

Submission for the Victoria's Gas Substitution Roadmap Consultation Paper

Australian Conservation Foundation – Albury Wodonga Region

We congratulate the government on its ambitious plan to transition from gas energy to cleaner, renewable energy alternatives. Given our heavy reliance on gas, it is a brave move that reflects a strong vision for a sustainable future.

The Government's consultative process with its broader community, is also to be commended as it reflects caution and deliberation in addressing an appropriate balance between urgency, social justice and best outcomes for all. We *do* need to move forward with considerable haste in order to stem off the critical tipping point in the climate change crises, but we cannot and should not leave vulnerable groups within our community behind, bearing the weight of the transitional changes on their shoulders, nor should we throw good money after bad in pursuit of quick-fix solutions.

The following provides our comment to some of the 'Key Issues' raised in the Victorian Gas Substitution Roadmap presented by DEWLP.

Maintaining electricity reliability with new sources of demand.

Maintaining electricity reliability during the time of transition from fossil fuel energy supplies to renewable energy sources is unavoidable as we still have a way to go in exploring the range of options and possibilities available to us, ***prioritising solar thermal technology research and development for high process heat requirements and renewable energy and batteries for electrification.***

While carbon neutral options are still being explored and developed, gas may be the best logical option for stabilizing our energy supply, given our State's ready access to gas at present. A recent report from Euractiv* to the EU entitled: '*Role of gas-fired power generation in maintaining the reliability of electricity supply by contributing to grid stability*', provides ***supportive evidence for gas-fired power generation in maintaining electricity reliability '... In the context of a rapid transition of the power system to a decarbonised system.***

Hence, this should be seen as a short-term, transitional proposition, that aims for a ***minimum 35% reduction by 2025 and 60% reduction by 2030*** and has a longer-term objective of replacing gas with alternative decarbonised sources.

With regard to further gas exploration in Bass Strait, we believe that ***there is no room for expansion of the fossil fuel industry at this point if we're to meet the climate goals of the Paris Agreement.***

Transitioning to more sustainable gaseous fuels with minimal disruption to end-users.

In exploring more sustainable gaseous fuels ***we caution against biomass and biomethane technologies which are risky for the climate and biodiversity.*** If bringing this green energy source to scale requires or encourages the establishment of mass mono-culture plantations for harvesting and consumption this would be totally at conflict with our aim to preserve and improve our biodiversity and forested land as a carbon sink. It would thus be an unsustainable energy source proposition.

However, biomethane technology could work for individual farmers who are able to capture biomethane from their own animal herd and plant waste in order to supplement their own energy supply needs. On this scale it could provide a sustainable energy supply for their farming business which the Government could look at encouraging and supporting.

Carbon capture and storage technology should not be a major focus of our government, as it has been proven to be inadequate as an effective means of abating emissions at scale.

Transitioning the Victorian economy efficiently and equitably.

In order to transition the Victorian economy efficiently and equitably there needs to be an ongoing process of education through continued engagement with the broader community, especially the more vulnerable groups in our society. Where rented accommodation is provided landlords need to be incentivised to transition to renewables and to be discouraged from passing on their higher fossil fuel energy costs to their tenants.

We also see an urgent need for the implementation of key measures, identified by experts as an effective means for reducing gas consumption. They include ***incentives and planning measures*** to facilitate:

- replacement of ducted gas heating
- Installing heat pump hot water
- Switching to heat pump space heating in commercial buildings
- Immediate planning law changes to prohibit gas to new buildings

Supporting Victoria's workforce, industry and the institutions that support them.

Especially in times of COVID restrictions and consequent unemployment there is an opportunity for the government to seize a captive, home-based audience with ***incentivised offers for retraining and re-skilling***, especially those sectors of the community who will be most effected. Training would need to closely relate to ***capacity building for the merging industries of renewables and include areas that relate to environmental management and biodiversity*** that support restoration and environmental resilience, adaptation and protection.

Retraining should now also be offered to technicians and staff currently employed in fossil-fuel industries, in preparation for ***a fair and equitable transition***. So too it would be prudent for the government to promote and subsidise university and TAFE training courses for start-up students, that offer skills and knowledge in a broad range of study areas related to renewable energy and environmental management.

We thank you for providing us with the opportunity to input Victoria's Gas Substitution Roadmap Consultation Paper and look forward to seeing the outcome of your community consultation process.

Regards,

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