

Women's Health In the North's Submission to Victorian Government's *Climate Change Green Paper*

Introduction

Thankyou for this opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Government's *Climate Change Green Paper*.

Women's Health In the North (WHIN) is a community organisation based in the northern region of Melbourne, an area that has one of the most diverse populations in Victoria as well as high socio-economic disadvantage. WHIN works with all levels of government and other community organisations to promote and improve the health and wellbeing of women by:

- Influencing policy makers, organisations and communities to recognise and respond to women's experience and concerns.
- Providing information and sharing knowledge that empowers women to know about and act on issues affecting their health.
- Advocating on behalf of women to drive social change and remove barriers.
- Providing leadership and innovation in the delivery of women's health programs and services across the northern region.

WHIN works within a framework that recognises that the health and wellbeing of each woman is determined not just by her state of physical health but by the social, cultural and economic factors that govern her life; these include poverty, childcare and carer responsibilities, single parenthood, low wages, intimate partner violence, sexual assault and healthy physical environments.

WHIN has 18 years experience in providing services to women in the region, with particular expertise in meeting the needs of women most marginalised by the health system who might generally be referred to as 'hard to reach' or 'at risk'.

WHIN's work is focused in four areas: climate change, violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and economic participation.

1. WHIN's Submission

WHIN agrees with the Victorian Premier Mr Brumby when he says that climate change is the defining challenge of our times.¹ WHIN, for the same reason, has included climate change as one of its four priority areas in its most recent strategic plan. WHIN recognises that climate change intersects with each of its priority areas and has specific and profound impacts on the lives of women.

WHIN's submission will therefore discuss a number of factors that increase women's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change: these factors include gendered roles, unequal access to wealth, power and privilege, and biological determinants. However, as well as highlighting the gendered impact of climate change, this submission will consider the capacity of women to adapt to and mitigate climate change.

¹ Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

2. Gender Matters in Climate Change

Gender inequality is a major factor contributing to the increased vulnerability of women and girls in disaster situations, such as Hurricanes Mitch and Katrina and flooding in South and East Asia, that are being increasingly linked to climate change.²

Globally, women are more vulnerable to the impacts of disasters due to different social roles and status.³ For example, recent catastrophic events show that women worldwide have been disproportionately affected by environmental disasters—up to 70 per cent of those killed in the 2004 Asian tsunami were women and another 70 per cent of those who died during the 2003 European heatwave were also women. Indeed, 85 per cent of people who die from climate-induced disasters are women.⁴ The heat wave in France in 2003 caused more than 15,000 deaths, mainly due to dehydration, hyperthermia and heat stroke. Sixty-four per cent of those who died were women.⁵ As environmental disasters increase because of climate change, women will be increasingly affected.

While there is belated recognition that women in developing nations are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, there is less acknowledgement that women in wealthy countries are also more susceptible or susceptible in ways different from men.

Despite this, many of the policies and reports addressing climate change, including Professor Ross Garnaut's *Final Report* and the *Victorian Climate Change Green Paper*, are gender blind.

Research that examines the gendered impacts of climate change has been overlooked at all levels and in all areas, including at federal, state and local government levels, by policy-makers and in academia.

When governments and think-tanks deliberate on strategies for combatting climate change, they'll very likely bypass one highly salient variable. This variable is that global warming's causes, effects, and solutions, are gendered.⁶

There has been some work into the gendered impact of climate change in Victoria at state level such as the *Victorian Government's Rural Women, Drought and Climate Change* initiative. However, the findings of this initiative appear not to have influenced the *Green Paper*.

International, national and Victorian policy shows that gender blind approaches are problematic. This is also the case for climate change. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) statement that asserts the need to respond adequately to gender inequality can be considered in the context of climate change:

... it is not enough simply to "add in" a gender component late in a given project's development. Research, interventions, health system reforms, health education, health outreach, and health policies and programs must consider gender from the beginning.⁷

Internationally, a number of bodies have expressed their concern that a gendered perspective is lacking in policies that address climate change. These include the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has pointed to the absence of a gendered perspective in the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* and other global and national policies and initiatives on climate change. The committee calls on States Parties to include gender equality as an overarching guiding principle in the UNFCCC agreement expected at the 15th Conference of Parties in Copenhagen.⁸

² 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women 2008, *Gender perspectives on climate change*, Issues paper, viewed 7 October 2009,

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/issuespapers/Gender%20and%20climate%20change%20paper%20final.pdf>

³ Women's Environmental Network 2007, *Women's Manifesto on Climate Change*, Women's Institute, viewed 16 September 2009, http://www.wen.org.uk/general_pages/reports/manifesto.pdf

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Poumadere, M, Mays, C, Le Mer, S & Blong, R cited in Hansson, Sven-Ove 2007, *Gender issues in climate adaptation*, FOI, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm.

⁶ Salleh, A 2008, *Is Australia's Climate Policy Gender Literate?*, Centre for Policy Development, viewed 29 September 2009, <http://cpd.org.au/article/is-australias-climate-policy-gender-literate>

⁷ WHO, *"What is gender mainstreaming?"*, World Health Organization, viewed 30 September 2009, <http://www.who.int/gender/mainstreaming/en/index.html>

⁸ gender cc 2009, *Statement of the CEDAW Committee on Gender and Climate Change*, New York, viewed 24 September 2009, http://www.gendercc.net/network-forum-news-and-debates/news-details/article/statement-of-the-cedaw-committee-on-gender-and-climate-change/83.html?no_cache=1

Climate change policy would be strengthened by a gender based analysis tool that could be applied to climate change legislation, policy, and programs and services to ensure that climate change policy is sensitive and responsive to gender. The application of a gender and diversity lens can also help to ensure that policies and programs are responsive to the needs of CALD women.

The Victorian Government Department of Human Services has developed a gender and diversity lens to identify:

- Hidden assumptions and values which may sustain inequality and contribute to discrimination.
- The possible consequences and impact of initiatives.
- Service gaps and research in areas which require further work.⁹

Recommendations

- Collect disaggregated data to increase knowledge of the gendered impact of climate change and to inform climate change planning and implementation, policy development, legislation, programs and services.
- Mandate a gender and diversity lens to climate change legislation, policy, programs and services at all levels of government and in public institutions, organisations and bodies.
- Mainstream gender into all levels of planning, policy, strategies and service delivery.
- Ensure equal representation of women at local, regional and national levels in all decision making around climate change.

3. Heatwaves

In this submission, Victoria's 2009 heatwave is used as an example to demonstrate the impact of climate change events on women and the urgent need for a gendered perspective of climate change.

Heatwaves killed more Australians during the twentieth century than any other natural hazard -- but few people are aware of the widespread dangers of heat-stress ... Heatwaves are silent, 'hidden' disasters' ... They are also the most underrated of the natural disasters but heat can kill and the elderly and marginalised are often most at risk.¹⁰

A report prepared for the Victorian Government assessing the impact of the 2009 heatwave, states that 'prolonged extremely high temperatures are a major hazard for Victorians that we must now expect and continue to prepare for in order to reduce harm'. In the last week of January, the subject of the aforementioned report, when Victoria endured almost a week of record-breaking heat, numbers of deaths increased in that week by more than 370.¹¹

While we do not know how many women died during Victoria's 2009 heatwave, because relevant data was not disaggregated by gender, the data does show that most of the 248 people were aged 75 years or older with 46 people aged between 65 and 74.¹² As women make up a greater proportion of the elderly, it seems reasonable to conclude that women were more likely to have perished in Victoria's heatwave than men.

Recommendations

- Conduct research into the gendered impact of heatwaves and incorporate into emergency and climate action planning.

⁹ Victorian Women's Health and Wellbeing Strategy Diversity Unit, 'Gender and Diversity Lens', Victorian Government Department of Human Services, viewed 20 May 2009, http://www.health.vic.gov.au/vwhp/downloads/gender_diversity_lens.pdf

¹⁰ Clement, N 2009, *Red Cross Urges Victorians and South Australians to take care in heatwave*, Australian Red Cross, viewed 23 September, <http://1.redcross.org.au/?fuseaction=NEWSROOM.archive&sub=544>

¹¹ The Public Health Branch, *January 2009 Heatwave in Victoria: an Assessment of Health Impacts 2009*, Department of Human Services, Melbourne, viewed 16 September 2009, http://www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefofficer/downloads/heat_impact_rpt.pdf

¹² Cooper, M 2009, 'Death toll soared during Victoria's heatwave', *The Age*, 6 April, viewed 16 September 2009, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/death-toll-soared-during-victorias-heatwave-20090406-9ubd.html>

- Close knowledge gaps through ongoing research into climate vulnerability and resilience.¹³

4. Ageing and Caring in a Time of Climate Change

The *Climate Change Green Paper* (now to be referred to as the *Green Paper*) points out that the elderly and people with disability will be among those most likely to suffer adverse health impacts as a result of climate change.¹⁴ As women are often the majority of elderly people, carers and volunteers, this section will consider the implications of this in the context of the *Green Paper*.

4.1 Elderly women

Women in Victoria typically live longer than men (84.3 years compared to 79.8 years). The proportion of women aged 60 years and over is growing, from 18.7 per cent in 2001 to 19.6 per cent in 2006. There are also more women than men aged 60 years and over (54.3 per cent) increasing to 67.7 per cent of the population for people aged 85 years and over. The number of Victorian women aged 80 years and over who live alone is 47,000. The proportion of overseas born women aged 80 years and over is 59.3 per cent. The total number of Victorian women living alone is close to 250,000, which is 50,000 more than men. Nineteen per cent of Victorian women live with a disability.¹⁵

These statistics show that a high proportion of Victoria's elderly population are women and that a large number of elderly women are from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

It is crucial then, that responses that consider the affects of heatwaves on the elderly, specifically examine impacts on older women.

4.2 Carers

In 2003, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Survey on Disability, Ageing and Carers* found that women accounted for 71 per cent of primary carers of older people and people with disabilities.

Those who provided care to people with a disability were more likely to be older and/or have a disability than those who did not provide care, 24 per cent of primary carers were aged 65 years and over, compared to 13 per cent of the total population.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, primary carers have a lower labour force participation rate (39 per cent) than people who are not carers (68 per cent).¹⁷

A Final Report to WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health states that women's health and wellbeing is at risk because women shoulder a double-burden of work, much of which is unpaid. The report asserts that women, already the 'shock absorbers' for families, economies and societies, are often called on in times of emergency to care for people, highlighting the need for them to be supported through resources, infrastructure and effective policies/programmes.¹⁸

¹³ Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Office of Women's Policy 2008, *Victorian Women's Policy Framework 2008–11*, Department of Planning and Community Development, Melbourne, viewed 16 September 2009,

[http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Women's+Policy+Framework+2008-11+WORD/\\$file/Womens+Policy+Framework+2008-11-k+word+for+web-km-09022009.doc](http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Women's+Policy+Framework+2008-11+WORD/$file/Womens+Policy+Framework+2008-11-k+word+for+web-km-09022009.doc)

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003, *Disability, ageing and carers, Australia*, cat. no. 4430.0, ABS, Canberra, viewed 16 September 2009, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4430.02003?OpenDocument>

¹⁷ Office for Women 2008, Office for Women's submission to the Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce, Office for Women, viewed 28 September 2009,

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ewr/payequity/subs/sub112.pdf>

¹⁸ Sen, G & Ostlin, P 2007, *Unequal, Unfair, Ineffective and Inefficient Gender Inequity in Health: Why it exists and how we can change it*, Final Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, Women and Gender Equity Knowledge Network, Karolinska Institutet, viewed 23 September 2009, pp. 16-22,

http://www.who.int/social_determinants/resources/csdh_media/wgekn_final_report_07.pdf

The Swedish Defence Research Agency concluded in its report *Gender issues in climate adaptation*, that the prevailing gendered division of labour, extreme weather events and other effects of climate change will place a particular burden on women:

Lack of adequate gender analysis can have the effect that 'planners depend on women assuming a central role in coping strategies, without taking into account the increased burden that this imposes on women'.¹⁹

4.3 Volunteers

A *regular volunteer* is someone who gives unpaid help at least once a fortnight for one or more organisations.²⁰ In 2006, 22 per cent of women were regular volunteers compared with 19 per cent of men. Women aged 35-44 years were the group most likely to be regular volunteers (32 per cent). For women, those employed part-time had the highest rates of regular volunteering (29 per cent), followed by those who were unemployed (25 per cent).²¹

During the 2009 South Australian heatwave, volunteers were asked to check on people considered to be at heightened risk of heatstroke and heat related illness. In Victoria, the Premier, Mr Brumby, urged communities to be "vigilant for their neighbours, family and friends and especially check on older, sick and frail people who may need help coping with the heat".²²

Volunteers and communities that care for each other are a crucial component of any response to disaster and emergency situations including heatwaves. However, it is important that policy and emergency responses take into account that women form the greater number of carers and volunteers, and that many may themselves be elderly or have a disability.

The *Green Paper* states that a decline in volunteering is hampering the capacity of emergency services to respond to climate change.²³ It is possible then, that this drop in volunteers could lead to greater dependence on those women not employed in full-time paid work to fill in some of the gaps left by reduced numbers of volunteers.

As extreme weather events increase it is likely the demands placed on women, whether as carers, volunteers or in their traditional roles, will grow. It is important then, that recognition of the contribution women make to the resilience of families and communities during times of emergency, be supported and incorporated into emergency planning.

Recommendations

- Plan for and target the health needs of Victoria's elderly population effectively and appropriately during events such as heatwaves.
- Acknowledge the contribution of women in emergency situations and incorporate into emergency and climate action planning.
- Recognise that a significant proportion of volunteers and carers are women whose age and/or disability may also put them at risk during emergency situations.
- Acknowledge contribution of carers and volunteers in emergency situations and incorporate into emergency and climate action planning.

¹⁹ Hansson, Sven-Ove 2007, *Gender issues in climate adaptation*, FOI, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm.

²⁰ Australian Bureau Statistics 2008, Australian Social Trends – Voluntary Work, ABS, Canberra, viewed 22 September 2009, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Chapter4102008>

²¹ *ibid*

²² Smith, B, Hunter, T & Millar, P 2009, 'Victoria readies for scorcher', *The Age*, January 27, viewed 23 September, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria-readies-for-week-of-scorchers-20090127-7qmr.html>

²³ Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

5. Women, Economic Participation and Climate Change

... efforts that fail to recognise the disproportionate impact of natural disasters on marginalised groups exacerbates their vulnerability'.²⁴

5.1 Employment

While elderly women are at greater risk than younger people during extreme climatic events such as heatwaves, women of all ages are more susceptible to negative impacts of climate change, and also experience particular impacts because of their gender. Gendered roles of caring tend to tie women to the home as well as limit economic participation which reduces their capacity to mitigate the costs and impacts of climate change.

In Australia in May 2008, the average total weekly earnings for *all* employees were \$702.30 for women and \$1,075.10 for men. These estimates produce a ratio of female to male earnings of 65.3 per cent, which equates to a gender pay gap of 34.7 per cent ... When only full-time employees are considered, the ratio increases to 80.5 per cent.²⁵

In 2008 in Victoria, women's average weekly earnings were \$1008 or 86.4 per cent of male earnings of \$1166. Women of all ages are more likely to be working under minimum employment conditions and be engaged in low paid, casual and part time work.²⁶ In 2004, Victorian women held 72 per cent of all part-time jobs, and 34 per cent of all full-time jobs.²⁷ Victoria has a six per cent unemployment rate for women ranging from 3.3 per cent in North-East Melbourne to 9.1 per cent in the Central Highlands-Wimmera.²⁸

In Australia, the definition for unemployment is: *those aged 15 years and over who were not employed for more than one hour during the reference period (the week before they were surveyed)*. Research conducted by the Australia Institute states that 'if those fairly strict criteria cannot be met the person may still be part of the *hidden unemployed*.' The same research also finds that women comprise up to 80 per cent of the hidden unemployed in key age groups and adds that lower incomes and broken working lives have serious financial impacts on women so that they retire with smaller superannuation balances.²⁹

The lack of financial security for many women of all ages makes them more vulnerable to the impact of climate change. For example, during times of prolonged high temperatures, women at home are much less likely to have access to air-conditioning than people employed in the workplace or to be able to afford the energy costs or purchase of adequate cooling such as fans, insulation and awnings. This situation is overlaid by more general concerns that the grid will not support the high demand for cooling during heatwaves with those living at home likely to be more affected if energy needs for cooling cannot be met.

²⁴ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 2009, *Human Rights and Climate Change*, viewed 1 October 2009, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/papers/hrandclimate_change.html#33

²⁵ Women in Australia 2009, 'Economic security and financial independence', Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, viewed September 28 2009, <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/general/womeninaustralia/2009/Pages/chapter3.aspx>

²⁶ Broderick, E 2009, 'Advancing women's rights and gender equality', Australian Human Rights Commission, viewed 28 September 2009, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/speeches/sex_discrim/2009/20090727_equality.html

²⁷ Office of Women's Policy 2008, *Victorian Women's Policy Framework 2008-11*, Department of Planning and Community Development, Melbourne, viewed 28 September 2009,

[http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Women's+Policy+Framework+2008-11+WORD/\\$file/Womens+Policy+Framework+2008-11-k+word+for+web-km-09022009.doc](http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Women's+Policy+Framework+2008-11+WORD/$file/Womens+Policy+Framework+2008-11-k+word+for+web-km-09022009.doc)

²⁸ Richardson, D 2009, *The impact of the recession on women*, Institute Paper No. 3, The Australia Institute, viewed 21 September 2009, <https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&pubid=668&act=display>

²⁹ *ibid*

5.2 Sole parents

In particular, adverse health impacts will be greatest among people on lower incomes, the elderly, people with disabilities and the sick. People who lack access to a good standard of housing are also likely to be at a disadvantage.³⁰

One of the most disadvantaged populations is sole parents whose income is 70 per cent of the income of coupled families. In Victoria, 166,000 sole parents are women compared to around 33,000 men.³¹

- The ABS Australian Social Trends Report 2007 states that one-parent families are at higher risk of disadvantage in income, housing, employment and social participation.'
- In 2003–2004, the weekly income of one-parent families with children under 15 years was 70 per cent of the income of coupled families with children this age. Half could not pay utilities bills on time (51 per cent compared to 20 per cent couples) with 8 per cent unable to heat their home compared to 2 per cent of partnered families.
- Lone parents with children under 15 years were most commonly renting their accommodation (64 per cent). Single-mother families are over-represented among users of homelessness services. In 2004–2005, 43 per cent of supported accommodation services involved families with children, with most of this figure made up of mothers fleeing domestic violence.³²

While 'current policy initiatives to support households to increase their energy efficiency are aimed at home owners, rental households are largely excluded.'³³ This arguably puts people, including a high proportion of women, already vulnerable to the social and economic impacts of climate change at increased health risk. The plight of people living in caravans must also be given urgent consideration.

Recommendations

- Provide additional investment to upgrade all public housing and ensure future public housing meets minimum standards.
- Mandate minimum standards for rental accommodation to provide adequate protection from the effects of climate change induced heatwaves.
- Ensure upgrades to existing public housing to provide adequate protection from climate change induced heatwaves.
- Support those on low incomes to meet the rising costs of energy and water.

5.3 Rural women

Rural women play a significant role in communities affected by drought and ongoing climate change. In these circumstances women in rural communities take on critical roles spanning

³⁰ Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

³¹ Office of Women's Policy 2008, *Victorian Women's Policy Framework 2008–11*, Department of Planning and Community Development, Melbourne, viewed 21 September 2009, [http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Women's+Policy+Framework+2008-11+WORD/\\$file/Womens+Policy+Framework+2008-11-k+word+for+web-km-09022009.doc](http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Women's+Policy+Framework+2008-11+WORD/$file/Womens+Policy+Framework+2008-11-k+word+for+web-km-09022009.doc)

³² Crawley, S 2008, Child support CLE target audience characteristics, Victoria Legal Aid, Melbourne.

³³ Rowe, R & Thomas, A 2008, *Climate Change Adaptation: A Framework for Local Action*, The McCaughey Centre, VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, The University of Melbourne.

family, business and the community, over and above the already heavy demands made on them.³⁴

Many regional areas in Victoria have already experienced sustained drought and more recently, catastrophic bushfires. The *Green Paper's* projections for the impact of climate change on regional areas include decreased production caused by drought, increased bushfire risk, loss of jobs in agriculture and manufacturing, erosion and extreme temperatures.³⁵

... there is limited health data on farm women. Prior to 1996 only one person per marriage was recorded as a farmer in the Australian census. This has made determining female farm health very difficult, as distinct from other rural people.³⁶

While drought conditions have led to increased levels of depression and anxiety for farmers, their families and the whole community,³⁷ the impact on women in these communities while less visible and different from men, is significant. Women in rural communities buffer families during times of social and financial hardship both emotionally and by seeking work outside the home or undertaking more work on the farm itself.

The tyranny of distance, isolation, lack of transport, increased availability of firearms, financial insecurity, fears about confidentiality and community attitudes and a lack of services³⁸ also put women in rural communities at an increased risk of domestic violence.

Women in these communities are also often socially isolated, have poor access to transport and communications as well as limited access to health services including mental health services.

5.4 Transport

Many women also lack transport or transport options and so are unable to escape to air-conditioned shopping centres, libraries or other public places. This is particularly the case for women living in rural and regional areas and women living on suburban fringes where there is little in the way of transport infrastructure. Women who have to walk to reach transport or places that offer some reprieve from the heat are unlikely to risk exposing themselves or their children to extreme temperatures.

Recommendations

- Ensure rural women are equally represented in planning and decision making around climate change.
- Increase research on the impact of climate change on women in rural regions.
- Increase research into the links between climate change-induced disasters and increases in domestic violence.
- Increase domestic violence, health and child-care services for women in rural communities.
- Improve transport infrastructure and provide transport options for isolated women.

6. Women's Health and Wellbeing and Climate Change

Sociological factors are rarely considered in the climate change dialogue.³⁹

³⁴ Rural women, drought and climate change, viewed 29 September 2009, [http://www.ruralwomen.vic.gov.au/Web15/rwn/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Fact+Sheet+text+updated/\\$file/Fact+Sheet+Rural+Women+Drought+and+Climate+Change++Text+only+version-Mar08.doc](http://www.ruralwomen.vic.gov.au/Web15/rwn/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Fact+Sheet+text+updated/$file/Fact+Sheet+Rural+Women+Drought+and+Climate+Change++Text+only+version-Mar08.doc)

³⁵ Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

³⁶ Brumby et al 2006, cited in Rowe, R & Thomas, A 2008, *Climate Change Adaptation: A Framework for Local Action*, The McCaughey Centre, VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, The University of Melbourne.

³⁷ Rowe, R & Thomas, A 2008, *Climate Change Adaptation: A Framework for Local Action*, The McCaughey Centre, VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, The University of Melbourne.

³⁸ Tually S et al 2008, *Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness*, Flinders Institute for Housing, Urban and Regional Research, viewed 29 September 2009, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/synthesis_report08/Documents/synthesis_report2008.pdf

In responding to climate change, governments have traditionally approached it as an ecological problem or more recently, as an economic one. To date the social and human rights implications of climate change have received little attention.⁴⁰

Much of the focus of climate change research has been on the technological aspects or the physical impacts of climate change. While the *Green Paper* does acknowledge the impact of climate change on mental health, it states the social impact is not fully known.⁴¹ It is though, widely accepted that climate change will exacerbate existing inequities⁴² and equally well documented that gender inequality and gendered roles already put women's mental health at increased risk.

A United Kingdom study mapping knowledge and gaps on gender and climate change, noted that the social positioning of women means they are often expected to take on supportive and reproductive roles that are centred around the home and local community rather than the public sphere.⁴³

Rural women are a good example of the way women provide support to families and communities during difficult times such as drought. Women in these communities are important to building the resilience needed to cope with the emotional stressors associated with climate change. However, if women are to continue to meet these needs and preserve their own resilience, they will need to be responded to, supported and acknowledged.

Recommendations

- Increase research to better understand the mental health impacts of climate change on women
- Support and recognise women's contribution to family and community during times of crisis.
- Adopt a social determinants approach to climate change that recognises the impact of economic, cultural and environmental factors on women's lives.

6.1 Violence against Women and Climate Change

The impact of domestic violence on the health and wellbeing of women is well documented. In 2004, VicHealth research found that intimate partner violence was the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in women aged 15 to 44.⁴⁴

There is evidence that women and girls are more likely to become victims of domestic and sexual violence after a disaster, particularly when families have been displaced and are living in over-crowded emergency or transitional housing.⁴⁵ This is supported by research conducted in communities affected by Hurricane Katrina that showed high rates of depression and domestic violence.⁴⁶

A report written by the Northern Integrated Family Violence Partnerships following the 2009 Victorian bushfires noted:

³⁹ Salleh, A 2008, *Is Australia's Climate Policy Gender Literate?*, Centre for Policy Development, viewed 29 September 2009, <http://cpd.org.au/article/is-australias-climate-policy-gender-literate>

⁴⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission 2008, Human Rights and Climate Change Background Paper, viewed 29 September 2009, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/papers/index.html>

⁴¹ Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

⁴² Australian Human Rights Commission 2008, Human Rights and Climate Change Background Paper, viewed 29 September 2009, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/papers/index.html>

⁴³ Brody, A et al 2008, Gender and climate change: mapping the linkages, Bridge Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK, viewed 5 October 2009, http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/Climate_Change_DFID.pdf

⁴⁴ VicHealth 2004, *The health costs of violence: measuring the burden of disease caused by domestic violence*, VicHealth, Carlton.

⁴⁵ 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women 2008, *Gender perspectives on climate change*, Issues paper, viewed 16 September 2009, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/issuespapers/Gender%20and%20Climate%20change%20paper%20final.pdf>

⁴⁶ Fritze, J et al 2008, 'Hope, despair and transformation: Climate change and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing', *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, viewed 6 October 2009, <http://www.ijmhs.com/content/2/1/13>

Funded family violence agencies quickly began to report their concerns about the toll of the fires on relationships, how women and men were experiencing the trauma impact differently and the possible co-occurrence of family violence.⁴⁷

Recommendations

- Fund research into increases in and patterns of domestic violence following disasters such as bushfires.
- Plan for and incorporate strategies in emergency planning to address increases in domestic violence following disaster events.
- Increase the number and availability of services to women immediately following disaster events.

6.2 Biology and Climate Change

There are indications that the health impacts of climate change can differ between women and men for biological reasons.⁴⁸ Statistics cited earlier in this submission show women die in greater numbers than men during both extreme weather conditions as well as in disaster and emergency situations. This accords with research that shows 'there are indications that biological differences make women less able to tolerate heat stress'.⁴⁹

The 2009 dust-storms that swept across many Australian states raised concerns that people with respiratory problems including asthma would experience increased breathing difficulties. Indeed health authorities were warning people with respiratory illness to stay indoors. The *National Women's Health Policy Consultation Discussion Paper 2009*, states that asthma is the leading cause of burden of disease in the 0–14 age group for both females and males, but remains the fourth highest cause for women aged 15–44 (dropping out of the top 10 for males). Asthma is also listed (along with bronchitis and emphysema) as one of the leading causes of female deaths in 2006. Women in rural areas are also identified as having higher rates of asthma than the national average.⁵⁰

The *Green Paper* states that in order to adapt to the unavoidable impact of climate change the State [Victoria] will have to change the way it delivers health services.⁵¹ However in order to target health services appropriately, research needs to be conducted into the gendered impacts of climate change on women in order to identify, address, mitigate and target the risks it poses to women's health and wellbeing.

Recommendation

- Research the effect of climate change on women's health and wellbeing.

7. Bushfire and Disaster

Victoria must face up to the prospect that it has a higher risk of suffering bushfire fatalities than anywhere in the world.⁵²

⁴⁷ Lancaster, C 2009, *A note on Bushfire/Family Violence intersections post February 7th 2009 bushfires*, Counselling Support Alliance and Women's Health In the North (WHIN), Northern Family Violence Integrated Partnerships.

⁴⁸ Hansson, Sven-Ove 2007, *Gender issues in climate adaptation*, FOI, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm.

⁴⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁰ New National Women's Health Policy Consultation Discussion Paper 2009, Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government, viewed 5 October 2009,

[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/D653037D835FC1C5CA257576007CF150/\\$File/cons-dis-paper2009.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/D653037D835FC1C5CA257576007CF150/$File/cons-dis-paper2009.pdf)

⁵¹ Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

⁵² Cooke, D 2009, 'Victoria has world's highest bushfire death risk: Teague', *The Age*, 1 October, viewed 5 October 2009, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria-has-worlds-highest-bushfire-death-risk-teague-20090930-gcrj.html>

The *Green Paper* predicts that Victoria, in line with the rest of the world, will experience more extreme weather events and greater fire risks.⁵³ These predictions are confirmed by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The predicted climate change impacts for Australia include increases in the intensity and frequency of heatwaves, fires, floods, landslides, droughts and storm surges.⁵⁴

... the February 2009 bushfires show that a large scale event also has wide ranging social and economic impacts that need to be considered. These include loss of life, social dislocation, dispersal of local populations, the destruction of entire communities, disruption to industries and economic activity, and widespread health effects, especially in relation to mental health.⁵⁵

Social impacts on women include an increased incidence of domestic violence and anecdotal evidence that the demands made on women increase during and following disasters. The care and support of others in times of crisis is an additional responsibility for women who are often already managing double-burdens of paid and unpaid work. The work performed by women during disasters must be acknowledged in order to prevent existing inequities being exacerbated.

Recommendations

- Conduct further research into increased levels of domestic violence against women following disaster
- Apply a gender and diversity lens to disaster planning

8. Women, Leadership and Climate Change

Gender equality is essential to the successful initiation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate change policies.⁵⁶ The Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon, has also highlighted the importance of giving women a greater say in climate change:

We must do more to give greater say to women in addressing the climate challenge ... Women should be seen not as victims but as agents of progress ... With their skills, perspectives and experiences, women are already responding to the impacts of climate change. It is time to involve them as equal partners. When we do, our world as a whole will benefit.⁵⁷

Women have been under-represented at all levels and in all areas of decision making around climate change. The neglect of gendered perspectives in policies and strategies designed to deal with climate change must be addressed by equal representation of women in all aspects of climate change planning. Women are not just helpless victims of climate change – they are powerful agents of change and their leadership is critical.⁵⁸

Equal representation will ensure that approaches to the problem of climate change are not developed from one gender perspective only. Involving women will also lead to more gender-sensitive planning that will consider gendered roles, the impact of climate change induced disaster on women, women's livelihoods and vulnerabilities, and the contribution women are already making to adaptation and mitigation.

The *Women's Manifesto on Climate Change* is clear about the need for women to be included in climate change planning:

⁵³ ibid

⁵⁴ InterGovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (AR4), IPCC, viewed 5 October 2009, <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar4-wg2-chapter11.pdf>

⁵⁵ Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

⁵⁶gender cc 2009, *Statement of the CEDAW Committee on Gender and Climate Change*, New York, viewed 5 October 2009, http://www.gendercc.net/network/forum-news-and-debates/news-details/article/statement-of-the-cedaw-committee-on-gender-and-climate-change/83.html?no_cache=1

⁵⁷ Ki-Moon, B 2009, United Nations, Office of the Spokesperson, Latest Statements, UN, viewed 5 October 2009, <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=4101>

⁵⁸ gender cc 2009, *Statement of the CEDAW Committee on Gender and Climate Change*, New York, viewed 5 October 2009, http://www.gendercc.net/network/forum-news-and-debates/news-details/article/statement-of-the-cedaw-committee-on-gender-and-climate-change/83.html?no_cache=1

Government action must reflect the views of women as both a powerful positive force in tackling climate change and negatively affected by it.⁵⁹

Recommendation

- Equal representation at all levels and in all areas where decisions on climate change are made.

9. Women, Climate Change, Adaptation and Mitigation

Efforts to reduce the impact of climate change focus both on mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation seeks to reduce the level of greenhouse gas being emitted, while adaptation seeks to increase our ability to moderate, cope with and take advantage of the consequences. Adaptation recognises that some level of impact is inevitable and hence a response strategy will be required to minimise the impacts.⁶⁰

The World Health Organisation (WHO) contends that the ability to adjust to climate change depends on certain factors:

The main determinants of a community's adaptive capacity are: economic wealth, technology, information and skills, infrastructure, institutions, and equity.⁶¹

The Victorian Government lists adaptation as one of its climate change goals, saying the government will enable communities to adapt to a changing climate, and work in partnership with Victorians to support them to respond effectively to climate change and as well as ensure vulnerable communities are not further disadvantaged by its impacts.⁶² An example of such impacts are possible increase in utility costs—one forecast is that Victoria's average household gas and power bill would jump by about \$7.00 per week, under the Emissions Trading Scheme.⁶³

While women have an enormous contribution to make to adaptation, it is likely they will be heavily impacted by the shift to a low carbon economy. This impact is explained thus:

Women have, on average, lower income and smaller economic resources than men. This applies in particular to single and widowed women. Therefore, it is predominantly women (and in particular single women) who will be disadvantaged if expensive adaptation measures are available only to those who can pay for them ... Gender-based and economic disadvantage tend to be highly integrated and mutually reinforcing.⁶⁴

While WHIN supports the *Green Paper's* call for greater energy efficiency this will not in itself be enough to address the needs of people on low incomes. Support must also subsidise the cost of carbon pricing for low income households if they are to avoid financial stress that may lead them to reduce energy and water consumption to levels that put individuals and families at risk of illness and disease.

As well as an awareness of the burden a carbon price may place on many women, adaptation must not just focus on individual behaviour change when systemic change and changes to industrial and agricultural practice is urgently required. In order for the Government to meet its identified goal of 'shared responsibility'⁶⁵ it must not penalise those who can least afford it.

A report to the Swedish Environment Council examining gender equality and sustainable development stated:

⁵⁹ Women's Environmental Network 2007, *Women's Manifesto on Climate Change*, viewed 5 October 2009, http://www.wen.org.uk/general_pages/reports/manifesto.pdf

⁶⁰ Rowe, R & Thomas, A 2008, *Climate Change Adaptation: A Framework for Local Action*, The McCaughey Centre, VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, The University of Melbourne.

⁶¹ World Health Organization, *Human health and climate change*, WHO, viewed 5 October 2009, <http://www.who.int/globalchange/climate/summary/en/index10.html>

⁶² Victorian Government Department of Premier 2009, *Climate Change Green Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

⁶³ *Vic facing largest electricity price hike under ETS* 2009, [Radio program], ABC News, 6 October, viewed 6 October, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/10/06/2705686.htm?section=business>

⁶⁴ Hansson, Sven-Ove 2007, *Gender issues in climate adaptation*, FOI, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm.

⁶⁵ *ibid*

What we know about the extent to which women globally live in a more sustainable way than men, leave a smaller ecological footprint and cause less climate damage.⁶⁶

While women are disproportionately affected by climate change there is evidence to show that women are enthusiastic to adapt and make changes in their own lives as well as encourage their families and communities to lessen their carbon footprint:

Women are key to adapting and mitigating climate change. Women ... have a key role in tackling climate change as consumers, educators and 'change agents' in our homes, encouraging the adoption of lower carbon lifestyles and passing on green values to the next generation.⁶⁷

Recommendations

- Ensure adaptation does not penalise disadvantaged women.
- Recognise and support the role of women in encouraging families and communities in adaptation and mitigation.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, WHIN's submission to the Victorian Government's *Climate Change Green Paper*, raises concerns that women are under-represented in climate change decision making and that a gendered perspective has so far been absent in climate change policy. WHIN is also concerned that failure to take gender into consideration has led to policies that ignore or overlook women, which in turn exacerbates existing inequities. Furthermore, the contribution made by women in supporting families and building resilient communities must be considered in climate change planning, implementation and program delivery, so that women's contributions can be recognised, supported and acknowledged at every level. Not to do so, puts at risk the resilience communities will need if they are to meet the challenges of climate change. The Victorian Government has an opportunity to lead the way in national and international arenas, by mandating a gendered perspective at all levels of climate change planning, decision-making and implementation.

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⁶⁶ Johnsson-Latham, G 2007, *A study on gender equality as a prerequisite for sustainable development*, viewed 6 October 2009, http://www.genderandenvironment.org/admin/admin_biblioteca/documentos/rapport_engelska.pdf

⁶⁷ Women's Environmental Network 2007, *Women's Manifesto on Climate Change*, viewed 5 October 2009, http://www.wen.org.uk/general_pages/reports/manifesto.pdf