

WHILE RESIDENTS GO HUNGRY, THE MAYOR TALKS ECO FASHION



Recently, the Mayor promoted sustainable clothing. While "sustainable fashion" has become a popular buzzword across social media and among some political and environmental groups, the reality is that sustainable clothing is not without its challenges.

Are the Mayor's priorities aligned with the priorities of the community?

At a time when many households are facing increasing pressure from rising grocery, housing, utility and insurance costs, charity organisations continue to report growing demand for assistance within Victor Harbor. Across our community, families, pensioners, and those on fixed incomes are making difficult choices about everyday expenses.

A number of local churches and charities provide vital assistance to residents across the Victor Harbor region.

- 3 Angels' Ministry in Victor Harbor provides free food for residents on weekends, operates regular food distribution programs exceeding 5,000 food parcels a month and provides weekly fruit supplies to breakfast clubs at several Fleurieu schools.
- The Salvation Army Victor Harbor provides food parcels, low-cost groceries through its Hope Food Market, clothing, blankets, practical assistance, and support for people experiencing financial hardship.
- South Coast Christian Community Care, a combined church initiative, assists with emergency food hampers, clothing, limited fuel assistance, prescription medication support and emergency accommodation referrals.
- Christian Gospel Centre and Victor Harbor Lutheran Church both distribute food sourced through OzHarvest and local donors, while Victor Harbor Baptist Church provides food vouchers to those in need.

Together, these organisations form an important community safety net, helping residents with food relief, emergency assistance, clothing, accommodation support, financial hardship assistance and community meals during difficult times.

Yet, rather than highlighting cost-of-living solutions, the Mayor's focus appears to be on self-promotion at a fashion event centred around elite sustainable clothing. Many residents may see such events as disconnected from the real challenges they face each week. Many residents view finding affordable food, finding the money to pay high council rates, high electricity, water and rent bills and obtaining the basic necessities, as higher priorities than purchasing premium Eco clothing products.

Supporters argue that sustainable fashion provides environmental benefits and encourages more responsible purchasing decisions. However, sustainable clothing is often more expensive than conventional clothing. Higher material costs, ethical labour standards, certification requirements, and smaller production runs result in prices that are beyond the reach of many households. Eco fashion caters to the affluent environmentalist market, not to the everyday person with a limited budget.

Consumers of sustainable fashion can face limited choice and accessibility. Finding clothing that matches a person's preferred style, size and budget can be more difficult than when shopping from mainstream retailers. While advocates argue these limitations are improving, sustainable fashion remains a premium product option for many consumers.

Sustainable clothing environmental claims should also be treated with some caution. Not all products marketed as 'sustainable' deliver the same environmental benefits, and concerns have been raised about "greenwashing", where environmental credentials may be exaggerated. Manufacturing of sustainable clothing can use more water than conventional clothing manufacturing, and it is important for consumers to carefully examine environmentally friendly claims made by 'sustainable' clothing brands before paying premium prices.

Community First

The question is not whether people should care about the environment. Rather, it is whether elected community leaders are focusing on the issues that matter the most to residents who are experiencing genuine financial hardship. Many in the community may reasonably ask whether the Mayor's priorities align with the day-to-day challenges faced by so many families in Victor Harbor.

Leadership is ultimately about identifying what matters most to the people who elected you, not self-promotion ahead of another Council election.

Victor Harbor has around 60% of its population on government assistance, pensions, or fixed superannuation income. An average single pensioner receives around A\$32,180 per year. If the Mayor is complaining about not being paid enough at A\$70,000 plus allowances, plus car, plus phone, plus computer, maybe she needs to adjust down her lifestyle to a more affordable level like everyone else has had to do in Victor Harbor.

COUNCIL WATCH FLEURIEU

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