

Submission to the Victoria Government Climate Change Bill

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Introduction

The Bendigo Sustainability Group (BSG) is a community group whose membership includes community, local government and business representatives. BSG promotes working together in partnerships to achieve positive outcomes for our community and environment.

Background

BSG is developing a number of community programs which utilises volunteer members' knowledge & skills:

Community Partnerships program

- § Partnerships with other community groups to promote & implement sustainability programs
- § Bendigo Sustainable Living Guide

Renewable Energy Community Cooperative

- § Bulk purchase of solar hot water systems and grid interactive solar panels

Community Carbon Offset Cooperative

- § Bulk purchase of offsets, Greenpower, etc through a community banking model

Sustainable Foods Community Project

- § Engaging the community to grow their own vegetables and fruit

This submission from the BSG is in response to the government's commitment to seeking submissions from the public and community groups in helping to formulate this Climate Change legislation. The BSG herewith provides comment and feedback on the 10 proposed strategic directions outlined in the report.

Victorian Government's Strategic Directions on Climate Change Policy

1. Positioning Victorian industry to capitalize on the new jobs, new technologies and new markets that will flow from the transition to a low carbon economy.

The government must implement an 'emissions rating' system on goods to inform customers of how much greenhouse gas was produced in the product's manufacture and transport to the marketplace. The emission rating level needs to be indexed to the taxation level to reflect the carbon offset cost. Locally produced goods achieving a lower emission rating would be taxed less and be cheaper relative to goods with a higher emission rating. This would stimulate the local economy and create new jobs.

BSG recommends that Government fund community facilitator positions across the state to provide support to community climate change initiatives and renewable energy co-operatives. Community facilitators would support the development of new enterprises that generate new technologies, new markets and retain revenue locally.

2. Supporting an ETS with complementary measures that smooth the transition for the Victorian economy.

BSG believes the Mandatory Renewable Energy Targets (MRET's) should be retained throughout the implementation of the ETS and even strengthened with targets reviewed and set at 50% cut in GHG emissions by 2020 and a 100% reduction by 2050 (on current emission levels).

BSG supports a program where local businesses set targets to reduce carbon emissions. If these targets are not reached, a tax should be imposed by local government. The income from this tax should not be included in the yearly budget, but should be put into a Trust with a Board of Trustees representing the Government, Business and various groups in the Community. Funds should only be spent on education and projects to reduce carbon emissions and water usage.

State government must mandate local governments to implement carbon emission saving programs. Much can be done in the areas of promoting:

- o Cycling as an alternative mode of transport
- o Improvement in access to public transport
- o Use of "green" power public transport vehicles
- o Using household waste to generate electricity
- o Reducing amount of streetlights and neon signs in cities
- o Using low energy globes in street lights

3. Pursuing cost effective emissions reductions in sectors of the Victorian economy not covered by the ETS.

Solar farms, wind farms and renewable energy generation from bio-mass are significant opportunities to provide supplementary income for landholders and small rural towns currently suffering from climate change impacts.

4. Ensuring the continued security, efficiency and affordability of Victoria's energy supplies by encouraging low-emission and renewable energy options.

BSG believes locally distributed renewable energy generation is the key to our future low-emission energy network. Distributed renewable energy generation within our community will lead to less transmission losses to regional and rural areas. This will lead to significantly reduced costs over time and provides greater security of electricity generation.

The enormous government subsidies given to the brown coal industry must be redirected to encourage renewable energy research and development to achieve zero emission electricity generation.

While it is important to look for low-emission and renewable energy options, there needs to also be an emphasis on energy efficiency, in our homes, in business, in products, in manufacturing. The ETS will only require the largest energy users to reduce emissions. There are many initiatives that could be implemented at a State level to encourage and drive a reduction in energy use by others not obligated under the ETS such as incentives, guidelines, education, design standards and the Victorian Planning Provisions.

5. Assisting households to adjust to the rising costs of electricity, fuel and other commodities.

Victoria must set an energy efficiency target for households to cut energy use to a quarter of the present level. The government must invest more heavily in providing cheap and accessible public transport to reduce the community's reliance on fossil fueled transport.

The mandatory installation of Smart Meters in prominent positions within the home would allow households to monitor their energy usage far better and would be a prime instrument leading to behaviour change, and seeking energy efficient appliances.

While individuals should implement measures at home, most households spend most of their day away from home. Children are at school until 4:00pm, mom and dad work in an office or factory until 5:30 pm. Of far more impact are general office/business operations on carbon emissions. The place of work gives us a captured audience. This is here where the most benefit of education programs can be achieved.

In addition, there should be emphasis on a reduction in what individuals consume. The energy associated in the products people buy has a higher impact than the energy used to run a household.

6. Increasing our knowledge about climate change and adaptive needs and possibilities.

BSG recognizes that education is crucial for our community and the Group needs support from the Government to develop and deliver locally relevant community education programs.

BSG is developing a community carbon footprint program training sessions for carbon footprint assessors.

7. Increasing the climate change resilience of the State's regions and communities.

BSG recognizes that local planning laws have to change and focus on local climatic influences. Building design codes should then be mandated within each region to provide house construction responsive to the local climatic conditions.

Empowering low socio-economic groups, farmers and small rural towns to adapt to climate change is important.

8. Assisting our natural assets and ecosystems to deal with the pressures and challenges that climate change will bring.

The community requires increased commitment by government to take strong, decisive measures such as establishing wildlife corridors, revegetation and farm forestry for sequestration. These would not only provide for a carbon emission fix but also support the maintenance of biodiversity.

9. Supporting Victorian individuals and communities to get active on climate change.

BSG believes the government should provide assistance to local community climate action groups by funding community group facilitators to align key stakeholders to work together, seek opportunities and develop business partnerships and ventures in the renewable energy sector.

Local community action will make a significant contribution towards reducing Victoria's carbon footprint given support and encouragement by the Government.

10. Ensuring Victoria continues to play a pro-active role in global efforts to address climate change.

The State Government must adopt a more assertive role in pushing for the review of renewable energy policy at all levels of government.

A starting point would be to push for a change to the Federal Climate Zone Rating. At present most of Victoria has a Climate Zone Rating of 3 or 4 which results in a lower Renewable Energy Certificate Conversion Factor. Many areas north of the divide in Victoria have a Rating of 4, the lowest, which is illogical given that regions such as Bendigo have a very high number of clear sunny days per year.

Successful models trialed in other countries need to be studied. For example, Germany has stimulated the renewable energy industry by having a gross feed-in electricity tariff. Sweden gets a third of all of all its energy from renewables; Norway half and Iceland three quarters, with Iceland committed to generating all its energy from renewables by 2020.

Victoria must commit to a vision of becoming a supplier of solar technology. A set of common goals and actions is needed to help the community move toward a much lower level of GHG emissions.

State Government must mandate local governments to set carbon emission targets to achieve in the area of their influence. State government should levy a tax on those local governments who do not achieve targets. The income from such a tax should be used only on projects to reduce GHG emissions.

Victoria must set short term and long term carbon emission targets. If a target is not reached, penalties are incurred through mechanisms such as the GST distribution system. A new elected state government should still be liable for the penalties generated by the previous government.