

Dear Environment and Planning Committee,

I am writing to express my concern for our environment and make a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline.

My name is Ava Graham, I am an American who has lived in Australia for the past few years and have now come to call it home. I have spent a little time in Queensland, but I've lived the majority of my years here in Melbourne. Over the past four years, I've worked across communications with a focus on sustainability in the fashion and outdoor retail sector. I have forever valued time spent in the outdoors and never doubt the power of fresh air and nature.

Late last year my partner and I took a road trip from Melbourne to the Sunshine Coast, traveling inland. I doubt there is a need for me to recall the devastating realities of last year's bushfire season. One of the things that so heavily struck me on our voyage north, was the dryness of the land, even in Victoria. I had become somewhat used to seeing cracked earth in central and west NSW and QLD — a crushing reality which itself should not be normalized — but I was confronted by the tans and browns of land within the Victorian border, as I'd only ever known the state to be so green. Of course, this comes with little surprise, as 2019 was [Australia's driest year on record](#).

The realities of climate change are well upon us, the effects have been and will continue to be arduous — catastrophic for many and deadly for some. Australia has the worst mammal extinction rate of any country in the world, a truth that is exacerbated each day action isn't taken. [A 2008 report from the Australian Department of Water, Heritage and the Arts](#) found that 95% of Australian ecosystems were modified by threats of water availability and land use, a statistic due to accelerate with the impacts of climate change. Little has been done to heed this warning, and 12 years on, we are living with these consequences. [This collaboration of the Climate Council and World Wildlife Foundation](#) merely scratches the surface. A third of the spectacled flying fox species died over the course of two days amidst a 2019 heatwave in Cairns. This damage was done in 48 hours, and we've only just begun to scratch the surface of climate crises.

In the face of this climate catastrophe, Victoria's forests play a critical role in removing carbon pollution from the air we all breathe, nourishing us with clean air and safe, clean drinking water. The Victorian state government must develop carbon accounting and policies that include forests. In addition, the state government must urgently implement and properly resource Action Statements (plans for recovery) for all threatened plants and wildlife. Victoria's plants and wildlife are at risk, with over 2000 recognised as threatened with extinction; however, only 15% of these have Action Statements.

I fear for the future and I question starting the family I've dreamt of having my entire life, because I know that if we don't take serious climate action now it will be too late. It is my hope that moving forward, on the state, federal, and international stage, Australia will enact climate-positive policy to build a future that can be sustainable for generations to come. I hope that one day we'll be able to act proactively instead of merely reacting, or in this case, fighting for appropriate reaction. There's no longer a question on whether climate change is real, the defence of denial is long gone. It is time the government acts in the interest of its people, its land, its wildlife, and its future.

Sincerely,

Ava Graham

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