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Inquiry into Climate Resilience

Submission into the Parliamentary Inquiry

(a) the main risks facing Victoria's built environment and infrastructure from climate change and the impact these will have on the people of Victoria;

Recent years have seen an alarming increase in the frequency and severity of climate-related disasters in Gippsland, including bushfires, floods, droughts, and storms.

These events pose substantial threats to both the built environment and infrastructure. Storms, characterized by strong winds, pose direct safety hazards through flying debris and structural damage. Climate change also means that storms are behaving differently and with warmer temperatures the atmosphere holding more moisture leading to more intense rain events.

The aftermath of these storms often leads to protracted recovery periods, adversely affecting mental health and community well-being. There can be significant damage to infrastructure both public and private as well as roads leading to isolation of communities and higher maintenance costs. Sea level rise and the resulting effects on inundation and high tides are already impacting coastal communities.

Economically, the region faces heightened challenges, with businesses suffering and insurance costs rising due to the increased prevalence of these climate events. For some these rising insurance costs or inability to get insurance will mean they have to move out of the area. Moreover, bushfires have wrought extensive devastation on communities, resulting in widespread displacement, fragmentation of social networks, and significant loss of social cohesion.

There are insufficient self-reliant places with appropriate communications and necessary services, regardless of electricity, water supply, internet existing in Victorian regional towns.

These impacts underscore the urgent need for enhanced resilience and adaptive strategies to mitigate future risks and improved understanding and policies where adaptation may not be an option.

(b) how the Victorian Government is preparing for and mitigating the impacts of climate change on our built environment and infrastructure;

We suggest that the Victorian Government:

- Strengthening Infrastructure: Upgrading building codes, retrofitting bridges, roads, and energy infrastructure to withstand extreme weather conditions. There is poor suitability of the existing housing stock to withstand future climate scenarios - this is not just extreme event, but also heating and cooling, draught-proofing, disproportionately impacting the least advantaged people
- Disaster Preparedness and Response: Developing comprehensive emergency response strategies with clear communications that resist large amounts of online traffic. Increasing funding for fire services, flood control measures, and drought management plans. Energy utilities should factor in stand-alone power generation for smaller communities who are likely to be impacted and DNSP's should prepare their own comprehensive response plan to energy outages – too often rural towns wait hours or days for the electricity to come back on with a website that tracks the outage often overwhelmed.
- Community Engagement and Support: Educating and involving local communities in disaster preparedness plans, supporting agricultural communities against drought impacts, and ensuring efficient and equitable distribution of resources in times of crisis. Develop and encourage community inventories of skills and resources so people know where to go to and who can help and provide support for existing trusted networks (churches, Landcare, RSL) to provide conduits of information and resourcing. Phone trees, food banks or simply knocking on your elderly neighbours door should be encouraged and supported.
- Emergency Preparedness: Implementing warning systems to alert residents of approaching events, ensuring readiness in terms of evacuation plans and in some cases emergency shelters.
- Research and Innovation: Investing in research to better understand the impacts of climate change on local conditions and to develop innovative solutions tailored to Gippsland's specific needs. Sensitivity index should be created for a range of conditions and the cumulative impact of multiple events and stressors.

(e) what more could be done to better prepare Victoria's built environment and infrastructure, and therefore the community, for future climate disaster events;

- Public Awareness Campaigns: Improve public awareness of climate change impacts on infrastructure, liveability and insurance risks both current and into the future of private infrastructure (houses) and public. Community is making better informed decisions on where to buy and build and the risks involved.
- Insurance Discounts: Work with the insurance industry to develop products that encourage community led resilience, such as reduced premiums for properties that implement specific resilience improvements. Encourage loan schemes like the Bank Australia eco-pause scheme - lower interest rates whilst implementing climate adaptation.
- Community-Driven Resilience Funding: Empower communities to proactively enhance their resilience against climate change by establishing dedicated funding mechanisms for local projects. This initiative would support community-led investments in critical infrastructure adaptations and innovations tailored to local needs. Examples of such investments could include the installation of community batteries to ensure power stability during outages, the construction of emergency shelters for use during disasters, the development of advanced warning systems to alert residents of imminent threats, and the reinforcement of existing infrastructure deemed vulnerable to climate impacts.
- Underground Power Transmission: Implement underground power lines for critical electricity supply projects, such as connections to offshore wind farms. This approach minimizes the vulnerability of power infrastructure to climate-related disruptions such as severe storms or bushfires. By burying transmission lines, the reliability and safety of the electricity supply are significantly improved, ensuring a more stable and resilient energy network.
- Reliable public Transport. Improved reliable public transport and emergency transport networks to mobilise after a climate triggered emergency.
- Support a modern day "phone tree". Support and encourage local services to check in on vulnerable neighbours and ensure no-one left behind and all have a safe place to go.

(f) whether further inquiries or investigation may be needed into other aspects of climate change adaptation and climate disaster preparedness in Victoria, noting that climate change will have far-reaching impacts on all aspects of Victorian life, including but not limited to biodiversity, human health, primary production, industry, emergency services and more, and that while these areas may overlap with the matters covered in this inquiry, they may also warrant further investigation in their own inquiries.

Need to examine the cumulative impact of multiple events - the algal blooms that follow the floods that follow the fires. These are not isolated events and have a larger impact than the initial one that makes news headlines and captures public imagination. Recovery has a very long tail and is more frequently being interrupted by subsequent compounding events.

Prepared by

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