

# **TRANSCRIPT**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**

### **Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities**

Bendigo—Thursday, 19 September 2019

#### **MEMBERS**

Mr Darren Cheeseman—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

**WITNESSES**

Cr Jennifer Alden, and

Mr Bernie O'Sullivan, Director, Strategy and Growth, City of Greater Bendigo.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, everyone, for coming along for our second day of hearings in country Victoria in terms of how regional and country Victoria is responding to the challenges of climate change. Today I would like to welcome you as we are heading around the state. I would like to extend a welcome to the public and to any media that might be present. All evidence taken today will be recorded and is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript of today's evidence at the secretariat's earliest opportunity. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and will be posted on the Committee's website. As is our customary practice, we will allow 5 to 10 minutes for a presentation and then the Committee will ask a number of questions. Could you please state your full name and title before beginning your presentation? And I do know, Councillor, that you would like to welcome us to country.

**Cr ALDEN:** Thank you very much, Darren. I would like to acknowledge that the City of Greater Bendigo is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung country. I would like to acknowledge and extend my appreciation to the Dja Dja Wurrung people, the traditional owners of the land that we are standing on today. Today we pay our respects to leaders and elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung people. We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Would you state your name for the record?

**Cr ALDEN:** Councillor Dr Jennifer Alden.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic. Over to you; it is your opportunity to present to the Committee.

**Cr ALDEN:** Thank you. On behalf of the City of Greater Bendigo I would like to thank you for the opportunity for the city to today host this, the Victorian Legislative Assembly's Environment and Planning Committee's public hearing into tackling climate change in Victorian communities. The City of Greater Bendigo acknowledges the risk posed by climate change to our community and our organisation and the need for urgent action to address environmental and climate breakdown. Regional city councils play a high-profile role in our communities as our community turns to their council to address a range of complex issues. However, we do need ongoing support to deliver outcomes. Indeed local governments make decisions that span generations and as such need to be assessing and responding to direct and indirect risks presented by climate change.

In recent years the City of Greater Bendigo has registered an increasing level of concern amongst our community about climate change as weather events previously thought of as extreme become more commonplace and sobering statistics about species decline have become available. At its ordinary council meeting on 21 August 2019 the City of Greater Bendigo endorsed the following motion:

That the Greater Bendigo City Council acknowledge:

1. The urgent need for action to address the environmental and climate breakdown that poses serious future risks to the health and wellbeing of the people of Greater Bendigo, especially those who are socially and economically the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community.
2. That climate risks will impact public health, emergency management, community services and recreation facilities and carry financial and social implications for LGAs requiring a whole-of-Council approach.
3. The current global consensus is that cities should be responsive to climate, environmental and biodiversity breakdown, investing in restoration and conservation of biodiversity and ensuring a resilient city in current and planned actions to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

4. That an internal report on the Council's expenditures aligned to greenhouse gas emissions across Council's business will be prepared by December 31st 2019.
5. The need for budget considerations for the 2020/21 year to incorporate Council-wide mechanisms and allocations to address the risks that climate change presents to the future health and wellbeing of the people of Greater Bendigo.

So, in brief, in response to this, council staff are working with councillors and relevant stakeholders to requisition council's expenditures, actions and programs to ensure that we minimise greenhouse gas emissions with the objective of zero emissions by our target dates, and we will adopt and implement a series of initiatives so that council is a proactive leader in our community.

Our sector has got a role to reduce emissions associated with operations, but we need to safeguard assets and operations as well. Additionally local government has a role to support our community and to build climate change resilience. We have got capacity and we can lead and advocate for large-scale change. Collectively regional cities have potential to lead significant positive change and act as living labs for other cities to replicate. We have got a unique opportunity to harness the culture of collaborations, and many councils have a progressive stance on climate change which places them in a favourable position to adapt to and mitigate the damaging effects of climate breakdown and global heating.

The fact that regional communities turn to their councils to address complex issues is in contrast to metropolitan councils, whose communities may more readily turn to State Government to address complex issues. Regional cities also assume a lead role in their region, and other smaller councils look to the lead of regional city councils. The City of Greater Bendigo has taken on this regional role, but it needs ongoing support to deliver on it.

Climate change presents many emerging liabilities, risks and challenges for local government, and we are familiar with long-term planning that utilises historical data and forecasting. However, we need higher resolution climate projections to assist council in this planning, and this will allow for improved planning for infrastructure design, land use planning, economic development and health outcomes.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning commissioned an assessment of climate change governance in 2017 and found that most local governments in Victoria are deficient in the 10 key areas of climate change adaptation governance. In the area of community mental health there is an emerging need for support for local governments to build capacity to assist communities that are experiencing climate grief and anxiety. There is also a need to support our local food supply.

The City of Greater Bendigo is acutely aware of the many health and wellbeing impacts of climate breakdown and subsequently has included this as a focus area within the *Greater Bendigo Health and Wellbeing Plan*. This emphasis will be strengthened by the recent inclusion of 'tackling climate change and its impact on health' as a key priority within the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan*. This plan provides evidence-based guidance to assist actions in a range of settings including local government. It is, however, only one of the areas in which State Government can support local government with additional resources so that we can step up the pace of addressing our obligations to and with the Greater Bendigo community.

**The CHAIR:** Bernie, do you want to introduce yourself for the Committee?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** Thank you. Bernie O'Sullivan, Director, Strategy and Growth, for the City of Greater Bendigo. Welcome to Bendigo. It is great to have you here.

Think about the actions that the City of Greater Bendigo is taking to tackle climate change. We are working hard to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We have got lots of work to do, but we are making positive steps, particularly around procuring cleaner sources of energy, implementing planning controls, investing in renewable energy and implementing innovative waste management techniques. We have recently been developing a new economic development strategy as well with seven major organisations in the City of Greater Bendigo because, at the end of the day, tackling climate change is not just a local government responsibility. It is the whole community's responsibility: community organisations, local council and businesses. It was great to have organisations such as the Bendigo Bank around that table. Climate change was seen as one of the three major economic challenges as part of the development of the recent economic summary paper and background

paper. What it also recognised was that as we aim to create a more inclusive society here in Greater Bendigo the impacts of climate change will hit hardest on those least able to cope with the consequences.

The *Greater Bendigo Environment Strategy 2016–2021* is one of our key platform documents that is guiding our approach to tackling climate change and protecting and conserving the natural and built environment that we have here in Bendigo. It contains key targets for the City of Greater Bendigo and the community out to 2036. Some of those include by 2036 a 100 per cent renewable energy community, zero net carbon emissions and zero waste to landfill. None of these targets are going to be achieved by a business-as-usual approach. We need to change our approach and we need to keep stepping up the action, both from a local government point of view but in partnership with State Government, Federal Government and business and community.

We are involved in lots of partnership opportunities. There are some really great alliances out there—the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance and the broader Victorian Greenhouse Alliances network. It is often these alliances that need support. They can collaborate and create economies of scale with many local governments and share information, and we think that is a very valuable approach.

When we think about some of the actions that the City of Greater Bendigo has done in recent times, we are a strong member of the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment—CASBE as it is known—and that has really supported environmental sustainable development in the City of Greater Bendigo planning scheme, in making sure that developers in Greater Bendigo as they are putting in new developments are designing and constructing for improved energy efficiency.

We are a signatory to the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. We are also a member of Bioregional Australia. The city has adopted their One Planet Living framework, and it is guiding the strategies and projects across the city. We closely work with Bendigo Sustainability Group and their initiatives around the Bendigo community power hub. We are also active in the Bendigo Drawdown Alliance, which is an emerging partnership between a range of organisations. This action is guided by the internationally acclaimed work of Paul Hawken's *Drawdown*.

Some other recent activities by the City of Greater Bendigo include the Victorian local government renewable energy power purchase agreement, with 48 local government signing up. In Greater Bendigo the outcome for us will be 100 per cent renewable energy for all electricity consumption, so really significant. The City of Greater Bendigo and a number of other councils have implemented a food and organics kerbside collection. That has been in place since 2016—very successful. In 2018–19 it has diverted over 10 000 tonnes of fresh and organic material from landfill, avoiding approximately 17 000 tonnes in greenhouse gas emissions. As I said before, environmentally sustainable development provisions are now in the planning scheme. A really significant project for the City of Greater Bendigo and the region has been the Lighting the Regions project a few years back, which was putting LED street lighting on roads. It was the largest street lighting project across Australia—in Australia's history.

We have got a great capacity now to work on the roads; that also includes VicRoads or Regional Roads Victoria. It is a shared partnership between VicRoads and local council, so that would be a great opportunity for State Government investment on those broader roads to partner with local government to also have LED implemented on those roads. We have been working really hard to get solar PV on council facilities. To date, over the recent years 438 kilowatts of solar PV has been installed on 19 council buildings. That is really helping facilitate community-owned solar through an innovative leasing model. The Bendigo Sustainability Group have been able to install their own solar systems on council rooftops under an innovative leasing approach.

The City of Greater Bendigo constructed Australia's first Passive House-certified public building, which is the Soldiers Memorial Military Museum, opened last year. It is using 90 per cent less energy to other comparable facilities.

To wrap up on the activities, the municipal emergency management plan and activities are really crucial for Greater Bendigo. We actively participate as part of the Northern Victorian Emergency Management Cluster. We have been audited recently and received a report in terms of our approach to making sure that as we are getting increasingly frequent and severe extreme weather events we are well prepared for that.

We have also developed the Water Sensitive Bendigo strategy, in partnership with the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities. The important thing here is that Bendigo was the only inland regional city in Australia to have this strategy. I think it talks to Bendigo and its community being quite proactive, not just at a state scale but at a national scale.

The Greening Greater Bendigo plan that is underway is aiming to push our tree planting from 1000 trees per annum to 3000, and we have a pretty significant community awareness program: *In an Emergency What Is Your Plan?*. We have got some little bags to provide you with at the conclusion of this.

When we think about some ways that the State Government can assist local government and communities, being able to provide targeted funding and support the building of local capacity to adapt to and mitigate climate change is really crucial. Some of the challenges that local government will have increasingly with climate change include infrastructure upgrades to withstand increasingly erratic weather, whether that be building assets, drainage improvements or streetscape, and community and social resilience programs—we do not want to just provide the cure; we want to provide the preventative measure as much as possible. There is a need for the State Government to be able to invest in local initiatives that help decarbonise local communities and also help provide solutions to rising energy prices, waste management and the transport and water supply sectors, which contribute to a proportion of our emissions.

Also, the City of Greater Bendigo is working hard to embed tackling climate change across all of our council areas. We need the State Government's support to be able to assist local and regional both governance and service delivery opportunities to ensure that we are doing as much as we can. We know that the draft Local Government Bill, which is very instrumental for us and the 78 other local governments across the state, is for the first time talking about including mitigation and planning for climate change risk. It is a significant change, and we need to make sure that we have got the investment and support to be able to deliver if that is a new provision of the Local Government Bill.

Tackling the waste crisis is a challenge that we are all going on the journey on, but we would certainly implore the further support and guidance the State Government can provide in terms of the waste crisis and also working with other local governments to implement a food and organics kerbside collection. It has been highly successful in the City of Greater Bendigo. We work closely with our regional shire neighbours, and we are happy to and very frequently do share lessons learned. But that is the great opportunity that can be successfully implemented. We have seen it, and it is a really great opportunity, but we are also looking at initiatives to reduce single-use packaging and also the development of local recycling initiatives. Part of tackling the waste crisis is keeping and creating jobs in local communities and helping them build a different future, a more positive future.

Cr Alden talked about the need for accurate, high-resolution, up-to-date climate data. That will help us guide our infrastructure design, land use planning and decision-making as we move forward. Being able to build more capacity for community-owned renewable energy projects is a great opportunity. We have many great businesses in Bendigo in the very thriving advanced manufacturing sector that are facing significant waste and rising energy costs. They increasingly want to join together to create a different energy future. At the moment they are largely restricted to simply operating their own operation without being able to, for instance, get behind the meter and ensure that businesses can work together to achieve different energy rates.

Electric vehicles and charging equipment across Greater Bendigo and the state is a really important opportunity for us and the State Government. We have also talked about LED lights on roads that are shared now between VicRoads and local governments.

The precinct of the city centre in this end, the northern end of the city centre, will significantly transform over the next few years. We have got approximately \$300 million in State Government-led projects. The new 1000-seat GovHub building for both State Government and local government is the first GovHub across Victoria that has been able to combine State Government and local government in the one building. We think that provides huge synergies for working together and delivering better customer outcomes. The GovHub, the \$152 million redevelopment of the Bendigo law courts and the \$60 million TAFE redevelopment—that provides a great opportunity. When we think about tackling climate change, we have got the potential to put flagship environmentally friendly, zero-carbon buildings into potentially a zero-carbon precinct. To give you an

example, for the Bendigo GovHub we are speaking with State Government at the moment, and the cost of doing that in the scale of things is quite small: \$3.5 million to \$4.5 million to ensure a carbon-neutral GovHub building.

**The CHAIR:** So how big is the budget for that?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** \$90 million to \$100 million.

**The CHAIR:** So less than 3 per cent?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** Correct. We have a great opportunity at the moment as we design those buildings—very hard to retrofit later on, but far easier and far more cost-effective to do it at the start.

In conclusion, as a local government and as a regional city that plays a regional leadership role, particularly through the Loddon Campaspe and Loddon Mallee region, we think we are doing a fair bit of heavy lifting. We know we need to keep doing that and that we cannot take a business-as-usual approach, but we need the State Government's support and we need Federal Government support.

We are working hard through our local communities to build capacity and awareness and to really empower local communities into positive action. We are seeing some great initiatives come out, but more consistent policy direction and decision-making by the Federal and State Governments will help local governments enormously and give us more confidence to tackle climate change. We stand ready to work with the State Government and all levels of government, the community and organisations to tackle this really critical issue.

We thank you for coming to Bendigo. The vision of our councillors and our council is 'Greater Bendigo—creating the world's most liveable community'. We know that to create the world's most livable community we need to take great strides to tackle and prepare for climate change into the future. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Terrific. Thank you, Jennifer and Bernie, for your detailed presentation. I am sure a number of the Committee members might have some questions. I might start with David if you are ready to shoot.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thank you, and thank you for hosting us this morning too; it is a great room to be working in.

A range of things popped up during that presentation and while I was reviewing the written submission. So if the questions I am going to ask do not seem to have any theme, that is probably because they do not but they are just particular things that have come up. Bernie, you talked about, and I think Jennifer did too, the need for high-resolution climate projections, and certainly, and I am someone who represents a coastal seat, when you look at the range of projections for sea level rise between now and the end of the century you think, 'Well, how on earth can we prepare for that?'. I recognise that obviously how well we do in terms of reducing emissions—whether we meet the Paris target, whether we better the Paris target or whether we just totally overshoot it—is going to have a huge impact on what the final outcome is. But what are you looking for there, given, as I say, the uncertainty about emissions reduction and whether we are actually going to get to net zero in a global sense? What sort of a range is more useful?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** Thank you for the question. Irrespective of whether we are going to fall short of, meet or better targets, we know we need to be really proactive in terms of having great available data to prepare for increasingly extreme and erratic weather events. That is using both historical data and projected data moving forward. We really congratulate the work that many climate authorities do at the moment, and the bureau, but as events get more extreme, we are looking for data and information to guide where local government, where the City of Greater Bendigo, needs to put its time and its investment, particularly when we think about higher risk communities. As we said before, our economic development strategy is particularly focused on an inclusive community, as we move forward, and those more socially vulnerable—so as we are thinking about improved data, is that able to give us a sign that there are certain areas of the community that we need to really focus more service delivery on?

**Cr ALDEN:** It makes me think also of some research happening currently with La Trobe University and Bendigo City Council around the Internet of Things and the weather tracking stations that are out in the

community—and that is a broader capture of more accurate recordings around humidity, dew point et cetera at the moment. So there is some good work underway that will certainly start that process of more localised data collection, which will be very useful. We have also been involved with the heat mapping project—the Cool It project—with the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance, so it is being able to identify how geographically areas of vulnerability may arise around higher temperatures, often with less street trees et cetera, often coinciding with areas of socio-economic disadvantage. So there is an acknowledgement of an investment that will be potentially favouring balancing the equity around the community with regard to those exposures, with investment in tree planting. That is another area.

**The CHAIR:** Is it okay if I just pick up on that theme?

**Mr MORRIS:** Yes, please do.

**The CHAIR:** I was just thinking in terms of the dataset obviously local government is principally responsible for delivering stormwater infrastructure, and I would expect with stormwater infrastructure that when you plan it and deliver it—you would hope—it is delivered in a way that is going to service that immediate environment for quite a number of decades. I am assuming that without this detailed dataset it makes it difficult to determine at times what is the appropriate level of stormwater equipment. Is that right?

**Mr O’SULLIVAN:** Yes, absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** Could it be used in those really practical ways about delivering the infrastructure that councils are responsible for?

**Mr O’SULLIVAN:** It certainly does. In terms of better or more accurate climate predictions it enables us quite significantly to think about our infrastructure delivery and infrastructure design, so at a basic level to be able to withstand events that are more extreme. With pipes for instance—that may have been okay in the past but it may not be into the future, and the outcome of not being able to design appropriately to withstand some of these increasingly erratic events might then mean you have got a subdivision that has been flooded or so forth, so we really need to make sure that the data that we are using is as good as it can be to protect the communities as we move forward.

**The CHAIR:** So good data therefore might in a sense be over the long term a cost saving, because you are not having to go back and either pay compensation or re-fit out stormwater or whatever it may be?

**Mr O’SULLIVAN:** Yes, it is usually very expensive after the event to have the infrastructure rehabilitation but also the rehabilitation of people’s lives—those who might be affected by those events.

**The CHAIR:** Just on that theme and then we will throw back to David, have any of my colleagues got any other questions on that data?

**Ms GREEN:** Probably data related, in that I really liked what you said about the community and collecting weather data and things like that. At the moment we are seeing really patchy droughts in that small area outside Mildura and Millewa. It has just got this patch of drought and other areas around it are doing better.

I kind of see, because Bendigo has always had to deal with its dry climate, that you guys are taking the lead and being the canary in the coalmine. My family, my dad and generations before, farmed in Llanelly from the 1850s. They had two dams that always fed the property. When we came up from the coast it was a bit like, ‘Don’t you kids waste that water!’, and we always had it instilled into us. But those dams disappeared in the millennium drought and they have not come back. So this magnificent garden that had been an acre garden around my grandparents’ property and had been there since the late 1890s is gone, because there is just no water left. So I think that that data from the community in really granular and great detail is so important. More than anything I just wanted to commend you on that, but also—do you mind if we move on, Chair?

**The CHAIR:** I was going to throw it back to David. I thought we would jump in on that point, so I will just throw back to David.

**Ms GREEN:** Okay, no worries. I will come back later.

**Mr MORRIS:** I have got a whole bunch of things that I could raise but there are two things that I would like to raise. One I think should be reasonably quick and the other one may take a bit longer. There is commentary around the need to provide support for local government to build capacity to assist communities who are experiencing climate grief and anxiety, in the written submission down on the bottom of page 2. I am wondering whether that is intended as the need for preparation, or whether you are seeing that sort of anxiety being manifested now? If so, how are you seeing that play out?

**Cr ALDEN:** In the millennium drought there was the need obviously for council, through the contact into the farming communities in the smaller rural townships that we work with, to address issues around mental health. There was a committee formed across agencies to work with communities who were experiencing the impacts. I would say that those types of communities and committees come together in times of need and that is starting to manifest again, and the acknowledgement that there are particular stressors out in the community. I chair the council's Farming Advisory Committee, for example, and currently there has been a forum planned up at Elmore, for example, to work with farmers and with men and other people around being able to talk about issues around mental health. It is a recurring theme, but it sort of peaks and troughs, I think, according to how we are seeing our situation in the community.

**Mr MORRIS:** Is it fair to say that those sorts of stressors tend to be event related, as in drought related, or is it a more general thing?

**Cr ALDEN:** Well, there is structural change, I suppose, also in the farming community, if we talk about that as one area. People are facing a different future compared with the previous, as Danielle has mentioned. So we know that people are having to make some adjustments, and that means that there might be a change to their farming arrangements and their livelihoods.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** And we do know that if your business is influenced by the weather and then events, that is most acutely felt, and as Cr Alden said, we can put our hand on those stressors quite immediately. The second point to note is, though, the underlying feedback in the community of what we can do more. We want to make a difference from a local community, power-to-the-people perspective, but we are not quite sure what to do and how we can do that. And you know, the community, they are smart. They know that we need numbers. We need organised initiatives. So certainly from a community point of view they are keen for action. We are keen to facilitate it as a local government—really great initiatives to tackle climate change—but we would like to do that on a much bigger scale. I suppose that is probably one of the messages for us: that some of the investment that we have seen from various levels of government around tackling climate change has been to some agree ad hoc and piecemeal. Each community is different in terms of their context, their people, and often those local governments and communities across the state have really great ideas about tackling climate change, and they have got some big ideas. I suppose it is hard to reach these targets that we have been talking about—zero carbon emissions by 2036. Little initiatives will not get us there, will not get us anywhere near there, so we really need to think about some game changer investment across the tiers of government.

There is one that we have been looking at here. Being a mining town we have got quite shallow groundwater that is quite contaminated, and there is an ongoing project to make sure that this contaminated groundwater does not start appearing around the city. It is being pumped out to the north at the moment, but we have been looking at a project with the State Government around being able to have a pumped hydro system where you can sort of use the water in the mine shafts to have it stored and then come down, turn turbines and generate electricity, but it is hard to get traction on some of those big projects that require more investment to look at their feasibility. They require governments and people to be bolder in terms of looking for innovative solutions.

**Ms GREEN:** Congratulations on identifying the mental health aspect of it. I am just querying whether you included that in a submission to the royal commission on mental health, and if you did not—and you can take that on notice—the interim recommendations are coming out in November. I know a lot of the regional partnerships are wanting to take a leadership role in that to make sure that they assist the commission in ensuring that the recommendations are case specific, especially to regions—but particularly I think putting that into their minds, if it is not in the recommendations, to try and suggest that it is, because I think that that is an excellent one. David made the point that what you are doing is cyclical, but my example just shows it is entrenched. If even one of my uncles was left on what was the family farm, there is no way that would sustain one person, let alone a family, and it is not just your income. It is just the grief of a whole lifestyle, and that is

what a lot of the Wimmera farmers and Mallee farmers are seeing, so you can see why that would be a huge sense of grief.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** We will certainly take that on notice. Thank you.

**Ms GREEN:** Thank you.

**Mr MORRIS:** Can I just clarify; I was not suggesting it was cyclical. What I was trying to do was tease out whether it is or whether it is developing into an ongoing situation.

**Ms GREEN:** Thanks, David.

**Mr HAMER:** Just in relation to your food and garden organics kerbside collection, that is across the entire municipality?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** Correct.

**Cr ALDEN:** Not the smaller townships; it is more the urban area.

**Mr HAMER:** Just the main urban area?

**Cr ALDEN:** At this stage.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** But we are looking for opportunities to widen that, and we have also been working with businesses to start implementing that through cafes and businesses that generate a lot of food source.

**Cr ALDEN:** It is very successful.

**Mr HAMER:** I think it is great you have had that in place for three years. So that was just added as part of the pre-existing garden waste collection—there is not an additional collection on an additional bin?

**Cr ALDEN:** It is an additional bin. It is a dedicated bin, and it will take around half of the waste stream out by doing that. It has been significant.

**Mr HAMER:** So the residents have four collections, do they?

**Cr ALDEN:** They have three bins.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** Three bins?

**Mr HAMER:** So there is waste, recycling and then food and organics.

**Cr ALDEN:** And then organics.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** Yes. So historically in Bendigo we have had private operators that have picked up green clippings and so forth, but the City of Greater Bendigo did the research. We knew it was going to make a pretty significant contribution to reducing methane emissions and diverting from landfill. And at the end of the day, hopefully as you visit Bendigo you love the public parks, the flowers and the welcome that you get here from a public realm perspective. Compost that has been generated from food and organic waste, that is the same—it is generating compost to go on those gardens that you see here today.

**Mr HAMER:** Sorry, I just had a couple of follow-up questions on that. Have there been many contamination issues associated with that, or has everyone been pretty good?

**Cr ALDEN:** It has been remarkable—very, very minimal contamination. So that has been something that maybe might bust some myths around how difficult it might be to implement something like this. So we have been pleasantly surprised.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** The community education awareness campaigns are really crucial and constructed in a positive way to give people a nudge that that is a contribution they can make. You have got to make it easy, so

every household was given a little household bin with organic liners, and those organic liners come out each year—so making it easy for people and also communicating the positive effect it is having. That is making a difference—those education campaigns.

**Mr HAMER:** And that, I guess, will lead into my final point. You have mentioned that where the Government could assist would be to support other local governments to implement that.

**Mr O’SULLIVAN:** Absolutely.

**Mr HAMER:** Is that primarily sort of through education or a bulk buying of the liners—that sort of thing—or do you have specific actions in mind?

**Cr ALDEN:** Maybe expansion of the service into the smaller rural communities, because we know that not everybody is doing composting on their own property, even in a smaller rural community. So where we make that easy for people to have subsidised compost bins, it may be possible to look at an expansion in that area.

**Mr HAMER:** So how could the State Government help in that expansion?

**Cr ALDEN:** Obviously with the cost.

**Mr HAMER:** Subsidies?

**Mr O’SULLIVAN:** From a City of Greater Bendigo point of view, we would love to push out that food and organics collection across the 3000-square kilometres of the municipality. We know that is a challenge, and it is that last mile challenge, so support to be able to ensure that all residents have that opportunity would be fantastic in the City of Greater Bendigo. That said, one of our primary considerations is that because we have got scale here, we have been able to implement it for Greater Bendigo—largely for the urban interface—but wouldn’t it be great to see that implemented in the urban interface in our neighbouring shires, for instance? That is, I suppose, where we are particularly going. It has been done before now. There are lots of lessons learned. There are toolkits, there is awareness-raising education, so there is certainly support for the State to say, ‘Well, it’s a known model now. There are cities like the City of Greater Bendigo that can provide leadership and support’. We see that as particularly supporting our smaller rural shires. It is an opportunity for the State Government.

**The CHAIR:** I am just going to ask one question on a point you raised earlier about pumped hydro using your old mine shafts.

**Ms GREEN:** Chair, do you mind if I just jump in on the green waste first? Sorry, I just thought—rather than bring them back.

**The CHAIR:** No, sure.

**Ms GREEN:** That is great. On the point of the small rural shires, I know that Hepburn shire and I think Mount Alexander, there have been five of them in a cluster that the State Government has funded to do a green waste trial. I would be interested in what interaction there has been from there and whether there have been learnings from there. Just a suggestion, I was in Barcelona in the middle of the year and they actually do not have individual household waste collection. They actually have these massive things on street corners that people just on their way to work put all the different things in, including green waste. It just occurred to me that that might be something that might work in the small townships like your Elmores and your Heathcotes and things like that. If people get the Bokashi bins or whatever, they are something they can easily just go and pop in every week or two into the centralised one. It might just be a cost-saving option. But have a look at Barcelona. They might share some information with you.

**Cr ALDEN:** Can I just make a comment with regard to Paul’s mention around the organics and the compost production just as another area of potential support. DELWP is doing some research with La Trobe University at the moment with regards to the use of compost as a soil conditioner for farmers to draw down carbon. That type of research data is very, very useful and very important, so there are other purposes that this compost can

be put to to regenerate as well, which will have a spin-off to a lot of other food production and other sorts of impacts.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** I would say, in terms of your point, Danielle, that once again it is about one size does not fit all for communities. A fresh and organic collection in a smaller community could look a bit different to a municipality like Greater Bendigo, so flexibility, absolutely agreed. But creating a different future for them, whatever that might be, would be a great area to look at.

**The CHAIR:** I just wanted to explore a little bit further, and I know we have run over time, but you talked about using some of your old mine shafts and groundwater to create pumped hydro as a way of generating clean energy. Clearly the project has not got up yet and I suspect that is in part because funding has not been secured. Would it be useful if the state had some form of a clean energy-type corporation that might support these types of applications? It would be clearly competitive and it might be with low-interest loans or all sorts of other different funding structures. Would some form of a fund like that help support the smaller scale but nevertheless potentially important projects that might enable local communities to generate clean, renewable energy within their own neighbourhoods?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** I certainly think it would. Each community is different, each community has ideas, and particular to Bendigo are all these mine shafts from our previous mining history. It would be unique. Some similar things have been done elsewhere, but it would be a first in Australia to be able to effectively pump water up from the underground at a low peak time to storage facilities and then at peak times be able to have the resource to release that water down through turbines and generate electricity. That has the potential to produce up to 50 per cent of Bendigo's energy needs. We have done an initial investment with the State Government. We each put in a relatively modest amount of money for a study—about \$100 000 worth—and it indicated that yes, there is absolutely potential there. But the project, for businesses to invest in it, it needs to be de-risked, and so there is—

**The CHAIR:** So low-interest loans or something like that, or no-interest loans from government?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** Well, I suppose it is like a lot of things: you have got to get it investment ready. There is market failure there because there is uncertainty. So I think there is a great opportunity for local government and State Government to say, 'Well, a small number of our projects need to be a little bit blue-sky; they need to be a bit different because you just never know if one of these is going to come off'. We think this is unique to Bendigo, has a lot of potential, and we would love to keep the conversation going with State Government about: is this something that we could do the broader feasibility work for to say, 'This project—we have sorted through the risks and it is now potentially investment ready'.

**Cr ALDEN:** There is a solar component to that as well. So obviously the solar investment is the other part that complements the pumping up.

**Ms GREEN:** Well done. I just had a quick economic question. Well done, including it in your economic strategy and identifying it as both a challenge and an opportunity. I think that opportunity with the youth unemployment rate being an aberration in regional Victoria is that it is just a blip here—the opportunities to, I suppose, partner. I mean, you did infer that there could be jobs in all of your proposals. But the regional partnership in Loddon Campaspe—two deep-dive propositions for the years going forward are dealing with that youth unemployment and under-representation in the workforce and agribusiness. So how do you think you could marry that objective from Greater Bendigo and segue into the greater regional partnership?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** We would say it is absolutely aligned. So the City of Greater Bendigo, its CEO Craig Neimann, is represented on the regional partnership. The views of the City of Greater Bendigo and the other partners of the regional partnership have then been able to come up with those flagship projects for the regional partnership. On many of these initiatives we have got to make sure it is not just one organisation that is doing something. If there are important issues and often these are wicked problems, whether it is tackling climate change or whether it is tackling increasing socio-economic disadvantage and youth unemployment, it means that we need to get as many organisations together—regional partnership, local government, key community leaders—

**Ms GREEN:** Do you have an idea on a job number, a job target, that you could achieve with what you are proposing?

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** I mean, certainly in terms of adult employment in Bendigo, the federal stats were that we had one of the lowest unemployment rates for the adult population in Bendigo, but it was our youth where we were one of the highest. We know that it is a complex situation, that there is no one silver bullet to it, but we do know that none of our organisations will be able to solve that individually. We need to work together. It needs to start from when a baby is born: the support for the family; the ability to ensure that the families and the children get a good start, get into education early and are really supported as they go through that journey through school. We need to make sure that when young people leave school they are not falling off the edge into either not attending training or—

**Ms GREEN:** The climate change sort of jobs, though?

**Cr ALDEN:** Yes. I was just going to mention the agribusiness in terms of picking up on Bernie's point about pathways to formal education. So we have the Bendigo Kangan TAFE. It has a centre of excellence in food and fibre, a range of different certification courses and career options for young people to progress straight to, and equally La Trobe University is very strong in agribusiness and career options that will be quite appealing to people in these regional areas. So there are those facilities there. It is I think a matter of making them equally or increasingly accessible. I understand there are obviously some free TAFE courses now that might be increasing that—we have not seen the data back from that yet of course—but that is a start.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for your time; we have run well over. Your submission was very informative, though, so we very much appreciate it.

**Witnesses withdrew.**