Submission re transition from gas in Victoria.

I am a resident of Victoria currently using gas for heating, hot water and hotplate cooking.

I have no particular expertise in the gas industry but I am a member of a field naturalists' club and am concerned about the future of the remaining bushland and wetlands of Victoria.

Firstly, I would like to commend the Victorian Government on tackling this very significant and necessary transition with a plan and a target date.

The goal is an efficient and smooth transition from gas. It is important to ensure that gas companies do not see the 2050 date as one by which they should extract as much gas as possible. Rather, they should be reducing the amount of gas extracted every year. The end date can be brought forward if this occurs more quickly than anticipated.

Victoria has enough natural gas to see us through this transition without using untried and environmentally unsound technologies such as carbon capture and storage or so-called 'blue' hydrogen. There is also no excuse for new exploration drilling in Victoria or the import of gas.

There are several things we can put into place immediately to facilitate the transition.

1. Export of gas from Victoria to NSW and Tasmania should be phased out, beginning in two years from now and ending entirely in 2030. This gives those states time to work out their own gas reduction or removal strategies.

2. No gas should be connected to new residential and industrial estates.

3. Knock down and rebuilds, both residential and industrial, should not have gas connected.

4. The sale of gas appliances (heaters, hot water systems, cooking appliances including dual fuel) should cease in 2022. There is simply no need to keep installing new gas appliances. We installed a Smeg dual fuel stove last year because it was the only one we could get at the time to fit the space in our kitchen. We paid a lot for the installation because the gas pipes had to be replaced from the meter to the stove. A fully electric stove would have been cheaper and more environmentally friendly but this is not what retailers were promoting. Perhaps discussions with the CEOs of appliance retailers would assist the transition.

There are several steps the government could take to facilitate the transition.

1. A public awareness campaign on why the transition from gas is needed to reduce Victoria's carbon emissions. If the public embrace this change, as they have solar energy, the transition from gas in residential settings will proceed quickly.

2. The pricing of electricity (the only real alternative to gas) needs to be overhauled and regulated. It was increased because the electricity companies argued that installing renewable infrastructure was costly. Now that solar and wind farms are in place, usage costs, particularly residential costs, can be reduced. There should be a clear relationship between the cost of providing electricity and the actual amount charged to consumers. If necessary, government subsidies may be required to keep electricity affordable for consumers, particularly in Victoria where heating in winter is essential. Currently, gas is much cheaper for heating.

3. Government subsidies could be provided for residential changeovers of major systems such as gas central heating to a viable alternative in existing homes. Perhaps some consideration could be given to funding research into developing better home heating systems in terms of efficiency and usage cost.

4. The Victorian battery being installed near Geelong, storing energy from renewables, will probably need to be replicated in other parts of Victoria.

5. Households should have the opportunity to use their own solar power first, only exporting to the grid when there is excess electricity produced and only using grid power when their own sources are depleted.

6. Home battery storage technology should be developed with some government funding so that it is affordable and sufficiently efficient to be widely introduced. Households should be subsidised to purchase and install solar storage batteries, reducing Victoria's reliance on the grid.

7. Clearly, industry will take longer than residential premises to transition from gas. The scale of usage and infrastructure is much larger and the change will be more costly. Perhaps once residential transition is well underway, government could provide incentives and assistance for existing industries to transition.

8. At the end of the process, capping of gas wells will need to be considered to ensure there is no leakage and no build up of pressure. If this is not possible, a small amount of gas could continue to be extracted into the future for industrial purposes. There is no point in putting gas pollution into the air or the sea. Once gas is turned off, energy providers should be required to remove gas lines. If possible, these should be recycled to cover the cost of their retrieval.