

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

4 July 2008

SUBMISSION – VICTORIAN CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to thank the Victorian Government for providing the opportunity to submit my thoughts and ideas in response to the Victorian Climate Change Summit held in April 2008.

I wish to provide a more human element to submissions by sharing some of my personal experiences and concerns as a long-time renter in inner Melbourne. I am typing my thoughts while holding my almost six-month old child on my lap. It is with her and my 14-year-old son's futures in mind that I urge the Victorian Government to do so much more in order to meet the challenges of climate change.

My concerns over the impacts humans are having on our planet led me to undertake a



Figure 1. Our current hot water heater – note the 2 stars rating

to talk about climate change and its impacts, as this is a problem that unites all humanity. Hence, the statements I make below are developed using my personal experience, but draw also from my professional experience.

I strongly support the creation of Energy Efficiency Assistance Programs as proposed by Tony Nicholson in the 'Assisting Households to Manage Rising Prices' discussion paper. We have rented three properties in West Melbourne over the past fourteen

years, and know how difficult it can be to save energy and water when the landlord has the power to decide what fittings are installed. In order to make bigger greenhouse savings; our landlord needs to be encouraged to take action. When our hot water system broke down several years ago, the landlord replaced it with a two-star rated appliance (see **Figure 1**). Dare we ask for solar hot water!

There is therefore an imperative to retrofit rental properties with necessary insulation and other energy and water saving devices, such as gas heating, solar water heating and green plumbing systems. I agree with Mr Nicholson that the highest priority has to be assisting low to middle income households in the private rental market. There is a great pool of this type of housing in the area in which I live. Much of this housing stock dates to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Energy is either lost or used inefficiently in these homes due to a variety of causes. In my case, our home has a number of large cracks in the walls letting in cold air (see **Figure 2**). In addition, we have to turn on the light to see our way through our loungeroom at all times of the day and night (see **Figures 3 & 4**). So, please don't forget energy efficient lighting. My friends living in apartments nearby constructed from old warehouse shells really need some help with this area. When moving in, they didn't realise that the trendy halogen downlights



Figure 2. Cracks letting in cold air

in place in their homes would leave them with higher electricity costs.

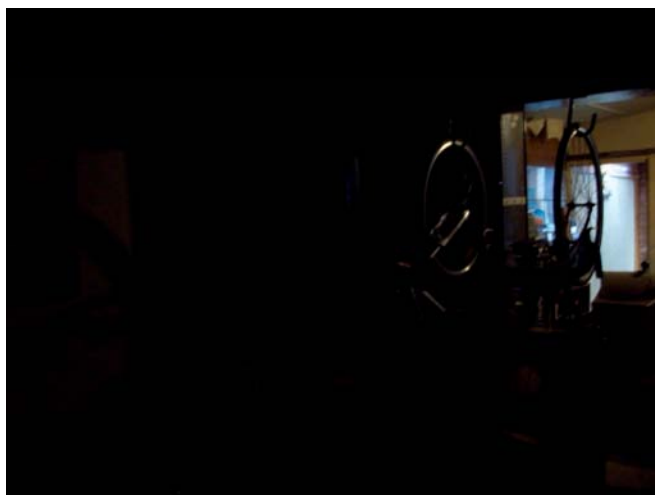


Figure 3. Our lounge room just before midday!

The Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2006 Census data outlines existing building stock/occupancy types in the suburbs of North Melbourne and West Melbourne. In North Melbourne, 62.9% of occupied private properties are rented and 57.9% are flats, units or apartments¹. Examination of maps contained within the Planning Scheme show that a great part of North Melbourne is

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2007a), *2006 Census QuickStats: North Melbourne (State Suburb)*, released 25 October 2007, [online] <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ProductSelect?newproducttype=QuickStats&btnSelectProduct=View+QuickStats+%3E&collection=Census&period=2006&areacode=SSC21505&geography=&method=&productlabel=&producttype=&topic=&navmapdisplayed=true&javascript=true&breadcrumb=LP&topholder=0&leftholder=0¤taction=201&action=401&textversion=false> [accessed 7 May 2008]

covered by Heritage Overlays, from which it may be assumed that housing stock is quite old.² In West Melbourne, 47.0% of occupied private properties are rented and 57.1% were flats, units or apartments in West Melbourne³. While little or none of this suburb is contained under a Heritage Overlay, it may be assumed that many dwellings are dated given the age of this suburb (as with North Melbourne). In addition, 37.0% of private dwellings are semi-detached, row or terrace houses, townhouses which are likely to date from earlier times.

Flats, units and apartments in North and West Melbourne are mostly low and mid-rise complexes, and are therefore quite different to those high-rise apartment buildings. Another of my friends has told me about the issues she has in trying to get change in her apartment complex. The body corporate (now known as the Owners Corporation: a very telling name change – where does that leave a renter in such a complex?) cannot agree on installing separate water meters to each dwelling so that tenants can monitor their usage and therefore limit their consumption and save money. The Victorian Government must empower the Department of Justice, through Consumer Affairs Victoria, to enact legislation requiring Owners Corporations to maintain dwellings under their control in an environmentally-friendly fashion, with appropriate education and incentives.



Figure 4. Same room, same time – with light on

Most of the property types outlined above could be retrofitted quite easily. Given their proximity to greenhouse-friendly public transport (and shops, services, the CBD, and employment) this would be a win-win situation for combating climate change. Aha – transport - another of my favourite topics! You may note the bicycles stored in our lounge room in **Figure 4** to avoid being stolen from the front of our house. We could question why our neighbours get a space to park their cars on public property (ie. the road) while we have to use private property to store our ‘vehicles’ – is this not a disincentive to do the right thing? We do not possess a motor vehicle given the environmental, social and (yes) financial cost to run one. We realise that not all Victorians are lucky to have the access we do to public transport, and may have to resort to driving a car to get to work, etc. However, given transport is the second

² Department of Planning & Community Development (2008a), “Heritage Overlay – Map 5HO”, *Melbourne Planning Scheme – Local Provision*, [online] <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/PlanningSchemes/melbourne/maps/melbourne05ho.pdf> [accessed 8 May 2008] AND Department of Planning & Community Development (2008b), “Heritage Overlay – Map 4HO”, *Melbourne Planning Scheme – Local Provision*, [online] <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/PlanningSchemes/melbourne/maps/melbourne04ho.pdf> [accessed 8 May 2008]

³ ABS (2007b), *2006 Census QuickStats: West Melbourne (State Suburb)*, released 25 October 2007, [online] <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ProductSelect?newproducttype=QuickStats&btnSelectProduct=View+QuickStats+%3E&collection=Census&period=2006&areacode=SSC21729&geography=&method=&productlabel=&producttype=&topic=&navmapdisplayed=true&javascript=true&breadcrumb=LP&topholder=0&leftholder=0¤taction=201&action=401&textversion=false> [accessed 7 May 2008]

largest source of greenhouse emissions, contributing about 16% of Victoria's total emissions⁴, I would expect the Victorian Government to act firmly in this sector. The Victorian Government itself claims that emissions in this sector are growing rapidly, and without further action, will continue to increase. The State Government of Victoria would be in a better position to encourage more sustainable forms of transport if it brought back the public transport system under its direct management for a start. I urge you not to renew the contracts with Connex and Yarra Trams later this year. And can you bring back conductors too? ☺

Yes, climate change does not have to mean a loss of jobs. Why not skill up existing tradespeople to convert existing houses to make them more sustainable. You will need also to integrate appropriate skill-based education into the training of apprentices. I was once an apprentice myself. I used to be an apprentice fitter and turner, although I wish now that I had chosen to be an apprentice to an electrician as I could now be making some practical change to combat climate change. My partner works for an electrical wholesaler. He has started to note the requests coming in for energy-efficient lighting and other environmentally friendly products are on the increase. So there is already some enthusiasm in this sector for undertaking the action required to combat climate change. Therefore don't assume tradies are against change, they are just like the rest of in that they want to support their families. While skilling up electricians, what about builders? I note that there is an incentive to construct 'new' homes in an environmentally friendly fashion. Would homes being built from reused/salvaged materials qualify for this scheme?

One area in which we as renters have been able to take action is in the purchase of accredited Green Power. Some people ask us why we sacrifice part our income in this manner, to which I reply that it is our moral obligation to act on climate change. Our small financial sacrifice sends a strong message to energy generators that we prefer energy generated from renewable sources, an act that the 'professionals' call a 'market signal'. Therefore, the recent announcement that the Victorian Government will invest in a new power station utilising coal drying and gasification is very upsetting. How can this government urge us, through Sustainability Victoria's campaigns, to sign up for green electricity, when it is failing to invest appropriately in renewable energy itself? Is this a case of "Do as I say, not as I do"? Please invest more time and money in renewables!

My friends and I are not waiting for the Victorian Government to act on climate change. We have formed a group called North Melbourne Sustainability Street [NMSS]. We are mostly residents, ie. 'ordinary people', from the suburbs of North and West Melbourne working together to reduce energy, water and waste consumption in our own homes and neighbourhoods. NMSS has developed a partnership with our local residents' association, the North & West Melbourne Association [NWMA], in order to deliver a series of sustainability-oriented

⁴ State Government of Victoria (2007), "Transport", Department of Environment & Sustainability website, [online] <http://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/greenhouse/wcmn302.nsf/childdocs/-CAA82826A6EDFBB3CA25702D00155C68-EF7E38A44447CB60CA25702D001B6603?open> [accessed 24 June 2008]

workshops, or ‘Sustainability Seminars’, in 2009 at our local library targeting the following themes:

- Renters & Sustainability
- Making a ‘heritage’ home more sustainable
- Working together to create ‘greener’ flats & apartments

We are still seeking funding to help us with this program. Therefore, any contributions from the Victorian Government would be warmly welcomed. For further information on our group and its aims, you may visit our very new website: www.northmelbourness.com.

I would like to leave you with some final words in order to emphasise my concern over the go-slow approach that is being taken in response to climate change (this concern I plan to voice at tomorrow’s Climate Emergency Rally in the CBD). While employed at the City of Moonee Valley, I was asked by a primary school in Strathmore to talk to Grade 3 & 4 students on the topic of climate change. In order to engage these children on this important issue, I put together a rap song. They ‘got’ the message – I hope you can too!

*Climate **change** is not real **cool**
We gotta fix it **soon** or be a **fool***

*Burning fossil **fuels** ... when we drive our **cars**
Sending up **CO₂** to the **stars***

*More **droughts** ... more **floods** ... yet less **rain**
When it gets real **hot** it drives my **nanna** insane*

*Then when we go for a trip to the **beach**
The winds ... they gonna ... wail and **screech***

*(What can you do? It’s up to you.)
(What can you do? It’s up to you.)*

*Spread of **pests** ... like **malaria**
Will they come down to **Southern Victoria**?*

*How can we **stop** the world getting **hotter**?
Renewable energies ... we gotta...*

***Harness** the sun ... wind and **waters**
To leave a cooler **planet** for our **sons and daughters***

*We **kids** did not create this **mess**
Gotta turn to the ones who should **know best***

*(What can you do? It’s up to you.)
(What can you do? It’s up to you.)*

I have fond memories of my time at school, but can only imagine the future that current students face as we all struggle to deal with the realities of climate change. Unfortunately, as a high school student, I would always leave my homework until the last minute and hence it suffered accordingly. Please don't leave it until too late to act upon climate change!

I wish the Victorian Government the best of luck in its climate change endeavours, as your successes and/or failures in this area will not be yours alone to benefit or suffer from.

You are not in this alone ☺

Yours sincerely,

Gabrielle Stannus

(NB. Contact details provided as requested in e-mail accompanying this submission)

PS. A final message from my children, Zac and Celeste:

