
INQUIRY INTO ECOSYSTEM DECLINE IN VICTORIA

A. THE EXTENT OF THE DECLINE OF VICTORIA'S BIODIVERSITY AND THE LIKELY IMPACT ON PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY FIRST PEOPLES, AND ECOSYSTEMS, IF MORE IS NOT DONE TO ADDRESS THIS, INCLUDING CONSIDERATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS.

1. BIODIVERSITY, FIRST PEOPLES, ECOSYSTEMS AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

I address this statement as a person of the land. This connection cannot be confined to populist words of urban environmentalism. Therefore a lifetime of observation -experience living in the Upper Yarra Valley and adjacent the Central Highlands. A lifetime of environmental consciousness.

Biodiversity - Life diverse

Natural life is what sustains human life. This connection to reality, appears to be masked by the fact that all the necessities to sustain urban life, are now provided by those still connected to agriculture, forestry, fishing.

First Peoples

Our Australian community is a proud mix of cultural ancestry. Those claiming cultural heritage should rightfully be proud of their culture. But is this incredible culture being sold short for political and economic gain?

This issue is so close to my heart that I write this candidly as my opinion, of my feelings, of my responsibilities. Until recently I considered myself the custodian of our Yarra Valley property and the adjoining Yarra River, not in the European sense of the ownership of land but as a custodian with responsibility to nurture and protect our property for our short tenure in time.

As the current custodians of the Yarra river system and Valley we can feel empathy towards the Wurundjeri people of 200 years ago. Our ancestors' actions to remove the Wurundjeri peoples custodianship of their land is nothing to be proud of. I am personally distressed thinking what it must have been like for the Wurundjeri people. The Empire-type thinking of the day knew no better, however this does not excuse it.

We the dispossessed custodians are going through a similar situation with our custodianship having been forcibly removed. Our ancestors are not us! As are the current Wurundjeri people, that are only descendants of the first nation people. Now it gets complex, the current Wurundjeri people are also descendants of both European and first nation people.

2. THE MODERN DAY WURUNDJERI PERSON LIVES A LIFE AS WE DO, FOLLOW OR PLAY FOOTBALL FOR EXAMPLE, AND LIVE IN A CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY. BUT THEY DO HAVE A CULTURAL HERITAGE THAT IS DIFFERENT TO ANGLO SAXONS HERITAGE. HOW DO WE ACCOMMODATE THIS DIFFERENT HERITAGE IN A MODERN WORLD, WITH A WURUNDJERI THAT ARE NOW VERY DIFFERENT PEOPLE TO 200 YEARS AGO?

The floodplains that once had billabongs stocked with eels and fish for food for the Wurundjeri now grow vegetables, dairy cattle, and beef cattle for food for the modern day Wurundjeri person. 70% of Melbourne's water comes via the Yarra system straight to all Melbourne households.

To truly return the floodplains to billabongs, for example, would require the removal of the Upper Yarra Dam, and consequently the removal of one of Melbourne's primary water supplies, and close proximity food bowls. It would also, naturally, reinstate the disastrous flooding that occurred prior to the introduction of the Dam, some of which reached as far as Geelong.

The Wurundjeri must be very careful to not be seen as being used as the paid urban based, green ideological policeman, adding yet another layer of bureaucracy. The Yarra system is too often seen as a money stream rather than a total life-giving stream. Ignoring the reality of Melbourne's water source and food bowl.

The voluntary custodianship of the Yarra system which I and fellow adjoining landowners previously experienced has been removed, and as adjoining landowners we have been re-graded as of low influence by the Victorian Government. We are now replaced by a career-based, paid environmental consciousness, incorporating those claiming indigenous heritage. This indigenous custodianship is reliant on a paid consciousness. The consequences to our environment are explored further on.

The following is an extract from the *Wurundjeri Yarra River Act (Wilip-gin Birrarung Murrow Act)* submission:

'The Wurundjeri therefore requests a seat on the Yarra Collaborative Committee and any sub-groups that are established and for this participation to be appropriately resourced.'

This is one of numerous requests of 'resourcing'.

Does custodianship no longer require the physical actions of custodianship? Is it simply a birthright? Is this reconciliation or discrimination? Does this allow for a congenial experience for all Australians, allowing a respectful relationship with nature, or does this, in reality convey environmental power to a few?

The separation of peoples within a community is disrespectful to the Australian spirit, that 'all Australians that live their life with integrity are equal.

3. CLIMATE CHANGE: THE CONTINUED CHANGES AND THE EVOLVING OF OUR CLIMATE.

Unfortunately the current understanding of climate change is plagued with misconceptions and exploitation. Emotive popular opinions that drive environmental legislation are being used to initiate changes, instead of critical thought and a personal responsibility towards our impact on our environment, thus a link to climate change.

4. TO BLAME CLIMATE CHANGE ALLOWS THE TRANSFER OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY BUT DOES LITTLE FOR PRESSURES ON OUR ENVIRONMENT. HOW DO WE CHANGE THE CURRENT THOUGHT PROCESS OF CLIMATE CHANGE TO MORE MEANINGFULLY REFLECT PERSONAL CLIMATE - ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY?

Some insight to this climate responsibility discussion. Solar panels, wind turbines, electric cars are touted as the saviour of the climate. This is convenient because it requires no personal sacrifice, and the community continues to exponentially increase its energy usage.

No critical thought is used to evaluate the true footprint of these purported 'green saviours', which are only financially viable because of taxpayers' subsidies. What is the carbon footprint of manufacture, shipping and disposal at end of life for example? Failed solar panels are presently dumped due to the financial cost and ironically, the energy required to recycle. Solar energy is upheld as a convenient crutch for the protection of urban lifestyle.

An affluent economy allows for responsible environmental governance. To shut down, and economically disadvantage Australian businesses with these dubious short term, taxpayer funded, feel-good climate saviours is actually detrimental to sustainable environmental - climate responsibility. It consequently results in the restriction of future funding for a respectful relationship with our environment.

For example; the closure of sustainable forestry without a viable option will result in large amounts of imported timber from indiscriminate forestry. Yet IPCC supports sustainable timber harvesting, as similar to a growing child, a growing tree absorbs greater levels of carbon in its first 20 years. UN world authority opinion opposite to the Victorian Government.

Does anyone have the fortitude to discuss our expanding population and our selfish demand for ever increasing energy consumption? Now I suggest, considered as a right, or entitlement of urbanisation. This is the discussion that we should be having. That this inquiry should be having.

B. THE ADEQUACY OF THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK PROTECTING VICTORIA'S ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING GRASSLANDS, FORESTS AND THE MARINE AND COASTAL ENVIRONMENT, AND NATIVE SPECIES; AND

C. THE ADEQUACY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND FUNDING PROTECTING AND RESTORING VICTORIA'S ECOSYSTEMS.

Absolutely no mention of the Australian people's role - responsibility towards our environment. Why? Is the environmental responsibility the sole ownership of politicians and taxpayer funded environmentalists? The pervasive business of environmentalism?

In the last 50+ years we have had a huge increase in areas locked up via legislation. Now we have an estimated 1,000,000 deer destroying our fern gullies and forest understories as browsers. Australia also has an estimated 8 million feral cats eating an estimated 1,000 native animals each, per year. Massive fuel loads from a lockup mentality. All rural knowledge by a close association with nature removed by legislation.

After two hundred years of global settlement, biodiversity - our environment has permanently changed and continues evolving. The current, populist, urban environmental opinion is to lockup and a return to pristine Wilderness via city centric legislation. This though emotionally satisfies those without the skills of critical thought, history tells us that in many cases it could be described as environmental vandalism. Weeds, insects, feral animals, disease that our environment has no evolutionary defences from, left abandoned of our duty of care to nature. Chemicals, poison, etc., now replace rural stewardship.

We have an Australian community that appears to be in love with global travel, trade and a global economy that inflicts these pressures on our environment, yet ironically some of this same community claim environmental responsibility by removing environmental responsibility from the Australian people and placed into bureaucratic lockup control.

D. LEGISLATIVE, POLICY, PROGRAM, GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING SOLUTIONS TO FACILITATE ECOSYSTEM AND SPECIES PROTECTION, RESTORATION AND RECOVERY IN VICTORIA, IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS.

Abraham Lincoln famously once said:

"Government of the people, by the people and for the people".

Environmental legislation, policy that has successfully removed my custodianship of nature shows no understanding of my respectful relationship as part of our natural world. . It is a sad truth that we seem to be moving ever more closely to a system of governance that more resembles political autocracy than democracy. On this increasing beleaguered planet , we as the intelligent species must work to protect the future environment for all , and it can be done sensibly and sensitively not railroading " paper based " ideology that has not been future proofed nor had an in-depth consultation and appreciation of local firsthand experience thus knowledge.

The removal of a respectful relationship with nature and replaced by a lockup and total chemical control system right up to the Yarra Rivers waterline is not respectful conservation. Why no mention of total chemical control in the legislation, policy, program, governance that removes respectful stewardship?

Over two years since my CUSTODIANSHIP (Riparian Management LICENCE) was forcible removed on our pristine Yarra River reserve and it now resembles a weed and feral animal reserve.

However, many environmental bureaucrats, those claiming indigenous heritage and consultants, are, or will be rewarded. Conservation should not be seen as a career gold seam. Yet Victoria wide, city centric governance has removed knowledge and experience by association with nature. Thousands of different ecosystems and one intellectually lazy lockup system. In the case of my river reserve, voluntary, respectful care replaced by the total domination of nature via chemicals and domination of communities by legislation.

E. OPPORTUNITIES TO RESTORE VICTORIA'S ENVIRONMENT WHILE UPHOLDING FIRST PEOPLE'S CONNECTION TO COUNTRY. AND INCREASING AND DIVERSIFYING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN VICTORIA.

Restore environment, first peoples and employment opportunities.

Integrity, voluntary custodianship, experience, knowledge by association doesn't rate a mention in the business of environmentalism. Clearly the "Racism of Wisdom".

First Peoples recognise elders lifetime of knowledge and experience. Yet Victoria Government legislation has removed this "wisdom" via urban contrived legislation. Can this legislation actually be called conservation? Or isn't this hypocritical? Isn't this discriminatory? Any person of the land, without discrimination of cultural ancestry, is welcome at my table. People of the land world wide have an instant affiliation upon meeting, but also an instant recognition of impostors.

First Peoples' culture has a lot to offer the present Australia, Australians, yet it appears to have been reduced to part of the environmental gold mining industry. Why? Are they now being reduced to environmental policeman over my freehold land? Why? When the Yarra River reserves are now deteriorating under a bureaucratic, total chemical control system.

Would any of these environmental management groups ever be truly at one with the land? Would they ever run the freshly turned earth through their hands in awe of its true worth? Would they weep from the effluvia of death as they walk through fire destroyed forest? Would they when weeping, vow never to again remain silent when it comes to defending our environment?

Edmund Burke stated in the 17th century:

"Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it."

He also stated:

"The greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse."

How little have we learnt as this inquiry is about centralised, bureaucratic power over environmental responsibility, destroying the Australian people's sense of ownership and individual responsibility? Further rollout of a one size fits all bureaucratic lockup mentality only appeases urban environmentalism, yet is detrimental to the goals of environmental responsibility.

F. ANY OTHER RELATED MATTERS.

Conservation, biodiversity and ecosystems should not be shackled with a parasitic burden of politics, career based environmental consciousness or a birthright financial inheritance.

Will this be yet another soulless announcement from on top of the biodiversity dead, concrete jungle soap box to further dictate, degrade and discriminate against the true stewards of the land? Furthering the business of environmentalism.

Or true leadership shown to engage rural Victorians as a true wealth to this state, instead of a tradable commodity for urban votes. The acknowledgement of thousands of different ecosystems that require local knowledge and experience. Those that have voluntary duty of care to our environment placed above political virtue signalling.

So I invite the Senate inquiry to contact the likes of myself as a person of the land. Also people of forests and the sea that have a generational association with nature to contribute to this important discussion, based on understanding of a lifetime of experience & knowledge of working in the Victorian environment.

No participation will occur if the online Engage Victoria is used. After numerous experiences of this system our local community will no longer be humiliated with participation of an online system that is designed to allow outside influence to dominate small rural communities. The Disengagement of rural Victoria.

Engage Victoria..... one of many examples that could be given.

Part of the Yellingbo Conservation Area (YCA) implementation was the reforestation of Haining Dairy Farm. A dairy farm that had been gifted to all Victorians, by Sir John Reid for the agricultural education of school children. Re-forestation plans were already completed when public outrage forced an engagement process.

A working committee chosen by DELWP (in charge of rolling out the YCA). Three options were presented to the public through the Engage Victoria online engagement process. About halfway through a check on the votes showed that the local community preference as the preferred option. Enter the morality of environmentalism. That very afternoon 255,000 emails were sent out worldwide by Zoos. Parks Victoria sent out emails alerting their employees to vote. Greening Australia placed Facebook ads. They achieved the required outcome. Freedom of information confirmed this.

Why the local opposition? Our bushfire history . We are a area that is over 80 % forested and apparently 2nd most fire prone area in the world. Haining Farm is located beside the township of Don Valley and up wind of Launching Place and Yarra Junction (up-wind historic fire direction).

23 November 2016 Premiers page. James Merlino deputy Premier quote:

"In order for this bushfire risk assessment to be effective it must be underpinned by the local knowledge and expertise of landowners and the community."

Two fire assessments were undertaken and the Yellingbo Conservation Area Bushfire Risk Management Plan (YCABRMP) was constructed.

All local knowledge and expertise of landowners and the community were excluded - banned from input into the fire assessments and the YCABRMP. All inputs and exclusions totally controlled by

DELWP. Unfortunately the resulting YCABRMP appears to have totally excluded our local fire history, as some fire facts claimed, are opposite our local fire history. So removed from bushfire history is that there is no mention of the effect of the Yellingbo Conservation Area on roads in a bushfire senario. Yet the YCA crosses or comes dangerously close to access roads in 13 places just within the area known as the North East corner. One major road in and out.

Bushfire awareness appears a nuisance to environmentalism. Yet as a sedentary bird I suggest that it is very relevant to the Helmeted Honeyeater. Does this highlight the dangers of urban designed legislation, when it is well accepted that bushfires are a huge threat to all life? It must be noted that the current Yellingbo Reserve (YR) is the template used for the reforestation of Haining Dairy Farm and the river reserves. The YR fuel loads as of December 2019 are 22 to 32 tons of fuel per hectre(district / region 13 fuel loads not released to the public). The considered dangerous level of fuel load per hectre is 8 tons. A irrigated pasture turned into a area of potentially 3 times the dangerous level. Yet the State Planning Policy Framework Ammendment , VC 140, clearly states that no projects are to be implemented that increase bushfire risk. Has environmentalism overpowered statute law? There are those in the local community that have suggestions of conservation with respect given to bushfire risk. Unfortunately as a community completely now disalusioned and humiliated, zero trust of environmentalism exists and zero intellectual input is allowed.

Rural Australians are now being put into a position that they must beg for a social license to exist, to be a contributing member of our Australian community. This is opposite to the Australian spirit - character that our people were once our strength, the wealth of our nation.

Nature without stewardship - custodians, is nature without defences.

Daryl Cochrane

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]