

28 June 2024

Re. Inquiry into Climate Resilience

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of Geelong Sustainability to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into Climate Resilience.

Our submission advocates for:

1. Specific and adequate funding for efficiency and electrification upgrades for low-income households
2. Statewide electrification program funding
3. Implementation of a Victorian Community Climate Adaptation Fund

Community education is also vital to effectively motivate and mobilise the community to become an active partner in developing climate resilience solutions.

Geelong Sustainability is a not-for-profit community organisation and registered charity that supports residents of Geelong and surrounding regions to be more sustainable in their everyday lives. Since our establishment in 2007, Geelong Sustainability has become the region's leading sustainability group with extensive networks in community, government and business throughout Geelong and the Barwon region. We are recognised for our evidence-based innovative projects, which educate and support our community's transition to a net zero, circular economy.

We have 240 financial members, over 50 active volunteers, and a broader supporter base of 20,000 newsletter and social media subscribers. Since our inception, we have delivered grant projects totaling over \$1.4M, and facilitated \$9.3M of renewable energy investment in the community which has helped mitigate over 120,000 Tonnes of cumulative CO2 emissions.

We have implemented several key projects to enhance climate resilience in our community (see Appendix A). We recognise the need for climate resilience through several key government funding priorities.

Implement a Victorian Community Climate Adaptation Fund (VCCAF)

We are part of Friends of the Earth Frontline Climate Alliance and support their [call for the Victorian government to establish a permanent Victorian Community Climate Adaptation Fund \(VCCAF\)](#). This fund would allocate grant money annually to community groups for localised adaptation and resilience projects, ensuring that communities have the resources needed to better adapt to climate impacts.

Worsening extreme weather is jeopardising Victorians' way of life, from their work to recreational activities. A responsible government must ensure the safety of its citizens by enabling communities to prepare for these inevitable climate impacts. A permanent VCCAF builds on previous successful grant schemes and recognises the highly localised nature of climate impacts. It would ensure community-led climate adaptation, taking a bottom-up approach by distributing funds to local groups familiar with their community's unique needs. Every step toward helping communities adapt secures a safer future, reduces the cost of climate disasters, and builds resilience.

A Victorian Community Climate Adaptation Fund (VCCAF) will empower knowledgeable and skilled community organisations to facilitate community-led climate adaptation.

Fund Efficiency and Electrification Upgrades for Low-Income Households

Those most at risk from climate extremes are often the least able to afford measures to mitigate climate impacts or adapt their homes for preparedness. This includes:

- Households with low incomes
- Communities in lower socioeconomic areas more prone to climate disasters (such as flood plains)
- People with disabilities
- Those receiving government assistance

We are advocating for increased government funding to support vulnerable households in making essential home upgrades such as draught proofing, insulation, and energy-efficient appliances. Ensuring that all community members can enhance their resilience to climate impacts, especially the most vulnerable, is critical. Projects such as Climate Safe Rooms (see Appendix A) can be delivered on a local level for an estimated \$18 million. This targeted funding will provide the necessary support to those who need it most and help create equitable climate resilience.

Not only does this funding benefit the individual through home comfort, energy bill savings and improved health outcomes, but the government realises economic benefits as well. During the pilot program, participants' average number of annual doctors' visits dropped from 26 to 19, resulting in \$887 saved in the healthcare system per person over one winter period.

Support for vulnerable households to make efficiency and electrification upgrades increases comfort, decreases energy bill expenditure and improves health outcomes, all while delivering economic benefits to the government.

Fund and Expand Electrification Programs

Climate resilience can only be improved with effective measures such as no new coal or gas projects, and household electrification. Electric homes are far more prepared for heatwaves, with efficient reverse-cycle systems which cool as well as heat, and renewable energy to power the cooling when it is required.

The Victorian government is clearly committed to an all-electric future, given its updated 2023 Gas Substitution Roadmap. To ensure the Roadmap's success, we urge the government to allocate additional funding to support and expand programs like our Electric Homes Program across all of Victoria. This funding should cover the promotion of electrification, information sessions, community building efforts and a bulk-buy component. We have indicated that this project was highly successful on a local level, and welcome energy efficiency funding across all of Victoria to deliver these crucial projects.

Household electrification is a crucial part of the climate transition. To achieve the goals of the Gas Substitution Roadmap, funding ought to be directed towards community electrification education and support programs.

Conclusion

The Victorian Labor government has set ambitious emission reduction and renewable energy targets and has communicated the benefits of these investments to communities. It is now imperative to act for climate adaptation.

The Geelong region is already facing considerable risks due to climate change and, regardless of changes in emissions, those risks will increase for at least the next two decades. In particular, our region will need to build resilience to the increased frequency and intensity of heatwaves and bushfire risk, reduced rainfall, more intense rainfall events, rising sea levels and increased coastal inundation.

We need community-led climate adaptation that is continuously and adequately funded. To enable this, we urge the government to provide comprehensive funding for home upgrades and electrification initiatives across Victoria with a focus on low-income households, and establish a permanent Victorian Community Climate Adaptation Fund.

Thank you for considering our submission. We look forward to working with the Victorian government to enhance climate resilience across our communities.

Sincerely,

David Spear
Chairperson
Geelong Sustainability

Dan Cowdell
CEO
Geelong Sustainability

Appendix A: Geelong Sustainability's Resilience Projects

Geelong Sustainability delivers a range of [initiatives](#), events, activities and campaigns. We have included two below which specifically have a climate resilience focus.

[Climate Safe Rooms](#) offers free home energy upgrades for low-income households where at least one resident receives home care support services for an existing chronic health condition that puts them at risk from heatwaves and extreme cold. Not only the environmental impacts, but also the health and economic outcomes resulting from this project are remarkable. Participants reported a 17% decrease in pain and discomfort and the average number of annual doctors' visits dropped from 26 to 19, resulting in \$887 saved in the healthcare system per person over one winter period. [Full report from the pilot project available here](#). To effectively scale up and deliver this region-wide to 1,000 homes, a total of \$18 million is required over five years. The program won two awards at the 2023 Premier's Sustainability Awards: Premier's Regional Recognition Award and the Industry Leader Award in the Healthy and Fair Society category.

Delivered successfully in 2023 and ongoing in 2024, our [Electric Homes Program](#) provides residents across the G21 region with the necessary information and tools to become efficient all-electric homes powered by renewable energy. The program saw a remarkable investment of over \$2 million in renewable energy and efficient electric appliances, resulting in substantial cost savings for residents. Participants are estimated to save \$214,366 annually on energy bills, translating to over \$5.3 million worth of savings over 25 years. In addition, the environmental impact of the program is significant, with 770 Tonnes of CO2 emissions reduced per year which is equivalent to 183 cars off the road. This is a total reduction of 18,328 Tonnes of CO2 emissions over the lifetime of the products. For every \$1 of government investment into the program, \$40 of value is realised.

The City of Greater Geelong's Economic Development unit conducted REMPLAN economic analysis on the 2023 Electric Homes Program results.

It is estimated that the \$2.1 million investment in the Electric Homes Program:

- Increased revenue in the regional economy by \$4.7 million (\$2.1m direct output and \$2.6m indirect output due to the flow on supply-chain and consumption impacts).
- Supported 12 regional jobs and \$902,000 in wages and salaries (5 direct jobs and 7 indirect jobs).
- Increased Gross Regional Product by \$1.7 million.