The Climate Change Exchange

Exchange Commentary

# Victorian Government Response to Climate Resilience Inquiry short on equity and justice

**Authors:** A/Prof Susie Moloney (Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University); Dr Haydie Gooder (Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University); Kate Lowsby (Centre for Just Places, Jesuit Social Services); Dr Annette Kroen (Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University); Dr Sarah Robertson (Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University); Prof Hartmut Funfgeld (ICLEI and the Adaptation Lab, LaTrobe University); Dr Karyn Bosomworth (Greater Melbourne Foundation)

## Context: climate change exacerbates existing inequalities

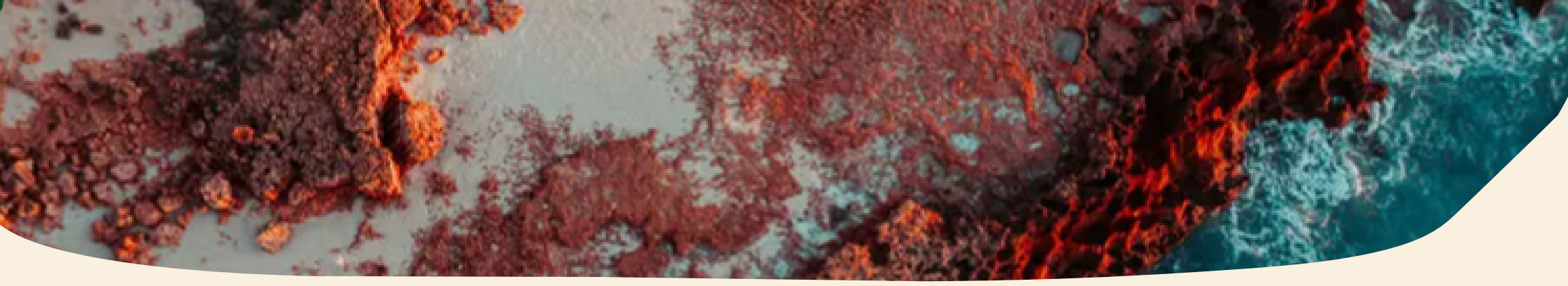
In 2024, Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment warned that climate risks across health, housing, infrastructure and food systems are escalating and compounding.

In Victoria, these impacts are no longer distant projections. Communities are experiencing more frequent and intense heatwaves, floods and bushfires – as summer 2026 has shown. While climate change affects everyone, its impacts are not evenly distributed. There is growing evidence and recognition, particularly amongst community service organisations, that **climate change is exacerbating existing structural inequalities**. This is backed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and a growing body of research consistently showing that climate risk and impacts are shaped by social and economic conditions, including housing quality, income security, health status, access to services, and historic patterns of underinvestment.

The critical question is not whether climate change exacerbates inequity, but whether government policy, investment and governance arrangements are adequately and proactively addressing the structural drivers that determine who bears the greatest burden of climate impacts.

### Acknowledgement of Country

The Climate Change Exchange brings together scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers who are thinking, working, and acting towards justice and sustainability in a warming world. We therefore acknowledge that we live, work, and learn on Aboriginal land and that sovereignty was never ceded. We pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their Ancestors, and to all Traditional Owners and Custodians of all lands and waters with which we live, work, and learn. Through the Exchange, we invite conversations and work that seek to honour our reciprocal obligations to Country and each other.



The scale and acceleration of climate impacts, regularly referred to as 'unprecedented', demand more than incremental responses. They require a **significant upscaling of investment in adaptation and a systemic integration of climate equity** concerns into planning, infrastructure, housing, biodiversity, health and budgeting decisions.

Equally important is **how progress is measured**. Embedding justice and equity into adaptation means tracking not only infrastructure, built or emergency responses delivered, but whether exposure to risk is being reduced, whether housing is becoming safer and more efficient, and whether communities facing cumulative pressures are experiencing tangible improvements in resilience. Without this shift, adaptation risks reinforcing the very inequalities that make climate impacts so damaging in the first place

## Inquiry into Victoria's climate resilience

In Victoria, we have **key climate change legislative and policy frameworks guiding action** in this state. Victoria's Climate Change Strategy 2026-30 (the Strategy) was released in Nov 2025 and the legislatively required sector Adaptation Plans are currently being updated. The government is making progress on its core targets of reducing emissions (aiming for net zero by 2045) and growing renewables (95% by 2035).

There have also been several major Inquiries and reports over recent years assessing the impacts and risks facing the state from climate change including: the Parliamentary Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities (2020); the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2022 Victorian Flood Event (2022); the Victorian Government Climate related Risk Disclosure Statement (2025) and; most recently the Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience (August 2025) (Inquiry Report).

This latest Inquiry Report is based on evidence gathered from the Victorian community through 286 submissions, consultation with more than 130 witnesses, and eight days of public hearings throughout urban and regional Victoria.

A central message of the Inquiry Report is that:
"extreme weather and climate change pose a significant risk to our built environment and infrastructure. This risk is particularly prevalent where there is a lack of adaptation measures or maladaptation has occurred" (Inquiry Report 2025: 4).

Alongside the findings from the submissions and hearings, the Inquiry Report highlights key concerns of stakeholders. These responses reflect **the complexity of climate resilience** that reach beyond infrastructure and built environment to include food security; residential tenancies and renter protection; equity, access and fairness; Indigenous led-adaptation solutions; geopolitical destabilisation; insurance; health and well-being impacts; climate and disability justice; local adaptation initiatives and biodiversity amongst others. The Inquiry Report acknowledges that not all these issues could be examined, and that further investigation would be needed in future.

Adaptation to climate change in Victoria, according to the Inquiry Report, means adjusting current **processes**, policies or behaviours and/or creating new systems and processes. Examples include improving building standards (e.g. for extreme heat), changing land-use regulations (e.g. flood overlays) and preparing the community for heatwaves and other risks. The Inquiry Report outlines what governments, individuals and communities can do to build resilience.

On 4 February 2026, the government released its Response to the Inquiry, which includes 80 recommendations: 37 supported in full; 40 supported in principle, and 3 supported in part.

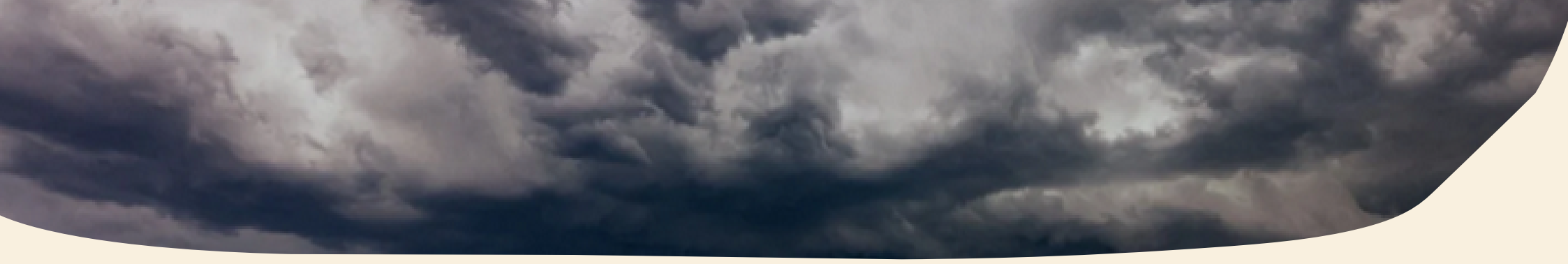
## Embedding equity and justice

Overall, the Response agrees with the Inquiry that strengthening climate resilience is a priority. It outlines a number of actions and budgetary areas where Victoria is supporting climate change adaptation as well a number of key reforms including changes to the Planning and Environment Act. While the Response acknowledges the increasing threat and impacts of a changing climate and the need for urgent and ongoing adaptation, **there is little clarity about how it intends to systematically strengthen resilience** in the communities facing the greatest cumulative pressures.

**Embedding justice and equity is acknowledged** as important and reflected, explicitly and implicitly, across 13 recommendations. However, closer examination shows that those requiring funding, such as adequately resourcing local governments and community service organisations, are only 'supported in principle' rather than 'supported in full'.

A climate resilience and adaptation agenda **must embed First Nations leadership** or risks reproducing colonial governance structures rather than transforming them. The 'importance of First Nations practices to care for Country' are recognised by the Response with the 3 related recommendations for joint and integrated land, water and bushfire management, supported in full. There is no detail on the governance arrangements of these projects and whether they will continue to be funded and tracked over time. It is also unclear how First Nations climate resilience will be supported outside of land management strategies although government is reviewing the Yoorrook recommendation to support a First Peoples Climate Justice Strategy.

International best practice highlights the importance of co-designing climate change adaptation solutions with those most affected (see IPCC). The **importance of place-based approaches** and committing to working with communities over long periods, is also echoed in the Victorian Government's funded research and guidelines to address place-based disadvantage. While the government acknowledges that place-based adaptation is crucial to shift from reactive to proactive planning, there is no mention of funding allocated to the 'Supporting Our Regions to Adapt' program. Six collaboratively produced Regional Climate Change Adaptation Strategies are now gathering dust with no resources or implementation strategy.



The government's Response emphasises adaptation infrastructure and improved emergency management systems, **however it lacks specificity about how these measures will be equitably accessed**. There is no clear articulation of how renters, older people, people with disabilities, women and girls or residents of under-resourced suburbs will be prioritised in planning, funding allocation and implementation. These groups are consistently identified in disaster research as facing disproportionate exposure and barriers to recovery. Without explicit equity mechanisms such as targeted investment, accessibility standards, tenant protections and community-led planning – **adaptation risks reinforcing existing social and spatial inequalities rather than reducing them.**

To date, very little new dedicated funding is identified beyond existing commitments or anticipated allocations from Commonwealth grant programs such as the Disaster Ready Fund and the regional drought resilience initiatives through the Future Drought Fund. While these grant programs are important, they are typically short-term, competitive and project based. Without sustained, coordinated, and integrated strategy there is no guarantee that underlying structures and systems driving inequity and climate vulnerability will be adequately addressed and transformed.

**State government reliance on Federal grants falls short on the investments needed for long term adaptation and resilience strategy and implementation.** Meaning that local governments, communities and individuals pay for and hold the majority of climate change impacts and their costs (Note ResilientFuturesRoundtable).

## The need for targeted policy and accountability

Meaningful progress on justice and equity in climate adaptation and resilience demands more than recognition: it requires clear goals, long term strategies working with place-based communities and adequately resourcing that work. It requires accountability and transparency around how those goals are being monitoring and evaluated over time.

**The government's Response stops short of specifying measurable outcomes or funding dedicated to closing gaps between affluent and structurally disadvantaged communities.** Without robust targets and accountability mechanisms, there is a real risk that adaptation will reinforce 'business-as-usual,' perpetuating and entrenching inequities.

For example, Victoria's efforts to improve the thermal and energy efficiency of rental housing stock is a welcome step forward for those living in some of the worst quality homes, but these efforts need to come with tenant protections to ensure renters don't carry the cost or are priced out of affordable and thermally efficient homes in a warming climate.

**Climate resilience must be about more than surviving disasters; it must ensure all Victorians to have the means to adapt and thrive in a changing climate.** This requires legislating climate-safe housing, prioritising adaptation investment in communities already experiencing disadvantage, and adequately resourcing cross-sectoral and community-led adaptation processes across Victoria. Central to this is sustained funding for local governments and community service organisations that lead this work.

## Collectively building a climate equitable and resilient state: Urgency to act

Our climate future is already a climate present. Victorians are experiencing direct and indirect impacts which will only intensify and increase in frequency. Despite numerous government reports, including the most recent Inquiry, an equitable climate future will only be possible if governments courageously implement their own recommendations and transparently track progress. The upcoming Victorian election presents a critical opportunity to demand this accountability. The evidence is clear.
**We have no other choice.**


The Climate Change Exchange

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The Climate Change Exchange exists to bring together research, policy and practice to build our collective capacity to create inclusive, just and transformative adaptation futures.

We create spaces for people to connect, grow their understanding and act to transform systems through building relationships and practicing adaptation together.


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## Suggested citation


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Exchange Commentary Chief Investigators from:

- Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University
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- Greater Melbourne Foundation


**Disclosure statement: This article reflects critical analysis and does not represent the views of any government or political organisation.**