

**From:** Hannah Robert <campaigns@good.do>  
**Sent:** Saturday, 15 August 2020 6:02 PM  
**To:** ecosystems  
**Subject:** Submission: Ecosystem Decline in Victoria Parliamentary Inquiry

**Categories:** Submissions

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to make a submission to the Victorian Parliament's Inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria on behalf of myself and my family.

We have an incredible and beautifully diverse range of ecosystems in Victoria, and we depend on those ecosystems for our survival and quality of life. As a parent, one of the things I love the most is sharing experiences of those ecosystems with my son, and helping him understanding their importance for clean air, water, food production and health.

I am worried that our current state government policies and actions are not doing enough to protect our ecosystems and that we are at a critical point where urgent action is needed. The fact that we have already lost 81 species to extinction (that we know about) should ring loud alarm bells - particularly for the 185 rare and threatened species in Victoria. The 2019 findings of the Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability's comprehensive assessment of Victoria's environment are concerning. Only 11% of environmental areas were assessed as in 'good health', with 30% going backwards, even without the impact of the disastrous bushfires last summer.

I urge the Victorian government to respond to the State of the Environment Report with a strong plan that makes caring for our unique ecosystems a key plank in our economic recovery from COVID-19. Investing now in transitioning communities from industries which are causing ecosystems decline (eg fossil fuels, native forest logging) can create thousands of green jobs and reinvigorate regional communities. It would also pay dividends in terms of acting early to exponentially reduce the risk of climate-related disasters, boosting low-carbon industries (eg eco-tourism, education) and developing world-leading expertise and technologies.

It is also the right thing to do in terms of our obligations to First Nations, our children, future generations and other living things not to cause further damage to the country which sustains us all.

I submit that at a minimum, Victoria's response needs to include:

1. A plan for transitioning our energy supply so as to end the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) for energy by 2030 and to reduce other sources of greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. from transport and agriculture). This is in

recognition that global warming is the number one threat to our ecosystems (and to our safety and wellbeing as a community) and that committing to and sticking to a zero carbon goal gives Victoria a much stronger voice in convincing other countries to do the same.

Building renewable power sources, large-scale batteries (or pumped hydro) and updating our grid will set Victoria up for the future, as well as creating thousands of jobs and enabling communities such as in the La Trobe Valley to re-skill and re-build.

2. A plan for immediately transition out of native forest logging, with financial support for workers and the industry. The Victorian Parliamentary Budget Office estimates this would save the Victorian budget \$190 million. The catastrophic cost of the 2019 bushfires would suggest that this money be re-invested in reskilling forestry workers and communities in ecosystem management alongside First Nations people to reduce fuel loads and prevent future fires.

3. A comprehensive and fully funded program to remove introduced plants and animals and a massive replanting program to restore habitat across the state. Again, this would also be a great way to employ many out-of-work Victorians as we rebuild our economy following COVID-19. It also offers an opportunity to reinvigorate regional communities, and build community knowledge of our ecosystems and how particular introduced species impact those ecosystems.

4. A dedicated 'Save our Species' program, along the lines of the \$100 million NSW program of the same name. Again, this would employ Victorians to work to restore threatened species in Victoria, provide public education on the significance of biodiversity as well as public information outlining what public funding is spent on threatened species conservation and how it is being spent.

5: A funded process for the Victorian Government to meet its commitment to purchase and restore private land in order to deliver a new 15,000 hectare grassland reserve, and a 1,200 hectares Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands Reserve within the next two years. This is in recognition of the significance of grassland and grassy woodland habitats to Victorian ecosystems, and is crucial to protecting threatened species.

6: Establish a Victorian Government funded \$50 million “revolving fund” to purchase, restore and then resell private land for conservation. The fund is “revolving” because some of the money is put back in once the land is restored and sold. This recognises that some of our most threatened ecosystems and important habitat is on private land. It would support and amplify the success of organisations like Trust for Nature and Bush Heritage whose work has demonstrated that purchase and restoration of habitat remnants of private land is incredibly beneficial for threatened species recovery. These programs would benefit enormously from public funding in the form of a “revolving fund” to enable the purchase, restoration and sale (for conservation purposes) of private land.

7: Reform Victoria’s Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act so that where private or government activities would damage our ecosystems and threatened species, the Environment Minister must by law step in to prevent or limit the activity.

The current laws are failing to protect the environment for destructive activities including logging and damaging developments like roads, mines and new housing developments. The current discretionary nature of the power to intervene and protect ecosystems means that the sitting Minister for the Environment is vulnerable to pressure from those with a big commercial interest in proceeding with no environmental protections.

We owe it to this incredible country that sustains us to be more resourceful in finding ways to meet our needs in ways that do not destroy our unique ecosystems. Victorian businesses, governments and communities are more than capable of that resourcefulness and innovation - but stronger laws are needed to ensure we don't just fall back on old destructive habits and options which are cheap in the short term, but at the expense of longterm wellbeing - ours and the environments we rely on.

I am conscious that the Victorian Government has had to rightly place its focus on the immediate threat posed by COVID-19. As the crisis continues, we cannot, however, ignore the ongoing risks to the ecosystems which are so significant for our health and happiness. In planning Victoria's response to the economic challenges created by COVID-19, the suggestions above offer opportunities to stimulate the Victorian economy and create jobs, while also investing in a much more sustainable future.

Thank you for the chance to contribute to the inquiry. I look forward to seeing the work of this committee manifest in action to transition Victoria from a state witnessing alarming declines in our unique ecosystems to one which prides itself on protecting and sustaining the ecosystems we rely on.

I am happy for my submission to be made public.

With kind regards,

Hannah Robert

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