

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

WITNESSES

Mr John Baker, CEO,

Ms Melissa Burrage, Manager, Climate Change, Energy and Water, and

Ms Stephanie Delaney, Agribusiness and Food Industry Officer, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing. I just want to run through some important formalities. You may have heard this through some of the other submitters earlier today. 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 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 for you to 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 each of you please state your name and your title before your presentation.

Mr BAKER: John Baker. I am Chief Executive Officer.

Ms BURRAGE: Melissa Burrage. I am the Manager of Climate Change, Energy and Water for the shire.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Over to you.

Visual presentation.

Mr BAKER: Thank you very much, Darren. Thank you for the opportunity to present to this Inquiry. It is very important. Working with the community to tackle climate change is critically important for Mornington Peninsula shire, and it is certainly something that we have been doing for many years now, particularly focusing on raising awareness of climate change and encouraging the community to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change.

As a demonstration of our seriousness about this issue, I think in February 2016 the shire committed to achieving carbon neutrality in all of our operations by 2021, and you will be pleased to hear that we are well on track to actually do that.

The installation of solar power: we are now pretty close to our goal of installing around 2500 solar photovoltaic panels across shire-owned buildings—you will see some of them as you drive around; sustainable retrofits in our buildings; lighting upgrades; and indeed carbon offsets that we use at the moment. So last year, you may be aware, we adopted our *Climate Change Community Engagement Strategy*, which is now actioned or is being actioned to support our community in this climate emergency.

More than 550 residents were involved in the shaping of that strategy, which outlines the council's vision to assist the community to become resilient as far as impacts of climate change—and there are many examples on the peninsula of climate change: being aware of those associated risks, being actively involved and supported to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and being prepared for the future.

You may be aware we have also very recently declared a climate emergency as a council, recognising the earth's current climate warming trajectory is a threat to life not just on the Mornington Peninsula but certainly most of the planet. We believe that it requires an emergency response by all levels of government—state, federal and local government. So while we are all committed to supporting our community, we recognise that this is something we cannot do alone. Our partnership with State Government is of the utmost importance: the required legislative changes that we need, the investment in our infrastructure, the investment in education and the financial incentives.

So to a large degree the community can only act on climate change if they have a framework to do that. At the Briars this morning I think you heard some of the ideas on how the shire and we can all safeguard our position

as a regional food bowl by securing our water supply, and my colleague will talk a little bit about that in a moment.

But we have more to say about that. I think first I would like to share with you the thoughts of our community on the subject of climate change. We are currently in the midst of extensive community consultation as a result of that climate change declaration in August. The feedback we get from this consultation forms the foundation of our climate emergency action plan. Over the past few weeks our residents have been talking to us about the fact that they are very concerned about climate change, what they think our key areas of focus should be from a local government perspective and what they should be from a state perspective. As I said, while we are still in the middle of this consultation, an analysis of the responses that we have received so far has highlighted some clear trends, and I will just talk a little bit about those.

A large majority of all the responses that we have had so far—about 65 per cent of our respondents—believe that we need to set a target that aligns to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a target of net zero emissions by 2030. Our community's major concern is the very long bushfire season and the forecast increase in the number of high fire danger days. This is closely followed by the need to secure our water supply and the potential impact on health and amenity of more hot days than we are experiencing, and indeed heatwaves.

This is not surprising when it comes to bushfire. The peninsula, as I am sure you are aware, is in a particularly vulnerable position. On hot days visitors flock down to the Mornington Peninsula. On average we receive about 6.3 million visitors every year. That is the population of Victoria coming down to the Mornington Peninsula each year. So on those hot days you can imagine the increased burden on communications, on infrastructure and on local roads at a point when we are particularly worried about bushfire. So having a high concentration of people packed into such a small area is a significant risk for us.

Linked to that of course is water scarcity. You may have heard this morning a little bit about some of the plans around recycled water, but with rural properties throughout our region dependent pretty much solely on tank water that also is a key issue of concern for us.

Other things that residents raised with us were around sustainable farming, zero net waste and transitioning to clean energy. But our residents are also realistic. They need to acknowledge that governments cannot solve the problem of climate change alone—it requires every member of the community to take both individual action and household action. This ties in with the peninsula's greenhouse emissions profile.

Some other things that we know are that 2 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent were emitted across the shire last year, and 61 per cent of those were from stationary energy—so covering commercial and residential. Clearly the most effective way to assist our community to reduce emissions is to target stationary use in households and businesses.

However, a sizable proportion—31 per cent of the total emissions—are from on-road transport. This is pretty high compared to the state average of 19.5 per cent. This is largely due to the high level of private vehicles; that is because of our notoriously poor public transport. In fact we have the second lowest provision of public transport per person in the metropolitan area; 82 per cent of the Mornington Peninsula is not covered by public transport at all so everybody is driving around in cars. By improving our public transport and trialling the use of things like electric buses we believe we can effectively kill two birds with one stone: we can drive down our community greenhouse gas emissions whilst also directly tackling the many social and economic deficits that stem from very poor or inadequate public transport.

So we believe there is incredible potential for the Victorian Government to unlock genuine and lasting environmental and social benefits by working with us to improve our public transport network. For example, we are the perfect location for trialling electric buses because of our mix of urban and rural roads and because of the huge influx of visitors that I just outlined to you. Therefore one of the things that we are really keen to call on the State Government to do is to conduct a trial of electric buses on the peninsula and to support us in our ask of a bus network on the peninsula that is frequent, direct and reliable, including a trial of on-demand services. This could be part of a broader State transport plan that supports zero emissions, including incentives and targets around uptake of zero emission vehicles.

I should also add that the shire is walking the talk when it comes to driving down our own transport emissions. We have invested very heavily in our own electric fleet, indeed my own car and the mayor's car are electric—I parked downstairs today—so we have invested very, very heavily in electric vehicles. But more importantly we are actually progressively transitioning the whole shire fleet to electric.

So with the right support from the Victorian Government, we could make a real and lasting difference to the peninsula's overall transport emissions profile, we believe. Now to outline some of our other areas of focus in response to climate change, I would like to hand over to Melissa, who is going to outline some other areas.

Ms BURRAGE: Thanks, John. Thank you. This morning you visited the Briars site—on a very wet morning, I might add—and this site actually neighbours the Mount Martha treatment plant and also an inlet point to the south-eastern outfall pipeline. So, as Stephanie and Brenda, probably touched on this morning, this pipeline each day has around 350 megalitres of high-quality recycled water pumped into Bass Strait at Gunnamatta.

Mr FOWLES: Sorry, Melissa. Do you have one of those laser pointer things by any chance?

Ms BURRAGE: I do.

Mr FOWLES: Just for those who are less familiar with the geography around here, could you run us through that?

Ms BURRAGE: So where are we? This is the Briars site here. This is the Mount Martha treatment plant. We actually have two other treatment plants on the peninsula: one over here in Somers and another down here in Boneo. We actually access recycled water from the Boneo treatment plant for agricultural use already and also some of our sportsgrounds and facilities. So we have already proven that this works and it is a high-value proposition.

Mr FOWLES: And by treatment plant, we are talking about sewerage treatment?

Ms BURRAGE: That is right, yes.

Mr FOWLES: It is not any other process, desalinating or anything?

Mr BAKER: No. But the pipe, when we talk about the water—

Ms BURRAGE: So this is this green line.

Mr BAKER: that pipe was going past you, today it is being poured out into the sea.

Ms BURRAGE: Yes. Essentially that 350 megalitres would actually fill the MCG every four and a half days, so it is a massive volume of water that we are talking about, and it is a valuable resource that is actually now being lost at sea.

Mr HAMER: That is all coming out as class A from Seaford or wherever that plant is?

Ms BURRAGE: Yes, that is right.

Mr HAMER: The eastern treatment plant.

Ms BURRAGE: The eastern treatment plant, that is right.

Mr BAKER: And it is not being used.

Ms BURRAGE: Yes. These treatment plants here actually add into it, so Somers actually transport their water at class C stage back to Mount Martha and then it is further treated to class A and then popped into this pipeline as well, and Boneo obviously accesses it here as well.

Mr FOWLES: And then just poured into the ocean?

Ms BURRAGE: That is it, yes. Yet last summer Victoria's potable water storage was the lowest we have seen since the millennium drought, and it is likely to continue to happen. Melbourne's rainfall will continue to be variable, but overall the predictions are saying that we are going to see a decline in our rainfall and particularly during the spring. Also, as Melbourne's population increases, the volumes of this water are only set to increase as well as we need to treat more and more sewerage going forward.

Mr HAMER: How much of those would be using potable water? They would all be using just rainwater now wouldn't they in these areas with their schemes. Is that right?

Ms BURRAGE: Yes. Some areas are using potable water. Some areas are capturing stormwater when it rains if they have got large enough storage for the water. Also what we are seeing is down this southern end of the peninsula—here—we have a massive number of groundwater bores. We are also seeing that the aquifer is virtually dry, and what is left there is highly salinated, so it is almost unusable unless it is massively shandied with potable water or other water is trapped in.

Mr BAKER: And just to paint that picture for you, as far as the potable water is concerned, we have got instances on the Mornington Peninsula of people using drinking water, buying drinking water in truckloads, and using that to water some of their facilities at the moment because you cannot get the recycled water around the Mornington Peninsula. It has got that bad.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask on that: there is obviously this massive asset, if you like, in the recycled water. There is obviously already to a limited extent a pipeline. What public policy changes are needed to encourage horticultural take-up of this water?

Mr BAKER: The demand is there, as I have said. These organisations—everyone from the winegrowers right the way through to the farmers—need this water. The price at the moment for that water is so high that it is actually not worthwhile, because what you are finding is that there is a full cost recovery for the treatment from the water companies, and therefore the price that they actually want to charge makes it not worthwhile. They would rather pour it into the sea than actually sell it.

The CHAIR: What public policy changes might see this water taken up? Would it be that we levy the cost of recycling the water across the whole corporation?

Mr BAKER: Yes.

The CHAIR: We pay for it—

Mr BAKER: That is exactly right.

The CHAIR: and the water authority then has the capacity to sell it at, presumably, a cost equal to if not lower than potable water.

Mr BAKER: That is spot on.

The CHAIR: Is that the model that is required?

Ms BURRAGE: That is right, yes.

Mr MORRIS: Really there are two issues. One is the pricing that the water companies put on the product. I just find it ludicrous. Water either goes out at Cape Schanck or they try and sell it, as John said, at a full cost recovery. They are not recovering a cent that flows out at Cape Schanck, so we are recovering 20 per cent of that.

Mr BAKER: That is a market issue.

Mr MORRIS: The other aspect too is the capital cost. I am aware of a number of points just up the top. Where Mount Eliza is there, you can see the pipe is close to there. So one of the schools and recently Mornington Golf Club have tapped into the pipe, but they are very, very close so it makes it feasible in terms of their capex to get from the pipe to their location.

Mr FOWLES: And are they charged for that water?

Mr MORRIS: It is not that they are charged for the water; they are charged for the pipe—

Mr FOWLES: Sure, I appreciate that.

Mr MORRIS: But they have to absorb the total capital cost. So as I say, it is reasonable there, but you get further down and the areas we are talking about serving—it is a very long way, and it is beyond the capacity of any individual business, and mostly small business, to fund that capex.

Ms BURRAGE: Even the collaboration of businesses. So we are currently doing a feasibility study around providing recycled water for the Tyabb-Somerville region and a collaboration of businesses there, but essentially you want to keep the line as short as possible because that is the expensive bit, that trunk line, to actually get it to the people that need it and the businesses that need to use it.

The CHAIR: You have talked about also having a very depleted aquifer. Has there been any consideration as to whether aquifer recharge with this water might be a useful—

Ms BURRAGE: Absolutely. At the moment the policy does not allow us to do it. The policies do actually limit what our end uses can be at the moment. Essentially we are limited on whether we can use it for firefighting conditions, we are limited around aquifer recharge and also essentially for environmental flows also. What we are seeing, particularly up in this region here and certainly along the Western Port side, is farmers are building in-line dams and using water from our waterways. That is meaning that we are actually getting ephemeral waterways, so they are not running through the summer months. They are dry because all the water is sitting in their dam.

Mr FOWLES: But you are statute barred at the moment from diverting that pipe into environmental flows as well?

Ms BURRAGE: Correct. But they are some of the things we would certainly like to see changes in, where best use for this type of water would allow—for firefighting, for environmental flows and for aquifer recharge.

Mr FOWLES: So after it leaves Mount Martha, at that stage it is class A, did you say?

Ms BURRAGE: Yes. Or class, swimmable—

Mr FOWLES: Or sort of A dash? A bit salty, but—

Ms BURRAGE: It is high-quality recycled water.

Mr FOWLES: Does the science say that that water is in fact suitable for environmental flows, aquifer recharge and these other purposes?

Ms BURRAGE: Yes. But there is a process that we would need to work through to confirm with the department of health. But certainly that is—

The CHAIR: How far is your community along the journey of accepting the use of recycled water for these types of purposes? Is this universally supported? Is there a high community acceptance? Is your community ready to potentially lead the charge on implementing potential new State policy around this stuff?

Mr BAKER: Absolutely. It is pretty much at every councillor meeting—there are some councillors here now. At every community meeting that we go to, this is something that we get reinforced over and over again, and for the more sophisticated members of the community or those that are involved in agriculture, in winemaking et cetera, this is something that they are now screaming for. It is not only logical but there is this pipeline that they can physically see—the water is going past them. You can imagine the frustration.

Ms BURRAGE: And the other thing, from the community consultation around the climate emergency survey work that we have been doing, water scarcity was one of the top three that our community is saying they are really worried about in the face of climate change, so it is all aligned.

Mr BAKER: And from a bushfire perspective as well, certainly the CFA and others are raising this as a key issue.

Mr FOWLES: To move now to the project of providing piping so that we can enable a bunch of these potential uses, I think our evidence this morning was that there is a feasibility study on foot. Is that tripartite funding?

Ms BURRAGE: Yes. We have three schemes that we are hoping to develop. So we have the Briars scheme here, which is essentially trying to shift the Briars site to a demonstration site for high-value agricultural crops and also potentially carbon sequestration and reforestation.

Mr BAKER: Melissa, the cost of that is in the order of—

Mr FOWLES: It was about \$30 million?

Mr BAKER: No, no, no.

Ms BURRAGE: No. It is about a million to get it to the Briars. Then if we would like to take it across the road to our sporting facilities, it is probably about another one and a half million, at most. They are the top end figures. It is probably likely to be less than that, depending on how it was delivered and who delivers it.

Mr BAKER: I think it is in the 30s for—

I mean, I think it is 50 million for the whole of it?

Ms BURRAGE: Yes. So the Tyabb-Somerville scheme—we are just doing the feasibility study for that at the moment. So that is about 1500 megalitres. There is provision for agricultural re-use, and it is probably about \$20 million there.

Mr FOWLES: So the intention there would be to divert the waste, like to treat it in Somers, or to actually still go up and then back?

Ms BURRAGE: No. So we would actually access the south-eastern outfall pipeline and trunk it straight to the region.

Mr FOWLES: Before presumably the Somers stuff hits it—water in before the poo goes in?

Ms BURRAGE: Yes, that is right. The Somers water actually goes to the treatment plant for a higher level of treatment before it enters the pipeline. So we are always talking a relatively high—

Mr FOWLES: So even though it is there as a trunk line, in fact it is a parallel line.

Ms BURRAGE: Yes.

Mr FOWLES: Gotcha. Okay. Stephanie may know this—the \$600 000 feasibility you referred to this morning, that is for—

Ms DELANEY: That is for Tyabb-Somerville.

Ms BURRAGE: That is for this one.

Mr FOWLES: That is for that one? Okay.

Ms DELANEY: And actually that 20- to 30-year figure was an original early projection.

The CHAIR: Stephanie, if you are going to add some evidence—and you are welcome to—could you please join us up here, just for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr FOWLES: Just for the record, your surname?

Ms DELANEY: Delaney.

Mr FOWLES: So that feasibility is for that Somerville-Tyabb scheme?

Ms DELANEY: That is right.

Mr FOWLES: And who was funding that—that \$600 000? Was that council?

Ms DELANEY: South East Water, Mornington Peninsula shire and the State Government via DELWP's IWM forum funding.

Mr FOWLES: The real issue I am trying to get to here is: once that feasibility has landed, presumably you will be coming to Government then with a costed, concluded proposal for this.

Ms DELANEY: That is right.

Mr FOWLES: Is there going to be similar work done for the hinterland scheme, because that to me seems to be the one with the big economic upside. Is similar work underway or will similar work be done down the track? What is the status there?

Ms DELANEY: A Federal Government commitment was made just prior to the election to invest \$300 000 into developing the hinterland scheme, but that is dependent on matched State funding. So that is through the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund that that will be facilitated.

Mr FOWLES: And have we said yes or no to that funding?

Ms DELANEY: We have said yes to 200 of that 300, because that is all we can match at this point in time.

Mr FOWLES: Sorry, the shire has?

Ms DELANEY: Yes, the shire and South East Water.

Mr BAKER: The State is silent on this at the moment.

Mr FOWLES: Has the State Government refused it or said—

Ms DELANEY: The State are silent.

Mr BAKER: We have not had a view from the State yet.

Mr FOWLES: That is good for me to understand.

The CHAIR: David, did you have any questions?

Mr MORRIS: Not on this, no.

The CHAIR: Keep going, Melissa. I know we jumped in.

Ms BURRAGE: All of these schemes are essentially climate change adaptation projects. They are critical to droughtproof the peninsula, reduce our reliance on potable water supply, protect us from fire and develop economic growth in agriculture for the region, and also it is about protecting and enhancing our environment. So we have touched on the three schemes and the relative costs associated with them—so it is about a million for the Briars (Stage 1); Tyabb-Somerville, at most 20; and about 50 in the hinterland scheme initiative.

John, did you want to touch on the city deal?

Mr BAKER: Well, this has been raised at a city deal level as well. So for south-east Melbourne we had a meeting a few weeks ago with Alan Tudge and representatives from the State Government. One of the schemes that has been put forward through south-east Melbourne is on recycled water, particularly focused on these areas as well. So there is huge potential there, I think, for this to be knitted together into something quite

meaningful. What was interesting about that was that the other seven municipalities were all as supportive of this, recognising its regional significance not just for the Mornington Peninsula shire but the regional significance of this type of project.

Mr FOWLES: Is there any risk it gets diverted upstream—that back at Seaford or whatever, they find some alternative use for the water or treat it a different way or put it back into the drinking water system or something?

Ms DELANEY: Speaking to South East Water and to agricultural industries here in terms of the volume they use, the belief is that there is no way—even if all of the available agricultural land was used across the whole peninsula, right up to and including Tyabb, Somerville, Pearcedale, that area, we could never use that amount of water over the annual period.

Mr BAKER: Which is a wonderful opportunity, but it is quite striking, isn't it, as a statistic?

Ms BURRAGE: So while we have got agriculture worried about the severe lack of access to water, we have got South East Water and Melbourne Water under considerable regulatory pressure to limit the volume that is being discharged, and we have a growing population, so it is going to continue to grow, and there are limitless amounts of water.

Mr MORRIS: Just on that, is the Bunyip food bowl concept dead or is that still hanging around?

Ms DELANEY: It was an early iteration of this—early in terms of climate change. What has happened since is obviously a lot more dramatic in terms of where we are and water security, and it was too big for a lot of people to digest, and the expense of it, and now I think it has become—it is getting more and more dire.

Mr MORRIS: The reason I ask, Stephanie, is if this gets up and succeeds, then vegie growers that are left at Clyde are probably going to want to get in on the act, so that is where the volume and what is available become important.

Ms DELANEY: It is. In fact talking to South East Water about the extension of that Tyabb-Somerville scheme, they are looking at, you know, even the treated water at Pakenham that they have to find a resolution for—they thought they may then be able to plug into this network if it was all connected up and it would become the fit-for-purpose solution for the whole area.

Mr MORRIS: Right. That is good. It makes sense.

Ms BURRAGE: We might just touch on the waste strategy that we have been developing. Essentially this focuses on avoiding the generation of waste by reducing, reusing and recovering waste, and it will shift the balance of those community emissions that we saw earlier and reduce the total emissions that we have in the region. Climate change and material use are inherently linked, and moving to a circular economy builds regenerative systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and responds to the climate change emergency. So following extensive consultation, we have adopted an ambitious target to produce zero waste by 2030, but we cannot do that alone.

Mr FOWLES: Sorry, is that the target for the shire or for the council?

Ms BURRAGE: For the region. There are actions to be delivered across the next 10 years to shift waste management practices, services and initiatives, supporting a circular economy and the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. Essentially these services will work towards achieving maximum landfill diversion, support community groups and achieve a high level of community satisfaction across the peninsula.

Mr BAKER: The economics of that is really quite fascinating as far as demand goes. One of the things that we are quite focused on in exploring the delivery of this strategy is whether we can get recyclables into every building that we are doing, into road building et cetera, et cetera, and how we can create that demand for product, because on the one hand we are doing lots on recycling, but if all they are doing is baling it and leaving it in a warehouse, then it is not much good to anybody. So we have got to actually start working as well with the State on how we encourage demand for this product.

Ms BURRAGE: Yes, and improving the costs of those products as well. At the moment the costs of those recycled products are far greater than the equivalent with primary produce, so we really need to shift that.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask, in terms of, let us say, your sports fields, your public open spaces and the like, obviously we have park furniture, playgrounds, park benches, picnic tables—all of that sort of stuff. At this stage is your municipality using treated pine and timber and the like, or are you using plastic sleepers for that stuff?

Ms BURRAGE: Traditionally we have used the pine and so forth, but we are now shifting towards the recycled products. But as I mentioned before, those recycled products are at a higher cost, so we cannot put in as much furniture or as many bollards for the equivalent cost. But that is part of our ESD policy that we are developing at the moment.

The CHAIR: What is the shire doing with some of your sister entities, some of your other local government bodies—I do not know—maybe Parks Victoria and the like in terms of creating that big market that might actually ultimately drive down some of the costs—

Mr BAKER: Associated with it.

The CHAIR: You know, if you drive up the demand, you might—

Mr BAKER: At the moment we are talking to VicRoads. We are talking to a range of different State-level bodies around how we can bulk-buy some of this, as it were, and manage demand. But also I think, quite interestingly, looking at how we procure at a shire level as well, we are building a very large aquatic centre in Rosebud, which is wonderful, but we have targets within that for the amount of recycled materials that we are going to use. Typically we would approach that by just going out and buying new, but we have got to start diverting at that level as well. So, yes, it starts at a State level, but we have also got to treat our own procurement differently.

Mr MORRIS: This is a bit out of left field, but in part I am sitting here because I used to sit here—

Mr BAKER: You did indeed.

Mr MORRIS: more than a quarter of a century ago.

Mr FOWLES: So when the Member for Nepean was but a glint in his father's eye?

Mr MORRIS: Probably, yes.

Mr BAKER: I am sure you will be showing them the photographs afterwards that are outside.

Mr MORRIS: The bicentenary. It just occurred to me, and in part it is because I am physically here, but I remember standing up one night, probably in late 1993 or early 1994 and moving a motion for which notice had been given that the shire would no longer use rainforest timber in its public building works, much to the chagrin of the shire engineer of the day. What sort of policies like that does the shire have in place now in the broader sustainability area?

Mr BAKER: Just everything from going plastic free—so there was a vote on single-use plastics. There is now an agreed policy, and we are reviewing everything that we do from the perspective of being plastic free, and of course it touches everything. We have a two-year plan around how we are going to go about it—methodically going through the organisation. It starts at that level, and then obviously the declaration of the climate emergency and the strategic approach to this. There are a range of policies now that we are putting in place to make sure that we deliver. As I said, yes, it is procurement. We have touched on our fleet and how we go about servicing our fleet, and there is our move towards electric vehicles. There is certainly a push from councillors around moving away from a reliance on carbon offsetting and doing genuine carbon reduction. I do not know whether there are any other things. There is so much going on.

Ms BURRAGE: One of the other biggest gains is around the design phase of new facilities. We have an environmentally sustainable design policy that is under development at the moment, and we are trying to

embed that in everything we do. The unique position that we are in around that is that we are not only going to tackle buildings, but we will be the first council to actually tackle our civil works in regard to ESD principles.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask: the circular economy and creating new markets for product is clearly something that the State Government is working on. Just thinking about it in terms of the nature of your shire, you obviously have a very large road network. I am just wondering what shires like yours and others might be doing in terms of using glass as road base? Where are you at in that space? I know the State Government has really only started on that journey itself, but I am just wondering where your shire might be at? What are the best shires doing in that space?

Ms BURRAGE: That is certainly something that will fall out of the civil works ESD policy, and we are looking to trial those sorts of initiatives over the coming years and embed that where it is most applicable and best applied.

The CHAIR: Road base, concrete for footpaths.

Ms DELANEY: Recycled concrete.

The CHAIR: Recycled concrete.

Ms BURRAGE: That is right. Yes, so trialling different types of surfaces, whether they can be permeable, and then alleviating some of the water quality concerns as well. We are looking at all of those and where they are best applied.

Mr HAMER: I have got a question on the transport emissions, which is obviously quite a high segment of the total emissions in the community. I just want to tease out what other initiatives you may have thought of that you may think are a bit too hard at the moment or that you would need further State Government assistance for. You talked about your own council fleet and you also talked about improvements in public transport, but even in suburban Melbourne, with more frequent public transport and a more dense environment, you are still probably only talking about a 10 or 15 per cent mode share. That is just the nature of Melbourne. It would make a difference, and for a long time there have been issues with public transport provision on the peninsula. But just given the geography, the distances, even from the agricultural and horticultural sectors there is a lot of movement and transportation of goods and produce. Are there other initiatives either that council could do but is prevented from a lack of funding or that it sees that the State needs to get involved in actually trying to bring down those emissions? Because like you say, the stationary energy sector probably has more options available to it at the moment that can reduce that, but transport being that next largest one, so I wonder if you could tease that out a little bit more if you have had any thoughts.

Mr BAKER: I would love to say there was a simple answer to this one. Of course if there was, we would all be doing it. Our focus has predominantly been on the bus network, and I understand the take-up issue around 15 per cent. But we actually believe that based on the demographic profile that we have got in the Mornington Peninsula, and put aside for a moment Portsea and Sorrento and down there and actually shift up towards Baxter and Hastings and Mornington et cetera, if you are a kid and you are lucky enough to have a job in Hastings and you live in Mornington, right now you are going up to Frankston by bus and then you are travelling back down to Hastings to get to that job. It is not feasible; it is about an hour and a half. It is a half an hour car drive across. So we are actually quite convinced that with a strong, healthy network of buses—SmartBuses, smart networks—we could get that percentage much higher than most other areas because of, one, our demographic, and two, the service provision being so poor and the need being so great. We believe that we could persuade people to give up that second and third car, which is what people have down on the Mornington Peninsula at the moment because they cannot rely on anything else. The need down here, the focus for us at the moment, is to get an integrated good solid bus network. It is not very sexy; it is quite cheap in fact compared to doing a large-scale electrification of a line at a cost of billions of dollars. This is tens of millions of dollars to get a good bus network in place. That is a big focus.

You are absolutely right, of course: that needs to be part of a suite of other things that we need to do, and train may well be part of that and persuading people. Certainly some of the tracks that we have got at the moment unfortunately are worse now than they were in the 1950s and 1960s, but actually with some improvement on

what we have got at the moment we believe that we could move freight and other things around the shire and up to where we need to get it as well. Other than that, from a transport perspective we do not have a lot of choices down here on the Mornington Peninsula. It is buses or cars, and that is about it.

Ms BURRAGE: That is where we need to shift the vehicles that are on the peninsula to a zero emissions vehicle, so really investing in that EV charging infrastructure so that the uptake of EVs is growing across the peninsula.

Mr BAKER: Charge points that we are putting out.

Mr HAMER: Is there much demand for car sharing schemes down here? Or does everyone have a vehicle so there is no real need?

Ms BURRAGE: Not really.

Mr BAKER: We would be more interested in some of the smart technology associated with buses on demand and those sorts of things.

Ms BURRAGE: Yes, that is right.

Mr BAKER: Car sharing typically requires a higher volume. We have got 44 villages across the Mornington Peninsula, so actually a lot of our population is spread out, which kind of challenges sometimes the car sharing aspects of it. But that does not mean to say that it would not be part of that suite of ways of tackling some of these issues.

The CHAIR: Obviously we know we are going to see a rapid take-up of electric vehicles over the next decade. Part of the, I think, benefit or the opportunity that comes from being a tourist locality is that you are likely to see the take-up of EV vehicles on your road networks to be greater. People that can afford to travel typically are more likely to buy into new technology earlier. Has the council developed its own EV charge policy in terms of what you want the network to look like down here? Are you letting the market do it, or are you being interventionist and looking for opportunities to create that network?

Mr BAKER: It would probably be remiss of me not to mention Cr Brooks over here, who has driven a large part of the electric vehicle strategy for us. He will not talk to me if I do not do that, and I am statutorily obliged to mention him! I genuinely mean that: he has really driven this strategy very, very well. So, yes, we have a strategy. We have a vision for what we want to see across the whole of the Mornington Peninsula. It is a source of some surprise to me actually our infrastructure—more broadly I think across the state—as far as charge points are concerned and the infrastructure required for electric vehicles. I know personally, driving an electric vehicle around, that whole fear of running out of charge is something which hits you quite quickly. We are lucky enough here to have charge points downstairs. We have got charge points in Rosebud. We have even got fast charge points in Rosebud, which will charge a car for 240 kilometres in about 2 hours. So part of our strategy has—

Mr FOWLES: I think you said you had 43 villages. So how many of the 43 villages, of which a significant number of those are tourist localities, would have a charge location?

Mr BAKER: Very few would have a fast charge point, but many of the vehicles now, as you would know, actually can charge domestic. It takes a little while but you can actually manage with that, and obviously the hybrid vehicles are useful. It is a particular challenge for rural communities to actually adopt these types of vehicles, which is why part of our strategy is: how can we support our communities and encourage the development of these? We are already seeing them in hotels. Everywhere from Cape Schanck right the way through to the Rye Hotel have Tesla charge points et cetera, so they are beginning to appear on the apps already. I think what you are getting at, though, is: how do we approach that strategically? I think that is part of our stewardship of that infrastructure to ensure that that gets built up, and we are quite focused on that at the moment.

The CHAIR: The shire runs a significant fleet of vehicles for your officers. I would certainly like to suggest to you, and I would be interested in your response, that you will not be able to buy a fleet car anywhere in this country in 10 years time that is not electric.

Mr BAKER: I would argue you would be hard pushed to buy a new car that is not electric in 10 years time. Unfortunately we do not manufacture them here and most of the major producers are saying they are moving to electric in 10 years.

The CHAIR: So that is a significant amount of infrastructure the shire alone needs to put in place just to service your own vehicles.

Ms BURRAGE: Yes.

Mr BAKER: Absolutely, and we are starting that right now. So people are quite pleased when they arrive at the carpark in Rosebud and go, 'Oh, there's a charge point; fantastic', but it is more of a relief, and we want to get it to an expectation.

Ms BURRAGE: We have a 10-year transition plan for our fleet vehicles that is under development at the moment, so all of our vehicles will be EVs or new technology that is zero emissions.

Mr FOWLES: Just shifting topic now if I can. You call in your submission for an extensive education campaign. I just wondered if you could give us some insight about what you think that looks like and what role you see for State Government in that.

Ms BURRAGE: Yes. When you visited the Briars this morning, I believe Tiffany did some presentation to you around the education work that we currently do. That is largely with schools, but there is more need on the education side. The schools program obviously looks at sustainability and climate change and waste and water quality and those sorts of initiatives. But as we have seen the waste area being challenged over the last year, there is a growing need for greater education in that space to prevent contamination of different waste streams and also to look at shifting some of those waste streams to other uses, essentially. Also, while we do some community education more broadly, I think there is a growing need for our adult community to further understand what they can do in this space. So there is a need to actually get out to the community even more and deliver those programs. But we need to take those programs to them. It is not as successful to always make them come to us at the Eco Living Display Centre.

Mr BAKER: This has to be a key focus for us, and it features in our strategies. For us what is wonderful and quite sad is the fact that actually, from talking to the children in the schools, they get it, and they are better educated often than not my colleagues here but certainly me as far as some of those things are concerned. It is about getting it out to the community. The number of plastic bags that we see in the recycling bins—it is just that basic level of understanding of what you put in your bins that we have got to get out there and get a focus on.

Mr FOWLES: And there is a role for the State Government in that, do you think?

Mr BAKER: Absolutely there is. This has to be an integrated approach.

Mr FOWLES: Do you have a view about what our intervention should look like? Are you talking about TVCs or do you want to see other forms of communication? Is there a particular method or manner?

Mr BAKER: Education, certainly as far as the network we have here, if we think about it, on the ground there is no better placed organisation than local government to get out into community and actually to facilitate that, so supporting us in the delivery of that with materials, with resources, would be incredibly helpful and very, very useful. But I also think there is a knitting job for the State to do as well around actually pulling a lot of the other State agencies together so this is more of a coordinated approach. Whilst local government has a role within that, and a key role in our view, I think that cannot be achieved if we are not doing that hand in hand with the State.

The CHAIR: Just to build on that, we heard from an earlier submitter—I do not know if you were here—from the Port Phillip EcoCentre, and in some of the evidence that they were presenting and some of the questioning from the Committee members they quite liked the idea of seeing a network of centres like theirs established around the state to educate and inform our communities. How do you see a program like that being deployed, and how might your centre fit into some sort of model like that?

Mr BAKER: This is just my personal observation around some of that, and I welcome my colleagues' views, but there are so many organisations out there that potentially we can work with, Port Phillip being of course one of them. But there are a range of other organisations, not least of which is the Biosphere and other organisations like that that are doing wonderful work across the Mornington Peninsula and more broadly across this state often.

I think that to some extent we could say the more the merrier, but within the context of a strategy. What I am noticing is lots and lots of activity. Everybody is very busy in this space at the moment, and coordination of that activity I think is incumbent on organisations like local government but also the State, to make sure that is coordinated properly, which I am sure is why you are here and why you are doing what you are doing at the moment.

The CHAIR: Is there a State strategy?

Mr BAKER: I do not know.

Ms BURRAGE: No. Sustainability Victoria is the primary area responsible for this education piece, but there are some challenges with that. ResourceSmart Schools, for example, is quite an onerous program. We are seeing schools that have previously been part of that withdrawing from that because it is too onerous and too hard for them, and we need to make these programs really accessible and not onerous, so they can bite off as much as they can chew rather than needing to be all-encompassing.

So while there are some success stories in there, I think we can make it better accessible and work in collaboration with other groups, like we work closely with the Dolphin Research Institute, the Biosphere and so forth and the catchment management authorities. They are all really good bodies to work with in this space.

Ms DELANEY: And when you think about waste too, a third of all landfill is organic waste, and we have the opportunity with the agricultural industry—like you heard from Rollo Crittenden this morning—that are using natural waste and organic waste now instead of using synthetic and phosphates. It is having a better outcome for agriculture, and we have got businesses coming here privately funded looking for land to build bioenergy plants to create energy out of waste and sell the by-product of that back to agriculture. This feels like the new frontier. We feel like there are a lot of businesses coming to us in this space, and it is about working out for the community what is the best.

Mr MORRIS: There is no strategy. I think that has been established.

Mr BAKER: We were being polite.

Mr MORRIS: We are hoping one will arrive.

Ms BURRAGE: We do have a new CEO at Sustainability Victoria.

Mr BAKER: Yes, there we go.

Ms BURRAGE: They will maybe take charge in that space.

Mr MORRIS: The thing I just do not want to pass up: the landfill levy has been hanging there for 20 minutes or so.

Mr BAKER: You said it; we didn't.

Mr MORRIS: But I do not know if we are going there.

Mr BAKER: We were not going to talk—you must be sick of hearing about that.

Mr MORRIS: I am just interested in the context and whether you were going to say anything beyond ‘Give it back to local government so we can spend it’.

Mr BAKER: No, actually. Don’t necessarily give it back to local government. Give it back to the schemes that are required in order to underpin this. So actually we talked about demand, perhaps using it to subsidise some of those products so that they become cheaper than off-the-shelf products. There are a whole range of different ways that you could deploy that economically without necessarily just handing it back to local government. It is such a significant sum of money, you have the opportunity to do something strategic with it. That requires it to be part of a strategy, as opposed to just handing it back.

Mr MORRIS: That is the Sustainability Fund.

Mr BAKER: Yes.

Ms BURRAGE: Yes.

Mr MORRIS: The landfill levy in New South Wales is pretty close to double the landfill levy in Victoria. Any thoughts on that?

Mr BAKER: Personally? Look, this is a huge issue for us. I believe that there are a range of things that we can explore before we need to start looking at that. First of all, we need to start seeing some strategic investment in the areas that we need to get off the ground. Before we start thinking about just getting more into the coffers, let us see what we can do with the money that we have got.

Mr MORRIS: I am certainly not advocating getting more in.

Mr BAKER: I did not think you did.

Ms BURRAGE: We want to prevent the other scenario of dumping that happens where the levy is massive.

The CHAIR: Illegal dumping.

Mr MORRIS: That is a subject that you cannot separate.

Mr BAKER: Exactly.

Ms BURRAGE: That is right, yes.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. I have exhausted questions. I think the rest of the Committee are exhausted. Thank you very much for your detailed presentation.

Ms BURRAGE: Thanks for your time.

Mr BAKER: Thank you, and enjoy your time down on the Mornington.

The CHAIR: We will.

Witnesses withdrew.