

Dear Committee,

Many thanks for the opportunity to participate in a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria.

Our family was unfortunate to have been involved in the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria in 2009. The Black Saturday bushfires were unprecedented in their intensity, destruction and loss of life and property.

In 2019/20 Victoria once again was subjected to immense raging bushfires. These fires were much worse than in 2009 and although we were not personally involved in these fires the impact resonated with us. Once again the devastation was "unprecedented." This time several fires connected and the devastating result was tabled "the worst bushfires in our history." The total result was 19.4 million hectares burnt, and over a billion animals lost their lives. 300 homes were lost in Victoria. We were hopeful, considering the devastation wreaked upon our natural environment for a second time, that we would have seen a pause from our Government in relation to native forest harvesting. We would have thought that at least a pause would have been appropriate to consider an Inquiry or at least an assessment of all of the Victorian forests and the animals which lived within them before logging resumed.

But that wasn't to be the case. Logging in the The Central Highlands did not stop at all during and after these fires. And VicForests resumed logging in East Gippsland in fire affected forests under the guise of "salvage logging." This was contrary to scientific advice saying that fire affected forests needed to be left to heal and regenerate and to provide food and homes for the animals which had survived.

So many times scientific advice regarding forest management is ignored by our State Government. The native forest areas around Marysville were heavily impacted by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and the activities of forest harvesting by VicForests over many years. However, the devastation which has occurred over recent years is unprecedented. The area between Marysville and Woods Point has been decimated by logging and it is not the only area. The Toolangi State Forest. The Rubicon State Forest and Dom Dom Saddle have also been decimated.

Over time VicForests has been taken to court on numerous occasions by environmental groups with proven evidence of breaches. Breaches which constitute illegal logging of Greater Glider and Leadbeater Possum habitat. Other breaches included logging on steep slopes and logging in areas not designated. Whilst the courts would rule these breaches occurred, penalties were never applied and VicForests was able to continue unabated. But today a ruling was made by a Victorian judge in a case brought about by The Friends of the Leadbeater Possum that VicForests has in fact broken the law, logging in coupes that contain Leadbeater Possum. To my knowledge this is the first time an environmental group has been successful in bringing VicForests to account for their activities. This ruling means they will not be able to proceed with logging activities in these areas.

Daniel Andrews has given a commitment to phase out harvesting in native forests over the next ten years. In the meantime VicForests will continue to harvest the timber from native forests and I fear if there is a change of government the phase out may not occur at all. At the current rate of extraction there will not be much left after ten years. Logging in native forests poses the greatest threat to ecosystems and bio-diversity in the Central Highlands and should stop immediately. Another ten years of logging would be enough to compound problems that already exist and push our threatened species ever closer to extinction. Native forest harvesting must transition to plantations.

Healthy ecosystems are key to our survival. There are many ways in which we can help nature repair the damage that has been afforded to the land through land clearing and logging by initiating programs for reviving the species facing extinction by leaving the forest to regenerate and heal.

A scheme to assist Farmers to regenerate forested areas within their farms to assist biodiversity. Protection of wetlands under threat of development such as the Westernport gas ship terminal which is unnecessary and should not be allowed.

Development of wetlands to absorb excess water in areas of new housing development will enhance the urban environment for birds and animals, insects and people.

Protection of native grasslands which are in serious decline.

Revegetation of degraded streams and rivers and removal of weeds to assist with water flow.

Programs to eradicate pest species such as wild dog, cats, deer, rabbits and foxes would provide environmental job opportunities.

Tree planting in parks and gardens and protection of existing trees subject to climate changes.

Renewables into the future instead of gas would assist with greenhouse targets and provide green jobs.

This green future would mean clean air and cheaper energy bills.

COVID 19 has given us time to pause and consider the future we would like live in. Let's put our recovery into green technology which is good for the planet and good for us and the generations that will

follow.

Madeleine Cox

