



Latrobe Health
Advocate

Community First Planning Aspirations and Priorities



February 2024





Foreword from the Advocate

It is with great pleasure that I present this report on Community First Planning in the Latrobe Valley.

This report is the culmination of extensive research, consultation and collaboration with community members, stakeholders and experts in various fields.

Its purpose is to shed light on the challenges faced by communities in the face of industrial development proposals and to propose actionable ideas to improve the planning process with a focus on prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents.

The Latrobe Valley is a region with a rich history, known for its significant contribution to powering the state for over a century. However, as we navigate through economic transitions and industrial developments, we must address the concerns and aspirations of the communities that call this region home.

Throughout this report, we delve into the challenges raised by community members, ranging from the need for credible information and engagement opportunities to concerns about environmental impacts and community wellbeing.

We explore the psychological impacts of major planning projects, the importance of consultation principles that prioritise health and wellbeing and the necessity of providing information about the public good to ensure community understanding and support.

Importantly, this report does not only highlight challenges but also offers aspirational themes and related actions to guide future planning processes.

These themes include developing an evidence base to assess psychological impacts, embedding health and wellbeing into project planning and development, providing information about the public good and embedding a regional narrative into communications to provide a vision for the future.

I hope that this report catalyses meaningful change in the way we approach planning and development in the Latrobe Valley. By putting the community first, we can create a future that prioritises the health, wellbeing and prosperity of all residents.

I extend my gratitude to all those who contributed to this report and express my commitment to working collaboratively toward a brighter future for the Latrobe Valley.

Jane

Jane Anderson

Latrobe Health Advocate

Challenges raised by stakeholders

A summary of the challenges identified by stakeholders the Advocate has engaged with in preparing this report is provided below.

- There is no singular or unanimous voice for or against industrial development proposals and at times, different perspectives within communities can create tensions.
- Communities are looking to be informed and engaged in a variety of ways, and want their voices to be recognised and acted on by governments and industry.
- Industrial development proposals and planning processes affect people in different ways and for some, uncertainty, lack of information, or significant change can trigger distress, grief and loss.
- Communities are supportive of enhanced employment and skill development opportunities and want to contribute to decisions about the economic transition for the region.
- Communities want economic prosperity for the region, however not at the cost of human or environmental health.
- Communities are looking for credible, trustworthy information and decision-making from government.
- Stakeholders, including the local community, have questions about the standards that developments are measured against and assessment criteria, the independence of government in assessing proposals and the ability of regulators to hold industry to account.
- Communities want to know about the cumulative effects of new developments on the environment.
- People ask about air and soil quality, noise pollution and environmental waste impacts associated with new developments.
- Communities are seeking reassurance that adequate risk and emergency management protocols are in place to prevent and minimise the impacts of industrial accidents.
- Communities want to see and understand how the Victorian Government is prioritising health and wellbeing, alongside economic development and transition in the Latrobe Valley.
- Farmers report feeling involved in planning processes but excluded from the decision-making processes and then being totally unsupported during implementation.
- Community members used to be proud of powering the State for over 100 years, now they report feeling denigrated as part of an attachment to 'dirty coal'.

Research insights

The Advocate and her office have undertaken a review of academic literature to better understand the impacts of development proposals.

A summary of the findings of this review is provided below.

Distress

- There can be positive and negative impacts on communities resulting from anticipation of a proposal. Poor 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 wellbeing (Lai, Lyons, Gudergan & Grimstad, 2017).
- 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 (Colvin, Witt, Lacey & Witt, 2019).
- There is emerging evidence that shows that as the science of wellbeing moves towards understanding the influence of social experiences shared by many at an individual and group level, a new approach to measuring wellbeing is required (Balwdin, Cave & Rawstorne, 2020).

Engagement

- The information that is first presented to communities by industry can significantly influence community members' attitudes toward a proposed development (Roden, 2021).
- 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 (Zhang, Measham & Mofatt, 2018).
- 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 (Parry & Wright, 2003).
- When communities are experiencing a situation where they are feeling helpless it can have three causes:
 - a weak foundation for public participation;
 - limited public participation channels; and
 - ineffective community engagement (Lai, Lyons, Gudergan & Grimstad, 2017).





A future vision for community first planning in Latrobe

The Advocate and her office have engaged extensively with a range of stakeholders in preparing this report and identifying the four aspiration themes and associated actions.

A summary of the stakeholders engaged and key issues discussed is provided below.

AusNet Services

Consultation on positive results of community engagement model being used in Gippsland with the less successful top-down approach being used in Western Victoria; the inclusion of social impact assessment, Electro Magnetic Field (EMF) information and mental health impacts in the Environment Effects Statement (EES).

Chunxing

Consultation on community concerns about the Used Lead Acid Battery (ULAB) recycling facility proposed for Hazelwood and the community engagement process.

Community Power Agency

Consultation on supporting and building the capacity of community renewable energy projects through workshops, training, mentoring, research and resource development.

Chief Environmental Scientist, Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria:

Consultation on the impacts of development on psychological health, gaps in capability, lack of instruments to measure psychological health, the University of Adelaide's work on metrics to collect data on people's health and opportunities to pilot this.

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (now Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action)

Consultation on placing the community at the centre, transition approaches, challenges in bringing community along, learnings to improve engagement and genuineness in listening to community.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Consultation on community engagement in service planning.

Department of Health

Consultation on population health, mechanisms to understand community need and applying a community perspective to health prevention. Consultation on community engagement in service design and priority setting.

Department of Transport

Consultation on the role of transport (i.e. we need air, we need water, we need transport (enabling access to food and movement of people and place) but how do we bring it all together?).

Deputy Chief Health Officer, Department of Health (DH)

Consultation on the importance of the issue that is subject of engagement. While physical impacts are often considered, psychological impacts are often not. There is a real interest in deliberative democracy. DH has no formal remit although it works with the EPA and has a broader understanding of community health.

EPA Victoria

Consultation on EPA permission process.

Federation University

Consultation on a research piece in proactive community engagement based on the Advocate's community planning model to maximise community aspirations for the three mine voids in the Latrobe Valley. Funding obtained from government and industry through the Cooperative Research Centre for Transformations in Mining Economies (CRC TiME) to facilitate community views about land use options and to develop a



community panel with broad representation across diverse demographic groups. The intention includes calling witnesses and developing citizen juries to progress the project.

Gippsland Climate Change Network

Consultation on the importance of community engagement in renewable energy projects. Its expertise in connecting and collaborating has been instrumental in building local networks.

Gippsland Primary Health Network

Consultation on active engagement with community to ensure doing with communities and stakeholders and not for them.

Gippsland Regional Partnership

Consultation with a Churchill Scholarship recipient on the approach Spain has taken to ensure a 'just' transition whereby anyone impacted by the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy is considered. The approach seemed structured, with a plan that everyone understood and was working towards and actively reviewing regularly.

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

Consultation on balancing community needs with centrally designed transition development plans.

Independent Expert Panel on Victoria's Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Consultation on the outcomes of a local forum on health and wellbeing impacts of the development proposal process in a transitioning community. Consultation on the community engagement process for the development of five-yearly emissions reduction targets to set the pathway to the legislated target of net zero emissions by 2050.

Latrobe City Council

Consultation on role of council in transition planning.

Latrobe Health Assembly

Consultation on the involvement of community-led organisa-

tions in business decision-making and balancing this with community experience. Consultation on the importance of embedding health and wellbeing impacts in transition planning.

Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA)

Consultation on improving outcomes for the community through local engagement.

Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority

Consultation on mine rehabilitation, community transition, and community engagement.

National Wind Farm Commissioner

Consultation on community engagement activities for wind-farm projects in Latrobe.

Opal Australian Paper

Consultation on community concerns about the local impacts of changes in access to native timber.

OSMI Australia

Consultation on community engagement activities for wind-farm projects in Latrobe.

Regional Development Victoria

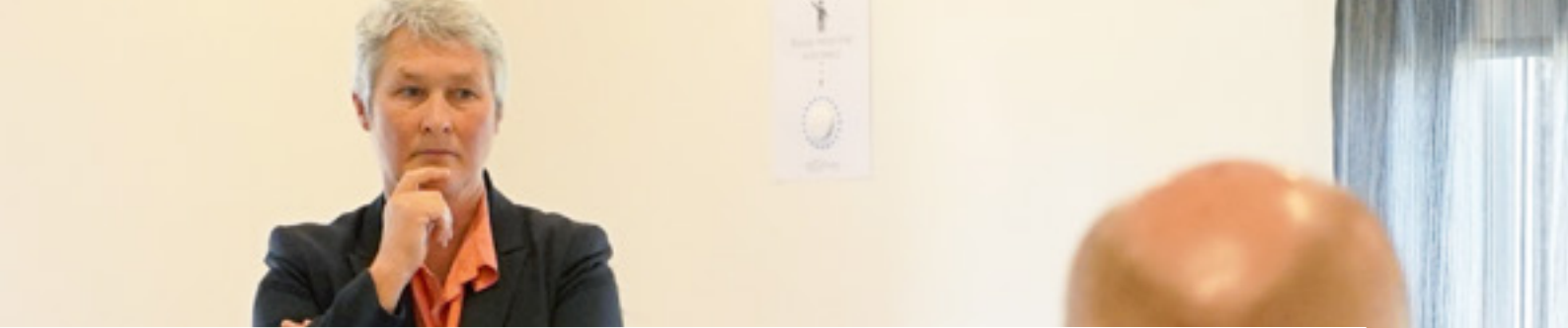
Consultation on jobs and attracting investment and balancing this with the community's needs and expectations.

VicGrid, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

Consultation on how to prepare communities for transition in a way that is enhancing for them.

Wellington Shire Council

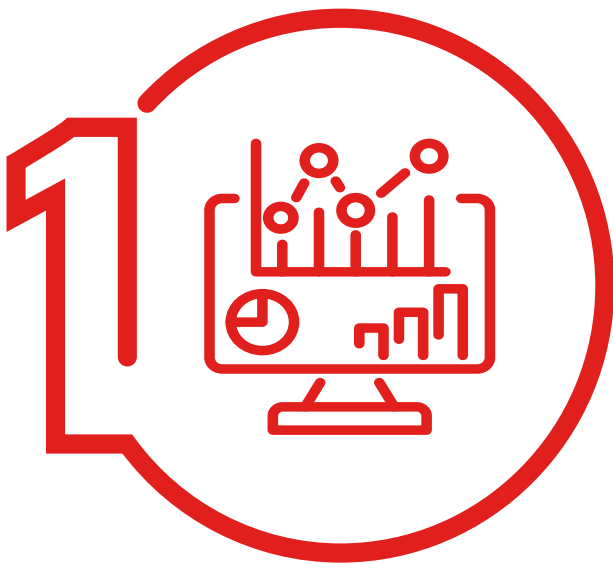
Consultation on role of council in transition planning.



Ideas to improve community first planning approaches

Based on the Advocate's extensive engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, four aspiration themes have been identified.

Each aspiration theme includes a number of associated actions to help improve planning processes in Latrobe. A summary of the progress of actions to date and next steps against each theme is provided in the following pages.



Develop an evidence base to better understand and assess the psychological impacts of major planning projects.

Related actions

- Work with Chief Environmental Scientist to research approaches and develop an instrument to assess psychological impacts.
- Work with Federation University to develop a research paper on progress of energy transition plans around the world.
- Develop a tool that makes risk profiles of new and old technologies explicit and provides information on mechanisms available to manage risks.
- Develop a shared data repository accessible to planning partners.



Develop a set of consultation principles to embed health and wellbeing into project planning and development.

Related actions

- Legislate a third-party mediator as a trusted voice in planning processes to provide independent review.
- Ensure a health and wellbeing perspective is incorporated into all consultation tools and development documentation.
- Promote the benefits of early community engagement and develop trust by tackling issues raised explicitly and honestly.
- Train stakeholders to anticipate community reactions like grief and loss upfront and to develop tools to address these normal feelings.
- Develop an agreed context description for each consultation project to provide a framework for consultation activity.



Provide information about public good to ensure the community understands the rationale for developments.

Related actions

- Communicate the community impacts of economic development, jobs and climate change to explain the need for developments.
- Develop a tool to receive community concerns and ensure objective evidence-based answers are provided quickly.
- Focus on the development of community trust by engaging regularly, actively listening and demonstrating a readiness to modify plans to address community concerns.
- Develop common wording around public good as a balance needs to be struck between consultation scope and what factors can be influenced via community consultation.



Embed a regional narrative into communications to provide the vision of the future.

Related actions

- Legislate a third-party mediator as a trusted voice in planning processes to provide independent review.
- Build a network of people trusted within the community to be the recipients of research, data and evidence-based responses to all community concerns raised.
- Review the Hazelwood Health Study and Mine Fire Inquiry to provide an approach for responses to community concerns.
- Ensure all development partners are abreast of planning processes and responses to community concerns to ensure the consistent messaging needed to instil trust.



Progress of key actions to date

- The Chief Environmental Scientist of Victoria engaged the University of Adelaide to undertake a review of peer-reviewed academic literature on available tools to measure and monitor the effects of pollution on psychological health. A report entitled *Tools to capture and assess mental health and wellbeing impacts of environment pollution: A scoping review* was produced in 2023. The report screened 547 articles and provides an annotated bibliography of 126 papers that were assessed as in scope. These articles are from the period 2000 -2022, with approximately a half being published between 2020 and 2022. Only seven of these were from Australia. The majority were from China (31) and the USA (22). The studies in scope used 11 tools, with the most common being the Centre for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D) tool. The most common mental health issues identified were depression (59), mental health (30) and anxiety (29).
- The Chief Environmental Scientist of Victoria has approached universities to research approaches and develop an instrument to assess psychological impacts to development proposals. The University of Adelaide has developed The Environmental Distress Index (TEDI) for the Victorian EPA. It will be used to measure the impact that environmental events and pollution have on communities. The TEDI survey will help the EPA understand how to better protect community wellbeing. Victoria has commenced testing this world-first tool to measure levels of psychological distress after industrial pollution events and natural disasters. Information about the project is available at <https://able.adelaide.edu.au/housing-research/research/current-projects/the-environmental-distress-index>.
- The Gippsland Regional Partnership received information from a Churchill Scholarship participant about the approach that Spain has taken to ensure a 'just' transition away from fossil fuels whereby anyone impacted by the transition to renewable energy is considered. The approach was structured, with a plan that everyone understood and was working toward and actively reviewed on a regular basis.
- The Energy Charter is conducting research into evaluating underground transmission, with a view to developing shared understanding across the many stakeholder groups and formulating better practice approaches to assessing and evaluating social costs and mitigating impacts. The Energy Charter is currently seeking research participants in Gippsland, especially from locals living in the vicinity of the Marinus Link and Star of the South projects.
- The EPA continues to be part of technical reference groups established when required and appropriate for the EES processes led by the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP). The EES process assesses applications for new technologies and business developments in line with legislation. The process requires that the EES is released for public comment, with the public comment period varying from 20-30 days. The EPA also works closely with Recycling Victoria and other government agencies to help identify and manage significant waste and pollution risks.

Next steps

LVA and the Latrobe Health Assembly (Assembly)

- The LVA and the Assembly will continue to identify opportunities to better understand and assess the health and wellbeing impacts of workers in transitioning industries (for example, in energy workforces), at both an individual worker and whole of workforce level and use these insights to recommend systems changes.

EPA

- Mechanisms to track cumulative impacts of change need to be developed, as major transition projects are rarely single events. The EPA work with the University of Adelaide's School of Social Sciences to develop TEDI could be a model for such a tool. While TEDI is being used to determine mental health impacts of events affecting communities (such as floods, fires or pollution events), it could provide insights that could

be used to measure the impact of major transition projects. Currently the TEDI tool is being delivered to communities, who are then followed up with a phone survey to determine their experience using the survey tool. The purpose of this is to refine the survey tool, with the goal that the EPA will be able to use it as part of its operations to better understand how to protect community wellbeing.





Progress of key actions to date

- VicGrid released its *Offshore Wind Transmission Development and Engagement Roadmap* in March 2023. The four-phase model developed for the offshore wind project evidences the centrality of community consultation and the awareness of the health and wellbeing impacts of major transition projects.

Phase 1 has been completed with significant positive community engagement and strong engagement from the Traditional Owners of the land and water in scope for the project.

Phase 2 included developing the options assessment methods through community consultation. A *Draft Options Assessment Method Report* was released in July 2023 and community consultations have occurred since, including drop-in sessions, community roundtables, pop-ups and online interactive mapping activities.

VicGrid is now in Phase 3, which is assessing the options against the finalised Options Assessment Method. The preferred options and next steps will be announced in Q1 2024.

- VicGrid has adopted a multimodal community consultation approach for projects in Gippsland. Consultation is in-person at local drop-in centres, via online webinars and through websites to accept feedback and submissions. VicGrid has also developed a partnership approach with First Peoples that recognises that the areas prospective for offshore wind off the Gippsland coast, and onshore areas that will support offshore windfarms, are on Traditional Owner Country and Sea Country. First Peoples are involved in the offshore wind transmission project and are a key focus of the work underway in the renewable energy workforce development plan. This remains a work in progress and conversations are continuing on how First Peoples will be involved in the development and design of the transmission infrastructure.

VicGrid has appointed an Independent Facilitator. This person is a trusted community member who supported the Wonthaggi community through the engagement process for the Wonthaggi Desalination Plant.

A health and wellbeing perspective is being incorporated into planning documentation and community consultations. The EES will explicitly address the impact of EMF as well as mental health impacts.

- AusNet has developed a community-based engagement approach that has resulted in lower levels of anxiety than those experienced in Western Victoria, where a more traditional top-down consultation approach was used. AusNet has also developed a mechanism to offer free services and packages to support mental wellbeing of community members who reach out expressing stress about the energy transition changes proposed and occurring.
- The LVA has offered to lead a project to develop an agreed set of principles for transition development work across Gippsland. These principles would ensure consistent, coordinated and collaborative engagement.
- Marinus Link established its Gippsland Stakeholder Liaison Group (GSLG) in December 2021. This group has met regularly since then and provides an example of excellent engagement with Traditional Owners.
- Latrobe City Council has promoted its website (https://www.latrobe.vic.gov.au/Property/Development/Proposed_Developments_in_Our_Region) that lists all proposed development projects in the region along with the approval process being followed and information on how community members can obtain further information and provide feedback.

Next steps

VicGrid

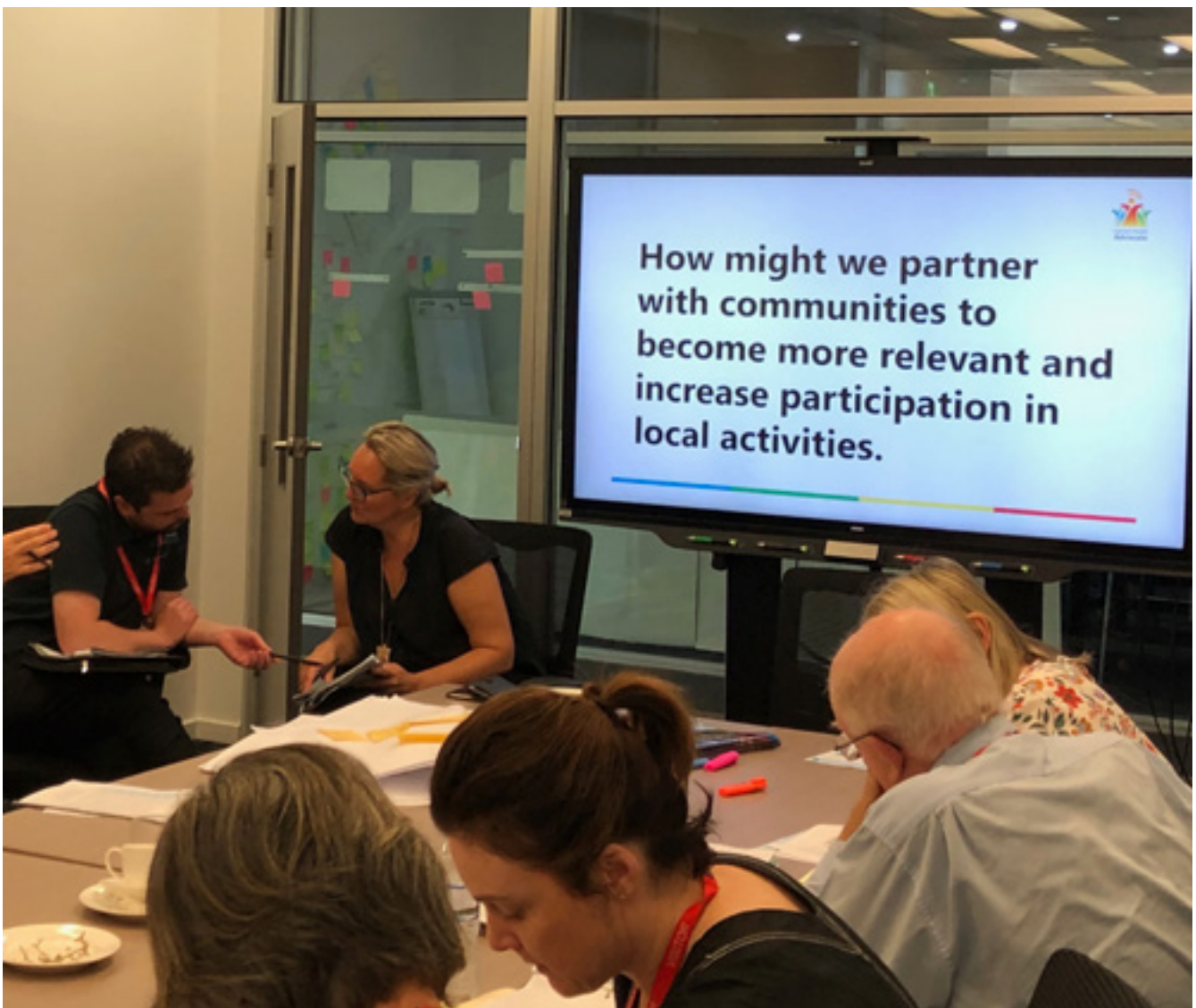
- Issues have arisen in sharing of community engagement information between AusNet, Star of the South and VicGrid, which has resulted in duplicated community engagement activity. A mechanism to ensure more transparent and timely information sharing has been developed. A Regional Engagement Manager – Gippsland who started with VicGrid in March 2023 now leads a local engagement team, and regular meetings are held with AusNet, Star of the South, Marinus Link and CarbonNet to discuss and coordinate community engagement activities.

VicGrid's Regional Engagement Team is connected into various forums such as the Gippsland New Energy Coordination group, which is facilitated by the LVA and is involved in the planning for the annual Gippsland New Energy Conference.

Latrobe City Council

- There are many large-scale projects being planned in the municipality or next to the municipality, and each project may have various approval processes (e.g. Planning Permit, Works Licence, EES, Environmental Impact Assessment) and community engagement approaches. As each approval process has a different purpose and scope this might be confusing to community members and result in a psychological impact due to feeling a lack of sense of control.

It is also important that community members trust that submissions to a decision-making process are heard even if they do not agree with the outcome. To address these issues Latrobe City Council has committed to proactively work with the community and project developers to provide information in a consistent format and location on the multitude of projects underway in the Latrobe Valley.





Progress of key actions to date

- Federation University is undertaking a project focussing on the future land uses of the Latrobe Valley's mined lands. Initial consultations have occurred with the mine operators, relevant government departments and Traditional Owners around what is feasible in terms of future land uses. The next phase commenced in August 2023 and is considering what is of value to the broader community and establishing evaluation criteria to assess the options with. Stage 2 (commencing in April 2024) will focus on community deliberations on these options.
- AusNet has committed to holding workshops on community benefit and a community advisory group is being established.
- A Festival of Big Ideas was held to provide information on energy transition and the potential benefits for the community. The festival attracted 1,200 community participants, 500 school-aged children and 500 community registrants, as well as 200 drop-ins on the days.
- The Gippsland Climate Change Network (GCCN) is the auspice and manager for the Gippsland New Energy Portal (<https://gippslandnewenergy.com.au/>) to make information about the renewable energy transition more accessible, including information about project scope, jobs and impacts.
- The GCCN has worked with the LVA to fund the Community Power Agency to provide 10 education sessions on energy literacy and to develop a train the trainer model to embed this training in Gippsland. The GCCN also worked with the Community Power Agency to provide education sessions on energy literacy in the community and at Gippsland schools.
- The GCCN established and continues to manage the Gippsland New Energy Conference, the largest regionally led renewables conference in Australia that connects global experts and community champions with the latest advancements and local challenges. The GCCN participates in and hosts several small to large-scale annual community events on community energy, energy efficiency, electric vehicles, agricultural energy opportunities and more.
- The GCCN co-partners with others to deliver youth summits focusing on energy careers and takes on industry placement students.
- The GCCN regularly visits and supports regional community groups to explore town-scale renewable energy projects and assists with technical design, grant applications and small loans for these projects.
- The GCCN supports various community energy consultations undertaken by proponents and state government departments as an independent voice to make sure community voice is acknowledged and regional community benefit sharing is taken seriously.


Next steps

LVA

- Establish a FAQ (Frequently Asked Question) page on the Gippsland New Energy website to provide consistent answers. This page could be maintained by a coalition of willing stakeholders from across Gippsland.

GCCN

- The GCCN in partnership with the LVA is establishing a peer-learning community forum in the first half of 2024 for established community energy champions to more effectively support each other and to connect new and emerging community members with an energy challenge or concern to valuable learnings. GCCN will run 'Power Pops' stalls in 2024 and is seeking higher education partnerships to connect with students. Renewable energy focused community pop-ups will be delivered by younger people targeting those aged between 18 and 30, who have been identified as an under-engaged audience. GCCN is partnering



with the Morwell Neighbourhood House and AusNet Services to run a project throughout 2024 on energy upgrades and education to low socioeconomic houses to increase understanding of how the energy transition impacts these households and to make future improvements. GCCN is exploring how to revive the train the trainer and kitchen table conversations program undertaken with Climate For Change around communities leading change, and to do more targeted network events across some of the under-engaged communities.

Federation University

- CRC TiME has funded Federation University to undertake a project looking at the feasible opportunities for future land uses of the Latrobe Valley mine lands, the risks, costs and trade-offs of various options, the core values needed to be enhanced in Latrobe Valley post-relinquishment and the community response to these options. First Nations engagement is embedded in the project as are consultations with young people in recognition of their vital role in the future. A Citizens' Jury will be established, comprising 30 people 'off the street' who represent the demographics of Latrobe City.

Latrobe City Council

- Ensure clear information is provided about decision-making processes for each development project.



Progress of key actions to date

- The *Latrobe Valley and Gippsland Transition Plan* was released on 9 August 2023 as a regional plan. The transition plan was developed by the LVA by gathering feedback and advice from people right across the region. The LVA advised that thousands of people shared their hopes, dreams and aspirations for the region's future. This feedback guided the long-term vision for economic growth, job creation and the development of sustainable industries. The plan contains six planning principles that guided its development and will continue to guide the transition process. These principles are:
 - People are at the heart of the transition process
 - Equity and inclusion
 - A sustainably developed future
 - Build on identified strengths and advantages
 - Adopting an evidence-informed approach
 - A coordinated approach across government, industry, education and communities.

The plan contains 52 recommendations in the areas of education and training, employment, the economy, liveability and coordination, collaboration and shared leadership.

- Federation University has commenced a research piece in proactive community engagement to maximise community aspirations for the mine lands of the three sites in the Latrobe Valley. Funding has been obtained through the CRC TiME to facilitate community views about land use options and to develop a community panel with broad representation across diverse demographic groups. The intention includes calling witnesses and developing citizen juries to progress the project. Separate deliberations will also be undertaken with indigenous and youth panels.
- The Department of Health, AusNet and the Advocate are collaborating to facilitate consistent communication. Consultations are occurring with GPs who have not identified anxiety over transmission line projects as an issue amongst their patients.
- The GCCN in partnership with the LVA runs Community Energy Innovation Networks to connect community to the latest research, industry developments, legislative changes and evidence-based proposals for place-based regional development opportunities.

Next steps

LVA

- Host a forum for identified developers on best practice in community consultation with a local expert on the impact of change on communities.
- Establish a working group to improve community understanding of renewable energy technologies and new energy project development across Gippsland. This will identify and build on existing energy literacy materials, identify community knowledge gaps and explore options to deliver new information.



Image credit: Life After Coal - 10 Years On Community Day

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"That people give each other a helping hand and build a future together"
Melinda





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Latrobe Health
Advocate

PO Box 108
2 Tarwin Street
Morwell VIC 3840
Ph: 1800 319 255
E: info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au
W: www.lhadvocate.vic.gov.au



The Latrobe Health Advocate respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal people as the Original Custodians of the land we walk on today – the land of the Braiakaulung people of the Gunaikurnai nation and passes on respect to their Elders past and present, future and emerging.