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This submission is not confidential - it can be made public.

To: the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Extinction Crisis.

Decades of under-funding, land clearing, weeds and invasive species, and logging have severely damaged Victoria's ecosystems. Many Victorian animals, birds, plants, insects and fish are on the brink of extinction. And this summer's bushfires have made things worse. We must act to redress this lamentable state of affairs.

My wife and I have been keen bushwalkers for thirty years, mainly in Victoria (the Victorian Alps, Yarra ranges, the Grampians are just a few of our favourite spots). Our younger son also does a lot of bushwalking, sometimes with us, sometimes with a walking group. Our grandchildren also take part in shorter walks in the Dandenongs. We have seen echidnas, wombats, lyebirds as well as pests such as rabbits, foxes, deer.

Over the years, we have witnessed the decline of many of our walking areas - poorly maintained and overgrown tracks, widespread weed infestation (eg blackberries around the Mt Torbreck area; onion weed, ivy, sycamore maple, blackberry in the Dandenongs).

We are also keen gardeners, having put in many thousands of hours of volunteer gardening (mainly weeding, especially onion weed) in our local BJ Hubbard Reserve over the last ten years. And we've also done a lot of weeding and some planting in our sons' properties in the Dandenongs (sometimes referred to as the Weedinongs, for obvious reasons).

We have often brought issues such as overgrown tracks, illegal rubbish dumping, weeds, dangerous trees, to the attention of Councils (SOYR and Maroondah) and Parks Vic, but these organisations are sometimes unable to act because of lack of resources and money. And we have written to State Environment Ministers about the chronic underfunding of Parks Vic. It's ironic that the more affluent our society becomes, the less money is available for the environment.

Victoria's environment is in trouble: it is the most cleared state in Australia; hundreds of native plants, animals, insects and beautiful ecosystems are under threat; and many of these animals make their home in forests that are still being logged. The recent bushfires have dramatically worsened the outlook for the places and creatures that make Victoria such an amazing place. The scale, severity and destruction of these fires was unprecedented, destroying much of the habitat for many rare and threatened Victorian animals, plants and other creatures and pushing already critically endangered species like the greater glider, smoky mouse, mountain ash eucalyptus and many others perilously close to extinction.

I would like our governments to spend public money and create jobs looking after people and the environment, such as:

. A huge program of weed and invasive species eradication:

Victoria is overrun by weeds and invasive animals, which kill and out-compete our native plants and wildlife. It's a big job to manage them, but it's critical for restoring habitat. We could create thousands of jobs clearing weeds out of rivers, creeks, farmland and national parks, and humanely managing introduced animals like cats, deer, rabbits and foxes. And more help and education is needed for residents in sensitive areas such as the Dandenongs to eradicate the weeds on their properties. Many residents are unaware their properties are weed-infested jungles.

. A tree-planting workforce to restore habitat:

More than half of Victoria's trees, mangroves, shrubs, and other plants have been cleared since colonisation. Much of what's left is in poor health. We could create thousands of jobs in both the city and the country, replanting trees and vegetation in our parks, streets, rivers and creeks right across our state, but especially in bushfire-affected areas. We could also help landowners plant native vegetation on their land.

. A dedicated program for reviving species facing extinction:

The work of rescuing Victoria's more than 120 species at risk of extinction deserves and needs a dedicated program of funding. 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 action like breeding programs so healthy populations of animals, birds and plants can be restored. Victoria has nothing like this program and spends almost no money on this type of dedicated species recovery work. We also spend very little money on research for our scientists to study new solutions to the extinction crisis. It's time that changed.

. An end to habitat destruction and strengthened nature laws. We must stop the destructive activities that are driving extinction:

- . End native forest logging and transition to a plantation-based timber industry;
- . Phase out coal and gas burning, which is making the climate crisis worse and driving devastating extreme events like heat waves, fires and floods;
- . Stop destructive and unnecessary development which puts corporate profit ahead of our environment (eg Westernport gas ship terminal);
- . Change the laws that allow wildlife to be killed, and grasslands and other habitat to be cleared, with little or no penalty.

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