The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
Climate Change Consultation

To the Climate Change Team,

Victorian Government's Climate Change Consultation

As the State Member of Parliament for the Morwell electorate, I am compelled to provide a submission to the Victorian Government’s Climate Change Consultation.

Tackling climate change and reducing Victoria’s greenhouse gas emissions are significant issues that leaders of the day face here and indeed around the world. I commend the Victorian Government for consulting with a wide range of stakeholders to understand the impact of this issue and the challenges it poses to a wide range of people.

This topic is of particular interest to a significant number of individuals, families, services and businesses in my electorate. The Latrobe Valley has been the State’s centre of brown coal fired electricity generation, since the original Yallourn Power Station first commenced production in 1928. For nearly a century, the power generation industry has been our major employer and business partner. We are proud of this history, and of the fact that our region continues to provide electricity for homes and businesses all over Victoria and beyond.

Our region currently sits uncomfortably high in unemployment data when compared with the rest of the State and Australia. We have towns that are continually over represented when it comes to unemployment, for example, the town of Morwell has held an unemployment percentage been between 15-20% since Hazelwood Power Station closed prematurely in March 2017.

This is despite many apparent programs and Government investment post this closure, into transitioning ex-Hazelwood workers into new employers, or new industries. In fact, two years following the closure, the statistics regarding the 750 workers who lost their jobs in the closure, are alarming:

- 185 are identified as still actively looking for work
- 307 are employed in casual roles
- 35 are employed in part-time roles
More poignant however, is the human collateral – workers who have had to leave young families behind to pursue work interstate, the emotional burden of long-term financial distress and the feeling of failure that comes with joblessness.

Encouraging business investment to shift our region towards being a hub for clean energy and renewable jobs is an admirable pursuit; however initiatives of this nature take time. For example, an electric car manufacturing facility that was announced for Morwell is not due to be established until 2021 at the earliest. This will be over four years post Hazelwood closing its doors. In addition, these roles often do not provide like-for-like jobs.

In regards to the Government’s Victorian Renewable Energy Targets (VRET) policy, I personally believe that it is important that we have a target to achieve in relation to tackling the issue of climate change. I also believe that this target should be responsibly set, and that the outcomes of achieving them – both positive and negative – must be planned for and mitigated for the long-term. Modelling should be completed showing all modes of energy into the grid to determine the effects on these distinctly different industries. The recent Independent Panel’s report states on page 15:

"Transition of the electricity sector will be critical to achieving interim targets in 2030. The electricity generation sector accounted for more than half of Victoria’s emissions in 2016 and, following the retirement of the Hazelwood power station, is projected to still account for 42% of the State’s emissions in 2020."

Community representatives have long been calling for carefully planned and meaningful transition that is supported across all levels of Government and Departments. Remarkably observed by a 2018 Parliamentary Interns Report titled ‘Beyond the Latrobe Valley’:

"There have been over 120 policy reports since 2007 on the economic future of the Gippsland region, with most receiving funding from Regional Development Victoria."

As a community leader of a proud regional area who is facing a complete transition away from its major industry as a result of our need to address greenhouse emissions, I implore this consultation to consider how to best support communities that will bear the brunt of any changes. The Latrobe Valley will require large-scale, long-term, consolidated, collaborative planning to ensure the move away from brown-coal fired energy production can be a positive and smart step in our regions history. The Panel even caution that:

"…careful planning by the Victorian Government will be required".
In closing, I believe that the community sentiment mirrors the concerns of the Government: climate change needs to be addressed, greenhouse gases need to be reduced and targets are an effective manner in which to do this. Modelling of how these targets are paramount to its success and of the industries involved across the energy production landscape. Those Victorian communities that have been built around the State’s electricity needs in the past, will need to be supported in creating their future and transitioning them needs to be a coordinated approach as part of the VRET policy.

Thank you for consideration of this submission as enclosed and good luck with your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Russell Northe | MLA
Member for Morwell