

Submission to Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

9th May 2020

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I congratulate the Victorian Parliament on establishing this inquiry, and I thank you for the opportunity to make this brief submission.

I am a Victorian citizen.

I have loved the natural world since first enjoying “the outdoors” as a boy-scout.

I am dismayed at the terrible degradation of much of our natural environment, with loss of both individual species and whole eco-systems.

The Committee will be aware that Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia - 66% of our land has been cleared of native trees, shrubs and plants - the habitat that supports our native wildlife. Similar changes have happened to our coastlines and waterways. At least 120 Victorian animals, birds, plants, insects and fish are recognised as being on the brink of extinction. Tragically, this summer's fires have dramatically worsened the outlook for many of these creatures. The scale, severity and destruction of these fires was unprecedented. The fires burned 1.4 million hectares in Victoria, destroying more than 50% of the habitat for 185 rare and threatened Victorian animals, plants and other creatures. Several already critically endangered species like the greater glider, smoky mouse, mountain ash eucalyptus and many others have been pushed perilously close to extinction.

I want therefore to stress to the Committee the absolute importance of doing everything possible to preserve Victoria's remaining native forests, and to restore, where possible, degraded forests to their former glory.

The Committee will no doubt hear the conflicting views of a variety of experts. Some have links to the Forest industry. Some are independent. I urge the Committee to seek the views of independent experts such as Professor James Watson and Professor David Lindenmayer. My non-expert view, informed by experts such as these, is that all logging of Victorian native forests must stop immediately. These forests - tiny remnants as they are – are the remaining refuges of some of our most iconic species, including of course our faunal emblem, Leadbeater's Possum.

It is vital to understand that

- There is no sustainable way to log our remaining native forests
- Regrowth forests do not become “old growth” in the true ecosystem sense for several hundred years. So no forests under 100 years old, at least, should be counted as “old growth”.

- Regrowth forests are at greater risk of bushfires, and burn with a greater intensity than true old growth forests

It is not possible to “phase out” logging of native forests. There is no time left, and precious little forest left. Native forest logging must stop immediately.

There are many actions which would both restore our environment, and create jobs far in excess of the relatively small number lost in an immediate end to logging of native forests:

- 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. 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.
- A tree-planting workforce to restore habitat. Two thirds 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 land-owners plant native vegetation on their land.

We are so fortunate in Victoria to enjoy some truly remarkable natural environments. Your committee has a great opportunity to prevent their further degradation and begin their restoration.

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