

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations**

Melbourne—Wednesday, 12 May 2021

*(via videoconference)*

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Ms Bridget Vallenge

**WITNESS**

Ms Claire Ferres Miles, Chief Executive Officer, Sustainability Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234. Thank you so much, Claire, for joining the committee today at this public hearing for the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations.

On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land, and we pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and any elders from other communities who may in fact be joining us today. I also extend a very warm welcome again to members of the public and media who may also be watching this hearing.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee is conducting to inform itself about issues relevant to the inquiry. Before we begin, Claire, I need to point out just a couple of things to you. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. What this means is that you can speak freely without the fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is really important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments that you make outside of this hearing, even if you are just simply restating what you said here today.

You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and to approve, and corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you again for taking time out of your day to come and talk to the committee. My name is Sarah Connolly and I am the Chair of the committee. I am also the lucky Member for Tarneit. I will get Paul to introduce himself.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks, Sarah. I am Paul Hamer and I am now the Member for Box Hill, but Claire and I used to work together, so we have known each other for quite some time.

**The CHAIR:** You will feel right at home then in this conversation, Claire.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** We are now both of us in different roles.

**The CHAIR:** That is fantastic. David Morris is going to join us shortly. He is the Deputy Chair of this committee, and he is the lucky Member for Mornington, lovely Mornington. You are just by yourself today, Claire?

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Yes, that is correct.

**The CHAIR:** So if you just want to, for Hansard, state your full name and your position, and then if you have a presentation pack you are more than welcome to go ahead with that. Some witnesses do not have a slideshow. They just want to sort of read out a little bit of a statement or talk about their submission. So whatever you are happy doing we are easy with.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Great. Thank you, Sarah, and thank you, Paul, and David, when he joins us. My name is Claire Ferres Miles, and I am the CEO of Sustainability Victoria. I do not have a presentation today, but I did want to spend some time just talking to the committee in two parts. Firstly, just to share with you a little bit about what Sustainability Victoria does, and secondly, in terms of three pieces of research that we have recently undertaken that I think will be of interest to the committee in terms of your terms of reference about environmental infrastructure.

So to kick off, Sustainability Victoria is a statutory delivery agency of the Victorian government. We are governed by the *Sustainability Victoria Act 2005*. Our purpose is to support all Victorians to accelerate our transition to net zero emissions, a circular economy, and we have two key policy outcomes to achieve. Firstly, net zero emissions by 2050, as outlined in the *Climate Change Act*, and more recently with our interim targets of 50 per cent by 2030, as announced in the climate change strategy released only a week ago, on 3 May 2021. We also have the *Recycling Victoria* policy, a 10-year policy announced on 26 February 2020 by the

Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio, which will transform the waste and resource recovery sector in Victoria, a significant opportunity for empowering the collaborative relationships between governments, industry and households, where we are seeking to change our behaviour; to change our mindset from a culture of waste to a culture of respectful resources; to design waste out of the system; to ensure our resources, our products and materials sustain our economy for as long as possible; to adopt circular procurement; to invest in new infrastructure and new ideas; and to create new jobs of the future.

Programs delivered by Sustainability Victoria support Victorian communities, academia, industry, businesses, schools and households to reduce waste; to work towards lower waste living; to recycle more; to invest in resource recovery, innovation and infrastructure; and to act on climate change, with energy efficiency upgrades, renewable energy and community-led energy initiatives. Sustainability Victoria provides three unique services for Victoria. We accelerate infrastructure and innovation investment, we lead statewide education and behaviour change, and we deliver direct community action in neighbourhoods and in regions. The quality of our programs that we achieve is due to our deep stakeholder connections and relationships in place and our understanding of community needs and aspirations, which is informed by quality data, market intelligence and behavioural insights.

So why is environmental infrastructure important in response to climate change, health and wellbeing? The transition to a zero net emissions circular economy provides a significant opportunity for Victoria to deliver policy outcomes that will achieve both prosperity for people and prosperity for the planet. Environmental infrastructure are the lungs of our cities and neighbourhoods, essential to both the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our communities. They have active transport corridors for walking and cycling; are hubs for community sporting facilities; have a positive impact on physical and mental health; connect us to nature, flora and fauna; are biodiversity conservation hubs; provide a safe space for climate extremes; can prevent erosion and flooding; ameliorate the urban heat island effect; and contribute to climate change adaptation.

Sustainability Victoria is a delivery agency of the government and plays a crucial role in supporting all Victorians to take action on climate change in their homes, in their workplaces, in their schools and in their broader community. Relevant to this inquiry, SV has carried out three pieces of research that I wanted to bring to the attention of the committee: Victorians' perceptions of climate change completed in 2017, our ResourceSmart Schools program student wellbeing study in 2019 and a study in 2020 about the health impacts of climate change.

Firstly, Victorians' perception of climate change: in 2016 we commissioned research with the objective of gaining baseline quantitative data on Victorians' attitudes and behaviours in relation to climate change to inform development of programs, including behaviour change and information campaigns, to guide policy and to measure future changes in community sentiment. This social research was conducted with a representative sample of 3300 Victorians aged 15 years and over. The key findings relevant to this inquiry are: Victorians are aware of the impact of climate change on the natural environment and are concerned that these impacts will directly affect them and their families. Key concerns vary across the state, but those mentioned include bushfires, drought, heatwaves, coastal erosion, crop failure and air pollution. Action on infrastructure design to protect Victoria's local environment from climate change damage and increase nature's resilience to extreme weather are considered to be positive initiatives that will assist to alleviate this concern and, what is more, is expected by those that were surveyed. Nine in 10 Victorians expect and support state and local government action on climate change, including protecting their local environment and preserving nature. And protecting biodiversity and preserving a healthy environment for future generations was one of the Victorians' main concerns about how we respond to climate change.

The second research piece completed in 2019 was related to the ResourceSmart Schools program, which is delivered by Sustainability Victoria. Since 2008, 1500 Victorian schools have participated in this program, and in the most recent 2020–21 state budget this program received funding of \$8.7 million over the next three years to continue delivery through till 2023. In 2019 SV commissioned research to explore how this program contributes to student wellbeing. The goal of the research was to investigate the potential link between the wellbeing of schools and their engagement with the ResourceSmart Schools program to better understand the co-benefits for teachers and students. The key findings relevant for this inquiry are: the study validated the link between the ResourceSmart Schools program and increased student wellbeing. The biodiversity module was identified by teachers participating in the study as most linked to increasing wellbeing for students. Students' views about environmental sustainability were highly positive, and 83 per cent of students agreed or strongly

agreed that because their school cares about the environment it contributed positively to their individual wellbeing.

Being at a ResourceSmart school for Victorian students made students feel happy that their school cares about helping the environment; proud that their school cares about the future; and safe and healthy, knowing that their school maintains a clean, green environment. They felt motivated to care for nature, wildlife and the environment beyond their school. They felt engaged and connected to nature by being outdoors. And most importantly, they felt empowered by having a voice and taking action and felt that they were making a difference.

And the third research that was completed last year looked to identify the relationship between health and climate change. Sustainability Victoria conducted statewide research in 2020 about the views of the Victorian public and healthcare professionals on the relationship between health and climate change. We know that health, in particular in the last 12 months, is a high-priority issue for all Victorians, and this research sought to provide an important evidence base that furthers our understanding of the link between health and climate change. The goal of the research was to measure awareness and understanding, and the key findings relevant for this inquiry are that data shows that many young Victorians are overwhelmed by a range of negative emotions in relation to environmental degradation and climate change. Most healthcare professionals believe that mental health conditions, such as eco-anxiety, will become more common as climate change impacts intensify. Importantly for this inquiry, access to thriving natural environments and the opportunity to help protect these spaces is believed to assist in reducing anxiety and improving the coping ability of young people who are feeling overwhelmed by the climate crisis.

Secondly, public housing tenants are at higher risk from climate change-related health impacts due to the poor thermal quality of Victoria's public housing. In the past 12 months 45 per cent have had to leave their home because it was either too hot or too cold to stay. And as we know, as heatwaves increase so will the need to provide safe community spaces, including green spaces and tree canopies that provide shade and a cooling effect for these residents.

Sustainability Victoria strives to be at the forefront of research, data, and government, industry and community insights to then develop evidence-based action to ensure that everything we do delivers the highest public value and positive impact and outcomes for all Victorians as we strive to accelerate Victoria's transition to a zero-net-emissions circular economy, and I am very happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks so much, Claire. It is great to be reminded about the wonderful work that Sustainability Victoria does, and indeed I am a huge fan of your ResourceSmart Schools. There is one school in my local electorate—only one—that is now a ResourceSmart School, and I am so proud of them; they have done a marvellous job. Just before I jump into some questions I will get my colleagues David Morris and Danielle Green to introduce themselves. David.

**Mr MORRIS:** David Morris, Member for Mornington and Deputy Chair of the committee and also Shadow Minister for Local Government, for housing and for aging.

**Ms GREEN:** Thank you, Chair. Danielle Green, Member for Yan Yean—a very large, growing electorate—and Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and for regional Victoria. And a number of my schools—I have got many, many schools across the Yan Yean electorate—are ResourceSmart Schools, and it is a great program. Thanks for joining us.

**The CHAIR:** Claire, I will kick off with the first question. It is probably an easy one for you. As you would know, in the outer western suburbs we have not got a lot of trees, urban shade or tree canopy, and we have got a bit of a heat island effect happening. I notice one of the great things about the ResourceSmart Schools is that you have planted more than 5.4 million trees. That is a lot of trees. Can you talk a little bit about how you think this should become or could become part of a broader government-wide strategic program to develop community awareness and involvement in the maintenance and development of environmental infrastructure—to me, schools seem like a really good place to start, because kids are really involved and hands-on in this space—and what you think that might look like?

So I have had some conversations with some of the locals here, and one recently reminded me of the concept of a 'one child, one tree' type of ethos and planting a tree per child—maybe that starts at prep—and things like

that. Can you talk a little bit about that and how it could be incorporated as a bigger, broader, government-wide strategic program?

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Thanks, Sarah, for the question. Yes, we are very proud of the 5.1 million trees that were planted with ResourceSmart Schools but acknowledge that that is just in Victorian schools on their own educational land property. I do know, and it is great to have David join us, in terms of many local government councils that they do have an urban forest strategy and they are seeking to increase the planting across their municipalities. There are a huge number of volunteer groups, through landcare groups and others, that do community-based planting programs. But in terms of a statewide initiative, I know there are many cities around the world that have adopted fairly ambitious—I know Paris, for example, has adopted incredibly ambitious—urban forestry strategies to accelerate the uptake and the planting of trees. We all know trees take time to grow, and so it is a multigenerational-type strategy in terms of planting and then achieving the urban heat island and the cooling effect of trees. So there definitely could be an opportunity for Victoria, particularly across the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning portfolio as Crown land managers in terms of a more explicit policy position across government in tree planting of assets that are owned by the Victorian government.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I am going to throw to my colleague David.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thank you, Sarah. Hi, Claire. Firstly, my apologies for being late. Now, if you covered this issue in your presentation, please say so. I was detained unavoidably. Down the bottom of the first page of your submission you are talking about perceptions of climate change. It notes that action on infrastructure designed to protect the local environment from climate change and increase resilience would help alleviate some of the concerns that exist in the community. Can you talk to us about that in a little more detail? And perhaps secondly, what actions do you think are likely to be most successful in achieving that outcome of dealing with that perception?

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Thanks, David, for the question. Yes, that research definitely told us that nine out of 10 Victorians expect and support state and local government action on climate change and they see a real need, that protecting our local environment and preserving our natural assets is a key component about that, particularly with a focus on biodiversity, and we are seeing fairly extreme negative impacts in terms of climate change about biodiversity loss, which is not just unique to Victoria but across the world. It also links to the other research I mentioned in my presentation, that the more that as individuals people feel empowered to take action in their local community, that has a positive impact on perceptions of health and wellbeing, particularly in young people that feel overwhelmed by the climate crisis and their inability to affect it.

Some of the key actions—I think building on Sarah's question about the potential for a more explicit statewide policy across Victoria's role as a Crown land manager in terms of tree planting, that is definitely one type of initiative. There is also a huge role in the work that Sustainability Victoria does about how the state government is a partner with community groups so that we are facilitated to work hand in glove, because every community is unique in terms of their neighbourhood and region and working with them to understand what they want to do. So I think it could be an enhanced role of the Victorian government in terms of supporting community houses and volunteering groups and not-for-profits in terms of working with them to understand what they think is the most impactful action that they could take. So some of them might see it as tree planting. We are obviously delivering a lot of programs about renewables on council buildings and community houses and community assets—energy efficiency-type programs.

But I definitely would say there is a huge role to play in terms of the Victorian government absolutely being a partner with local communities—not coming down necessarily with a top-down approach but working very much as a facilitator. A good example of that is the community power harvest program that Sustainability Victoria is delivering that was funded in the recent state budget. That is very much about working with regional communities and metropolitan communities to deliver community renewable energy projects. Our role is absolutely about community capacity building and supporting sustainable finance mechanisms and private sector investment to deliver the infrastructure, so it is building capability and capacity in communities to do these projects.

**Mr MORRIS:** Terrific. Thank you very much for that. Thanks, Sarah.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, David. That is some good feedback, Claire. I am going to throw to Danielle.

**Ms GREEN:** Sarah, I just had a recalcitrant dog. Do you just mind going to someone else?

**The CHAIR:** Sure. Paul.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks, Sarah. Thanks, Claire. The question I have actually builds on what David was saying. It is to do with, I guess, your behavioural change programs and building that community capacity. I guess I am hoping for perhaps some blue-sky thinking here in terms of: what are the areas that you think perhaps need to have the greatest intervention? Where are the greatest opportunities to actually build on the work that you have done in particular environment areas? Obviously the work you mentioned on schools and on the power hubs has been very successful. There has been a really large take-up and participation rate on those initiatives. Are there other programs that may just be at the moment a bit intractable because there might be regulatory issues or other issues that are preventing those elements from getting off the ground? Sorry, it is a bit of an open-ended question, but it would be useful from a committee perspective to just get your thoughts on that.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Thanks, Paul, for the question. My answer will be slightly not focused on environmental infrastructure but sort of more broadly in terms of our response to climate change. I think across Victoria we do not quite understand or have quantified the scale of behavioural change that our society will need to experience in the next decade in terms of a decade of action. If you start to look at global megatrends in terms of what is happening across the world, one of the biggest things—and I will speak again to our young people in terms of the marches that occurred after the bushfires in 2020—is that there is a growing movement and a social movement around conscious consumerism. I think that is a really interesting area which requires behaviour change, really focusing on not necessarily reducing consumption but looking at, actually, consumption that speaks to people's values and ethics; speaks to local production and consumption of locally grown food and locally manufactured materials and products; looks at circularity—so looking at consumption where you are keeping resources within the economy for longer and recycling; and has a focus on quality—so spending money to buy things that will last longer that can be repaired, can be recycled.

So I think in terms of a society-wide change, that is one of the biggest things that we will need to have a discussion with the community about—this idea of conscious consumerism and actually bringing in some of the social movements that are emerging from teenagers and the younger generation about their desire to buy better and to buy products that are actually good for them but are also good for the planet. I think that is a fantastic thing that the Victorian government could lead in terms of key information, education and messages—the communications that we could have across the Victorian community over many years. That is one idea in terms of a sort of large-scale program.

I would also say the reform that we are leading on Recycling Victoria of course contributes to emissions reduction, so there is a key part for that. The other big one, I would say, which, Paul, you would well know, is transport. Transport has got some significant regulatory barriers to transform what are perceived as barriers that cannot be changed in terms of our mode choices and how we move around the state. Interestingly enough, I do not think we fully understand the impact of COVID in terms of hybrid working and changing the way we live and work, which has had and could continue to have positive impacts on our emissions reduction.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks, Claire. I agree we are sort of moving a bit away from environmental infrastructure. But for most of those programs, do you see that as a funding issue? I guess putting some of the transport issues aside, is that a funding issue, or are there other barriers in place in terms of feedback—those sort of education programs and other behavioural change programs?

**Ms FERRES MILES:** It does require funding, but I do think we need to look more broadly at the scale of incentives and the role of government. It is not always about direct grant programs to build infrastructure. It is about, like we mentioned before, broadscale building community capability and capacity to lead their own community's transition. That is one of the key ones. Behaviour change is about education using behavioural insights and research to understand the barriers about how people make choices about their behaviour. It requires funding, but it is not funding for infrastructure that is tangible; it is a broad, multi-year research- and evidence-based strategy for how you support all members of the community and to better understand the barriers about the choices they are making and how you can provide information to support them to make

different choices. So there is always a role of government in terms of the carrot and stick, in terms of how you support and empower people to change their behaviour or to build different types of infrastructure to deliver policy, and there is always a role for regulation when needed in terms of mandating it, and I believe government has to do both.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks, Claire. I might have another question later, but that is it for the moment.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Paul. Danielle.

**Ms GREEN:** Thank you. Sorry, I just had a dog leap over me before—just one of those things with working from home. Claire, I really enjoyed the presentation, and I am sorry I missed just the start of it. Firstly, I wish I shared your optimism about hybrid working. I use public transport all the time, and I know that all the car parks in my electorate, rail car parks, are empty and there has been an 8 per cent increase in traffic—so maybe longer term, when people's anxiety is resolved a bit. It seems like at the moment it is actually adding to traffic, not detracting, but that is something different.

I was interested in what you were talking about regarding the alternative energy program, which I am familiar with. You talked about that capacity building, and that is with regional communities and there is proposed to be one metropolitan project, so that is good that we will have those as demonstration projects. Would Sustainability Victoria work with groups in their infancy, when they are trying to put those deals together, rather than just the ones that have been successful in being admitted to the program? Because I am Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria I come across a lot of groups, and in my electorate as well, and it just seems like there are a lot of people with goodwill, but they do not necessarily know how to get to the point of connecting with capital and funding and all of those sorts of things.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** So that is absolutely the intent of the program, and I will just say that we have done a lot of thinking. When I joined Sustainability Victoria I would have described us as almost a start-up organisation. We did a lot of pilots to test propositions or evidence. And now looking at how you take a start-up to scale up, I would say scaling up is not always taking a proposition and making it bigger, particularly in the climate change space. Like, community power hubs is about replication of a model, about how you take that thinking out of community capability and capacity building and be able to replicate that in other neighbourhoods and other regions or areas that have interest. One of the big learnings that we have found is there is a key issue in the environmental portfolio about volunteer burnout. There are people in our communities who are really passionate but just are stretched too thin and they just run out of hours, and so a key part of the community power hubs program is actually having funding from government to pay for a staff member to support the community groups in terms of building their capacity.

Sustainability Victoria staff also work in the communities in terms of leading workshops. We have a sustainable financing fund in terms of how to connect into that. A key outcome of the program is not to have a continual drain on government money about how you continue to build a sustainable funding mechanism to employ staff in other areas. So we definitely are not just looking for what we call the lighthouse communities, those communities that are well advanced on their community transition, but are looking to also support groups that are just emergent and are just starting to think about it.

**Ms GREEN:** Good.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Danielle. Claire, I just have a question. You have given us some really great ideas that help formulate recommendations. What would be your top three things that you would like to see come out of the committee as a recommendation in the final report that you think would better support and ensure environmental infrastructure for growing populations? What do you think are the top three? You might have 30, I do not know, but what would your top ones be?

**Ms FERRES MILES:** I think the first one is the health benefits but also the avoided health costs of investment in environmental infrastructure and seeing that as a core part of our urban fabric—that actually green infrastructure is not just a tree and some grass, it is actually a fundamental part of community health and wellbeing, and there are incredible benefits and avoided health costs by investing. It is an offset cost by investing in environmental infrastructure. That is one.

The second one, I would say, is we definitely need as a society to see parks and greening in our communities as much more than grass, that they have a significant role in terms of biodiversity and climate change in terms of resilient communities. So I think that is a key one in terms of how we could leverage that, and I know you have had a presentation from Matthew Jackson about the role of our green spaces in recreation in terms of physical health. I do not think we have done enough work—we do not understand and we are only starting to emerge our understanding about the role of green spaces for our mental health and wellbeing, so I think that is a key part of it, and we experienced that a little bit during COVID in terms of the exponential use of our green spaces and parks purely for mental health and wellbeing in connection with nature. So I think that is a key part of it.

The third one is—now you are asking me to prioritise.

**The CHAIR:** If there are more than three, you can hit us with more. You strike me as an ideas person. I am sure you have got heaps of ideas there.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** I am just going to put it as blue-sky, picking up on Paul's comment. I think the interesting thing is if we had a ResourceSmart Schools program for communities, you know, and took that sort of learning—and it probably builds on the community power hubs program—that would be a dedicated sort of program about how we support communities to lead their own community transition. It would be kind of the scaled-up program of all the things we do in schools and how we empower people to feel that they could lead their own transition. I think that would be a really exciting initiative. I will leave it at three.

**The CHAIR:** You will leave it at three. I like that last one. It is clever. I am going to go back around the table. David?

**Mr HAMER:** Can I just jump in on your first two suggestions? I was just wondering: the data and research that you have done as Sustainability Victoria, has that been able to quantify any of those impacts to any extent, because I think that is one of the great challenges. We can talk about how many trees are planted et cetera and you can get some numbers around that, but actually then translating it into, say, the health benefits that can be calculated in the same way that any other assessment is done has often proved a bit challenging. So I was just wondering: has that work been done by anyone in SV?

**Ms FERRES MILES:** No. That is probably the next piece of research we need to do. I am not too sure if you have heard from the City of Melbourne. The City of Melbourne are very advanced in terms of their work, also with the University of Melbourne, of quantifying the economic benefit of a tree and actually looking at all of their green infrastructure, identifying it as an asset class in their asset register and actually looking at the economic value of all of their green infrastructure and greening across the city. So they are probably quite well progressed on understanding and quantifying nature. Matt Jackson sort of spoke about this in terms of some work done about economic quantification and benefits of national parks and parks in our area. I would say that is an area that in terms of health we do need to do more work on in terms of: can we quantify the avoided health costs and/or the health benefits of more time spent in nature? In some ways the research that I have spoken to the committee about today has validated the link—that there is a link between nature and health. And with the ResourceSmart Schools program, there is a clear link between student wellbeing and their activities working on sustainability initiatives. So we have research that validates the link; the next step would be to seek to try and quantify the numeric value of that link.

**Mr HAMER:** And presumably it is not necessarily linear. You say that the City of Melbourne might be looking at it down to an individual tree level, but it is probably at an aggregated or a cumulative level that it probably makes a greater difference—let us say, greater than the sum of the parts.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Yes. And I would say probably the most significant of the three studies in terms of, I would foreshadow, economic benefit is the link between working on environmental activities and student health and wellbeing. I think it is quite profound, particularly when we are seeing obviously through the mental health royal commission and other commissions how young people feel so significantly overwhelmed by the climate crisis in future generations. Therefore the opportunity to feel empowered that you are individually doing something about it and your school cares and the infrastructures and the community you work in care about it, I think it could be quite profound in terms of the economic value of that intervention.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks for that. Sorry, David.



**Mr MORRIS:** No, that is fine, Paul. No problem at all. In some ways what I was going to ask works into that discussion pretty well. Claire, right towards the end of the submission it talks about Sustainability Victoria collecting and providing reliable data and market behavioural insights. I wonder if you can expand on that a bit more. I am aware of some of the data that you collect. I think probably the committee more broadly is not, so perhaps you can give us a bit of an insight into the sort of data you collect, but going on from that, whether there are any particular datasets that you have or that you are collecting that we could leverage to improve the provision of environmental infrastructure.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Thanks for the question, David. We do not explicitly have datasets in terms of environmental infrastructure, but the key data we do have is to do with the waste and resource recovery sector. So we have a phenomenal dataset, which still needs to be improved, in terms of all of our material streams and all of the materials that have been imported and exported, and that gives us an incredible baseline in terms of our drive towards a circular economy and understanding all of the material flows of what is being generated in the state and where it goes. That is a key part of our data system, but we also have a lot of data in terms of all the programs we deliver, so obviously in terms of community-led energy efficiency programs. We run first track five, which is the regulatory requirement in terms of energy efficiency for new housing builds in Victoria, so we have that dataset for the last 15 years in terms of every new build in Victoria in terms of its energy efficiency rating. None of these are relevant to environmental infrastructure, but I am just letting you know what we have got. I cannot sort of think of a direct link between our current datasets, and that is why I chose, in some ways, for my presentation today to focus on the research that we have done, because I thought that that would be most relevant to the committee.

One thing that we do have, which is an interesting question for the committee around education and behaviour change, is quite a phenomenal behavioural insights unit. We work with Monash University's sustainable development institute and BehaviourWorks Australia to understand the behavioural science of why people behave the way they do; to understand the barriers, particularly for our CALD communities, which have completely different barriers to other sections of the community; and to inform and influence our programs, so that they are delivering the highest benefit. So that is probably the one dataset and behavioural insights area that could be of benefit to the committee.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks for that. I am only too familiar with the waste side of what you collect, having crawled through that at length. No, that is a useful pointer. Thanks for that. Thanks, Sarah. That is me.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, David. Danielle.

**Ms GREEN:** Look, I do not think I have got anything to add. I am just blown away with the work that Sustainability Victoria does. I suppose the only thing I would say is I went to a school recently—they are a ResourceSmart school—where they have an Indigenous space in their garden, and I just reiterate what you were saying about that empowerment for kids and having an impact on being able to deal with climate change better. But I think by linking it in with Indigenous people and Indigenous food, I have just seen the benefits at one of my local schools with how they are doing that and promoting healing and connection to country. There are 16 children at the school that identify as Aboriginal but who are not connected to country, and so through that project they are now being connected to country. I just think my anecdotal understanding of the data and research that Sustainability Victoria is gathering is reinforced by what I am seeing locally.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Thanks, Danielle. I definitely think ResourceSmart Schools is one program, but it always can benefit and be added to to make it richer and more informative. One anecdote I would say, Sarah, which is probably building on I think my third priority, is that what we do see in ResourceSmart Schools and some of our leading schools—I recently visited Mount Waverley Primary School, which was our ResourceSmart School of the Year last year—is that the school students are so engaged in understanding their emissions and their waste and what they are producing. I asked them what the biggest challenge was in terms of their school, and their response was, 'the community', because they hire their community facilities for sporting functions and when the community comes in they do not sort things properly and they do not look after things. It was an interesting observation from grades 5 and 6 kids that they have lifted their knowledge and understanding of climate change, and they see the gap between their understanding and knowledge and their local community when they come into their school facilities.

**The CHAIR:** Some really interesting points you make. I like the idea of having ResourceSmart communities. You might not have the answer to this, and that is completely fine, but I am just thinking: when you look at the ResourceSmart Schools and the type of schools that participate in it—because it really is an amazing program, and I know in my community we have a lot of schools just in my electorate alone, let alone Wyndham, and there was just one school that participated—is it fair to say that in newer, emerging areas or maybe areas with low socio-economic demographics, I do not know if you can point to particular demographics, but do you find there is a low uptake in particular parts of Victoria that perhaps we should know about to really target those communities?

**Ms FERRES MILES:** There is not. In fact we do a lot of work to seek to ensure equity in the program across the state. So we have a regional coordinator in each of the regions across Victoria, and that primary role is around engagement in terms of encouraging schools to sign up. We are also doing more work with the department of education in terms of what we have found, which is that a lot of the schools are driven by one passionate teacher that is incredibly engaged in sustainability and climate change. If that teacher leaves the school, it can fall apart, or if there is no teacher in a school that is interested and they see it as an add-on—schools in Victoria have an incredibly dense curriculum—at times this can fall off the radar. So it is a good question. I do not have any data that indicates that the socio-economic background of the community impacts their uptake. In fact the data we have got is very much about working with the department of education to increase the appetite and interest of teachers across the state to take this on and in terms of our investment in teachers to support them to deliver this program.

**The CHAIR:** I know most certainly in Trug south primary school it was driven by a fabulous teacher, I think even during her pregnancy. So it would be interesting to see what happened when she went on maternity leave, but it was something the school was very proud about and the kids were really passionate about. It was wonderful to see.

If that is data and information that you end up finding or being able to source, it would be really interesting to see that, even if we just took that offline to have a look at.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Yes. I am very happy to go back to the team and ask them and even to give the committee sort of a mapping of the reach and the remit of the program. That might be useful for the committee to see.

**The CHAIR:** I think that would be really interesting to see. Yes, if you can send that through. Well, if members do not have any other questions, we might finish here. Thanks, Claire, for coming today. I am sorry you are not feeling too well. I hope you get over that cough. It sounds quite nasty. It looks like you are working from home, so it is a good place to be if you are feeling under the weather. But thanks again for joining us. We really appreciate it. A lot of the things you have said have been really insightful, and I think it will give us a lot to think about going forward.

**Ms FERRES MILES:** Well, thank you to the committee for the opportunity. And I think one of the positive impacts of COVID is never again are you ever allowed in an office workplace if you have got a cough or a cold, and we have enabled an environment where we can work from home. So I really appreciate the opportunity.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Claire.

**Witness withdrew.**