Submission by Macedon Ranges Shire Council

Disclaimer

This submission was prepared by Council officers and was not able to be presented to Councillors for official adoption or endorsement.

Current climate crisis

As acknowledged in the Expert Panel’s Final Report, the task of reducing greenhouse gas emissions is urgent. Global emissions are on track to result in 1.5°C of warming above pre-industrial levels in as little as 10 to 15 years. All aspects of life are at risk should global temperatures exceed this threshold including food and water supplies, community safety and biodiversity. Most climate scientists, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) acknowledge that the difference between 1.5°C and 2°C of warming is significant and that 2°C of warming would result in catastrophic impacts associated with the melting of the polar ice caps, bleaching of coral reefs and extreme weather.

Locally, the Shire of Macedon Ranges straddles both sides of the Great Dividing Range making it highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. The forecast for reduced rainfall and increased days of extreme heat will impact on a range of ecosystems at different altitudes and aspects, on agricultural production, on the local economy, including tourism, and on the community’s exposure to heat waves, floods, fires and storms.

In this context there is an imperative for global actors to take immediate, dramatic action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect and expand carbon sinks. While having a strong target is important for accountability and to show leadership, it is important that governments not limit action to targets, but instead aim to exceed any set targets by making every effort to reduce emissions as much as possible, as soon as possible. For this reason, Council’s submission focuses on the actions required to minimise emissions, regardless of any legislated target.
Emission targets

Council commends the work of the Independent Expert Panel. However, in recognising the urgent need to reduce emissions quickly, Council submits that stronger interim targets be set to maximise the chance of stemming global temperature increases to no more than 1.5°C, rather than 2°C as per the lower end of the recommended targets.

That is, it is recommended that the State adopt the following interim targets:

- 40% – 49% below 2005 levels by 2025 (instead of 32% - 39% as proposed)
- 50% – 65% below 2005 levels by 2030 (instead of 45% - 60% as proposed)

Council’s reasons for advocating for the higher targets include:

- **Stronger targets are more effective** – The lower range of the recommended target was designed to stem global temperature rise to no more than 2°C. This is not considered an optimal outcome by most climate scientists, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Instead a steeper reduction by 2030 followed by rapid emissions reductions after 2030 potentially enables global temperatures rises to be limited to 1.5°C. This trajectory provides a better chance of avoiding catastrophic impacts.

- **Stronger targets are feasible** - The Expert Panel demonstrates that the higher target ranges will be feasible to achieve, with associated costs being equitably shared amongst all sectors of the community and economy.

- **Stronger targets are more cost efficient** - The Panel acknowledges that “early action is cheaper than delayed action to meet internationally agreed goals”, and refers to several studies regarding the environmental and economic benefits of taking early action, stating that “avoiding the worst impacts of climate change through reducing emissions far outweigh the costs of implementing emissions reduction measures”.

- **Stronger targets show leadership** - The adoption of ambitious targets in state legislation sends a message to the Commonwealth Government to adopt the recommendations of the Climate Change Authority. While action at a national level is needed, state governments have a critical role to play in “leading by example”. Strong legislated targets also send a strong message to businesses and the community, providing greater certainty for investment and action across the community and private sector.

Opportunities to reduce emissions

Council considers that the Panel has identified the key greenhouse gas emission reduction opportunities, reflecting the relative contribution of the different sources to the total amount of emissions from the state.
However, specific opportunities that warrant more detailed and urgent consideration by the Victorian Government include the following:

- **Energy hierarchy / reducing demand** – The energy hierarchy provides a holistic approach to reducing emissions and, therefore, should underpin the State’s approach to emission reductions. This involves reducing energy demand prior to considering renewable sources and then low carbon energy options.

- **The electricity network** – Installation of small and large scale renewable energy infrastructure is hampered by constraints in the electricity network. In many areas existing sub-stations are at capacity and can only accommodate additional reverse flows if they are upgraded at significant cost to the project sponsor. Addressing these constraints is critical to enable businesses and communities to contribute to the State’s emission reductions.

- **Built environment** - The built environment generates a significant proportion of Victoria’s overall emissions. This is likely to increase as Victoria’s population grows. As such, improving energy efficiency in the built environment represents a significant opportunity for emission reductions. These opportunities include:
  - Increasing the minimum energy efficiency standard for new buildings and large renovations through the planning and / or building approvals process.
  - Supporting low emissions construction materials, including through supporting the low carbon cement industry through government sponsored road and infrastructure projects.
  - Increasing the minimum energy efficiency standard for appliances.
  - Introducing energy efficiency standards for rental properties and public housing.
  - Co-funding sustainable design advisory services within local government.
  - Continuing to provide financial incentives and support for installation of solar panels and energy efficiency upgrades across the residential and commercial sectors.

- **Agriculture** – The Panel focuses on emission reduction opportunities associated with on-farm forestry and livestock management. Additional emission reductions can be achieved through holistic farming practices such as regenerative grazing and other innovative agricultural methods which increase carbon storage in soils and water bodies. These practices also help build resilient farm businesses, reducing exposure to seasonal risks such as drought which are likely to increase as the climate changes. Further promotion and support for these practices, such as educational programs and financial incentives and support, would help achieve the State’s emission reduction targets.

- **Native vegetation** – Ensuring protection of existing native vegetation and facilitating establishment of new native vegetation corridors will increase carbon sequestration across the landscape while enhancing the resilience of ecosystems. This can be achieved by:
  - Maintaining existing native vegetation clearance regulations and continuing to review permit exemptions and the offsetting framework to ensure implementation of the regulations achieves their biodiversity goal and contributes to achieving the State’s emission reduction targets.
Increasing investment in biolinks on private land, including through resourcing state and local government departments and agencies to facilitate their implementation rather than over relying on volunteer organisations such as Landcare.

Increasing permanent protection of existing biodiversity assets through increased resourcing of Trust for Nature and direct investment in expanding the state’s public reserve portfolio.

- **Public and active transport** – Further investment in public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure is required in order to reduce emissions from the transport sector. Significant investment is required in regional areas where trains and buses are infrequent or non-existent, thereby entrenching car dependency for short trips which generate a high proportion of emissions from the transport sector.

- **Electric vehicles** – Deliberate investment in the electric vehicle industry is required to facilitate the fuel switch away from fossil fuels. This could include:
  - Investment in charging stations across the state
  - Financial incentives and support for the electric vehicle industry such as tax incentives
  - Establishing targets for procurement of electric vehicles by state government departments and agencies

- **Waste** – While the waste sector is directly responsible for a relatively small proportion of the state’s total greenhouse emissions, resource efficiency can play an important role in reducing emissions associated with the manufacturing and recycling industry. This should include:
  - Expansion of existing product stewardship programs to ensure manufacturers take responsibility for the waste generated by their products.
  - Expansion of the upcoming plastic bag ban to include the phase out of other single use plastic items such as plastic water bottles.
  - Support for the roll out of full organic waste collections across the state, including support for organic waste processing facilities where required.
  - Variable landfill gate fees to encourage greater resource recovery – e.g. higher fees for organic waste and polystyrene

- **Behaviour change** – High profile and targeted behaviour change campaigns are required to promote reduced car and electricity use as well as reduced waste. Consistent messaging and communications materials are required as well as increased investment in this element of climate change action.

- **Support for local government** - Macedon Ranges Shire Council is on track to achieve zero net emissions from its operations by 2030. Many other councils are working towards similar or stronger targets, and some have already achieved accredited carbon neutrality. As such, supporting the work of local government through grants, research and a favourable state policy framework would help accelerate emissions reductions across the state.

- **Advocacy** – It is important that the State Government continue to advocate for stronger environmental action at a federal level, particularly in relation to waste reduction and investment in renewable energy. This could involve higher national standards for packaging and buildings, as well as financial incentives that support the transition to a low carbon economy.
Overcoming barriers to change

While there are various barriers to change acknowledged in the Final Report, many of these can be addressed through the following:

- **Acknowledge the urgency** – Many local, state and national governments around the world are acknowledging the importance of urgent action by declaring a Climate Emergency. Macedon Ranges Shire Council will consider making this declaration at its Ordinary Council Meeting in October. This declaration sends a clear message to businesses, the community and other levels of government that preventing catastrophic climate change should frame all other decisions.

- **Regulation** – Establishing a regulatory environment that prioritises emission reductions, is designed to achieve legislated targets and provides clarity and certainty for the private sector.

- **Financial incentives** – Utilising the financial instruments available to achieve emissions reductions across the economy.

- **Policy** – Establishing clear policies that ensure the emission impacts of proposals are assessed and accounted for in decision making.

- **Training** – Investing in training across the economy to assist the community to transition to a low emissions economy and take advantage of the employment opportunities this presents.

- **Investment** – Allocating sufficient resources to climate change action across the government’s budget and considering delaying expenditure on non-urgent items which can wait 5 to 10 years. This resource allocation needs to be commensurate with the urgency of the climate crisis we face.