

## Submission to Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

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To: ecosystems <ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au>

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To the Honorable Members of Parliament,

Thank-you for holding this inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria. It is no exaggeration that humanity faces an existential crises, as the diverse ecosystems that support life as we know it are being placed under extraordinary stress. As MPs in our great State you hold great responsibility for the welfare of some of the most unique and threatened flora and fauna on our planet. Due to the special characteristics of the continent, Australia possesses a richness of varied species that evolved to fill specialist niches. Whether these species thrive or perish depends on our actions; and I hope that you will have a proud legacy of preserving our ecosystems for future generations. It is becoming abundantly clear that our own existence is dependent on these natural systems. The looming threat of biodiversity collapse is symptomatic of the unsustainable levels of resources extracted from the environment. It is time for us to adopt the wisdom of indigenous peoples who understand that we are inherently part of the ecosystem, and our prosperity is entirely dependent on ecosystem health.

As Victorians you have no doubt travelled to some of the mosaic of Mountain Ash forests and temperate Gondwana rainforests that once stretched from the Otway ranges to East Gippsland. These forests once covered the majority of the state area, but have now been subdivided and cleared to less than 2%. The remaining areas of forest hold a special place in my childhood, spending summers taking refuge from the heat amongst the tree ferns of the undergrowth. When logging first began in these areas they would cut down the trees to measure their height, and based on these records and the tremendous growth rate of c 1.5m per year it is recognized that if undisturbed they would be the tallest trees in the world. In 2018 Mountain Ash forests were categorized as a collapsing ecosystem. These magnificent trees provide homes for a vast array of our precious fauna, including the leadbeaters possum, yellow bellied gliders, kookaburras and lyre birds. The loss of this precious ecosystem will seal the fate of hundreds of species. Large areas of our water catchments are made up of these forests, filtering the rainfall, holding the soil and providing some of the best quality drinking water in the world. They also buffer the heavy downpours we experience, regulating the flows into the waterways and mitigating flooding. Driving the collapse of this vital ecosystem is logging and fire, both factors that we can influence, and if we act quickly it might not be too late to save them for future generations, and provide a boon for tourism in our state.

Specific actions I that the State Government can take include:

- placing an immediate ban on old growth logging throughout the state;
- expanding the area of protected land in the State;
- entrusting indigenous Australians as custodians of the land and adopting traditional fire management practices;
- requiring sustainable forestry practices in plantations, e.g., Forest Stewardship Certification;
- providing incentives for reforestation of degraded land; and
- actively implementing a program of weed and invasive species eradication.

There is much research into the state of Mountain Ash forests and the interrelationship of logging activity and fire risks, conducted for more than 30 years by Professor David

Lindenmayer. This recent article by David is a good place to start:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-29/logging-bushfire-affected-areas-australia-increases-fire-risk/11903662>

In closing, I once again thank-you for this opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry, and hope that you will take the time to go out and explore some of these areas before making a decision on whether they are worth saving.

Regards,

Will Nash