



From: POV eSubmission Form <ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au>
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Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Categories: Submissions

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Eric Smith



SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria.

It begins with our attitudes and philosophy. As a rural resident, a volunteer with Landcare, a birdwatcher and simply as a human being who recognises that my health and the health of our community depends on the state of our environment, I make this submission that we can, and must, do much better than is currently the case. As a Christian my perspective is based on the call for people to respect not only one another, but all life. No longer is the paradigm of human exceptionalism and domination of the rest of the creation an acceptable foundation for human community.

My fundamental plea is for the enquiry to recommend an end to the reduction in staffing and resources allocated to the environment. There is no point fostering industry if our water and air deteriorate. There is little point in encouraging agriculture if the animal, bird, insect and plant life is diminished. We are an interdependent society of occupants of the planet. A good starting point would be to recommend a fixed proportion of the State Budget be allocated to the environment as a legislated statutory requirement, with more available for particular projects.

I recognise that Victoria's laws will need to fit in the framework of Federal legislation, and I have separately made submission to the Federal review. There can be no doubt that Victoria's ecosystem is in decline. The environment has always been in a process of change, but the key drivers of current change are not just natural processes but human induced change such as land clearing, urban expansion, over-extraction of natural resources such as water and timber, and the introduction of invasive species. These, together with world-wide climate change are accelerating the environmental change beyond the capacity of the natural processes to cope, making addressing this issue much more urgent.

The Inquiry into ecosystems decline in Victoria should take into account the following reforms to help ensure that we make the most of this opportunity:

1. All our laws need to factor in climate change stops our laws working effectively. Climate adaption must be a part

of our legal frameworks.

2. Resource and implement the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act is the centrepiece of Victoria's biodiversity conservation legislation. Reforms last year have "refreshed and modernised" the Act, updating the objectives, adding a new duty for public authorities, and introducing new conservation tools. However, none of these reforms will be worth the paper that they're written on if they are not properly implemented.

3. The Office of the Conservation Regulator needs to be strengthened to ensure government agencies (Vic Forests particularly comes to mind) and private business comply with the standards expected by a concerned community. Fully funded and with powers of enforcement, such an independent regulator will make a substantial difference and show that these issues are of the utmost seriousness.

4. Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975 does not represent current best practice as it has developed since 1975. The Victorian Government's Biodiversity policy requires detailed action plans that are not able to be circumvented by over strict or literal interpretation of the letter of planning law rather than its intention.

5. New property development continues to avoid responsibility for the environment.. If the Federal Government hands over responsibilities under our national environmental law – the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act – to state governments, as is currently being discussed, then it provides even more reason for the Victorian laws to be updated. Victoria's planning laws and environmental impact assessment laws need to be revised so as to take into account the increasingly urgent need to protect what little remains of our fragile environment and to ensure that public and private infrastructure projects properly account for their impacts on Victoria's biodiversity before we even think about accepting any additional responsibility on the State. Sufficient funding needs to be provided to facilitate timely assessments of projects.

6. Nature protection laws should be a safety net, picking up the pieces from mistakes of the past. Legislation now needs to ensure such mistakes are not perpetuated in the present or continued into the future. Stopping native forest logging sooner rather than later, more sustainable water resource management, and new fit for purpose invasive species management legislation are needed if ecosystem decline is to be turned around. Then practical policies need to be developed in partnership with business and local communities and adequately resourced.

7. The goal of our environmental legislation must be the enhancement of our ecosystem, not just the cessation of further destruction. Restoration is important, and so is pro-active improvement. Nature protection laws alone will not be enough – our laws must also guide and encourage the restoration of Victoria's ecosystems. On both public land and private land, our land management must be subject to appropriate obligations to ensure that ecological processes and natural assets are there for future generations to enjoy.

We have a great opportunity. Please help the willing community to do what we want to do, by ensuring our legislative framework meets our aspirations in one of the most special places on the planet. The places we love need more than individual love

Thank you for considering my submission.

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File1:

File2:

File3: