



22nd August 2021

**The Secretary
Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002
C/- chypsinqury@parliament.vic.gov.au**

Dear Sir / Madam

Inquiry into the Closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations

Gippsland Disability Advocacy are pleased to write to the Inquiry into the Closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations.

By way of introduction, Gippsland Disability Advocacy's (GDA) mission is to advocate, promote, and be responsive to the welfare, rights, and interests of people with disabilities, and to build a more inclusive community. Our vision is that through advocacy, people with disabilities are empowered to exercise their rights. Located in Traralgon, Bairnsdale and Wonthaggi we are the Gippsland regions disability advocacy service.

People with disabilities experience the highest rate of disadvantage in Australia, with employment and connection to community major barriers as evidenced by the current Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

The need for our contact is to advise that the Latrobe valley community is in desperate need to address greater employment opportunities including demystifying myths that exist for people with a disability.

At present, Unemployment rates in the Latrobe Valley are the highest in the state, coupled with this, new figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show the youth unemployment rate have climbed 5% per cent since 2015. The rate now sits more than 15% – 50% higher than the average across regional Victoria. Youth unemployment rate in Latrobe Valley is now the highest of anywhere in regional Victoria. With regards to disability and unemployment, National Disability Services research shows that more people with disabilities are unemployed than those without disabilities. Since 1993, the labour force participation rate of people with disabilities has fallen, while the rate for people without disabilities has risen. We can advise that 1 in 4 people in Gippsland have a diagnosed disability and the rates and numbers of people accessing the Disability Support Pension in Gippsland is higher than anywhere else in the state and that 45% of people with a disability live in poverty.

Having a disability substantially affects a person's life activities, by having appropriate, employment and connection to community for people with disabilities modified to meet individual and community need allows for greater supports and connection to the broader community for people with disabilities.

We understand the Hazelwood Power Station employed people with disabilities and since its closure, many of them have been unable to access long-term and ongoing employment and have subsequently been engaged with Gippsland Disability Advocacy in-order to receive disability advocacy support for a range of issues (housing, education, employment, peer support, peer education, access to NDIS, relationship breakdown, financial disadvantage, access to Disability Support Pensions).

Whilst the needs of the community are paramount for any Power Station closures, consideration needs to occur for diverse groups and the community we advocate for being people with Disabilities with regards to alternate options including opportunities.

An offshoot of the closure of the power stations is the impact it has on the community grants that they provide to not for profit organisations like GDA, we have benefited via the Power Stations Community Grants scheme, thus able to complement our disability advocacy systems work by receiving funds to undertake community events in conjunction with International Day of People with Disabilities held annually on December 3rd impacting our ability to further promote initiatives and themed events.

I would be pleased to discuss the contents of this letter in more detail and can be contacted on [REDACTED], our postal address is [REDACTED], my email address is [REDACTED]. We would be happy for this letter to be made public.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Adrian Terranova
Chief Executive Officer
Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc.