

1 August 2008



Climate Change Summit  
Office of Climate Change - Department of Premier and Cabinet  
1 Treasury Place  
Melbourne, Vic 3000

## **A general submission to the Victorian Government**

**From**

**The Bayside Climate Change Action Group**

Local climate change action groups can help bridge the gap that exists between public perceptions and attitudes toward climate change and the commencement of behavioural changes to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle. The BCCAG propose that the Victorian government set up local community drop-in centres for climate change information and sustainability practices. Workshops and classes run by local community members will foster a sense of community spirit in tackling climate change. These centres would be staffed by local community volunteers and would have State-supported websites and administrative support.

Additionally, the BCCAG support a gross-metered feed-in tariff to be paid on all electricity generated, not just the excess contributed to the power grid for Victorian households without a limit on system sizes. This is important because a quarter of the grid-connected systems in Victoria have more than a 2kW output. For homeowners interested in solar energy, the feed-in tariff to systems of 10kW would be more consistent with other states. For families who currently have 2.1kW systems, they would have to remove an entire bank of panels, worth several thousand dollars, and reduce their output by up to a third to be eligible for the payment the Victorian Government is proposing.

### ***Community Groups as key stakeholders***

As studies have shown that peer-group learning at a community level are effective in creating social change, climate change action groups such as the BCCAG may be well utilized in the effort to raise public knowledge and understanding of environmental issues, and how behavioral changes may be made to help mitigate climate change effects. A partnership between local council and community groups can be fruitful in affecting change.

Community Sustainability is possible when it happens in social networks, local community groups, amongst work colleagues, etc. This contrasts with other social-level measures such as mass advertising, fiscal and regulatory measures. Group-based peer learning fosters inspiration from other within the group, and these types of learning programs have delivered a number of benefits in the communities in which they have been used.

*“Locally driven programs are critical to the engagement and empowerment of the community.” Alan Pears, Adjunct Professor, Environment & Planning, RMIT University.*

## **Key argument:**

There is already significant information available in Australia on the topic of climate change and most people have a clear understanding that their individual consumption patterns contribute to the overall rise in greenhouse gas emissions at a national level. However, quantitative research has shown that while most people are familiar with the issue of climate change and its causes and considerable effort has been undertaken to educate the Australian public about it, there has been an overall lack of behavioural change in consumption of energy, water and petrol for transport.

There is concern amongst environmental groups and government that without support, the public may be unable to differentiate the appropriate measures for action or the potential impacts of the problem. This in turn reduces the level of public concern and action (Bulkeley, 2000). Clearly, providing information alone is not enough.

## ***Awareness of Climate change***

The media in Australia have called attention to climate change by highlighting the negative impacts we are facing. However, if care is not taken, people may become immune to its message and perhaps become apathetic.

Many government agencies, and NGO's have undertaken qualitative research to assess the level of public understanding of climate change, both its problems and programs currently in place to address it. (Australian Greenhouse Office 2003, Australian Conservation Foundation 2007, Environment Victoria, Greenpeace, The Climate Institute 2007). These studies conclude that there is much confusion concerning environmental issues and how to best address it among the public, and as a result, there are few behavioural changes taking place. This confusion arises from a deficit in public knowledge and understanding of environmental issues (Buckeley, 2000) .

Having good quality information is necessary, however it is not sufficient to achieve behaviour change (Burgess 2003). In other words, just knowing about climate change and its causes has not rationalised into behavioural changes.

## ***Capacity and Willingness to change***

Qualitative research has shown that most people understand that climate change is a significant threat, and that lifestyle changes need to be made. While many people are still unfamiliar with the more detailed specifics of climate change and its causes, this does not detract from their belief that it needs to be dealt with (The Climate Institute 2007). However, a portion of the population (over 25%) believe that industry and governments are to blame for the current situation, which included the burning of brown coal to provide electricity. Nearly 60% felt that addressing climate change was the responsibility of everyone equally (AGO 2003).

Additionally, there is repeated suggestion that Australia should have been investing into solar energy decades ago, and that the majority of people surveyed would be prepared to pay a higher price for cleaner energy sources. (AGO 2003). This shows clear support for enabling renewable energy. It was clear that most people understand that reducing their energy consumption will have a direct impact on greenhouse gas emissions. They accept that there may be increased prices associated with these changes, and they support clean energy as an alternative. There is clear support for solar and wind technology to be developed, with a clear opinion that Australia's abundant sunshine has been untapped as a clean energy solution (Climate Institute 2007).

The information provided by the Federal Government's top agency on climate change, the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO), was taken from research conducted in 2003. Interestingly, this information from five years ago indicated that over 25% of those polled were doing everything they could to reduce their energy use, with further 66% saying they were taking some action, but knew they could do more. It was cited that understanding that their behavioural changes would reap financial benefits in the form of savings, provided proof that their changes were indeed making a difference.

### ***Decisive legislation needed***

A common finding of research carried out has shown that Australians are looking for strong leadership. They accept that there may be increased prices associated with tackling climate change, and are calling for more decisive action. The onus to act and consume responsibly cannot lie solely with the consumer as they are faced with a bewildering range of products, many claiming green credentials (Burgess 2003). There is much that the Australian and other governments could do to assist both industry and consumers in their efforts to live and operate more sustainably. Banning coal-fired power plants, increasing strong housing codes, and enabling alternative energy sources to flourish are just a few. (Flannery, 2005).

Cutting greenhouse gas emissions globally by 90% by 2050, and transforming the energy system will also reap social and environmental benefits, creating more and better jobs, and also lead to an industrial renaissance (Hamilton 2006). This is the view of other nations, and they have moved forward, embracing the opportunities that renewable energy can provide, and they are revamping their cities and public transport systems as well.

As it has recently come to light that the Australian government has known about the threat of climate change for nearly 25 years, and has been slow to act; this has created a sort of mistrust of the government. And while the Federal Government has stalled for over a decade, what is now clear is that most Australians are no longer in a state of denial, and want to face up and meet the challenges of climate change. (Hamilton 2006).

Legislation should call for better labelling and strong accreditation of products, as consumers are unable to discern effectively the water and greenhouse intensity required to produce each and every product they may wish to purchase. Therefore the government needs to foster ideal conditions for households to follow sustainable practices, whether it be by providing efficient public transportation, creating renewable energy, developing financing strategies to enable purchase of water tanks and solar panels, or developing community education programs and social change programs for communities and businesses.

### ***Community Groups and Local Government as Key stakeholders***

With growing concern about the threat of climate change, the major political parties responded by quickly hammering out climate change policies in the lead-up to the federal election of 2007. However, with big-fix solutions promising reductions of greenhouse gas, there has not been much information presented as to how these solutions would filter down to the local level.

Review of research done in Southeast Queensland across 18 councils show that there are large discrepancies of the level of support and commitment given to the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign as set up by the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO) in 1998. It identified impediments to implementing best practice strategies, and offered recommendations for councils and planners to improve climate mitigation strategies, which

included community education and strong local political leadership to assist the public to connect global thinking with local action (Burton, 2007).

Community Sustainability is possible when it happens in social networks, local community groups, amongst work colleagues, etc. This contrasts with other social-level measures such as mass advertising, fiscal and regulatory measures. (Environment Victoria, 2005). Group-based peer learning fosters inspiration from other within the group, and these types of learning programs have delivered a number of benefits in the communities in which they have been used (Herriman, Willetts & Partridge, 2006).

Quantitative research provided by the AGO (2003) indicated that two-thirds of people polled said that following the example of others would encourage them to reduce their energy use to help secure the environment for future generations. What is clear is that individual behavioural changes are easier to make as a member of a social group, work environment or club rather than alone as it builds confidence to tackle such a daunting threat and fosters a sense of shared responsibility within that community (Burgess 2003), this shared commitment could be fostered in a work environment, as well as a school, church or other local community group. Facilitation, training and ongoing support for these groups is essential, and local councils could be instrumental in organising them and offering structural strategies, facilitators, information and support.

### ***Bayside Climate Change Action Group***

The Bayside Climate Change Action Group are a non-political, not for profit community organisation who are committed to influencing any relevant organisation or individual that can have a positive effect on reducing the impact of climate change. The group enjoys an excellent reputation for organisation and professionalism, which has led to working relationships with high-profile businesses and individuals. Continued success with its public forums, community education program and the exciting Residential Energy Assessment Program (REAP) have placed the group in an enviable position amongst other grassroots environmental groups. Its success in forging a productive partnership with the local council and local businesses augurs well for continued fostering of positive behavioral changes to help mitigate climate change effects, both locally and beyond.

The Bayside Climate Change Action Group was formed in October 2006 by Bayside residents, Coni Forcey and Lucy Allinson, who felt passionately about the future they, and their children, will be facing as a result of climate change. Today the BCCAG is a non-political, not-for-profit organisation which provides a collective voice for Bayside residents. Since its inception, the BCCAG has had wide-reaching appeal and has grown to over 450 families and now includes some of Australia's brightest minds from various fields.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN VICTORIA.**

The BCCAG's main issues/objectives are to raise awareness of the climate change issue and to inspire residents to make a lighter carbon footprint, by living more sustainably. The group has enjoyed an excellent reputation at a local level, as well as by the media and from established environmental groups. In particular the BCCAG has often been referenced as a model for other environmentally conscious to establish grassroots environmental groups within their own communities.

Due to our excellent rapport with the local council and a reputation as a family-based non-political organisation the BCCAG are contacted regularly by local newspaper and other media outlets to comment on and disseminate information regarding environmental issues.

## Objectives

Our objectives are to endeavour to influence any relevant organisation or individual that can have a positive effect on reducing the impact of Climate Change, specifically by

- highlighting to government and others the level of community concern about Climate Change and related policies;
- working with businesses and local council to reduce greenhouse emissions and to provide residents with sustainable energy solutions;
- working with residents to reduce Climate Change impacts;
- working with community groups and schools to provide education about Climate Change impacts and responses.

## ACHIEVEMENTS & RESULTS

The BCCAG have made significant progress in all areas outlined above. To highlight the level of community concern about climate change and to raise awareness about the urgency of climate change, the group organised:

- **Public Forum November 2006:** Prior to the State Election. Candidates from the Liberal, ALP and Greens invited to present their parties' policies on Climate Change at a forum that attracted over 200 attendees. As a result of this forum, the BCCAG and the Bayside Council worked together to hold the inaugural Sustainability Festival, held in conjunction with the group's next event, the Human Sign as outlined below.
- **"The Human Sign"** on 22 April 2007 (Earth Day) on Sandringham Beach. Over 2,500 local residents and 13 local schools participated to form the message "HALT CLIMATE CHANGE NOW!" for an aerial photo. This was published in the Herald Sun, The Age and Bayside Leader newspapers. The photo has been featured on numerous Australian and International websites, including Environment Victoria, Beyond Zero Emissions, Port Phillip Eco-Centre, and Greenpeace, as well as a year 12/VCE 2008 English textbook (used by over 10,000 Victorian students). This event was featured in an episode of **ABC Catalyst** (enclosed DVD) for making significant impact through community work in raising awareness of climate change and working to educate our local community. Representatives of the Island Nation of Tuvalu also participated. To see the slideshow on the web, please go to: <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/BCCAG.albums/BCCAGHumanSign22April2007>
- **Public Forum May 2007** – "Climate Change on the Political Agenda". Sandringham Primary School. Speakers: Mark Wakeham, Climate Campaigner, Greenpeace, and Tricia Phelan, Climate Change Campaign Director, Environment Victoria.
- **No Junk Mail Campaign** – Over 8,500 stickers have been distributed within the Bayside Community to promote the "No Junk Mail Campaign". Objective: reduce recycling waste, reduce consumerism and to save 2,500 trees. An audit indicated that the average Bayside home receives over 5,000 sheets of printed A4 advertising through junk mail. After consultation with Bayside Council, it was determined that reducing junk mail also reduces demands on council recycling services.

- **Sustainable House Open Day** – Rose Street, Sandringham 9 September 2007. Extremely energy efficient house 42 points/6 stars, passive solar design (thermal mass, double-glazing, maximum living area northside, grid solar power system. The home was open for inspection and to ask questions regarding solar energy. Owned by BCCAG members Richard & Audrey Potter.
- **October 2007 – Candidates Public Forum on Climate Change** held prior to the Federal Election – 300+ attendance. Candidates: Andrew Robb, MP (Liberal), Julia Mason (Labor); Neil Pilling (Greens).  
Compere: Simon McKeon, Executive Chairman - Macquarie Bank Melbourne. Guest Speaker, Dr. Barrie Pittock, Honorary fellow, CSIRO.
- **Residential Energy Assessment Program (REAP)** A BCCAG initiative partnered with the Bayside City Council to help residents meet the target of a 20% reduction of household greenhouse gas emissions by 2010. To date, 28 BCCAG volunteers have undergone professional training to become energy mentors (up to 75 planned). Residents will receive free energy assessments along with practical advice and information meet this target. This is the first community driven project of its kind.

REAP Program Ambassador, and Bayside resident, Alan Pears, is an Adjunct Professor in environment and planning at RMIT University: *“By running the program through trained volunteers, we are getting directly to where it counts – at the grass roots.”*

- **Community** – The Community Education program has flourished, with requests for speakers in 2008 secured. Weekly ‘snippets’ column offering tips on energy reduction, and sustainable living being provided to several local schools.

### **Speaking Engagements 2007** - Reaching an estimated audience of 4,000

Beyond Zero Emissions Conference	City of Bayside Council
Hampton Rotary	Sandringham Rotary Club
Rickett’s Point Marine	Melbourne High School
Sandringham Primary School	Hampton Primary School
Firbank Grammar School	Brighton Secondary College
St Leonard’s College	Sandringham Uniting Church
Haileybury College	All Souls Church, Sandringham
Bedford Heights Retirement Village	Holy Trinity Ang. Church Hampton
Bayside Historical Society	St Bridget Catholic School
Mentone Grammar School	Carrum Downs Group

- **Public Forum February 2008 – David Spratt**, policy analyst for Carbon Equity, co-Author of “Climate Code Red”.
- **Solar Energy Challenge** – Bayside kinders, sporting groups, churches and clubs have been invited to participate in this competition to win solar panels for their venue. Each group must show proven record over 6 months to reduce electricity consumption, and reduction of carbon footprint. Supported by a \$5,000 grant by Bayside Council and by group fundraising. Over 150 community groups contacted.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO A SUSTAINABLE VICTORIA**

The BCCAG is firmly committed to a sustainable Victoria in which citizens are:

- aware of the environmental issues they face,
- have an avenue to voice their concerns
- are educated about reducing their carbon footprint
- are empowered to affect change in their own lives and those around them, to establish a greener Victoria.

Public forums prior to state and federal elections showed candidates for election that there were substantial issues to be addressed and that they represented a concerned electorate on the issues of sustainability and climate change. It provided citizens with the opportunity to **voice their concerns** directly and allowed them to cast a well-informed vote for the candidate that provided environmental policies that were most closely aligned with their own.

*"I am very impressed with the wide level of support you have achieved, with a membership of some 450 families, and the rapport you have achieved with Bayside City Council. The provision of advice to residents on energy efficiency is great." **Dr A. Barrie Pittock, Honorary Fellow, CSIRO***

The community **education** program, combined with the REAP program is reaching a large number of residents and beyond about reducing their carbon footprint. Community group participation creates a positive approach to climate change, and participants are proactive and **empowered**.

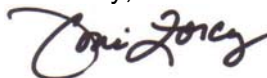
## **PARTNERSHIPS FORMED AND UTILISED, STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED**

The partnership that the BCCAG has formed with the City of Bayside is strong. The Council has a firm Green Action Plan and its support of the BCCAG is proven with its \$20,000 support in training for the REAP program and the \$5,000 grant for the solar energy challenge, as well as the Sustainability Festival held in 2007. This ensures commitment from the council to work cooperatively with the group to reduce energy consumption by 20% by 2010. Local real estate agents are now working with the BCCAG to provide information about free in-home energy audits with every sale and to new residents. 2008 initiatives by the group will focus on work with local businesses. BCCAG works closely with several of Australia's top scientists, who are local residents and BCCAG members, to ensure that the information that is being provided is clear, concise and easy to understand.

### **SUMMARY:**

The BCCAG have proven leadership experience in highlighting the need for action on climate change, and have initiated action with its local council. Our track record shows that local community groups can be influential in effectuating societal change with regard to lowering energy consumption. The history of BCCAG, as well as other local climate change action groups, such as Mt Alexander Sustainability Group, indicate that local community groups are well-positioned to assist the Victorian State Government in effectuating positive change and mitigation. Support of these groups with funding and set up of offices and drop-in centres will help position Victoria as a leader within Australia in the fight against climate change.

Sincerely,



Coni Forcey  
Co-Founder  
Bayside Climate Change Action Group