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## **GREENHOUSE ALLIANCES – RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **Purpose of this Paper**

This paper outlines the case for why, in a time when deep and immediate action is needed to reduce to half the chance of climate catastrophe, locally-driven organisations such as Greenhouse Alliances should be strengthened to tackle the task ahead. It discusses the Alliances' achievements over the last 10 years in generating local action and recommends support to enable them to continue.

### **What are Greenhouse Alliances?**

Greenhouse and Climate Change Alliances are partnerships of local governments and other organisations responding to climate change through implementing projects. Covering 72 councils and most of Victoria, the ten current Greenhouse Alliances work with their members, communities and private partners in mitigation, adaptation and sequestration activity.

The Victorian Government, which has taken a strong leadership role on climate change in Australia, began funding Alliances through the Regional Partnerships Program in its Victorian Greenhouse Strategy (2002). In its 2006 Update of the Strategy it indicated that the partnership program "has been successful in engaging a wide range of regional stakeholders in greenhouse abatement activities – including clusters of local governments, tertiary education institutions, community groups and Catchment Management Authorities."

Government assistance was particularly targeted at supporting Alliances to:

- Develop greenhouse abatement measures to address the specific needs and priorities of Victoria's regions
- Build the capacity of local government, community and the private sector to engage in greenhouse abatement
- Partner with government in the delivery of State and Commonwealth greenhouse programs
- Improve the integration and targetting of government services and programs

A review of the regional greenhouse partnership Program in 2006 found that the Alliances had "provided a very cost-effective vehicle for encouraging coordinated action at the regional level" and "contributed significantly to raised awareness, improved knowledge and coordinated action". The review recommended that the Regional Partnership Program of funding for Alliances be expanded to include other regions of Victoria and (subject to the development of a favourable business case) "encompass the entire state" in three years. While this recommendation was not accepted, alliances have nonetheless prospered and grown to include now all but very few of Victoria's local governments.

### **Deep and immediate actions required**

The need for action has become more urgent since the Victorian Greenhouse Strategy, and its updates, were released. Many of the indicators of climate change, such as sea level rises, extreme weather events and the retreat of arctic summer sea ice coverage, have exceeded the worst-case predictions made by the International Panel on Climate Change just a few years ago. If the world continues on its current path we may be living on a planet that is six degrees warmer by the end of this century, a world that could not support the diversity of life as we now know it, nor the population or civilization that we now have.

The urgency was highlighted in the 2008 Garnaut Climate Change Review and the 2011 Update. Garnaut has indicated that quick and deep action is necessary to have a 50% chance of staying below a CO<sub>2</sub>e level of 450ppm, a level that places Kakadu, the Great Barrier Reef and the alpine ecologies in severe danger and as well could lead to more irreversible tipping points in the climate. Garnaut indicated that it is cheaper to take action now rather than delaying a response to climate change.

## Victoria to be badly hit by climate change

IPCC and CSIRO reports to the Garnaut review indicate that Victoria is very likely to become hotter and drier. Indeed, this is already happening. The Australian Local Government Association's State of the Regions reported in 2007 that over the last four years:

- climate change is costing households over \$2500 per year
- the average temperature has risen almost 1 degree

Major agricultural industries are already suffering, both in the dry land and irrigation areas. This has been documented by the Birchip Cropping Group report – *Critical Breaking Point?* This research suggests that the impacts of drought are multi-layered, widespread, significant, long-term and growing.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly the impact of rising sea levels in coastal areas will have a significant impact on residential and tourist infrastructure and assets. The Victorian Coastal Strategy, released in December 2008, recommends that proposals for coastal developments should assume a 0.8 metre rise in sea level by 2100 and plan accordingly. Further, in accepting that there is doubt about the precise rise in sea level over such a time scale, it also recommends the adoption of 'the precautionary principle' where proposals should err on the side of conservatism. VCAT has already included the need for responding to climate change in coastal planning decisions and many coastal councils are including responses to climate change impacts in their planning schemes.

Victoria's economy, based as it is on brown coal and other fossil fuels, is also significantly at risk as the world moves to an emissions-constrained economy.

## Renewable Energy

Victoria has significant opportunities for renewable energy that can be commercialized immediately and indeed in south west Victoria wind power generation already provides for more than 40% of the region's domestic and commercial power use. A report by the CSIRO for the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance region<sup>2</sup> has indicated that there is enough renewable energy potential from either wind, solar or biomass to power the region. This research complements work done by the Victorian State Government's Sustainability Victoria which has mapped many resources available to Victorian regions. Such opportunities would also exist around Australia, and if realised would generate new export industries for Australia and many jobs in regional and rural areas. However, recent Victorian Government policy on wind-farms may constrain further development of this energy source.

A proposal put forward by the Ararat Rural City Council for the development of a biogeneration plant has estimated that it would create 40 jobs in the town and bring in income to farmer for their marginal areas of land while at the same time sequestering carbon. The Solar Cities project, sponsored by the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance will also bring renewable energy into the Alliance regions. Work done by the Alliances with their school and sports communities will also increase the uptake of renewable energy, supporting rebate schemes offered by State and Federal Governments. The Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action is investigating solar and wind potential within its boundaries while alliances are partnering with other community based organizations such as the Wonthaggi Energy Innovation Cooperative in local generation and consumption options, thus obviating the need for long-distance transmission and the attendant electricity losses.

The creation of the South West Rural Industry Climate Change Forum, which is funded predominantly by the Commonwealth Government following seed funding from the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bcg.org.au/cb\\_pages/news/Critical\\_Breaking\\_Point.php](http://www.bcg.org.au/cb_pages/news/Critical_Breaking_Point.php)

<sup>2</sup> [Reaching for Renewables Milestone 3](#)

[http://www.cvga.net.au/main/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=15&&Itemid=72](http://www.cvga.net.au/main/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=15&&Itemid=72)

Greenhouse Alliance and the dairy industry, is another example of Alliances bringing together the necessary partnerships between all levels of government and communities.

### **Energy reduction**

There are also many opportunities to provide goods and services with a much lower energy budget. Even auditing, reviews and sensible changes can lead to 15% to 30% reductions in energy use by householders, businesses and organisations. Major systemic reviews can lead to greater reductions and could lead to the development of new low-carbon services with strong business cases.

All the Alliances have been involved in energy reduction projects with their members and communities. The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance has been conducting a behaviour change project in Castlemaine, Kyabram and Ararat. Both the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance and the North East Green House Alliance are working with their farming communities and their schools to reduce emissions. The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance worked with 17 of its schools to create major reductions in their energy use and this has sparked other projects. The Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action has also been working with its community to introduce the Sustainability Street program to 18 communities and it has developed training programs for trades-people to provide needed services.

The Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action has also achieved substantial progress in installation of energy efficient public lighting, through partnerships with state government departments, electricity distribution businesses, lighting manufacturers, the other Regional Alliances and communities. The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance, Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action and the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance promoted the Victorian State Government's Vic1000 project, conducted by Village Green, to their local businesses.

### **Carbon Sequestration**

The Alliances have also brought together partners to develop carbon sequestration projects, which can lead to city-rural council partnerships. The South East Councils Climate Change Alliance is implementing ways to offset the carbon that member Councils produce through their operations via a biodiversity planting in their first carbon sink at Bunyip, while their second has now been planted on the high-visibility site on the Monash Freeway. The North East Green House Alliance is mapping appropriate local government owned sites and their compliance for future carbon trading potential, evaluating current planting programs for their value as carbon sinks and developing planting programs to maximise carbon sequestration. The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance has worked with Bendigo Bank and Greenhouse Balanced to develop a local carbon sequestration project.

### **Adaptation**

Adaptation is also an area in which the Alliances are playing a part. The South East Councils Climate Change Alliance conducted the project Impacts of Climate Change on Human Settlements in the Western Port Region: An Integrated Assessment. This project, funded by the then Australian Greenhouse Office and the Department of Sustainability and Environment, featured a partnership of the CSIRO, Marsden Jacob Associates, Broadleaf Capital International Pty Ltd (risk assessors) and the Regional Development Company (facilitators and evaluators). The CSIRO was commissioned to carry out modeling for the likely biophysical impacts due to climate change in the Western Port region. Councils then described the communities and the infrastructure for which they are responsible that might be vulnerable to impacts such as storm surges, high winds, extreme rainfall, high temperatures, etc. The councils then conducted risks assessments to help them consider appropriate adaptation responses. This was one of 5 AGO-funded national adaptation projects that broke new ground in preparing community responses to climate change. Members councils using the data generated from this project are now building climate change responses into their programs and services.

## **Beyond the new legislative environment**

Australia is in a legislative environment that includes a carbon market mechanism and mandatory renewable energy targets to assist with a transition towards an emissions-constrained economy. Alliances are well-placed to carry out practical projects that respond to these policy imperatives. For example, a CSIRO report<sup>3</sup> indicated that these policies could lead to 60% of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance region's electrical power coming from renewable energy sources by 2020. This represents an approximate 20% reduction in the region's greenhouse gas emissions overall. The CVGA accordingly looks for projects that will provide renewable energy for its communities. However, if we are to achieve the deep cuts that science is suggesting we need, we must do more than just rely on carbon emissions trading and mandatory renewable energy targets.

All levels of government must play a role to bring about the deep and urgent cuts in our emissions. Legislation, leadership, data, addressing market failures and funding must come from the Federal and State Governments. Local government needs to work with their communities to find the new ways of living and prospering in a carbon constrained world. Knowledge about opportunities and barriers to opportunities must flow between all levels. As can be seen from the examples of Alliance work above, Greenhouse Alliances have been assisting local governments and communities to play their part in this urgent task.

## **Benefits of Alliances**

Greenhouse Alliances have helped fill many of the resource gaps for local councils, particularly those in regional areas that are not well-resourced with funds, time or knowledge, or those that are undergoing massive development. The Alliances at the moment provide a dedicated resource to cover some of these gaps.

But they do more than fill in gaps. They have already been able to:

- bring together the partners necessary to commercialise rural Victoria's massive renewable energy potential.
- link the partners that are needed to help industry and organisations adapt and thrive in a low emissions economy.

And they can continue to:

- work with their local communities to support them to make the change to a new way of living. They are already doing this with their projects. It is interesting to note that in Greenhouse Alliance areas the community is very active. In the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance area alone there are 10 local climate action groups dedicated to reducing the CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions in their community. The Northeast Greenhouse Alliance has at least 5 groups active in their area. The Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action works closely with the Moreland Energy Foundation.
- communicate the need for urgent and deep action. They are well respected within their regions and provide positive material for local media to convey the urgency of climate change.
- work efficiently and effectively, as the review undertaken on behalf of the Department of Sustainability and the Environment has shown.
- work cooperatively across regions as a network of Regional Alliances on issues of state or national scope or importance.
- attract funds into the regions from many different sources. The Northeast Greenhouse Alliance has attracted \$545k of additional funds and in-kind support since its inception. The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance has attracted over \$700k of project funds, plus its successful Solar Cities bid will bring in over \$40m of cash and in-kind support.

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<sup>3</sup> R4RReport4\_Final

[http://www.cvga.net.au/main/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=15&&Itemid=72](http://www.cvga.net.au/main/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=15&&Itemid=72)

Since its inception, the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance has brought more than \$6.5 million of value in cash and in-kind support to climate change response across its member councils. The Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action has brought in almost \$1.5m in dollars and in-kind support in 2011. This support is project based, not core funding based, and relies on the networks established by the Alliances.

## **Funding**

All of the above activities require the fostering of long term trust relationships with regional, community, business and state and federal government stakeholders. These are going to be particularly needed as climate change impacts worsen and larger-scale, more complex projects become necessary.

Alliances receive funding from their council members, some of which are quite small and invariably cash-strapped, and from project grants. The latter are almost always competitive and usually submission-based so attention turns as much to submission writing as to project implementation.

Project based funding, particularly when there are far more applications than can be funded, can lead to high staff turn-over and a loss of regional cohesion and continuity as staff come and go with the commencement and conclusion of projects. Alliances need to raise approximately \$80,000 to \$120,000 pa to maintain core functions. Grants providing even 20% for administration are rare. This means groups wanting to take longer-term local action will have to attract at least \$500,000 from grants or increase their membership numbers and membership fees. Rural councils in particular will not be able to increase their fees and yet these are the areas where some of Victoria's climate change impacts will hit hardest.

Funding of Alliances needs to involve a genuine partnership of local, state and national government so that they continue to meet their mutual obligations and implement government policy within local communities.

## **Governance**

Alliances have different governance structures and membership arrangements that reflect local cultures, the members who sit around the table and the projects that they do. Alliances work in collaboration to share successful strategies and develop locally-appropriate governance structures and work programs. Thus they can maximise their capacity to carry out work across Victoria to deliver swiftly and successfully local government and community components of the Garnaut and IPCC / worldwide targets for emissions reductions.

## **Further information**

Coordinators and Executive Officers of greenhouse and climate change alliances meet a number of times each year to swap intelligence, share news of activities and plan collaborations. They are also willing to meet with state government agencies, regional organisations and local groups to build response to climate change in their regions. A listing of alliances, their members, staff and contact details follows. Please make contact.

## **Victoria's Climate Change Alliances**

### **1 Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance**

Shires of Buloke, Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Gannawarra, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mt Alexander, Northern Grampians and Pyrenees, the Rural City of Ararat, the Cities of Ballarat, and Greater Bendigo, St. Luke's Anglicare, the Bendigo Bank, Loddon Campaspe Mallee Education Region, Origin Energy, Department of Primary Industries, North Central Catchment Management Authority, Bendigo HealthCare Group and Access Employment

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### **2 Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action**

Shire of Yarra Ranges, Maroondah City Council, City of Knox, City of Monash, City of Whitehorse, City of Boroondara, City of Stonnington

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### **3 Gippsland Climate Change Network**

East Gippsland Shire, Shire of Wellington, Latrobe City Council, South Gippsland Shire, Baw Baw Shire, Bass Coast Shire Council, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Primary Industry, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Department of Planning and Community Development, Environment Protection Authority, East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Southern Rural Water, East Gippsland Water, Gippsland Water, Environment Victoria, Construction, Forests, Mining and Energy Union, Gippsland Trades and Labour Council, Powerworks, Members and Education Credit Union, Australian Paper, Gippsland TAFE, East Gippsland TAFE, Monash University and local community-based sustainability groups.

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#### **4 Goulburn Broken Greenhouse Alliance**

City of Greater Shepparton, Rural City of Benalla, Mansfield Shire, Mitchell Shire Council, Murrindindi Shire Council, Campaspe Shire Council, Moira Shire Council, Strathbogie Shire Council, Goulburn Broken Catchment Authority

Tracy Taylor (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)  
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#### **5 North East Green House Alliance**

Wodonga City Council, Alpine Shire, Moira Shire, Shire of Indigo, Towong Shire, Rural City of Benalla, City of Wangaratta, Latrobe University and the North East Catchment Management Authority

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#### **6 Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action**

Cities of Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Moreland, Whittlesea, Manningham, Melbourne and Yarra Nillumbik Shire Council, Moreland Energy Foundation Limited (MEFL)

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#### **7 South East Councils Climate Change Alliance**

City of Casey, Cardinia Shire Council, Bass Coast Shire, Baw Baw Shire, Frankston City Council, City of Kingston, City of Bayside and Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

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## **8 South West Sustainability Partnership Inc**

Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Corangamite Shire Council, Glenelg Shire Council, Moyne Shire Council, Southern Grampians Shire Council, Warrnambool City Council, Deakin University, Glenormiston College – University of Melbourne, South West Institute of TAFE, Glenelg Region Water Authority, Portland Coast Water Authority, Natural Resources and Environment, South West Water Authority, Western Coastal Board

Rob Small  
Chair  
South West Sustainability Partnership Inc  
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## **9 Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action**

Cities of Hobson's Bay, Melton, Wyndham, Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley, Moorabool, Brimbank, Greater Geelong, Victoria University, Western Environment Centre

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## **10 Wimmera Mallee Sustainability Alliance**

Shires of Yarriambiack, West Wimmera, Hindmarsh, Ganawarra, Buloke, Northern Grampians, Rural City of Horsham, Rural City of Ararat, Desert Fringe and Grampians Waste Management Groups, GWMWater, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Wimmera Development Association, University of Ballarat and Longerenong College.

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