

Hello,

My name is Veida and I am a proud Victorian, lucky enough to grow up in the beautiful yarra valley surrounded by natural environments and loads of wildlife! We had a resident wallaby named Ralph. Growing up in this area really instilled a love for our natural environments in Victoria and fuelled a passion in me to protect them. I feel at home in nature and gain so much value from spending time outdoors hiking or at the beach.

Knowing that already 700 native plants, animals, insects and beautiful ecosystems are under threat, that it's going to worsen is absolutely heartbreaking to me. Once these areas are destroyed or species are destroyed- they are gone forever and that is something that you can not put a price tag on.

We need to protect our beautiful, diverse natural habits of Victoria now more than ever with the effect of climate change making these areas more vulnerable.

I believe this is our tipping point and that the re-build after covid is a perfect opportunity to get onto a sustainable trajectory before it is too late.

We cannot hope to stop extinction unless we stop the destructive activities that are driving it... I would like to see an end to habitat destruction and strengthened nature laws:

- 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 would also like to see a tree-planting workforce to restore habitat.

67% 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. Replanting and greening areas would not only restore habitat, improve air quality and human health but also help mitigate the effect of climate change. It is a win win all around.

Covid-19 pandemic has really allowed me to stop and appreciate the natural environments that are available to me in my state- I consider myself very lucky to have coastal parks, forests and mountains all within short driving distance. It needs to stay that way. It's time we stop acting like we are above mother nature and stop destroying our unique and wonderful home on this planet.

Thank you,  
Veida Somerville

  
Please note I am happy for my submission to be public.