

Submission: Inquiry into the Loss of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Mrs Ellie Robertson,


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I am writing as a citizen of Australia who is deeply concerned on the destruction and degradation of our environment. Even though I live in Sydney, all of Australia is my home and I have visited Victoria many times. This is not a local state issue. This is a national issue.

I am writing this submission in the hope that the government will give this survival issue, and I call it a survival issue because our humanity depends on serious and actionable processes to protect our dwindling natural environment and our slowly disappearing wildlife.

I am reading articles daily on more and more of our natural bushland being ripped apart and developed for farming or housing.

Even in our local suburb, every day I can hear chainsaws a obliterating yet another tree. I do not hear the kookaburras like I did when I was younger. I do not even see the butterflies and bees I used to see a few years ago. Something is happening. Something very dangerous.

Please consider my comments below beginning with the overall problem.

The world's biodiversity (variation in life) is under intense stress and pressure, causing a loss of biodiversity that has led to a Biodiversity Emergency. This is recognised and reported by scientists around the world and by leading global organisations such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

These threats to nature and decline in biodiversity are also reported in Victoria. The 2018 State of the Environment Report (<https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/reports/state-environment-2018>) from Victoria's Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability was damning. The status of 60% of the Biodiversity Indicators are rated as "poor" and none are rated as "good"; in terms of trends, 51% of the Biodiversity Indicators are deteriorating and only 1 out of 35 had improved and that is Private Land Conservation.

The main drivers of Biodiversity Loss are over-exploitation (harvesting), pollution, non-native (introduced) species, habitat loss and climate damage. So to prevent further biodiversity loss and ecosystem decline and to protect and restore species and ecosystems, we must tackle these factors. Exploitation, disregard and disrespect of animals is the major contributor to all drivers of Biodiversity Loss.

Please also refer to: The Senate Inquiry into Faunal Extinction, Interim Report. (https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Faunalexinction2019/Interim_Report) & World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency ([/academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/70/1/8/5610806](https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/70/1/8/5610806))

Following below are my concerns and suggestions:

Habitat Loss:

- Animal Agriculture is a key driver of habitat loss:

Solution :

- Stop land clearing and destroying grasslands for animal agriculture.
- Encourage and support more plant-based agriculture and reduce animal agriculture.
- Support and encourage biodiversity-sensitive agriculture; invest in research & development to expand this industry, *e.g.* Regenerative Farming, Permaculture.
- Stop logging remnant native forests which are habitat for native wildlife.
- Protect the coast and the bays; protect and restore the Great Southern Kelp Forests.
- Restore ecosystems using sound biodiversity science.
- Consider Ecotourism opportunities: Ramsar Wetlands, coastal communities, forests, grasslands.

Exploitation: use, abuse & disregard

Exploitation can be divided to three areas: animals, ecosystems & habitats and resources (*e.g.* land, water)

ANIMALS:

Native species are not pests; they should be celebrated not vilified.

Kangaroos & Wallabies: Victoria's Kangaroo population is in fast decline; the Victorian Government relies on outdated and poorly-monitored figures and its reports and quoted numbers are illogical and non-sensical (https://www.creativecowboyfilms.com/blog_posts/kangaroos-in-victoria-status-2019).

Solution:

End the Commercial harvest of Kangaroos & wallabies:

- Authority to Control Wildlife (ATCW) System should be terminated or overhauled.
- Develop eco-tourism programs around the most iconic Australian wildlife species – kangaroos.

Ducks: shooting of native birds is decimating populations that are under stress from drought and climate emergency, and it is polluting and damaging wetlands, in particular Ramsar-listed wetlands (<https://birdlife.org.au/australian-birdlife/detail/drawing-a-line-in-the-mud>). It is also encouraging and enabling violence.

Solution:

- Ban duck shooting
- Develop an eco-tourism industry based around Victoria's unique bird populations and the Ramsar-listed wetlands

Dingoes: Dingoes are native animals and important in the ecosystem; they are not an introduced species, nor are they "wild dogs". The Dingo is a true-blue, native Australian species.

Bats: important pollinators, critical to ecosystems. Greatly impacted by climate change (*e.g.* drought, rising temperatures), land-clearing, use of nets on fruit trees.

ECOSYSTEMS & HABITATS

Fishing in our waterways: the impacts of recreational fishing are not well-understood in Victoria. We need better monitoring and evaluation of recreational fishing to understand the impacts on fish populations, non-target animals (e.g. birds, mammals) and general ecosystem effects.

Logging: exploiting native forests; disregards all species that live in this habitat, e.g. Greater gliders, Leadbeater's possum, Powerful owls, Helmeted honey eaters.

Logging is due to start in fire-ravaged forests this week. It's the last thing our wildlife needs. Logged native forests mostly end up in landfill, not in buildings and furniture.

The Victorian Volcanic Plains Grasslands are critically endangered; they have been exploited by people, predominantly for animal agriculture. Please refer to: [https://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/projects/victorian-volcanic-plains/#:~:text=The%20Victorian%20Volcanic%20Plains%20\(VVP,significant%20area%20for%20Aboriginal%20people.](https://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/projects/victorian-volcanic-plains/#:~:text=The%20Victorian%20Volcanic%20Plains%20(VVP,significant%20area%20for%20Aboriginal%20people.)

RESOURCES

Stop exploiting water: water is diverted from natural waterways to facilitate agriculture and in addition, water is polluted by logging activities. Land exploitation leads to unhealthy soil. Please refer to: Soil Health: <http://www.fao.org/resources/infographics/infographics-details/en/c/326257/>

Pollution:

Pollution is a major pressure on biodiversity and ecosystems.

Solution

Tackle pollution on: Plastics, Chemicals, Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) & toxins, (many of which are used in agriculture e.g. Fertilisers, Herbicides [e.g. Glyphosate]; Pesticides, 1080, PFAS; Endocrine Disruptors (e.g. Bisphenols, PFAS); and Antibiotics used in animal agriculture.

Non-native (Introduced) Species:

- **Non-native (introduced) species** are in Victoria because of human actions; therefore, we need to be accountable for the impact and create effective and humane solutions. Don't shift blame to the species we introduced by vilifying and demonising them. We did this.

We must consider options where all species are given equal consideration; in addition to considering the species and ecosystems that are impacted by the introduced species; be considerate of and responsible for the animals that we have introduced.

- **Brumbies:** aerial shooting has been used many times – it has not solved the problem. It is a short-term solution, but a long-term failure.

Can we allocate land to brumbies? Relocate them and apply fertility control to stop them breeding and allow them to live out their lives humanely.

- **Deer** are not native animals; they should not be running wild in state and national parks where they damage ecosystems. Can we develop fertility control?

- **Cats:** While cats can be loveable companions and family members, they are effective hunters and injure and kill wildlife. Keeping cats confined to properties can not only save wildlife, but also improve the health and wellbeing of cats.

Climate Emergency:

The main drivers of the climate emergency are fossil fuels (used for energy production) and animal agriculture; both result in land clearing and habitat destruction, which is the third main driver of climate change.

Points to consider:

- 30% of the ice-free land across the planet is used for animal agriculture
- Animal Agriculture results in further impacts once the animals are farmed on the land (i.e. methane), which is multiplied with intensive farming.

Solution:

- Reduce consumption of animal products and therefore reduce animal agriculture
- Shifting Diets for a Sustainable Food Future
- Behavioural change to stop extinction
- Develop more plant-based food industries to replace animal food products
- Plant-rich diets
- Move with urgency to 100% clean, renewable energy sources

Legislation - there are many sections of legislation that need to be reviewed and indeed rewritten as a matter of urgency.

- Independent Review of Timber Harvesting Regulation, Victoria: Oct 2018 (https://www.forestsandreserves.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/414165/Independent-Review-of-Timber-Harvesting-Regulation-Report.pdf)
- Environment Victoria: report into bushfires and regional forest agreements (<https://www.envirojustice.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EJA-report-No-longer-tenable-1.pdf>)

We need Government programs to protect and restore ecosystems; review threatened species and ecosystem recovery programs.

The Law: We need new Nature Laws that are sacrosanct

- Environmental Accounting & Natural Capital: Please refer : *United Nations System of Environmental Economic Accounting* (<https://seea.un.org/>)
- Legal status for nature: Please refer : *Australian Centre for the Rights of Nature* (<https://rightsofnature.org.au/what-are-rights-of-nature/>) & *Environment Victoria* (<https://environmentvictoria.org.au/2019/09/12/legal-rights-for-nature/>)
- Animal Property Rights: Please refer : *animals have a right to a home* (<https://scholar.google.ca/scholar?q=%22Animal%20property%20rights%20:%20justice%20or%20conservation?%22>)