Climate Partnerships

Workshop Summary Yarra Ranges Climate Partnership

January 2025

Prepared by Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places.

Jesuit Social Services Building a Just Society | Centre for JUST Places | arc justice | eastern community legal centre | FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES VIC

We acknowledge the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, Yorta Yorta and Wurundjeri peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which this project is taking place.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and extend this acknowledgement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who continue to care for Country, community, and culture in these regions and beyond.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

For further information, contact:

Anna Brazier
Senior Climate Justice Officer, Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places
T: 0474 791 245
E: anna.brazier@jss.org.au

Prue Bagley
Community Project Lead, ARC Justice
T: 0487 144 997
E: Prueb@arcjustice.org.au

Ebony Hogg
Community Engagement Lead – Disaster Recovery and Climate Justice, Eastern Community Legal Centre
T: 0476 420 866
E: Ebonyh@eclc.org.au

Visit the Climate Partnerships webpage:
Climate Partnerships: Strengthening place-based resilience

Contents

Climate Partnerships 2
Project Partners 3
ARC Justice 3
Eastern Community Legal Centre 3
Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria 3
Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places 3
Introduction 4
Workshop Design and Approach 4
Workshop Outcomes and Analysis 5
Part One - Impacts of Climate Change and Disaster in Yarra Ranges 5
Part Two - Strengthening Climate Change and Disaster Resilience in Yarra Ranges 6
Planning and Preparedness 7
Cross-sector Collaboration – Coordination and Planning 7
Staff and Volunteer Capacity Building 8
Communication and Information Sharing 8
Proactive Community Outreach 9
Conclusion 9
Appendices 11
Appendix 1: Workshop Participants 11
Appendix 2: Thematic Analysis – Impacts and Response 13

Climate Partnerships

Climate Partnerships is a three-year project working with community service organisations to strengthen place-based resilience in the Yarra Ranges and Campaspe communities.

Climate Partnerships is supporting cross-sector partnerships in each region to design and implement a 'Collaborative Action Plan', which articulates a shared vision for strategic action on disaster and climate resilience, with a focus on equity and justice.

The project is being delivered through a partnership with Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places, ARC Justice, Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), and the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

Community legal centres are ideally placed to lead place-based action on climate change and disaster, through their trusted community relationships, direct service delivery, and deep knowledge of the complex and cascading local impacts of climate change and disaster.

Climate Partnerships aims to:

- Build an understanding of how climate change and disasters can entrench, exacerbate and create social inequities.
- Recognise the value of diverse organisational knowledge in identifying local priorities and need.
- Create awareness of the vulnerabilities of community service organisations to disaster and climate risks.
- Design and implement a 'Collaborative Action Plan', which will articulate a shared vision and guide for strategic, place-based action on disaster and climate change resilience.

Climate Partnerships commenced in 2024, with the key project stages outlined below.

Project Partners

ARC Justice

ARC Justice is a rights-based, for-purpose organisation incorporating the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre and Housing Justice, a specialist renter support program based in Bendigo, and the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre based in Shepparton. ARC provides legal and tenancy support services across 13 local government areas in central and northern Victoria, with a team of more than 60 staff working to advocate for and uphold the rights of rural and regional Victorians.

Eastern Community Legal Centre

ECLC is a multidisciplinary legal service dedicated to preventing legal problems, advancing equitable outcomes, and fostering the well-being and resilience of communities and community members in Naarm's (Melbourne's) East. ECLC's commitment extends beyond immediate legal assistance. The Centre's work is grounded in the understanding that legal issues are often interconnected with broader social and environmental factors. By addressing these intersecting problems, including climate justice, ECLC aims to create more equitable and resilient communities. Working across the prevention continuum, the Centre facilitates long-term community resilience by tackling the societal drivers of climate change, building capacity of communities to manage climate risk, and delivering crucial support following extreme weather events.

Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria

The Federation of Community Legal Centres is the peak body for Victoria's Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal Legal Services. The Federation of Community Legal Centres' members are at the forefront of helping those facing economic, cultural or social disadvantage and whose life circumstances are severely affected by their legal problem.

Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. The Centre for Just Places was established by Jesuit Social Services in early 2021 with support from the Gandel Foundation and the Victorian Government to enable and support place-based approaches. Through our research, advocacy and practice, the Centre unlocks the relationship between social, environmental and economic justice. Our mission is to enable strong and resilient communities through three main areas of work: working in place, enabling climate justice, and supporting strong, healthy and equitable communities.

Introduction

This report summarises the Yarra Ranges Climate Partnership Capacity Building Workshop held in Kilsyth on 12 September 2024. The workshop brought together over 40 participants from 28 community service organisations across the Yarra Ranges (see Appendix 1). Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places and Eastern Community Legal Centre co-facilitated the workshop.

The aims of the workshop were to:

- Strengthen climate literacy in a way that centres equity and justice
- Build a shared understanding of organisational roles and opportunities to act on climate change and disaster impact
- Explore potential impacts of disasters on the local community and service delivery infrastructure of participating organisations
- Identify opportunities to strengthen local climate change and disaster resilience.

Throughout the workshop, participants worked collaboratively to explore the local impacts of climate change and disaster in the Yarra Ranges. Through guided exercises, participants explored actions that could strengthen organisational responses to disasters and build community resilience. This document provides a high-level summary and analysis of the qualitative data generated from the workshop, focusing on impacts, challenges, responses and opportunities identified through the workshop activities. The findings will inform the next steps of the Yarra Ranges Climate Partnership, including group model-building workshops and the development of a 'Collaborative Action Plan'.

Workshop Design and Approach

The workshop was structured around several key activities. These included:

- Building literacy around climate change
- Exploring the drivers of risk
- Mapping the impacts of climate change and disasters in Yarra Ranges
- Examining local responses to disasters regarding current resources, relationships, and plans
- Reflecting on how preparedness could inform and alter local responses.

A scenario exercise specifically developed for this workshop guided the impact mapping and response activities. The scenario mirrored the hazards and conditions experienced across the region during the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires. The example focused on an

extended heatwave compounded by smoke impact from a bushfire in the neighbouring local government area.

Workshop Outcomes and Analysis

Inductive thematic analysis was used to identify key themes from the discussions and group activities. Part One focuses on the findings from the drivers of risk and impact mapping exercise. Part Two integrates insights from the discussions on local responses and preparedness, offering a deeper understanding of how service systems can be strengthened in the face of future challenges.

Part One - Impacts of Climate Change and Disaster in Yarra Ranges

In the scenario exercise, workshop participants were asked to reflect on the direct and indirect impact of extreme heat and bushfire smoke exposure on their organisation, clients, the wider community and the natural and built environment.

Overarching themes that emerged from the discussions in this exercise included:

- Increase in family violence and other risk factors
- Safety concerns (personal and organisational)
- Physical, mental and financial impacts on staff
- Inadequate access to information and communication
- Service disruption and infrastructure breakdown.

The discussion identified particular community cohorts being at higher risk to the impacts of extreme heat and bushfire smoke exposure including, older people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, First Nations people, people with disabilities, people with pre-existing health conditions, low-income households, those in inadequate housing and rough sleepers, and those with limited community connections or social support. Key challenges faced by these groups may include language barriers, geographical isolation, culturally unsafe practices, increased discrimination, and unequal access to essential services, transport, and safe, cooling spaces—factors that exacerbate their vulnerability in extreme weather events.

A rise in family violence and other risk factors, such as alcohol and drug use and gambling, were also identified as a significant concern. Participants emphasised that people may increase consumption of alcohol and use of drugs as coping mechanisms in extreme heat, while gambling venues are perceived as safe, cool spaces to escape the heat.

Communication challenges, lack of information and uncertainty about evacuation orders and safe spaces were also identified as factors that aggravate confusion. Rapidly changing weather conditions and the disconnect between available information and on-the-ground realities further intensify the impact, leaving communities more vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat and bushfire smoke.

The conversation also highlighted the compounded challenges that may arise from the increased demand for community services, driven by the above impacts on individuals and the wider community, while organisations struggle to meet these growing needs with reduced capacity. A major concern raised was the physical, mental, and financial toll on staff and volunteers. Participants emphasised that organisations heavily reliant on volunteers face additional pressure to manage limited resources, a surge in demand, and the challenges of training and onboarding new volunteers. Volunteers and staff are forced to make difficult decisions, balancing their responsibilities with their own family needs or safety concerns. This conflict of priorities—whether to focus on caregiving duties or work commitments—further impacts their capacity to work.

The psychological impacts of extreme weather events and natural hazards were also highlighted. Heightened anxiety, stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a pervasive sense of insecurity affect not only the broader community but also the staff and volunteers of community organisations. These pressures can strain workplace relationships, with high stress and tension increasing the potential for conflict within teams.

Loss of social connections and support systems, along with breakdown of physical infrastructure and its ripple effects, also emerged as key themes. Inadequate housing and its implications for health and wellbeing was another theme to emerge from the discussions. Additionally, the conversation explored the profound impact of climate change on the environment, particularly the harm to the land ('Country') and cultural heritage, leading to a loss of connection to place. Detailed information on these themes, sub-themes, and specific examples can be found in Appendix 2.

Part Two - Strengthening Climate Change and Disaster Resilience in Yarra Ranges

Following the impact mapping activity, workshop participants reflected on what actions they could take to prepare and strengthen organisational and system resilience. Using the scenario of an extended heatwave and bushfire, the group reflected on how their organisations and the wider sector could adapt to the reality of more frequent and intense extreme weather and identify resources and collaborative opportunities that might support efforts to strengthen climate change and disaster resilience. The focus was to clarify roles and responsibilities within their organisation and the broader community, including identifying gaps in service delivery.

A summary of key insights, barriers and challenges, and opportunities for action are presented under the themes of:

- Planning and preparedness
- Cross-sector collaboration – Coordination and planning
- Staff and volunteer capacity building
- Communication and information sharing
- Proactive community outreach

Planning and Preparedness

Participants emphasised the importance of proactive planning for disasters and natural hazards - creating organisational action plans and 'person-centred' and 'place-based' emergency plans. Participants agreed that organisations need to prioritise planning for extreme weather events rather than waiting to respond after a crisis. Some of the examples shared by the participants included the need for:

- Business continuity planning - identifying and implementing measures to minimise damage and enhance post-disaster response and recovery capacity. This included outlining necessary actions before and after an event, such as ensuring access to physical resources like 'technology suitable for emergency situations', 'generators', 'crank radios', 'batteries for solar systems', 'fuel storage' and 'refrigerated trucks and fridge trailers'. Additionally, the importance of having information on other services that possess these capabilities was also emphasised.
- Identifying communities and individuals at risk and how best to support and engage them
- Identifying safe and appropriate evacuation centres in the area
- Preparing ready-to-share information and advice for staff and clients
- Engaging in scenario planning for organisations, with constant reviewing and debriefing after events
- Participating in existing emergency management planning exercises by local government.

Cross-sector Collaboration – Coordination and Planning

Several participants emphasised the importance of collaborative planning and coordination across organisations and services to effectively respond to extreme weather events. The focus was on developing well-established communication hubs and networks to ensure that all community members are informed and connected during emergencies. Participants

highlighted the need for a shared understanding and collaborative approach among local government, emergency services, and community organisations.

Key actions identified to strengthen planning and coordination included:

- Establishing community hubs with information, Wi-Fi, and power, accessible to all members of the community
- Developing collaborative, cross-organisational teams that work together with emergency services to respond to disaster events
- Building networks for resource sharing and information exchange between peer agencies, such as local government and community organisations
- Engaging with critical infrastructure and service providers to assess risks and develop action plans to address interdependencies and infrastructure vulnerabilities.

Staff and Volunteer Capacity Building

There was a strong emphasis on understanding and building organisational capacity through staff and volunteer training to handle emergencies and provide frontline support. Some examples shared

by the group included:

- Training staff and volunteers for emergency support and conducting workshops in 'off-season'
- Improving awareness of available services and resources in an emergency
- Supporting staff to have household/individual Emergency Preparedness Plans.

Communication and Information Sharing

A central theme from the discussions was the need for clear, effective communication with the community during extreme weather events and disasters. Most discussions focused on methods of communication to ensure critical messaging reaches the wider community before and during such events. Key points included:

- Supporting regular communication with clients, providing referrals and connecting them to operational services and sites
- Ensuring communities fully understand emergency warnings
- Utilising a variety of communication channels, including social media (Facebook, Instagram) and traditional methods like posters in clubs and Country Fire Authority locations
- Filtering information to reduce the risk of misinformation

- Developing informational content 'targeting tourists, including international visitors who are unaware of the roads and have English as a second language'
- Utilising multilingual communication tools and resources to ensure information is accessible to the community in-language.

Proactive Community Outreach

Effective community outreach, engagement and proactive networking also emerged as a key theme from the workshop discussions. Participants acknowledged that by fostering connections and sharing information, organisations can better support individuals and communities in preparing for climate change and disasters. Key strategies identified by the group included:

- Helping clients prepare ahead of time for climate events
- Conducting proactive outreach to at-risk community members
- Ensuring adequate resources and funding continuity to integrate climate resilience into core operations and community engagement
- Focusing local outreach efforts on population groups that are at higher risk, such as older people and those in aged care facilities.

The participants identified resources and financial constraints as significant barriers to investing in emergency preparedness and strategically building climate resilience within their organisations and the wider community. Another key barrier was the failure to prioritise disaster preparedness, coupled with outdated or redundant organisational policies and procedures. Additional challenges included a lack of knowledge and understanding of the local context, country, and available community resources. Other obstacles highlighted were restrictive organisational policies, high staff turnover, and competing demands and responsibilities. Communication challenges also emerged as a critical issue, further complicating efforts to strengthen resilience and preparedness.

Conclusion

The workshop emphasised the urgent need for a comprehensive and proactive approach to building climate and disaster resilience in Yarra Ranges, particularly in the context of increasing extreme weather events and natural hazards such as severe storms and flash flooding, heatwaves and bushfires.

The discussions highlighted the critical importance of proactive planning, cross-sector collaboration, and capacity building in enhancing disaster resilience and preparedness. Participants emphasised the need for organisations to prioritise disaster planning, with a focus on creating tailored and place-based action plans. Collaborative efforts between local government, emergency services, community organisations, and service providers were considered essential to ensuring effective responses and mitigating the impacts of

climate change and disasters. Additionally, the importance of building staff and volunteer capacity through training and awareness was highlighted, ensuring they are equipped to support the community during disasters. Effective communication and proactive community outreach were also identified as key factors in ensuring that information reaches all individuals, especially vulnerable populations.

Participants agreed that a coordinated, proactive approach is essential in increasing resilience to climate change and disaster and ensuring that communities are well-prepared to face future climate challenges collectively.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Workshop Participants

1. Anchor Community Care Inc
2. CHAOS
3. Communities' Council on Ethnic Issues (CCOEI)
4. Dandenong Ranges Emergency Relief Service
5. Disaster Legal Help Victoria
6. EACH
7. Eastern Community Legal Centre
8. Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV)
9. Eastern Health
10. Federation of Community Legal Centres
11. Fernlea Community Care
12. Foodbank
13. Fire to Flourish
14. Healesville Living and Learning Centre
15. Inner Melbourne Community Legal
16. Inspiro
17. Mums of the Hills
18. North Eastern Public Health Unit (NEPHU)
19. Oonah Aboriginal Community Care
20. Permaculture Yarra Valley
21. Tecoma Uniting
22. Tenants Victoria
23. Red Cross

24. Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
25. Windermere
26. Women's Health East
27. Yarra Ranges Council
28. Yarra Ranges Emergency Relief Network

Appendix 2: Thematic Analysis – Impacts and Response

Category	Theme	Example
Impact on clients and wider community	Financial pressure	"Primary producers – impact on crops – long term > leads to price hikes, pressures on businesses"
	Housing	"Loss of homes – affordable housing crisis" "Homelessness – more vulnerable to smoke and heat"
	Health and wellbeing issues	"PTSD/anxiety" "Heightened anxiety – increase in unusual behaviour"
	Increase in demand for services and limited access	"Services closing down – continuation of service issues" "Services limited due to high risk • Social services • Schools • Childcare"
	Social connections and support systems	"Social connections being missed e.g. can't meet etc."

Category	Theme	Example
	Increase in family violence and other risk factors	"Exacerbation of discrimination– lack of cultural safety" "Increase in risk factors e.g. • AOD drinking to cope with heat • gambling"
	Infrastructure breakdown and its cascading impact on health, wellbeing, mobility, social connection	"Anger at authorities – anger at local services with less staff, more demand" "Perception Yarra Ranges not safe – knock on effect on tourism"
Impact on organisations	Adaptive role and conflicting priorities	"Conflicting demands e.g. staying near school vs. heading to work" "Activated volunteers/staff to support communities for emergency response"
	Reduction in services and operational challenges	"Transport - runs to Sunday timetable" "Higher risk locations" "Less people available due to travel limitations/personal health"

Category	Theme	Example
	Safety (personal and organisational)	"Is it safe to open" "Business delivery vs. personal safety" "Staff getting home if they're already at work • Do they get home safely or prioritise their safety and family"
	Negative impact on staff (physical, mental and financial)	"Stress and anxiety about whether systems will meet demand" "Leaders taking responsibility and emotional burden" "What about someone who puts their employment at risk if they don't go to work"
Impact on natural and build environment	Connection to place and cultural heritage	"Connection to place • Trust to live there" Harm to country – clean-up consult + engage local First Nations people
	Flora and fauna	"Animals (native, livestock, pets) on roads, other local places (dislocation)" "Biodiversity loss risk"

Category	Theme	Example
	Damage to infrastructure	"Contaminated water" "Smoke in buildings – filtration system" "Solar power generation is reduced due to smoke – impact"
	Buildings, homes and safety	"Unsuitable evacuation locations" "Homes • Fire safety • Renting • Knowledge"
Drivers of risk	Age, gender and other demographics	"Environment people live in • Rural vs. urban" "Educational background" "Family structure and make up – e.g. big families, lots of kids"
	Disadvantaged community/cohorts	"Existing trauma" "Hardly reached/under serviced community" "Culture and cultural responses to grief/trauma"
	Emergency management and preparedness	"Not having an emergency plan" "Organisational: lack of preparation for "new" disasters e.g. no generators, backup food – planning"

Category	Theme	Example
	Geographical location, isolation and connection	"Social capital (lack of connection)" "Live in high-risk area e.g. • High density bushland / limited access • Low-lying area • Urban heat island • Remote / inaccessible services"
	Knowledge, information and communication	"Understanding of environment and its risks" "Communication: language / not having tech literacy or access" "Inexperience with disaster" "New to the country → unfamiliar with the systems and services"
Barriers and challenges	Financial barriers and lack of resources	"Adequate supports for complex needs including health" "Funding - delays and uncertainty" "Financial resources to build emergency stockpile"

Category	Theme	Example
	Communication issues	"Information is not specific enough" "Foreign languages" "Unclear how to check without internet"
	Lack of knowledge	"Knowledge of who is doing what" "Not understanding local context and country"
	Lack of policy and disaster preparedness plan	"No organisational policies and emergency plans" "All disasters and events are different, and all individuals have separate needs" "Limitations of business continuity, policies and procedures and staff knowledge of such"
	Lack of transport and other essential infrastructure	"Roads being blocked, transport issues" "Power out" "Dangerous conditions to travel (no phone)" "Electric powered wheelchairs" "Are you on life support" "How do you keep cool."