



**Victorian Local Governance  
Association**

**Response to the Victorian Climate  
Change Green Paper**

**September 2009**

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## Introductory thoughts on building capacity and behavioural change

“The challenge is how to create a sufficient degree of awareness so that we may reconcile diverse and often contrasting expectations. While it is generally recognised that educational experiences can have an effect on short and medium-term behaviour changes, there exists an underlying assumption, but limited evidence, that increasing awareness helps to change individual behaviour and promote advocacy.

Behavioural change is often only temporary and this presents yet another dilemma at the community level: increased knowledge will not automatically generate a sustained rational response, because much of human motivation operates at the sub-conscious level and is thus outside awareness. The current investments in behavioural responses to the threat of global climate change do not match the potential climate change presents for cumulative, adverse, and potentially chaotic outcomes.

The implication of this predicament is that only direct experience with adverse outcomes appears to lead to sustained behavioural change. The climate change conundrum, however, does not allow for a delayed response based on personal and communal catastrophic experience. It needs to be marked by precaution, circumspection, and scientific insight.

This, then, leaves us with the fundamental question of why the connection is so flimsy between what we know and how we behave. It is partly possible to explain this phenomenon by the fact that in an increasingly uncertain world individuals and local communities lack the resources and necessary resilience to respond with determination. However, it is more challenging to assign meaning to Government strategy that largely ignores the dangers of the most significant challenge our community faces.

Building understanding must therefore happen quickly, and be strongly linked to the actual experiences that community members are already having to the adverse impacts of climate change. There are opportunities for this to occur, but not at a scale that will result in significant improvements, until and unless there is a significant expansion of local community programs funded by the State and Federal Governments. Local governments are well situated to directly implement and tailor such programs to suit individual and complex community needs, but we do not currently have the staffing or financial resources to deliver these programs.”

**Dr Heinz Kreutz**  
**Chair, VLGA Climate Change Working Group**

## About the Victorian Local Governance Association

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) is a unique peak body for councillors, community leaders and local governments working to build and strengthen their capacity to work together for progressive social change.

Our membership uniquely consists of fifty-seven member local governments, and two hundred community groups, organisations, and individuals.

## Overview of the VLGA response to the VCCGP

The VLGA response to the Victorian Climate Change Green Paper is primarily focused on addressing the social equity implications of climate change and the key role that local governments can play in building community capacity and enabling local mitigation and adaptation. The VLGA view is informed by the association's *Liveable and Just* project, and is the focus of our Climate Change Working Group which brings elected councillors, council staff, community groups and community leaders together to advise the VLGA Board on policy priorities.

Many other submissions, including the Municipal Association of Victoria will focus their discussions on science, economic, technical and environmental aspects. While we are generally supportive of these other submissions, we believe we can add value to this conversation by focussing on people, communities and the capacity for localised responses.

## How the VLGA has addressed the Victorian Climate Change Green Paper

The VLGA has focussed on a number of goals contained in the Green Paper, followed by addressing those questions relevant to our focus. We have provided a series of recommendations within a framework of social equity, community adaptation and community capacity building framework from a local government perspective.

Each goal and question is highlighted, and recommendations are contained within boxes for easy navigation.

## Executive summary

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Victorian Climate Change Green Paper (VCCGP) and acknowledges the State Government's commitment to community debate. Working together to respond to the complex challenges presented by climate change is inevitable.

We are aware of a significant number of draft and final submissions that concentrate on the scientific, economic, technical and environmental aspects of climate change, including many from our member Councils and community organisations.

Our twenty-three recommendations are focussed on two areas of climate change debate that we believe should receive greater attention – namely:

- the social equity implications of climate change, and
- the key role that local governments can play in building community capacity and enabling local mitigation and adaptation.

The scale of behavioural change required will only occur with significant investments by all levels of Government. The VLGA is confident that new inter-governmental partnerships can achieve results in the short and medium-term.

One overriding concern, from the VLGA's perspective, is the complexity of challenges facing different communities in urban, rural, and regional Victoria. We believe this complexity highlights more than ever the need for tailored, targeted, and local adaptation and mitigation programs.

We therefore strongly advocate for the urgent and ongoing investment of resources, policy agreements and commitments by all levels of Government working with local communities.

Systematically lowering the barriers to change, such as access to resources and education, particularly for young people, will be vital in generating widespread behavioural change. Like all initiatives on climate change, this will require a Triple Bottom Line approach.

## Recommendations on VCCGP goals

In response to the ten goals articulated in the VCCGP, the VLGA makes the following five recommendations.

### Goals 1 and 2

#### **Recommendation 1**

The VLGA supports the position of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) “That the State Government advocate to the Australian Government for a ‘science based’ target that reflects the true urgency of the climate change challenge and the need to avert dangerous climate change.”

In addition, the VLGA recommends that the State Government undertake consultation with local government, community groups, green energy corporate sector and individuals in developing low carbon future (LCF) scenarios.

### Goals 3 and 4

#### **Recommendation 2**

The VLGA supports the position of the Municipal Association of Victoria “That the State Government monitor the effects of the national carbon policy approach on Victoria, and advocate to the Australian Government for equality in the policy outcome.”

### Goals 5 and 6

#### **Recommendation 3**

That appropriate funding and attention be given to building adaptive capacity of local communities through a range of locally targeted initiatives addressing specific needs.

In particular, research into the relationship between resilience and adaptive capacity across issues of mental health, positive ageing, water and food security which form an intrinsic part of a community’s ability to respond to climate change.

### Goal 7

#### **Recommendation 4**

The VLGA supports the position of the Municipal Association of Victoria that “Where current State Government regulation or legislation presents a barrier to risk reduction for Victoria’s infrastructure, natural and built environment and communities, the State must remedy this situation as a matter of high priority.”

## Goals 8, 9 and 10

### **Recommendation 5**

That local government and community agencies are involved in developing effective responses to climate change, both through further research identifying local community needs (such as the VLGA's *Liveable and Just* project), as well as action-based projects.

As stated in the introductory quote, there must be a substantive increase in resources for such projects, and this funding must necessarily come from the Federal and State Governments.

The State Government should work in partnership with local government recognising the need for concerted action and a consolidated response across all government sectors. The close involvement of local communities should also be considered.

Such partnerships and integrated responses to climate change require the facilitation and sharing of resources and exchange of knowledge, as well as shared decision-making processes.

## Recommendations on VCCGP questions

In Relation to the eight questions posed in the VCCGP relevant to the VLGA's focus, the VLGA makes the following eighteen recommendations.

The VLGA believes that it is imperative to prepare and support all communities to transition towards a low carbon society, while managing the exposures to the many risks arising from climate change, and understanding the true costs and prices on carbons.

### **Recommendation 6**

The VLGA believes that short and medium-term results are achievable through local engagement, and the provision of education and behaviour change programs.

Advocacy and education geared towards younger Victorians should also receive priority attention.

### **Recommendation 7**

Another practical step would be to strengthen the Building Code and Planning and Environment Act to achieve greater emissions reductions.

The VLGA believes that the following five recommendations would not only assist local communities to make the aforementioned transitions, they would also ameliorate some of the social equity impacts of climate change outlined from page 13 onwards.

### **Recommendation 8**

A key plank in Victoria's climate change strategy should include behaviour change programs that address local adaptation and mitigation needs.

Local governments are ideally placed and highly skilled in building community capacity, therefore behaviour change programs should be conducted by local governments with local communities.

These programs should be properly funded by State Government.

### **Recommendation 9**

Ensure that information on water and energy efficiency products, incentives, rebates and behaviour change also be provided in appropriate language, formats, and media by trusted sources, and that they are adapted to meet local community needs.

### **Recommendation 10**

There should also be additional support for the roll out of information from local government to community and environmental organisations.

**Recommendation 11**

That a green-job scheme be developed, initially for the local government sector. This could provide a framework for other levels of government, and should include local food production and distribution.

**Recommendation 12**

A review of enabling documents and policies such as the Building Code, Planning and Environment Act is needed to encourage environmentally sustainable development principles to be embedded into local planning schemes.

Further specific recommendations relating to existing and future housing stock follow. Again, the VLGA's focus is on ameliorating some of the social equity impacts of climate change outlined from page 13 onwards.

It should also be noted that some of the following recommendations refer to effective land use and strategic planning issues such as food security and public transport. The VLGA believes that the social equity impacts of climate change can be effectively addressed through wiser planning decisions.

**Recommendation 13**

Define and regulate standards for 'climate-safe homes.'

**Recommendation 14**

Overhaul the State's Public Housing stock for energy and water efficiency and security.

**Recommendation 15**

Introduce mandatory minimum standards for water and energy efficiency in all properties, including rental housing stock, to ensure that Victorians are not disproportionately affected by energy and water price rises.

**Recommendation 16**

Introduce the requirement for zero carbon homes by 2020 as a first step of improving minimum standard to seven stars.

**Recommendation 17**

Ensure that high yield agricultural land is retained to ensure local food security.

**Recommendation 18**

Ensure that new developments include equitable access to fresh food, safe walking tracks, and public transport, and the protection of natural biodiversity.

The importance of effective land use and strategic planning cannot be overemphasised in dealing effectively with climate change.

**Recommendation 19**

That locational, housing stock and social disadvantages that impact on housing affordability and the implementation of new climate-safe standards be widely researched. The issue of 'liveability' should also be emphasised as a moral issue, and not limited to purely financial considerations.

Further, the State Government should work with the Federal Government to consider the efficacy of subsidies or special assistance to households, based on these locational, housing stock and social disadvantages.

**Recommendation 20**

That learnings from the Department of Health and Safety Heatwave Pilots be shared, embedded and promoted within local governments, and that the State Government provide funding for this purpose.

The Pilots demonstrated that very young children and babies, as well as the aged, are particularly vulnerable to climate change.

And finally, the VLGA makes the following three recommendations that relate to inter-governmental agreements and funding.

**Recommendation 21**

That a 'National Climate Change Compact' containing agreements on the roles of all three tiers of government, households and businesses is required as a matter of urgency.

**Recommendation 22**

As previously advocated by the VLGA to State Government Ministers, the State Government should fund the development of a one-off program to enable all seventy-nine local governments to apply a climate change 'health impacts' filter to their Municipal Health Plans.

Municipal Health Plans can contain information and evidence of:

\* the partnerships required to build a sense of optimism that 'we are in this together'

- \* investment in essential services has been made and that emergency planning and procedures are robust and take care of all Victorians, and
- \* the local planning needed for improved systems required to protect people at risk during heatwaves.

### **Recommendation 23**

The VLGA recommends that the State Government advocate, in partnership with local governments, for a dedicated proportion of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) revenues to be invested in helping communities mitigate and adapt to climate change.

This will include actions such as behaviour change programs, boosting energy and water efficiency, transitioning communities to low carbon and low water lifestyles, improving local food and water security, and providing sustainable transport choices to outer Melbourne, regional and rural communities.

## The Victorian Climate Change Green Paper

The Victorian Climate Change Green Paper (VCCGP) appears to be the result of a thorough process and informed by solid climate change research. The Government is to be commended for its courage and potential exposure of its own actions to criticism.

At the same time, it is disappointing that the VCCGP includes unsubstantiated claims. For example, the assertion that “Victoria is recognised as a leader in tackling the challenges of climate change” (VCCGP, p.1) seems somewhat untenable.

Recent research and widespread public opinion would suggest otherwise. It is a fact that Australia is one of the worst per-capita Green House Gas (GHG) emitting nations in the world and, in Australia, Victoria the worst state on a number of measures. In addition, the governments own advisors and contracted experts have repeatedly stated that more decisive action is required.

Although a critique of the VCCGP seems somewhat inevitable, there is much to be commended for the Paper’s action-focused adaptation response framework.

It is here that local governments and communities are presented with a range of opportunities for a productive and constructive Local-State Government partnership approach and jointly utilise community indicators to meet the challenges we all face.

## The role of local government in climate change

Local government has responsibilities across a wide range of areas that impact on both climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the health and wellbeing of citizens and their communities.

To date local government risk assessment and planning for climate change has tended to focus on the physical implications for landscapes, weather patterns, and human settlements with limited consideration of social impacts.

Social impacts of climate change can be defined broadly as those that influence the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, covering areas such as physical and mental health, social equity, disadvantage, social inclusion and participation, access to food and water, employment, education and social

services, as well as the strength of community cohesion and engagement of citizens in community life.

There is currently little available information on how local government can frame and address the critical and wide-ranging social impacts of climate change in light of their roles and responsibilities.

## Local governments and communities at the front line

Many local governments have been proactive in dealing with climate change in a number of ways. These include emission reductions, carbon neutral targets for council operations and Local Government Associations (LGAs), environmental sustainable design (ESD), understanding risk to infrastructure and finances, behaviour change and raising awareness.

However, actions to date do not come close to addressing the scale of change needed to prepare for and help avoid climate change, and it is not expected that local governments can achieve this alone. Local governments will do what they can to provide leadership locally and advocate effectively to other levels of government, as they have a mandate to protect citizens and to promote wellbeing.

## The *Liveable and Just* project

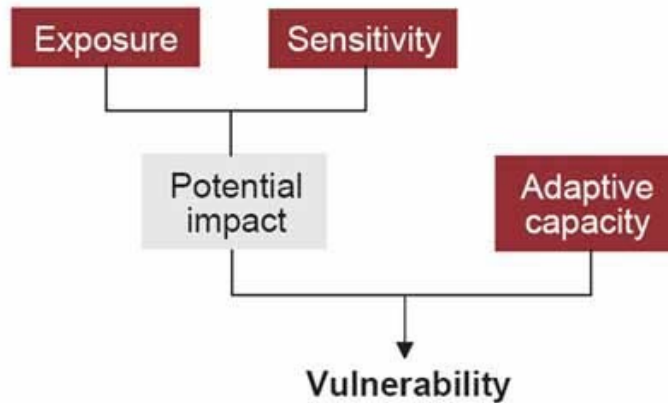
One of the key ways that the VLGA is seeking to improve the capacity of local government to respond to climate change in ways which are healthy, just and sustainable is through the VLGA's *Liveable and Just* project.

The VLGA, in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence, is undertaking a project designed to investigate the capacity of local governments to deal with sustainability, climate change and social equity. This project has been funded by the Victorian Local Government's Sustainability Accord. The VLGA has also engaged Melbourne University's McCaughey Centre to undertake this project.

Below is a brief outline the *Liveable and Just* project and its major focus. The VLGA believes the findings of the project are very important for the State Government to consider in further developing its climate change strategies.

*Liveable and Just* concentrates on the social impacts of climate change and attempts to go beyond the mere identification of social impact, but seeks to engage with those are most at risk and work towards long-term solutions based on enhancing resilience and improving capacity.

Consequently, the project's conceptualisation of vulnerability may be represented as follows:



In the context of the project, vulnerability is therefore the overall degree of susceptibility to, or inability to cope with, adverse impacts of climate change. Whilst exposure to climate change is determined by climate science, and in particular an improved understanding of the physical impacts at the local level, further explanation is required to understand and identify the factors that contribute to a given community's sensitivity and adaptive capacity.

Social systems, such as friends and family networks, community networks and civic organisations, that respond to changes or shocks without 'significant decline in their crucial functions' are said to have high adaptive capacity.

Closely related to the concept of adaptive capacity is the concept of resilience, which means "the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change, so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks."

Characteristics associated with greater resilience include the degree to which the particular system (or community) is capable of self-organisation, flexibility in problem-solving, as well as storing and learning from knowledge and experience.

## **Social impacts of climate change: who is most vulnerable?**

As understanding of the physical impacts of climate change becomes more sophisticated, it is increasingly important that societies are able to translate what this means for community life.

In Australia, the focus to date has been on understanding how climate change will impact on the domestic economy, including our industries, terms of trade, jobs and the insurance sector, as well as risks to infrastructure and human settlements, with significant attention also given to health impacts.

All of the research on climate change impacts indicates there will be repercussions for individuals and communities. Regardless of the pace or depth of action on climate change globally, there will be important social and equity impacts to address locally. This section considers what they are and who is most vulnerable.

There is emerging interest in, and evidence of, the social impacts of climate change in Australia.

To date, government consideration of social impacts has largely focussed on policy development around carbon trading and mitigation and the financial impacts of policy changes on low-income families.

More widely there has been an increase in advocacy and writing about the social and equity impacts of climate change. This has been driven by non-government organisations that support disadvantaged and vulnerable populations such as the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) (and its Victorian arm, the VCOSS), the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Mission Australia, Kildonan Uniting Care and St Vincent de Paul.

## **Social impacts of climate change: what are they?**

The social impacts of climate change are those concerned with the effects on the quality of life experienced by individuals and communities.

The International Association for Impact Assessment defines social impacts as 'all impacts on humans and on all the ways in which people and communities interact with their socio-cultural, economic and biophysical surroundings'.

The social impacts of climate change, therefore, clearly encompass a very broad range of factors that can be categorised in numerous ways. The categorisation presented in this section is based on insights from the vast literature on the social determinants of health, poverty and social disadvantage and community wellbeing and social cohesion.

A growing evidence base is emerging to explain the likely impacts of climate change on the factors presented below in the table which underpin the quality of life of people and their communities.

Given the lack of focus on the social impacts of climate change, we are presenting some of the preliminary findings from a Literature Review conducted as part of our *Liveable and Just* project, as below.

<b>HEALTH AND WELLBEING</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Physical health</b> Climate change is already impacting on the global burden of disease and premature death, with World Health Organisation (WHO) figures estimating climate change could already be causing the loss of over 150,000 lives per year. Health impacts of climate change can occur through a number of direct and indirect causal pathways with key health impacts in Australia arising from extreme weather events, infectious diseases and drought-related problems. According to the Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Victorians face a broad range of negative health impacts including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- injury or death as a result of extreme weather events including heatwaves, wind, storms, floods and fires;</li><li>- exposure to waterborne disease and toxins due to affected or unreliable water sources;</li><li>- exposure to food poisoning due to warmer temperatures and malnutrition linked to food insecurity;</li><li>- higher respiratory disease incidence linked to pollutants and increased rates of asthma and hay fever due to increased aeroallergens;</li><li>- increased exposure to vector-borne and other infectious diseases such as epidemic polyarthritis caused by Ross River virus and Barmah Forest virus; and</li><li>- increased exposure to ultraviolet radiation.</li></ul></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Mental health</b> In addition to physical health impacts, studies are beginning to highlight the mental health impacts arising from climate change, which may be even more pervasive. Many individuals are likely to experience ongoing emotional stress and anxiety for a variety of reasons, which may act cumulatively. Implications of climate change for mental health include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- direct mental health impacts due to traumatic events, extreme weather events (for example, floods or bushfires) or longer-term changes to the land (for example, persistent drought or coastal</li></ul></li></ul>

<p>inundation) and forced migration;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- indirect mental health impacts through impacts on determinants of mental health such as economic security and participation, social inclusion and freedom from violence and discrimination. Indirect impacts also include distress from decreased security in protection of housing and assets due to extreme weather; or arising from fewer opportunities for relaxation associated with the use of public open spaces; and</li> <li>- emotional distress arising from awareness of climate change as a global environmental threat and what it means for the future.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public safety</b> Studies in the United Kingdom have suggested safety and crime levels may be compromised by climate change due to increased international and terrestrial conflict in other parts of the world resulting from greater resource scarcity, and potential social unrest over resources locally.</li> </ul>

### ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL GOODS AND SERVICES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Food</b> Increased droughts and extreme weather events will impact on Australia's local and imported food supply leading to price rises, food scarcity, and the potential breakdown and/or destruction of food systems. Increased food prices are particularly a concern for people on low incomes already much more likely to lack access to fresh food.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Water</b> Water scarcity and drought are already impacting heavily on Victorians. Infrastructure investment by the Victorian Government to increase water supply will raise water costs. People on low incomes will struggle to afford water tanks or water saving technologies.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Housing</b> As the climate alters, housing will need to alter to provide adequate protection from heat and extreme weather events, such as bushfires, floods and coastal storm surges. Costs of retrofitting are often prohibitive for people on low incomes. In some areas, building or maintaining existing houses may not be viable, leading to the need for people (and potentially whole communities) to relocate.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Energy</b> Climate change, and policies to respond to it, will impact on Victorians' access to energy and, therefore, access to the vital services it provides such as heating, cooling and cooking.  Extreme weather events can damage crucial energy system infrastructure and disrupt transmission, causing power shortages and blackouts. Climate policy-related increases in electricity and petrol prices, and the availability and affordability of alternatives, also present significant social justice concerns, given that transforming our energy system to withstand impacts of climate change and transition to renewable energy will increase energy costs.</li> </ul>

<p>For example, modelling undertaken for the Brotherhood of St Laurence considered the impact of emissions trading, finding that a carbon price of \$25 per ton would increase living costs by 2.5% for low income households compared to 1.85% for higher income households.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Transport</b></p> <p>Higher costs of petrol and public transport due to 'peak oil', increasing electricity costs and policies to reduce emissions will make mobility more expensive. This will in turn affect many people's access to fresh food distributors.</p> <p>Research undertaken for the Brotherhood of St Laurence has shown that the imposition of a carbon price will have a greater adverse impact on low-income Victorian households with limited access to public transport and those in neighbourhoods affected by poor urban planning. Transport infrastructure can also suffer damage or malfunction during extreme weather events, for example, much of Melbourne's rail network was not able to operate during the heatwave of early 2009, which has implications for those reliant on public transport.</p> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Emergency management services</b></p> <p>Climate change is predicted to cause an increased incidence of 'disaster' situations such as bushfires, flash flooding, heatwaves and drought. The impact of such disasters will be felt acutely locally and will require well planned and executed action by local government in effective partnership with other organisations and service deliverers.</p> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Health services</b></p> <p>Extreme weather events can disrupt access to essential services including health services. Increased demand, given the physical and mental health implications outlined above, is also likely to place increasing pressure on an already stressed health system in Victoria.</p> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Education and training</b></p> <p>Extreme weather events have the potential to disrupt education by affecting ability to attend classes. However, climate change is also expected to bring positive social impacts by opening up new educational and training opportunities relating to adaptation and the shift to a low-carbon economy.</p> </li> </ul>

<p><b>SOCIAL INEQUITY AND DISADVANTAGE</b></p> <p>A report entitled <i>Climate Change and Equity in Victoria</i>, released by Friends of the Earth Australia in 2007, highlighted the likelihood that climate change will entrench and exacerbate existing inequalities faced by low-income earners in all of the areas referred to above. Increased resource scarcity will lead to price increases in the market, with potential negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of individuals and the social equity of our communities.</p> <p>Low-income households spend a disproportionate amount of their disposable income on essentials such as electricity and food, which will increase in cost through climate change and with the</p>
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introduction of carbon trading (through the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme).

If swift and radical mitigation is executed through Commonwealth and State Government actions, immediate social impacts on constituents will largely take the form of increased financial pressures. These pressures will be greatest on those least able to accommodate price increases in essential goods and services and disadvantaged populations will need to be protected against economic exclusion or hardship.

### **LIVELIHOOD – EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL SECURITY**

- **Employment and job security**

Climate change is likely to impact on livelihoods and the continued economic viability of rural and regional areas across Victoria. Industries at most risk due to climate change include agriculture and tourism. Increased drought and bushfires will reduce productivity and increase stress on rural communities, particularly those engaged in snow-based tourism, fruit and dairy industries, forage and animal production. Changes to emissions intensive industries such as energy production, transport, agriculture, mining and heavy industry to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will also impact on employment.

However, there is an increasing focus on the potential for new job opportunities associated with the need to transition to a low-carbon economy. There will be new jobs in local food production, and in 'green' industries such as renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors, for example.

- **Access to insurance**

It is likely that an increased knowledge of climate change impacts especially more frequent and intense extreme weather events will affect the availability and affordability of insurance.

### **COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS**

- **Cultural participation**

Climate change will impact on our everyday way of life, including access to public open space for sport and recreation and other community facilities. Community facilities allow citizens to interact and develop relationships with each other.

Low cost and free facilities also allow widespread participation in leisure, fitness, health and social activities. Opportunities to access quality facilities support communities to be happier, healthier and more cohesive. The impact of loss of sports facilities and the use of public space such as parks and gardens is already being felt in some parts of Victoria due to drought and high temperatures.

Climate change will also alter land and seascapes which are important to the cultural beliefs and practices of some communities.

- **Social cohesion and sense of home and belonging**

Climate change is likely to lead to temporary or permanent displacement of communities affected by extreme weather events, coastal erosion, sea level rise or loss of economic viability. Social cohesion could be negatively affected by a lack of integration support for climate refugees or displaced peoples.

It could also be affected by divisive or unfair adaptation policies. For example, in the UK conflicts have emerged between communities who will and will not be protected by coastal flood risk management. There is also some evidence that, where there is good management of evacuation and clean up processes, climate change impacts can enhance community spirit and cohesion.

### Direct and indirect impacts of climate change

Social and equity implications are attached to both direct and indirect impacts of climate change. Climate change also interacts in complex ways with existing trends to produce flow-on social outcomes that may not be immediately or obviously attributable to climate change. For example, aside from direct impacts, there are also:

- **secondary or indirect impacts** – occurring away from the original effect or as a result of a complex pathway. For example, medium to long term disruption to the education system due to a large number of families being displaced by extreme weather conditions
- **cumulative impacts** – for example, the impact on the ability to insure a property following a series of flood events; and
- **synergistic impacts** – where effects tend to interact to produce a total effect greater than the sum of the individual effects. For example, the impact on a family's ability to work after a flooding event combined with mental health problems as a result of living with flood risk.

## The VLGA response to VCCGP goals

The Victorian Climate Change Green Paper identifies the need and potential for Victoria to reduce its Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and emphasises existing and future opportunities in the areas of planning, the natural and built environment, infrastructure in general and industry development. It further derives, from this focus, the need for greater energy efficiency and adaptive measures, especially in local community and infrastructure.

The VCCGP articulates the following goals and objectives:

1. Contribute to global and national emissions reductions
2. Develop a portfolio of energy options for a low carbon future (LCF)
3. Help communities and industries to adjust to a carbon price
4. Capitalise on new opportunities emerging from a carbon price
5. Enable Victoria's regions, industries and communities to capture opportunities and adapt to a changing climate
6. Promote resilience and improve the management of Victoria's natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity
7. Manage the risks to Victoria's infrastructure, natural and built environment and communities through good planning and emergency response systems
8. Work in partnership with Victorians to provide the knowledge and information needed to respond effectively to climate change, and
9. Take action to reduce emissions across government operations and ensure that climate change is considered in all government decision making.

What follows are five recommendations the VLGA makes in response to the goals set out in the VCCGP.

To ensure that we do not duplicate the efforts of many others making submissions to the VCCGP, there is also a more detailed discussion of goal nine, as this is relevant to a key focus of the VLGA's approach to climate change – social equity.

**Goal 1:** Contribute to global and national emissions reductions.

**Goal 2:** Develop a portfolio of energy options for a low carbon future.

### **Recommendation 1**

The VLGA supports the position of the Municipal Association of Victoria “That the State Government advocate to the Australian Government for a ‘science based’ target that reflects the true urgency of the climate change challenge and the need to avert dangerous climate change.”

In addition, the VLGA recommends that the State Government undertake consultation with local government, community groups, green energy corporate sector and individuals in developing low carbon future (LCF) scenarios.

**Goal 3:** Help communities and industries to adjust to a carbon price.

**Goal 4:** Capitalise on new opportunities emerging for a carbon price.

### **Recommendation 2**

The VLGA supports the position of the Municipal Association of Victoria “That the State Government monitor the effects of the national carbon policy approach on Victoria, and advocate to the Australian Government for equality in the policy outcome.”

**Goal 5:** Enable Victoria’s regions, industries and communities to capture opportunities and adapt to a changing climate.

**Goal 6:** Promote resilience and improve the management of Victoria’s natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity.

### **Recommendation 3**

That appropriate funding and attention be given to building adaptive capacity of local communities through a range of locally targeted initiatives addressing specific needs.

In particular, research into the relationship between resilience and adaptive capacity across issues of mental health, positive ageing, water and food security which form an intrinsic part of a community’s ability to respond to climate change.

**Goal 7:** Manage the risks to Victoria’s infrastructure, natural and built environment and communities through good planning and emergency response systems.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The VLGA supports the position of the Municipal Association of Victoria that “Where current State Government regulation or legislation presents a barrier to risk reduction for Victoria’s infrastructure, natural and built environment and communities, the State must remedy this situation as a matter of high priority.”

**Goal 8:** Work in partnership with Victorians to provide the knowledge and information needed to respond effectively to climate change.

**Goal 9:** Help to ensure vulnerable communities are not further disadvantaged as a result of climate change.

Goal 9 is commendable in that it identifies a social reality where certain communities are more vulnerable than others. It needs to be recognised, however, that there are challenges both across horizontal (geographic) and vertical (social) systems.

The impact of droughts, bushfires, heatwaves rising seas level etc. is having a marked impact on identifiable regional communities.

Many communities have started to organise their adaptive responses in regional clusters such as the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA), Moreland Energy Foundation Limited (MEFL), and the United Kingdom’s leading provider of residential energy efficiency, eaga. These initiatives are to be applauded.

Less well understood is the vertical social impact of climate change on different cohorts such as the elderly or the socially disadvantaged.

Such groups have less recognisable network and support structures which need to be strengthened, if they are to develop a meaningful adaptive response.

This is where civic agency service provision intersects: the elderly and the socially disadvantaged are ultimately affected by climate change because it impacts on health and well-being, especially among the more frail members of our community, and because of increasing costs to mobility (for example, petrol, gas, and electricity), thus augmenting the negative impact of a higher degree of social isolation.

**Recommendation 5**

That local government and community agencies are involved in developing effective responses to climate change, both through further research identifying local community needs (such as the VLGA's *Liveable and Just* project), as well as action-based projects.

As stated in the introductory quote, there must be a substantive increase in resources for such projects, and this funding must necessarily come from the Federal and State Governments.

The State Government should work in partnership with local government recognising the need for concerted action and a consolidated response across all government sectors. The close involvement of local communities should also be considered.

Such partnerships and integrated responses to climate change require the facilitation and sharing of resources and exchange of knowledge, as well as shared decision-making processes.

## The VLGA response to questions posed in the VCCGP

The following responses to relevant questions contained in the VCCGP contain some discussion, where relevant to the VLGA's climate change focus. The response also includes eighteen recommendations arising from eight questions in the VCCGP.

### ***Has the Government set the right priorities for short and medium-term action on climate change? Should there be others?***

The priorities and long-term goals set out in the VCCGP (VCCGP, pp. 11-13) seem to address the key challenges in need of a response at different levels of strategy and policy.

However, they are also a stark reminder of a demonstrable gap between strategy rhetoric and policy behaviours.

For example, the Government purported climate change mitigation and adaptation responses in areas such as transport, energy, logging and urban growth boundaries seem to be discordant with current and future large-scale infrastructure initiatives.

At the same time, the Government's preparedness to effect tangible outcomes by involving local communities is commendable, and the VLGA, local governments, and local communities look forward to there being generational improvements in how these are resourced.

#### **Recommendation 6**

The VLGA believes that short and medium-term results are achievable through local engagement, and the provision of education and behaviour change programs.

Advocacy and education geared towards younger Victorians should also receive priority attention.

#### **Recommendation 7**

Another practical step would be to strengthen the Building Code and Planning and Environment Act to achieve greater emissions reductions.

***What information, incentives or assistance would help households, businesses and community organisations to become more energy efficient?***

There exists plenty of scope to improve existing practices via small-scale education programs.

Many councils have trialled such initiatives (for example, the City of Knox's *Greenleaf School's For Sustainability*, Boroondara's *Living for our Future*, the City of Greater Bendigo's *Smart Gardens* for a dry climate, Moonee Valley City Council's *Green Homes*, and Yarra City's *Sustainability Streets*).

A more coordinated approach would generate even more tangible impacts for many more communities across Victoria.

Other initiatives available at the individual household level such as a more rewarding feed-in tariff would also be welcomed. This would necessitate a shift in government policy away from large-scale, big budget infrastructure projects to a more distributed system of individual contribution and reward.

**Recommendation 8**

A key plank in Victoria's climate change strategy should include behaviour change programs that address local adaptation and mitigation needs.

Local governments are ideally placed and highly skilled in building community capacity, therefore behaviour change programs should be conducted by local governments with local communities. These programs should be properly funded by State Government.

**Recommendation 9**

Ensure that information on water and energy efficiency products, incentives, rebates and behaviour change also be provided in appropriate language, formats, and media by trusted sources, and that they are adapted to meet local community needs.

**Recommendation 10**

There should also be additional support for the roll out of information from local government to community and environmental organisations.

***What would drive the development of the new green jobs, skills and services need to make it easy for households, businesses and communities to become more energy efficient?***

The VLGA would welcome a special scheme that specifically targets green jobs in the local government sector. Councils are employers of a significant number of professionals with a diverse skills base who work across a broad range of portfolios.

Up-skilling and retraining existing professionals, as well as the creation of new position with peripheral and core responsibilities in ESD, would generate much interest. This could cover a gamut of professions from community services, strategic and social planning, finance and risk management, to parks and gardens, transport and waste management, as well as State Government employees.

The VLGA understands that a significant market-based green jobs sector, including local food production and distribution, will, and should flourish. However, we would also argue that as local governments have the expertise, are closest to their local communities, and can provide programs at a very cost-effective price, there should be a significant Local Government Green Jobs Program.

**Recommendation 11**

That a green-job scheme be developed, initially for the local government sector. This could provide a framework for other levels of government, and should include local food production and distribution.

***What actions are required to ensure our cities, towns, suburbs and homes produce low emissions and are located and designed to deliver comfort and affordability as our climate changes?***

**Recommendation 12**

A review of enabling documents and policies such as the Building Code, Planning and Environment Act is needed to encourage environmentally sustainable development principles to be embedded into local planning schemes.

**Recommendation 13**

Define and regulate standards for 'climate-safe homes.'

**Recommendation 14**

Overhaul the State's Public Housing stock for energy and water efficiency and security.

**Recommendation 15**

Introduce mandatory minimum standards for water and energy efficiency in all properties, including rental housing stock, to ensure that Victorians are not disproportionately affected by energy and water price rises.

**Recommendation 16**

Introduce the requirement for zero carbon homes by 2020 as a first step of improving minimum standard to seven stars.

**Recommendation 17**

Ensure that high yield agricultural land is retained to ensure local food security.

**Recommendation 18**

Ensure that new developments include equitable access to fresh food, safe walking tracks, and public transport, and the protection of natural biodiversity.

The importance of effective land use and strategic planning cannot be overemphasised in dealing effectively with climate change.

**Recommendation 19**

That locational, housing stock and social disadvantages that impact on housing affordability and the implementation of new climate-safe standards be widely researched. The issue of 'liveability' should also be emphasised as a moral issue, and not limited to purely financial considerations.

Further, the State Government should work with the Federal Government to consider the efficacy of subsidies or special assistance to households, based on these locational, housing stock and social disadvantages.

***What are the roles of government, households and businesses in preparing for the impacts of climate change?***

It is important for the State Government to build partnerships between all levels of government with the intent to build the capacity of local businesses and community organisations to respond effectively to climate change.

Local governments can work with local communities to actively build resilience and to promote adaptive responses. State and

Federal Governments have their own regulatory roles, and these should continue to focus on responding in a timely manner to the scale of challenges presented by climate change.

**Recommendation 20**

That learnings from the Department of Health and Safety Heatwave Pilots be shared, embedded and promoted within local governments, and that the State Government provide funding for this purpose.

The Pilots demonstrated that very young children and babies, as well as the aged, are particularly vulnerable to climate change.

***What are the critical steps the Victorian Government can take to ensure that we are prepared and can respond quickly and effectively to deal with increasing extreme weather events?***

**Recommendation 21**

That a 'National Climate Change Compact' containing agreements on the roles of all three tiers of government, households, and businesses is required as a matter of urgency.

***What help does your community need in adapting to the possible health impact of climate change?***

Local government through Municipal Health Plans need to plan for the health impacts on local communities, particularly the increase in service provision including mental health impacts.

**Recommendation 22**

As previously advocated by the VLGA to State Government Ministers, the State Government should fund the development of a one-off program to enable all seventy-nine local governments to apply a climate change 'health impacts' filter to their Municipal Health Plans.

Municipal Health Plans can contain information and evidence of:

- \* the partnerships required to build a sense of optimism that 'we are in this together'
- \* investment in essential services has been made and that emergency planning and procedures are robust and take care of all Victorians and
- \* the local planning needed for improved systems required to protect people at risk during heatwaves.

***Which communities, regions and sectors would most benefit from a targeted adjustment partnership or accord?***

The VLGA argues that health and social justice are under-represented themes in the climate change debate.

Special support programs for disadvantaged communities would be most welcome, especially where such programs address healthy ageing, social isolation and key disadvantaged groups.

Energy, water and transport prices are set to rise in coming years. It is essential that government is working to assist families prepare for and minimise their exposure to these increased costs.

Higher energy, water and transport prices will disproportionately affect those living on low incomes.

Additionally, higher prices will also disproportionately affect those living in poor quality housing, large families, people with medical conditions, older people, rural households and culturally and linguistically diverse households, many of whom are more likely to miss out on information and opportunities to take up efficiency measures.

Finally, and in addition to Recommendation 21, the VLGA believes that a new compact would not only clarify the roles that each level of government should play, but would also enable an audit of all local government climate change responses, including targets set, the actions that are proving effective in local communities, and the actions that assisting local communities to meet targets.

While the compact may be the vehicle to achieve this role clarity and audit, this will not occur unless there is a dedicated income stream available through the CPRS.

**Recommendation 23**

The VLGA recommends that the State Government advocate, in partnership with local governments, for a dedicated proportion of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) revenues to be invested in helping communities mitigate and adapt to climate change.

This will include actions such as behaviour change programs, boosting energy and water efficiency, transitioning communities to low carbon and low water lifestyles, improving local food and water security, and providing sustainable transport choices to outer Melbourne, regional and rural communities.

## Conclusion

The VLGA understands that responding to climate change is perhaps the most important generational issue facing our communities. The complexities for regulation, let alone the different contexts for urban, rural and regional communities are immense.

Nevertheless, we commend the State Government on undertaking the important work reflected in the VCCGP.

In this submission, the VLGA has focussed its feedback on two areas that we believe require ongoing attention by all levels of government – namely the social equity implications of climate change, and the key role that local governments can play in building community capacity and enabling local mitigation and adaptation. The VLGA believes these two areas to be inextricably linked.

As outlined in the *Liveable and Just* project, the VLGA affirms the significant cross-over between services provided by local government, and key areas in which climate change impacts on quality of life and the factors that contribute to healthy communities.

Local government has both formal and moral obligations to respond. Both the Federal and the Victorian Government's policies and programs will continue to determine the context in which local government adapts to the social impacts of climate change.

It is therefore important that strong relationships between the different tiers of government be further developed and maintained, so that they can work together on the planning and implementation of climate change responses, ensuring consistency and complementarity.

At the broad strategy level, the VCCGP understates the challenges of dealing the impact of population growth, large polluters, and the long overdue augmentation of the public transport sector. However, the VCCGP offers a timely opportunity for proactive collaboration between the three tiers of government, and the development of effective responses to climate change at the local community level.

In this regard, some encouraging signs have already emerged, for example the many initiatives funded through the Victorian Local Sustainability Accord.

Nevertheless, the primacy of strong Local-State Government partnerships to advance environmental sustainability needs to be further emphasised, and relationships between civic agencies and peak bodies at local and state levels nurtured. There needs to be a significant increase in emphasis placed on behaviour change and modification programs at all levels of government, as well as accompanying funding commitments.

As many of our member local governments have commenced drafting their own Climate Change Risk Assessment and Adaptive Action Plans, collaboration between local and State government is essential, especially when considering the overlap in service provision and responsibilities.

There is growing recognition that planning amidst climate change uncertainty will require local governments (and other organisations) to re-evaluate decision-making based on past and predictable climatic conditions. Cooperation and collaboration between State and local government is even more essential given our shared responsibility to promote community wellbeing.

It is important to re-state that the approach of the VLGA's *Liveable and Just* project, as well as the Association's broader approach to climate change adaptation, is premised on the moral obligation to provide assistance to local government in preparing for the social equity impacts of climate change.

Local governments need to be supported to understand and act in response to climate change risks and need to be resourced to explore how this can interact with the resilience and coping capacity of diverse communities.

Local governments can provide leadership in adapting to climate change, and advocate to other levels of government on behalf of local communities.

As the representatives of local communities and businesses, local governments can help citizens from a diverse range of backgrounds understand the urgency of responding to climate change and take a lead in advocating for those who are more likely to be disadvantaged or marginalised by, and vulnerable to climate change.

Finally, while we have not concentrated on this issue in our submission, the extent to which Victorian councils, and State Government, have legal responsibilities relating to climate change is another significantly complex issue that should be clarified. There exist areas in which liability in relation to climate change may arise, and the question remains unclear as to what extent negligence and compensation may be invoked.

While the VCCGP is silent on such issues, these consultations do provide an opportunity to negotiate a common Local-State Government framework. This would allow for obligations to be shared, thus providing communities with a less ambiguous frame of reference.

## Resources

Municipal Association of Victoria. *MAV Draft Submission – The Climate Change Green Paper* (September 2009).

The McCaughey Centre at the University of Melbourne for the Victorian Local Governance Association. *Liveable and Just: Improving the capacity of local government to respond to climate change in ways which are healthy, just and sustainable* (May 2009).

Environment Victoria. *Action for our climate, The People's Climate White Paper* (September 2009).