

JUST TRANSITION



SOUTH GIPPSLAND

Assembly 2 Communique - June 2021

Why Just Transition?

The Just Transition (JT) project emerged from a small number of South Gippsland community members who - along with the majority of Australians - recognised the urgent need for action to deal with the pressing environmental and social problems that threaten our future.

Any transition to a low-carbon economy and society cannot just be about mitigating the effects of climate change, but also requires the creation of a fairer society that serves the interests of all, irrespective of wealth, gender, skin colour and who you know.

JT also recognises that our current form of democracy is ill-equipped to mobilise the necessary action in a timely manner. To date, neither vote nor protest have provoked the urgent response required from those who possess the power to initiate it.

JT therefore proposes an alternative means of action - through participatory democracy - where fundamental decisions concerning our society are returned into the hands of those best placed to decide: the local community.

JT has grown and engaged with the broader community, with its diversity of skills, ideas and experience, in order to map out the commonly accepted problems of the present and the potential solutions of the future.

The contents of this community-generated and endorsed map is to be presented to South Gippsland Shire Council with the intention that it should frame council's five-year plan for the region, as well as being a model for other parts of our community ready to engage with a Just Transition.

And if South Gippsland can become a model for similar actions in an expanding network of other communities, then the real broad-scale change we need can begin to happen. That is a big idea, but it is what we all have to do.

Outcomes and Goals of Just Transition

The local level of government and community can be where significant and real change happens. According to the [UN Development Program](#), “50-to-80 percent of adaptation and mitigation actions necessary to tackle climate change are or will be implemented at the subnational or local level of governance”. The Paris Agreement itself notes that the municipal level can be a “powerhouse of ambitious mitigation and adaptation measures that are hard to legislate and implement at the national level”.

The ultimate goal of JT is to *initiate* the transformation of South Gippsland into a sustainable, democratically empowered, culturally rich and prosperous community that is better positioned to respond to the challenges of climate change, one that is more resilient, driven by mutual support and the common good, with a strong commitment to fairness and justice, and a commitment to reconciliation with the Indigenous community.

The immediate goal is the production of a community led ***South Gippsland Just Transition Strategy*** in good time for local council elections in October 2021. The Strategy will propose the first steps in the redesign and remake of the South Gippsland region through infrastructure and policy-building for an equitable low-carbon economy.

JT will continue to engage with the sitting council and foster connections with councillors, with the goal that the JT Strategy be adopted as the framing for council’s five-year plan. Implicit in this is the ***declaration of a climate emergency***.

The progress of JT will be a demonstration of the principles of participatory democracy and what it can achieve, with the intention that a formal version of this process - in the form of a ***Citizens’ Assembly during the council term*** - be adopted as the standard democratic process.

The Citizens’ Assembly would in effect be a broad consultation process that would feed into planning the future of the region, ultimately through the Council Plan. The process doesn’t force the responsibility for outcomes onto council alone, but rather, makes council and local people co-creators of something larger that transcends the disagreements that so often derail effective civil society.

JT recognises that this represents the beginning of a ***decades-long process***. It will be the work of generations to reduce the energy and carbon intensity of our economy and society, to stop environmental degradation and deal with resource limitations, whilst creating new jobs, achieving biodiversity in the environment and delivering socially just and equitable outcomes.



The story so far

JT hosted its first **public assembly** in November 2020 and followed with a second in May 2021. Between these assemblies, JT had many conversations with people in our community and contributed to policy debates.

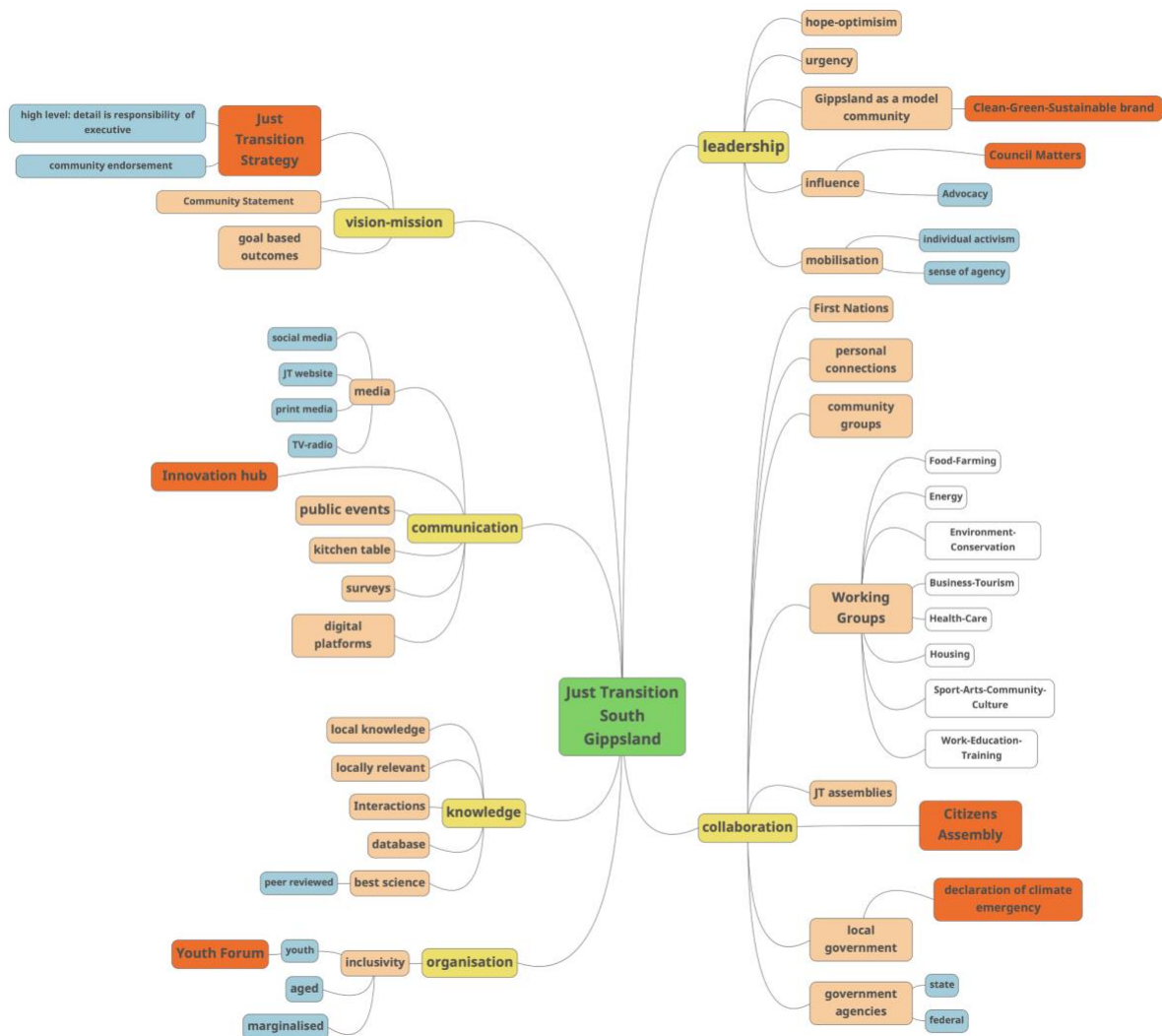
At Assembly 1, it became clear that there are many organisations and individuals working in this space in our region. But what is missing is the means of unifying and organising these groups together in a just, democratic and effective way.

In order to deconstruct the seemingly overpowering complexity of the task, Assembly 1 established smaller working groups to further investigate the problems and potential solutions that a Just Transition would need to deal with.

Since January these working groups - **food and farming; energy; transport; environment; health and care; work, education, and training; housing business and tourism; and sports, arts, and community** - have been meeting regularly. The goal has been to both understand the issues and what is already going on in our community and also to start to collate a broad vision for what a Just Transition for South Gippsland should look like.

These initial findings were presented by each group at Assembly 2. As well as learning from each other, Assembly 2 gave us the opportunity to think through how each area impacted the others and the broader goals, and issues that the project may face.

The **mind map** below represents a visualisation of the how JT views itself after the reflection of Assembly 2:



Alongside grassroots organising we have also had the opportunity to:

- Appear at the parliamentary inquiry into Zali Stegall's Climate Bills
- Be asked to contribute to both the Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shires' health and wellbeing plans
- Invited onto the Labour Environment Action Network Gippsland launch with Chris Bowen
- Written up in the Act on Climate People's Climate Strategy and Communities Leading Change newsletter

Emerging themes and next steps

This is a big project, aiming to strengthen all parts of our community in the face of the climate crisis. We have split up the project into workable sizes through the **working groups**, but at the same time, each working group feeds into the others and there are many common themes and goals. For example, the current housing crisis means that businesses can't attract workers because of the lack of affordable rental accommodation and housing. A lack of working age residents puts further pressure on existing services, and so on.

At Assembly 2, each working group demonstrated how interconnected all these issues are, the need to approach a Just Transition holistically, and that through this bottom-up process we can rebuild our community's understanding and confidence in local democracy. Some of the emerging themes and ideas are:

Long term

- An **Innovation Hub** to translate current research or funding opportunities to our region
- **Clean-Green-Sustainable South Gippsland brand** to demonstrate the economic benefits of a carbon neutral economy
- Revitalised relationship between community and council through **participatory democracy**
- Low carbon public transport and logistics

Middle term

- Support local food processors such as abattoirs which will reduce transport emissions, improve animal welfare, and support local jobs
- Build social and public housing to address the housing crisis, tackle issues of planning
- Support community renewable energy projects
- Develop more awareness and skills in regenerative farming practices and biodiversity
- Build on emerging low-carbon economic opportunities such as renewable energy, kelp farming, and expanding the health and care sector
- A **Citizens Assembly** on how South Gippsland can transition towards a carbon neutral region

Short term

- Get as many council candidates as possible to sign up to the Just Transition Strategy and commit to pushing for it once elected
- Gather **community endorsement** of the strategy
- Make sure that gender issues are integrated into each working group
- Develop more strategies for engagement with young people, such as organising a **Youth Forum**
- Establish partnerships with First Nations communities
- Kitchen-table events for local producers to share best-practice knowledge
- Support existing projects that push forward these goals and links between issue areas
- Tap into the existing strength of community organisations and networks

To start working towards these goals our steps for the next six months include:

May-June: working groups will continue to reach out to more individuals/organisations in their topic area to collect proposals and visions, alongside this an online survey will be launched

End of July: Assembly 3 to finalise the first draft of the strategy including vision, principles, and goals

Early August: feedback and input into the strategy proposals through public outreach and voting

August: Public launch of strategy and the Council Matters project

August-September: encourage those running for election to sign up to the strategy and commit to holding a citizen's assembly once elected

In conclusion...

Just Transition South Gippsland has come a long way since its inception in 2020. It has quickly evolved into the beginnings of ***a movement*** which promises to play a leading role in guiding the region to an equitable and sustainable future. The collective talents and dedication of its contributors has already delivered a sense of optimism that there may be an alternative to the intransigence inherent in the various tiers of government above us. It is up to us to continue to ***grow, talk, listen, organise and influence*** in the run-in to the council elections and beyond.

