

THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT CLIMATE CHANGE GREEN PAPER

An AEU Submission

AEU Victorian Branch

Submission paper

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Australian Education Union Victorian Branch
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Introduction

The Australian Education Union Victorian Branch (AEU) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Victorian Government's new climate change strategies through the Victorian *Climate Change Green Paper*.

The AEU represents over 41,000 teachers and education support staff in early childhood education, primary and secondary schools, TAFEs and adult provision settings. The union has been very active in recent years in raising awareness amongst members about the problem of climate change, the challenges it presents our community and the manifold responses – local, state, national and international – that are needed to ensure current and future generations are not impacted more negatively than necessary from the rise in global temperatures.

With significant international decisions imminent about how to best tackle our greenhouse gas emissions and important steps recently taken by the Federal Government, it is timely that the Victorian Government seeks to rearticulate its approach, and with it, the approach of the Victorian Community, to the issue of climate change.

The State Government has a central role in tackling climate change and must be prepared to take the lead and act boldly and decisively – not to do so will further the damage to our environment and will deny the Victorian community advantages and opportunities that arise out of the move to a low carbon economy. The commitment to tackle climate change should match the magnitude of the problem. The Government must do more than it is currently to ensure Victorians live and work in a 'climate safe' way.

The *Climate Change Green Paper* asserts that action is best managed at the local or regional level. Whilst empowering local communities to tackle the specific issues they face is essential this should not be done in the absence of an active State Government. Indeed this issue of such gravity that the leadership we have seen from the Government must be redoubled.

Successfully combating climate change is central to the sustainable and socially just economic development of the Victorian community; the success of this Government will be judged, in part, by the measures it takes to deliver this key outcome.

The AEU believes that decisive action must be taken to reduce carbon emissions. The available evidence indicates that the costs of climate change will be profound, including loss of biodiversity, increases in mortality and morbidity, destruction of cultures, displacement of people in vulnerable areas, increases in extreme weather

events, and global and regional losses in economic output. There is already evidence to suggest that considerable damage has been done and will continue to worsen in the decades to come, however much can be achieved to negate these impacts and ensure the planet we leave to future generations will not be in a worse condition than we inherited.

This submission will mainly focus on the policy frameworks and initiatives that the Government can embark upon as related to Public Education in Victoria. There are many other, better placed, stakeholders who can and will provide advice across the spectrum on this complex issue, not least in terms of potential impacts on vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, households and communities.

From the built environment perspective the AEU sees schools, TAFEs and early childhood education settings as uniquely placed to be a focus for much Government action and investment on climate change – indeed through community facilities such as schools the Government can lead the way.

It is also clear that many Victorians are employed in industries that will be significantly altered by the impact of climate change and the measures to reduce our carbon emissions. Some industries will go through a long phase of adjustment; others will no longer be viable in a low carbon world. In both circumstances there will be an ever increasing need for vocational education and training opportunities if those affected workers are to adapt to changes within their workplaces or find work in other sectors of the economy. The Victorian Government has a profound responsibility to support workers facing such changes and provide them access to timely and appropriate retraining at a reasonable cost. It is disappointing – to say the least – that the Victorian Government's *Securing Jobs for Your Future – Skills for Victoria* policy prices too many Victorians out of TAFE and Vocational Education and Training (VET).

Tackling climate change means ensuring that there is a highly skilled workforce so that this state can take advantage of the opportunities for new and expanded industries and the growth of 'green jobs'. Unfortunately, the Government's current training policies will prevent many Victorians accessing vocational education. The policy will disproportionately affect those from low socio-economic backgrounds, precisely those who will be most vulnerable to the economic changes brought about by our adaptation to a changing climate.

The Victorian Government's Role in Tackling Climate Change

The Victorian Government has a clear leadership role in ensuring that Victorian households, businesses and industries are able to succeed in a low carbon economy. Equally, the Government must actively reduce its own carbon footprint. The AEU supports the view outlined in the *Climate Change Green Paper* that a key Government responsibility is the need to ensure “economic fundamentals”, including education, skills and infrastructure, if we are to successfully face the climate change challenge.

It is clear that the ongoing Victorian Government response to climate change will occur in the context of evolving national and international steps to tackle the issue. Measures already taken in Victoria have somewhat anticipated the national and global approach and position this state relatively well to mitigate against the worst effects of climate change and taking advantage of the opportunity it presents our community.

Given the Victorian position, this Government should lead the way nationally and be amongst some of the most effective Governments internationally in dealing with the issue. However, this is only possible if the Government is prepared to invest in innovative solutions and indeed be a key player in the solution to climate change; the other option is to see the opportunities it presents fall by the wayside only to be grasped by others.

As the *Climate Change Green Paper* states: “Governments will also need to change their own practices and operations, leading by example in reducing emissions from public services and facilities such as schools and hospitals and becoming ‘first movers’ in using new technologies and adopting new ideas”. The AEU considers this vision as a key aspect of the Victorian Government's response to climate change.

The AEU believes that a decisive action that would deliver a positive message to the Victorian community would be to aim for a mandatory renewable energy target of 25% by 2020. Such a target has the potential to actively stimulate local development, design and manufacturing of renewable energy technologies. Whilst such a target is ambitious, and cannot be achieved in the absence of additional effort on the part of Government and the community, it would enable the development of local businesses and industries that can drive job growth. Such a target would set Victoria ahead of the national target and provide a focus for investment in this State. Early Government investment in and support of these markets will enable the renewable energy sector to expand quickly and take advantage of the opportunities presented.

The Government's current aim to purchase 25% of its total electricity outlay on Green Energy by 2010 should be revised and extended to 40% by 2015 – this would be another decisive action.

Given the significant emissions generated by homes and other buildings, a focus on developing world leading standards for retro-fitting existing buildings to improve energy use and conservation should be matched by requirements to install site specific energy sources, such as solar and wind on all Government buildings by 2020. New (public and private) buildings should be required to include site based renewable energy sources – this is best achieved through additional requirements to achieve a Green Star rating for dwellings and an expansion of mandated Green Star requirements to even higher levels for all Government, commercial and industrial buildings.

Adaptation and Industry Policy

The *Climate Change Green Paper* asserts that a key role for Government is to promote industry development based on Victoria's competitive advantages. Whilst such an approach is prudent, Government must be mindful not to focus overly on only lessening the carbon pollution created by high emission energy sources and industries. No matter the possible technological advances in carbon sequestration and capture and storage in the future, genuine innovation and job creation will be best achieved by developing policy frameworks which shift Victoria away from carbon based energy sources to renewable sources. With the right Government industry policy large sections of the current manufacturing base in Victoria can seize on the market opportunities created by the renewable energy sector. In this context the German experience illustrates that effective Government policies can develop an ever expanding green sector. The number of German workers employed in 'green jobs' is second only to that nation's vehicle manufacturing industry.

Providing medium and high emission businesses with financial incentives to develop and implement new low emissions technology will have the dual effect of reducing local carbon emissions and potentially creating new products, processes and expertise for export, strengthening the Victorian economy.

An emphasis on investment and innovation is amplified in the context of vocational training to support new jobs in a low carbon Victorian economy. An essential basis for re-skilling elements of the existing workforce and providing opportunities to young people entering the workforce for the first time is affordable training through Public Education.

Vulnerable Communities

Communities such as those in the Latrobe Valley and other vulnerable communities and businesses need to receive additional support. Low income households are particularly at risk to significant increases in the price of essential services like electricity and water. Short term financial support to adjust to energy and water

price rises should be augmented by a long term approach which reduces energy consumption through energy efficiency and increases localised renewable and distributed energy generation technologies.

Clearly the Government's actions to adapt to climate change will need to account for differences in "geography, demographic mix and resilience to the various impacts of climate change ... industries also face differing risks and challenges depending upon their energy intensity, trade exposure, size, market power, preparation for climate change or location (urban or rural)" (*Climate Change Green Paper*, p. 9).

Government must be sensitive to the many and varied dynamics impacts on individuals, families, communities and business when developing policy. However, the AEU believes that the road to a low carbon economy must be to emphasise the realigning of our energy supplies to those sources with low or zero emissions. For example, it will not be sufficient to simply provide financial assistance to low income families to help them cope with the rising cost of electricity and water. In the short term such an approach may be necessary although long term the Government must ensure that energy efficiency measures and localised renewable sources of energy become the best way to support those Victorians most at risk. Any assistance with rising water and energy costs should be matched with assistance/education to reduce the use of these utilities.

Community Awareness and Education

The Government's own public information and awareness campaigns about efficient energy and water usage has shown how effective they can be in reducing consumption by individuals and families. Developing ongoing communication strategies to this effect is essential as is expanding such campaigns so that a greater impact is made in business and industry.

Government policy should seek to develop an expanded range of information about climate change for children and young people. Schools, TAFEs and Early Childhood Education Centres are well placed to distribute such material and make links with parents.

The continued development of quality curriculum materials suitable for all ages that focuses on solutions to the challenges of a changing climate is an essential part of educating the next generation about our impact on the environment. Government must provide additional funding to aid the development of more curriculum resources in this area and also provide teachers and schools with the time and opportunity to adapt and implement it in a way suitable for their students. Linking new resources with concrete energy efficiency and renewable energy generation measures within each educational setting is essential. The Victorian Government Schools Plan, which will see the rebuilding, modernisation and renovation of all

Victorian Government schools by 2017 provides an excellent opportunity to connect environmentally sustainable buildings with the curriculum program.

Built Environment and Energy Production

The *Climate Change Green Paper* states that “Victorian Government buildings are responsible for around 1.5 per cent of Victoria’s energy consumption and 1.2 per cent of the state’s greenhouse gas emissions. The Government spends approximately \$150 million on energy every year. In particular, health care and educational facilities are responsible for around 75 per cent of Victorian Government building energy consumption. There are substantial opportunities for emissions and costs from these sources to be reduced” (*Climate Change Green Paper*, p. 84).

It is clear Victoria can significantly reduce its energy usage and carbon emissions through mandatory retro-fitting of existing building and stricter guidelines on new building designs. There are potential energy savings of between 9% and 30%. The AEU calls on the Victorian Government to support these measures, particularly by increasing Government funding to enable projects that retro-fit Government and non-government buildings. Expanding the *Smart Energy Zones* program to include energy efficiency and other retro-fit measures would be an immediate way to make further advances in this area.

The expansion of the *Zero Emission Zone* program to incorporate all new housing developments will lessen carbon pollution. Eventually such a program should be extended to all residential communities and achieved by increasing the installation of site specific renewable energy sources, mandated energy efficiency measures and other sustainability measures.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) environmental sustainability strategy outlines a series of implications for Victoria’s provision of Public Education as a result of climate change – not least the possibility of up to 50% more days over 35°C by 2030 and the negative impact this can have on effective learning and increased absenteeism. As one of the largest building infrastructure owners (\$5.6 billion/7.2 million m² excluding TAFE infrastructure) within Government, the Department is a key player in reducing Government’s own carbon footprint.

The DEECD predicts that an increase to its budget of over \$90 million annually will be required with the introduction of an emission trading scheme based on a carbon price of \$20 per tonne to provide the same level of education services. According to the Department it “currently has an opportunity to minimise these cost increases by reducing energy consumption through its operations. However, the Department’s ability to do this may be limited by the impacts of climate change with higher

temperatures likely to result in the increased use of air conditioning” (*Looking Ahead: DEECD’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy*, 2009).

In terms of measures taken at the local school level in combating climate change and establishing environmental sustainability the results of the Department’s 2006/2007 *Supplementary School Census – Part 8 – Environmental Sustainability* show that:

- just over half (52.5%) of schools changed/retro-fitted some of its facilities to reflect and incorporate sustainability;
- 96% of schools reported including sustainability practices in the school’s everyday operation;
- less than half of schools included environmental sustainability in the school’s Strategic Plan; and
- only 1 in 5 schools had an environmental sustainability policy.

Schools are active in their attempts to be environmentally sustainable with clear implications for their ongoing willingness and capacity to reduce energy and resource use. Nevertheless, few schools include environmental sustainability in their Strategic Plan and less have local policy. There is tremendous scope for the Government through the DEECD to make environmental sustainability and carbon footprint reduction a focus for schools and direct them to establish targets which aim to reduce the school’s carbon footprint, implement sustainable practices, and address the issue of climate change through the curriculum.

Zero Emission Schools Program

The AEU believes that whilst reducing energy consumption and introducing environmental sustainability practices is essential, the Government should support DEECD in moving to localised site specific energy production in the context of an expanded *Zero Emission Zone* program.

A first step towards the expansion of the *Zero Emission Zone* program should be to provide funding, through a Zero Emission Schools program for all Government schools, TAFEs and early childhood education centres to enable them to become zero greenhouse gas emitters. A key part of the program should be to incorporate a curriculum which makes use of the on site technologies and practices that deliver zero emissions. Such a program would fit within the existing Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (Victoria) and be supported by the *Save Energy @ School* resource.

Through a Zero Emission Schools program the Victorian Government should aim for all Government Education facilities to be able to produce 100% of their electrical energy needs on site. As Robin Batterham (Group Chief Scientist with Rio Tinto, President of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and member of the Premier’s Climate Change Reference Group) suggests “every school should be a leading example of energy consciousness” (*Climate Change Green Paper*, p. 50). This would enable the Government to develop projects in every community in the state that showcases positive steps towards tackling climate change. Such an initiative will require significant Government investment; however it would drive the

expansion of a local 'green' industry, provide employment and be a focus for skills development. The current DEECD goal of solar panels installed in 20% of schools by the end of 2015 is grossly inadequate.

Such a program could incorporate and expand upon some existing programs already aimed at schools operated by the State and Federal Governments. Currently the Federal Government's *National Schools Solar Program* provides schools (and other community organisations) with up to \$50,000 dollars to install solar panels amongst other efficiency measures. The Victorian Government should seek to have the amount of funding available to schools through this program increased at the Commonwealth level and expanded to include other site specific renewable and distributed energy generation sources such as small scale wind turbines. In lieu of increased Federal Government funding the State Government should augment the funding that is available.

Whilst the current *Victorian Solar in School* program does this to some extent, the funding of \$5,000 available to each school is severely insufficient. The Victorian Government should incrementally increase funding over several budget cycles that enables all Government education settings to generate their electricity needs on site.

Skills for a Changing Climate

The AEU believes one key responsibilities for the Victorian Government in addressing climate change is ensuring existing workers and new entrants into the labour market have the right skills to gain employment in a low carbon economy.

The current Government reforms to the TAFE and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector through the *Securing Jobs for Your Future – Skills for Victoria* policy will, in its current form, fail to aid the development of skills to enable Victorian workers to access 'green jobs'. The policy creates significant financial barriers that will limit the participation of many in training. Fee increases, abolition of concession enrolments at the Diploma/Advanced Diploma level, the introduction of full fee courses for many, an income contingent loan scheme and moves towards privatisation of public TAFE will not support the development of a vibrant green sector in the Victorian economy. The Government should commit itself to providing reasonably priced vocational education and training for all Victorians that seek it and increase investment to support the transition to a low carbon economy. The Government needs to match investment in 'green jobs' with guaranteed additional funding to deliver high quality training through TAFE. This is to ensure that Victorians through appropriate training and retraining have the opportunity to develop the necessary skills needed to take advantage of the new industries in this area.

In providing the necessary support for workers transitioning into the green economy the Government must be proactive in addressing skills shortages in these areas. This

is particularly relevant for jobs that require engineering, construction and technical skills.

The Government's move to a demand driven vocational education and training system will exacerbate skill shortages and potentially cause those individuals and families who currently rely on employment in high carbon emitting industries to be double disadvantaged by a changing climate. In the first instance these Victorians will face the greatest impact from industries adjusting to the low carbon future (with less or no employment opportunities in those industries), and secondly when trying to access training they will confront increased training costs and long term debts.

The Victorian Government must also focus on attracting and retaining highly skilled TAFE teachers who are well resourced and able to train others so they are ready for the employment in the green sector.

New qualifications will need to be developed and some existing ones varied. They need to avoid being based on narrow competencies but rather should be broader qualifications to allow those Victorians trained for a low carbon future to find suitable employment in a range of jobs. There should be also be a focus within each of these qualifications on environmental sustainability in the particular skill area/industry.

We can ensure that Victoria has the skilled workforce needed for the transition to a low carbon economy by keeping the cost of vocational training low.

Government Employment – Every Job a 'Green' Job

As an employer of in excess of 250,000 Victorians the State Government has great scope to influence Victoria's response to climate change. Indeed the Government has a moral responsibility, in the move to a low carbon economy, to ensure in the long term that employees of the Government are able to perform their jobs in a 'climate safe' manner. Ultimately this should be realised through a goal for the Government to become a zero net greenhouse gas emitter.

Whilst some work has been done to address within Government departments with regard to Whole of Victorian Government initiatives and targets in the areas of waste, water, biodiversity, emissions and transport, more needs to be done in this area. The desire, as expressed in the green paper, for the Victorian Government to provide leadership for the Victorian community in its response to climate change is partly fulfilled by ensuring that the operations of the Government itself result in the smallest carbon footprint possible.

The AEU believes that it is unacceptable that Government employees would be required to undertake their roles in a fashion that has a long term detrimental

impact on the environment. The concept of green occupations should be expanded to include those jobs that are able to be performed in a 'climate safe' way. This would mean that 'green jobs' are not just limited to those industries directly connected to the green economy but that expands to all employees, not least those employed by Government. For example, a teacher employed in a school could be considered to have a 'green job' if they were able to do their duties in a way that had the least impact on the environment and they had the necessary resources to integrate environmental sustainability issues into their teaching and students learning.

Recommendations

Through the *Climate Change White Paper* the Victorian Government should take the following steps that will reduce Victoria's carbon footprint and enable Victorian's to take advantage of opportunities that are presented by the transition to a low carbon economy.

Energy Generation and Efficiency

1. Establish a Victorian mandatory renewable energy target of 25% by 2020.
2. Install site specific renewable and distributed energy generation technologies (such as cogeneration, trigeneration, bio-energy, solar photovoltaics (PV), solar hot water, wind turbines and micro grid technology) on all Government buildings by 2020 supported by a significant funding increase to allow the expansion of the Energy Technology Innovation Strategy.
3. Develop further regulations and incentives to increase renewable and distributed energy generation technology sources on private property.
4. Require mandatory energy efficient retro-fitting of existing buildings and stricter guidelines on new building designs that aim for them to be carbon neutral.
5. Revise the Government aim to purchase 25% of its total electricity outlay on Green Energy by 2010 to 50% by 2015.

Community Support

6. Provide financial support to vulnerable, low income, households to adjust to increase costing in essential services. And provide financial support to allow these households to become more energy efficient.
7. Develop an expanded range of information about climate change for children and young people.
8. Provide additional funding to aid the development of more curriculum resources to support teaching and learning on climate change and environmental sustainability.

Built Environment

9. Expand the *Zero Emission Zone* program to incorporate all new housing developments to lessen carbon pollution. Eventually such a program should be extended to all residential communities.
10. Establish a Zero Emission Schools program for all Government schools, TAFEs and early childhood education centres to enable them to become zero

greenhouse gas emitters. The Victorian Government should aim for all Government Education facilities to be able to produce 100% of their electrical energy needs on site.

11. Provide funding for specific environmental sustainability positions within the DEECD to manage these initiatives at the state-wide, regional and network levels.
12. Negotiate with the Federal Government to increase the funding allocated to the *National Schools Solar Program* and have it expanded to include other site specific renewable and distributed energy generation technologies.
13. Work with the Federal Government to expand the funding available to the AUSSI(Victoria) program to enable all Victorian Schools to participate and have staff trained.

Skills and Training

14. Abandon plans to increase the cost of vocational education and training and increase funding to TAFEs to support the transition to a low carbon economy
15. Develop strategies to attract and retain highly skilled TAFE teachers who are well resourced and able to train students so they are ready for the employment in the green sector of the economy.
16. Work with industry and teachers to develop new qualifications and vary existing ones so Victorians have access to the right skills to thrive in a changing climate scenario.

Government Employment

17. Implement strategies that ensure by 2020 all Government employees are able to perform their jobs in a 'climate safe' manner with zero net greenhouse gas emissions.
18. Expand the definition of 'green' occupations to include all jobs that are able to be performed in a 'climate safe' way. Every Victorian should be entitled to be employed with minimum impact on the environment.



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