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To: ecosystems
Subject: Submission: Inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria

Categories: Submissions

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Environment and Planning

In nature, I connect most with our beautiful bush and forests. I love to hike – although now with my son this has turned to meandering bushwalks! – and spot native Australian wildlife in their natural habitats. I've spent many weekends exploring greater Victoria and interstate to find off-the-beaten tracks to explore and soak up the natural world we live in.

Whilst I haven't yet seen in person the devastation of the 2019 – 2020 bushfires, I've hiked in Kinglake and surrounds: areas that were impacted in 2009 by the Black Saturday bushfires. I volunteered at the time to help re-build community spaces and school gardens.

These fires caused a significant animal death toll and, as we are now discovering after the recent fires, putting already at-risk species at further risk of extinction. It has been particularly devastating to learn that government decisions have ensured that the logging industry are seemingly exempt from parts of the act and have been allowed to continue logging in impacted areas – further destroying habitat and killing animals.

These fires have dramatically worsened the outlook for our environment and creatures - but they weren't in a great position to start with anyway:

- Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia - 66% of our land has been cleared of native habitat
- Over 700 (and counting) native plants, animals, insects and beautiful ecosystems are under threat
- 120 Victorian animals, birds, plants, insects and fish are at the brink of extinction
- More than 70 threatened species make their home in forests that are still being logged

Our environment has the ability to bounce back - but it needs our support now. As part of the COVID economic recovery, now is also the perfect time for governments to spend public money and create jobs looking after our people and our environment.

I would be thrilled to see some solutions enacted to support our environment. The below outlines just a few solutions:

A dedicated program for reviving species facing extinction

- With 120 Victorian species at risk of extinction, we need and deserve a dedicated program of funding
- NSW has committed \$100 million to a 'Save Our Species' program (identifying risks, addressing them + breeding programs)
- 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. Now is the time to address this.

An end to habitat destruction and strengthened nature laws

We have to stop destructive activities to stop extinction. We need to:

- 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 like the Western Highway Duplication and the proposed Westernport gas ship terminal which continue to bit-by-bit erode the health of Victoria's environment for corporate profits
- Change the laws that allow wildlife to be killed, and grasslands and other habitat to be cleared, with little to no ramifications

I wait in anticipation of your brave and bold leadership in this space.

Nicole Humphreys

