

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I'm writing this submission as a concerned citizen who has spent time in most of Australia's iconic regions and national parks and is proud of the unique and diverse species and ecosystems that crown this ancient land.

As such, I am alarmed that our state's natural wonders are in trouble: with 120 animals, birds, plants, insects and fish on the brink of extinction in Victoria alone.

Decades of underfunding, land clearing and logging, weeds and invasive species have severely damaged Victoria's ecosystems. Of course, logging only makes things worse, as more than 70 threatened species make their homes in forests that are still being logged.

With 66% of native trees, shrubs and plants cleared from the land, Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia, which means the habitats supporting our native wildlife are under threat: over 700 native plants, animals, insects and our beautiful ecosystems are at risk. Sadly, this number is still on the rise!

Also tragically, this summer's fires have dramatically worsened the outlook for the places and creatures that make Victoria such an amazing place. With 1.4 million hectares burnt in Victoria alone, the scale, severity and destruction of these fires is unprecedented; destroying over 50% of the habitat of 185 rare and threatened Victorian animals, plants and other creatures.

This catastrophic event has caused me great anxiety and sadness. The estimated loss of species is terrifying and heart-breaking – I cried whenever I came across an article or news coverage about the devastating fires and I still get depressed whenever I think about it – because mental health is closely linked to environmental health!

Fortunately, there are ways to successfully restore habitat and wildlife with the right commitment and funding from government. And as we come to grips with the economic fallout from COVID-19, it's a perfect time for government to spend public money and create jobs looking after people and the environment. Here's what I'd like to see:

1. 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. It's a big job to manage them, but it's critical for restoring habitat. 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.

2. 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. We could also help land-owners plant native vegetation on their land.

3. A DEDICATED PROGRAM FOR REVIVING SPECIES FACING EXTINCTION

The work of rescuing Victoria's more than 120 species at risk of extinction deserves and needs a dedicated program of funding. NSW has committed \$100 million to a 'Save Our Species' program, which systematically identifies risks to species and goes about addressing them. It also includes action like breeding programs so healthy populations of animals, birds and plants can be restored. 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. It's time that changed.

4. AN END TO HABITAT DESTRUCTION AND STRENGTHENED NATURE LAWS

We cannot hope to stop extinction unless we stop the destructive activities that are driving it. 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, specifically duck shooting;
- Change the laws that allow grasslands and other habitat to be cleared, with little to no ramifications.

The Australian environment is truly a remarkable place; with the right care and protections, we can help it to heal for future generations.

NB: you may publish my submission

Yours sincerely,

Christine Guthry

