

SUBMISSION

Inquiry into the decline of Victoria's ecosystems and measures to restore habitats and populations of threatened and endangered species

I am writing this submission because I have many happy memories of growing up with a variety of Victorian native animals on and around the district of our family farm. My family has enjoyed many camping trips, where we have a chance to come across many native creatures in their habitats. We love bushwalking as well, and we particularly love to visit the bat colony by the Yarra Bend that thrives in Kew. These bats provide such an important source of pollination for the whole of Melbourne. We are privileged to have these creatures living amongst us.

It pains me that future generations will not be able to do what I have done – that is, see native species in their natural habitats. One by one these animals are disappearing. It is a tragedy, and we must help to preserve their lives and habitat.

I have been to many national parks with my family – ranging from the Grampians, Wilson's Promontory and Croaginalong as well as to smaller state parks and other camping areas.

The devastating fires this summer have further endangered our native species. Their habitats have been destroyed, and I am horrified that the Andrews government has allowed loggers into the devastated areas to log the forests when the animals are still trying to recover.

Logging our native forests has taken a heavy toll. Some 66% of Victorian land has been cleared of native trees, shrubs and plants --- and, along with it, the habitats of our native wildlife. Sadly, 700 native plants, animals, insects and ecosystems are under threat, and this loss is growing day by day.

Stop the urban sprawl and new housing developments

Governments must stop the urban sprawl and stop developers from clearing land around Melbourne and big rural towns like Geelong and Ballarat to build houses. We need denser housing, not mass clearing that destroys valuable habitats and destroys the very reason we love Victoria so much.

That is why 120 Victorian animals, birds, plants, insects and fish are facing extinction. Some 70 threatened species live in forests that are still being logged!

And of course, the scale, severity and destruction of our fires this summer caused unprecedented damage to habitats and the creatures that call them home. Some 1.4 million hectares of Victoria were burnt. This destroyed more than 50% of the habitat for 185 rare or threatened Victorian animals, plants and other creatures. The greater glider, smoky mouse, mountain ash eucalyptus are close to extinction.

Solutions

Habitat and wildlife can be restored with the right commitment and government funding. **It is not too late.**

After the lockdown and unemployment created by COVID-19, NOW is a perfect opportunity for the government to spend public money by creating jobs for people to restore our natural environment. Much of the work does not require complicated skills, for example weeding and cleaning up of damaged areas.

Weeds and non-native animals

Too many weeds and non-native animals are competing with native plants and wildlife. Thousands of jobs clearing weeds out of rivers, creeks, farmland and national parks, and humanely managing non-native animals can be created.

A tree-planting workforce to restore habitat would provide much-needed jobs

Some 67% of Victoria's trees, mangroves, shrubs, and other plants have been cleared since the country was colonised. Thousands of jobs in both the city and the country could be created with workers replanting trees and vegetation in our parks, streets, rivers and creeks throughout Victoria -- especially in bushfire-affected areas. LandCare programs could be built upon – encouraging landowners and farmers to plant native vegetation on their land.

Develop a program to revive species facing extinction

Victoria has more than 120 species at risk of extinction. NSW has committed \$100 million to a 'Save Our Species' program, which systematically identifies risks to species and goes about addressing them. It also includes breeding programs so healthy populations of animals, birds and plants can be restored. Victoria has no such program. It spends almost nothing on this type of dedicated species-recovery work. Scientists need funding to study and innovate solutions to the extinction crisis.

We must end habitat destruction and strengthen the laws to protect habitats.

I believe we need to stop logging native forests and transition to plantation-based industries. The government and its departments must be mindful of the damage to habitat that is caused by unnecessary road duplications like that on the Western Highway where irreplaceable old trees were removed.

Conclusion:

I ask that the Victorian Government do more to protect our critically endangered species and ecosystems. Laws, which allow wildlife to be killed and grasslands and other important habitats cleared and destroyed with no protection - and no punishment for perpetrators - must be changed to protect our remaining fragile environment for future generations to enjoy as I have done.

Jan Kendall
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