



Yarra Climate Action Now
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Annual Report 2019

OVERVIEW

After 12 unbroken years of campaigning for urgent action to address the worsening climate emergency, YCAN has conflicting feelings. We are proud of our record, we recognise that there have been some steps forward, but we also know that the situation is dire. Despite increased pressure on governments and business from activist groups, young people, unionists, some business leaders and in particular economists, the progress often feels glacial. This is an inappropriate analogy; the glaciers are melting more quickly than **drastic** action is being undertaken globally and in Australia to prevent them from doing so.

2019 has seen the birth of a new global movement, Extinction Rebellion, which grew out of desperation as people worldwide wondered how many more petitions they needed to sign, how many more letters they must write and whether the next big protest would finally be the one to achieve rapid, meaningful action. Extinction Rebellion's tactics of non-violent disruption may have been divisive, but also seem to have been widely supported in some sections of the media and public. Use of this style of campaigning may need to be considered by YCAN in the future.

While YCAN has continued to focus its activities in the City of Yarra where Council has been responsive and we feel we have had influence and some success, the need for action at the State and Federal levels becomes more urgent. The Victorian Government has shown some leadership with the recent passing of 50% Renewable Energy Target (RET) by 2030 (opposed by Opposition) and investments in Public Transport, particularly the promise of solar-powered trams. However, with the ending of the ban on unconventional gas exploration in 2020 and pressure from AGL for permission to develop a gas terminal in Westernport Bay, we have grave concerns about Victoria's commitment to a higher RET.

The 2019 Federal Election campaign suggested that the election of a Labor Government would provide more chance of a commitment to stronger policies on climate change. However the resultant Coalition Government has been so poor in this area that Australia was not invited to present at The United Nations Climate Action Summit in September. The government has remained committed to an Emissions Reduction Target which is acknowledged to be entirely inadequate to meet the challenge of keeping global temperature rise to below 1.5 degrees. And, of course, Australia's emissions are rising, not falling.

Australia's and the world's waste problems burst onto the front pages in 2019 with the rejection by of our rubbish by countries, particularly in Asia. A concern is the

promotion in many decision-making circles of the possibilities of burning waste for energy.

Nevertheless, YCAN's charter is to "Think Globally, Act Locally" and we have enjoyed, and been encouraged by, the response to our activities and involvement in Yarra, also recognising that local governments worldwide are leaders in tackling climate change.

Planning Meetings:

In order to campaign as effectively as possible, YCAN has regularly begun the year with a planning meeting. The challenges facing us in 2018 seemed so big that year we saw the need for two such planning meetings.

1. November 14 2018: we had an initial planning meeting after the 2018 Annual General Meeting and discussion of the Annual Report which enabled us to reflect on the activities, achievements and difficulties of 2018. This highlighted issues such as strategy and workload challenges, but also enabled members to evaluate YCAN's role and purpose. One of the outcomes was the agreement that our efforts in the local community were both effective and satisfying.

2. January 16 2019: the purpose of this meeting was to finalise YCAN's Goals and Strategies for 2019, and discuss more productive methods of working as a team. We decided to continue with our main goal being concrete policy and action on climate emergency particularly at local government level, and at state and federal level to continue lobbying for action on eliminating fossil fuels, and developing renewables and active transport infrastructure to tackle the emergency.

YCAN's 2019 priorities

Within the City of Yarra, YCAN's goals are, in order of priority, to:

1. ensure that Council has a Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan which underpins every decision Council makes
2. lobby the Council to ensure the food waste collection program is successfully taken from trial to Yarra-wide rollout
3. ensure the new Yarra Environmental Strategy is robust and has clear and ambitious actions to address climate change
4. monitor the implementation of the Proudly Plastic Free campaign to ensure its successful rollout
5. promote the adoption of a new Active Transport Strategy to support coordinated infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists and encourage greater uptake
6. promote the adoption of Urban Agriculture and Open Spaces strategies that prioritise greening Yarra to improve Yarra's livability.

At state level, YCAN's goals are to lobby the Victorian Government to:

- fund active and public transport infrastructure, instead of new roads.
- implement stronger waste and recycling policies.
- not invest in or approve any new fossil-fuel based development, including coal to hydrogen, fracking, coal-fired generators, or gas.

At the national level, YCAN's goals are to lobby the Federal Government to:

- block the establishment of all fossil fuel based projects
- honour the Paris Climate Agreement
- establish a strong emissions target and/or renewable energy target.

ACTING ON OUR PRIORITIES

At Local Level - City of Yarra:

1. WITH COUNCIL

YCAN reps attended many council meetings and met with councillors and council officers throughout the year. We asked public questions and made submissions.

Public Questions

a) Active Transport Will Council consider expanding the BAC into an Active Transport Advisory Committee?

How is Council responding to the threat of the NE link, and was it collaborating with other affected councils?

b) To be asked Waste Revolution: on-going funding, development and education.
Electric Vehicle Policy: promotion and facilitation of EVs
Natural Gas Transition: report on phasing out gas.
Climate Emergency Plan: release of plan.
Cities Power Partnership: Council commitments.

Submissions

a) Phasing out Gas – we gave verbal support for CR McEvoy’s motion.

b) Nicholson St Tram Stops – we presented verbally and in writing, our concerns about tree removal, and poor pedestrian/ cyclist accessibility.

c) Council Budget – we made written and verbal submissions focusing on traffic, parking and active transport.

Other Yarra Council Activities

We engaged with the Council in a number of other ways.

- Climate Emergency: having campaigned for both the recognition of the emergency, and the need for a plan for action on tackling it, YCAN was pleased to have had the opportunity for discussion and input into the development of the Climate Emergency Plan with Council officers.
- Electric Vehicles: we asked Council to consider replacing its vehicle fleet with electric vehicles because of the economic as well as environmental advantages. It was encouraging to receive responses from the Mayor and another councillor assuring us that investigations are occurring.
- Car Share Policy: through Your Say Yarra we supported Council’s recommendations for greater provision of parking for share vehicles.
- Waste Trial: YCAN wrote to Council congratulating them on the waste trial initiative in Abbotsford.
- Climate Emergency Forum: we participated at Council’s forum in April, with a speaker and an information stall.
- Proudly Plastic Free Yarra Launch: we also spoke and had an information table at this event, one very important to us after a long campaign.
- Membership of Council Advisory Committees: YCAN is represented on the Environment, Waste and Bicycle Advisory Committees.
- Yarra Energy Foundation: we have enjoyed positive relationships with YEF.

2. WIDER LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Film Night – 2040 Film: YCAN presented the Damon Gameau film at Bargoonga Ngangin Library, entrance by donation. Approximately 80 viewers were inspired by the positive messages presented in the film.
- Stalls: we had a stall at the Carlton Farmer’s Market promoting the Climate Strike and the 2040 Film. These two events provided great opportunities for conversations with the community.
- Pedal Powered Cinema: we participated in Melbourne Girls College’s annual event.

- Re-usable Container Campaign: as Piedimontes' Supermarket has been uncertain about filling customers' own containers we have written suggesting they do so, as well as encouraging our members to request this service, explaining why they feel it is important.
- City of Melbourne: we wrote to congratulate Melbourne Council on its Recognition of Climate Emergency, and its suggestion to the Victorian Government to hold a "Climate Week". We also requested information on how Council will now ensure that their decisions will be underlined by this recognition. The Council has offered to inform us of further action in this area.
- Protests and Rallies: YCAN members advertised and attended a range of protests, ranging from the two Student Strikes to a number of smaller more specific demonstrations such as outside businesses and banks which had dealings with fossil fuel, particularly Adani.

At State Level

State Government

After having delivered 400 letters signed by members of the community to the then Premier and Leader of the Opposition before the 2018 election, with our request for strong action on climate change, we hoped to receive a response from the re-elected Premier, but it was not forthcoming. As noted above we have welcomed some positive initiatives, but continue to be worried about the depth of the Government's commitment to its ban on unconventional gas exploration. Consequently, YCAN made submissions to:

- a) The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Waste and Recycling, which argued specifically for:
 - a container deposit scheme
 - banning of unnecessary single-use plastics
 - a renewed focus on extended producer responsibility.
- b) The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry in to Emissions Targets, which supported targets of 65-80% below 2005 levels by 2030 to be achieved by:
 - rapid roll-out of renewable energy
 - phase-out of coal-fired power stations
 - support for electrification of heating and vehicles
 - investment in public and active transport
 - protection of forests and reforestation.

In addition, we wrote to

- a) Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change re the EPA investigating updating the licences of 3 coal power stations. The Environmental Protection Authority responded that a notification will be given when decisions are made.
- b) Public Transport Victoria re Route 96 Tram Stop Upgrades with the concerns about loss of trees, and poor cycling and pedestrian accessibility and safety. The response received did little more than justify decisions as necessary and carefully considered.

At Federal Level Australian Government

The 2019 Federal Election was seen by climate action groups as a chance to press for urgent action. Polls seemed to suggest that climate change was a big issue among the voters, with the ALP making a range of commitments, but continuing to back away from firm commitments in regards to coal, and the Adani Carmichael proposal. The Coalition presented inadequate policies, focusing on its Snowy River hydro plan.

YCAN asked candidates in the Melbourne and Cooper Electorates to be photographed with the Climate Emergency Declaration sign, and to nominate their top two policies for addressing climate change. Disappointingly, only one candidate, the sitting member, Adam Bandt, agreed to meet, be photographed and to discuss meaningful policies. Other candidates either did not respond, or in one case, responded with abuse, even after second requests for information without the photograph. We publicised the process in our Election Newsletter, along with a summary of the various policies as obtained from Party or candidates' websites.

After an election result that left us all completely despondent, we rallied and pledged to keep campaigning. A letter was sent to the Prime Minister congratulating him on his re-election, and asking for:

- a stronger ERT,
- a moratorium on new fossil fuels,
- a just transition for workers through investment in renewables leading to 100% renewable powered electricity grid by 2030.

A response was received from the Director of Mitigation Policy at the Department of Environment and Energy emphasising the Government's "comprehensive suite of policies" to meet its "emissions reduction commitments".

The Business World

This year YCAN has written to the CEO and Head of Sustainability at QBE Insurance to both congratulate that company on its commitment to phase out investment in thermal coal, but asking it to withdraw from oil and gas projects. And we have written to GHD Engineering to request that that company follows its own sustainability policy and refuses to provide engineering work for Adani's Carmichael Mine..

Non-Governmental Organisations

YCAN has continued to consult and liaise with a range of non-governmental climate and environmental organisations to gain up-to-date information about national and state wide campaigns, the latest scientific reports, and possibilities for our own directions. Our Newsletters provide links for our readers to information about petitions, actions etc. These include:

- Victorian Climate Action Network
- Environment Victoria
- Friends of the Earth
- Stop Adani
- Market Forces
- Climate for Change
- Climate Council.

YCAN in 2019

In Yarra

- Growth: YCAN has been encouraged by the influx of new members, who have brought passion, knowledge and inspiration to the ‘old guard’.
- Newsletters: our newsletters continue to be received, and we hope read by many subscribers, and we hope also that the readers are benefitting from the ‘Green Tips’, which we ourselves have found to be useful.
- Communication : with a stronger presence in a range of social media our communications reached beyond our members.
- Relationship with the City of Yarra: we understand that Council’s hands are tied by many constraints, and often our requests are impossible for it to meet. But we respect Councillors and Officers, and feel that respect is mutual.
- Climate Emergency Plan: one of YCAN’s successes has been the development of this essential plan
- Proudly Plastic Free Yarra: it was exciting to see the launch of this trial project after much campaigning
- Yarra Waste Revolution: another great project supported by YCAN.
- Bicycle Infrastructure: the lack of a new Bicycle Strategy Plan is disappointing.
- Active Transport: this is an area in which we would like to see more done.

In Victoria and Australia

- Federal Election: the result was a devastating blow for climate activists everywhere. Our communications with the Prime Minister left us with no hope of any improvements in the federal sphere, though the re-election of the Member for Melbourne, who has declared his belief in the climate emergency was a relief.
- State politics: in Victoria the government has made some progress in renewable energy, emissions reduction targets and commitment to public transport. However this is outweighed by the emphasis on road building, and the possibility of renewed gas exploration. The commissioning of an inquiry into waste and recycling has been positive, but we remain baffled by the Andrews’ Government’s continued resistance to a Container Deposit Scheme.

YCAN in 2020

Once again we will consider our goals and strategies for the future. There will be new challenges, but we do know that we will be watching Yarra’s progress in dealing with the recycling crisis, in strategies for making Yarra a cleaner, safer place for cyclists and pedestrians and particularly in the release of its Climate Emergency Plan. We hope the election of a new Council enables us to continue to have influence on the development of the most sustainable city possible.

In the State and Federal spheres, the struggle for 100% renewable energy and 100% emissions reduction will continue, as the battles against fossil fuel companies and short sighted government policies continue. It will be necessary to continue to act with a range of organisations to achieve the strongest possible outcomes. Constant pressure on our elected representatives will be essential.

The business world will become more outspoken on the issues of climate change, and we must not forget that this can be an important avenue to achieving better results, possibly requiring different tactics.

We will continue to debate appropriate campaign tactics, to attend demonstrations and to write letters. The path we are on is not smooth and produces many disappointments. Most of all, Yarra Climate Action Now needs to value its members and supporters and keep motivated and active. Our mutual support is inspirational and we must never forget its worth.

Kerry Echberg

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Convenor
Yarra Climate Action Now

