

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Climate Resilience**

Melbourne – Wednesday 20 November 2024

#### **MEMBERS**

Ryan Batchelor – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

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Wendy Lovell

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John Berger

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Rachel Payne

Aiv Puglielli

Richard Welch

**WITNESS**

Natasha Palich, Executive Officer, Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Climate Resilience in Victoria. We are joined by a representative from the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment, so welcome.

All evidence that taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things those comments may not be protected by privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of the Parliament.

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My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Chair of the committee and a Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region. Welcome. I will ask the committee to introduce themselves.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Hi, David Ettershank, Western Metro region and Deputy Chair.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Wendy Lovell, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Melina BATH:** Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Hi, Natasha. I am Gaelle, Member for Northern Victoria.

**John BERGER:** John Berger, Member for Southern Metro.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks so much for joining us. For the Hansard record, if you could state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of, and then we will invite you to make an opening statement.

**Natasha PALICH:** Thank you. My name is Natasha Palich. I am the Executive Officer of the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment. This is an alliance of councils that is auspiced and hosted by the Municipal Association of Victoria of which I am a staff member.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Over to you.

**Natasha PALICH:** Thank you, Chair and committee, for the opportunity to speak today on climate resilience. I have prepared a statement. It may be longer than 5 minutes. However, I have reviewed the transcripts that are up online from previous hearings, and my presentation anticipates some of the questions you might have for me based on what you have asked previous witnesses.

I will start by quoting Sarah Ichioka from her presentation at last week's Melbourne University symposium on climate action in cities: we are about to experience the warmest summer on record, and it will likely be the coolest summer we ever experience again. As you heard last month from the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes, and as reported in the 2024 Australian state of the climate report, Australia's surface air temperatures have already risen by about 1.5 degrees since national records began in 1910. Last weekend we saw fires in the rainforests in the Otways in November.

This Inquiry into Climate Resilience looks at the risks facing Victoria's built environment and infrastructure from climate change and the impact that these would have on the people of Victoria. It also looks into how government is preparing for these impacts. Our view is that the built environment is ill prepared for the impacts of climate change and that our existing planning policy framework is insufficiently equipped to prepare our communities.

There are two aspects of the risks that we would face that I would like to talk to: firstly, the risk of exacerbating climate change by continuing to emit greenhouse gas emissions, and the second relates to the risks associated with the impacts of climate change. With regard to that first point, climate change is outpacing climate model forecasts, demanding urgent transition back to a safe climate. My introduction describes only some of the impacts we are already experiencing. Urgent transition requires focused and collaborative efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to as close as possible to zero. For the built environment this means a zero-emission approach for both embodied and operational emissions, and believe it or not, the new developments are the low-hanging fruit in this area. As such we need to rapidly implement mitigation measures for new developments so we can collectively turn our attention to areas that are more difficult to navigate. There is strong work underway already to address mitigation in new development in both the Victorian and federal governments, and this includes the recent agreement by the Australian building ministers to include climate resilience as a specific objective of the Australian Building Codes Board from 2025. The June 2024 communiqué from the building ministers meeting also agreed to include a voluntary pathway in the National Construction Code 2025 for commercial buildings to measure and report on embodied carbon.

CASBE welcomes these initiatives. However, there are some sectors of industry and some government jurisdictions that would pause this work. We urge the Victorian government to continue to support regular and planned updates to the National Construction Code to maintain this trajectory. This work must not pause. Indeed Australia's current national emissions reduction targets fall far short of the latest scientific evidence, which indicates our country must strive to achieve zero emissions by 2035 in order to limit global warming to the safest levels possible. This will require fast adaptation by the building industry, and the seriousness and the challenge of this task cannot be overstated. It will require rapid effort at every stage and level of the procurement process.

CASBE councils are progressing mitigation goals. We manage the BESS tool, the built environment sustainability scorecard, which is a local government funded sustainability assessment tool that assesses sustainable design at the planning permit state. In the 2023–24 financial year just under 5000 projects were entered into the tool, which included over 38,000 dwellings. These projects were spread across the 35 councils who currently use the BESS tool, and analysis of these projects showed that there was a commitment to a 47 per cent average greenhouse gas emissions reduction against our business-as-usual baseline for residential developments for that year.

I now speak to the second point, which is the risk from the impact of in excess of 1.5 degrees of global warming, and this is where a climate-resilient built environment can support our society. A climate-resilient society needs as a foundation a built environment and supporting infrastructure that are resilient to flooding, sea level rise, the risk of bushfire and damage from severe storm events, as you just heard. And there are two aspects to this point that I want to talk to: buildings and land use planning.

Firstly, buildings: as stated in our submission, CASBE councils have a planning policy amendment before the state government that proposes to strengthen environmentally sustainable design, or ESD, requirements for buildings. This amendment is called – we call it – the ‘elevating ESD targets amendment’. What it proposes is improved energy performance of the building envelope, minimum requirements for onsite renewable energy generation, a reduction in embodied carbon, zero net carbon operational energy, increased rates of bicycle parking for apartment developments, electric vehicle charging, support for transport modal shifts and design strategies that address the impact of future climate conditions on water supply and management of water resources. It considers the volume and flow of stormwater discharging from sites and looks at climate-resilient landscaping. It outlines site-specific cooling strategies, such as canopy cover and reflective surfaces. It talks about onsite food production, thermally safe buildings and a functional waste recovery and management approach. This is what a climate-resilient building looks like: good design that responds to not even future impacts but the climate impacts we are already experiencing.

We strongly recommend the state government approve these amendments for authorisation. Now, I have to say this, because a lot of work has been undertaken by our member councils: the approach we have taken is sound. It is backed up by research. Councils have invested a lot in this project, and they are still waiting for a response from the government two years after lodgement. Our members are happy to lead this work, they are happy to be leaders in this space and they are happy to work with industry and find case studies that demonstrate that this is already occurring. But let me be clear, we very strongly feel that there should be strong statewide requirements for environmentally sustainable development in planning schemes in the state. There are many

advantages to a statewide approach: regulatory consistency, certainty for the industry, greenhouse gas mitigation, climate resilience, the freeing up of councils' amendment resources and also equity.

There are two points I would like to make about equity. Firstly, the impacts of climate change pose significant risks to the built environment and infrastructure of Victorian communities as well as risk to human safety, livelihoods, mental health and lives, and these impacts will not be evenly distributed across the population. Secondly, every Victorian deserves a resilient and safe building to live, work and play in, not just the residents of the councils who are able to resource the work to undertake a planning amendment. I will also highlight the following: at least 28 Victorian councils have used their own resources to undergo a planning amendment to introduce a local planning policy related to environmentally sustainable design in their municipality; 31 councils shared the cost of the research that underpinned the 'elevating ESD targets amendment'; 24 of those 31 councils resourced the preparation of the 24 planning amendments that are now sitting with the minister. This seems an unnecessary use of resources for work that could be undertaken by the state government at scale. We understand that there is state planning reform occurring at the moment. The pace of this reform is paradoxically concerning because (a) rapid pace is needed to transition our communities but (b) we are concerned that the reform process has lost sight of the climate crisis.

Before I leave buildings I just want to comment on our existing buildings. You have heard in these public hearings from rural and regional councils who are concerned that their residents will not be able to afford to heat or cool their homes due to the substandard quality of the building envelope and that this will lead to an increased reliance on local governments for support. More frequent and severe extreme weather events mean that buildings will be lost; many of these are already uninsurable. This is our next area of challenge: to identify how and when to retrofit these existing buildings. Please, let us not build any more buildings that are ill equipped for the future.

Now I turn to land use planning. Both building and planning regulation can and must continue to support greenhouse gas mitigation and climate-safe buildings, but land use planning is the foundation for community adaptation and resilience. At the moment Victoria's planning system prioritises growth over climate resilience. We support financially sustainable growth, but the climate crisis must be factored into our future plans. Ignoring the climate crisis unfortunately does not mean that it will not and is not happening. Our planning system determines where and what we will build. It also has the potential to deliver a state-led approach to hazard mapping and meaningful urban greening, which is a key global cooling strategy – I think that we are going to start to talk more about global cooling efforts in the future. Our planning system also has the potential to provide a science-informed approach to managing risk. It also has the potential to support managed adaptations of communities that are in our high-risk areas. Councils are struggling to resource that work to address those risks for the natural hazards, and unfortunately we now must move faster than even seems possible. I know that you have heard this from multiple sources and that you are interested in pathways forward. As we stated in our submission to this inquiry, CASBE and the Victorian Greenhouse Alliances commissioned research to determine key areas for change in the Victorian planning system to address climate change, and this report, *Climate Change and Planning in Victoria: Ensuring Victoria's Planning System Effectively Tackles Climate Change*, highlighted numerous areas of change. Can I continue for a minute?

**The CHAIR:** Very quickly, because we do want to get questions.

**Natasha PALICH:** Okay. We need to align planning with best practice and science. These are in our submission; I will just touch on them here. We need to shift the balance of decision-making, we need to support statutory decision-making, we need to make climate change considerations explicit, we need to support strategic directions, we need to plan for climate resilient communities and we need to integrate climate change actions. There is more detail in our submission on that. There is no one silver bullet to fix the planning system or in the planning system to fix mitigation or adaptation or resilience – it relies on many, many changes. I do have a further list of specific actions, but I am happy to stop there and take questions.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks very much. I might start. You talked about growth and climate resilience. We are obviously in a situation where we need to build more homes for people to live in in the state. How do we achieve the goal of making sure people have got a place to live and ensuring that the built environment that we are creating is resilient to a changing climate? They are not in opposition to each other, are they?

**Natasha PALICH:** They are not in opposition to each other. It is a problem that is affected by a multitude of factors, as you would be aware. I do not think that there is any one solution to fix the problem, but I think that part of it is a slight reconsideration of our values and of what we might expect in a home. There is a strong sentiment in Australia that we have the semi-detached house and that that is seen as a bastion of security, of place and home, and that there is a move to shift that towards an understanding that an apartment might create a home, for example.

I have got a couple of scenarios here that I want to share with you on this very question. I think that it is hard for profit-led apartment development to provide that affordable housing element, particularly in the current environment when the costs of construction are really high and there is a bit of hesitancy. I think that there is a role for government to work with not-for-profits – there is a lot of potential here – to provide affordable housing that does not need to account for a commercial profit. This is where I will turn to one of the scenarios that I have. One of the things that we can look to is adaptive reuse. I know that this is a challenge, but there are projects out there. There is a case study in Melbourne, which you may or may not have heard about, that is a not-for-profit project, and it is about aged care. They have converted an existing building into residential dwellings in that scenario.

I was talking about this the other day, yesterday in fact. There is research that supports the adaptive reuse of buildings, and as I said, there is a successful case that is in the not-for-profit sector in Melbourne. There is existing research happening that suggests that housing can be delivered more cost-effectively and in shorter timeframes than a demolish-and-rebuild scenario, but what the industry needs are examples, case studies to demonstrate viability. This is where state government could work with the non-profit sector to realise projects. At the moment I am talking about adaptive reuse projects as an example.

**The CHAIR:** We heard some evidence earlier today that said that part of the challenge is that many of the older buildings are lower star-rated energy efficiency and therefore have lower energy efficiency and higher running costs and are worse places to live in than newly designed and constructed buildings. Any reflections on that?

**Natasha PALICH:** Yes, and I have also heard that for those adaptive reuse buildings it is hard for them to come up to the standards of the better apartment design standards, for example.

**The CHAIR:** So do we need to move to consigning some people to living in non-energy-efficient, non-better designed buildings?

**Natasha PALICH:** I think we need to work towards making these buildings –

**The CHAIR:** It does not seem fair though, does it?

**Natasha PALICH:** No. I am not saying that we consign people to live in those buildings. I think we need to use our innovation, expertise, practice and case studies to continually improve the technology so we can make these buildings work in a way that achieves –

**The CHAIR:** Hang on, let Mr Ettershank ask a question.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Unless you want to get ahead of me – that is fine.

**Natasha PALICH:** I was going to give you another example.

**David ETTERS HANK:** You have been quite prescient so far.

We heard this morning from the City of Melbourne how they have two key planning scheme amendments that have been sitting with the minister for more than two years. You referred to 24 PSAs. Are these across multiple councils?

**Natasha PALICH:** Twenty-four different councils.

**David ETTERS HANK:** And they all strive to climate adaptation and resilience. Could you elaborate a little on that?

**Natasha PALICH:** The City of Melbourne have a planning amendment which is not dissimilar to the one that I am talking about. It is focused on the typology you would get in a CBD. That is their work, and they are seeking similar outcomes to this planning amendment. The planning amendments that I am talking about are all identical. They are based on research that looked at the standards that were developed, that were tested from an economic point of view, a sustainability point of view and a planning point of view. The planning research that was done identified that the structure of the policy instrument available to local government following the review of the planning scheme – that is, the local policy – was no longer suitable for the content that was required in these revised ESD policies. These amendments refer to a proposal by 24 councils seeking the same thing – the amendments are more or less identical – a state-particular provision, so a state policy instrument that outlines how one might get to a climate-resilient building. Twenty-four councils submitted the identical planning amendment on the same day, in July 2022.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Has there been any feedback from the government on that?

**Natasha PALICH:** Not formally.

**David ETTERS HANK:** A deafening silence.

**Natasha PALICH:** Informal only.

**David ETTERS HANK:** That is pretty disappointing. Okay. Thank you.

In your submission you said that one of your priorities was the implementation of the built environment climate change adaptation action plan in its entirety – I think it was about three times. From the alliance’s point of view, what are the key elements that have not been responded to?

**Natasha PALICH:** From my understanding, very little of that has been actioned. The sorts of things that we are looking for to be implemented in the planning – there is a range of things. I am not really sure where to start. Let us start with data. You heard from the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes that there is some unpredictability in climate data. But we need to plan for the climate of the future, and so we need land use planning based on the latest climate science, so we need coordinated and standardised climate projections. If the Victorian government was able to provide a pathway into the planning scheme for reference to updated and consistent climate data, that could be updated in a rapid way, not with the amendment process that councils are faced with at the moment. That would be a start.

**David ETTERS HANK:** What are the priority ones that are missing from the alliance’s point of view?

**Natasha PALICH:** So this report that we did had 42 recommendations, and we set up an advocacy campaign a couple of years ago with four highlighted points, one of which was to amend the *Planning and Environment Act*, and we thank you for taking action on that. I think the priority actions would be to deal with the new buildings, get ESD planning reform for buildings into place because then councils can turn to the more adaptation and resilience aspect of the ability of the planning scheme. I think that councils need help undertaking long-term planning for a 50-year timeframe, for example; they are very aware of the risks of climate change in their communities, and it is very difficult for local government to undertake adaptation measures, particularly where it leads to discussions of retreat when they have to live and work in these communities. So I think what councils need is a framework, and a planning system is part of that framework. To get to your question, this built environment adaptation plan provides that framework for councils to manage adaptation retreat in their communities.

**David ETTERS HANK:** It is just unclear if it has actually been done, isn’t it?

**The CHAIR:** Ms Lovell.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thank you. I am just interested in planning, in the style of planning that has been put forward. You talked about the change from thinking, ‘We have a quarter-acre block with a house,’ and going to apartment-style living, which might be fine for the city, but also we are seeing more and more developments imposed on regional Victoria where the blocks of land are extremely small – very different to the lifestyle that has been there in the past. For instance, in Riddells Creek, where the traditional urban block is a large block with plenty of garden space around it – the edge of town has been more lifestyle where you might be able to

have a horse or something like that – we are seeing a development that is proposed that will double the size of that town. Some of the amenity blocks are as small as 100 square metres. It is quite a significant walk from there; I do not even know that you could even walk it from there to the railway station. There are no footpaths or bike paths planned; there is no public transport there. It is inappropriate for that style of living. But we are also seeing a change in the way people are building – building houses with no eaves and virtually no garden space around them as well – and I am just interested in your thoughts on those types of developments going into regional Victoria and the sustainability of them.

**Natasha PALICH:** They have their challenges, as you have identified, and some of those are the supporting infrastructure around them, the transport that is made available to these when they get built, but some of these things could be addressed by an ESD policy for buildings, because that does look at site area; it looks at canopy cover, it looks at areas for trees, and it considers the performance of the envelope which is where it will capture eaves and orientation and so forth. So the inadequacy of the buildings can be addressed by a building-related policy.

**Wendy LOVELL:** And the style of developments that is being sort of forced onto country communities?

**Natasha PALICH:** Anecdotally, I have heard that we are not seeing that many apartment buildings going up in regional areas, and we are hearing that that is because there is perceived not to be a market for that. There is a market for –

**Wendy LOVELL:** So you might not be seeing apartments, but you are definitely seeing these very small blocks of land with the house built on every centimetre of land – no yard, no tree, no shade canopy, no eaves.

**Natasha PALICH:** Those can all be dealt with by planning, and at the moment there is a reform proposed for ResCode, which is the planning control that looks at residential buildings, ensuring that there is enough room for permeable space, for garden area, which we have in place – we have these things in place – making sure that we retain those and that there is room for canopy trees.

**Wendy LOVELL:** We might have these things in place, but these developments exist. They are everywhere on the edge of the city. They are creating the slums of the future.

**Natasha PALICH:** At the moment, if you have a block of land that is only a single dwelling, it is unlikely to require a planning permit, so it does not go through the planning process. The siting guidelines are covered in the building regs, but they are more deemed to comply. But in theory they should be meeting the same requirements.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Dr Mansfield.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you. Just I guess continuing on that idea of getting higher ESD standards implemented across the board rather than it being a voluntary thing or something individual councils have to try and negotiate, I understand that CASBE has been pushing this for years and it still has not had any response. You were meant to get a response, I think – was it last year that there was meant to be some sort of –

**Natasha PALICH:** We were told that there would be a response following the implementation of the state ESD road map. The first phase of that was gazetted and introduced higher level objectives, and the second stage, which was the more detailed standards – we are not sure where that is at. Potentially that is going to be rolled out through these different planning reforms rather than one discrete ESD package. I am not sure.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Okay. Reflecting on my time being on a council, you get pushback from particularly for-profit developers but even in the not-for-profit space against higher ESD standards, basically saying, ‘Look, it’s too expensive. We need to just get housing built. People need somewhere to live.’ I think this is further to Mr Batchelor’s point before: ‘You can’t expect us to comply with higher ESD standards.’ So there is this tension where it is like, ‘We need to just roll out housing quickly; forget about the higher ESD standards.’ How do you respond to that? Firstly, does it have to be more expensive? Is that true? But also, what are the costs of doing it that way?

**Natasha PALICH:** Different building typologies will pay off ESD requirements in different ways. Hospitals, for example, are on the go the whole time, and they will pay off the investment in a very short amount of time. It is more difficult for things like schools. But for houses there is the potential for pay-off because their operating costs are going to be lower, and for owner-builders the ongoing longevity and robustness of the building will provide them with that affordability. But this has been a conversation that is ongoing. It is not going to stop being ongoing. Whenever you roll out a new technology there is a period of time where it does cost a bit more to incorporate it. We support a whole-of-building approach to affordability, and if we build buildings that will not be safe to live in in 10 or 15 years time, then we question the affordability of doing that.

That is what I have got. It is the operational and it is the climate resilience of that building that makes the difference. You will hear from other witnesses that we need to build buildings and the green tape is preventing us from building houses, but I do not actually think that that is the case. I think there are a wider set of factors that are impacting on the affordability of housing in Victoria and Australia, and I just do not know if we have a choice. So it comes down to providing strong and brave regulation to look after our future communities and the industry will even out. I know that that is not a view that would be supported by sectors of the construction industry.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you very much for your earnest presentation today. I am interested in whether CASBE has an idea or a position, in terms of sustainable building design, on construction materials. Does CASBE rate construction materials in terms of being more climate resilient and/or climate mitigating? Is that in your tool bag?

**Natasha PALICH:** We do not have a materials assessment tool. We assess and consider things like durability, which is also built into the better apartment designs standard, the ability of a building to be reused or disassembled and reused, the recyclability of materials and the content of recycled materials in the materials, but only at a broad scale. It is a complex assessment to undertake, the assessment of materials. I am pleased, though, that there is progress in assessing embodied carbon. Yesterday you would have heard of the NABERS tool. That is a big –

**Melina BATH:** No, no, I have not. That was my next question. We talk about carbon footprint, we talk about net zero, embodied carbon and also importing carbon and the footprint that that requires. I am interested to develop your thoughts on that.

**Natasha PALICH:** Okay. We have not taken any steps on assessing embodied carbon because we have been waiting for an accepted methodology to emerge. An accepted methodology in our eyes is one that is transparent and ideally led by the government, and we have been waiting for the NABERS tool to emerge and that got launched yesterday.

**Melina BATH:** Can you explain that, because I have not read it so far? Everyone else might have done, but –

**Natasha PALICH:** NABERS – National Australian Built Environment Rating System – actually assesses the performance of as-built buildings, so it is an excellent assessment tool because it is actual outcomes. It has developed a module to assess the embodied carbon of building materials. This is something that we have started to ask for. We have got two frameworks that we look after. One is addressed at buildings and one is addressed at residential subdivisions to try and create sustainable subdivisions, and we are trying to introduce the concept and the discussion and a gentle requirement of embodied carbon considerations while we wait for there to be a nationally accepted methodology, which we are now hoping there is. We are yet to introduce that into what we are asking for. This is an example, though, where the Australian government is sort of keeping up because, as I said in the opening statement, there is a commitment to consider the inclusion of embodied carbon in the 2025 national construction, so I am pleased to see that.

There are commercial embodied carbon tools available in the market, but we just need to be careful about understanding the inputs into those tools and the parameters around which they have been assessed. For us, it is also the governance arrangements around those tools. These are the things we need to consider.



**Melina BATH:** My final question is: one of your recommendations looks at introducing light-coloured roof policies, for example. Call me an independent thinker, but what happens if I want to still have a dark blue roof on my house? How far does government policy reach into our decisions as independent people in Australia?

**Natasha PALICH:** Can I be a bit of a smarty-pants?

**Melina BATH:** I threw it out there because I want to have that dialogue.

**Natasha PALICH:** It depends how safe a climate you want. Every single decision matters here.

**Melina BATH:** But you are saying that under CASBE the government should be able to regulate what colour roof you have on your house. Is that a position?

**Natasha PALICH:** That is a position. There is something called the urban heat island effect, which I know many of you have talked about. That is applicable in urban areas. But there is an argument that we have light-coloured roofs across our urban environments everywhere to support a global effort, as I mentioned earlier, of global cooling.

**The CHAIR:** We will get into a discussion about externalities later. Mr Berger.

**John BERGER:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your appearance today. What are the climate impacts that are of most concern to your member councils?

**Natasha PALICH:** I think they vary. We have member councils across Victoria. We have got 44 members, and they range from East Gippsland, which you heard from, to Port Phillip and Warrnambool out in the west to up north to areas that have been under water, so the full range of climate change impacts are felt – and up north too, to areas that have been underwater. I would be guessing, but I think making the decisions about identifying high-risk areas and what to do with development in those areas is one of their biggest challenges, because they are talking about communities that may potentially need to be relocated.

**John BERGER:** Okay. Thanks. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Broad.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you very much for your contribution today. We have been talking a bit about houses. I want to talk about a different type of infrastructure that applies in regional Victoria when we talk about the built environment. I am just interested in levees in particular. You represent quite a number of councils, but in advocating for local communities – I know Barmah were there yesterday, and they are certainly keen to see a levee. In Seymour there have been discussions about levee. In Echuca levees were very valuable, and in Kerang they have protected power facilities and helped the communities get back on their feet a lot quicker. How important are levees to your organisation?

**Natasha PALICH:** That is not something that we can comment on – it is not something I can comment on. It is outside my area of expertise. It is not something that we consider in our frameworks.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. So you have not had member councils raise any concerns about the inspection or maintenance of levees?

**Natasha PALICH:** Not in our planning forums.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. No, that is fine. You referred earlier to a climate-safe building. What is that? How would you define that?

**Natasha PALICH:** I would define a climate-safe building as one that is not susceptible to flooding, that is not susceptible to sea level rise, that is structurally sound enough to withstand severe storm events and that is resilient to bushfire, but it is also one that actually provides a safe haven in times of extreme heat for occupants. And there is one more element – when the power does go off, which we were talking about in the last session, it is able to maintain thermally comfortable and thermally safe conditions without cooling.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. Are there any particular examples that you can put forward as satisfying those elements?

**Natasha PALICH:** The location of the flooding and the bushfire and the sea level rise is location specific. I would say that the Nightingale is an example of a climate-resilient urban building.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Is that in Richmond?

**Natasha PALICH:** The Nightingale projects are across Victoria.

**Gaelle BROAD:** There is one in Ballarat, I think, isn't there?

**Natasha PALICH:** There is one emerging possibly. But it is in Brunswick. I could certainly provide you with a list.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Yes, that would be helpful.

**Natasha PALICH:** We did include in our submission an extract from the World Green Building Council guidelines on resilient building, which looked at the resilient strategies at city scale, neighbourhood scale and a building scale.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Yes. Dr Mansfield touched on this a little bit, but we are going to hear shortly from the Housing Industry Association. In their submission they said they call on the government:

... to place a pause on any additional 'red' and 'green' tape regulatory burden (including but not limited to responding to the impacts of climate change) and let industry focus on building Victoria's share of the National Housing Accord target of 1.2 million homes over the next 5 years.

They talk about creating more consistent, efficient and streamlined processes and reducing unnecessary red tape to support the delivery of new housing. I guess you are talking about a number of different requirements, but what is your response to what they have put forward?

**Natasha PALICH:** Yes, I have read their submission. I think the pressures of a changing climate are going to occur. Our climate is changing. It is going to have an impact on our buildings regardless of whether you want it to or not. A dwelling is not affordable if you cannot afford the insurance, if you cannot afford to heat and cool it, if you cannot afford the energy, if you cannot afford to drive from it, if you cannot afford to get anywhere from it, if it is in the wrong location. It is not affordable if it is unlivable. We could take an approach that we ensure we maintain a construction pathway for the next five years, but we are not taking a long-term view, which is what our members are calling out for.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Our time has concluded. Thanks so much, Natasha, for coming in –

**Natasha PALICH:** Thanks for having me.

**The CHAIR:** and providing us with that evidence. It was really informative. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript to review in about a week.

With that the committee will take a short break.

**Witness withdrew.**