

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Mrs Michelle Thomas  
[REDACTED]

President and Shelter Director  
Animalia Wildlife Shelter & Rescue  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**SUBMISSION CONTENT:**

--

I am a wildlife rehabilitator and rescuer of over 30 years, in that time I personally seen the extent of the decline of Victoria's biodiversity in our native forests decimated to an almost irretrievable state.

I have witnessed the unchecked habitat destruction by Vic Forests and found dead bodies of greater gliders and yellow-bellied gliders scattered across the destruction of a logging coup. Wildlife Officers have failed the animals they are employed to protect.

The loss of biodiversity is greater than anyone can see due to the lack of knowledge of species that have not even been recorded. New species of frogs, lizards, spiders, moths and insects in ecosystems of high biodiversity need protection as they are becoming extinct before discovery and recording.

To protect our biodiversity, we need the destruction to stop immediately. I refer to the central highlands (Toolangi-Warburton- Marysville) and Far east Gippsland (Goongerah and surrounds) all of these areas have experienced catastrophic fires (2009 and 2020) which has come close to wiping out the animal biodiversity along with the vast array of flora that is both specific & indigenous to these areas.

These flora and fauna can only survive in these areas of remnant critical habitat. Tree's need to be a certain age and size to allow hollows to form. Greater gliders cannot use lower trees & hollows as they need the cross winds and updrafts to assist in their gliding to feed on suitable food trees. They also need the protection of the upper canopy to protect them from predation. It was written in Mammals of Australia 1983 by GM Mckay that "Greater glider conservation is reliant on sympathetic forestry practices, which retains large areas of buffer strips " it has been proven though that only conservation groups are actively looking for and protecting species likely to be impacted by habitat loss or forestry practices.

The total inadequacy of the legislative framework protecting Victoria's environment, including grasslands, forests and the marine and coastal environment, and native species; is all too apparent. The EPBC ACT has FAILED our wildlife and has only given forestry and industry free reign to remove huge areas of high conservation. Native forest logging must stop immediately to protect the little we have left and allow recovery of species. VCAT has also allowed the constant removal of small areas of high conservation value at an urban and suburban level just for the benefit and monetary gain of greedy developers with endless purses.

Due to urbanization, suburbanization & habitat destruction in all other parts of our state going unchecked for over

thirty years almost all areas have failed to retain areas of high conservation value. Each area is significant to its individual landscape and makes up another piece of our overall biodiversity, to remove one piece is disappointing- to remove several is criminal!

The Logging industry is known for its cruel practices and lack of empathy towards Australian native/indigenous wildlife. Examples of this were shown during the discovery of maimed koalas in logging coups near Warrnambool January 30th 2020. These koalas flock to blue gum plantations (Tasmanian spp) not because they are there, but because they are the only food source available.

By comparison their indigenous species of trees have all but disappeared, becoming just a curtain, a veil of deceit created to make drivers passing through believe there is still plenty of native forests.

Iconic species are being culled and removed from the very landscape they have existed on for millennia.

Due to current circumstances (Covid 19) the average Victorian is becoming more informed of the loss of biodiversity habitat and fauna. People have become more appreciative of our wild populations and have endured lockdown better if able to look forward to observing fauna in its natural environment, Thoughts of the smell of fresh eucalypt and banksia forests ie. future camping trips & getting back to nature. Ocean drives and smelling the clean air is what is holding hope for many of us.

Adequacy and effectiveness of government programs and funding protecting and restoring Victoria's ecosystems is on too small a scale. Offset programs have not been implemented in the areas they effect. I give the example of Frankston freeway extension offsets were to be planted in Gippsland yet it was the Mornington Peninsula that lost 27km of untouched virgin bushland to a road to nowhere. Millions of dollars were promised and allocated to Parks Vic to retain fencing for The pines Flora and Fauna reserve in order to protect the southern bandicoot population. However when push came to shove they reneged and said it was not worth protecting and would be too costly even though friends groups had pledged to help with monitoring and rehabilitation of said fence. Tree and habitat replanting programs in the park failed, the few dollars given in the end were poorly executed ( planting at times of year certain to make plant growth fail).Rabbit fences not maintained so what did grow was eaten by vermin.

Dog walking in parks where it is supposed to be on leash is ignored by most and dog attacks regularly occur on koala and wallaby species. No or very little staff are present on a daily basis and those who are- do not interact with people doing the wrong thing, out of fear of physical violence. One ranger between three parks is not adequate or good WHS PRACTICE. WILDLIFE OFFICERS SHOULD BE PATROLING, NOT PARK RANGERS.

At every opportunity to restore Victoria's environment jobs should be given to First Peoples at least one indigenous officer to uphold connection to country per parks vic parkland, the funding for that should come from federal funding. This should be another step in part of ongoing reconciliation (In February 1830, the government legitimised the massacre of Indigenous people by offering a bounty of £5 per Aboriginal adult and £2 per Aboriginal child).

A native fauna protection plan should be implemented- not a fauna management plan, which only refers to killing and culling species. Often kangaroo wallaby & wombat species are blamed and vilified for grassland loss however no effective eradication /removal of herbivore feral species such as deer and pigs have been a priority to ensure the retention of our native species. Foxes and cats need to be eradicated from the landscape to protect juvenile natives and smaller species such as antechinus, feathertail gliders and native rat and mouse species. To make a feral cat eradication plan more achievable a domestic cat curfew needs to be implemented across the state, local governments are doing it but too slowly to make enough impact.

Poison bait programs are failing and secondary poisoning is still occurring this is reducing native species of birds and mammals to unacceptable levels.

Continual burning practices are not protecting us from fire either all it is doing is drying out areas that prior to these practices being implemented in such a heavy handed way- were wet sclerophyll forests that actually stopped fires getting through to dryer areas.

Common sense needs to prevail and consider the impacts all this has made on our faunal species of which are responsible to turning fallen leaf litter into wet compost. Bandicoot, Potaroo, Wallaby, Wombat & kangaroo eat fungi leaf and sedges passes through their system allowing the replenishment of soil and dispersal of many natural flora species. Burning practices are impacting on them greater than ever before.

Overall, we need an overhaul to our failing biodiversity practices before we lose faunal species that are indigenous to this state. We need a new arm of government that is responsible solely for the protection of our native indigenous wildlife, Currently Forestry and wildlife officers (their title) are being utilised to protect poor forestry practices not wildlife.

Each species even if found in other states are different and specific to our state failing to protect them is deplorable.