

## JUST TRANSITION



## SOUTH GIPPSLAND

This is a summary of the key themes and issues that emerged from the seven break-out groups conducted at Assembly 1, held via Zoom on Saturday November 21, 2020.

### **Break-out Session 1:**

#### **Q: What brings you here today, what do you care about?**

As would be expected, motivations of the 46 people attending varied, but the underlying theme was a deep concern about where we are heading with the climate emergency, biodiversity loss, and the need for action to ensure a safe future for our families, friends and communities. Community was perceived as being especially important for participants. The community level provides a coherent framework for manageable actions. In transitioning to a low-carbon society, justice was seen as being crucial; it is not sustainable if it doesn't address social inequities across areas such as housing, education, employment, access to culture and public space, energy and transport. A carbon-neutral economy should have equality and fairness at its centre.

There was a strong focus on the need to enhance local democracy, restore an elected council and have a council that was far more consultative and willing to collaborate. A healthy participatory democracy was seen as an essential precondition for a Just Transition.

Participants see an opportunity to influence policy at and through local government, to work together to strengthen communities and to work in partnership with existing organisations. There was a firm view that involvement of local Indigenous people and youth is essential, as is the need to engage and work with a wide cross section of the community.

There was a view by some that the current economic model does not have a climate and human perspective. We need to have carbon-neutral industries, but also across the whole value chain of production and our way of living.

There were specific motivators for participants such as renewable energy, protecting wildlife and biodiversity, affordable housing, local food security, and the issues of equality and justice.

There was a presumed sense that it is now time to act constructively to plan and to influence our future.

### **Q: What do you think of the idea of a Just Transition for Southern Gippsland?**

The foundation for a Just Transition was clearly seen as being dependent on the revitalising of democracy and becoming a more open and consultative democratic society and community. There was a strong belief that we need to be engaging citizens in developing policy and not allowing vested interests to control what goes on. Local democracy has failed us in South Gippsland and needs to be fixed. Restoring locally elected democracy is seen as crucial to a Just Transition and a sustainable and prosperous society. We need to use citizen juries/people's assemblies as an adjunct to representative democracy.

We need to offer hope for people and communities about the future. We need to communicate in simple and clear ways that engage people, and we need to listen to their needs and aspirations. We need to be inspiring to people to work together for the necessary change and transition. We need to help in the building of resilient and connected communities.

We need to face up to the reality of the climate emergency and once and for all deal with its implications good and bad.

We need to understand our boundaries are defined by water sheds, i.e. Bass Coast bio-region. What happens in Latrobe Valley affects southern Gippsland, e.g., pesticides etc. in water. We are part of a bioregion and need to work as one.

There was clear agreement that priority should be given for starting with issues-focused groups, but through time utilising a hybrid model of issues-based groups and locality groups. We need to be careful that the working groups do not become siloed and to ensure that future assemblies focus on the interrelationships and overall strategy. We need to commit to local action.

For South Gippsland, a Just Transition will add to our wellbeing and prosperity.

There was a sense that we are moving towards a community 'tipping point'. We need to inspire people to work together with hope for necessary change. We are setting ambitious goals and work, but it is necessary to the transition to a low-carbon future in time.

### **Interests and Areas of Concern**

There was a broad range of specific interests and areas of concern, from community renewables to public housing, health services, regenerative farming, participatory democracy, social justice, and biodiversity protection and restoration.

There was a recognition that we need to be balancing growth and sustainability. We need to shift from an extractive industries mentality or approach to a regenerative approach. We need to design the transition to include justice, equity, and affordability.

The pandemic has shown how we can work together and support each other. Change can be difficult, and some will resist the necessary change. We need to overcome community apathy by communicating in relevant and clear terms the upside of change. We need to devise multiple avenues for people to participate.

It was seen that the Just Transition Plan could provide a platform for the next council election and a way to partner with local and regional organisations.

## **Break-out Session 2:**

### **Q: What do you think would be the best way to organise the process?**

People were genuinely happy with the idea of developing a Just Transition Plan in principle. There was strong agreement this needs to be based on building good relationships, utilising local and regional groups, and tapping into their knowledge and work. Building relationships and alliances across Gippsland and beyond was considered essential. We need to use inclusive working groups and multiple ways of engaging and involving people. We need to focus on increasing participation. We need to better understand what is contagious about ideas that will motivate and inspire people.

Locality could be a good way to organise ourselves, but the main thing is to keep what we are doing as concise as possible - we don't want it to be too complex and time consuming. We really need to tap into what is already being done, e.g., in energy there are multiple groups who are working on this, so we don't need to reinvent what is already there. There are three major energy groups and a renewable energy roadmap for Gippsland. And so, a group devoted to energy would probably replicate what these groups are already doing. We should start from what already exists rather than starting all over again. Council could help significantly by being a conduit and having a supportive role in helping to design the future.

The timeline is ambitious, but that is what is needed to deal with the scale of the problem. We also need to have advocacy about what we end up with. We should start with a skills/interests register that catalogues people's interests, capabilities and capacity. We should do the same to identify other organisations and groups in this space.

## **Some Conclusions**

There is clearly a desire to act on an initiative for a Just Transition. There are lots of conversations about transition already underway across the community, but no clear plan. People have faith in working together at the community level where real action is most likely. The preferred approach is for working groups to be formed around specific interest areas, best seen as sectors of a local economy and society, that can be addressed separately

yet easily cohere into an integrated Just Transition Plan (JTP). Working groups should develop a coherent vision for the sector in a low-carbon economy and a path on how to get there. The timeline of August 2021 for a first draft of a JTP is ambitious, but this is the very beginning of a years-long process that will be subject to constant review and renewal – just making a start is what’s important. An August 2021 first draft can also serve as a basis or guide to any individuals or groups who might emerge to run in South Gippsland local government elections in October 2021 on a Just Transition platform.