



The Greater Yarra Valley and Ranges hub will implement large and small scale renewable energy projects throughout the region.

A local led spark

By Renee Wood

The Greater Yarra Valley and Ranges is one of seven regions coming together to ignite community led renewable energy projects.

The State Government invested \$3.73 million dollars into establishing 'Community Power Hubs' across Victoria to explore clean energy solutions for home and towns to accelerate the state's future targets.

Healesville Core President Jeff Barlow is the executive officer of the region's hub and said it will work closely with Como Energy, a specialist in rolling out renewable projects, on investigating small and large scale options that can be implemented locally.

"We're interested here in Victoria in utilizing their professional expertise, both within renewable energy and also legally as well, to provide us with the advice that we need to run

similar sorts of programs here in our region," Mr Barlow said.

"For example, medium sized solar farms, bulk buys for households and businesses with things like solar panels, batteries, heat pumps, maybe reverse cycle air conditioners...."

"Perhaps solar car parks where you have a car park with solar panels on top to provide shading... with electric vehicle charging points as well."

The funding will support four jobs within the hub's steering group, that will develop and deliver locally owned projects, while working closely with smaller established groups, including Healesville CoRE, Yarra Glenenergy, Clean Energy Nillumbik, Yarra Valley ECOSS, Dandenong Ranges Renewable Energy Association, Bunyip Renewable Action Group, and Eastern Climate Action Melbourne.

Residents will also have the opportunity to

work with the hub on public and private initiatives.

"This idea that we're a trusted organization, and that we can do the hard work for the community."

"A lot of people think that they want to put solar on their rooftops, but they just don't know where to start. They don't know who to go to, they don't know who installers are and there aren't a lot of installers in our region."

The seven regions and Energy Minister Lily D'Ambrosio came together online to officially launch the Community Power Hubs on Saturday August 28.

"So many excellent ideas come out of our regions, and the Community Power Hubs make these ideas happen - creating jobs, cutting bills and helping us halve our emissions by 2030," Lily D'Ambrosio said.

High-risk bushfire days set to soar

The number of high-risk bushfire days could nearly double across the Yarra Ranges by the end of the century, according to new climate research by CFA and international research bodies.

The research, published this month in the International Journal of Wildland Fire, found that under different emissions scenarios both mean and extreme fire danger are expected to increase in Victoria.

Statewide, research modelling indicates a 10-20 per cent increase in extreme Forest Fire Danger Index, with the greatest change projected in the north-west region.

However, the greatest relative change in the number of 'Very High' days per year will be in central and eastern parts of the state where there is a projected doubling and tripling, respectively in the number of 'Very High' days.

The Yarra Ranges features on the edge the CFA's central Victoria region, which encompasses Melbourne. Historically this region has seen an average of 12.5 'Very High' fire risk days each year but that could extend to 22.5 by the end of the century.

Report co-author, CFA Manager Research and Development Dr Sarah Harris, said scenarios used in the research show increased temperature, caused by human-induced climate change, to be the main driver of heightened fire danger.

"Changes in temperature, humidity and rainfall during spring and early summer mean the fire season will continue to start earlier and run longer. As a flow-on effect, springtime opportunities for prescribed burning could reduce," she said.

CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said he was proud of CFA's robust research program, which he said brought further understanding of the impacts of climate change in the context of firefighting.

"As firefighters, we see the effects of these longer and more severe fire seasons and it's important that we turn our minds towards



what firefighting looks like in the not-too-distant future," he said.

"CFA is undertaking work to identify challenges brought on by climate change and increased fire risk, and ways to solve them through adaptation and mitigation."

"CFA also proudly works to reduce our own greenhouse emissions, through initiatives such as increasing our use of rooftop solar and the number of hybrid vehicles in the fleet."

CFA Manager Research and Development Sarah Harris and co-authored the research with researchers Scott Clark (School of Earth, Atmosphere and Environment, Monash University), Timothy Brown (Desert Research Institute in Nevada, USA), Graham Mills (Monash University) and John T. Abatzoglou (School of Engineering, University of California).

The research was funded through Safer Together, a Victorian approach to reducing the risks of bushfire through fire and land agencies such as CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria and Parks Victoria working

together with communities, combining in-depth local knowledge with the latest science and technology to reduce bushfire risk on both public and private land.

Forest Fire Management Victoria Chief Fire Officer Chris Hardman said partnerships with community and agencies such as CFA and FRV help ensure we are unified in emergency preparedness and response to keep the community and environment safe.

"We know that Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world. Climate change is increasing the risk bushfires pose to our communities, our critical infrastructure and our environment," he said.

"That's why our strategic approach to managing bushfire risk is based on the best evidence available, such as this research."

"We have a 365-day approach to fuel management, more mechanical treatment and increasing capacity to contain bushfires at first attack. We are also prioritising empowering Traditional Owners to lead self-determined cultural fire practices on country."

Future of McDermott Avenue netball facility

At the 24 August council meeting, Kilsyth resident and Lilydale Historical Society president Sue Thompson submitted a question relating to the old McDermott Avenue netball facility.

This facility was closed in 2015 after relocating to Pinks Reserve in Kilsyth.

Since then, the open space has been used by local residents as recreational and exercise space, particularly during the last 18 months of Covid-19 lockdowns.

Ms Thompson was curious about what Yarra Ranges Council had planned for the site and what residents could expect to see happen with the space.

Director of Environment and Infrastructure Mark Varmalis said the council had initially intended on selling the site and had planned utilising the funds generated to put towards the new facility.

"This, however, did not progress at the time as further information emerged, identifying a need to undertake a review of the council's recreation and open space strategy to consider any sale of land across the municipality in the overall context of recreational needs," Mr Varmalis said.

"A review of the recreational and open space strategy is currently progressing with updated demographic and development data identifying the need for open space in the Mooroolbark area to meet current and future projections."

"The council's recreation and active living team have initiated a master plan process for the McDermott Avenue site which is seeking initial community input for the future of the site."

"As this continues to be developed, further reporting to council will occur to seek a direction for the future of the site."

The site is currently being used as a Covid-19 drive through testing site which has previously raised concerns with local residents.

Yarra Ranges Men's Health Network update

Brian Mier from Yarra Ranges Men's Health Network provided an update on the current state of men's health support in the shire.

Using men's health data collected in 2010 by the Department of Health, Mr Mier spoke of how men make up many of the deaths related to major health and situational concerns like heart disease, alcohol consumption, lung disease and road traffic accidents.

"So when you think about that, that means men are making up the victims of an awful lot of health related issues, be they physical related issues, be they mental health related issues," Mr Mier said.

Mr Mier believes the council's 2025 plan discards violence against men by only stating 'prevent violence against women and their children' and argues it should read something like 'prevent violence in our community.'

Having witnessed male to male violence himself, Mr Mier said he thinks men are "being denied recognition and support" in the Yarra Ranges.

Mr Mier would like to see the sociology and psychology of men, women and children studied to ensure services can work together in a proactive manner.

The submission made by Mr Mier requested the council change the wording in its 2025 plan and encouraged Yarra Ranges Council to become a leader in the area of men's health.

Storm recovery update

Yarra Ranges Council provided its first storm recovery update at the 24 August council meeting and introduced the new director of recovery Jane Sinnamon.

The council is now the lead agency in the recovery stage and is being assisted by Bushfire Recovery Victoria.

The longer-term needs of impacted communities is now the focus for the council while it continues on-the-ground work such as debris collection.

The cost of rehabilitation, restoration and recovery has been estimated at \$65 million on public land and could be up to \$160 million on private property.

The council is not in a position to bear the financial burden of these recovery efforts and is in ongoing conversations with the State and Federal Governments to seek financial assistance. State government funding of \$8.2 million will be shared across the 10 council areas which were impacted by the storms, with Yarra Ranges expected to receive \$3.5 million. A revised budget is being prepared to adapt to the financial impacts of the storm, and will be released in early 2022.