

Submission to the Victorian Extinction Inquiry

I would like to draw the attention of the enquiry to the decline in numbers of migratory shore birds. At the end of our summer these remarkable birds leave Australia to follow the East –Asian Australasian Flyway some 10,000 kms to Siberia where breeding takes place. At the approaching winter, first the mature birds and later the fledglings make the return journey. Feeding grounds in Siberia, China, Japan, Korea and other countries along the Flyway are crucial to the survival of these birds. Too often these swampy sites are reclaimed for building and industry.

Much work has been done to develop an International Flight Network to ensure these sites are protected and managed.

Birdlife Australia and Australian Waders Studies Group have been instrumental in encouraging foreign governments to protect these areas.

We in Victoria have a duty to protect such areas in our state.

Westernport Bay is such an area. It is an important summer feeding ground for many species of shore birds.

Birds that feed on the mudflats and intertidal zones of Westernport include:

Bar-tailed Godwit

Whimbrel

Eastern Curlew

Common Greenshank

Terek Sandpiper

Common Sandpiper

Grey-tailed Tattler

Ruddy Turnstone

Curlew Sandpiper

Pacific Golden Plover

Grey Plover

Red-necked Stint

Westernport was listed as a significant wetland under the Ramsar Convention on Conservation of Wetlands of International Importance in 1982. However this area is now under threat due to AGL's proposal to build a gas transfer terminal near Hastings.

Shore birds are extremely sensitive to human disturbance. Noise and unusual activity cause them to lose valuable feeding time. Small birds like stints (which weigh a mere 30gms) suffer most as they need to feed for long periods to gain sufficient weight to make the 10,000 kms journey to Siberia.

This terminal will not only impact shore birds but also many of the other fragile ecosystems which make up life in this unusual bay.

Protection of Westernport as a haven for many avian, terrestrial and marine species should be a high priority of any inquiry.

A Plea from the Heart

I am 82 years old and have personally witnessed the decline of many much-loved species which used to be common in my youth. Birds like scarlet robins and willie wagtails, delicate

orchids like spider orchids and sun orchids, animals like platypuses and koalas, insects like bogong moths, have all become rarer as their habitat has diminished due to human activity. On top of this the recent bushfire season killed billions of native plants, animals and insects. This is a time when we should make every effort to cherish our unique fauna and flora, already challenged by accelerating climate change.

We now have the opportunity to move away from fossil fuels and to rebuild our economy investing in fossil fuels. We should also focus on conserving our remaining forests, grasslands and marine habitats as well as restoring areas that have been degraded. Let's do it while we can!

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