

**Victorian Extinction Inquiry**

**Carl Rayner,** [REDACTED]

As a private individual I would like to make the following submission to the Victorian Extinction Inquiry.

**Anglesea, Aireys Inlet District**

I belong to an environment group called ANGAIR Inc (Anglesea Aireys Inlet Society for the Preservation of Flora and Fauna). My title is Leader of Environmental Care. I run the weekly volunteer working bees (1.5hrs) in conservation areas in the Anglesea/Aireys Inlet district with usually 8 to 14 participants. We work in the Great Otway National Park, Alcoa Lease areas, Anglesea Bushland Reserve, Gherang Gherang Bushland Reserve, Pararparap Bushland Reserve, the Coastal Reserve and Surf Coast Shire Nature Reserves. Our work mainly involves removing environmental weeds from these areas using Loppers, Bow Saws and treating the cut stumps with Roundup. We also obtain Community Grants to restore indigenous vegetation in badly degraded areas, where we need Chain Saw Contractors and Mulching Contractors for the removal of large mature weeds. We have collaborative working arrangements on projects with a number of secondary student school groups.

Environmental weeds are a major problem in the district. Weeds spread from private gardens in townships, along roads, walking tracks, mountain bike and trail bike tracks. Weeds overrun indigenous vegetation, out-competing the native plants and killing the indigenous plants. Parks Vic have limited funding to pay for contractors to remove environmental weeds from the Great Otway National Park. This funding shortfall puts the long term protection of the Parks flora and fauna values in jeopardy. Volunteers from ANGAIR and Friends of the Eastern Otways undertake some work to remove environmental weeds in the park, but they do not have the labour resources to cover all the weed outbreaks throughout the park. Bushland Reserves and Alcoa Lease areas, which are listed under the National Estate, are a much lower priority for Parks Vic and very limited to no work is undertaken in these areas by Parks Vic. The Great Ocean Road Coast Committee (GORCC) have only 3 officers to protect and restore the Coastal Reserve between Torquay and Cumberland River (west of Lorne), an impossible task. Again volunteer groups including Torquay Coast Action, Jan Juc Coast Action and ANGAIR restore and protect some areas along the Coastal Reserve. However significant parts of the Coastal Reserve, covered with environmental weeds, are left to degrade the indigenous vegetation without any work by GORCC.

Recently a new authority "The Great Ocean Road Authority" has been formed to manage the Crown land from near Peterborough to Torquay. I believe the new authority has been formed to make it easier for the Government to undertake tourist developments along the Great Ocean Road. I do not believe that the protection of flora and fauna was adequately considered in the formation of the new authority. Unfortunately funding allocated to the new authority is very limited. It will obtain funding from GORCC and other Foreshore Committees, mainly through profits from Caravan Parks, but now will have to allocate the funds to a much larger managed area. Some Surf Coast Shire managed Nature Reserves in Townships, which previously obtained satisfactory conservation funding from the shire, will now be managed by the new authority and it is highly probable that these reserves will not receive adequate resources to protect the significant indigenous vegetation. Consequently I feel the formation of this new authority will lead to a larger degradation of our local flora and fauna.

The Anglesea/Aireys Inlet district is an area of very high fire danger and therefore cool burns are undertaken frequently throughout the district to try and reduce the fire danger in the local community. Fire causes a major disturbance to the natural environment by removing most of the ground cover. This creates ideal conditions for a mass germination of indigenous plants and environmental weeds. Unless the environmental weeds are removed they will take over the indigenous vegetation and kill most of the indigenous plants. The fire authorities provide very limited resources to remove environmental weeds after the fire. I have had 20 years of experience frequently visiting previous burnt patches of the Great Otway National Park, Bushland Reserves and the Coastal Reserve and I haven't seen any indication that contractors are removing weeds in recently burnt sites. ANGAIR volunteers have undertaken many projects in areas previously burnt in a cool burn but the government needs to dramatically increase funding to do this work. In our district cool burns will change the vegetation type from heathy woodlands to dense large flammable scrub, particularly dominated by the environmental weed Sallow Wattle (*Acacia longifolia* var. *longifolia*). Hence I think the cool burns dramatically increase the fire danger to the local community unless the fires are undertaken bi-annually, which will destroy many indigenous species.

**Recommendations** 1. The Government allocate a major increase in funding for weed control in areas burnt in cool burns. Sufficient funds are allocated for sites, to allow follow up over a number of occasions, to ensure good weed control.

2. In order to help young graduates obtain job experience after graduation and to help pest plant and animal control, I recommend that the government fund teams of graduates, who have studied Resource Management, Conservation and the Environment, to conduct environmental work in conservation areas throughout the state.

### **Native Forest Logging**

I am very concerned with the effect on the environment of logging in native forests, particularly on wildlife and plant communities. In my opinion clearfelling of forests for woodchips/paper production and other low grade timber products is an unacceptable activity. It destroys all the wildlife in the clearfelled areas including endangered animals and the indigenous vegetation. Some, but not all of the indigenous vegetation re-germinates but the thick young vegetation is highly fire prone compared to the pre-clearfelled plant community. Consequently the risk of future fires at the site is increased with its subsequent further destruction of flora and fauna. Mechanical equipment that is used in the clearfelling operation is not compatible with the restoration of all the plant species that were originally present at the site. Considering that we have recently had unprecedented bushfire over 2019/2020 summer period in Gippsland that severely destroyed and killed a massive amount of flora and fauna, it is paramount that we stop logging of native forests. I am absolutely gobsmacked that the current Government has allowed logging companies to go into these fire burnt forests to remove logs for timber production. The further devastation to the environment removing these tree logs, which often still contain tree hollows suitable for endangered wildlife for decades, with the subsequent erosion and destruction of more natural values is mind boggling.

I am very concerned with Vic Forests the government organization that is totally disinterested in protecting rare and endangered flora and fauna and have no care for the environment. They provide a few short term jobs for forestry workers but destroy our flora and fauna, which is a major pull

factor and highlight for international visitors and will remain so for ever, if we manage the forestry resource properly. As well as protecting our flora and fauna as a humane thing to do for our planet, it provides billions of tourist dollars. I think our priorities are crazy.

I am disgusted how Vic Forest treats Dr Lindenmeyer, an internationally acclaimed forest scientist, who has been studying the forests of the Central Highlands for over 30 years. They refuse to change their forestry practices as a result of the world class research he has carried out. Also Vic Forests is hardly profitable. We are destroying our endangered wildlife and flora with minimal gain and an unbelievable huge future loss to the planet and our economic future.

I am also concerned about our Regional Forest Agreements between the Commonwealth Government and State Governments as these agreements are independent of our environmental laws. Therefore our flora and fauna can be more easily destroyed as they are not regulated by our environmental laws.

**Recommendations** 1. The Government immediately transition timber logging from native forests to plantations.

2. The proposed National Park in the Central Highlands is proclaimed and all forestry activity is immediately stopped.

3. The VEAC proposed National Parks at Mt Cole, Wombat Forest and Enfield near Bendigo are proclaimed and timber production immediately stopped.

### **Species Protection**

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act has been around since the 1980's, however I still think it has not achieved its objectives. The grasslands on the Basalt Plains contain many endangered and rare plants and animals. Although many Action Plans have been developed to protect our endangered species, habitat destruction continues, and more species are on the brink. The Minister of Environment is not compelled to protect species that are under threat, and so loss of flora and fauna continues. We need a workable Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act that will protect our flora and fauna.

**Recommendations** 1. The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act is amended to make the Minister of the Environment compelled to prevent future developments that impact listed species under the act.

2. Funding is increased so that DELWP can regulate the act satisfactorily.

### **Clearing Native Vegetation**

I am concerned about further clearing of indigenous vegetation within the state. I think all clearing should be forbidden, considering it destroys our flora and fauna and increases our greenhouse gases. I do not support the current "Offset" policy.