

Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

23/08/2020

Dear members of the Committee,

We would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. My partner and I moved to north east Victoria eighteen years ago to live on a fifty three hectare property in the Indigo Valley. We placed a covenant on the property with Trust For Nature to protect the significant native flora and fauna into the future.

Unfortunately a year later a bushfire swept through the property. The house was saved but the native vegetation and wildlife were seriously affected. Over the years we planted trees and shrubs to assist in the rehabilitation of the land. Unfortunately in 2015 another bush fire ravaged our property. Again the house was saved but the land and animals were devastated.

We attempted to re-build once again but record heat waves coupled with increased dry lightning strikes forced us to move into the relative safety of Wodonga. We consider ourselves climate change refugees and this scenario will be played out many times as people living in remote and rural areas face the danger of bushfire as the climate heats up.

The bushfire threat is one reason that native forest management is so important in Victoria, but it is also vitally important to protect endangered species which is why we cannot understand how VicForests has failed so miserably in Forest Stewardship Council certification. It has been found by the federal court that they have destroyed the habitat vital for the survival of two threatened species-Leadbeater's possum and the greater glider in the central highlands. The question has to be posed, why is VicForests still logging old-growth forests and threatened species habitat?

Our forests are vital in protecting our drinking water, helping to combat climate change and absorb carbon. Why are we destroying them to prop up an inefficient logging industry? The Victorian government must bring forward the 2030 native forest logging industry transition to ensure greater protection for our threatened species and that plans for the recovery of threatened plants and wildlife are implemented urgently and properly funded.

Although we are not indigenous ourselves we feel that the rights and interests of Traditional Custodians have been ignored in all aspects of land and water management and decision-making in respect of their traditional lands. If we are truly determined to protect and restore our forests we must recognise their rights and practises. The government must protect our forests for all Victorians, now, and in the future.

Thanks for your consideration of this submission.

Alan Hewett & Joan Jones.

