

SUBMISSION

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

Thank you for the opportunity of making a submission.

My family and I have a great love of Victoria's wildlife, its beautiful forests and natural environment. We have enjoyed many daytrips for bushwalks, and we have traversed the whole of Victoria camping and spending time in our beautiful state parks as well as the national parks.

We enjoy seeing Victoria's native animals in their natural habitats. This is most often achieved by travelling some distance into the countryside, but because we live near the Yarra River, we also enjoy being able to visit the splendid Yarra Bend bat colony, which manages to share our lives as well as pollinate our gardens – a most important factor for home gardeners with fruit trees as well as market gardeners. And the colony is in our inner suburbs and easily accessible to city dwellers.

Unfortunately, such a sight of native animals is a rarity – as many struggle to survive with the encroachment of human activity. It is tragic that habitat destruction is causing many extinctions among our native animals.

This summer's bush fires further destroyed our native species. The Victorian government should not have allowed loggers back into the burnt areas to log when habitats and native animals are already under pressure from the fire devastation.

Sadly, 66% of Victorian land has been cleared of native trees, shrubs and plants. This means loss of habitat and the wildlife that live there. Some 700 native plants, animals, insects and ecosystems are under threat, and this loss is ongoing. It is frightening that 120 Victorian animals, birds, plants, insects and fish are on the brink of extinction. AND 70 threatened species live in forests that are still being logged. This summer 1.4 million hectares of Victoria burnt in bush fires, destroying the habitats of 185 rare or threatened Victorian animals, plants and other creatures such as the greater glider and the smoky mouse as well as our mountain ash eucalypti.

An important part of the problem is urban sprawl. Every time developers clear land for housing, habitats and native animals are destroyed. The government must develop housing policies that provide for denser

housing. Melbourne is already too big; hence the need to keep building freeways to connect these outlying suburbs.

What is the answer?

The Victorian government must enact laws to both end habitat destruction and strengthen the protection of habitats. Plantation forests must replace logging in native forests. Every time a new road is built, more habitat and native animals are lost. I cite the example of the roadworks on the Western Highway where large old growth trees were removed. It is terrible to hear how so many habitats and ancient trees are removed for freeway and highways.

The government must devote more resources and manpower to restore habitats for our native animals. I EMPHASIS that any killing of non-native species must be done humanely after scientific and public consultation.

After the COVID-19 lockdown many jobs were lost. However, this is a good opportunity for the government to create jobs associated with the restoration of our natural environment. There are opportunities for unskilled jobs like clearing weeds from rivers, creeks and parkland. There are also training opportunities for people to work on tree planting and other revegetation programs.

Sadly 120 Victorian species face extinction. Whereas NSW has funded \$100 million to its 'Save Our Species' program to address extinction issues, the Victorian government has not done similarly. Scientists also need funding to find a solution to the extinction crisis.

In conclusion, the Victorian Government must do more to protect our critically endangered species and their habitats.

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