

Finally, a lifeline for the Murray-Darling!

What the new legislation means for our rivers



PLUS

10 years since the Hazelwood mine fire, the community gathers to reflect

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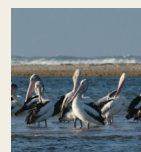
Front cover: River advocates from Victoria, NSW, SA and QLD out the front of Parliament House, pushing for a strong plan for healthy rivers.

Image credit: Hilary Wardhaugh

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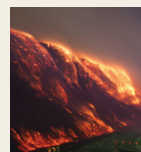
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Editorial

Jono La Nauze,
Chief Executive Officer



Five years ago as the new CEO of Environment Victoria I spent several days in the Latrobe Valley meeting community leaders and visiting the giant coal mines and power stations that dominate the landscape.

When I visited this February to mark the tenth anniversary of the Hazelwood mine fire, it struck me how much has changed in that short period.

The once mighty Hazelwood power station has been levelled and in its place sits a battery big enough to power 75,000 homes. Debate about the future of coal is over – all three remaining coal

burners will power down by 2035. But most profoundly, the community that has hosted this industry for a century has seized its destiny and is leading the transition to a fairer and cleaner regional economy.

The Morwell Community Day (see page 13) exemplified how this transformation has occurred: organised by local leaders and backed by the whole Environment Victoria community. There's more to be done, but we should be proud about how far we've come and confident about the journey ahead.

Another transformation we must celebrate is the restarting of water buybacks in the parched Murray-Darling. Two years ago, Environment Victoria teamed up with our sister organisations across four states to build a new national rivers campaign

and in November we celebrated a historic win that, until recently, had seemed impossible. You can meet some of the grassroots heroes of this campaign on pages 3-5.

Speaking of grassroots power, our gas campaign is accelerating thanks to our volunteers across the state. The gas industry are on the back foot, but we have our work cut out for us countering their misinformation and scare campaigns. Read all about it on page 8 and 9.



Image: Hilary Wardhaugh

A lifeline for the Murray-Darling

This delegation of First Nations leaders, farmers, fishers and environmentalists met with Water Minister Tanya Plibersek in Parliament House in November.

Greg Foyster,
Rivers and Nature
Campaign Manager



The federal government has passed new legislation to finally deliver more water for the Murray-Darling. It's a lifeline, and it's thanks to thousands of people speaking up for healthy rivers and communities. Here's how it went down and what it means for our biggest river system.

In November 2023, we headed to Australia's Parliament House with a big group of river advocates from across the Murray-Darling – and 20 kilograms of Coorong mullet.

Collectively, we'd travelled thousands of kilometres from all corners of the Basin to be there. Gloria and her daughter Julie, a fishing family who supplied the sustainably caught mullet, came from Clayton Bay

in South Australia. Gamilaraay, Wirria and Anaiwan Elder Maria 'Polly' Cutmore travelled from Moree in New South Wales. Irrigator Bill McClumpha came from Red Cliffs in Victoria. Many others came from places in between.

Together, we had a message to deliver to our politicians: the rivers of the Murray-Darling need more water and thousands of Australians want action.

We were hosting a big BBQ breakfast at Parliament House, with fresh fish from the end of the River Murray and speeches from those whose culture, livelihood and jobs depend on healthy, flowing rivers.

In August, a few months earlier, the federal government had announced a plan to restart water buybacks, which mean the government will buy water rights from people willing to sell them to set aside more water for the river. It's widely recognised as the most effective, affordable way to ensure our environment has the water it needs. But it's also politically contested, because it reduces the volume of water available for irrigation.

In 2015, with the National Party in charge of the federal water portfolio, water buybacks were stopped, and progress ground to a halt. You don't need to look further than the recent mass fish kills, plummeting waterbird populations or dry riverbeds during the last drought to see the markers of a river system left to languish.

That's why the federal government's plan to start buying water again was so significant, and it had the support of every Basin state – except Victoria. Our state government instead chose to side with the irrigation lobby, doubling down on its opposition to water buybacks and continuing its long tradition of undermining progress on the Basin Plan.

What the federal government put forward – the Restoring Our Rivers Bill – was a good start, but there were several worrying gaps. Most notably, there were no guarantees that enough water would make its way to rivers and wetlands in the next few years, and despite the federal government making an election promise to deliver water rights to First Nations,



From left: Gloria and Julie Jones serving fish to Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong, Labor Senator Karen Grogan and Labor MP Louise Miller-Frost; Brendan Kennedy and Grant Rigney present on behalf of the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN); Ngarrindjeri / Kaurna Senior Elder Major 'Moogy' Sumner and Kate McBride point to their photos on the map.

the original bill didn't offer anything to Traditional Owners.

The bill needed the support of the Greens and the crossbench to get through the Senate, which meant we had a window of opportunity to push for a better plan that would deliver more for rivers, First Nations and regional communities.

We launched a big campaign with our allies in QLD, NSW and SA to show the federal government there was broad and diverse support, and to push them to go further. We met with politicians, presented to a Senate inquiry, published newspaper ads, and collected thousands of petition signatures and hundreds of personal stories from across the Basin.

It culminated with our trip to Parliament House, where we delivered a giant map with these stories and photos directly to Water Minister Tanya Plibersek. Thanks to your generous support, we were also able to help 23 river advocates from across the Basin make the trip, so politicians could hear their powerful stories in person. We packed out the Parliament House courtyard with senior government Ministers and politicians from all sides of politics, who came to hear these voices (and enjoy the Coorong mullet that Gloria and Julie cooked up!)

This public pressure helped the Greens and crossbench negotiate a much better deal (see below for the details). It passed weeks later with the support of the Greens, and Independent Senators David Pocock, Lidia Thorpe, Jacqui Lambie and Tammy Tyrell.

An important part of this was negotiating improvements for First Nations water rights. The Murray-Darling is home to over 40 First Nations, whose water was

stolen along with land during colonisation. Over-extraction and water markets have doubled down on this dispossession – further damaging Country, disempowering Traditional Owners in water management and denying their share of wealth made from their land. First Nations currently own just 0.2% of the water in the Basin and are too often left out of decision-making.

Thanks to tenacious advocacy from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) and First Peoples across the Basin, the Greens and Senator Thorpe were able to secure changes in the legislation to begin to address these injustices.

What now?

The passing of the *Restoring Our Rivers Bill* represents a crucial win for our environment. If properly delivered, it will give wetlands, fish and birds a fighting chance of survival ahead of the next looming drought.

But it's important to understand this win in the context of the past decade of damaging water policy, led by the Liberal-National Coalition in lockstep with the Victorian and NSW state governments. Ultimately, this new legislation focuses on repairing that damage and removing the unworkable barriers put in place to delay water recovery. It aims to deliver what was promised way back in 2012, but it doesn't propose significant new programs or funding commitments.

This is not to diminish the huge power that was required to get the Basin Plan back on track in the face of fierce opposition. However, it does help show the massive job we have ahead of us

A HUGE THANK YOU

to everyone who shared their story, signed a petition, sent a message to Water Ministers or helped to support advocates from across the Murray-Darling travel to Canberra.

Together, we helped show the massive support for healthy rivers right across Australia – and made sure governments heard our message loud and clear!

still. Now we need to hold the federal government accountable to deliver on what they've promised. We need to make sure all governments, most notably Victoria, come to the table, and we need to raise the bar on what's possible for the next iteration of the Basin Plan.

The deadline for recovering the water promised in the original Basin Plan has now been pushed back a few years, to at least 2027. Against the backdrop of a hotter, drier climate, the stakes for the Murray-Darling are also getting higher. That means we need a bigger, bolder plan in the coming years to deliver meaningful improvements for rivers, First Nations and regional communities.

Last year, we showed the power of thousands of Australians speaking up for healthy rivers and communities – up and down the river, in the city and country, and across state lines. Now, we need to continue growing this movement to build a collective vision of what's possible in the Murray-Darling.

'RESTORING OUR RIVERS' LEGISLATION: THE DETAILS

1. Water can be bought for the environment again

This is the most effective and affordable way to get water for the river, but has been off the table since 2015.

2. 450 billion litres of water for the river

This water is part of the Basin Plan, but thanks to a bogus "socio-economic test" developed under the previous Coalition government, only a fraction has been delivered. This legislation removes this barrier, but also postpones the deadline to recover water by three years.

3. Improvements for First Nations water rights

Along with increased funding for Aboriginal water entitlements, this legislation provides a pathway for First Nations to have a greater say over how their waterways are managed and a requirement to identify how the principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) can be promoted in the Water Act.

4. Independent audit of water recovery

This will give us a clear picture of how much water has been set aside for the river so far – and whether projects have delivered what they've promised.

5. New powers to cancel dodgy water 'offset' projects

These projects were cooked up as a way to avoid recovering water for the environment. This legislation gives the federal government new powers to cancel projects that don't stack up.

Stand by your river: Stories from across the Basin

We asked people across the Murray-Darling Basin to share stories from their patch of the river, showing why they care about healthy rivers and want to see our government act. We received more than 250 personal stories, photos and videos, which made it all the way to decision-makers in Canberra. Here are some of our favourites.



“
My husband and I have a stone fruit farm north of Swan Hill. We irrigate from the Murray River on the Woorinen pipeline, so we are 100 percent dependent on water in the Murray River.”

Peta,
Woorinen VIC



“
The government needs to not just be listening, but actually hearing and implementing the teaching from First Nations people on how to look after our rivers and water systems. We need real water returned to the river to keep our waters clean and pure, not just for us but for everyone.”

Major 'Moogy' Sumner,
Murray Mouth, SA



“
As farmers who run cattle on the floodplains in the Darling Basin, our industry contributes hundreds of millions of dollars to the economy and produces food for Aussie tables. We need this Bill to guarantee more for the Darling ahead of the next drought.”

Gary and Leane,
Macquarie Marshes NSW



“
I live at the mouth of the Murray in a Ramsar protected area and feel myself to be a sort of custodian to the migratory birds of this place and the Coorong beyond. Here is a pic taken a number of years ago at the Murray Mouth, around the corner from where I live. For years now the Mouth has been kept open by dredges as there isn't enough flow left to keep it open naturally. It is a spawning place for baby fish, birds, crabs, etc – called piccanini waters by the Ngarrindjeri, meaning baby waters.”

Liz,
Murray Mouth SA



“
I spent many childhood holidays on the banks of the Loddon River in Central Victoria. As an adult the Ovens and King Rivers have been an important part of my life. They are all part of the Murray-Darling basin, which is critical to the health of so much of our country. This photo is a polaroid from 1970 of me fishing in the Loddon River near Serpentine with my cousin and my brother.”

Liz,
Melbourne, VIC



“
I have lived in the Murray Darling Basin since 1974 on many of its rivers. First on the Murray at Albury, then the Edwards at Deniliquin, Macquarie at Dubbo and now the Molonglo in Canberra. Healthy rivers mean healthy communities, and healthy communities provide a future for our children, no matter where they live. If we care for our rivers, they will care for us.”

Terry,
Canberra ACT

READ MORE

Want to read more stories of people standing by their river?
Head to [STANDBYOURRIVER.ORG.AU](https://standbyourriver.org.au)



The opportunity to break free from fossil fuels is here, but can we seize it?

Image: Doug Gimsey

Jono La Nauze,
Chief Executive Officer



After years of denial and delay under the Coalition, Australia is playing catch-up in the transition to clean energy. The task is gargantuan, and we need to make up time, but the politics, the economics and the technology are finally aligning behind clean energy.

As a recent Climate Council report shows, Australia can reach 96 percent clean energy by 2030 with the right policy settings. Here are some the steps we'll need to take if we are to achieve a fast and fair transition to clean energy by 2030:

Passing environment laws fit for the task

We need environmental planning laws that can quickly and robustly determine where and how we can safely build energy infrastructure. That means setting higher environmental standards including regional planning (onshore) and marine spatial planning (offshore).

It means properly resourcing environmental regulators so they can make good decisions quickly. And it means recognising that building renewable energy infrastructure is an urgent matter of public interest, so we need to put these projects at the front of the queue.

Our environmental laws must consider climate damage in decision-making about projects – which means including a climate trigger in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

Respecting First Nations

A key challenge is to make sure energy companies (whether privately owned or government) pay the rent. Instead of unleashing another wave of Indigenous dispossession, the renewables rollout should contribute to First Nations self-determination and economic empowerment.

Turbocharging offshore wind with a national strategy

Because Australia is an island nation, we are in a great position to take advantage of offshore wind. We can develop a massive industry with a national strategy that ensures we build it fast and build it here.

But developing an industry from scratch is a huge challenge, and no other country in the world is doing it without a national strategy. We need to act now to ensure we don't miss out on the economic opportunities that could come from "onshoring" the offshore wind supply chain.

Having a well explained and equitable transition plan

A priority now is simply explaining to all Australians why the clean energy transition is happening and what it means for them. This will get people on board and ensure we don't leave an information vacuum to be filled with misinformation.

Getting community, business and government on the same page

Leaders across community, business and government need to take on difficult conversations, instead of taking cheap pot shots at renewable energy or getting distracted with false solutions like nuclear power and unproven carbon capture and storage technology.

After a decade of delay and inaction, we don't have any time to waste. It's going to take extraordinary leadership and coordination from governments to ensure the transition happens on time and in a fair and equitable way.

While the Albanese government has taken Canberra's foot off the brake (at least as far as our electricity system is concerned), it hasn't yet gripped the wheel and pressed the pedal to the metal.

The gas industry wants us hooked on methane and distracted with hydrogen



The gas industry has been repeatedly caught spreading misleading sustainability claims

Kat Lucas-Healey
Senior Climate
and Energy Advisor



The gas industry has spent years working against Victorians who want to save money, protect their health and cut climate pollution by going electric. It successfully opposed energy efficiency standards and is now distracting consumers with false promises that hydrogen is the solution.

In the coming months we will be spotlighting the dodgy tactics of the gas industry, so keep an eye on our website and in the media for more on this campaign.

For now, let's look at why the gas industry's attempts to distract Victorian consumers with the false promise of hydrogen is so misleading.

Why hydrogen won't work to save the gas network

Hydrogen is a gas that can be produced by splitting water molecules. This process is called electrolysis and can be powered by renewable energy. In many applications, such as fuel cells, using hydrogen only produces water and oxygen as byproducts.

Great! But unfortunately, the idea of using hydrogen to replace methane in the gas network is a fantasy. Here's why ...

1. It still produces toxic indoor air pollution

Hydrogen is only clean when it's used in applications like fuel cells where the energy is released through a chemical reaction. When it's burnt, hydrogen produces even more toxic nitrogen oxides (NOx) than methane. These pollutants damage our lungs and increase the risk and severity of respiratory infections and asthma.

2. It's too expensive

Hydrogen is far too expensive for household use. It's currently two or three times more expensive than fossil gas. Even under the most generous assumptions it will only become cost-competitive after 2045. Meanwhile electric alternatives are cheaper and less polluting to run right now.

3. It's a waste

A valuable resource like hydrogen should be used where there are no other alternatives, such as shipping and steel production. Using it for home heating, where there are cheaper and more efficient electric alternatives, makes no sense.

4. Existing gas appliances would have to be replaced anyway

Traditional gas appliances aren't safe to use with hydrogen, so gas companies would need to coordinate the replacement or alteration of every single appliance in an area before increasing the ratio of hydrogen above 5 percent. Households and businesses would foot the bill for this, and any old

appliances that were overlooked could cause an explosion.

5. It would require an overhaul of the entire gas network

Hydrogen is a smaller and more flammable molecule than methane, meaning it can leak more easily and increases the risk of explosions. It also reacts with steel, causing what's called embrittlement. So, to handle any more than about 5 percent hydrogen, the entire gas network would need a massive upgrade, which households would have to pay for.

6. Gas appliances also fail during blackouts

Many gas appliances require electricity to run, which means that if the power goes out, gas appliances fail as well.

By world standards, Australia's power grid is extremely reliable, so paying for a second fuel source as backup makes little economic sense. Especially when the savings from not having gas could go towards a home battery, for example.

No matter how the gas industry spins it, the solution to cutting pollution, protecting our health and lowering bills is to switch to clean, electric appliances. That's why we're pushing for solutions that will make it easy and affordable for everyone to start the switch.

READ MORE AT
[ENVICT.ORG/HYDROGEN](https://envict.org/hydrogen)

People power driving momentum for a gas-free Victoria



Alex Merory,
Campaigns Director



Volunteers have been getting creative and building public support for a fast and fair transition off polluting methane gas.

Gas is a disaster for our climate and our environment. And as Victoria's gas reserves in the Bass Strait dry up, electrifying Victorian households is the best way to avoid destructive new projects or importing dirty gas from other states – and have healthier homes that are less polluting and cheaper to run.

We know that ditching gas and going electric can cut winter heating bills by 75 percent. Efficient electric appliances already cause less climate pollution, and the gap will widen as we build more clean energy. But our research also shows many people don't know about the adverse effects of burning methane gas or the

savings to be made by switching to efficient electric appliances.

That's why last year we kicked off a powerful campaign for a fast and fair transition off gas.

In the last issue of Environment Victoria News, we caught you up on the critical work of our Action Network. Volunteers had hundreds of face-to-face conversations in their communities to find out what Victorians really think about methane gas, and hand-delivered the findings to almost every MP in the state. Their message was clear; Victorians want the government to champion ambitious policies to ditch gas and electrify every Victorian household.

Our actions were noticed, and insiders reported our presence had a big impact!

But while we were engaging our local decision-makers on this issue, we knew the gas industry and its backers were working behind the scenes to undermine

our efforts and keep gas burning, so it was vital we kept up the pressure.

Again, our incredible Action Network stepped up with a colourful 'lightning bolt' action to show how much public support there is for our government to electrify Victoria using clean, renewable energy. Since the last issue of EV News went to print, countless individuals, groups and even the odd friendly canine appeared in photos with our lightning bolt logo, sharing images and messages on social media, and tagging Victoria's Climate Action Minister, Lily D'Ambrosio.

THANKS to everyone who took action! Whether you spoke to your community, emailed or met with your local MP, donated, shared stories about electrification or took a lightning bolt photo – together we're making a big impact!



Our gas briefer was delivered in-person or via email to almost every MP in the state.



Across Victoria, volunteers and supporters got creative with our 'lightning bolt' actions.



Update to the Gas Substitution Roadmap

In December, the government released a long-awaited update to the Gas Substitution Roadmap – their plan for the future of gas in Victoria. Some measures we were hoping to see weren't there. It didn't rule out new gas projects or include strong support for households to electrify, though there were some new incentives for induction cooktops. But it contained one very bold step forward - kicking off a cost-benefit analysis for ending the installation of gas appliances.

Every time someone buys a new gas appliance, they lock in another decade of pollution. So replacing hot water, stoves and heaters reaching the end of their lives with healthy, efficient all-electric appliances is a huge and necessary step in phasing out household gas.

Before things can get better, we must stop making the problem worse, and that's what ending the sale of new gas appliances would do. If followed through, it means Victoria, which is the biggest user of gas in the country, could become the first state to phase out gas appliances.

The state government is also reviewing rental standards, which affect nearly one in three Victorian homes. This is a once-in-a-decade opportunity to ensure that rented homes are healthy, comfortable and affordable. We're working with allies in social, environment and rental groups to call for the best possible standards.

A massive year ahead

2024 will be the year gas lobby fights desperately to stop Victoria, its largest domestic market, from phasing out household gas use.

We know they'll come out swinging, resisting change and protecting their profits. They're already launching scare campaigns and ramping up their greenwashing (see page 7).

We need to respond by standing up against the polluting gas industry. From the gas burner in the kitchen to seismic blasting off the Great Ocean Road, methane gas is a disaster for our environment, our health and our hip pockets.

READ MORE

about the updates to the Gas Substitution Roadmap at envict.org/GSRupdate and sign up to get involved at envict.org/gasbusters

THANK YOU! This critical work would not have been possible without our funders, the Paul Ramsay Foundation and Boundless Earth.

We'll expose the gas industry's lies to the media and to decision makers, starting with our special report on their dodgy tactics and secret shopper action to see if the gas industry's greenwashing and misinformation goes all the way to the check-out. And we'll highlight those who are seizing the opportunities of electrification.

With public consultations on new rental standards and the phase-out of gas appliances scheduled for the coming months, it's important that community voices are heard. We'll help bring them together and secure measures that make it cheaper and easier for households to electrify, and make sure no-one is left behind.

Together people across the state will show that the community isn't buying the gas industries lies and speak up for a fast and fair shift off gas.



Lifting up diverse stories and leadership for climate action

Taegen Edwards,
Organising
Program Manager



To achieve a fast and fair transition to clean energy, we need leadership and participation from all parts of the community.

Culturally diverse communities have been chronically under-represented in decision making about climate solutions. Whether advocating to politicians or implementing policy, multicultural voices and stories have often been sidelined or missing entirely.

For this reason, we're excited to be rolling out a new project focused on lifting up the voices and perspectives of multicultural community members. In late 2023 in the City of Greater Dandenong – one of the most culturally diverse parts of Victoria – we begun a series of "Table Talks" to facilitate new conversations about climate impacts and solutions from unique cultural points of view.

So far, we've met with young people of colour, Pasifika and Vietnamese community members in the Dandenong region, and Table Talks with Chinese and South Asian communities are planned in coming months.

Working with a co-facilitator from each of these communities, we are encouraging participants to share stories from their own perspectives and experiences and capturing themes from the discussions.

We hope to build new relationships and learn about the best ways to work together to support leadership on environmental and climate issues within these communities.

We're particularly excited about the opportunities this work is creating to team up with groups like Sapna - South Asian Climate Solidarity, which won the Innovation Award at our AGM last year. Sapna is an intergenerational group of activists, artists, writers and scholars who have come together to create platforms and share stories about climate impacts and climate justice from South Asian perspectives. We're looking forward to sharing more of their great work, so watch this space!

This year we're expanding the program beyond Dandenong to other parts of metro Melbourne and regional Victoria. Peizhi Jiang has joined our team as a new Community Organiser focused on this work. Peizhi used to work as a union organiser in NSW, where he organised migrant workers from China and Malaysia in the food delivery sector, achieving some great wins on pay and safety standards.

As Peizhi says, "Coming to Australia as a first generation migrant from Southern China, and being a democratic activist, I feel grateful about the vibrant democracy we have here. I have great passion to empower Victorian multicultural communities and promote participation in the climate movement. When we come together as a community, we will have more energy to achieve positive climate solutions."

Remembering Faizul Islam

Victor Komarovsky,
Senior Organiser



I first met Faizul during our online People Power Workshops in 2021, and I quickly came to know him as a bold, visionary, broadminded, loyal and kind person.

Faizul was deeply respected in his community and his ability to bring together multicultural leaders inspired our dedicated programme of multicultural outreach in Dandenong.

He understood the climate crisis as an issue of global justice. Australian coal, Faizul pointed out, was being stripped from First Nations lands and burned in his homeland of Bangladesh, polluting their lungs and driving devastating climate impacts. This understanding guided his unwavering commitment.

As I write this, our Muslim brothers and sisters begin their fast on this day of Ramadan. At this time it is customary to give generously – the zakat – to those in need. Faizul's zakat was his tireless service to his community. On top of his role at Environment Victoria, he served as the Treasurer for the Australia Bangladesh Council of Victoria and was a leader in the campaign to reduce gambling harm in Dandenong.

Faizul Islam passed away on January 2nd after a 9-month battle with leukemia. The staff and volunteer team pay our deepest respects to his wife and two children. We honour his life by continuing the work he started.



Email us at community@environmentvictoria.org.au if you are interested in helping to organise a Table Talk or outreach event in a multicultural community near you.

Why we need to keep showing up for First Nations justice

Jono La Nauze,
Chief Executive Officer



For generations, First Nations communities have fought tirelessly for the right to control their own lives, communities and land. This huge momentum for change has been growing on the back of two centuries of resistance and struggle.

Last year's referendum for a Voice to Parliament was one potential mechanism for change. Alongside 42 other climate and environment organisations, we threw our support behind the YES campaign and calls for transformative justice for First Nations in Australia.

Together, Environment Victoria supporters joined calling parties to speak with voters about the referendum and why First Nations justice matters. We organised an incredible panel of young First Nations leaders to talk to our community about the intersection between climate and environment issues and the Voice. We put up corflutes, had brave conversations with family and friends and showed up in force for YES on polling day.

The result was devastating, most of all for First Nations communities and campaigners. It showed us how far we have to go as a nation, and how important it is to continue speaking up. The moment was always part of a bigger struggle for justice, and we know there is still widespread support for transformative change – things like treaties, truth-telling and land rights.

But there is still long way to go. Earlier this year, the Victorian Liberal Opposition backflipped on their support for Victoria's Treaty process. Across the country, big fossil fuel companies continue to ride roughshod over Traditional Owners' demands to stop destroying their land, waters and culture. Rather than stand up against these interests, the federal government has introduced a new bill that would allow fossil fuel giants to bypass genuine consultation with Traditional Owners.

It's clear that on these issues and more, 2024 will be another year where it is important to stand in solidarity with First Nations and back in their demands for justice. Here in Victoria, there are plenty of ways you can continue showing up.



Environment Victoria volunteers join the Walk for Yes rally in Ballarat.

Four ways you can support

1. Victorian Treaty

Treaty negotiations are gathering steam in Victoria, with a newly elected First Peoples Assembly and the establishment of a Self Determination Fund. In 2024, the Assembly is looking to kick off state-wide Treaty negotiations.

FIRSTPEOPLESVIC.ORG

2. Pay the Rent

We live, work and play on land that was forcibly taken from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the effects of this continue today. Paying the Rent is a powerful way you can acknowledge this history and support First Nations communities' self-determination.

PAYTHERENT.NET.AU

3. Water Justice in the Murray-Darling

The Murray-Darling Basin is the ancestral domain for more than 40 First Nations, but colonisation and the over-extraction of water have left them with few rights to own, manage or care for land and water.

The Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) is a confederation of Sovereign First Nations from the southern part of the Murray-Darling Basin, focused on caring for our rivers and achieving water rights for Aboriginal people.

MLDRIN.ORG

4. Southern Ocean Protection Embassy Collective (SOPEC)

SOPEC is a First Nations-led campaign to protect Gunditjmara sacred lands and sea Country from seismic blasting by oil and gas companies. Alongside the Otway Coastal Environment Action Network, they recently spearheaded a powerful campaign to stop seismic blasting off the Victorian coast.

ENVICT.ORG/SOPEC

Image: Johan Mouchet

Looking back: A decade on from the Hazelwood mine fire

Hayley Sestokas,
Latrobe Valley
Community Organiser



Since the mine fire of 2014, Latrobe Valley community groups have maintained their relentless advocacy to make sure we never see another disaster like this.

Coal power has been part of the Latrobe Valley for generations. Many of us have family members working in the industry. We pass the pits and cooling towers on our way to work and school, hearing the distant thrum and dutifully wiping the coal dust from our clotheslines.

But on 9 February 2014, embers from a nearby bushfire blew into the Hazelwood brown coal mine, igniting a fire that burnt for 45 days and covered the town of Morwell in toxic smoke and ash.

Health advice from state authorities was sparse and lacking in local context. While firefighters battled the blaze, families did their best to avoid the dangerous smoke. It would later be confirmed to have contributed to the death of 13 people and caused irreversible harm to many others.

This disaster was a brutal reminder of the outsized environmental and health burden placed on communities in the Latrobe Valley. And with the spark that set the

Hazelwood mine alight, something shifted in our social fabric.

Two government inquiries found that mine owners ENGIE had failed in their duty to keep the community safe. The company was fined over \$1.5 million. The inquiries also discovered that the lack of mine rehabilitation had contributed to the fire's severity. As a result, the government took a much closer look at the rehabilitation requirements for the coal mines and there was a massive increase in mine rehabilitation bonds.

The inquiries also led to improvements in emergency communications, as well as the establishment of a 'Health Innovation Zone' and a long-term health study conducting valuable research into the effects of living alongside brown coal mines.

But the massive coal mines still pose a risk to the community.

Air purity standards are extremely weak, so the air pollution from the remaining coal power stations is as harmful as ever. ENGIE also plan to create a 'pit lake' in the disused Hazelwood mine, which is full of toxic coal ash. This proposal is a threat to local groundwater, the Latrobe River system and the Ramsar-listed Gippsland Lakes downstream.

We will continue working with the community to ensure these huge mine pits are cleaned up properly, and that ENGIE is not allowed to cut corners at the community's expense.

We will continue to draw inspiration and hope from what has already been achieved, building on the work that has gone before as we fight for a future worth inheriting.



NEW FILM SHOWS HOW FAR WE'VE COME SINCE THE MINE FIRE

We teamed up with independent filmmakers Josie Hess and Stephanie Sabrinskas to make a new film about the mine fire, featuring first-hand accounts by six local people. They discuss their experience of the fire and reflect on how far we have come since – from the immediate mutual aid response to the subsequent years of advocacy, connection and reimagining a future beyond coal.

This film was made possible with support from Bank Australia.

WATCH IT ONLINE AT ENVICT.ORG/10-YEARS

Morwell Community Day inspires heartfelt conversations

Lucilla Hammond,
Volunteer Local
Organiser



Local volunteer Lucilla Hammond reflects on Morwell's jam-packed community day which included panel discussions, film screenings and stalls from groups across the Latrobe Valley.

I was so excited to be part of Life After Coal's ten-year anniversary commemoration day. And oh, what a day! From the moment stalls started putting their displays together,

the atmosphere was buoyant and positive. As the day progressed and people from all backgrounds started pouring in, it became a day of excitement, hope and palpable community spirit.

There were myriad things to see, do and experience. The kids were especially well catered for, with bugs to handle, games to play, and art to be made.

But what I loved most about it was the coming together of community leaders from all angles of this debate. My role was to support the panellists for the discussions throughout the day. These talks covered

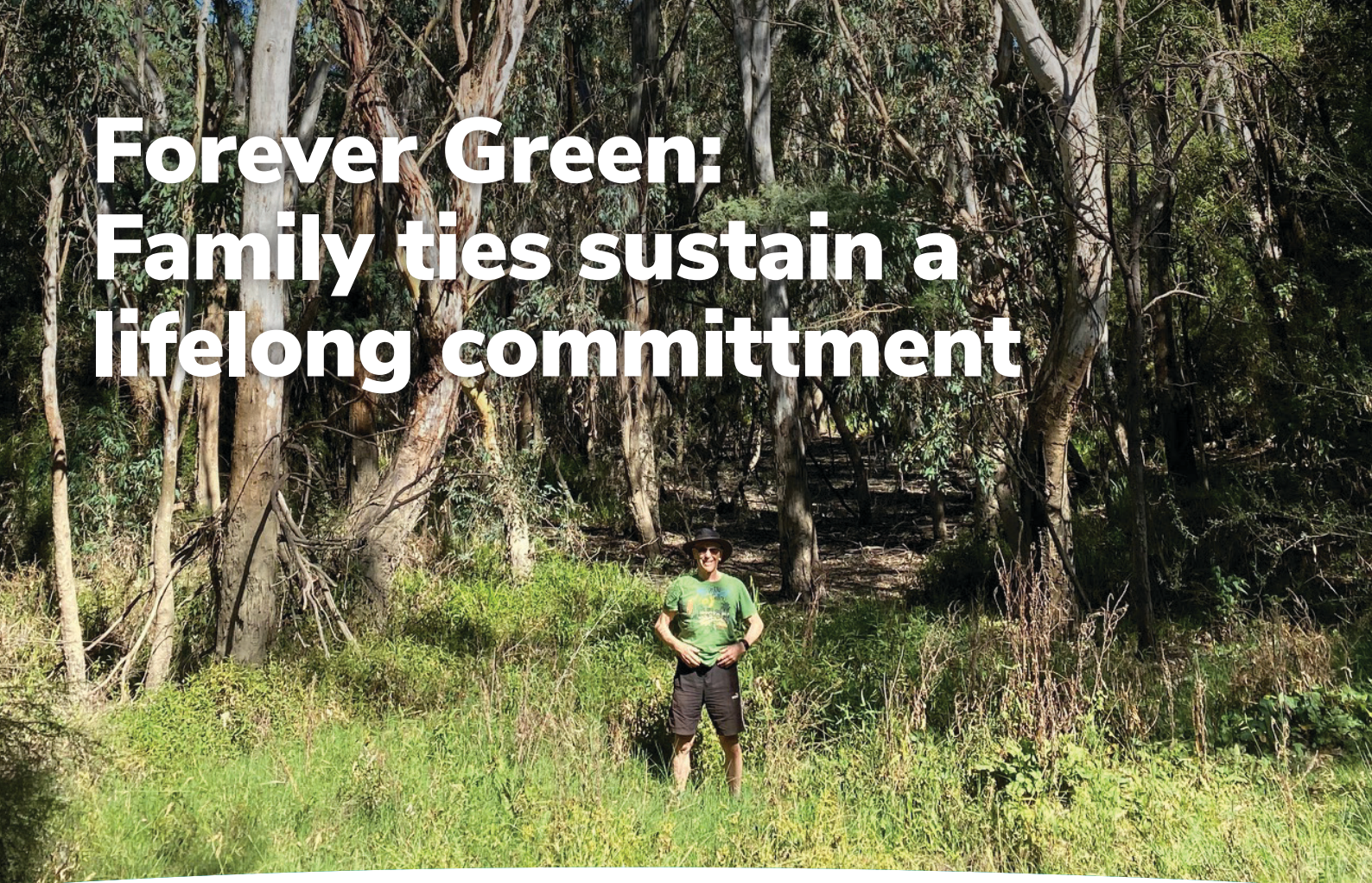
every possible subject of conversation. They were inspiring and at times prickly, but everyone came to the table with an open and willing attitude. It was incredible to have a space for big, heartfelt conversations about the huge impact of the mine fire, and the legacy of community power it left behind.

It's a day marked in my heart for what we can create when we work together and the true possibility of making the change we want to see in our community. Weeks later, I still find myself immersed in the glow of the experience.



Clockwise from top left: Local organiser Lucilla Hammond; dozens of community group stalls packed out Kernot Hall; Local organiser Electra Greene at the Bug Blitz stall; Environment Victoria's kid zone; Esther Lloyd, Laura Melville, Arfa Khan, Tracey Anton, Bodey Darvill and Jane Sultana on the Active Communities panel. Images courtesy of Life After Coal and Isabel Kimpton.

Forever Green: Family ties sustain a lifelong committment



Andy Grant,
Fundraising Director



John Merory is one of a growing number of dedicated supporters who are including a gift in their Will to Environment Victoria.

John recently turned 78 years old. "I'm hoping to plant 78 trees somewhere to mark the occasion!" he mentioned in a recent chat with us.

John has included a gift to Environment Victoria in his Will, and in his interview he recalls why he made this decision.

"I think a gift like this is a really important way to create impact. I hope to see

Environment Victoria be even more effective into the future."

One of John's four children is Alex, our Campaigns Director here at Environment Victoria. As an environmental scientist with decades of conservation and climate activism under his belt, John is immensely proud of the connection he and his daughter share. "Something must have rubbed off over the years" he mentions.

"I love walking with Alex and her children along the Yarra River. I love seeing the Red River Gums I planted 36 years ago in the ephemeral wetlands in Wilson reserve. They're now huge! It's as if the seedlings felt they were at last back home when we planted them all those years ago. It brings tears of joy to my eyes."

John's passion for the environment was heavily influenced by Dr. Joseph Peter Funk, his father's second cousin.

"He was a meteorological physicist and worked for the CSIRO in Melbourne measuring CO2 levels in our atmosphere."

"In 2000 I achieved a Masters degree in Environmental Science. I was always fascinated by science and the environment. Both Dr Peter Funk and Professor Frank Fischer inspired me."

A professional passion became even more personal for John about seven or eight years ago when he and wife Marsha decided to remove gas from their home completely. "We became fully electric, including our car. We had to keep pestering the gas company to take the meter away!"

It was around the same time that he decided to include a gift to Environment Victoria in his Will.

Since then, he has also decided to become vegan. "My reasons for these changes are ethical, environmental, and health. I recently read that if virtually everyone adopted a vegan diet, the reduction of crop land required would be up to 75% and reduction in pasture for livestock would stop half of global deforestation."

Thank you John!

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, Sylwia Sierkiewicz, 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.

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Please complete this form, cut off this page and return it with the reply-paid envelope enclosed, or to Reply Paid 12575, A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, VIC 8006 or visit www.environmentvictoria.org.au 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.





**6 COMMUNITY MEMBERS
TELL THEIR STORIES**

Ashes to Aftermath: 10 Years On From the Hazelwood Mine Fire

In 2014, Victoria experienced its worst industrial air pollution disaster when the Hazelwood mine fire burned for 45 days. This short film shares the experience of 6 local people and reflects on how far we've come, 10 years on.

Watch the film online at
envict.org/10-years



Who's who at Environment Victoria

Chief Executive Officer **Jono La Nauze**

CAMPAIGNS & PROGRAMS

Campaigns Director **Alex Merory**

Climate Campaign Managers

Sarah Rogan, Joy Toose

Rivers and Nature Campaign Manager

Greg Foyster

Healthy Rivers Campaigner **Tyler Rotche**

Senior Climate and Energy Analyst

Kat Lucas-Healey, Bronya Lipski

Community Organising Co-Managers

Laura Melville, Taegen Edwards

Senior Organiser **Victor Komarovsky**

Latrobe Valley Organiser **Hayley Sestokas**

Greater Melbourne Organiser **Peizhi Jiang**

Data Support Officer **Chante Bock**

Communications Manager **Cameron Wheatley**

Media and Content Manager **James Norman**

Rivers Communication Lead **Isabel Kimpton**

Digital Campaigner **James King**

Research Intern **Francesca McMillen**

OPERATIONS

Finance Manager **Don Batson**

Accounts Officer **Jing Lu**

Office Manager **Cate Hoyle**

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People and Culture Manager

Eleisha Mullane

Fundraising Director **Andy Grant**

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

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