household gas connections, with the government announcing that new homes built from 2024 on will be all-electric.

Liz Wade is breathing a sigh of relief at having paid her last ever gas bill. "That's one less bill coming in," says the mother of three from Ballarat.

Although she had always planned to electrify, the switch was brought forward when a water leak damaged the flooring in her house. When replacing the floors, her family decided to ditch their ducted heating at the same time and install efficient electric reverse-cycle air conditioners.

The Wades are at the forefront of a growing wave of electrification, which just got a massive boost when the Victorian government announced that from 1 January 2024 new gas connections will end in Victorian homes and government buildings.

This announcement is a vital step towards ending Victoria's reliance on polluting methane gas. It will help us achieve our climate targets, improve our overall health and cut household energy bills.

Wade says that despite tight finances, her family knew switching to electric appliances would pay off in the long run. But, like many Victorians, the Wade family faced financial challenges in making the switch, and says she hopes the government expands subsidies to low-income households.

"We were grateful to receive the Utility Relief Grant to pay our gas bill," said Liz.

"It made me feel like we might catch up on our bills."

All-electric homes aren't just cheaper to run, they're safer too. Burning gas for home cooking releases harmful particulate matter and toxic pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), carbon monoxide (CO) and formaldehyde (HCHO), all of which contribute to heart disease, asthma and other health issues.

Wade says that the health impacts were a key motivator for her family. "We're very happy our little ones can now practise their cooking without the risk of flame burns or gas contributing to asthma."

Although the gas industry's multi-million-dollar PR machine is now running in overdrive, it's clear their product has no future in Victoria.

For too long giant gas corporations have made record profits while attempting to

convince the public not to change. But the stark reality is that methane gas is helping to cook our planet and supplies in Bass Strait are running out.

The Andrews government is due to update its Gas Substitution Roadmap later this year. In the coming months, our focus will be on promoting solutions that make sure that everyone in the community can share in the benefits of electrification powered by clean renewable energy, including renters and those who can't afford the upfront costs.

The roadmap must include a clear plan for helping the two million Victorian homes already connected to gas to be retrofitted with efficient electric appliances.

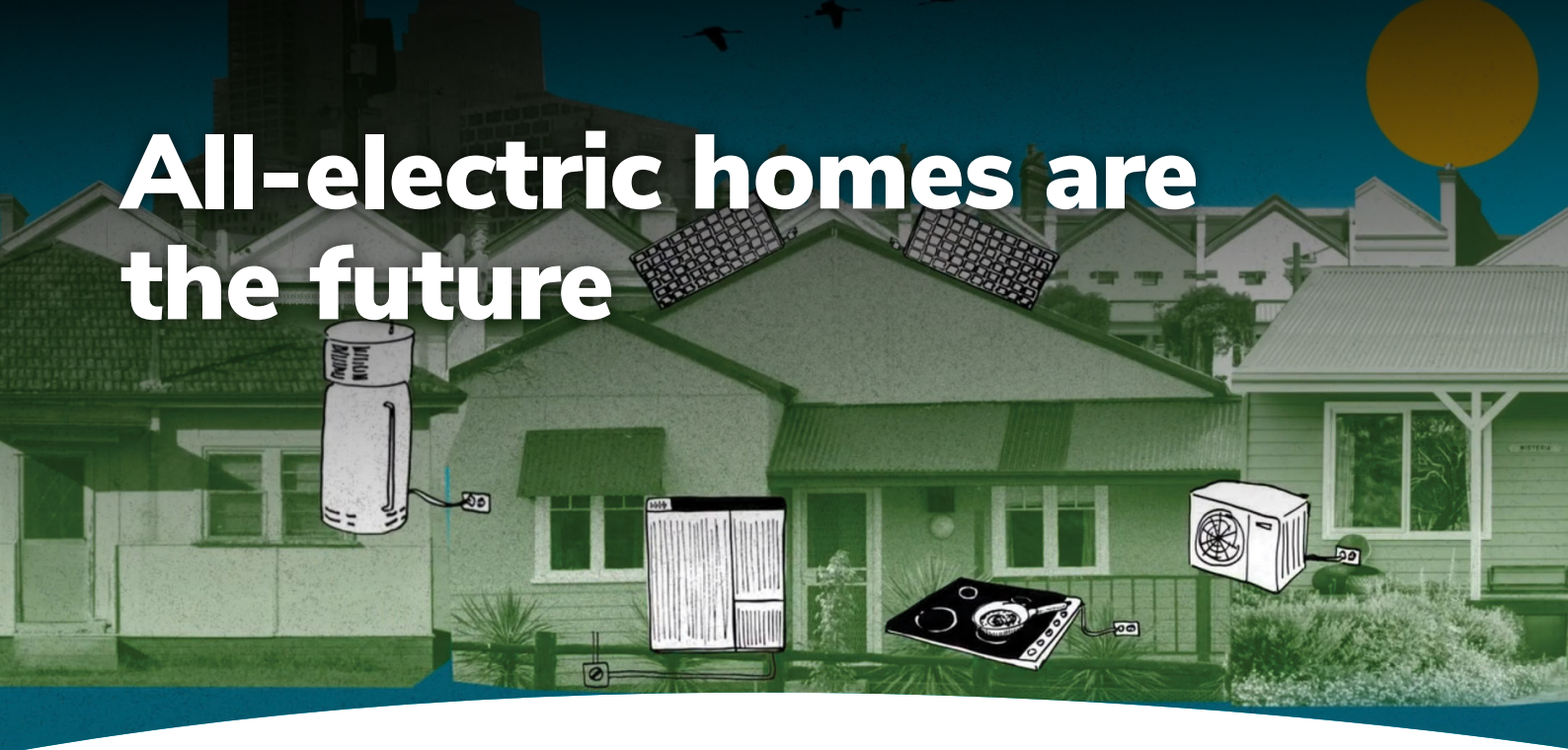
If Victoria, Australia's most gas-dependent state, can get off gas and embrace electrification, we can lead the world in setting a path to a gas-free future.



Liz's kids practise their cooking skills on the portable induction cooktop

THANK YOU to everyone who emailed their local MP, showed their support for electrification on social media or made a generous donation to help power this campaign. Together we are having a real impact – to think that a little more than 12 months ago new homes were being forced to connect to the gas network!

All-electric homes are the future



Jono La Nauze,
Chief Executive Officer



I never thought much about the gas heater in my lounge room until an interstate visitor did a double-take, exclaiming, “what’s that on the wall? It looks like a rocket!”

Compared to the rest of Australia, Victorian homes use a stupendous amount of gas, ninety-five percent of it for heating and hot water. Why? Because our government promoted it. After a huge store of gas was discovered in Bass Strait nearly sixty years ago, the Victorian government subsidised the rollout of gas pipelines to households.

But those days are gone. The gas in the Bass Strait is rapidly running out. Burning gas is now significantly more expensive and dirtier than using efficient electric heating. And now the Victorian government has announced the end of new gas connections, stopping the gas network from expanding.

Considering this history of the government intervening in the gas market, it’s hardly controversial.

This decision will ultimately benefit households and the Victorian public. All-electric homes are cheaper to run, healthier and better for our climate.

Firstly there’s those dreaded gas bills. The long-term trend shows gas prices will keep rising while renewable electricity gets cheaper.

Study after study shows that all-electric households are already cheaper to run. The government’s modelling says households

can save up to \$1000 a year, and savings increase to \$2200 with rooftop solar.

Our own report found gas heating over winter is about four times as expensive as using an efficient electric reverse cycle air conditioner.

All electric homes are safer too. Recent studies, backed by the Asthma Foundation, show burning gas for home cooking releases toxic fumes, contributing to heart disease and around 12% of all childhood asthma.

Improvements in electric stoves mean induction cooking is the way of the future – plus it’s backed by a growing community of celebrity chefs, home cooks and MasterChef’s Melissa Leong.

Then of course there’s the environmental impact. As the once abundant supply in Bass Strait runs out, the gas industry is looking to drill next to the Twelve Apostles

and conduct seismic blasting in the Otway Basin.

Plus burning gas in the home is worse for climate change. As more renewable energy enters the grid, electricity becomes cleaner, but methane gas stays as polluting as ever.

Just like with the rollout of gas in the 1960s, the transition off gas in the 2020s can’t be left to the market alone. Many Victorians face barriers to switching, and we need governments to help bring down the costs for all households to switch to electric.

Electrifying Victorian homes won’t happen overnight, but change is inevitable. In years to come, it won’t be interstate visitors who puzzle at strange gas heaters. It will be everyday Victorians, looking at photos of gas wall furnaces in the same way our kids look at a landline or CD player – a superseded dinosaur of the past.

WINTER HEATING REPORT

This winter we worked with Renew on a report showing the economic and environmental benefits of shifting away from methane gas.

Our analysis showed Victorians could save up to 75% on winter heating bills by switching from gas and included data for households in specific areas like Frankston, the Latrobe Valley, Geelong and Bendigo.

The findings were widely reported in the media from the ABC to Sky News and adds to the growing body of evidence behind the benefits of electrification.

Read it at
ENVICT.ORG/WINTERHEATING



A way forward for rivers ... without Victoria?

Tyler Roche,
Healthy Rivers
Campaigner



We've all seen the images of parched riverbanks, toxic algae and fish kills in the Murray-Darling. It's river mismanagement writ large. Tanya Plibersek's new deal for the Basin rivers isn't perfect, but it offers Australia's largest river system a possible lifeline on the brink of drought.

In August, the federal government announced a new agreement to return water to the rivers of the Basin, breaking a ten-year standstill and allowing more water to flow to wetlands and wildlife that are facing many hot, dry summers to come.

Yet, while the Australian government and every other Basin state signed up, Victoria refused. Why? Here's a quick guide to the deal's most important features, its history, Victoria's role in undermining the Basin Plan, and what comes next.

FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW MURRAY-DARLING DEAL

1. It allows for water purchases (buybacks) to resume
2. Every Basin state and territory except Victoria signed up
3. It pushes back deadlines, allowing three more years for the Commonwealth to recover water
4. It allows for more dodgy water offset projects
5. It provides funding support for regional communities to adjust

The new deal allows for water purchases (buybacks) to resume

It's been clear for nearly 15 years that buying water from willing sellers is the most reliable, cost-effective way to set water aside for rivers. When the federal Nationals inherited the water portfolio in 2013, these purchases stopped and progress toward water targets slowed dramatically.

But water buybacks are contested, not because they're ineffective but because they work: they reduce the volume of water available for irrigation.

When the federal Nationals inherited the water portfolio in 2013, these purchases stopped and progress toward water targets slowed dramatically. In 2015, the federal Coalition introduced legislation to limit buybacks, and in 2021 the government scrapped on-farm infrastructure upgrades. The only option left was to find savings by upgrading leaky channel infrastructure.

But there wasn't enough water to be saved. The low-hanging fruit had already been picked. The only projects left were exorbitantly expensive and wouldn't save enough water.

For that reason, the most important part of this new deal announced by the Commonwealth is that it allows water purchases to resume. It removes a major policy barrier that has been holding back water recovery for a decade.

But this is also the main reason Victoria refused to sign up. The Victorian water minister said, "Victoria has a long-standing opposition to buybacks and nothing we have seen in this deal has changed that position."

This stance is so entrenched that the state seems willing to throw away the other benefits of the deal – including a huge amount of project and community development funding – for the sake of rejecting buybacks.

History: negotiating a national plan to save rivers

In 2007, a new federal Water Act provided a framework for protecting and restoring Basin wetlands and freshwater ecosystems. The first step was to set a science-based limit on the water that could be taken from rivers.

The best science said we'd need 7,600 GL (billion litres) to have a good chance of protecting biodiversity.

But the Basin states intervened in what was meant to be an independent process. Soon the target was reset at 3,200 GL, less than half what was needed, and even this wasn't agreed until 2012. By then, the Commonwealth had already started buying water to return to the rivers.

Under Penny Wong as Water Minister, this initial effort largely used open-tender buybacks. Between 2008 and 2011, more than 1,000 GL was purchased. There was no shortage of willing sellers. Every time the government set out to buy water, it had more offers than it could accept.

Then in 2013 the federal Nationals inherited the water portfolio. Buybacks stopped and progress toward water targets slowed dramatically.

THANK YOU to the thousands of supporters who have sent a message to Victorian Water Minister Harriet Shing and Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek.

Our collective voice is being heard, and we're showing that Victorians care deeply about the future of our rivers.



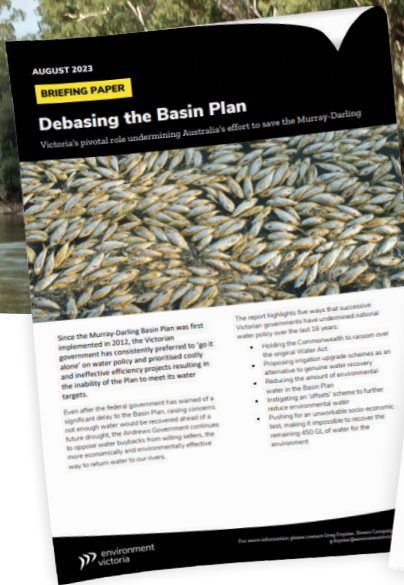
Victoria's role in undermining the Basin Plan

A lot of the water in the early buybacks was bought from Victoria, and as Basin Plan negotiations continued, the Victorian government came under intense pressure from irrigators. The government responded by pushing to avoid buybacks and promoting less effective alternatives: a program for water-saving infrastructure upgrades and a dubious water offsetting scheme.

Over time, these measures came to dominate water recovery. Instead of buying water directly, the government spent public money on handouts for irrigators to make their equipment more efficient, and on concrete and pipes to re-engineer wetlands so they would need less water. Some projects involve converting river red gum forests and wetlands into big irrigation bays, an expensive and ecologically dubious approach.

The offset program ballooned into a massive amount of water – 605 GL, more than the volume of Sydney Harbour – and offsets were treated as a substitute for flowing water. Successive Victorian governments were heavily involved in pushing for these dodgy alternatives.

The projects have fallen years behind schedule. In NSW, the largest projects have receded from view amid perpetual talk of



In August we released a report, *Debasing the Basin Plan*, which documents 16 years of Victorian government actions undermining the Murray-Darling basin plan. Read it at ENVICT.ORG/DEBASING-THE-BASIN

Our report was covered by various media outlets.

“rescoping” and reworking. In Victoria, four projects were halted after \$54 million was spent on planning.

The new agreement extends the deadline for these offset projects and allows for new ones, which is probably the most worrying concession in the deal.

What's next? Drought, delays or delivery

We're now entering a long period of negotiation over how to complete the original 2012 Basin Plan and reformulate its next iteration.

The deal is a long way from being done. It still needs to pass through Federal

Parliament, which means either the Greens or Coalition need to back it. This gives us an opportunity to push for a stronger plan that guarantees more water for rivers ahead of a looming drought.

The Basin Plan still rests on addressing over-allocation “once and for all”. That should mean letting the rivers flow like rivers and making sure Traditional Owners have a say over the management of rivers and Country. But these issues remain unaddressed. This new deal doesn't offer anything new to solve these problems or rectify the underlying injustice.

But in terms of Basin politics, the new agreement is a substantial shift – the first sign of real progress we've had in a decade. With water purchases back on the table, there's finally a way forward to revive our rivers. It's just that the Commonwealth might have to bypass Victoria to get there.

LAUNCHING A NEW NATIONAL VOICE FOR RIVERS

This year we united conservation councils across the Basin to create a powerful new alliance and a shared strategy.

Together we have launched videos and national media stories, commissioned a billboard mural right outside Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek's office (right) and held a roadshow of events in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne.

Thank you for supporting this work, which was instrumental in showing the Albanese government there's massive support for returning water to the rivers and wetlands of the Murray-Darling Basin.



Doomed without a drink: Threatened species at risk in the Murray-Darling

Greg Foyster,

Rivers and Nature
Campaign Manager



Our new report shines a light on 140 species that are at risk of extinction in the Murray-Darling Basin. Whether great or small, feathered or scaled, charismatic or cunning, they all have one thing in common: they need more water flowing through rivers and wetlands to survive.

The Murray-Darling Basin is much more than the two big rivers it's named after. It's a mighty system of lakes, streams, rivers and wetlands, home to majestic river red gum forests and some of our most iconic fish and birds.

But for decades, the river system has been exploited and mismanaged. Governments have allowed too much water to be taken out of the river, and now these incredible places and animals aren't getting the water they need. And with the next drought just around the corner, it's never been more urgent for governments to act.

To the right is a snapshot of three of the 140 species whose future depends on returning more water to the Murray-Darling.

See the full report at

[ENVICT.ORG/THREATENED-MURRAY](https://envict.org/threatened-murray)

THANK YOU to everyone who sent this report to the Victorian government. With hundreds of personal messages and big news stories in the ABC, Guardian and local newspapers, we've drawn national attention to what's at stake in the Murray-Darling.

Together, we'll keep pushing the Victorian government to protect our threatened species and make sure they get the water they need!



Murray Cod

The largest freshwater fish in Australia – and one of the largest in the world – the Murray cod is found only in the Murray-Darling Basin and is the river's apex predator. Sadly, it's been making headlines recently for all the wrong reasons. The Murray cod has been in long-term decline throughout the Basin because of many factors making it harder for the fish to feed and spawn. But after the devastating fish kills in 2018 and early 2023, its population in the Darling-Baaka has been decimated. This means that it's more important than ever to protect populations in Victoria, and local spawning and nursery habitat.



Australasian bittern

The Australasian bittern is easier to hear than it is to spot, with a booming call that can travel across the wetland. It used to be found throughout southern Australia, but it's estimated that only about 1300 remain today. The wetlands it used to call home are changing and disappearing altogether: too much water is being diverted away from the river for irrigation, and wetlands are being drained and cut off from the river. Its most important remaining habitat is the Barmah-Millewa wetland on Yorta Yorta country along the Murray.



Sloane's froglet

The Sloane's froglet grows to just two centimetres long and is found only in a small pocket of the Murray-Darling floodplain, hidden among grasslands and woodlands that get periodically wet. The problem is that irrigators' demand for water has changed how the river flows and floods. Now, many of these places aren't getting the water they need, so many of the habitats the froglet once relied on are disappearing.

Voice, Treaty and Truth in Victoria

Members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, 2023. Credit: Leroy Miller

Djaran Murray-Jackson

Assembly Member representing Dja Dja Wurrung Clans



The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is leading the nation with huge progress around Voice, Treaty and Truth. With the referendum for a national Voice fast approaching, Assembly Member Djaran Murray-Jackson shares what this moment means to him.

Earlier this year the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria held elections for mob across the state to decide who would negotiate a statewide Treaty. In many ways, the Assembly is essentially the democratically elected First Peoples 'Voice' in Victoria.

I was fortunate enough to be elected by my Community to representing the Dja Dja Wurrung Nation. I am a proud Dja Dja Wurrung, Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Barapa Barapa, Wergaia and Wiradjuri man. I have deep and ancient connections to this Country, and I take my responsibility in enabling my people seriously.

The Assembly supports all the elements of the Uluru Statement from the Heart – Voice, Treaty and Truth. This is to ensure our people and our Country are cared for by us, the Traditional Custodians of this land.

We are getting on with all three elements

in Victoria. We have a Voice through our Assembly. I'm one of 32 elected Members. There is Australia's first formal Truth-telling commission in the Yoorrook Truth Commission and the Assembly will begin Treaty negotiations with the Government early next year.

Now, we're also being asked a lot about the national debate for a Voice to Parliament that has popped up.

I'll be voting YES to the Voice. Our Assembly has also endorsed the YES vote.

When you listen to Aboriginal people about Aboriginal issues, you get better outcomes. I see voting YES as a step towards self-determination for my people. We know that if you make decisions about us, whether it be about our children, our trees, or our rivers, you get better outcomes when we're involved.

For a long time we've had governments thinking they know better and telling us how to live our lives and control our Country. That hasn't worked for 230 years. We've had fires ravage our lands, Governments destroy our scared trees and mining companies erase our history. A Voice would simply mean we get a say and can hopefully influence those kinds of decisions.

It would also be part of recognising that we are the First Peoples of this country.

If the referendum fails it would be upsetting, but it's not the end of the world.

But make no mistake, a NO vote will also delay progress and tangible action on protecting our people and our lands. For

many it will feel insulting, but I believe goodwill from the broader public is out there, it's just all getting mixed up with misinformation and arguing. But we know how to wait, and how to keep trying.

My Great Grandfather, Pastor and Aboriginal activist, Sir Doug Nicholls, liked to say to get a tune out of a piano, you can play the black notes or you can play the white notes. But to get harmony, you've got to play both.

With the referendum coming up, I've had lots of friends reaching out to me and wanting to learn more about my culture and my Country. This is great.

I'd love people to research who the Traditional Owners of the Country they're on and the history of the area. Have a conversation with a First Nations person before you vote in the Referendum, that way you'll better understand who and what you're voting for.

Djaran Murray-Jackson, 29, is a proud Dja Dja Wurrung, Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Barapa Barapa, Wergaia and Wiradjuri man. Djaran was born in Naarm (Melbourne) and lives in Naarm's north.

In mid-2023, Djaran was chosen to represent the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans on the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.

He will be speaking at Environment Victoria's webinar 'The Environment Movement and the Voice' on 27 September.

You can RSVP at [ENVICT.ORG/VOICE-WEBINAR](https://envict.org/voice-webinar)

GET INVOLVED WITH THE YES CAMPAIGN

Writing YES means coming together to build a fairer future, one where First Nations people have the power to make decisions about their own lives. That's why Environment Victoria is supporting the Voice.

We're getting active, having meaningful conversations about First Nations justice and making support for YES visible in our streets and towns.

There's plenty of ways to get involved – find more resources and sign up here at [ENVICT.ORG/WRITEYES](https://envict.org/writeyes)

LEARN MORE

Find out more about the First Peoples' Assembly and sign up to their newsletter here [FIRSTPEOPLESVIC.ORG](https://firstpeoplesvic.org)

Read more about the First Peoples' Assembly's support for the Voice at [FIRSTPEOPLESVIC.ORG/YES](https://firstpeoplesvic.org/yes)



Conversations heating up to get Victoria off gas

Taegen Edwards,
Organising Program
Manager



Volunteers in our Action Network have been having hundreds of in-depth conversations with the community about methane gas and the solutions we need to help all households electrify.

Winter is the peak period for gas use across Victoria, where two million homes are still connected to gas. It's a time when gas heaters are cranked up and gas bills soar. It's also an important time to highlight how polluting and expensive gas is and make the case for governments to support much faster uptake of efficient electric alternatives.

That's why teams of Environment Victoria Action Network volunteers have been braving the cold and heading out to local shopping strips, social-housing neighbourhoods, libraries, footy clubs, markets and local events to gauge where the temperature's at with everyday Victorians.



Together our legendary crew interviewed a whopping 582 Victorians from Bairnsdale to Clunes, Dandenong to Hastings, Mount Waverley to Traralgon and many more towns and suburbs across the state. They recorded feedback and so many stories – some of them heart-wrenching – about the experiences people have of rising costs, health impacts and pollution concerns from gas use in our homes.

The results tell a powerful story of strong underlying support for moving our state off gas. Of the people we spoke to, 83 per cent said they support getting our state off gas entirely by 2035. Yet many highlighted the significant work that needs to be done to help households convert to electric appliances. They came up with plenty of suggestions for targeted support for renters, low-income earners and others who face structural barriers – whether these come from upfront costs, information gaps or the lack of support for renters to choose their own appliances.

As the Victorian government decides what will go into its next version of the Gas Substitution Roadmap, this work is critical in showing MPs that they need to step up and champion stronger action.

We've summarised this huge collective effort into a shiny report to be delivered to state MPs in early September, with creative actions happening at electorate offices far and wide. On top of the thousands of emails many of you have been sending MPs through winter, there's no way they can miss the growing call for bold action to transition off gas.

Huge thanks to everyone who is pitching in to help build this momentum.

You can read the full report at ENVICT.ORG/GAS-BRIEFER



WELCOME TONY!

We're excited to welcome Tony Fretton to the Environment Victoria team as a new Community Organiser focused on the Greater Dandenong region. Having grown up in the area, Tony brings local knowledge and an impressive range of experience in community engagement, advocacy and working with multicultural communities.

Tony's an active leader in the Pacific Island community and has a passion for storytelling, cultural exchange and fostering spaces for his community to decolonise and connect to their Pasifika identities.

His work in Dandenong will develop support for climate solutions in partnership with representatives from a range of cultural backgrounds, building on the work of volunteer leader Faizul Islam.

People Power Workshops building skills and new connections

Laura Melville,
Organising Program
Manager



In July and August this year we held our second People Power Workshop series. Through four online workshops, more than 100 volunteers gathered to build their skills in community organising and campaigning, making new friendships along the way.

The workshops aimed to deepen people's understanding of campaign strategy and how to plan impactful actions. We were privileged to be joined by three wonderful guest speakers: Ed Hill, who spoke about the campaign to protect Victoria's native forests; Sal Fisher, who taught us about alliance building through her experience with the Real Deal in Geelong; and Monica Morgan, proud Yorta Yorta woman and CEO of the Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Council, who spoke to us about First Nations peoples' ongoing leadership in change-making.

I'd like to give a shout out to local organisers Sue Broadway, Robyn Rhul, Bruce Cutts and Alex Leib, who all played a huge role in developing and delivering content as well as recruiting people to the workshops.

The series was a great success, we had loads of positive feedback, and we're excited to see what action the workshop participants take. Here are some of their responses:

"I feel I have a community of people who share my beliefs. I like that it's proactive. I love the speakers and information on the campaigns"

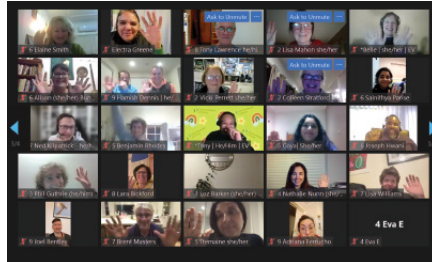
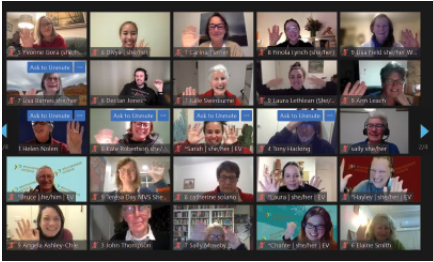
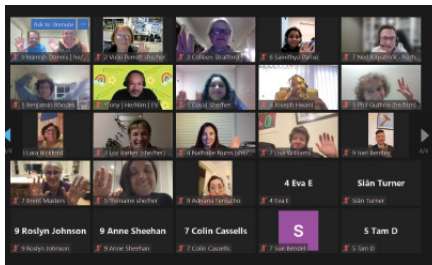
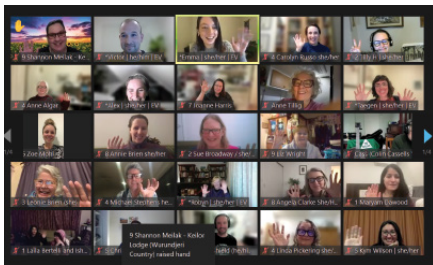
Jo, Ferntree Gully

"Loved the young, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and committed presenters/organisers. Always smiling and positive"

Tony, Maryborough

"The actual way the session was delivered was a good lesson for me, as we run meetings in our org. We rarely do breakouts and one-on-ones, which I think are important. It was very professionally done"

Teresa, Essendon



Celebrating ten years of EVSEV

Environment Victoria South-east Volunteers (EVSEV) share their secrets for building a sustainable local group.

Local volunteer groups are the foundation of our movement, but it's not often that a group finds the right ingredients to campaign sustainably together over the long term. Environment Victoria South-east Volunteers (EVSEV) have crafted the perfect recipe for success: balance.

"In normal times we like to do one action each month," said one of the team during their 10-year celebration potluck dinner. "That means we've got energy left to ramp up actions during busy moments, like elections or before a big government decision."

For them, the group is as much about mutual support and friendship as it is about action. When they started, climate was seen as a fringe issue. Their camaraderie



EVSEV members celebrating their 10-year milestone. From left to right: Mark, Ingrid, Mary, Bruce, Gabriella, Liz, Rick. Not pictured: David, Sue, Adam, Andrea, and many others who have worked with EVSEV over the years.

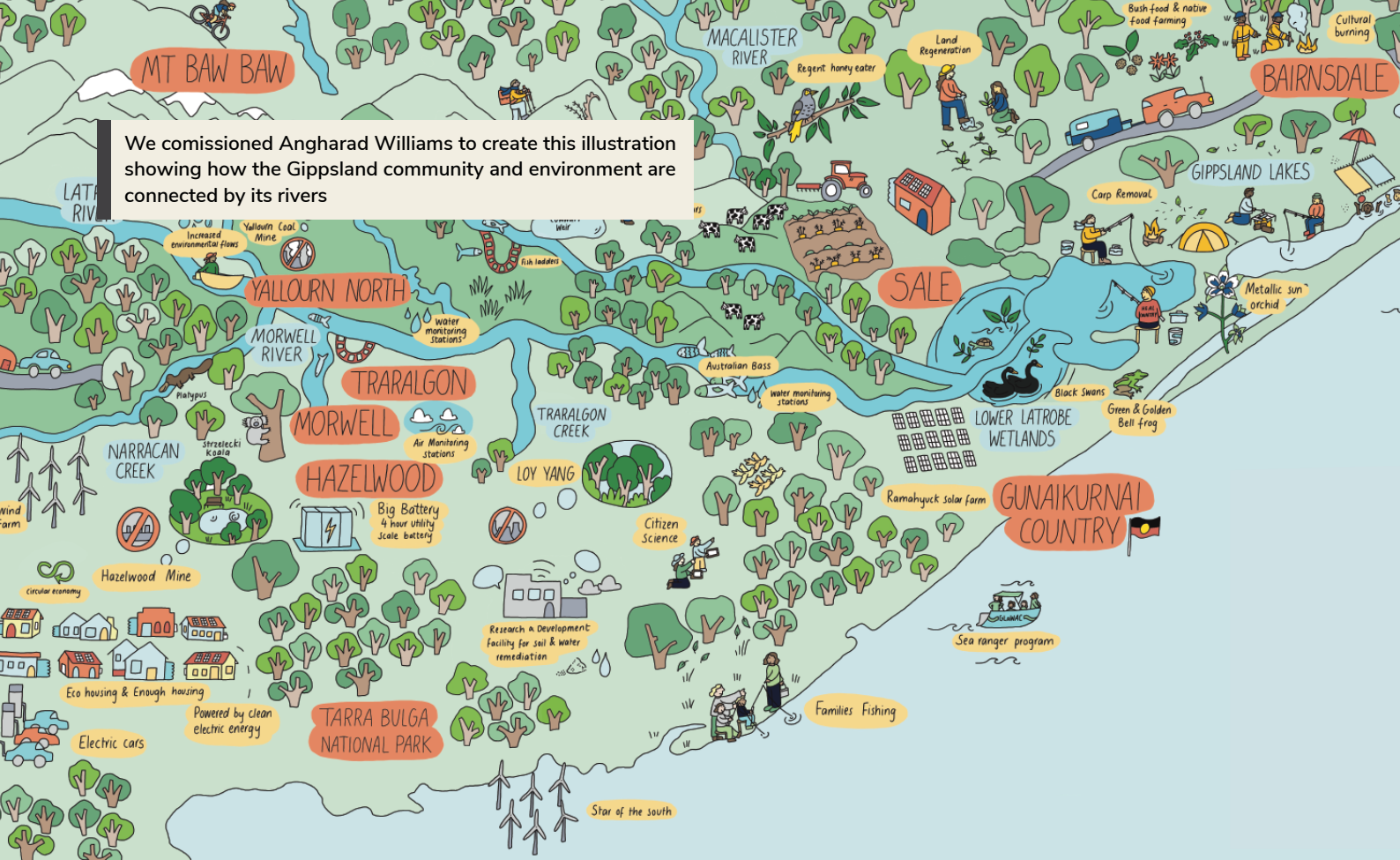
gave them the strength to do the work of bringing climate into the mainstream.

"Without the support of this group I wouldn't have been able to set up Higgins Climate Action Network," said veteran campaigner Mary Mahoney.

And they have much to celebrate. Over the decade, they've racked up an impressive list of wins. They've persuaded local councils to declare climate emergencies (and make the accompanying commitment

to action). They've mobilised voters to show up for the climate at polling booths for federal, state and local elections. They've held countless thousands of conversations with their community to help secure big wins for our forests, renewable energy and climate laws. And in the process they've incubated several other organisations doing the work of creating a better world.

Here's to the next decade of friendship, action and impact!



New festival sparks big ideas for the Latrobe Valley

Margie Barrett-Poole,
Latrobe Valley
Volunteer



The Latrobe Valley Authority's first ever Festival of Big Ideas was designed to engage the community in the transition to clean energy. It sparked powerful conversations about education, health and employment in new industries. Local Organiser, Margie, shares her experience of the event.

I was part of a team of local Environment Victoria volunteers who were there to speak up for the importance of the environment in Gippsland's future. Here she reflects on the events and the transition more broadly.

The recent agreement between AGL and the Victorian government to keep Loy Yang A power station available until mid-2035 is a great example of how a healthy environment isn't given the prominence it deserves in decision-making. The agreement was all about industry and jobs

and didn't give a lot of certainty for our environment or mine rehabilitation. It also leaves the door open for coal-to-hydrogen projects, which is not a good outcome for a region that is moving beyond coal.

So being at the Festival of Big Ideas was an excellent opportunity to speak to our community and remind people that we cannot have a healthy community without the environment being front and centre in our vision for the future.

In preparation for the event, we worked with graphic illustrator Angharad Neal-Williams to create an artwork of Gippsland connected by waterways and energy systems. We wanted to show people that what happens upstream in the Latrobe Valley, with the rehabilitation of coal mines for example, is going to have flow-on impacts right through to the Gippsland Lakes and the ocean.

The response we got was generally positive, with lots of thoughtful interest from the people we spoke to. Historically, industry and government have dictated what happens in the Latrobe Valley. We're often told what's going to happen to us without being given the space to express

what we would like to see happen, so it feels unusual that we are being asked.

In that sense, this event was the beginning of a big conversation regarding our future.

When you talk to people in the Valley, although they accept that the coal industry will shut down, they're not confident that the government has the policies or plans in place to fully support a fair and just transition to renewables.

So there's still a long way to go, but I'm grateful that we have support from Environment Victoria to raise our concerns. It feels good knowing that we're part of a larger network of people, rather than feeling isolated.

THANKS MARGIE!

Margie is a Local Organiser with our Action Network, and like the many volunteers who make up this people-powered force for change, she has given countless hours of her time to make a difference.



Volunteers engaged with the community at the Festival of Big Ideas and hosted a 'book nook' where they read environmentally theme children's books



GIPPSLAND CONNECTED

Update on the Hazelwood mine rehabilitation

Hayley Sestokas,
Latrobe Valley
Organiser



An Environmental Effects Statement (EES) is currently being prepared to address Engie's plans to rehabilitate the Hazelwood brown coal mine by filling the pit with 638 billion litres of water and cover 1.5 million cubic metres of toxic coal ash.

An EES is required whenever a project has the potential for significant environmental

effects, and the company, in this case, ENGIE, is required to investigate the likely impacts and how they might be avoided or minimised.

At the time of writing, we are still waiting for the government to release the final 'scoping requirements' which stipulate the studies, assessments and alternatives that need to be assessed. This stage is taking longer than usual, partly because there is so much interest in the rehabilitation of the Latrobe Valley's coal mines right across Victoria. People understand the risks posed to precious water sources in a drying climate.

Most of the 145 public submissions called for the scoping requirements to be strengthened. They should include alternative studies on the risks to ground and surface water, an investigation of impacts on the Gippsland Lakes and Aboriginal cultural heritage and further studies on rehabilitation options that use less water, or that use water from alternative sources.

The level of interest in Hazelwood's rehabilitation also reflects the importance of this project in setting the standard for the rehabilitation of the other brown coal mines in the Valley, Yallourn and Loy Yang.

So watch this space!

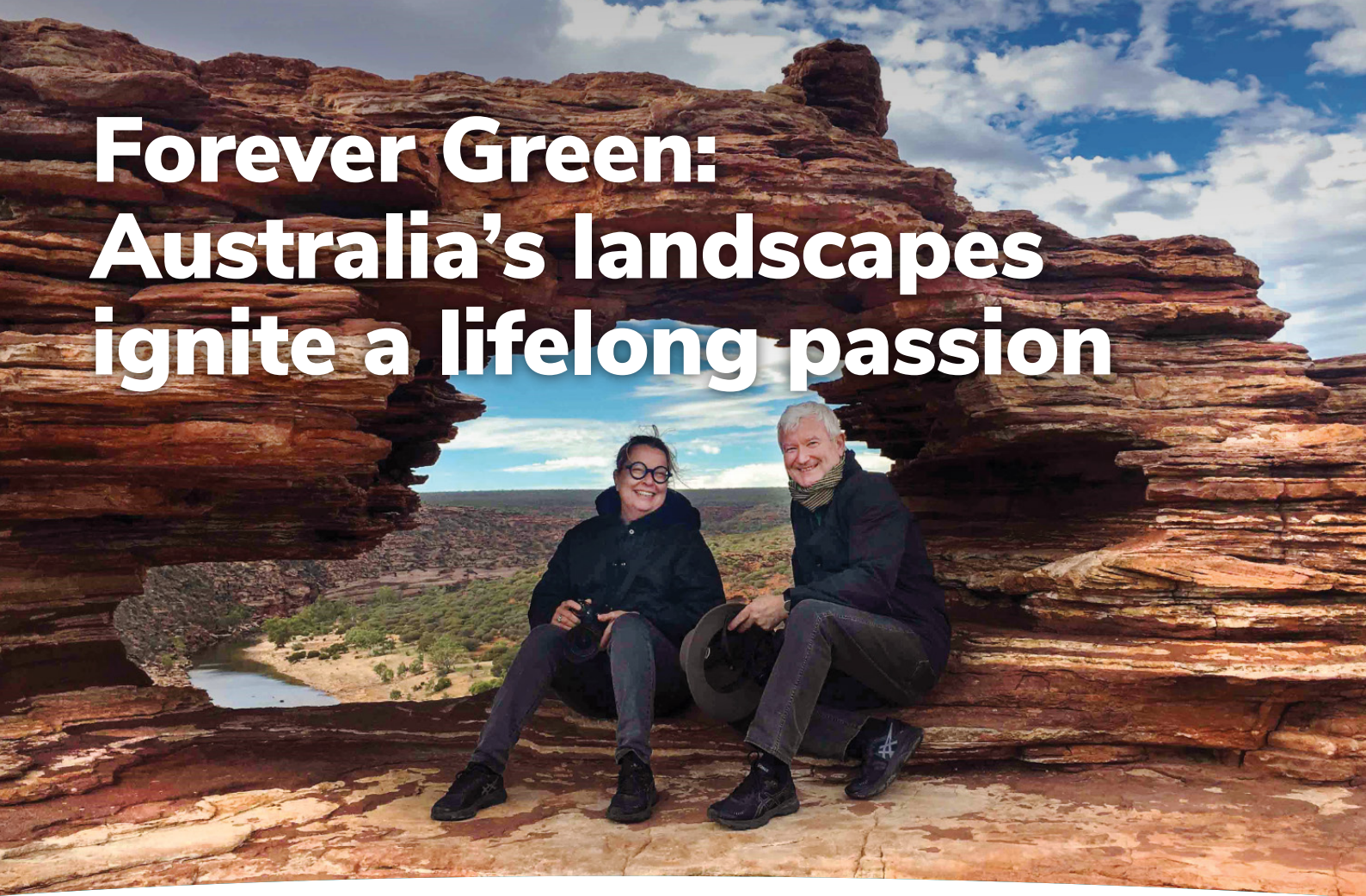


This drone shots shows just how close the Hazelwood mine pit is to the town of Morwell. Credit: FLOW

THANK YOU to everyone who made a submission on the scoping requirements and who signed the petition calling on ENGIE to properly clean up their mess.

The level of public engagement in the rehabilitation process is having a real impact.

Forever Green: Australia's landscapes ignite a lifelong passion



Belle Poole,
Key relationships
Officer



Harriet Mantell and David Hanna are regular donors to Environment Victoria's campaigns and have become 'Forever Green' supporters by leaving a gift in their Wills. We asked them to tell us about their personal connection to the Murray-Darling and why they chose to leave bequests for Environment Victoria.

Harriet and David's connection to the Murray-Darling began when they visited the Barmah National Park in the early 1990s. Barmah is home to the world's largest river red gum forest, and they had the chance to witness it in flood. It was a majestic experience, and they both remember the feeling of being dwarfed by these extraordinary trees.

For this reason, Environment Victoria's campaign to restore the Murray-Darling Basin back to health resonates with both Harriet and David.

They understand that river systems are not only indicators of environmental health, but

the health of the communities that rely on them, and they believe that the Murray-Darling has been "sending us so many clear messages" that our society is getting things wrong.

"We are one of the driest continents, and water is precious to so many aspects of life. Our rivers are like arteries, they are the country's lifeblood. It is unimaginable that we could lose these precious ecosystems and the landscapes that rely on them."

Harriet's passion for the environment more broadly began in the 1970s, when she moved to Australia. Leaving the bustling cities of southeast Asia, she found the vastness of Australian landscapes intimidating at first, but she slowly grew to appreciate the endless expanse of inland

landscapes, which are breathtaking in their openness and intricate in their colours, movement and patterns.

This shared appreciation underpins Harriet and David's ongoing support and decision to include Environment Victoria in their Wills. With no children of their own, they'd like to leave what they have to organisations they have a connection with and whose causes are important to them.

They acknowledge that while funding specific causes is important, the organisations behind the work must be sustained to ensure meaningful outcomes, supporting the longevity of the work into the future.

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.





Dear Jono, I want to protect our precious rivers, wetlands, plants and animals.

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: _____

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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.



Join us for our AGM and Celebration

It's time for this year's AGM!

Join us from 5.30pm on Thursday 26th of October to reflect on the year and celebrate individual and group achievements through the Environment Victoria Awards.

There will be food, drinks and entertainment, and as our first in-person AGM since the pandemic, we hope to see plenty of old and new faces!

WHAT Environment Victoria's AGM + Celebration

WHEN 5:30pm onwards, Thursday 26th October 2023

WHERE ANMF Victoria Branch, Level 8/535 Elizabeth St, Melbourne VIC 3000

RSVP at envict.org/agm2023

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**
Rivers and Nature Campaign Manager **Greg Foyster**
Climate and Energy Analyst **Rai Miralles**
Community Organising Co-Managers **Laura Melville, Taegan Edwards**
Senior Organisers **Emma Horsburgh, Victor Komarovskiy**
Latrobe Valley Organiser **Hayley Sestokas**
Greater Dandenong Organiser **Tony Fretton**
Data Support Officer **Chante Bock**
Communications Manager **Alex Merory**
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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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