



19 November 2018

Re: Submission to Central West Investigation

Hepburn Wind welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) regarding the Central West Investigation (CWI).

Overview

Hepburn Wind is Australia's first community-owned wind farm, located at Leonards Hill only a few minutes from both the Hepburn Regional Park and the Wombat Forest. We welcome many of the findings of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council on the CWI. Creating new national parks and conservation parks will not only boost the ecological resilience of these forests but also ensure the significant carbon sinks are maintained, help our shire to reach zero-net emissions and act as a lighthouse to other communities seeking to act on climate change and preserve critical ecosystems.

Climate change mitigation

To avoid dangerous climate change the world must transition from emitting high amounts of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to emitting very low, zero, or even 'negative' emissions or sequestration. The transition has already begun but needs to expand and speed up considerably if the world is to meet its global emission targets. The majority of the world's countries have, by signing the 2015 Paris Agreement, endorsed the common goal of keeping global temperature rise below 2°C. For the first time, local government through the Compact of Mayors had a significant impact on global negotiations.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Global Warming of 1.5 °C Report released in October 2018 sets the scene for a necessary drop to zero-net emissions within a 12 year period, to remain within 1.5°C, which would significantly limit the impact in comparison to a 2°C target. The following chart from the report shows the level of actions required to meet zero-net globally within the next 12 years. This has set the impetus for the Hepburn Shire to have a Community Transition Plan that is achievable in 10 years. However, even with an emissions transition, Australia is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change that are already underway.



This is particularly apparent in rural and regional Australia. Further, there is the question of how current state and local governments can achieve their own contributions to the Paris Agreement.

The Victorian Government's response to Paris has been to align with the zero-net emissions by 2050 target, to establish renewable energy targets for 2020 and 2025 and to establish the Take2 climate change pledge. The overarching Climate Change Framework is its long-term plan stating:

- the vision for a net zero emissions, climate-resilient Victoria in 2050;
- how action on climate change aligns with jobs, cost of living and health
- the steps of Government to commence the transition;
- how the Climate Change Act 2017 will drive action to 2050;
- the challenges to be addressed for a net zero emissions economy; and
- how Victoria is preparing for a changing climate.

The State Governments Climate Change Act (2017) seeks to implement significant emission reductions over the next 32 years. As stated in the most recent IPCC report (2018) protecting carbon sinks¹ and enabling community level action will play a key role in this transition to net-zero emissions.

Carbon sink forests are for the dedicated purpose of carbon sequestration (absorbing carbon from the atmosphere). Reforestation projects not used for firewood (or other wood products) act as carbon sinks in the Shire. There is a significant carbon sink in the Hepburn Shire from the Wombat Forest. There are three primary categories of land use changes:

1. Land clearance, and the resulting loss of stored biomass (land clearance may either be new land clearance, or re-clearance)
2. Afforestation
3. Bushfires

¹ IPCC report: Summary for Policymakers http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf



Zero-net emissions

Hepburn Wind is a key partner in the Z-NET Community Transition Pilot funded by Sustainability Victoria where we are working to reach zero-net emissions by 2030 across the Hepburn Shire. Many of the forests studied in the CWI were included in the Z-NET Community Transition Plan, which contains a shire-wide emissions blueprint and mitigation opportunities.

Across the Hepburn Shire forests abate 50,600 tonnes of CO₂ per annum – entirely offsetting the municipalities emissions by an additional 20,000 tonnes of CO₂. Comparatively, these forests abate almost as much carbon as livestock grazing produces in a shire where agriculture creates 41% of our shire-wide emissions. The following graphic represents the significance of this carbon sink.

HEPBURN SHIRE BASELINE EMISSIONS

Emissions by sector

with proportion of net emissions

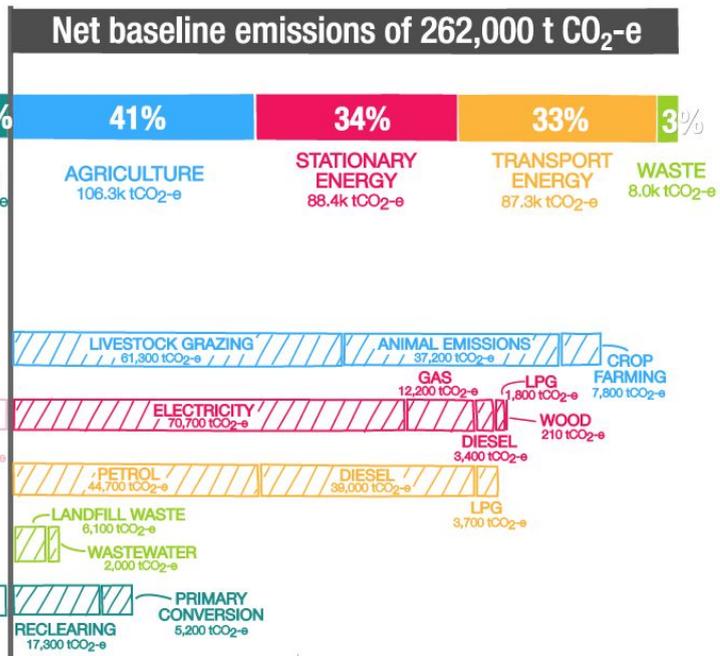
Emissions by source

Energy sourced from current renewables avoids emissions

SOLAR 8,400 tCO₂-e WIND 12,400 tCO₂-e

Forestry regrowth acts as an emissions sink which offsets emissions from other sources

FOREST REGROWTH -50,600 tCO₂-e

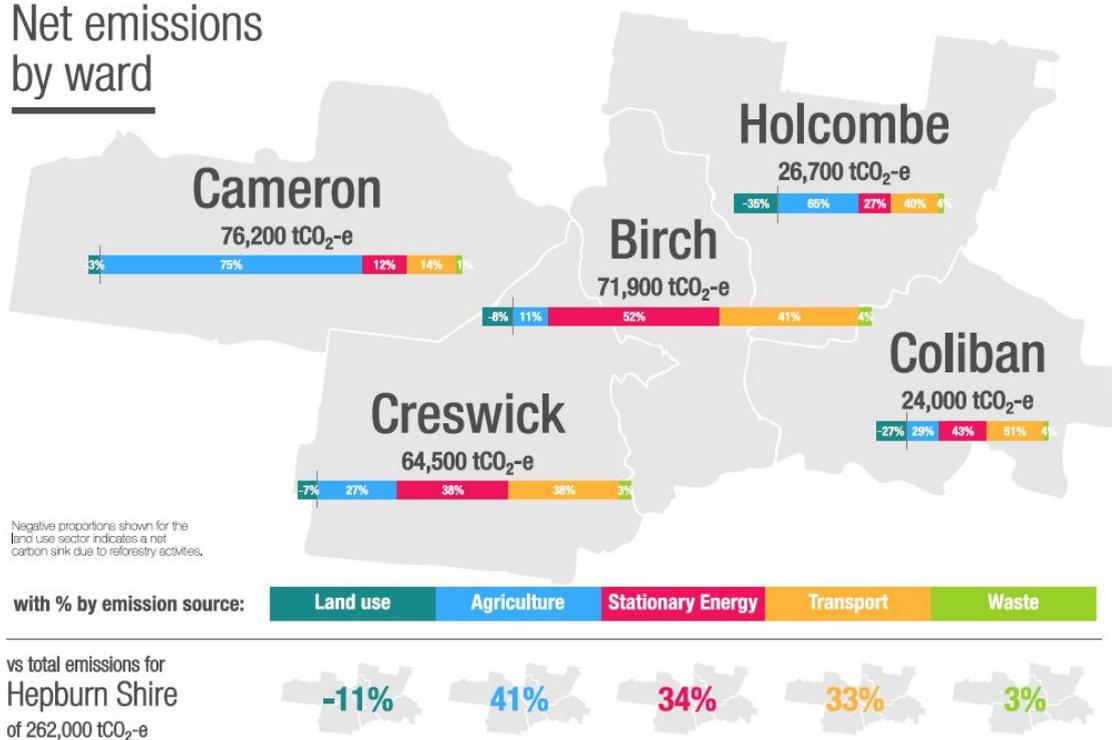


As the impacts of climate change worsen, these forests will be more vulnerable to ecological decline. These changes would greatly reduce these forests ability to act as a carbon store. Protecting forests located in the Hepburn Shire and those across Central Victoria is critical to contribute to local mitigation efforts and sustain critical ecosystems. The following graphic shows the breakdown of the carbon sinks across each of the Wards within the Hepburn Shire.



HEPBURN SHIRE BASELINE EMISSIONS

Net emissions by ward



Of note is that Coliban produces the lowest emissions among the Wards in Hepburn Shire and is fairly balanced across the sectors, including a significant carbon sink due to forestry activities that reduced the emissions profile by 27%. Holcombe ward hosts the largest forestry carbon sink, which creates a reduction of 35% to their emissions.

Ecosystem services

Beyond carbon abatement, these forests offer invaluable ecological services. Forests studied within the Central West Investigation provide habitat for over 375 endangered species including the brush-tailed phascogale, greater glider and powerful owl. These forests also contain the headlines for eight major rivers. Without implementing the measures recommended by the VEAC these forests will be unable to weather the continued impacts of logging, mining, and climate change.

The Wombat Forest, in particular, is an important refuge for many endangered species and vulnerable flora - including the endemic Wombat Leafless Bossiaea. This forest is the only place



across the globe where this plant grows. Additionally, we have fungi species, like the Earpick Fungus, which is only found in the Wombat Forest.

Economic benefits

There are many reasons to implement the proposals from VEAC and go further still. National Parks draw large flows of tourism and investment to regional areas. Victorian tourists spend \$1.4 billion per year during visits related to our parks. This tourism creates at least 14,000 jobs for the state economy.

Subsequently, we greatly encourage the State Government to accept a number of the recommendations (listed below) stemming from the VEAC's Central Victorian Investigation. These recommendations provide a strong framework to reduce the vulnerability of these forests to environmental degradation and climate change impacts. By strengthening these forests the Victorian State Government will be taking meaningful climate change action, helping our region reach zero-net emissions and demonstrate the potential benefits of a holistic transition.

Recommendations:

We endorse the following recommendations from the VEAC:

- The creation of three new national parks: Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, Pyrenees National Park, Mount Buangor National Park
- Two new conservation parks at Hepburn and Cobaw ranges'
- Five new regional parks including a new Wellsford Regional Park
- The creation of 30 new/ expanded bushland reserves
- We would also like to see stronger protection for Mount Cole where 70% of these forests are still open to intensive logging.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Yours Sincerely,

Taryn Lane
Manager