



Castlemaine's Heather and Neil Barrett, pictured here at The Paddock Eco Village, have received OAMs for their longstanding environmental and climate activist work. Photo: Richard Baxter

OAMs for Castlemaine climate activist couple

Eve Lamb

Australia needs to step up to the plate on climate action, Castlemaine's newly named OAM recipients Neil and Heather Barrett say.

The two veteran campaigners for the environment and climate action have been individually named recipients of the Order of Australia medal.

Each told the *Midland Express* they initially thought the prestigious Australia Day honour was a hoax.

"We're a bit blown away," Heather said.

"We were quite shocked," Neil added.

The two received their OAMs for their longstanding work to protect Australia's environmental health and heritage, particularly towards providing a more ecologically sustainable model for urban housing.

The Barretts have risen to prominence in recent times for their Castlemaine de-

velopment of The Paddock Eco Village as an international model for environmentally sustainable housing aimed at reducing the emissions that fuel climate change and global warming, while also fostering greater social connectivity.

Both surprised new OAM recipients said they wanted to see far stronger policy settings to address runaway climate change, set at a federal level.

"Our government has got to set a much more challenging target for reductions," said Mr Barrett whose public environmental activity dates back to least to the '70s when he served as state Friends of The Earth coordinator.

"We can do so much better," the new OAM recipient said.

The couple believe the recent US election result and installation of Joe Biden as president has significant positive implications toward more effective international

climate action - including Australia's.

"We're lagging badly and America will be putting huge pressure on us now to step up," Neil said.

Heather, whose focus is also particularly around social equity issues, had been named Victorian businesswoman of the year back in 1997 for her work at the time in producing educational resources on environmental and social justice issues.

She told the *Express* that striving to see more effective measures to curb runaway climate change remained the current focus for both herself and her husband.

"It will definitely be on climate change because I think that's the most pressing issue of our time," she said.

"As people say - there's no Planet B.

"What local climate activists are doing here is absolutely admirable.

"But we're not doing the best we can in this country."