

Summary

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Introduce role of the Advocate and provide context about the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone

Latrobe Health Advocate

As Latrobe Health Advocate I provide independent advice to the Victorian Government on behalf of Latrobe Valley communities on system and policy issues affecting their health and wellbeing.

I maintain a focus on strategic outcomes and systemic change, ensuring advice and activities within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone are informed and underpinned by a strong collaborative approach.

My role reports directly to the Victorian Minister for Health. I am required to develop an annual Statement of Intent outlining priority areas of work for the year ahead. I also produce an annual report that includes my key recommendations for Government, services and communities.

Responsibilities of my role are to:

- Research, monitor and report on current and emerging issues affecting the health and wellbeing of Latrobe Valley residents.
- Provide strategic advice and informed and collaborative leadership on health-related matters in the Latrobe Valley.
- Enable, advocate and mediate system change and improvement to address barriers or improve opportunities for good health and wellbeing in the Latrobe Valley.
- Provide leadership and an independent public voice to engage directly with the community, particularly more marginalised members, about health matters.
- Actively engage and adopt a collaborative approach with stakeholders across the community in executing my terms of reference, namely:
 - Community members.
 - Business.
 - Industry.
 - Agriculture.
 - Health Services.
 - Community organisations.
 - All levels of government

- Engage and work collaboratively with the Victorian Government Departments, the Latrobe Health Assembly and the Hazelwood Long Term Health Study Ministerial Advisory Committee as relevant.
- Chair the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce which brings together governments, agencies and communities for the purpose of bringing about consistency, collaboration and improved community engagement and awareness for management of asbestos in the Latrobe Valley.

The role of Latrobe Health Advocate is a key recommendation from the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry. The Inquiry highlighted the need to work differently to address the health inequalities and entrenched disadvantage experienced by Latrobe Valley communities.

From HMFI Report Volume III

The Board considers that a Health Advocate is required for the Latrobe Valley. The Board envisages that the Health Advocate will provide a trusted and independent voice for the Latrobe Valley community, while also working in an integrated manner with the Latrobe Valley Health Assembly and its Board, to ensure the community is engaged with the development of the Latrobe Valley Health Innovation Zone.

The Board suggests that careful consideration should be given to the employment of the Health Advocate to ensure that the Health Advocate is primarily focused on the wellbeing of the community and can maintain an appropriate level of independence.¹

In response to the Inquiry, Latrobe City was designated as a Health Innovation Zone, the first of its kind in Australia, and the Latrobe Health Assembly was established. The Assembly and the Advocate are key structures within the Zone that empower communities to have influence on health promotion, health planning, priority setting and service and program design.

The purpose of my role is to give voice to Latrobe Valley communities on issues relating to health and wellbeing.

As the Latrobe Health Advocate, I act as a go-between for the Victorian Government and Latrobe Valley communities providing advice to the Victorian Government on system and policy issues affecting community health and wellbeing.

Latrobe Health Innovation Zone

The local government area of Latrobe City is located approximately 150kms east of Melbourne. It is recognised as one of Victoria's major regional centres and is one of six local government areas that make up the broader Gippsland region.

Latrobe is home to 73,929 residents and 5,019 businesses. Latrobe City is made up of four central towns; Churchill, Moe, Morwell and Traralgon, and several rural townships; Boolarra, Glengarry, Toongabbie, Tyers, Traralgon South, Yallourn North and Yinnar.

Latrobe has traditionally been recognised as the centre of Victoria's electricity industry with local coal mines and power stations providing significant employment opportunities and contributing to the local economy for much of the past century.

¹ 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report Volume III, Health and Wellbeing

In 2014 a fire ignited and took hold in the Hazelwood Coal Mine, it lasted for 45 days. Latrobe communities were significantly impacted by this event and subsequent Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiries were held. These inquiries found that the health profile of the Latrobe Valley is poorer compared to other local government areas in Victoria and the average for the state. The Inquiries established that there was a strong case for the health of the Latrobe Valley to be substantially improved.

The Latrobe Health Advocate and Latrobe Health Assembly are key structures within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone to empower communities to have influence on health promotion, health planning, priority setting and service and program design.

Central to the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone is the Government's commitment to enable changes in the pattern of investment in health services in the Latrobe Valley.

Developments and projects in the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone are characterised by a new, innovative, community-led approach of co-design and community engagement.

This approach actively engages with individuals and organisations, ensuring all people, including those who are marginalised and under-represented, have choice, control and a voice in developing the supports and services they need in their lives.

As the Latrobe Health Advocate, I act as an advisor to the Latrobe Health Assembly and organisations within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone. I have a clear mandate to advocate for the best interests of Latrobe Valley communities.

Government departments and agencies as well as local health and social services regularly seek my advice and feedback on how their strategies might relate to community views. It is not uncommon for businesses and industry representatives to also seek my advice about community engagement methods and opportunities for them to prioritise health and wellbeing as part of their work.

Since commencing in the role, I have maintained a commitment to engaging with Latrobe communities, hearing their views and aspirations for health and wellbeing. I listen to the stories, concerns and aspirations from people in Latrobe. I share them with key stakeholders and decision makers within local organisations and all levels of Government. This amplification of community voice forms the basis of conversations and decisions about systems change and innovation, with the intention to improve health and wellbeing outcomes in Latrobe.

I engage with communities across all towns in Latrobe, hearing from people from across the lifespan that represent a broad range of demographics. I have made a deliberate effort to reach out to those that may not usually have their voices heard.

My engagement techniques have been formal and informal, in person, through the local media and online. I have had conversations with people on the buses and at bus stops, at community events and activities, in their workplaces, at neighbourhood houses, at local gathering places such as community gardens, multicultural centres and men's sheds, and online via social media and other digital platforms.

Economic transition in the Latrobe Valley

Since the establishment of the Latrobe Health Advocate's office, I have engaged regularly with local businesses, including ENGIE, Australian Paper, AGL Loy Yang, Chunxing and OSMI on matters that have the potential to impact the health and wellbeing of Latrobe communities. In 2019 I was appointed as the independent Chair of the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce. The taskforce brings together government agencies, local council, unions and community groups to work together to deliver the best outcomes for the management of asbestos in Latrobe Valley.

My aim is to influence development projects, government planning and decision-making processes in terms of how they:

- Actively involve communities in the design and decision-making process
- Create a healthy community
- Impact on climate change and the determinants of health; and
- Do not adversely affect community health

Community voice

We engage

An essential part of my job is to listen to and understand the views and needs of people in Latrobe. For me, the only way to do this is to first understand how people in Latrobe want to have their voice and what is important to them. In particular, people who – for a range of reasons – may be experiencing disadvantage, people who may not usually have their voices heard, or people who may not recognise the value of their voice.

We influence

We identify immediate actions and longer-term aspirations and work to improve current systems and transition to new systems. We connect stakeholder into community and build community sensitivity to the genuine constraints of the system.

We prompt change

We advocate on behalf of Latrobe communities for systems change to improve health and wellbeing.

Engagement data from my office shows that over the past three years of listening to local communities, the goal of a *safe environment for everyone in Latrobe* has featured in the top five community aspirations. This is often coupled with the goal of *more effective community engagement for people in Latrobe*.

There are a variety of stances within Latrobe communities in relation to the Delburn Wind Farm. I have been approached by people strongly opposed to the development and others who support it.

Commentary has included.

- People expressing support for the employment opportunities that are promised by the project and for the associated economic benefits of increased employment in the area.
- People supporting the development of renewable energy projects in the Latrobe Valley.
- People citing a lack of trust in the information provided to them by the applicant and the relevant government bodies.
- People expressing concerns around the health impacts of the operation of the turbines, in particular infrasound effects. There is confusion for some people about the evidence in relation to this which makes it hard for them to accept the advice of experts.
- People expressing frustration regarding the perceived negative impact of the wind farm on property values.
- People expressing distress at the immediate impact on people's mental health of the application process and the proposal as a whole.
- People are apprehensive that the current maintenance practices of the plantation are not sufficient to mitigate any increased fire risk around the turbines.

- People are expressing concern around the proximity of turbines to roads and the possibility of distraction to drivers and riders on the road.
- People are unhappy with the possible impact to their enjoyment of their home as a result turbines/towers in their line of vision.
- People are uneasy regarding the independence of and expertise available to the Community Advisory Committee.

In line with the priorities of my role, and in response to concerns raised by communities across Latrobe, I have sought to be involved in the processes in relation to the proposal. I have met with representatives of OSMI Australia and a number of community members who believe they will be directly impacted by the Delburn Wind Farm construction.

I have also received information and advice from Andrew Dyer, National Wind Farm Commissioner and now, Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, in relation to the support the Commission provides about best practices for the wind industry.

Advocacy for engagement with communities

I have consistently put forward the view that governments and industry need to actively involve communities in the design and decision-making process. Research undertaken by my office has found;

- The information that is first presented to communities by industry can significantly influence community members' attitudes toward a proposed development. This highlights the importance of having concrete community engagement plans in place and demonstrating strong commitment to regulatory requirements right at the beginning.²
- When communities are experiencing a situation where they are feeling helpless it can have three causes;
 - (1) a weak foundation for public participation
 - (2) limited public participation channels and
 - (3) ineffective community engagement committees³
- As economic transition and industrial developments occur, there is a need to address any knowledge gaps there might be amongst local workforces and communities in relation to chemicals, health, the environment and renewable energies.⁴
- Communities are not typically involved in Health Impact Assessments (HIA), as these assessments are often a desktop exercise undertaken by scientists and health experts. There is some research that highlights the benefits of directly involving communities in what is described as Participatory Health Impact Assessments. Although this can be challenging to do in practice, it can also help to build greater understanding for policy makers and within industry about the needs and views of communities, particularly communities who may not usually have their voices heard.⁵

² A. Zhang, T. G. Measham and K. Moffat, Preconditions for social licence: The importance of information in initial engagement, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 172 1559-1566 (2018)

³ Y. Wang, R. Zhang, S. Worden, H. Cao and C. Li, Public participation in environmental governance initiatives of chemical industrial parks, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 305 (2021)

⁴ J. Roden, Exploring the Perceived Health, Community, and Employment Impacts of an Announced Closure of a Coal-Fired Power Station in Upper Hunter Valley, Australia, *Journal of Environmental Health*, Vol. 83 (7), 26-35 (2021)

⁵ A. Leuenberger, et al, Health impacts of industrial mining on surrounding communities: Local perspectives from three sub-Saharan African countries, *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 16 (6), 1-23 (2021)

- Community involvement may have a positive impact on the success of project development and implementation. Participation may also directly affect individuals by changing attitudes and actions towards the causes of ill-health, promoting a sense of responsibility and increasing personal confidence and self-esteem. Involvement in the policy process may decrease alienation among socially excluded groups and reorient power relationships with the “professional” decision-makers.
- Participation is intuitively appealing but participatory approaches do not always run smoothly. Establishing relationships with communities and participatory partnerships takes time to do well. And herein lies the problem: HIA usually have to be done quickly, but when this occurs in the absence of community involvement, it can lead to further, avoidable problems into the future
- Health Impact Assessments should explicitly acknowledge the tension between the time required to deliver on a government policy agenda and the time required to build true participatory partnerships with communities.⁶
- Good practice health impact assessment is only one component of a successful community engagement strategy. Complementary strategies are essential to extend the benefits of development to local communities and for companies to establish a ‘social licence to operate’.⁷
- There is still much to learn about bringing community engagement together with industrial and environmental communication. As such, this needs to be approached with a mindset that allows for a greater degree of investment of time and resources and with a genuine curiosity about ways to engage and listen more effectively with communities.⁸
- When engagement is done well, it can lead to innovative solutions and stronger relationships with local communities, built on mutual respect and understanding. This involves a shift in mindset for infrastructure providers and their project teams. Through genuine engagement of key stakeholders, infrastructure providers can tap into the ideas and problem-solving abilities from within communities to assist in identifying innovative solutions that are far more acceptable to all parties.⁹
- Increasingly, communities are demanding more involvement in decision-making, with expectations of receiving a greater share of the benefits from industry. The general public require assurances that the industries are appropriately regulated. The combination of increasing pressures on industry performance and the associated societal acceptance of such operations can be described as the ‘social licence to operate’. In many ways, the social licence reflects the evolving nature of the relationships between industries and the community. More recent research emphasises the roles of trust, fairness and governance that underpin the relationships between industry and society.¹⁰

⁶ Jayne Parry & John Wright, Community participation in health impact assessments: intuitively appealing but practically difficult, *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2003, 81 (6)

⁷ R. Boele and C. Crispin, What direction for human rights impact assessments? *Impact Assessment & Project Appraisal*, Vol. 31 (2), 128-134 (2013)

⁸ S. M. Cruz, Themes Across New Directions in Community Engagement, *International journal of environmental research and public health*, Vol. 16 (19), (2019)

⁹ M. Brennan and T. Stinson, Seek First to Understand Before Being Understood, *Australian Journal of Multi-disciplinary Engineering*, Vol. 7 (2), 243-250 (2009)

¹⁰ K. Moffat, J. Lacey, Z. Airong and S. Leipold, The social licence to operate: a critical review, *Forestry: An International Journal of Forest Research*, Vol. 89 (5), 477-488 (2016)

- In one study, that relates specifically to societal acceptance of wind farms in Australia, research showed strong community support for wind farms, but four common themes emerged that influence this societal acceptance of wind farms in Australia: trust, distributional justice, procedural justice and place attachment.
 - Trust: trust was a recurrent theme in the interviews with wind farm developers and community representatives. The community participants recommended that the wind company ensure honesty and transparency during its engagement activities to help build and maintain trust.
 - Distributional justice: expectations for justice regarding how costs and benefits were shared from the wind farm were repeatedly stated by participants, defined here as distributional justice. These expectations were expressed as suggestions for a more just distribution of benefits to the wider and affected community. The responses were the same for both commercial- and community-owned wind farm case studies.
 - Procedural justice: satisfactory engagement involving open, participatory decision-making was another key theme that consistently emerged in all the interviews. Three principles emerged from the participants regarding how the wind company could maintain procedural justice during its engagement with the local community: honesty and transparency, full and unbiased information, and ensuring that donations of funds to community infrastructure or programs were not perceived as tacit support. Combined, these aspects can be considered within the realms of procedural justice.
 - Place attachment; Research suggests that the impact of visual changes to a place or landscape can significantly influence attitudes towards wind farms (van der Horst, 2007). All community participants were asked to describe the landscape into which the turbines were, or would be, installed. For most participants, the positive descriptions of their local landscape and sense of attachment to the land conflicted with the wind farm development.
- Without addressing these factors through integration into policy development and engagement approaches, wind energy is unlikely to provide the early and majority of new renewable energy.¹¹

Advocacy to minimise the psychological impacts of industrial development processes and economic transition

In my submission I have suggested that the Victorian Government considers the psychological impacts of the approval process on those people who have raised concerns and works to mitigate the effects raised, by maintaining a transparent process, and ensuring evidence-informed communication strategies are employed to prevent unintended harm. Research undertaken by my office has found;

- Energy developments affect communities in a range of ways. Impacts on communities can be caused by changes to landscape amenity and access, disruptions to community cohesion, increased or decreased income streams, effects on property values, and population changes. These changes are ideally captured through a social impact assessment (SIA) process, where proponents outline in a formal statement the balance of benefits and burdens on local communities, and measures that will be taken to minimise negative outcomes for the community.¹²

¹¹ N. Hall, P. Ashworth and P. Devine-Wright, Societal acceptance of wind farms: Analysis of four common themes across Australian case studies, *Energy Policy*, Vol. 58 200-208 (2013)

¹² R. M. Colvin, G. B. Witt, J. Lacey and K. Witt, The community cost of consultation: Characterising the qualitative social impacts of a wind energy development that failed to proceed in Tasmania, Australia, *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, Vol. 77 40 (2019)

- There can be positive and negative impacts on communities resulting from anticipation of a proposal. Negative community perceptions of a proposal can contribute to negative emotions that can lead to deteriorated psychological wellbeing. Conversely, perceived positive impact is conducive to positive emotions that in turn can foster residents' psychological well-being.
 - Importantly, these effects differ in strength for residents characterized by different ages, lengths of residence, and distances of their properties from the development.¹³
- A study that looked at the Pars Special Economic Energy Zone (PSEEZ) located in the south of Iran, found that the creation and development of industry can create major stressors in the community; due to a range of environmental and human health risks and, importantly psychosocial stresses associated with social change. This study concluded that community participation in health issues has many benefits because it increases problem-solving skills in communities so that they take responsibility for their health and well-being as much as possible. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the needs and issues of the community are properly addressed.¹⁴
- Another study that investigated the long-term and increasing pressures on Australian farmers and a developing knowledge of the mental health risks they face. This study revealed a comparatively new source of psychological stress - the impacts from the announcement of a mining development proposal. This study found that there are pre-development impacts that can occur with the announcement of large-scale developments and concluded that there is opportunity for such impacts to be anticipated, prepared for and resources set aside, with which to assist communities and individuals whose lives are adversely affected.¹⁵
- There is emerging evidence that shows that as the science of wellbeing moves towards an understanding of the influence of social experiences shared by many at an individual and group-level, a new approach to measuring wellbeing is required that takes into account the process by which people form, maintain and change their understandings of risk from urban and industrial projects, and any subsequent effects on individual psychosocial wellbeing.¹⁶
- Environmental psychologists and sociologists examining community acceptance of energy development have recently argued that disruption to social-psychological values such as attachment and community- and place-based identity may drive oppositional behaviour to large land use changes.
 - Clearly, physical, environmental, social and psychological factors all play important roles as people are faced with potentially transformative changes to their landscapes and communities.
 - Accordingly, a better understanding of social psychological disruption and incorporating these understandings in the planning process can aid in reducing these types of disruptions and associated deleterious effects on the social fabric of communities, allowing decision makers to better understand – and hopefully incorporate – them in the planning process.¹⁷

¹³ P.-H. Lai, K. D. Lyons, S. P. Gudergan and S. Grimstad, Understanding the psychological impact of unconventional gas developments in affected communities, *Energy Policy*, Vol. 101 492-501 (2017)

¹⁴ d. behzad, et al, The Effects of Energy Industry Development on the Health of Residents of the Pars Economic Energy Zone: viewpoints of people's mediator, *Salāmat-i kār-i Īrān*, Vol. 17 (1), 1-10 (2020)

¹⁵ J. Moffatt and P. Baker, Farmers, mining and mental health: The impact on a farming community when a mine is proposed, *Rural Society*, Vol. 23 (1), 60-74 (2013)

¹⁶ C. Baldwin, B. Cave and P. Rawstorne, Measuring the Impact of Public Understandings of Risk from Urban and Industrial Development on Community Psychosocial Well-Being: a Mixed Methods Strategy, *International Journal of Community Well-Being*: Published in collaboration with the Global Community Institute, Vol. 3 (1), 57 (2020)

¹⁷ Jeffrey B. Jacquetta* and Richard C. Stedman, The risk of social-psychological disruption as an impact of energy development and environmental change, *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* (2013)

Advocate to protect and not adversely affect human health

In my submission I have suggested that the Victorian Government considers the evidence surrounding the health impacts of infrasound on people occupying neighbouring properties.

AND

That DELWP considers the opportunity to provide for better maintenance of the area surrounding the turbines, utilising local knowledge and expertise to better understand and manage the perceived fire risks.

Through my recent interactions with both the Department of Health and the Environmental Protection Authority, I have gained further understanding of the interactions between government departments in relation to health impact assessments and internal government processes that relate to industrial development proposals. It is evident to me that health experts do review and contribute to government decisions in a range of ways. However, this is not necessarily visible to members of the general public. Local communities could be further supported if there was greater visibility and a proactive sharing from government of the health advice that is being provided and the government interactions that do occur to ensure human health is protected.