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Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this very important, ignored for too many decades and more rapidly increasing problem.

The main reason for ecosystem decline in Victoria is the acceptance of strategies without considerations for consequences to flora and fauna and landscape investigated beyond the target desired. Single purpose, tunnel envisioned government activities, with unknown, wide ranging detrimental results, has destroyed far too much of what is special about Victoria. The Victorian government is populated by politicians who appear to have no idea about the natural world, and its relation to the well being and identity of the population. Or it has been ignored?

We need ministers for environment to protect our ecosystems, not be in the job to find loopholes round the legislation that attempts to save the native flora and fauna that rely on the various ecosystems that are in decline.

The ecosystem decline in Victoria has taken too long to be considered seriously; so it is huge, not new, nor ever been slow. The ecosystem is a great deal more than flora, fauna, water, air land and landscapes, it is the awareness of well-being that is generated by a healthy environment and each ecosystem within it. The enormous damage and continual threats to Victoria's ecosystems, and there are many, are government encouraged. This government, in the famous words of Oscar Wilde, "Knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."

The destructive governmental policies and enactments to our environment, destroys what various ecosystems have to work with, so struggle to survive. All living things struggle because the environment upon which they rely to sustain life, is being torn away without knowledge of the consequences. The replacement as in farmland, logging coupes, mining and development, is too altered, too quickly to be of much use to native flora and fauna.

The destroyers of our environment leaving our ecosystem struggling:

- Logging native forests
- Fuel reduction burns
- Environmental burns
- Land clearing of native forest
- Mining with the limited consideration for the environment
- Industrial waste production, creating natural resource destruction i.e excessive packaging, embroidered as recyclable.

1 LOGGING NATIVE FORESTS

The method used to log native forests has always been at an enormous environment cost. Logging native forest has always been seen as a way of making money, and never looked at in reality as ecosystem vandalism. That governments of all persuasions permitted native forest areas to be logged by completely clearing the land, usually leaving a mess. If any replanting was done it was not done with any knowledge and an attempt made to create a monoculture. Understorey plants were never given the same priority as trees for timber.

Logging native forest is a criminal act if viewed from a position of what we wish to bequeath our grandchildren and future generations. Logging the way it is currently carried out creates a greater fire danger than the forest would otherwise present. Governments should not have ignored the iniquities and consequences for 10 decades now gone, but ignore it still?

There are methods of harvesting timber from forests, that does little damage if any damage, leaving the rest of the forest, in the main, intact; and the denizens of that ecosystem little disturbed. These methods creates a profit, but not the indecent profits that the logging industry and the government demands at any cost to the ecosystem they work in and the environment in which it attempts to exist.

The government encourages the use of "bush" as a name for our forests. Because it alludes to something of little value, not the rich ecosystem that nurtures many unique species, all of which generates and delivers clean water, fresh air, healthy soil and amazing landscapes among other things, beneficial to our and every other species.

2 FUEL REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL BURNS

Fuel reduction burns were instigated to give the general public a false sense of security in relation to wild fires and to give the Victorian governments forest/environmental employees a little extra money through overtime. Many employed by the state governments environmental department were only able to survive with the overtime generated by "prescribed" burns, often lit prior to the weekend and requiring attendance to monitor at that higher wage rate paid to DELWP personnel.

Fuel reduction burns do not reduce fire risk to any extent, unless lit a fortnight or so prior to a wild fire in that place. This spurious and destructive practice should make the general public feel secure. However, fuel reduction burns do kill a great deal of wildlife, especially those that are small and ground dwelling. The frequency of these burns also destroys the seedlings and thus further depletes the seed bank of native species in the upper part and on the ground.

Fuel reduction burns are used by the DELWP to cleanse an area of wildlife, as wildlife is seen as a nuisance to the governments use of forest, be it for logging, mining or possible clearing for other purposes in the future.

Environmental burns are not required for most species of Australian native plants, as some germinate by smoke alone, and the forest fires, that occur often enough, ensure the species whose seed needs actual fire, are germinated. Environmental burns are conducted for another reason than to ensure native flora survival. The whole process around fuel reduction and environmental burns needs to be jettisoned, at the very least, thoroughly and independently reviewed. Although this has been done before and only got worse.

3 SPECIES EXTINCTION

The people of Victoria are informed that Victoria has the highest number of threatened species by subregion in Australia. The progressive rate of native animal and plant extinctions in Victoria has been the loss of 18 mammal species, 2 birds, 1 snake, 3 freshwater fish, 6 invertebrates and 51 plants. Of the 3,330 known Victorian species, 49 are extinct and 2,097 (63%) are on the Threatened Species Advisory Lists. These are only the ones that have been recorded, and

therefore known to be lost. There would have been many that were lost and not even known about, other than people who came across them by accident. This is unacceptable, and yet it keeps getting worse and destructive government policy is stacked on top of destructive government policy. How can any government not notice these losses, or be indifferent to this for so many decades; if the losses were noticed? To know an answer to these questions would demonstrate how little concern all governments previous and present have for the important things of this state, country and for our species.

With regard to climate change, which affects the environment and every ecosystem. Every tier of government in Australia, and certainly in Victoria, appears to be frozen, like a rabbit caught in the headlights. No governmental policies of use are being implemented that will ensure Victoria is not pushing climate change increases. The scientific community is treating the symptoms instead of the cause by genetic engineering plants that will survive on current and increased climate change conditions. One assumes, because they too see that government will never implement what is required to bring the climate back into balance.

All that is mentioned above and more is in the public domain. Because we live cheek by jowl with the natural world as wildlife carers and people of the outdoors, we have observed much of this. It appears this inquiry is like many such, to make the populace think that the government is actually interested in doing something to halt the destruction and decline of Victoria's various ecosystems.

Decades of correspondence to Premiers and Ministers of the environmental departments of Victoria has mentioned more as well as all the above, and been ignored. Timing was probably wrong. Peer reviewed papers on the subjects above have been ignored and it is my belief that the final findings of this inquiry will have the same fate.

My fingers and computer keyboards are worn out from writing about these issues, only to be ignored.

The bottom line is the policies and actions of government see no further than the immediate end they desire. Consequences of what is proposed and acted on is not considered, or ignored for the expedience. A crystal ball is not required to know that this will continue into the future. Environment, ecosystem and all that rely on both, are ignored because government as the conglomerate have leaders, who care about getting re-elected by a population who are also not taking a wider view. The cost to the environment and ecosystems upon which so many species rely, is not at the forefront of the minds of most people. Certainly not politicians.

[End but not exhaustive]