

27TH FEBRUARY 2024 HEATSAFE FRANKSTON COMMUNITY EVENT

REPORT by Alison Cooke

INTRODUCTION

I have authored this report as a response to the Questions On Notice read out 11th December 2023 where I requested the support of Frankston City Council (FCC) for a HeatSafe event in February. These kinds of events connect people and let them know that they are not alone in their concern or worry. I want to thank everyone in Council for their support, specifically Cr Claire Harvey, Cr Brad Hill, Cr Sue Baker, Veronica, Mary-Kate, Matthew, and the wonderful women at the Library. I have learned a lot and met a number of like-minded locals.

On Tuesday 27th February 2024, Sweltering Cities and Co-Power supported Frankston local community advocate Alison Cooke's "HeatSafe Frankston" event. The event focused on how increasing temperatures and frequency of heat waves impact on what (and how) our Frankston community does every day, and on the built and natural assets the community loves and fosters.

The event brought together community leaders, medical professionals, local council, and environmental advocates to talk about what the ingredients are to build a "heat-safe" community. It was a hot night and although the air-conditioning worked, it did get stuffy. The Climate Council had just released its new interactive heat-map tool of Australia – plug in your postcode and find out the projection of hot days by 2050 and 2090 under three climate pollution reduction scenarios: no action, existing action, and necessary action [Climate Heat Map of Australia | Climate Council](#).

This report outlines the recommendations generated from the event. It is overwhelmingly evident that our community wants to be heard. We want to work with Council to hold more of these events to collect and channel our ideas; we want these ideas and concerns to be responded to and acted upon in a timely manner, and with regular communication to know what is going on. In and of themselves, these types of events are positive for the community's mental health among climate anxiety in a cost-of-living crisis, and the number of concerned people who participated reflects on the current state in the Frankston City Council community and neighbours.

CONTEXT

It's crucial that communities build community and environmental resilience to heatwaves while working to reduce emissions from transport and energy consumption. This must be done in a way that protects and increases our natural carbon sinks, our tree canopy, and stands of mature trees and habitat. Communities must be able to call on their local government to give them the support they need and work together on solutions that benefit the whole community. It is critical to start engaging as soon as possible, as some solutions important to a community's health and functioning, may have solutions that are not simple to implement in a way that matters. For example, some solutions may not be so obvious or require the influencing of other layers of government for support / funding.

Local governments have in many cases, taken their cue from concerned residents to act on climate change, with state and federal governments only stepping up to make stronger emission reduction commitments recently. Attention is now being turned to the equally urgent task of climate adaptation, and of working to protect people and places from various climate harms. Councils know that they cannot do this work on their own: partnership with engaged, motivated, and

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well-networked community groups form a vital piece of the puzzle and certainly adds momentum. It is great to see a Council member reaching out, stepping up, and making things happen in Frankston.

As it happens, submissions for the [Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience](#) have opened. Their Committee has been tasked to inquire into the main risks facing Victoria's built environment and infrastructure from climate change and the impact these will have on the people of Victoria. This includes how the Government is preparing for these impacts, the barriers in upgrading infrastructure to become more resilient to the impacts, and the preparedness for future climate disaster events. The content and attendees of the Community HeatSafe event are valuable input to any submission made by VIC communities and councils.

The Event

Cr Brad Hill, CEO SECCA Helen Steel, CEO Peninsula Leisure Board, Peninsula Voice and SEEN members were among the approximately forty locals, community advocates and leaders in the room. They listened to three speakers and participated in a forty-five-minute Community Resilience Mapping Exercise.

Alison Cooke opened the meeting and set the scene by stating some truths and issues that the community faces such as global scientists continue to tell us that our climate has changed because of fossil fuel use – the major effect being increasing temperatures and more prolonged heatwaves. We see and feel it now and new coal and gas mining only worsens the cascading climate impact. Australia had almost 50 cities being the hottest in the world on one day recently. Global terrestrial and marine heatwave records are tumbling all over the world. 2023 was the hottest year on the planet – ever. Our 2-Party System of 'Yes and No' impedes the creation of the good policies which we desperately need to drive down emissions and adapt to the climate reality that we the community are left to face alone if the policies fail. We know that FCC area does not have [great canopy coverage, and has problems with urban heat islands](#). We know that building new houses that suit our climate and retrofitting the old is vital, so our Planning laws need to be updated and enforced strongly.

Sophie Emdur of Sweltering Cities, a national health NGO based in Melbourne, spoke about their work with communities in Australia's hottest suburbs, campaigning and advocating for more liveable, equitable and sustainable cities. Sweltering Cities amplifies the voices of suburban communities that are experiencing debilitating heat in increasingly hotter summers. They organise campaigns and advocate to representatives, to put the voices of the people most affected by the climate crisis in our cities front and centre in media coverage of extreme heat.

Claire Harvey spoke about her passion for action on climate change. waste reduction and moving toward models of a circular economy. She also spoke of her desire to add diversity to our housing supply and her support for modes of travel and transport that allow locals to become less car dependent. Claire is currently a Frankston City Council delegate to the South-East Councils Climate Change Alliance, Peninsula Leisure Pty Ltd Board and Housing Advisory Committee, amongst others. She spoke to the current actions in the FCC's Climate Change Strategy (adopted by Council last year) that aims to deliver 57 actions over seven years through to 2030 including:

- supporting community programs focused on building emergency preparedness and resilience to the impacts of climate change, particularly with residents most at risk.

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- supporting community programs to connect people, increase their knowledge of the climate emergence and provide skills for effective advocacy and action.

Dr Genevieve Cowan spoke about her advocacy and outlined the effects of heatwaves on people and pets. She noted that extreme heat kills more Australians than any other climate disaster for some key reasons – one is that most of our buildings are not designed or built for extreme heat in Australia. Cities are particularly hot because of the built environment including concrete, glass and bitumen and do not have enough shaded paths etc. Dr Genevieve is a specialist public health physician with a background in public health policy and health protection, including environmental health. She volunteers in climate and health advocacy for Doctors for the Environment Australia and is Convenor of their Research, Education and Advocacy Committee. She loves to see communities getting involved in managing their health and especially in climate action and resilience. This is their fact sheet ‘How Climate Change affects your health’ <https://dea.org.au/how-climate-change-affects-your-health-the-facts/>. Further fact sheets are available on <https://dea.org.au/publications/fact-sheets/>.

Community Resilience Mapping

The rest of the event was a Community Heat sensitivity mapping exercise led by Friends of the Earth - Act on Climates’ Aleesha Hanczakowski and Vicky Ellmore. They are the collective’s co-community organisers and were assisted by collective members, Molly, Miriam, and Marine.

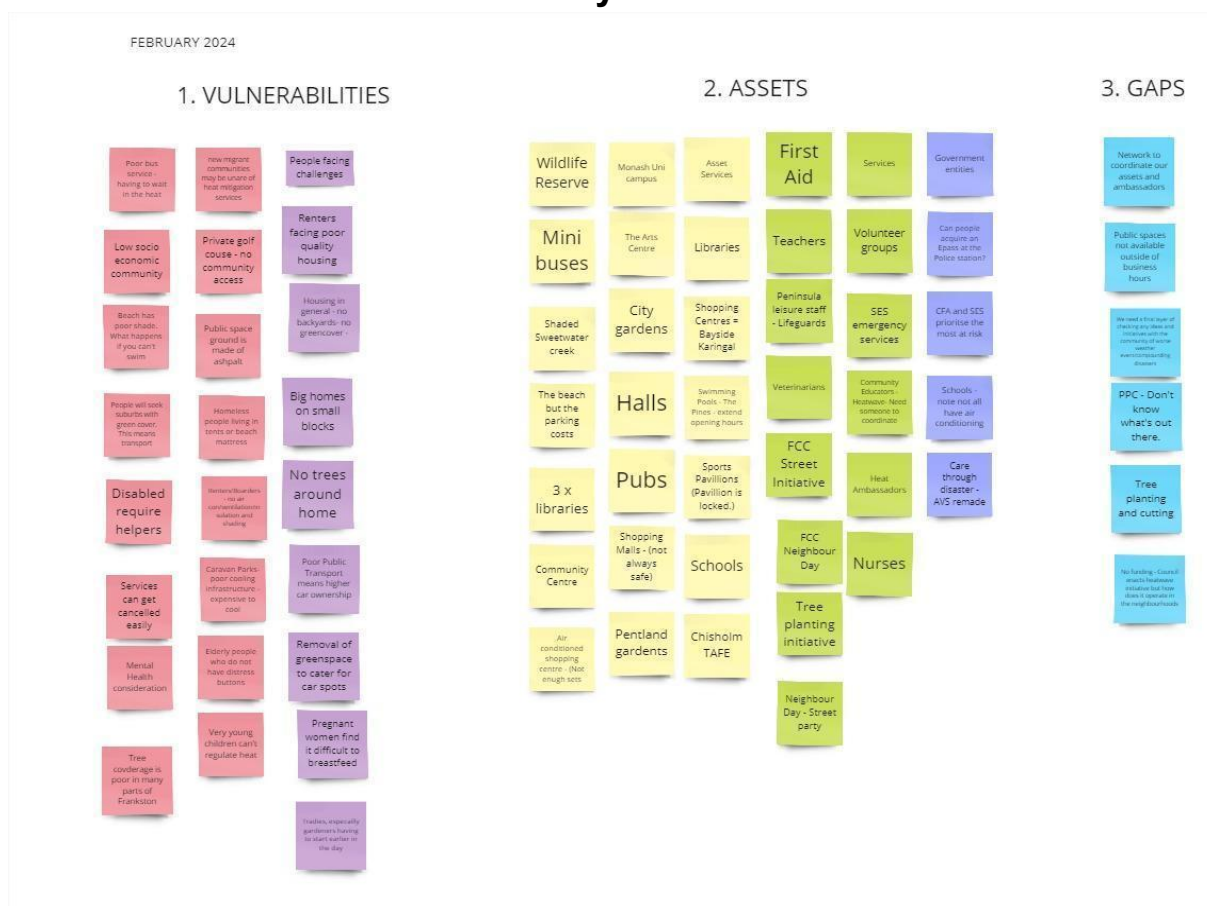
Act On Climate is the climate justice collective of Friends of the Earth Melbourne. They are a grassroots group for environmental and social justice focused on ensuring community-led climate adaptation in Victoria. This is facilitated through local understanding of impacts and community visioning of what local resilience looks like and through the Frontline Climate Alliance Vic, enable and communicate the sharing of knowledge and resources across VIC communities. They are demanding that the Government adequately and continuously fund community-led climate adaptation, and are assisting with submissions to the [Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience](#).

The Community Mapping activity brainstormed strategies for keeping the local community safe during heatwaves specifically. This process provided an exciting and engaging way to identify Heatwave related gaps and opportunities based on their identification of the communities’ vulnerabilities and existing assets. Events such as this showed the eagerness in the community to start planning the climate adaptation initiatives required to create / build resilience to climate impacts. They also demonstrated their keen desire to be involved and work with Council and other community groups to achieve our common agreed goals.

The participants totally engaged in the brainstorming and feedback process and did identify areas for action/follow-up in climate adaptation, particularly efforts to identify and better support the more vulnerable members of our communities (e.g. renters, the elderly, those with disability or living with chronic health conditions). They could have kept going they were so engaged but time had to be called on the short, jam-packed session. The diagram below graphically represents the process leading to the identified gaps/actions. Some are actionable now, but some need further fleshing out.

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In summary the “gaps” or identified actions are in the Gaps column on the right of the diagram.. They form the basis of several recommendations for action because they show how much the community worries, what they are worried about, what inaction they see, and how they don't feel connected/heard or communicated with.

- A network to coordinate our assets and ambassadors and communicate in preparation for or response to disasters.
- Public spaces are not currently available outside of office hours (this is a missed opportunity to utilise infrastructure such as air-conditioned facilities for heat relief)
- 3PCC- Don't know what's out there.
- No funding: council enacts heatwave initiatives but how does it operate in the neighbourhoods?
- Tree planting and cutting down.

It was also raised that:

- Any ideas, initiatives and plans in the FCC area must consider an assessment of the impacts and risk of heat to its objectives and implementation, especially compounding disasters of heatwave plus other extreme weather events occurring simultaneously.
- That value must be placed on our mature trees as key assets, both as habitat and shade. They must be retained, and their health monitored, in conjunction with new plantings.

EVENT FEEDBACK

As part of closing the event, participants were asked to provide feedback The analysis shows that the community want more of these events to collect and channel their ideas, and for them to be owned and actioned. The feedback on the event is below and shows overwhelmingly that the

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participants want the event to both be held again and extend the time allowed. There is demand to continue to research and resolve the issues and concerns raised, either at a community mapping continuation event or directly with Council or appropriate Community Owner(s). It shows the community energy to know who to collaborate with to gain momentum in community climate adaptation and resilience.

1. Did you find the meeting useful? – On a scale of 1-10, 10s and one 9 were circled.
2. Should we hold another session and why?
 - a. Yes Maybe in another area of Frankston Council (Frankston North, Carrum Downs).
 - b. Yes.
 - c. Yes Great meeting – helping with community is so important for health.
 - d. Yes For community education, empowerment and strengthening.
 - e. Yes To build on the ideas and fill the “gaps.”
 - f. Yes please! An excellent community building forum.
 - g. Yes.
 - h. Yes – to build connections, knowledge, and momentum.
3. What could we have done better?
 - a. Nothing – very well run.
 - b. A less full agenda so that it is less rushed but otherwise great!
 - c. It was great.
 - d. Great engagement activity.
 - e. Great activity – would be good to connect people to others in their suburb from the group (opt-in).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

For all involved, the event was an incredible opportunity for community advocates and leaders, and council to come together and share insights into how we (the community) keep ourselves and our community safe and healthy during heatwaves and on hot days. Everyone heard and shared what more could be done to heatproof Frankston City Council and neighbours. It is a great example of council working to support its residents (the community champions), and various individuals and groups collaborating toward shared goals.

These are the recommendations created from the event community mapping, the event feedback and other relevant news in the media locally, across the state, nationally and globally. There have been heatwave days - and nights! They are in no particular order but are all important to the climate adaption required, and community physical and mental health.

1. The community is asking for the creation of a Community Climate Change Heatwave Group to advise Council, similar to what other councils are already doing, such as the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.
2. There was an overwhelming call for more heatwave resilience events to collect and channel our ideas, and to see those ideas being responded to by Council. We recommend that Frankston council support more events like this in the future and assign all identified community concerns to an appropriate person for resolution.
3. We recommend that there is a regular, formal mechanism to track progress of assigned actions and escalate actions that are not progressing (i.e. being resolved or moving off the program to

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run as a defined project). A mechanism to measure if the results of actions taken are making a difference should also be adopted.

4. The fact that public spaces are not available outside of office hours had strong support as an identified gap. As a first step, we recommend that Frankston Library is open until 10pm during heatwaves. This will go a long way to protecting community members from the health effects of heat.
5. We have recently sweltered through hot nights as well as hot days so alternatives need to be identified to provide a means for people to reach them safely day or night, have use of facilities like charging devices, and can return home safely. The homeless need consideration here as well. As Heatwave Emergency procedures and communication currently sit with Council, we recommend that the lead assigned be more visible, and could contact the event participants as an initial communication and consultation if required.
6. Although not specifically identified, community communication needs to be strengthened. It appears in the gaps “3PCC - Don’t know what’s out there” and “council enacts heatwave initiatives but how does it operate in the neighbourhoods?”. We suggest that current community engagement processes with FCC on strategies and plans, be changed to opt-out rather than opt-in as one solution to improve the community’s feeling about level of engagement. Another opportunity could be regular publication of all active community engagements and their feedback closure dates, in an existing FCC newsletter (or similar).
7. There is major concern about the mature trees that are being lopped and removed around the Council area, and that new plantings are with immature plants that take years to grow. The removal of mature street trees is leaving large areas of suburban streets without shade and hotter as the ever-present heat island effect increases without the tree(s). The community would like to retain and augment its natural habitat by replacement with more mature trees in conjunction with seedlings and saplings. These latter two take many years to grow into shade and replace habitat. Further action is needed to stop the removal of mature trees and have more consultation with the community or at least the neighbours when a mature tree is planned to be removed.
8. We would like to request FCC put a submission to the [Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience](#) based on the output and recommendations from the HeatSafe Frankston Community Event. We think it is important that FCC outline the main risks facing our built environment and infrastructure from climate change, and the impact these will have on the people of Frankston City Council and neighbours. Detail on how the community is preparing for these impacts, the barriers in upgrading infrastructure to become more resilient to the impacts, and the preparedness for future climate disaster events will be included. The attendees of the Community HeatSafe event are available input to any submission made by VIC communities and councils.
9. It is vital to embed Heatwaves and their impact in all council practices, policies, building approvals, requests for feedback etc. Everywhere, there should be assessment of Heatwave Impacts clearly outlined and understood before any approval is given. There may be significant cost/benefit missed in the community health and asset impacts if this is not done or ignored. One thing that could assist embedding this thinking is by everyone using the interactive [Climate Heat Map of Australia | Climate Council](#).