

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Climate Resilience**

Macedon – Tuesday 3 December 2024

#### **MEMBERS**

Ryan Batchelor – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

Gaelle Broad

Jacinta Ermacora

Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Sheena Watt

#### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

John Berger

Ann-Marie Hermans

Evan Mulholland

Rachel Payne

Aiv Puglielli

Richard Welch

**WITNESSES** (*via videoconference*)

Maureen Blair, Secretary,

John Jackson, Member, and

Murray Blair, Member, Barmah Community Group.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Climate Resilience in Victoria. We have joining us via Zoom Maureen Blair from the Barmah Community Group.

Maureen, I will just read out this short statement about the evidence. All the evidence that we take 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 this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of the Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearings, and those transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee and Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council. I will ask our committee members to introduce themselves.

**David ETTERSHPANK:** Hi. I am David Ettershank from the Western Metropolitan Region in Melbourne.

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

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

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

**Gaelle BROAD:** Hi, Maureen. Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for Northern Victoria.

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

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Jacinta Ermacora, Member for Western Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks very much. Maureen, we will hand over to you. When you start, if you would not mind just stating your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of for the purposes of Hansard, and then I will invite you to make an opening statement.

**Maureen BLAIR:** My name is Maureen Blair. I live at [REDACTED] Barmah, Vic, 3639. I am the Secretary of the Barmah Community Group Incorporated. I have here with me John Jackson, who is also a member of our group, and he is going to say a few things about what we want to say. I have already put in a short submission to the committee about the problems that I had personally because of the flood, the lack of action and the impact that it had on our community. I do not know if I need to reiterate that or repeat what I have said.

**The CHAIR:** Only if you would like to draw our attention to any of the particular points, we would be happy.

**Maureen BLAIR:** I think one of the things that was a glaring problem that we had was that too many cooks spoiled the broth. We had too many agencies who did not know who was doing what, and for the first couple of days there was no action. Even though they declared a flood emergency, it took four days for the emergency services to swing into action. My husband is in the CFA, and I have submitted his log of the flood to the

commission already. He said he could not officially do anything until he was told to by the emergency services because the governing agency at the time, I think, was the SES, so the CFA had to wait to be told to swing into action. So what happened was some of our community – and there are only 180 of us – got together, bought some sand, got some sandbags and started sandbagging. If we had not done that, we would have been a lot worse off.

Our community did lose a few houses, which was devastating for those involved, but we managed to save quite a few houses, and that was because we got the sandbags and we got help. We had the army helping us. We had pumps being manned 24 hours a day for a couple of weeks. So it was a great effort after that. But the SES had told us to abandon the town, and if we had abandoned the town, the loss would have been devastating. We probably never would have been able to rebuild our community.

I think that is all I have to say. Unless you have got any questions for me, I would like to pass –

**The CHAIR:** Yes, we will have some questions. You said someone else was with you. Did they want to make –

**Maureen BLAIR:** Yes. It is John Jackson.

**John JACKSON:** My name is John Jackson. I am a local in Barmah, as well as Maureen. I have been here a long time. When our steering committee got set up, basically by the works of the Moira Shire, I came on the steering committee with the sole purpose of trying to get the levee banks underway for a second time. The first time that we attempted to do the levee banks was in 2012. It was an official job done by the shire and the CMA, the Catchment Management Authority, and we went through the process. We got a plan done but that was as far as it went. Back in those days, 2012, it did not matter about humans – the impact on the township. All that mattered was an economical ratio based on the asset value as against the cost of building the levee bank. So that was as far as it went. Now, our understanding now is the rules have changed and us humans are taken into consideration – our welfare – and so we are having a second crack at building levee banks. One of your terms of reference I saw in writing for this meeting was, ‘Do levee banks have an effect on climate change?’ My view, and I could be totally wrong, is that they do not have any significant impact whatsoever. It is really the other way around – levee banks protect us from climate change, and I think those two things are very important to understand. We are expecting higher floods in the future; if we can get a levee bank up instead of spending millions of dollars on recovery, we should be able to sit back and maybe help other people in outlying areas rather than doing all the hard work for ourselves.

The other thing I would like to do just very quickly is cover climate change. There are a lot of sceptics around, but if we went back about 500,000 years ago and I happened to be here, which is impossible, and I walked 100 kilometres to the west of here, I would be at the seaside around the Kerang area. So climate has changed since 500,000 years ago. If we go back to around 80,000 years ago, research on pollen says that back then the whole of Australia was green. Australia is certainly not all green today. So again, we have the change of the climate. Then if we go back about 15,000 years ago – and I still was not here then – I am told by the scientists that I could have almost walked across to Tasmania. So we have gone through having the sea 100 kilometres away from me into the west, to being able to walk to Tassie 15,000 years ago. Climate change is very, very real, and it is impacting on us now, I believe, and Barmah does need help doing some mitigation against it for the future. So there you go; I have said my bit.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Thank you. Maureen, we will just take some questions. I might start with you if I can. What are the biggest changes that you have noticed in terms of the intensity of the weather events that you are getting? Whether it be particularly – well, any sort of weather event. What have you noticed in terms of the intensity of the weather you are subjected to?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Well, I think the weather is more changeable; it is not so stable. I was born in Ireland – I have only been in Australia since 1967 – but what I do remember is that when we first came to Australia it was always very hot in December and January, whereas I feel now the seasons seem to be getting later. So there is definitely climate change, and storms – we seem to have more storms than we have ever had before, and they seem to be quite severe. So the weather does seem to have changed a lot, to me. Whether or not that is as a result of human intervention is up for debate – I would not express an opinion on that – but it is definitely changing.

**The CHAIR:** Maybe you can describe for us in your community how well you think the community-based infrastructure that you have got is able to withstand those changes? How well is it coping with the way the weather is changing?

**Maureen BLAIR:** The only infrastructure we really have in Barmah is the sewage treatment plant and a couple of telephone towers. If we had not sandbagged those, they would have gone under. We really, really need our telephone towers – it is vital. When we had a nearby bushfire the towers went down, and after 24 hours the batteries went flat and nobody in the town had any communication. It was just devastating. So, yes, we need –

**The CHAIR:** It is a common experience we have heard over the course of the inquiry – the sort of vulnerability of telecommunications infrastructure. You mentioned those towers did have battery backup. How long did the batteries last?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Hang on a minute. Muz, how long did the batteries last?

**Murray BLAIR:** 24, 48 hours.

**Maureen BLAIR:** 24 to 48 hours. Sorry, my husband is sitting here now.

**The CHAIR:** You can phone a friend – that is okay. It is an acceptable way to get an answer in this quiz. Has there been any communication with the community from the telecommunications companies about ensuring continuity of service in disaster events?

**Maureen BLAIR:** No, we did not, did we? No, we did not. We were on our own. Actually my husband contacted the army to come out and sandbag the phone towers to make sure we did not lose that communication in the flood, because that was vital – absolutely vital.

**The CHAIR:** And did it work?

**Maureen BLAIR:** It worked, yes. We got the army out – it was great. I know I am singing his praises, but because he has been in the CFA for a long time and he has handled quite a few flood situations in various places – in Swan Hill, where he lived most of his life – he knew what to do, who to call on and how to get things done.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Thanks very much. Ms Broad.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** Thank you very much, Maureen. Can you just tell us about – the community has got a levee bank plan. Where is that at the moment? What progress has been made?

**John JACKSON:** The levee bank plan – it is called ‘the plan’ by the people who are developing it. At this point of time the Moira shire has got a grant for about \$100,000 to do ‘the plan’ again. There is a consultant engineer, Phil Hoare, who is a consultant for the shire, and he is working with Guy Tierney, a hydrologist from the CMA. It is their responsibility to hire some consultants to actually go through the process of developing the plan again. I am not sure whether they have hired the consultants yet, but if they have not it will be very close. I would expect them to be working on the plan early next year.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** Did you want to add to that, Maureen?

**Maureen BLAIR:** No, I am happy.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** That is fine. This inquiry is looking at barriers facing Victoria in upgrading infrastructure to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change, and it talks about including barriers in rebuilding or retrofitting infrastructure. What barriers do you see with progressing a levee? What is making it difficult?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Well, I guess it is because we are a small population and levees are expensive.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** Yes. What has been the impact on insurance in the town with the risk of flooding?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Well, I could only speak for myself, but our insurance went from \$1200 year to \$5000 a year. I rang the insurance company and I asked them why that was and they said, ‘Oh, because you’ve gone

from a category 1, for the lowest risk of flood, to category 5, which is the highest risk of flood.’ That was before we had our floods. This was in 2011. I said, ‘We haven’t had any floods in Barmah.’ We just could not afford to have flood insurance. We just had to drop the flood insurance, so our insurance went back to \$1200 a year. Our property is not worth a great deal of money, so that is quite expensive anyway. But \$5000 was just out of the question. I know other people that I spoke to at the time had the same problem; they simply could not afford flood insurance.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. Are you liaising with other communities who have had experiences with levee banks, because we know that maintenance is an issue in some other places and who takes ownership of them. Have you sort of learned anything from other regions?

**Maureen BLAIR:** We have been very much on our own, and we cannot get anyone to say who owns the levee banks here. No-one will take responsibility for them. Sorry, is that what you meant?

**Gaelle BROAD:** Yes. We certainly saw that challenge during the flood inquiry. With climate change, I guess you have talked about floods, is there any other sort of risk? We know there have been hailstorms in some regions and bushfires and that sort of thing. Is it mainly floods that threaten your area?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Floods and bushfires – yes, we are affected by both because we are right next to the national park.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Mrs Broad. Ms Lovell.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thank you. It is great to see both of you again. We were together with Rikkie and Gaelle just a week or so ago. It is really good to see you. Other than the levee – and we all know the need for the levee in Barmah – what are the other top three to five things that need to be done to better prepare the Barmah township for climate resilience?

**Maureen BLAIR:** For me, apart from the levee, I think it is a meeting place. We do not have a community meeting place that we can go to for meetings, gatherings or whatever. As you could see when you came to visit us last week, the only place we have to meet is the CFA shed, which is not really ideal if we want to have a meeting of the whole community. Even during the floods, when we had a community meeting, we were just out in the open and people came and spoke to us. So I think we need to have some kind of community gathering place that can be used in times of emergencies to provide food, equipment, bedding, and all those sorts of things when we have an emergency and also to provide emotional support to our community. John?

**John JACKSON:** No, I cannot add to that. That is exactly right. Barmah is situated right next to the national park, which is the world’s largest river red gum forest. We have forest right on our doorstep, so we are at risk from fire and extreme conditions, and if climate change carries on the way it is and the storms become more extreme, then we are at a greater risk because of that forest.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Yes, and that was going to be my next question. With the national park, what has been the impact of the national park and the increased risk of fire? Is the park being managed by Parks Victoria or is there an increased bushfire risk? How does the Barmah CFA feel about that?

**John JACKSON:** I am going to talk for myself, but I am sure the whole of Barmah would have pretty much the same opinion. Since 2010 when it became a national park we have seen a continual reduction of work done up in the national park. The place is a total disgrace. There are no proper firebreaks anymore. They do a half-pie job now. A number of roads that were there prior to the national park that created natural firebreaks have literally been overgrown. There is only basically a ring-road around the place now. The place is absolutely disgusting compared with what it used to be prior to being national park, and it is steadily getting worse. We have seen parks personnel reduced constantly and nothing has been replacing them. We had people working in Nathalia at a parks depot, and I could be wrong, but most of them I believe have been shifted, especially the firefighting ones, off to Tatura. So if we get a fire up there now, instead of having a local depot, they have to come from Tatura, which is putting more stress or strain on the local CFA. So yes, in a nutshell, the park now is disgusting compared with what it used to be before it was park.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Okay. And if you did get a fire, what is the condition of the tracks, and are there any barriers to getting the CFA tankers in to fight those fires?

**John JACKSON:** To be quite honest, most of the tracks are in a disgusting state. Our tanker is a four-wheel drive, fortunately, but you certainly would not get two-wheel drive tankers over most of the tracks now. In fact it is hard to walk them. That is how bad it is. It is disgusting. That is the only way to describe it.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thank you. And talking about walking them, I have walked the levee banks – it might have been before or it might have been after the 2017 floods – and looked at the condition of the levee banks. Can you just tell us about what is remaining of the levee banks and the condition of those?

**John JACKSON:** The levee banks that exist now, although they are pretty deteriorated, as you have probably seen, were pushed up by local farmers in 1993, so they are not proper levee banks. Over the years of course you have had trees and saplings growing in them; you have had rabbits digging at them. The state of them – they are really barely worth having.

**Wendy LOVELL:** They are a bit like honeycomb, aren't they? They are holding together by threads.

**John JACKSON:** By fresh air.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Of course in 2017 we were fortunate that the levee banks on the New South Wales side blew out, which meant that we were a little bit more protected on the Victorian side. But I believe that they have since strengthened their levee banks, and ours are only deteriorating even further.

**John JACKSON:** If we go into the rural area north and north-east of Barmah, the farmers around that area and Peter Newman in particular, the leader, have done a lot of work restoring and repairing the levee banks in that rural area. But in Barmah itself, from Barmah up to the national park, which is around about 5 kilometres, the levee banks pretty much do not exist; they have been washed away, particularly in the last flood.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Dr Mansfield.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you. Thank you for appearing today. I am interested in understanding how ready you think Barmah is for some form of weather-related disaster, whether it is fire or flood. Has the experience of the floods led to any changes? Do you feel the town is more prepared than it was previously?

**Maureen BLAIR:** I would have to say no, and I would say I think that the people of our town are so stressed about the mere thought of having another flood and having to go through that again. The Barmah Community Group was formed for this very reason, to actually get something done so that we can prepare, and we can prepare our community for what is to come. But we need help. We need assistance. We just cannot do it on our own; there are just not enough of us.

**John JACKSON:** I totally concur. The official lines of support are not there. If we got another flood tomorrow – and I guess most Barmah people are pretty apprehensive right at the moment; over the last few days we have had 100 mil of rain. There is water lying around. We are not sincerely in any danger of flood, but it makes the nerves – ‘Oh, it’s raining again.’ If the flood comes up tomorrow and it is anywhere near the height of the last one, I am sure it will be us locals that have got to try and do it ourselves. The support from official lines is not there. That is probably why I joined this committee, to try and get the levee banked up, because at least if we get a proper levee structure put in place it is going to give us breathing room.

**Maureen BLAIR:** But also if we could have a community plan that we can implement and put in place if we find ourselves in whatever kind of natural disaster it is, we can prepare. But we are just so unprepared and underequipped for what is to come.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** What support have you had from your local council?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Well, platitudes. We had a whole group of agencies coming down to us after the flood to try and assist us. I think I put in my submission that I ran a holiday rental business – I do not own the property, I manage it – but that property was flooded so I could not operate my business during the flood. The shire came and they said, ‘Oh, you’re a business. We can assist you.’ I said, ‘Well, because my business is very small and I don’t turn over more than \$75,000 a year I’m ineligible for any kind of aid because I’m not registered for GST.’ The shire agreed with me that the help had been badly targeted, and they suggested that I write to my local MP.

But at the time it really was not any help to us. And the help that came was really long after it should have been. It was too little too late, I think. So I think, too, the emotional support – we got phone calls from people who were supposed to be providing support and I just felt it was a waste of money. I mean, what can you do on the end of a telephone line? I think people needed to be on the spot, on the ground, rather than remotely there.

**John JACKSON:** Another little example of what went on with the shire, we did get an evacuation order placed on the town, and we were told that if we evacuated we needed to register and there would be a small payment made to compensate. So a few people evacuated, especially the older folk in the caravan parks, and I am not sure whether they ever saw a payment or not. I am not young, but I was that stressed that once the flood reached its peak the wife and I decided to evacuate. So we followed the procedure and we registered with the shire, and the shire said, 'Oh, this is great you have registered. Fill out the paperwork.' They rang us up not that long after and said, 'You will be eligible for a payment' and all that sort of thing. The wife and I took off and we had a week away and that was absolutely needed, and we had relief and came back and then helped again as the flood receded. I got a knock on the door about a month later from three shire people asking how I was going, which is very nice, and did I need any help and how had it affected me. A week later they sent me a note out and said, 'You are not eligible for that payment.' The shire was mixed in its reactions and my feeling was they were going through steps that they had to go through and they were not really looking at what they were doing and how they were dealing with people. The money had nothing to do with it. I was not concerned about it. I just registered because they told me to register. But that is just a little anecdote that shows you the feeling of a local person going through a flood.

**Maureen BLAIR:** That was the thing. The people that left the town, most of them got payments, but the people that stayed here and sandbagged and fought to save the town got nothing.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Dr Mansfield. Mrs Tyrrell.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Thank you, Chair. Where do you think the state government could improve on assisting your community in the event of a weather-related emergency?

**John JACKSON:** Well, flood mitigation is absolutely essential. If the state government is willing to help us get the plan up and get our levee banks up, they will have done a magnificent job, and I will be personally ever grateful for it.

**Maureen BLAIR:** I would have to say local liaison. They really need to take notice of the people on the ground. We need people close by who know what is going on and can say what is happening because there are so many mixed messages from so-called experts all over the place when this is happening. For example, when we had our meeting, we were told by Guy Tierney that the flood was going to top at 7.33, and he said, 'I think that will be it. I think that is what it is going to be.' Then there was another friend, Leon Atkinson, who is the manager of the Cummeragunja settlement which is on the other side of the river in New South Wales, who stood up and said, 'I have been told by my experts in New South Wales that the flood is going to go to 7.6, so what is it going to be?' That is frightening, because the experts cannot agree, so what do we do? We have to go with the worst-case scenario, which we did. It is all very well for experts to make their best guess, but that is just their best guess. The people on the ground are the ones who are going to suffer.

Could I invite my husband to actually take part in this discussion? Because I think he really knows a lot more about this than I do.

**The CHAIR:** Maybe, Maureen, if he could just state his full name for the record, when he sits down.

**Maureen BLAIR:** Yes.

**Murray BLAIR:** Hi, everybody. Murray Andrew Blair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Murray.

**Maureen BLAIR:** You were talking about local liaison, and you thought that was what was needed.

**Murray BLAIR:** Yes. Look, I was – I suppose you would call me – the incident controller during the floods. My role within CFA – well, if there is a major impact from bushfires, I would probably be part of that incident controlling system as well. But one of the things that probably needs to be considered by the federal

government, state governments and probably local government is the fact that they need to talk to people on the ground who are being affected rather than putting things like 'Evacuate immediately', because, as I said, if we had evacuated immediately, the town would have gone under. We built the levee banks up. I was very adamant about getting crews to maintain it after somebody, within their power, decided night crews were not needed. However, we still needed pumps and stuff like that to keep the town protected. So I jumped up and down and ended up getting crews to stay overnight because the people of Barmah were absolutely, to put it simply, knackered after five weeks. And that is what it was. I was five weeks at the fire station, and I hardly left there. I was getting phone calls at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning from concerned residents about what was going on, and I was fortunate enough to be in that position where I could advise them or had contact details of who to talk to to get that information. Realistically, the communication needs to be both ways, not just one way, which is what we found it was in a lot of the cases. I would put out a question for more pumps. 'What do you want more pumps for?' Come on, it is a flood; what do you think I need more pumps for? You know, that sort of thing. So they are not really talking to people on the actual spot, on the ground.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Okay. Thank you. You mentioned before, Maureen, in regard to your insurance and how it went up in 2011 that Barmah did not flood before that. How often did Barmah flood before just recently?

**Maureen BLAIR:** We had a small flood, I think was it, in 2017.

**Murray BLAIR:** 2017 was a big one.

**Maureen BLAIR:** [Zoom dropout] because the banks broke on the New South Wales side, so it was not a crisis. We did have some sandbagging, but it was quite minor flooding. I have only been in Barmah for the last 11 years. John has been here much longer than we have.

**John JACKSON:** Thirty.

**Maureen BLAIR:** John has been here 30 years. How often would you say Barmah floods?

**John JACKSON:** It probably floods about every six years.

**Maureen BLAIR:** John has just said it probably floods approximately every six years, but as to the severity of that flood, it varies.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Okay. Thank you. Unfortunately, I am out of time.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Ermacora, you had a question?

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Hello. I am hearing about the levee. How much do you estimate it would cost to build the levee, and who do you believe should pay for it?

**Murray BLAIR:** I will put John back on for that one. That is his department.

**Maureen BLAIR:** How long is a piece of string?

**John JACKSON:** Yes, that is exactly right. How long is a piece of string? I have no idea what it would cost. To be sensible, the way to build a levee in Barmah is mostly to raise roads. Some of the roads belong to the state and some of them belong to the shire, but by raising the level of some of the roads, you effectively put a levee bank around three-quarters of Barmah, and you are only required to build a levee bank along one section. You would be well aware that it costs a lot of money to build roads, so I am not in a position to estimate costs.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Just giving me a bit of a sense of distance, is this a couple of hundred metres of levees or a couple of hundred kilometres of levees?

**John JACKSON:** Okay, so we would need approximately 1.5 kilometres of new levee and then we would need approximately 8 kilometres of roads depending on where we actually put the banks, and the plan will make the decision. You could put the levee bank on a wider range, making room for development in Barmah, or you could put it right in close and make no room for development, so there are options, and that is what the plan looks at. But maybe, say, 8 kilometres of roads and a kilometre and a half of new levee bank.



**Jacinta ERMACORA:** And just on a high-level question around who should pay for it, what are your thoughts on who should pay for the levee in Barmah?

**John JACKSON:** You are being nasty, you know that?

**Maureen BLAIR:** It is a good question, isn't it?

**John JACKSON:** But it is a good question. The catchment management authority with Guy Tierney and Phil Hoare, with a consulting engineer, they are going to work out who owns it – I am not sure – and they will probably work out who will maintain it. Guy Tierney talked to us at an earlier meeting, and he suggested there was a lot of money available, if you knew where to go and get it, for things like levee banks.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Okay, thanks.

**Melina BATH:** It is at the end of a rainbow.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Yes, let us know where it is. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Thanks, Ms Ermacora. Ms Bath, any questions?

**Melina BATH:** Thank you, Chair. On that note, I am looking for rainbows all the time for regional Victoria. Thank you very much for your care of your community and your passion and your volunteerism. There are a couple of things I have just been picking up, Maureen. First of all, I have looked it up – you presented to the flood inquiry, and it was submission 596. That is where your submission is, not to this one, but that is okay. I am really interested: in our flood inquiry on this discussion, recommendation 37 of our flood inquiry report stated that the Victorian government should clarify flood mitigation infrastructure – and we can call those levees included – for accountability and transparency, and who is responsible for each. So that is a recommendation that this committee has made to government, and we are waiting on a response. I guess I am interested in the community plan. Would you like to provide that to this committee? After we finish today, could you submit that to this committee, take that on notice?

**Maureen BLAIR:** I do not have a copy of it yet. I do not think it has been created, has it?

**Wendy LOVELL:** No, the community plan one.

**Melina BATH:** The community plan?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Oh, yes, sorry. Of course.

**Melina BATH:** Could you just provide that for good context?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Yes.

**John JACKSON:** The CFA has a community fire plan.

**Maureen BLAIR:** No, we have the copy of the community plan that we had done by Shepp, and we have got printed copies that we have had done.

**Melina BATH:** Great. If you could take it on notice and just respond to the committee secretariat after we have finished, that would be fine.

**Maureen BLAIR:** Okay. I have some. I can post you one or I can scan it and send it.

**Melina BATH:** Beautiful. We will work that out. Thank you.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Or, Maureen, a link from the Moira shire would do. There is a PDF, I think, on Moira shire.

**Melina BATH:** That is okay. Just to provide a bit more context and material. I am interested – you have spoken about, I think, the Goulburn catchment management authority.

**Maureen BLAIR:** Yes, Goulburn Broken management authority.

**Melina BATH:** Yes, so are they an impediment or a facilitator for your vision to come to fruition? Are they being supportive or are they being, say, slow?

**John JACKSON:** They are totally supportive. Guy Tierney represented them at our meeting. I can only say as far as levee banks go, the shire and the CMA are supportive.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. That is great to know. In relation to the built environment and a levee or not and the state of the Barmah National Park – and I was up at Moira Gums there five months after the floods and saw how the floods decimated the environment and the infrastructure – how much of an impact do you think that makes, these sorts of floods and also the state of the Barmah forest and the weeds and the lack of maintenance of roads? How much environmental cost would that eventuate? The lack of maintenance of roads and the like there, what sort of an impact would there be if there is another either flood or fire event?

**Maureen BLAIR:** Well, I think Barmah has a long and sad history. When the national park was being logged, we had a thriving community and we had school excursions and we had tourism. And then when it was converted to a national park, the government of the day promised that they were going to develop tourism industries in Barmah and that did not happen. The little industry that we had – we did have the *Kingfisher* little boat that used to do tours, but that is not happening anymore. There is very little available for any kind of tourism in Barmah apart from walking in the national park. We used to be able to ride horses in the forest, we cannot do that anymore. We used to have brumbies that people used to come and look at – actually they are not brumbies; they are heritage horses – but that has been taken away.

**John JACKSON:** Firewood.

**Maureen BLAIR:** We used to be able to get firewood. Now we cannot get firewood anymore. Barmah, it just seems, has been forgotten and that nobody really seems to want to help it keep going. That just seems to be getting worse and worse and worse, which is a shame, because the Barmah National Park is a beautiful place.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** We are out of time. Maureen, John and Murray, thank you so much for your evidence today. You will be provided with a copy of a transcript to review shortly.

With that the committee will take a break for lunch.

**Witnesses withdrew.**