

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Mornington—Thursday, 7 November 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

WITNESS

Mr David Williams, Vice-President, Bayside Climate Change Action Group.

The CHAIR: I will just run through some important formalities for you before we begin. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege; this means no legal action can be taken against you in relation to the evidence that you give. However, this protection will not apply to any comments you make outside the hearing, even if you are restating what you have said during the hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of the evidence in the next week or so, and you may check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the Committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report. Thank you for making the time to meet with the Committee today. Could you please state your full name and title before beginning your presentation?

Mr WILLIAMS: My name is David Williams. I do not really have a title. I do work with the Bayside Climate Change Action Group, if that is helpful.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Over to you, David.

Mr WILLIAMS: Well, I am not quite sure how today will unfold. We did make a submission to the Committee, and I do not want to waste your time by repeating all of that. I assume you have had a chance to absorb some of that. Perhaps you have some questions about what we submitted.

The CHAIR: It is normal practice, David, for people who are submitting to give a verbal presentation on some of the key, salient points that you particularly want us to note. So it is up to you, but if you are able to just touch on some of the key talking points, the key evidence that you really want us to reflect on, that is usually helpful.

Mr WILLIAMS: Okay. I am not sure what you have covered so far. I am sorry, I understood we would start at 1.15, so I do apologise.

The CHAIR: That is all right.

Mr WILLIAMS: One of the issues which I am not sure you considered is the cost of gas, and whether there is anything we could do to move away from gas towards more renewable generated electricity. We have got plenty of gas, we are exporting a lot of it, but I just wonder if there is room to drive a transition to renewable-energy generated electricity. That may be something for the Committee to consider.

The other important point I think is, if we are to get anywhere, we maybe need to consider a specific budget for climate action. If we really want to take action in this area, then we need to have some budget provision so that we can have the finance available. If we decide to take or support this or that action, we need to have the money to do it. If there were a specific budget set aside as part of parliamentary planning, then it may make it easier to move forward if a renewable energy project comes up that looks like it might be worth funding; then the funding would be available. I note that Government has moved in recent times to set an emissions reduction target. This may be an adjunct to that, to have provision for other initiatives that may become available. The other point I think worth noting is I understand that the Premier announced that he is moving towards phasing out logging of native forests by 2030. This is a useful step forward, but 2030 is 11 years away. We could lose a lot of forest in between, and I think there are alternatives to logging old-growth forests, which I am sure you are aware of.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask, David: your group as I understand it is a group that is principally driven around informing the community of climate change. It seems from the materials I have read to date that is the key focus. How might governments best support the work of groups like yours around the state? Is there a role for government to help support the advocacy? How could governments better support what it is that your group does?

Mr WILLIAMS: Well, this is an interesting one. We work with governments at all levels and we talk to our federal colleagues, our state Members and also our local council about what actions could be useful in this

space. How could the State Government support us? You could give consideration to educating people from groups like ours and helping them to be better leaders, better advocates, better communicators so that the community at large is more informed and better informed about the facts.

The CHAIR: Do you have a paid facilitator or coordinator?

Mr WILLIAMS: We do not have any paid people. We are all volunteers.

Mr FOWLES: You spoke about directly funding climate action and there needing to be a fund for that. Do you have any particular ideas about how that ought to be structured or the sorts of initiatives that it ought to fund, or is there a particularly meritorious or efficient way of going about it in your view? You are allowed to say no if you do not.

Mr WILLIAMS: It is difficult to put ourselves in the position of State Government. However, the concept is: if there were a specific budget set aside for climate action or work in the renewable energy space, then it may be easier for Government to recognise and support initiatives which come forward. I do not have any top of mind at the minute that I could suggest.

Mr FOWLES: But to be clear, you spoke about supporting the advocacy work and being better communicators and stuff. There is a lot happening in that space. Do you see a role for Government in furthering that work or do you see it more as funding direct shifts to renewables or carbon sequestration and those sorts of projects?

Mr WILLIAMS: I think it would be better spent funding major projects so that we actually make progress. Community groups like ours will operate as best we can. Of course if we were better educated, better informed, better facilitators, maybe we could do the job better. But really Government can do much more and move bigger mountains more quickly and with more effect than we can.

Mr FOWLES: If you could change one or two things about what the Victorian Government is doing at the moment, what would they be?

Mr WILLIAMS: I guess the key that we are thinking about or considering is that this budget which I spoke about is established and put aside, so that whatever the other pressures—on spending and requirements—there is always something there because this topic is important. Of course Government has to deal with a number of important issues but this one is also very important.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask: if a bunch of locals within the geographic area that you guys look after decided that they wanted to establish a community renewable energy project, what level of support might be useful for the Government to provide your group to enable you guys to have the tools to support that local application? How might the State Government support your group in enabling you guys to be the enabler of community-owned renewable energy?

Mr WILLIAMS: Well, you are already doing it in a way. We are working on sustainable grants at the moment. We have an application in for a tree-planting project with primary schools. We are working on a community solar project with council. They have solar on all of their facilities. There is one major one that is left, and that is the one that we are keen to see developed into a community project, so that poorer people and people who cannot afford solar could access that. That would be like a community grant scheme. These mechanisms already exist, and this one could have a particular focus for a community project such as a community solar project.

The CHAIR: Thanks David. We appreciate it.

Mr WILLIAMS: Okay. Thanks for your time.

Witness withdrew.