

MAV and Victorian Greenhouse Alliances

Federal and Victoria Election Advocacy Collaboration

1. Introduction

Recognising the positive outcomes that can be achieved through a strong productive relationship, the Victorian Greenhouse Alliances (VGA) and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) have met several times to discuss how they can collaborate to progress action on climate change.

The VGA and the MAV will work together to ensure, where possible, alignment and cooperation on advocacy in the lead up to the Federal and Victorian State elections which will be held in 2022.

Advocacy can also be undertaken independently by councils and through collaboration with organisations that share the same interests. The VGA and MAV can lend their voice to campaigns being undertaken by others.

Local government comes to the climate debate with unique characteristics:

1. More than any other level of government, local government has a long and strong track record of actively working towards zero net emissions and increased organisational and community resilience
2. Councils and communities are directly experiencing the impacts of climate change and are increasingly exploring this impact in more detail.
3. With the right resources, local government has the capacity and will to engage and support community in tangible ways to address climate change in their homes and / or businesses.

This paper proposes a range of commitments that should be sought from all parties with regard to actions in the next term of government.

2. Federal Election advocacy priorities

Advocacy should focus on influencing initiatives that are the preserve of the Federal Government.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is the national local government representative body. There is opportunity to contribute to the ALGA platform via the MAV's positions on the ALGA board. It is important to note that ALGA views are balanced across all its member state associations, which may constrain some of the more progressive action we would seek from a Victorian perspective.

Emission reduction targets and climate resilience

It is critical that the current and new Federal government commits to an ambitious 2030 emissions reduction target, that supports the longer term zero emissions 2050 target. Both need to be consistent with global action. These targets should be science-based and ensure Australia contributes equitably given its position as the highest per capita emitter among developed countries.

There are strong economic imperatives behind ambitious emission reduction targets. Global economies consider decarbonisation a fundamental necessity. Should the Australian position on

decarbonisation be out of step, the Victorian economy will forgo investment opportunities, their competitiveness will be diminished, impacting growth and social wellbeing. For example, productive enhancements such as regenerative farming and soil carbon have been touted as offering greater commercial viability than traditional farming practices.

Financial support for local government to address climate change

As part of its 2021 Federal election manifesto, ALGA is promoting a national \$200 million local government climate partnership fund. The fund is for both adaptation and mitigation and, if successfully advocated for, may mean in the order of \$40 million for Victorian councils. We consider this fund should focus on a range of practical mitigation projects by councils that continue the move toward councils being net zero emitters. Examples include carbon neutral aquatic facilities, microgrids for energy resilience, use of recycled product in road making, and heavy vehicle conversion away from fossil fuels. Practical adaptation projects should also be considered.

The VGA are also developing a proposal for a Victorian Climate Resilient Councils program. How this relates to the ALGA \$200 million resilience fund should be discussed and a position agreed. The program is based on a needs analysis and investigation of comparable programs including the Queensland Climate Resilient Councils program and QCOAST which is a climate resilience program valued at approximately \$13 - 14 million.

Funding for mitigation and adaptation is an essential element of Australia's economic recovery post the COVID 19 pandemic and also the ongoing impact of the 2019 Black Summer and the millennium drought. Economic stimulus should include support for energy efficiency measures for low income / vulnerable households to reduce the cost of living and improve resilience to climate change. Federal funding for infrastructure should also prioritise and incentivise decarbonisation and climate resilience.

Carbon sequestration and offsetting

Regional Victoria has the opportunity to aggregate and scale carbon drawdown initiatives. Support to explore the challenges and opportunities, including the co-benefits this delivers, is needed. There are also opportunities for high emitting areas (i.e. urban centres) to invest in carbon offsets in regional areas. A pilot environmental carbon fund that can be scaled and rolled out across other regions should be considered. Support for blue, teal, green and red carbon sequestration is required.

Federal Government macro policy settings

The Federal Government is responsible for setting underlying policies and macro economic initiatives that will shift the Australian economy towards decarbonisation and climate resilience.

These issues include

- Tax policy to incentivise decarbonisation and climate resilience, including investment incentives, taxation incentives for lower emission fuels, utilising superannuation fund investments in both renewables and power infrastructure
- Energy market reform to accelerate transition away from fossil fuels and towards uptake of renewable energy, green hydrogen, energy storage and energy efficiency
- Changes to the National Electricity Rules that support sustainability goals and market restructure to allow for regional energy systems and services to emerge
- Support for active and public transport and for electric and zero emissions vehicles infrastructure and uptake, including in the commercial space.
- Reforms to the National Construction Code to support a net zero carbon, and ideally carbon positive, built environment.

National vs State climate policy alignment

There is a significant gap between the Commonwealth and state governments on climate change mitigation and adaptation. A commitment from the Commonwealth to increase its efforts to bridge this gap and align the goals and actions of all governments will provide significant benefits for community and business.

Waste management

The Federal Government has a clear leadership role in product stewardship, packaging and waste minimization and recycling.

3. Victorian State Election Advocacy priorities

Planning and Environment Act

The VGA and Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE) have undertaken research and produced recommendations on proposed changes to the Planning and Environment Act (P&E Act) that will enable effective action on climate change.

The Victorian Government is currently working on major reform to the P&E Act however there is limited publicly available information about what this reform program involves. It is clear however that the primary focus of the reforms is streamlining and reducing development barriers in the P&E Act to speed the post-covid economic recovery. It is imperative to ensure that the reform program also includes progressive climate action.

A key priority is informing and advising relevant ministers, members of parliament and senior departmental staff about the changes recommended in the VGA / CASBE research. Resources that more simply communicate the rationale for change and the recommendations is required.

Built form compliance

Non-compliance with planning and building regulation is frequent and undermines hard-fought policy victories in both mitigation and adaptation. Planning schemes and building codes are only effective to the extent they are reflected in actual built environment outcomes. Councils need improved capability and capacity to ensure planning compliance. The building regulatory system needs more broad-reaching reforms to address significant conflicts of interest, improve role clarity, and provide regulators (including councils) with the resources necessary for monitoring and enforcing compliance.

Victorian Climate Resilient Councils

Victorian Climate Resilient Councils (VCRC), a VGA program under development, will establish a climate change adaptation program that will guide councils through a clear step-by-step process to reduce and manage climate risks and embed climate change adaptation. Co-funding from the Victorian State Government will be required.

Victorian Climate Change Act

Victoria has taken world leading action on climate change and the Climate Change Act is strongly supported however must be strengthened. Schedule 1 is currently too narrow in terms of the decisions it covers and should be amended to include decisions under planning, transport, agriculture and energy legislation. There also needs to be greater accountability for whole-of-government emissions reduction.

Rewiring Australia

Victorians are the largest gas users. Substituting gas use with electricity generated from renewables is a key step in emissions reduction.

Technology and resources now exist for whole communities to operate energy systems independent of the National Grid. These initiatives need to be enabled through regulatory change and policy that supports investment.

Significant progress is required to enable the energy grid to deliver renewables into key areas of consumption.

4. Next steps

- Engage with Gippsland local government network
- Consider what VGA/MAV are reasonably able to influence given capacity and resources
- Progress the development of an advocacy strategy