



climateactionmoreland.org

20 May 2015
John Englart
on behalf of Climate Action Moreland
P.O. Box 381
Fawkner, VIC 3060
johnenglart@takver.com

Jane Garrett MLA
Minister for Emergency Services
Suite 1, 31 Nicholson Street,
Brunswick East, VIC 3057

Dear Ms Garrett,

I am writing to you as Minister for Emergency Services formally on behalf of Climate Action Moreland in regards to the *Heatwave plan for Victoria*, the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* and the necessity for preparing an adequate emergency response for heatwaves for Victoria.

This is particularly important given current Bureau of Meteorology alerts regarding an El-Nino event occurring this year,¹ A strong El-Nino is likely to cause higher temperatures, with early seasonal onset of hotspells, and heatwaves of greater intensity, frequency and duration.

As you are aware heatwaves are a silent killer that particularly impact the very young, the very old, those with medical conditions and also those from a lower socio-economic status.²³

Heatwaves are the top cause of death in Australia of any natural disaster by a substantial margin. As Lucinda Coates and colleagues conclude in their landmark 2014 study - *Exploring 167 years of vulnerability: An examination of extreme heat events in Australia 1844–2010* - "The dangers from extreme heat within Australia remain neglected, and fundamental changes will not take place until extreme heat is given the priority it deserves as Australia's number one natural hazard killer."⁴

We note the Victorian Auditor General in the Heatwave Management report tabled in State Parliament 14 October 2014 was highly critical of the previous Liberal Party run State Government finding critical deficiencies in heatwave emergency response and governance.⁵ We would like to be fully assured that all eight major recommendations by the Victorian Auditor General are being carried out.

We particularly note that:

- Under the *Victorian Emergency Management Act (2013)* there is no specific mention of the management of the impacts of heatwaves or hotspells.
- That the *Heatwave Plan for Victoria* is not a state-level plan similar in scope to other emergency response plans. This seems to be highly inconsistent.
- In the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* while fire and flood rate numerous mentions in *Part 1 – Emergency Management in Victoria* and *Part 2 – Emergency Risk*

Management and Mitigation in Victoria, there is no mention of heatwave or heat related risk management, mitigation or adaptation strategies.⁶ This is a serious oversight given the extent of the mortality rate from heat events and the necessity for engaging in mitigation and adaptation strategies and behaviours.

These aspects are even more alarming given the experience of the 2009 Victorian heatwave when not only human health was affected, but also deleterious impacts on electricity provision and transport services which produced a cascading economic and social impact.⁷ While much attention has focussed on the danger of bushfires, our fear is that the combined emergency of heatwaves on population health and bushfire impacts are not being strategically managed with adequate governance and emergency response.

While heat-related excess death rates were substantially lower in 2014 heatwave conditions, clearly showing a reduction in mortality, statistics on after hours doctor consultations and ambulance callouts show heat stress related conditions were still prominent with major stress on the capacity of the ambulance service and health system. Indeed, the spike in deaths in 2014 forced the unconventional storage of dead bodies "indicative of a disaster similar in scale to the two-week period during the 2009 heatwave that preceded Black Saturday", according to Institute of Forensic Medicine director Stephen Cordner.⁸ The VAGO report highlighted that during the 2014 heatwave Triple Zero emergency call-taker responded to the highest number of calls for ambulance services ever recorded, and with a doubling of Priority 0 callouts per day for metropolitan Melbourne. Clearly Ambulance Victoria needs appropriate resourcing for surge capacity during such events.⁹

We appreciate the early response the new Labor Government has had in starting to address climate change issues, both in mitigation and adaption, that were severely neglected through the Baillieu and Napthine Governments. We note in particular relaxation of wind farm planning regulations, continuation of Victoria's energy efficiency target, and proposal for a Victorian Renewable Energy Target. These are important initiatives for long term mitigation.

We are already experiencing climate impacts now through extreme weather events, particularly rising temperatures resulting in extreme heat events and heatwaves, but also through increase in torrential rain and flash flooding events. We need appropriate adaptation and emergency response plans in place at the state and local government level.

I did an extensive literature review of climate change and heatwaves in Melbourne, published in February 2015, which provides an overview of the problem and the challenges in how to respond and adapt.¹⁰

I would be pleased if you could arrange to meet with a small delegation from our group to discuss our concerns and allay our fears over lack of preparation for the next extreme heatwave event here in Victoria. We would appreciate a formal response to this letter within 30 days.

John Englart
for Climate Action Moreland
mob: **0408 536733**

- 1 Bureau of Meteorology ENSO Wrap-up, 12 May 2015.
http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/archive/ensowrap_20150512.pdf
- 2 Huang, C., Adrian Gerard Barnett, Xiaoming Wang, Pavla Vaneckova, Gerard FitzGerald, Shilu Tong (2011) Projecting Future Heat-Related Mortality under Climate Change Scenarios: A Systematic Review. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119 (12) pp 1681-1690
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378778807000175>
- 3 Loughnan, M.E., Neville Nicholls, Nigel J. Tapper (2010) The effects of summer temperature, age and socioeconomic circumstance on Acute Myocardial Infarction admissions in Melbourne, Australia. *International Journal of Health Geographics* 2010, 9:41
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2924270/>
- 4 Coates, L., Katharine Haynes, James O'Brien, John McAneney, Felipe Dimer de Oliveiraa, (2014) Exploring 167 years of vulnerability: An examination of extreme heat events in Australia 1844–2010. *Environmental Science and Policy*. Volume 42, October 2014, Pages 33–44
- 5 Victorian Auditor General's Office (2014) *Heatwave Management: Reducing the Risk to Public Health*. Report tabled in State Parliament 14 October 2014
- 6 Emergency Management Victoria, *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* particularly Part 1 – Emergency Management in Victoria and Part 2 – Emergency Risk Management and Mitigation in Victoria, Accessed 14 May 2015
- 7 McEvoy, D., Iftekhar Ahmed, Jane Mullett (2012) The impact of the 2009 heatwave on Melbourne's critical infrastructure. *Local Environment* 17(8), 783-796
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13549839.2012.678320#.VNcp-B93P0o>
- 8 Julia Medew, The Age, 27 January 2014, Anger over spike in deaths during record Victorian heatwave <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/anger-over-spike-in-deaths-during-record-victorian-heatwave-20140126-31gxb.html>
- 9 Victorian Auditor General's Office (2014) *Heatwave Management: Reducing the Risk to Public Health*. Report tabled in State Parliament 14 October 2014
- 10 Englart, John (2015) Climate Change and Heatwaves in Melbourne – A Review
<http://takvera.blogspot.com.au/2015/02/climate-change-and-heatwaves-in.html>