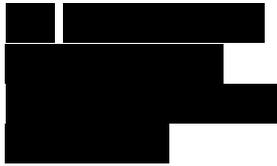


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Re: Enquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

This submission focuses on the adequacy of the protection of biodiversity in Victoria, and draws from personal experience from

- Bachelor of Environmental Science (Wildlife and Conservation Biology) and related work
- Internship with Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority
- Experience in on-ground natural resource management (Contractors, Green Army, Parks Victoria)
- Experience in not-for-profit sector (Bush Heritage)
- Experience campaigning for protection of habitat and species with the [SERA pilot project](#)

I organise my thoughts into sections, each addressing different themes I have noticed in my experiences. If you would like further information or clarification, please feel free to contact me.

Decision-making is difficult but could be made better with a decision-making framework

There is inherent difficulty in conservation; where work towards conserving one species may adversely impact another. For example, removing blackberry may allow native vegetation to grow back; but likewise removes important habitat and food sources for native birds. Native vegetation may provide better food source and attract birds in the future, but if all the blackberry is bulldozed together, then will the native birds survive X years until the native species regrow?

Given the fundamental problem of limited amount of funding and literally hundreds and hundreds of species that are under threat, where would we see best return on investment and how can we save the most number of species with that limited funding?

[Conservation decision-making frameworks and tools](#) can help list species in order of priority, based on the 'value' of the species (species uniqueness or representativeness); amount of funding needed to secure the species into the future; and impact that the conservation action would have. This can allow decision-makers to spot low-hanging fruit, where a few thousand dollars spent now might secure important habitat to protect numerous threatened species for the long-term; which might result in better outcomes than spending the same amount of money on, for example, neutering koalas.

Inconsistent council strategy impacting landscape-wide conservation

For example, the Cardinia Shire Council has a [management strategy](#) for the Southern Brown Bandicoot, which is threatened in Victoria under the FFG Act. DELWP also have a [strategy](#). Clearly there is work going on to protect the species, and particularly in the Cardinia Shire Council; but in the neighbouring councils Baw Baw and South Gippsland, [important habitat patches are being designated for mining](#) under the SERA Pilot Project.

This is particularly disturbing, given that those same habitat patches are marked as future “nature links” in the PPWCMA regional strategy for the area, which is supposed to coordinate conservation in the region ([reference](#)). You can clearly see the nature links being mined in the satellite view:



Focusing on weed management without revegetation is not an effective long-term strategy

In my work at Landlinks, we were contracted to keep the old railway lines free of weeds. This included spraying blackberries, cutting down Pittos, and spraying Bridal creeper. We visited each site perhaps once a year.

When we first are allocated a site, it might have a mature infestation of blackberries. We would spray all of these in the first year or two. This then created a large amount of disturbance, and left the area open to invasion for other weeds. In the following years, we would then be targeting the bridal creeper that would grow. Each year we would return to new appearances of some other weed, as we used more and more chemicals to target those weeds.

This is not a long term strategy, as it clearly requires continual investment of resources into spraying the yearly re-invasion. It also has very large negative impacts on the native vegetation, as chemical spray and drift results in native species succumbing year after year, as different weeds begin to grow around them.

A better strategy would be to perhaps identify the areas that could be revegetated and try to establish a '[climax community](#)' of native species that would then be resistant to weed invasion naturally. This would require a larger upfront investment, but would be cheaper in the long run.

Our Australian culture does not support environmental protection

This is perhaps the biggest and most overlooked issue. If our general population base thinks environmental protection is about 'greenies' and 'tree huggers' and conservation continues to be thought of as strange or not-normal, and our Government is elected by our general population -- and must make decisions that are approved by that population, lest they lose the next election -- then it is difficult to see how we can work towards conservation, regardless of the intentions and willingness of the Government entities involved.

I think more conservation funding directed towards very intelligent and well-executed education and behaviour change programs would have a far larger impact than spending that money directly on conservation activities. The program would have to be executed extremely well and by professional marketers, and targeted to the numerous audiences involved.

The loss of habitat for housing is not sustainable

This is the other major issue that is often overlooked. Habitat is continually being lost to housing, and although we have an 'urban boundary', we have made sure that we have plenty of supply for more and more estates; and they keep popping up everywhere.

Moreover, we encourage people to live in urban areas with the new home loan grants and tax concessions. Why? The travel distance to work is usually large; and more infrastructure in regional areas needs to be developed and maintained. The mere presence of people in regional areas impacts wildlife through road impacts, general waste, weed invasion, etc etc.; and the increased travel distances and more inclination to burn rubbish results in more greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to the climate crisis which will ultimately result in hundreds if not thousands of extinctions.

Our culture is again implicated in this issue, as we typically want to live in our individual house with a backyard -- we have inherited the American dream. Clearly not sustainable into the future, as every housing estate takes land that could have been used to support native species; or could have been used for farming.

Why not give concessions to people who live in apartments near public transport or workplaces? This would encourage people to live in apartments which would obviously help alleviate the continued need for new housing estates, and would start preparing Victorians for the future where ultimately, the majority of the population will need to be in apartments. If we can preserve our open spaces in the present time, at least our children will have access to areas that they can visit.

This would obviously be a huge cultural shift that could again be supported by a behaviour change program. Although the funds would not be put directly towards 'on the ground' conservation, the impacts of encouraging Victorians to live in apartments would be long-lived and far-reaching.