

9 February 2020



## **City of Yarra Draft Climate Emergency Plan – YCAN written submission**

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) is pleased to make this submission in relation to Council's draft Climate Emergency Plan ('The Plan'). Should you have any queries in relation to this submission, please don't hesitate to contact Geoff Golden, YCAN Convenor via [convenor@ycan.org.au](mailto:convenor@ycan.org.au). Our submission is structured with an introduction to summarise our priority feedback, and then further feedback under headings corresponding to each of the strategic priorities that constitute the chapters of the Plan.

### **Introduction**

YCAN commends Council for following up the declaration of a climate emergency with the commitment to develop a strategic response plan. The draft Plan is a great template that identifies the right priority areas, and YCAN thanks Council officers for their hard work in getting the document to this stage. However, we feel strongly that there remains a lot of work to do before the Plan can be considered a truly ambitious response to the climate emergency. The introduction to the Plan provides a somber and accurate depiction of the gravity of the situation in which we find ourselves as a global community, yet proposes a suite of actions that are little more than incremental change. The Plan correctly identifies that a 'business-as-usual' response is no longer adequate and that urgent and transformational change is required, but doesn't provide sufficient ambition or funding to move beyond business-as-usual. Various actions in the Plan – such as LED upgrades and waste actions – are not new ideas and represent existing commitments.

To address these concerns, YCAN would like to see the Plan transformed so that:

1. Council allocates a percentage of their annual budget to climate emergency mitigation and adaptation actions (e.g. 5%); following the model proposed for the European Union (which has recently proposed to allocate up to 25% of its budget to tackle the climate emergency).
2. The Plan is data driven. Council needs to be able to monitor and measure progress of the Plan's initiatives in real time. Data will also assist the community to understand what it can be doing to reduce emissions.
3. Funding priority is urgently directed at those initiatives that have the greatest potential to reduce emissions in the quickest time possible (e.g. redirect \$2.1 million funding from LED street lighting to accelerate moving away from gas, more separated bicycle lanes, supporting EV take-up and encouraging businesses to more urgently adopt renewable energy sources).
4. More ambitious plans are established for creating a safe local environment for residents and other species (true priority for active transport in all urban planning designs and radical urban greening).

5. There is a clear roadmap and target timeframe for achieving net-zero emissions (rather than 'as soon as possible').
6. Funding allocation for each initiative is clear, and each action is linked to a measurable and time-bound target.
7. Yarra Energy Foundation (YEF) is allocated substantial additional resources to enable them to play the central role in delivering the Plan as envisaged by Council.
8. Advocacy work is delivered through a newly recruited Climate Emergency Advocacy Officer. The advocacy work detailed under each of the strategic priorities, when consolidated, amounts to a significant amount of work that will require new resources to ensure delivery in an urgent, not business-as-usual manner.

To be clear, all of the actions identified in the plan are worthwhile, but we want to see these and more. More ambition, more funding, more clearly defined targets. YCAN recognises that a truly transformative plan that addresses the points above will involve some difficult budgetary decisions. But given the significant reduction in climate risks that can be achieved by near-term emissions reductions (as compared to cuts in the future), this is a hard conversation that Council needs to have with the community. If resourcing is a constraint, then Council should consider whether debt is an appropriate mechanism to fund action now. This will be so much more impactful than action later.

Council should establish clear data-driven targets/KPIs and a robust plan for monitoring progress against the Plan. Regularly reviewing and adapting the Plan to ensure it continues to achieve the objectives of an emergency response will be critical. The two-yearly review process as specified in the Draft plan needs to be defined and condensed as befits an emergency.

### **Plan Objectives**

The Plan objectives are largely the right ones, though we would recommend some changes:

- 'Zero-net emissions' needs to be defined (as compared to carbon neutrality and 'zero emissions') as many in the community will not be familiar with the important distinctions between these terms.
- The objective to achieve zero-net emissions should be linked to a specific target date rather than "as soon as possible".
- Rather than just ensuring the community are *engaged*, we should strive to ensure every member of the community is taking practical *actions*.
- 'Leading by example' should include advocacy to other levels of government, and should also include reference to adopting best practice from others (through collaboration).
- Introducing language that socialises the concept that we need to all participate in a *transformative shift*, and the importance of climate emergency response as a broad community endeavour.

### **Strategic Priority 1: Community mobilisation and engagement**

Council should consider whether funding under action 1.1 is most efficiently deployed directly or through enabling existing organisations to grow their work. Leveraging community-led groups and ‘train the trainer’ type models could yield most value for money. Council should clearly define their objectives in allocating funding and resource effort to engagement and mobilisation work. We think Council can play a role to lend this work a layer of credibility that community organisations may sometimes lack, and to engage new audiences.

Action 1.3 is critical and requires priority focus and dedicated funding given that around 60% of residual emissions in the City of Yarra are from stationary electricity consumption by businesses.

Existing not-for-profit organisations, including YCAN, are already committing substantial energy to community mobilisation and engagement. Support from Council in this space is welcome, and in particular the new community grants program (action 1.4). However, we urge Council to maintain in parallel a substantial pool of grant funds for the existing sustainability grants and small grants programs, so that the new grant program is genuinely accretive.

### **Strategic priority 2: Reduce emissions in the municipality, including Council operations**

While the Plan addresses phasing out gas in Council operations (action 2.6), YCAN is concerned by the absence of strong goals for new developments. We propose a goal to mandate against the provision of gas connections in any new developments (and to be considered even for renovations) both domestic and commercial. Advocacy work detailed in action 2.9 could be made more specific to the achievement of this aspiration. Council could also consider ‘fast-tracking’ arrangements for planning applications for new and refurbished commercial and industrial premises that plan carbon neutral operations.

YCAN supports the measures for vulnerable and low-income households (action 2.1), as these measures recognise the important justice and equity issues presented by a heating planet. However, we urge Council to closely monitor the efficacy of this initiative and the sufficiency of funding allocated, in consultation with YEF. Provision of practical information about energy efficiency measures and financing options to fund them, as well as strong advocacy to State Government for investment in energy efficiency measures for public housing are additional initiatives that Council should consider to support vulnerable households.

YCAN notes that YEF is the nominated lead agency for proposed actions 2.1 through to 2.4, but that no additional funding or resources are to be committed. YCAN recommends that Council work closely with YEF to agree what additional funding (including staffing) they would require to deliver an ambitious plan to transition all Yarra residents, businesses and community

organisations to 100% renewable energy, and to achieve best practice energy efficiency, as quickly as possible. With additional funding, Council could also expand YEF's role in community engagement and education.

Encouraging commercial and industrial users to transition to 100% renewable energy is a (potentially) very impactful initiative given that stationary electrical energy use by these users represents about 60% of total emissions in the City of Yarra. YCAN believes that this priority is not adequately addressed in the draft Plan and that Council should step up the ambition for this 'influencing' work. For major commercial and industrial emitters, Council could explore underwriting significant green energy initiatives focussed on both demand reduction and on-site renewable energy. However, given likely resourcing challenges, it will be crucial for Council to make maximum use of other organisations that are undertaking complementary work in this space. These other organisations could include:

- *Better Building Finance*, an independent, expert advisor and the main source for information on Environmental Upgrade Finance (EUF); created in partnership with the Federal Government (see <https://betterbuildingfinance.com.au/about-us/>); and
- *CitySwitch*, a program that is helping commercial office tenants and owner occupiers around Australia to enhance energy efficiency and work towards a carbon positive future (see <https://cityswitch.net.au/About-Us/WhatisCitySwitch>)

To support prioritising work and resourcing decisions in this area, the information in relation to Yarra's emissions profile (draft Plan p. 10) should be more detailed.

While LED lighting upgrades (action 2.7) are a worthwhile initiative from the perspective of reducing energy consumption (with the parallel benefit of reducing lifecycle costs), given that Yarra sources all of its electricity from renewable sources, implementation of this initiative will have limited climate benefits. Given the urgency to act, this initiative should be accorded a low priority and the (majority of the) funds proposed to be spent on this initiative invested elsewhere, including urban forest enhancement.

YCAN also asks Council to consider whether they could take a lead role for local governments in Australia by committing to trial innovative community solar and micro-grid solutions.

### **Strategic Priority 3: Climate adaptation**

Climate adaptation is a critical component of a climate emergency plan, given certain levels of warming are already 'locked in' through historical emissions. YCAN notes the extensive planning and consideration given to the climate resilience of parks, water resources, Councils assets and the city more broadly (actions 3.3 through 3.6).

The reference to additional green and open spaces ‘where possible’ (action 3.2), however, is the language of business-as-usual rather than transformation. The community expects Council to lead and re-imagine what is possible. We envisage a radical greening of the City of Yarra, and urge Council to apply specific and substantial funding commitments against both actions 3.1 and 3.2. Urban forestry, as well as providing shade, carbon drawdown and other ecosystem services, can act as a visual manifestation of the Councils intent to do things differently, serving to encourage and reassure the broader community.

In relation to tree planting, we provide the following feedback:

- Survival of planted trees is critical. In the Urban Forest Strategy, the identified species are introduced-species heavy. Trees don’t necessarily need to be Australian or indigenous to Yarra, but a mix of the most resilient and best performing shade trees is essential.
- Trees must have decent soil surrounds; for example, planting in medians rather than planter boxes to give better water saving, better growth and more shade.
- Council could provide further support and encouragement of residents and businesses in Yarra to increase the use of native species in private gardens and reduce the loss of native trees.
- Council claims to follow the principles of water-sensitive urban design, but much run off is wasted because of inefficient tree surrounds. Better design is needed to harvest more ground water to ensure plant growth.

In describing the impacts to the local environment in this section of the Plan, YCAN recommends using layman’s terms (e.g. not ‘evapotranspiration’) and setting out the practical risks in ways that the community can understand. For example, the risks to urban biodiversity could be made clearer. The plight of wildlife in relation to bushfires has served to motivate the community to action and Council could leverage this sentiment to engage for the climate emergency more broadly – it’s tangible, emotive and irreversible in the case of extinction. For example, information boards throughout Yarra (on the streets and in parks) could tell powerful stories about our beautiful local flora and fauna species, and identify the ways in which they are at risk from climate change.

#### **Strategic Priority 4: Transition to zero-emissions transport**

The actions defined against this strategic priority represent business as usual, incremental improvements to integrated transport over time. What is needed is the City of Yarra to take a leading role in a radical reclamation of common space to make bicycles, pedestrians, public transport and other sustainable options the priority, with cars required to work around

everything else. The only caveats to this strategy should be adequate provision for emergency services vehicles and measures to support equality of access to sustainable transport options.

Yarra's proximity and connectivity to Melbourne's primary urban centres means it is uniquely placed to become a leader in active transport given shorter distances and relatively flat terrain. Given this, the Plan should set an ambitious target to reach European-like levels of share of trips on foot, by bicycle and by public transport. The Integrated Transport Plan (ITP) may yet deliver on this ambition, but it is not clear and with further deliberations planned, meaningful action appears a long way off. The delivery of the ITP should be accelerated, including through the use of iterative trials (suggested in action 4.2). Community buy-in to reduce reliance on cars is essential. YCAN would like to see a new campaign to reduce car trips, and make walking and cycling whenever possible a tangible action that residents undertake to reduce their carbon footprints with the same enthusiasm they have for reducing plastic usage and food waste.

In relation to bicycle infrastructure and support for active transport, YCAN recommends:

- Separated bicycle lanes are imperative for safety (with pedestrians also separated from bicycles) and merit substantial investment, together with State Government.
- Safe east-west bicycle routes (with separated bicycle lanes) through Yarra should be the first priority.
- New 30km/h zones across the whole municipality, together with appropriate enforcement.
- Prominent car parking spaces could be reclaimed for bicycle parking (like the space adjacent to the entrance to Fitzroy Library).
- Funding for discount bicycle storage equipment for homes with limited space, and a mandate that all new multi-unit dwellings have secure ground-level bicycle parking (at least two per dwelling).
- More public bicycle trackers to encourage cycling (like that on the Capital City Trail near Nicholson Street and at the end of St Georges Rd, Northcote), noting that people like a visual representation of how they are contributing. Suggested locations in Yarra are at the end of the Wellington Street "Copenhagen-style" bicycle lane, and at the Canning Street crossing of Alexandra Parade.
- More radically (as befits an emergency), the trial of a 'car-free day' on certain roads or in certain areas on a Sunday.

In relation to public transport, YCAN recommends:

- Council works with public transport providers to provide enhanced waiting facilities for public transport users – facilities that provide appropriate protection from the elements (sun, wind and rain) and make public transport a realistic commuting option in all weather conditions.
- Council engages with public transport users to understand their concerns around safety in their movements to and from public transport stops and takes appropriate action

(e.g. enhanced lighting) to ensure that public transport is a realistic commuting option at all times of the day.

In relation to electric and low-emissions vehicles, YCAN recommends:

- It should be made clearer what the \$100k budget for action 4.5 will be spent on.
- Council should work with external providers (electricity distribution providers and electricity retailers) to facilitate the provision of fast-charging sites throughout the municipality.<sup>1</sup>
- Noting that fast-charging sites are not a solution for regular charging of batteries due to battery degradation, Council needs to be guided by global best practice to ensure that Yarra residents, a great number of whom have no access to off-street parking, have access to charge points for regular, domestic charging. This will likely require working with electricity distribution providers, electricity retailers and technology vendors and may require some streetscape redesign.
- Transitioning Yarra's transport fleet to zero emissions should be a priority well before 2030.
- More radically, consideration of a low emission zone where only certain cars are allowed in or pay a fine (like London), with measures to ensure this burden doesn't fall on those who are least able to afford it.

### **Strategic Priority 5: Move towards zero waste and conscious consumption**

Council has already made significant progress in improving waste and recycling practices, and is to be commended on taking a leadership position (e.g. in the four-bin trial in Abbotsford). It therefore makes sense that the actions detailed against this priority are largely work already underway – in this space we'd encourage Council to keep up the good work.

An idea that we think has merit is another recycling depot or transfer station for Yarra. Ideally it would be located in the south of the municipality, but it need not be as large as the Clifton Hill Depot. Such a facility would increase interest, enthusiasm and participation in recycling and waste reduction efforts.

YCAN would encourage Council to follow through with campaigns (such as the Proudly Plastic Free and Yarra Waste Revolution strategies) and schedule greater ongoing communication with the community. The effectiveness of these campaigns should be assessed, reported and used to inform forward strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> YCAN believes that the model, adopted by some neighbouring councils, whereby the municipality provides electricity at no cost to electric vehicle owners at fast-charging sites, is controversial. While there may be some merit in the idea in the short term in order to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles, it is not sustainable, nor equitable, in the medium or longer term – electric vehicle owners must be required to pay for the electricity that their vehicles consume.

In relation to conscious consumption, there is nothing in the plan about informing and influencing food consumption patterns. Embedded emissions in our diets contribute a significant portion of our carbon footprint at an individual level – in particular, animal agriculture is the second largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions globally, larger than all of transport<sup>2</sup>. For example, Council could leverage the excellent vegan and vegetarian restaurants and caterers in Yarra to promote the benefits of plant-based foods.

YCAN notes the increasing number of multi-residence developments within the municipality and observes that the City of Yarra frequently plays no role in waste collection from these developments. Yet Council does oversee in the planning approvals process and the waste management strategy proposed by such developments. As such, Council has an important role to play in both:

- ensuring that waste management strategies are best practice and, at a minimum, are consistent with the efforts being pursued by the remainder of the municipality;
- auditing waste streams from multi-residential developments to ensure that strategies approved by Council are being adhered to.

YCAN recommends that Council ensures, as part of the Plan, that appropriate resourcing is being applied in this area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important plan of action.

Kind regards,

Geoff Golden

Convenor – Yarra Climate Action Now

On behalf of the entire committee, a diverse and passionate group of Yarra residents

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/a0701e/a0701e.pdf> (refer xxi)