

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria**

Melbourne—Tuesday, 10 August 2021

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Cesar Melhem

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

#### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Dr Tien Kieu

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

**WITNESSES**

Mr Geoffrey Goode (*via videoconference*);

Ms Nina Earl (*via videoconference*); and

Mr Gray Ardern (*via teleconference*), Friends of Warrandyte State Park.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I would also like to welcome any members of the public who may be watching these proceedings via the live broadcast as well.

At this point I will take the opportunity to introduce committee members to you. My name is Sonja Terpstra. I am the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. Also appearing with me via Zoom today are Mr Clifford Hayes, Ms Melina Bath, Mr Andy Meddick, Mrs Bev McArthur, Ms Nina Taylor and Dr Samantha Ratnam, and I think that is it for us at the moment. If other members join us, I will introduce them if they come online at the time.

All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

I will ask each of you in turn now if you could please just state your name for the Hansard record and any organisation you may be appearing on behalf of. Perhaps I could start with you, Mr Goode, if you could just state your name for the record and who you are appearing on behalf of.

**Mr GOODE:** I am Geoffrey Goode, and I am not appearing officially for any organisation.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, so in your own capacity, yes?

**Mr GOODE:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thank you. Ms Earl, if you could state your name.

**Ms EARL:** Nina Earl. I am appearing for myself, although I do belong to a lot of groups.

**The CHAIR:** No problem. Mr Ardern.

**Mr ARDERN:** Yes, I am appearing on behalf of the Friends of Warrandyte State Park.

**The CHAIR:** And your full name?

**Mr ARDERN:** Gray Crompton Ardern.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thanks very much. With that, I will now invite each of you to make your 5-minute opening remarks, and I will give you a 1-minute warning as we come up to the end of that time. Perhaps if we could start with you, Mr Goode, if you would like to give your opening remarks. If I could ask everyone else on

the call: if you could perhaps mute yourselves just to minimise background noise, that would be great. Thank you. Over to you, Mr Goode.

**Mr GOODE:** Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee today to expand on my submission 437 to its Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. The main concern I have indicated is the overall adverse effect I consider the very rapid rate of population increase has had and is having on the natural environment and ecosystems of Victoria, as it is having on much of the world. Just as concerning is the open-ended nature of this increase, where governments and their planning systems appear to be valuing and encouraging the growth of human populations without even indicating when or where such increase should have a declared upper limit on both its time rate of increase and the absolute level of population in the jurisdiction concerned. Official declaration of figures of that rate of increase and that level of population included in planning and environment legislation could be later amended to either increase or decrease them, but that would at least require that the major question be reviewed and debated publicly by the elected representatives of Victoria's voters.

It is sometimes stated that an ever-increasing population results in new thinkers and doers that benefit society. Unfortunately one cannot run a control experiment in parallel to compare how a more stable population might achieve a better outcome—as it is not possible to have both scenarios running simultaneously. What is hard to contest is that Victoria's fourfold increase in human population in the last 70 years has resulted in a massive expansion of the Melbourne metropolitan area, in area and in density, and extensive environmental effects in many parts of Victoria as a consequence of the state's much larger population and that there is no projected upper limit on that, although many think there should be.

It is true that time has brought environmental benefits, such as some increases in the area of protected land, often substantial; improved technology for managing it; and an increase in public awareness in some cases. But that has to be measured against the whole increasing scale of the problems we face. Victoria is the laggard state in regard to various things. One of them is beverage container legislation, which is promised for 2023.

In my submission I mention some of the environmental issues affecting the water and coast of Port Phillip Bay, which is Melbourne's major natural feature—all 2000 square kilometres of it and its long coastline, which is in public hands. I mention this as I have particular experience of them. I mentioned in my submission the long undetected case of a rural landowner at Leopold digging out a large marina and channel to the bay across the Crown foreshore reserve.

**The CHAIR:** You have about a minute left, Mr Goode.

**Mr GOODE:** Thank you. They include illegal building of shacks and these other things: illegal building of shacks at Campbells Cove; the attitude that Jeffrey Kennett publicly displayed about the orange-bellied parrot, calling it a trumped-up corella, when overdevelopment there was fortunately prevented. There are other problems around the bay. Mornington Peninsula coast has been affected. There is currently a contested claim for Portsea, bathing boxes at Mount Eliza, a swimming pool on the Mount Eliza foreshore—you can go on and on about this. Twenty hectares of the bay seabed was zoned at Frankston for a marina. It is a crazy idea, and it has never happened. The other problems, I conclude, call for planning and environment legislation to include statements about the upper limits on the rate of population growth and its size. I realise the Commonwealth has the final say on that, but I think Victoria's Parliament could be influential. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Goode. All right, we will go to you now, Ms Earl—5 minutes, thanks.

**Ms EARL:** Thank you for hearing me, and I apologise for my background. I would like to reinforce the points of my submission last year—(b) and (d)—and name some additions to those two. Of my submission, of which I sent an electronic copy to you, additions to (b), which was the legislative framework, are the weakened Code of Timber Production, which would advance logging of old-growth forest with habitat values as currently occurring in the Central Highlands, as reported to me by conservation colleagues and frequently in the media, the Sturt coupe of Alberton West State Forest, with Flinders and other coupes to follow, reported to me by Binginwarri Landcare, and in the *Age* of 30 July:

Residents and farmers have raised the alarm over logging in a small forest north of Wilsons Promontory, an area of remnant bushland home to rare and endangered species like powerful owls, greater gliders and Strzelecki koalas.

That is the Code of Timber Production weakening.

Also under that: Western Port Woodlands, reported to me by a conservation colleague—the last strip of significant woodland left in Bass Coast Shire, with old grass trees under threat from sand mining activities. Another addition to point (b) is recreational hunting and fishing impacts—native ducks, native sea-star hoicked out instead of Pacific sea-star, abandoned fishing hooks and line that harm wildlife, both frequently seen at Mordialloc.

Point (d) of my submission last year—additions to that. The IPCC report just on the 9th reveals global heating is likely to reach 1.5 degrees in a decade, with severe consequences for all types of ecosystems and life in Australia and on the planet. The need for effective legislation and action to reverse global heating and meanwhile protect ecosystems to mitigate heating impacts is ever greater, and there is a link to that report. Also, ongoing issues as I see them: continued involvement of First Peoples in all types of ecosystem management; continued land clearing or changed land use on the outskirts of Melbourne and peri-urban areas, and especially western grasslands; and the need for continued public education for all age groups about ecosystems and respecting them.

Apologies, I missed some things earlier—additions to (b) in my submission following on from recreational hunting and fishing impacts. Priority given to eradication of pest species in the most impacted ecosystems, followed by less impacted ones over time, through new legislation or policies or funding of existing ones.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Earl, you have about a minute left.

**Ms EARL:** Thank you. The current Suburban Rail Loop has a single generic EES for the whole alignment instead of a separate EES pertinent to the varying landscape and habitat types affected along the alignment. I go on to the train stabling and tunnelling launch yard—so you can read that at your leisure—and also the Mordialloc Freeway through green and wetland habitats, if would you read further to that, please. Better Boating Victoria initiative, one option of which at Queenscliff is to remove saltbush, which is a refuge for the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot. And I also support the comments of Geoffrey Goode—hello, Geoffrey—about population. That is something I bang on about too. That is enough. Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you, Ms Earl. All right. Mr Ardern, we will go to you now if you could give us your opening remarks, and I will give you a 1-minute warning as we get close to the 5-minute mark.

**Mr ARDERN:** Thank you, Sonja. I am speaking to you today from a bush block that I was brought out to as a newborn infant some 76 years ago, and during that time I have seen a great deal of change in Warrandyte, not all of it, unfortunately, for the better. I remember as a child the roadsides to this property were covered in wildflowers at this time of year. There were maroonhoods. There was spur velleia. There was running postman. There were ever so many pea bushes and lots and lots of beautiful wildflowers that have since entirely disappeared.

One of the activities I used to enjoy as a little boy growing up here was imitating the songbirds and imagining that they were responding to my pathetic efforts to imitate their songs. Unfortunately nearly all of those songbirds have disappeared now.

The cause of these declines is of course the heating and drying of the climate, as mentioned by both Ms Earl and Mr Goode, and the Victorian government is to be applauded for its efforts to reduce fossil fuel consumption. It is certainly leading the commonwealth government by a very long margin, but in view of the urgency, as emphasised in the IPCC report that Ms Earl mentioned earlier, we exhort the government to take even more powerful measures to reduce fossil fuel usage.

The other major cause of decline in this particular part of the world is the growing population of feral deer. As a member of the Friends of Warrandyte State Park, it is extremely saddening and frustrating to see the results of so much of our effort to reclaim the bush, to improve it, to plant where there is degradation, to see that this work is being destroyed by deer. They chew, they trample, they pull down, and even when we manage to raise trees to sapling stage, they can kill them by rubbing repeatedly against those trees. We are well aware of the political difficulties in removing the deer, but we feel that if New Zealand can achieve this, then certainly Victoria can.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thanks, Mr Ardern. Is there anything you wanted to add, or is that the end of your submission there?

**Mr ARDERN:** Well, part of the ambit of this inquiry is to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of government programs. As a member of the Friends of Warrandyte State Park, a lot of our work is supported by the Victorian government through various grants, and we are extremely grateful that that funding and support is made available to us, but we feel that a more effective way of getting that important environmental work done is to improve the funding of Parks Victoria. The problem with funding things through grants is that, firstly, it is a huge impost on the organisation that is applying for the grant with of course no guarantee that you are going to get the grant. And then, once the grant period is over, that project, which may have been extremely successful, is simply left in limbo. So, for example, if an emphasis of the program has been on weed control, with the end of the grant period all of that activity of controlling those weeds ceases and the site becomes weedy again.

At Friends of Warrandyte State Park we feel that it would be more appropriate to fund Parks Victoria more adequately, so that these works have a sustained and ongoing effectiveness. Just on the topic of the funding for Warrandyte State Park, we feel it is entirely regrettable that at this time of year, and when there are so many visitors to the Warrandyte State Park, rangers are only present every second weekend. It is really a most regrettable circumstance that during a—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Ardern, you have got just a minute left.

**Mr ARDERN:** Okay. I think probably that is about all that I have to say, except to back up what Mr Goode has said about population. That of course is the major determinant of ecosystem decline, and secondarily, the Friends of Warrandyte State Park urge the state government to take even more stringent measures to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Thanks very much for the opportunity to present our views.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thanks very much for that. All right, we will throw to questions now. So Mr Meddick, we might start with you. I will throw to Mr Hayes.

**Mr HAYES:** Okay. Thanks, Chair. Thank you very much for your presentations today, Mr Ardern and Ms Earle and Mr Goode. Of course I know Nina and Geoffrey well, as long-time battlers for the environment in my neck of the woods. But I just wanted to ask Geoffrey—and Nina too and Gary, if they want to comment—I am particularly concerned about population growth, as you know, and your evidence today, Geoffrey, is that Victoria's population had quadrupled over the last 70 years, which I did not know. I knew that Australia's had doubled over the last 50 years. And I just wanted to get you to comment on some aspects of that, because not only that but we plan, under *Plan Melbourne*, to redouble again over the next 20 or 25 years the population of Melbourne. This is seen as a great objective to increase consumption and economic activity and building in Melbourne. You said you could go on and on. Why can't we just load Australia up with the sort of population density that America has? People say to me, 'We've got plenty of open space. Why don't we just have more people there?'. What are the implications for the environment, drawing on the experience you have seen over your last 70 years that you talk about?

**Mr GOODE:** Who is first?

**Mr HAYES:** You go first. Anyone can join in.

**Mr GOODE:** Well, you say, 'What are the implications for the environment?'. I would also ask: what are the implications for the people? I really do not see any great benefit by having millions of more people in Victoria. I have been to places that have millions of people, and they just seem to me simply overcrowded. Where there are more people there are more houses, there are more roads, there is more this, there is more that, and obviously, because every country has a static, fixed amount of land, there are less of the natural features. And you could say, 'What does nature matter? We're the only thing that matters. Just put us in little boxes and multiply. Go up, go sideways, out into the water—just go on'. Personally—and I can only give my own personal view—I do not think that benefits humans or certainly the creatures and the organisms. The whole tapestry of life declines.

**Mr HAYES:** Okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps, Ms Earl, you might like to comment on Mr Hayes's question.

**Ms EARL:** Yes, I do. The carrying capacity of this land has never been assessed, and that is part of the problem. I grew up in England, which is a much milder climate—or was—with quite high rainfall, which Australia does not have. Australia was populated by people from Europe initially expecting to manage the land the same as they do in Europe, but that is not possible or easy here. In Australia conditions are much drier, it is an older continent and our topsoils are less deep—factors like that. And population—well, as a species we are too successful, you could say. How you contain that I am not really sure. That is a moral question in a way. But it is quite right that everything does flow from population, including consumption, which is partly driving global heating, I call it, because that is what it is—'climate change' is too mild in my view.

It is a difficult question, because if you distribute the population more evenly, then you are going to have greater areas of the environment affected. At the same time there has been really a lack of town planning on the spread of existing populations. That is partly human nature too because people want to go where the employment is and where the facilities are, and that is natural. Some places around the world, I have read—at this moment it does not come to mind—have limits to growth, which means inevitably that people have to go elsewhere to live or they go up. Going up has its problems, and there is no easy answer to that. But what I would say is that the population requirements or the requirements of people should not necessarily take precedence over the natural environment, and where the population density spreads it is really important to keep biodiverse pockets, especially across suburban or urban areas. That connectivity across urban and suburban areas is absolutely important for wildlife. There is a tendency to think the natural environment we can dispense with in a built-up area, and you go up Woop Woop for whatever you want to see or do and the wildlife will go somewhere else. Well, they are running out of places to go, frankly. Looking after biodiverse areas where I live, I have learnt that it is really, really important to provide those wildlife corridors across the suburbs where the green areas still exist and along riparian waterways and the coastline. Especially connectivity between the coast and the hinterland also is really important. We need to maintain those corridors. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Ardern, would you like to comment?

**Mr ARDERN:** Yes, I would. Thanks, Sonja. I agree with everything that Geoffrey said and Nina too. I would simply like to add that a growing population will need more water, for example, and where is that going to come from? A growing population will need more food. I believe we are already importing more food than we export. Look, I am not absolutely sure of the figures, but I believe that we are indeed already heavily reliant on imported food from having at one stage been a major food exporter, so those are some constraints to a greater population that I can see.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, thanks. I might just take a question here, following on from Mr Hayes's comments, and I will ask each of you to comment if I can, but I might start with you, Mr Goode. The theme of the question is around population expansion. It seems to be a common view amongst all panellists here today, 'How can we keep expanding? There are too many people et cetera'. But how do you realistically impose limits on growth? Like, what do you say? Do you say, 'Well, if we reach a certain amount of people in a particular town they have to move out?', and who would enforce that? So realistically, how does that work? What is in your mind? How does that actually work and what does it look like it? So, Mr Goode, if I can start with you.

**Mr GOODE:** Well, I would start by saying yes, Madam Chair, you are quite right. I agree there is no easy solution. But one starting point would be to refrain from and in fact not any longer advocate population increase. The Victorian government this century put out—and I attached it to my original submission—the 'beyond 5 million' or some such title for its huge PDF, extolling the virtues of a bigger Victoria. And our neighbouring state, Tasmania, actually has a Department of State Growth. This is a small island, which is mountainous—it is the most mountainous island in the world—and it wants to crowd more people in, but at least it is starting from a small base. But the main point I would argue, apart from saying just stop advocating more people and extolling it—

**The CHAIR:** Okay, yes?

**Mr GOODE:** The main point—I can just finish, if I may—is to fix a limit. Why is this open-ended? When are we going to stop? Are we ever going to stop?

**The CHAIR:** Who would enforce that limit then, I wonder?

**Mr GOODE:** That is another question.

**The CHAIR:** And how would you arrive at a limit?

**Mr GOODE:** I agree enforcing it is difficult, but first call—

**The CHAIR:** But who would determine the limit, and how would you arrive at it? It is actually a really big question.

**Mr GOODE:** It is a good question, but there needs to be some debate about it. And if the debate proves fruitless, if there is a structured debate and the case for and against is put and we get nowhere, so be it, unfortunately. But there will be people advocating both sides, I realise that.

**The CHAIR:** Sure. Thank you. Ms Earl, same question. You know, who is going to decide a limit, how is that limit arrived at and how would it be enforced?

**Ms EARL:** Again, that is a difficult one, and it is a pertinent question. It is something we have to ask and face. One problem with the population issue is Victoria has lost a lot of its manufacturing capacity, which once drove the economy, and now we rely on population increase, i.e. the development industry, to drive the economy. That is my reading of it. So one way is if manufacturing is again encouraged, then there would be less reliance on development and population. And let us remember that we are voluntarily bringing people in from overseas to add to our population pressure. Is that really necessary to drive the economy, when we could encourage manufacturing? I did not say before, but I shall say now, regarding density increase and growth: we must preserve arable land for local food production rather than have food production carted from overseas or as far away in Australia as is possible. So building over arable land makes no sense at all. Okay, thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thank you. Mr Ardern, would you like to have a go? Who would come up with the upper limit, who would police it and how do we arrive at it?

**Mr ARDERN:** Whereas I agree entirely with everything Geoffrey and Nina have said, I am sorry, I cannot really venture an opinion on that. This is, I think, one of those very, very difficult questions, and I am sorry, it is beyond my powers of imagination to work that one out.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, no problem. All right. I will throw to the rest of the committee now for questions. So Ms Bath—a question?

**Ms BATH:** Thank you. This is most interesting. I appreciate your time here today. Earlier on you referenced an important document from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—the report that has just come out. And there was a previous report in 2019, and I want to read a section of it. Rather than ruining the interpretation, I will just read it. The IPCC report states:

Sustainable forest management can maintain or enhance forest carbon stocks, and can maintain forest carbon sinks, including by transferring carbon to wood products, thus addressing the issue of sink saturation ... Where wood carbon is transferred to harvested wood products, these can store carbon over the long-term and can substitute for emissions-intensive materials reducing emissions in other sectors ...

End of quote. Now, just my editorial on that, noting that the IPCC just speaks of ‘forest management’ rather than plantations in particular: we have one document that is very important out today, or this week, we have another one that speaks of maintaining forests and we have a forest industry, a native forest industry. How do you either endorse one or disregard the last? What is your opinion on the IPCC in relation to sustainable forests?

**Ms EARL:** Ms Bath, when you say ‘sustainable forests’, do you mean existing forest or creating new forest? What do you mean, may I ask?

**Ms BATH:** So the IPCC report goes to ‘sustainable forest management’ and then it goes on, and so this document is saying that sustainable forests are very important in climate change, in trapping carbon dioxide, in putting it into sinks—i.e., trapping it in wood and then using that wood to make our tables and our doors et cetera et cetera, or hardwood floors. So they are endorsing the use of sustainable forests. So I say it is a conundrum, because for some—and I think you articulated it before—we need to apparently end native timber, but this document actually goes to supporting sustainable forest management.

**Ms EARL:** Yes. I do refer to the forest logging, that is quite right, but you are talking about carbon sequestration through forests, I think. So yes, that is a good thing, whether it is plantations or existing forests. So if I understand your question, it is: how do you keep a forest sustainable if you are logging it? Is that what you are saying? I am a bit unclear.

**Ms BATH:** I think, in truth, I am trying to point out that this very worthwhile document from the IPCC speaks to maintaining sustainable forest management.

**Ms EARL:** Yes.

**Ms BATH:** And that includes, in my opinion—and here is my editorial—native timber in Victoria and plantation in Victoria. So if this document supports that, then I cannot see why many are seeking to close the industry down in its entirety, when a particularly important document says, ‘Let’s keep doing it’, in effect.

**Dr RATNAM:** On a point of order, Chair, can I just ask a question, just in terms of the line of questioning here? I am just a bit disturbed by the line of questions, because I cannot recall the witnesses—forgive me if I missed it—referring to the IPCC report, and so the member is asking the witnesses to reflect on the IPCC report, which is not something they authored, for a definitional analysis, and I am not quite clear about why this line of questioning is going to the witnesses.

**The CHAIR:** As I understood, it was a question about Ms Earl’s opinion about the report. Ms Earl may not be qualified to give an opinion about that. It is a tricky question. So, Ms Bath, can I ask you to perhaps rephrase the question, because I think you started talking about or were trying to inquire about what Ms Earl’s views were about sequestration of carbon, as I understand it, but using the report as the basis for that question.

**Ms BATH:** Let me just say this, Ms Earl—and others, so it is not just to Ms Earl: the importance of capturing carbon and storing it, and that is via trees, in the wood and then harvesting that wood and turning it into a wood-based product is most useful. Indeed, as I said, a report from the IPCC has endorsed that. I am just interested in your opinion on that.

**Ms EARL:** In principle, yes, but it comes down to what sustainability means. It means a different thing to different people. To a forest worker, sustainable might mean one thing; to a conservation volunteer it will certainly mean another. So what is meant by sustainability? Carbon sequestration can happen in many ways—in the sea; it does not have to be plantations. And there is not necessarily anything wrong with logging of forests, only particular forests that might contain old growth with hollows that are habitat; they are particularly biodiverse, so you are losing species as a result of that. Of course, even plantations—which, you know, generally I favour—again, it depends on what the plantations replace. If you are wiping out native forest or some sort of ecosystem to put in a plantation, that is not necessarily a good thing for ecosystem decline, which is what we are discussing.

**Ms BATH:** Thank you very much.

**Ms EARL:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Dr Ratnam, have you got a question?

**Dr RATNAM:** Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you very much, everyone. I just had a question for Mr Ardern. Just in reference to something you mentioned in your verbal submission just before in terms of the grant funding versus kind of ongoing funding for some of the work that you are doing and some of the limitations of grant funding—so the kind of stop-start nature where you lose momentum—you made a comment that one of the solutions could be improved funding for Parks Victoria. I wondered if you could expand on that. What do you think that could help achieve, and what have you seen on the ground? You mentioned a limited range of capacities, so only once every second week they are able to come out. Is that what you mean—that you think extra funding would actually help support the kind of ongoing maintenance of some of these areas you are trying to protect?

**Mr ARDERN:** Thank you very much for the question, Dr Ratnam. Actually there are two separate topics there. The first one—perhaps if I could talk about a project that I have been involved in, it would illustrate the problems. So when the Eastern Freeway was extended, there was great public concern that it was going to be

done by a huge cutting through a very important wildlife habitat at Donvale, and those of you who live out in the eastern suburbs will be well aware that in fact the freeway was extended through a tunnel rather than through a cutting through that very important bit of bushland. Now, following the construction of the freeway through the tunnel, I think because of the surveys of the botanical assets in that land, there was initially a great enthusiasm for getting rid of weeds in that area and looking after the various rare and threatened species in that reserve. But after the funding of those initial grants dried up, this very important bit of habitat became increasingly weedy and there was some concern that the mountain bird orchid would be lost through overshadowing and through competition by weeds. Also local residents had reported that the southern toadlet was less often heard as the weedscape replaced the landscape. So there was a round of grants made available through DELWP, and we, Friends of Warrandyte State Park, applied for a grant and we were indeed successful.

I mentioned the huge impost on volunteers in making these grant applications. That application took literally hundreds of hours to make, and of course there was never any guarantee that we were going to get the funding. As it happened we were successful, and we poured a huge amount of effort into that land over three years. But the grant period has finished, the funds have dried up, we have planted all these plants there, but we have no further funding to continue the good work that we have done. We needed to employ contractors to get the huge amount of weeds out of that site, but with the drying up of those funds the site is now deteriorating. We are getting over there and working on it as often as we can, but there are limits to what a voluntary organisation can do out of its own resources. Now, had the same funding been a permanent stream of funding for Parks Victoria, this project could be continuing now, not going backwards. That is the kind of point that I am trying to make. The funding of volunteer organisations through grants seems on the face of it to be a good way of harnessing all that enthusiasm, but it does have the limitation that once the funding dries up the projects tend to go backwards.

As for the second point, Dr Ratnam, that was really just a further amplification of the need for further funding for Parks Victoria. The fact that it cannot even manage to have rangers on duty every weekend during really busy times of the year demonstrates that there simply is insufficient funding for this very important organisation. I hope that answers your question, but I am happy to elaborate if you desire.

**Dr RATNAM:** No, absolutely, Mr Ardern. They are very illustrative examples and really informative for the committee, so thank you very much.

**Mr ARDERN:** Thank you, Dr Ratnam.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Taylor, a question?

**Ms TAYLOR:** I just want to take one of the concepts a little bit further because I am obviously listening intently to your suggestions. If you are saying do not encourage population growth, are you saying people should have less children or cut migration? If we get down to the weeds of that, because if you are going to make that proposition you have got to kind of own it, so I am just wanting to know where you are going with it. What is your vision?

**Mr GOODE:** Are you talking to me?

**Ms TAYLOR:** Whoever wants to answer.

**Mr GOODE:** I just make the point first of all—and I will say this again—the Victorian government comes across as saying it is a great thing. They are not unhappy with population growth. There seems to be insufficient concern. This committee is certainly one good sign that things might change. It is not a question of saying, ‘We’re going to do it this way’ or ‘We’re going to stop’—we just do not want it. If you do not want it, if you are not pushing it, that helps a lot. If you are pushing it and you are nudging it all the time and saying, ‘Look, we’ve got to do this because of the population’, it will happen. You will get the population growth, more land will be concreted, more things will happen that are not conducive to ecosystem quality. You will get all this spread of undesirable things. If you can go for a little bit of stability, then there can be ways of considering, ‘Are we bringing in too many people to Australia?’. I am not suggesting that we stop people having children. That is not something I am saying. I am not thinking we should advocate more children. I think that would be a bad thing. Just going around paying baby bonuses seems to me a little bit inappropriate.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Ardern or Ms Earl, do either of you want to make comment on that question?

**Ms EARL:** I would add to that. Goodness, bringing migrants into the country really makes the place vibrant and wonderful, but unfortunately—and I am the first to acknowledge that, being a blow-in myself—people have impacts. People talk of balance, but I think there is no such thing as balance, because it usually means something misses out. In this case with population it is our environmental values that are missing out. I think that as many nations get wealthier, which has happened, then population will naturally decrease because people want things more than children once they have the income available, but that is not to say that will not always happen. I do not have a clear answer to that, but yes, we do have to consider it, and how we consider it—I am lost at the moment.

**The CHAIR:** That is okay. That is all right. Look, we have got about 3 minutes left, so I will quickly ask Mr Ardern if he has any final comment to make on that question before I throw to Mrs McArthur for a final question. Mr Ardern, anything you wanted to add there?

**Mr ARDERN:** Well, there is a strong negative correlation between education and the size of families. That is to say, the more educated the mother, the less children she is likely to have. We can look for examples in Scandinavia and Japan just as examples. The main cause of Australia's population growth is that recent immigrants tend to have larger families than established Australian populations. That is my understanding. So maybe the answer is improved education. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mrs McArthur, a final question from you before we wrap.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair. Look, I am most interested in this population issue and the vision of our panellists as to where we go, whether we do embark on the communist approach of the one-child policy, whether we ban refugees, for example. Would that be a possibility? I have had three children. I did lose one. Did I have too many? Should I only have had one, or should I have had more because I am not an immigrant? Can you just expand a little further on this whole proposition of reducing the population? Because in effect we have to reduce it if we are going to make progress to meet your requirements, and if you want us, as I think Ms Earl suggested, to have a new manufacturing industry. Manufacturing in this country was driven by immigration. Do you think that was a bad thing? And if we were to embark on being an island state where we do not trade, then would we be able to manufacture everything because we have not been able to do it before. So just expand on your vision for the population issue, please.

**Ms EARL:** Is that to me, or—

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps we might start with you, Ms Earl, and then we will go to the others. So, yes, if you would like to take that, because we are running out of time. So quickly, if you could answer that, that would be great.

**Ms EARL:** In terms of manufacturing it is quite true: you would not have it unless you had people. You have got to have enough people for manufacturing. But I was just making the point that over-reliance on one form of the economy at the expense of another form—that was the point that I was making.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** But you do accept that the manufacturing industry was driven by immigration, and if we were to go—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mrs McArthur, something just happened. There we go, you are back again.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** But we need to wrap up because we actually need to finish. So I will perhaps ask Mr Ardern—and we will finish with Mr Goode—for any comment on what Mrs McArthur has said.

**Mr ARDERN:** Yes, I have, that it is a mistake to think that manufacturing is driven by immigration. Manufacturing was driven by tariffs, not immigration—tariffs. When the tariffs were reduced, manufacturing ceased.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Ah, so you would like to impose increased tariffs on us?

**Mr ARDERN:** No, I am not saying; I am just saying there has been a mistake made, that is all. I am just pointing it out.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thanks, Mr Ardern. Mr Goode, a final comment from you.

**Mr GOODE:** All right. My final comment in response to Mrs McArthur is that as far as manufacturing is concerned I think Alfred Deakin and protection had a lot to do with that, and that did prevail for the first 50 or 60 years of the Commonwealth. But the main thing you raised was wanting to reduce the population. I am certainly not advocating that we reduce the population. I think that would be a very difficult and dubious proposition. What I have said, and all that I have said, in regard to size and rate is that it needs to have an upper limit specified and that in my opinion that upper limit should be relatively low, lower than it is at the moment, but reduction is not on the table—until you raised it there.

**The CHAIR:** All right. I would like to thank all of you very much for your presentation and for coming along and letting us hear from you today. It has been very much appreciated.

**Committee adjourned.**