



**South West Sustainability
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REPONSE TO “A CLIMATE OF OPPORTUNITY”

The South West Sustainability Partnership Inc. (SWSP) is pleased to provide this response to the Victorian Governments’ Climate Change Summit Paper - “A Climate of Opportunity”.

General Response

The Partnership, which has membership from and represents the five municipalities and related water, higher education, catchment and coastal management groups and related industry interests from the south west region of Victoria (see attached) applauds the Victorian Governments initiative in working towards developing the White Paper and endorses the broadly based direction of action set out for discussion in the Summit Paper.

South West Victoria is in a reasonably favoured position relative to the impact of climate change in that:

- It is well placed to become a major region for alternative energy generation through wind, geothermal, biomass and natural power gas production;
- Its domestic and rural water supplies while subject to reductions are still anticipated to be able to support the current populations and in some areas should support some population growth and high intensity agriculture.
- The region has significant opportunity for increased carbon sequestration through tree planting and geosequestration
- The local government bodies and regional agencies that created the SWSP 10 years ago are progressive, aware and have been active in programs such as Cities for Climate Protection.

The region, through the Partnership is therefore well placed to be a significant contributor in taking the Government’s agenda forward.

As well as assisting in facilitating alternative energy production and reducing domestic and industrial carbon emissions, the Partnership is particularly well placed to provide an integrated response to the social and economic challenges of climate change.

THE 10 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The 10 strategic directions identified in the Summit Paper are endorsed by the South West Sustainability Partnership and it is currently involved with or has the capacity to influence seven (7) of these.

1. Positioning Vital Industry to capitalise on the new opportunities.

Both the wind power and natural gas industries have provided significant employment and specialised skill formation in the region. Specialist manufacturing in the wind power industry in particular has already been significant to industry and employment in Portland with South West TAFE Institute being involved in the overseas training of staff to support local operations.

Carbon geosequestration trials at Peterborough are also establishing specialist skills in the region.

Trials in geothermal energy production and wave power in the region are also forming the basis for locally based industries.

3 Pursuing cost effective emissions reduction in non ETS sectors.

The information and communications activities of the South West Climate Change Forum of SWSP working with the region's rural industries and particularly the dairy, forestry and broad acre cropping industries are being effective. This work together with the underpinning research will put the region's rural communities in a stronger position when agriculture becomes involved with ETS.

4 Ensuing continuity of energy supplies through alternative energy production.

The SWSP through the Greenhouse Alliance group is working with the windpower and natural gas industries to identify issues and standardise planning frameworks. There is also local interest in biomass power generation using plantation harvest waste and cropping waste. Geothermal resources are also being explored.

6. Increasing knowledge of climate change.

& 9 Supporting individuals to get active on climate change.

Research is being undertaken at Deakin University into indicators of environmental sustainability; and the DemoDairy cooperative research farm and regional Department of Primary Industry staff are trialling adaptive behaviours for the dairy and cropping industries. Collectively this work will benefit the climate change resilience of the region's agriculture.

The work of the South West Climate Change Forum which is working to increase the farming community's awareness of climate change and the knowledge that already exists an adaptive behaviours is also of importance.

Hopefully the urban communities of the south west will similarly gain in knowledge of climate change and available domestic scale adaptive behaviour through the "Smart Living Expo" planned by the South West Sustainability Partnership for November this year.

8 Assisting Natural Assets and Ecosystems

The Partnership has established its Natural Assets Alliance specifically to coordinate and enhance the work of its members in this area. Much work has already been done by individual member organisations but the Alliance provides for a more integrated approach. As an initial endeavour the Alliance is seeking to create integrated GIS mapping of the region incorporating a range of overlays relevant to member interests and interrogatable in a number of ways. Some work relevant to this project has commenced using Local Government Accord funding.

7. Increasing the Climate Change Resilience of the Regions

The South West Sustainability Partnership provides the regionwide integrated approach required to bring together the range of factors that influence Climate Change resilience. Through its CEO level Board and its Greenhouse Alliance and Natural Asset Alliance action groups and the rural sector information services of the South West Climate Change Forum together with the individual and collective work of the members, the south west region is well placed to contribute to the statewide effort.

WEDGE ACTIVITIES

Of the wedge activity areas identified in the Summit Paper, current projects or immediate potential projects in the south west are in a position to make a contribution.

Energy

- A significant geosequestration trial is occurring at Peterborough.

- Substantial wind farm developments are currently in place and more are under development in the region. Collectively these will make a significant contribution to the State's green power.
- The Peterborough natural gas fields provide the potential for electricity generation as is currently being considered for Mortlake.
- Biofuel generation is possible using the region's bluegum plantation harvesting waste and straw waste from the rapidly increasing cereal acreages in the region. This potential is increased further when coupled with the available natural gas.
- A significant reduction in power use for public lighting can be achieved by improving the efficiency of the lights used and south west municipalities are part of the move to install new high efficiency lighting.
- Providing the wider community with information about new and retrofit opportunities for their homes will be provided with a free entry "Smart Living Expo" planned for Warrnambool in November.

Transport

- Natural gas provides a potential fuel for the local and regional dairy and timber transport operations. Some current use exists.
- The currently available rail transport and passenger services provide a basis for reductions in road usage. A moderate reduction in passenger travel times and passing loops to increase freight capacity would result in a substantial increase in use in both areas.

Agriculture

- Optimising the emission efficiency of agricultural practice will depend on informing and encouraging the farming community to adopt already known processes. The South West Climate Change Forum which incorporates several key farmer organisations provides the basis for this service.

Land Use

- Integration and coordination of land use planning can be provided by the South West Sustainability Partnership which incorporates all relevant planning authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Support existing alliances and extend the program to include all local governments in Victoria

The South West Sustainability Partnership together with the Greenhouse Alliances groups elsewhere in the State can manage effective responses to climate change on behalf of their local communities because they work across broad regions involving several local governments. Each region is responsible to its own agency members, and has the resources of these agencies available to assist in responding to climate change issues. Many of the issues need to be addressed across municipal boundaries. The need for local knowledge and the capacity to respond with practical and everyday actions, must inform regional and statewide approaches.

Ongoing operating funding from the State would help secure this network as a regional underpinning of statewide activity.

2. Research Funding

Further data, processes and equipment is urgently needed for effective mitigation and adaptation to be put in place.

In south west Victoria specific research is urgently needed to identify the extent, capacity and recharge processes involved with ground water reserves in the region.

Current research activities involved with CO₂ geosequestration, emission related management practices in agriculture and forestry and with environmental sustainability indicators, all need to be maintained.

3. Project Activity

For effective community outcomes to be achieved, action needs to be taken at national, state and regional levels. For community engagement, regional projects will be critical. Local government, industry and environment related agencies have limited capacity to undertake projects, so there is a need for state and commonwealth funding.

The South West Sustainability Partnership and all its member partners are pleased to join with the Victorian Government in tackling the issues and challenges of climate change.

Our capacity to be effective will be a result of the resources available to maintain the focus and undertake the projects that will make a difference.

Barrie Baker

Executive Officer