



To: Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

8 April 2024

Victorian Energy Jobs Plan

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the upcoming Victorian Energy Jobs Plan.

Environment Victoria is the leading not-for-profit environmental advocacy organisation in Victoria. With 40 grassroots member groups and over 200,000 individual supporters, we've been representing Victorian communities on environmental matters for over 50 years. Through advocacy, education and empowerment, Environment Victoria seeks significant and enduring solutions that will safeguard the environment and future wellbeing of all Victorians.

We stand for a just transition for workers and communities. Environment Victoria maintains a strong organising presence in the Latrobe Valley and we have worked closely with those communities for decades to advocate for social and environmental justice for the region in a post-coal economy.

The clean energy workforce spans multiple sectors including renewable energy and transmission development, the built environment, community participation and minesite rehabilitation. The Victorian Energy Jobs Plan should reflect this diversity.

Supporting workers in sunset industries

Long-term planning is required to support workers in sunset industries such as coal and offshore gas to transition to growing industries such as renewable energy and mine rehabilitation. Plans must include funding commitments that match the timescale required for transition, and include both retraining and attracting new investment to affected regions.

Education and training

While we appreciate that the Victorian government has made material improvements to the TAFE system, it remains that TAFE teachers earn far less than tradespeople. The education and training system can attract more trainers to energy education by improving employment conditions for TAFE teachers, particularly their remuneration.

We encourage the government to build on existing cultures of learning within the apprenticeships system and encourage working tradespeople to give back to their vocation and periodically spend time as trainers. Trainers, particularly those who are late-career or no longer practicing tradespeople, also require support to keep pace with new technologies such as heat pumps.

Education and training offerings need to address barriers to uptake. One example is to lower costs to students for training up in key skills. For self-employed tradespeople, every hour spent training is not spent earning, so there can be little incentive to update skills. It may be appropriate to require

certain additional training and accreditation for work that involves cross-trade skills, such as refrigerant air conditioner installations.

Growing market confidence in large-scale housing retrofit

Despite decades of campaigning by social and environmental organisations, residential housing quality is still a huge gap. There is great potential to grow the sector servicing the residential retrofit market by addressing barriers to the creation of sustainable jobs. At present, retrofit work is seasonal; for example, new heaters installations skew to the colder months. This makes it difficult for installers to maintain a sufficient pipeline of work across the year.

The government can boost the residential retrofit market by progressing energy performance disclosure and cultivating a healthy assessor and installer workforce. Energy performance standards and disclosure, alongside Victorian Energy Upgrades and Solar Victoria, should form the cornerstone of a strong Victorian retrofit industry.

Supply chain development

As part of this ecosystem, the Victorian Energy Jobs Plan should include support for local manufacturing. Victoria currently manufactures half a hot water system – the tank. There is scope to expand local manufacturing of heat pump units to complete the picture. The Victorian Energy Jobs Plan can support local supply chain development by funding and complementing aspects of the Energy Efficiency Council’s Heat Pump Hot Water Systems Roadmap.

Workforce

The government needs to ensure that policies designed to stimulate investment in renewable energy are not incentivised to strip labour conditions. The consequence of lower labour conditions is that workers move away from the energy sector. Successful applicants for the Victorian Renewable Energy Target should be required to meet minimum labour standards, particularly remuneration and skills.

First Nations workforce and business development

Government strategies need to create ways for First Nations to grow generational wealth. The Victorian Energy Jobs Plan needs to consider complementary measures that provide access to capital in order to encourage First Nations-led clean energy projects and businesses. In particular, there is a need for a First Nations-led home retrofit program that includes not just retrofits but capacity building in energy literacy at the household level.

We refer the government to the First Nations Clean Energy Network’s guidance paper from January 2024¹ for a comprehensive list of measures to develop First Nations workers and businesses within the clean energy sector.

Women in the energy transition

An upcoming report from Womens Environmental Leadership Australia (WELA) will discuss women’s inclusion in the clean energy workforce among other issues. Environment Victoria is a partner to this project. We also note work being done by the Victorian Trades Hall Council, WELA, the Clean Energy Council and in the Victorian government’s own gender equality strategy. It is important that the

¹ First Nations Clean Energy Network, 2024. Guidance Paper.
https://assets.nationbuilder.com/fncen/pages/472/attachments/original/1705621117/First_Nations_Clean_Energy_Strategy_Guidance_Paper.pdf?1705621117

government take an industry-wide approach to improving gender equality rather than leaving it up to individual employers. We encourage the government to lend long-term support for programs that support women to pursue careers in trades and undertake data collection and evaluation.

The government also needs to recognise the contribution that women are already making in Victoria's energy transition. The Victorian Energy Job Plan should include community engagement and encourage locals in renewable energy zones to pursue it as a career. Community and stakeholder engagement professionals are essential to renewable energy projects, from initial development stages right through to project end of life² and this workforce is estimated at 76% women.³

Dr Kat Lucas-Healey
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² 'Community and Stakeholder Engagement Careers', Clean Energy Council, accessed 28 March 2024, <https://www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/advocacy-initiatives/workforce-development/careers-guide/stakeholder-engagement-careers?token=142>.

³ International Association for Public Participation Australasia, '2020/21 Community Survey Findings' (IAP2, 2021), <https://iap2content.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/marketing/Community+Survey/2021/2020-21+IAP2A+Community+Survey+Findings.pdf>.