

Dear Environment and Planning Committee,

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline.

My name is Annie McCallum, and I am a young environmental enthusiast. After completing a Bachelor of Commerce, Majoring in Finance, I joined the Wilderness Society as a Finance Coordinator.

I live on the coast in Mount Martha, VIC. Growing up, I remember spending every day of the summer holidays at Mount Martha beach. Every morning, my family would take our dog, Charlie, for long walks along the beach, up into the boardwalk along the estuary. Then I would walk through the small beach town and collect all of my friends from their houses. We would stay at the beach all day.

The summers were long and sunny, with clear skies and moderate temperatures. There was nothing better than diving into the clear, blue water to cool off from the Aussie sun. The long beach was so beautiful and picturesque, you could barely tell where the sand ended and the water started. It was common to see lots of seashells, seaweed, fishes, jellyfish, and dolphins. We could head to the cliffs on the South beach and walk along the rock pools. Filled with crabs, small fish and coral. The beach was bursting with life.

In 2005, I started noticing signs on houses during my usual walk to collect my friends. The signs read, " Don't bugger the bay, Bracks!". The Port of Melbourne Corporation had announced plans to start dredging the Port Phillip Bay. At the time, I was 14 years old and did not understand how this affected the people of Mount Martha.

In the summer of 2008, I understood. I went to the beach with my family to walk Charlie, but we didn't get far. We stood still, side by side, and with a heavy heart, looked upon our ravaged beach. The life and colour was stripped from the shore line. There was now a small hill between the sand and the water. The beautiful beach I once knew, was gone.

To this day, the beach still has that small hill before the shore line, there is no seaweed and the jellyfish are rare to come by. The summers are not like I remembered. The weather is erratic, raining one week, and 40 degree heat waves the next. The beach days are becoming harder to come by.

Australia is known around the globe for its unique nature, including its amazing coastlines. I want the future generations to experience the beautiful Australian summers I did, abundant in wildlife and marine life. I want the value of nature to be prioritised over industrial exploitation, because you can not buy back these rare, well established ecosystems.

Below are changes that the Victorian state government must take action on in order to make this vision for our shared future a reality:

1. Community rights must be guaranteed when governments are making environmental decisions, including the right to participate, the right to access necessary information,

the right to challenge environmental decisions and the right to transparency in government decision making.

2. The state government must urgently implement and properly resource Action Statements (plans for recovery) for all threatened plants and wildlife. Victoria's plants and wildlife are at risk, with over 2000 recognised as threatened with extinction however only 15% have Action Statements.
3. Victoria needs a new, independent, well resourced conservation regulator to police deforestation and other destructive industries. The EPA is the independent watchdog for pollution, but currently there is no independent watchdog to ensure industries comply with environmental laws, with numerous breaches to laws continuing to occur and a long history of regulators turning a blind eye.
4. The rights and interests of Traditional Custodians should be recognised in all aspects of land and water management, as well as decision-making in relation to their traditional lands, including traditional management practices such as cultural fire. First Nations - declining ecosystems have profound implications for First Nations.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission, and I invite any further discussion via email at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Annie McCallum

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16 August 2020

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