

The Committee Manager  
Standing Committee on Environment and Planning  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE, Vic. 3002

Dear Sir,

I own an 8 hectare property in the Rural Conservation Zone in Smiths Gully, Victoria. I am a Horticulturist and grower of indigenous plants for revegetation. I have lived in Smiths Gully for 47 years and have studied the flora on my property and throughout the Shire of Nillumbik. I have 42 species of orchids growing on my Box-Ironbark block and in winter the bush goes pink as the heath flowers, followed by the yellow of wattles and the orange of the peas in the Spring. That is, it used to. Now, however we are lucky to see a flower because of the heavy browsing of feral deer and the enormous numbers of kangaroos. Our understory of shrubs has disappeared, eaten and broken so disastrously that the shrubs simply died. To save the biodiversity on our property we have fenced 6 20mx20m plots which exclude deer, rabbits and other browsers. We poison rabbits and spend an enormous amount of time on hands and knees weeding. There is an amazing difference between the fenced and unfenced areas, the growth being measurable in 10's of centimetres, and species appearing that have not been seen before. Sadly, outside these areas the deer trample the orchid patches and create trails across hillsides and eat plants to the ground; erosion of slopes washing away any seed that was stored in the ground. The pressure of lower rainfall due to climate change, feral animal browsing, weeds introduced from neighbouring pasture properties and the imbalance of our own natural animal species is destroying the biodiversity of our Australian bush and creating a decline in our ecosystems. I have spent a lot of time and money guarding vulnerable species and maintaining habitats to provide for pollinators in an attempt to maintain seed production for future generations of bush species. Our area has a large number of rare species of plants that are not appreciated by many land users, local councils and roadside management crews.

Following this review in which you will find a serious decline in ecosystems across Victoria, I urge you to put in place policies and legislation to ensure the long term protection and management of our rare and endangered species and habitats. Climate Change being our most serious threat.

Julie Franke

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