

To the Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

28.8.2020

Dear Environment and Planning Committee,

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline.

I am a retired medical practitioner, mother and grandmother living in Mt. Eliza since I came to Australia nearly 40 years ago. The Mornington Peninsula is on my doorstep and my family and I enjoy its beaches as much as the forests, wetlands and views across wide meadows, vineyards and the ocean. The local communities are very fond of our beautiful environment and keen to preserve it.

During last summer we could smell the smoke in the air during the bushfires, which made walking difficult. I was very concerned about the CO2 pollution resulting from the fires, the loss of forests and wildlife habitat and substantial old forest logging continuing despite this loss.

Locally, I am concerned about communities growing and gradually taking up more and more green space on the Peninsula at the expense of forests and habitat for the local fauna. I am concerned about proposals such as the AGL gas terminal at Crib Point and the pipeline to Pakenham. I am concerned about the erosion along our beaches due to rising seawater levels.

I am extremely concerned about the rising risk of pandemics as a result of the loss of biodiversity.

Global warming and loss of biodiversity have an immediate as well as a long-term adverse effect on the safety of our descendants as well as on their health and quality of life. It is the government's first duty to ensure the safety and well being of their citizens. Therefore, government action is urgently required to address the fact the Australia is one of the worst per capita polluters in the world and to change this shameful situation.

We have an opportunity to use the economic recovery from COVID 19 to make changes and modernise the way we do business. We can create countless jobs in renewable energy projects and the refurbishing of homes, public buildings and transport, we can invest in renewables, storage and recycling projects which have much better economic prospects than fossil fuel projects, we indeed have the capacity to become the renewable powerhouse of the world. We can contribute to a secure future society, which is kind to the planet, its people and its animals.

I ask the Victorian State Government to consider the following possible actions:

1. The devastation inflicted on our wildlife and forests from the 2019 - 2020 bushfires has made forest protection and a rapid logging transition more urgent. The Victorian state government's commitment to a 2030 industry transition must be brought forward. Two immediate priorities are protection of unburnt Greater Glider habitat, and a continued moratorium on logging in East Gippsland.
2. There are opportunities for the state government to protect forests for all Victorians to enjoy now and into the future. Two community led initiatives are the proposed Great Forest National Park and Emerald Link conservation economy proposal.
3. In the face of 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.
4. 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% have Action Statements.
5. The rights and interests of Traditional Custodians should be recognised in all aspects of land and water management, as well as decision-making in relation to their traditional lands, including traditional

management practices such as cultural fire. First Nations - declining ecosystems have profound implications for First Nations.

6. Victoria needs a new, independent, well-resourced conservation regulator to police deforestation and other destructive industries. The EPA is the independent watchdog for pollution, but currently there is no independent watchdog to ensure industries comply with environmental laws, with numerous breaches to laws continuing to occur and a long history of regulators turning a blind eye.
7. Community rights must be guaranteed when governments are making environmental decisions, including the right to participate, the right to access necessary information, the right to challenge environmental decisions and the right to transparency in government decision making.

Thank you.

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