



Anglesea, Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna

3C McMillan Street,
Anglesea, Victoria 3230
Phone: (03) 5263 1085
Email: admin@angair.org.au
Web: angair.org.au

Legislative Council Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Submission from Anglesea, Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna (ANGAIR Inc)

ANGAIR is an incorporated not for profit community conservation organisation dedicated to protecting our indigenous flora and fauna, and to maintaining the natural beauty of Anglesea and Aireys Inlet and their local environments. It was established in 1969 and has over 600 members. ANGAIR has always aimed to work cooperatively with State and Local Government agencies

Our detailed submission follows a short summary of comments relating to the terms of reference:

- (a) There has been significant loss of biodiversity since settlement resulting in species loss and damaged ecosystems. Climate change impacts (including bushfires) will only continue to exacerbate the rate of loss. A broad range of actions will be needed to reverse the trend.
- (b) The planning and environment framework has not prevented this ongoing loss. Actions are required to address incremental loss from development, land use change and current agricultural practices.
- (c) The funding programs cover a range of environmental issues. An increase in funding is critical. There are Action Plans for threatened species but limited targeted funds to maintain and enhance habitat for these species.
- (d) Addressing climate change impacts requires a triage approach and more research to identify priorities. Catchment Management Authorities are the preferred agency to deliver programs to improve biodiversity on private land.
- (e) Increase indigenous ranger program and expand job opportunities for caring for country. COVID-19 has increased the jobless numbers. This is an opportunity to increase environmental repair programs especially those that train and employ more indigenous people in conservation and land management issues.

About ANGAIR

ANGAIR organises a wide range of activities including bush walks and nature rambles, environmental working bees, indigenous plant propagation, education groups and bird

watching for both members and visitors. Since its inception, ANGAIR has held an annual spring Wildflower Show We offer the following comments on biodiversity loss:

Biodiversity is the variety of all living things. Biodiverse ecosystems are healthy and self-sustaining; simplified ecosystems are fraught. Victoria's biodiversity has been subjected to an ongoing attack since Europeans first arrived. There are a multitude of causes of biodiversity loss and no simple and fast solutions to reverse the trend. We require long term commitment to improved policy, planning, funding, research and implementation.

Victoria is the most developed state and its indigenous biodiversity has suffered at each stage of development/settlement. Aboriginal burning regimes diminished with the influx of squatters in the early 1800s. The gold rush in the 1850s and 1860s brought a population surge, destruction of soils, forests, streams and demand for private ownership of land and closer settlement. Over development of farmland post world wars (Soldier Settlement Schemes) increased the rate of clearing, destruction of wetlands and native grasslands, and incursion into marginal hill country and dry Mallee regions. Pressure on Victoria's biodiversity continues due to a number of factors including impacts of climate change, remnant vegetation decline on farms and roadsides, weed invasion in native grasslands, permitted and illegal clearing on private land, inadequate protection of remnant vegetation (failure of enforcement of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act), inadequate offset requirements and follow up with planning permits. **Whilst recognising the importance of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity to underpin our economy** (Victorian Biodiversity Strategy 2037) the State Government has failed to set sufficiently ambitious targets to improve the situation. We have gone from aiming to achieve net gain with planning permits to hoping for zero loss.

Biodiversity loss occurs in multiple ways. Duck shooting is legal and allowed on Ramsar wetlands. Pest plants and animals often introduced with good intentions erode our biodiversity values. Willows for example were used to stabilise waterways but destroy platypus habitat and riparian vegetation values. Gorse was introduced as a fencing measure and is a major invasive weed. Rabbits, deer, foxes, goats and hares all deliberately introduced to make Victoria more like England have gone feral and created havoc with our ecosystems and wildlife. Clearly, pest plant and animal control schemes have failed dismally. Industrial and housing developments in coastal wetlands have impacted on endangered Orange-bellied Parrots and migratory waders.

Further examples: As climate change impacts, farmers change enterprises from grazing to cropping and more endangered grasslands and grassy woodlands are threatened/destroyed. To make land arable, farmers are using large machinery to remove basalt floaters from paddocks allowing cropping and destroying native grasslands. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act has **not** been used to stop this process which is widespread across western Victoria. Individual very old and large high habitat value paddock trees are removed under clearing permits to allow cropping or pivot irrigation with offsets

that are totally inadequate. The result is no homes and nesting sites for endangered Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and a myriad of other hollow dependent species. Brown Stringybark and buloke decline is also impacting on food supplies for these birds.

Example 2 In the Great Otway National Park, lower rainfall associated with climate change has reduced the number and distribution of many endangered marsupial species to the point where they are unlikely to be found over 95% of their previous range. They have retreated to a narrow wedge of vegetation along the coast.

Example 3 Population pressure has greatly expanded the urban fringe into the volcanic plains west and north of Melbourne. Native grassland offsets were promised but delivery is at about 10% of that promised with no further funding forthcoming to purchase and protect highly endangered EVC's.

Example 4 Decline in Heathy woodlands - Anglesea Heathlands, Gariwerd/Grampians region, Wilsons Promontory etc due to:

a] Long term impacts of the fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* - major effects include decline in plant species richness, diversity and fauna habitat structure, impacts on fungal diversity and thus ecosystem health, impacts on small mammal species richness and habitat of individual species, decline in food availability of endangered mycophagous mammal species –Southern Brown Bandicoots, Potoroos, New Holland Mouse, Swamp Antechinus, and even formerly common species- Bush rats and Swamp rats.

b] Impacts of weeds— there are a long list of environmental weeds both native and foreign reducing biodiversity eg sallow wattle, gorse, blackberry, pine trees, bluebell creeper, boneseed to name a very few species.

c] Impacts of climate change- declining rainfall has impacted on species such as Swamp Antechinus and the New Holland Mouse.

d] Decline in Brown Stringybark in western Victoria Lower Glenelg etc. - Coast wattle, Pine invasions, and impacts on food availability for endangered Black Cockatoos.

First Peoples' connection to country

ANGAIR would hope to see more implementation of indigenous burning regimes in grasslands and forested areas. Current fuel reduction burns are detrimental to animal survival chances as escape is difficult when starting a fire from a perimeter. Random mosaic burns are far more desirable and could create employment opportunities for indigenous people.

Biodiversity Incentives for Farmers/Private Landholders

These need to be ramped up to tackle continual loss due to the damage done since settlement by continuous grazing and cropping regimes. Recruitment of vegetation is

urgently required in what was previously wooded country. Incentives for biodiversity improvement could be combined with other benefits such as carbon sequestration, salinity amelioration and include funds to address major pest plant and animal issues.

Peter Forster

Secretary

12/08/2020