

Joint taskforce proposed

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FEDERAL Regional Development Minister Simon Crean has been presented with a proposed structure for dealing with the Latrobe Valley's transition to a low-carbon economy during a recent visit, which if implemented would result in all three levels of government working in unison.

Last week Mr Crean travelled to the Valley to meet with representatives of local councils, Regional Development Australia and labour groups.

During the meeting local representatives proposed the creation of a joint ministerial taskforce, which would be co-chaired by Mr Crean and State Regional Development Minister Peter Ryan, to coordinate efforts to ensure a success transition following the introduction of carbon pricing.

RDA Gippsland committee chair Richard Elkington said the committee would be supported by other ministers as required and by senior bureaucrats in the state and commonwealth governments.

"A level below that you'd have what we termed as (the) Latrobe regional transition committee, which would operate in overseeing the (State Government's Latrobe Valley) Advantage Fund," Mr Elkington said.

The proposed transition committee would consist of Gippsland RDA representatives, GTLC members, chief executives of local municipalities and mayors.

Structures for dealing with transition have yet to be formalised, with approval needed from the Gillard Government before any measures are locked into place.

The Latrobe Valley is expected to receive funding from the Federal Government's \$200 million structural adjustment fund to help the region adjust in the likely event a local power generator is phased out following the introduction of carbon pricing legislation.

Mr Elkington said the region needed an integrated approach from government which would coordinate federal initiatives with those created by the state governments such as the Latrobe Valley Advantage Fund.

The LVAV is a \$30 million funding pool designed to assist the region in its transition and boost local employment.

He said the key to a successful transition for the region was attracting private-sector investment.

"The last thing we want is to be waiting for a structural adjustment package if you like that really is just more government money," Mr Elkington said.

"We want to have a situation where we're building a profile, building a transition, where we get greater private sector investment into the region to create long-term sustainable employment."

He identified forestry, agriculture and alternative uses of coal as some of the industries likely to play a key role in the region's future.

"We don't want to become a... society dependant on government again, because that's almost recreating the past," Mr Elkington said.

"We actually want to have some assurance that we've got a future because investors are willing to put some real money (into the region), whether it's in coal or whether it's in food."

A spokesperson for Regional Development Minister Simon Crean did not return calls.