

SUMMARY OF SESSION 3: CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION FOR VICTORIA

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THE session on adaptation to climate change was covered by four speakers who, in turn, addressed the topic by putting the case for using scenarios for climate adaptation, looking at climate change adaptation efforts by Victorian local governments, discovering what we have learned from Victorian Indigenous communities and an overview of current policy arrangements in response to climate change.

SCENARIOS FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION: A TOOL FOR CHALLENGE AND POLICY

Lauren Rickards (2013) emphasised that ‘adaptation’ was a very different issue from ‘impact’, namely that adaptation was ‘at the end of the food chain’ and was an effort to ‘clean up the mess’. The challenges for adaptation to climate change are that it is: inescapable; highly uncertain; interconnected with development; path dependent, with it difficult to change directions once a policy has been adopted; and raises questions about values in our society.

Given these difficulties, scenario planning is a powerful tool with which to develop and use multiple plausible stories about how the future will unfold. Rickards explained what scenario planning was and how it had the capacity to engage and assist people to make informed decisions about the best way to adapt to climate change.

FRAMING THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION FOR VICTORIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Hartmut Fünfgeld (2013) asked the question, ‘What is the role of local government in adapting to climate change?’ He pointed out that local councils, being

closest to the people, have played a significant role in their decisions in mitigation and adaptation of climate change.

Fünfgeld then went on to give examples of what local government has done to plan for adaptation. He explained how better risk management schedules had been developed after the big hailstorm in Melbourne in March 2009. He pointed out that adaptation is a process, not a method, and that social, economic and political contest is important.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT FROM VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

Kate Auty has been working with Aboriginal people extensively over many years, learning what can be done about adapting to climate change. In her talk (Auty 2013), she explained how much we can learn from the Aboriginal community and also how much inventive work has been done in the community to date. People know that the best development programs are done when people can say ‘we have done it ourselves’ in a way that forges a sense of ownership.

Professor Auty, along with Aboriginal people, has learned that to get adaptation and change we need to forge and foster healthy relationships, cultivate strategic opportunism, remain flexible, adopt a settled vision embraced by the community, surrender control and take time and converse and exercise judgement. She gave several examples of elders in the Aboriginal community who had shown resilience through change and have engaged in conversations with interested groups to share knowledge about adapting to change. Many of the elders in the Aboriginal community have extensive knowledge

about changes that have occurred to the landscape, including the Murray River.

In summary, Auty explained how knowledge can be brought into these discussions in a way that empowers people, and not in a way that knowledge is appropriated for the benefit of others. It is also about how the profound knowledge of local landscape can be integrated not just by Aboriginal people, but by people who have lived in our landscape for a long time with a broader understanding of the global climate system.

AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT POLICY ARRANGEMENTS IN RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Ross Garnaut opened by warning that we will have to go through an adaptation process as the world will continue to warm no matter what achievements are made (Garnaut 2013). He pointed out that as the world continues to warm it is getting harder and harder for the sceptics to defend their case. He said the spectrum of possible consequences of failing to respond rationally are troublingly interesting at the benign end, but costly and disruptive to an extent that would put the continued rise in global living standards at risk in the middle, and catastrophic for our civilisation before we get to the severe end. It will not be possible to survive in a world that is rapidly warming by resorting to adaptation alone; this has to be done along with mitigation.

Garnaut then focused on progress in the world as a whole and then looked at how Australia is faring with mitigation policies and emerging outcomes, now with a carbon price playing a central role.

Globally, most countries have acted to put in place some strategies to reduce the production of greenhouse gasses. Europe in particular has been very successful and is ahead of target. Australians tend to be surprised by the changes in developing countries, such as Brazil. Japan and Korea both have low emissions. The situation in very large countries, including China and the US, is impressive.

More than half the world's emissions growth will be in China. The Chinese have developed ways of

meeting demand for food and all kinds of services that lower emissions. China is committed to reducing emission by 40%–45%. This has been achieved by imposing massive interventions, incentives and disincentives. For example, there is a 70% export tax on iron and aluminium that results in China only producing enough of these materials to meet its own needs.

In the US, progress has also been impressive, but largely 'under the radar'. In the US, local government has made a big issue of climate change and there has been a will to 'do it anyway'. There has been strong regulation at the state level and a large shift from coal to gas in power generation. The US has also made it difficult to sell gas overseas, which has kept prices down. This is in contrast to Australia, where gas is exported to Asia and the prices match Asian prices. When President George W. Bush was forced to do something on climate change, he said that the US would put in place policies that would result in a peak in emissions in 2025, but the peak, in fact, occurred in 2007.

Australia is well placed. It has a good trading scheme and good assistance to generators. Although these processes are under political threat, they will not be entirely abandoned.

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