

Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry
into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

29th August, 2020.

Dear members of the Committee,

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

My name is Jacinta Van Eede and [REDACTED]. My community is in the Strzelecki Hills of the Latrobe Valley in Gippsland.

I've lived in Gippsland for the past 21 years and one of the many things I love about this area is its proximity to the forest. My small town is surrounded by national parks, local bush tracks and pine plantations. My home is a quiet sanctuary I return home to each day after working in a high stress job in Family Services working with victims of Domestic Violence. I am often impacted by the experiences of my clients, so when I return home I can get out into nature and recharge.

My home and surrounding bushland is regularly visited by many of our unique Australian wildlife. My home borders the Strzelecki Biolink that also runs in corridors throughout the neighboring HVP pine plantation. This Biolink enables wildlife to transverse throughout the region in order to feed, reproduce and survive, it is especially important to the Strzelecki Koala whose numbers are in decline. The Koala population was severely decimated during the 2009 Delburn Complex Fires and are only now starting to recover. This area is also home to many endangered species of wildlife and fauna only found in this region such as the Growling Grass Frog, the Strzelecki Burrowing Crayfish, Strzelecki Gum trees, Micro-bats, and, Strzelecki Orchids to name a few. We have seen the endangered White Bellied Sea-Eagles and heard the Powerful Owl all within the corridors running through and surrounding the pine plantation. Lyrebirds have their mounds in the bush, Wedge-Tailed Eagles soar majestically above the bush and pine trees hunting for prey, and Lace Monitors can be seen running across the roads. It is a beautiful, tranquil and unique place to come home to after a long and emotionally draining day.

But unfortunately this area is about to change as the proposed Delburn wind farm is to be built in HVP pine plantation, if it gets planning permission. Already 41.40 hectares of native bush and remnant vegetation has been identified for removal by the developer OSMI. This native bush informs a large part of the Strzelecki Biolink that supports our native wildlife, that in light of the recent bush fires 2019-2020 and as a recovering landscape from the 2009 fires, is already under threat and the removal of even 1 hectare of bush will have a detrimental impact on the resident wildlife and also those who are currently being released after surviving fires. Clearing the bush to make way for 250 meter tall wind turbines with blades 90 meters long, widening roads, removing roadside vegetation and trees, and years of construction will also have a detrimental impact to the threatened local wildlife residents.

I cannot imagine coming home and not seeing and hearing all the various birds and wildlife that rejuvenate me after a hard day. I ask what effect will the turbulence, the swoosh of the blades, the shadow flicker, the vibration, infra-sound, heavy articulated vehicles, thousands of tons of concrete, digging and in some cases blasting have on the animals and flora? Will the sounds of nature disappear? This is just one area of native bush that is in the sights of wind farm developers in Gippsland, the Jeeralangs have also been discussed to host a wind farm developed by the same company- OSMI with the same landowners Hancock Victoria Pine Plantations (HVP) who own a large percentage of pine plantations in Victoria. The Jeeralangs are part of the Strzelecki Biolink for wildlife. Where does the greed of corporations stop taking precedence over protecting our native wildlife creatures and their declining habitat end? 1 of 3

Until now wind farms have been built predominantly out on open farm and grassland. Should this practice of building Industrial wind facilities in pine plantations and native bushland become common place then we can say goodbye to our precious wildlife whose numbers are already at a critically low amount.

This should not be allowed to happen and our state government needs to acknowledge the extinction crisis is here and happening right now, and that this is the time to protect not eradicate our native animals and flora.

It's 2020. We're wiser than this. It doesn't make sense to me that there needs to be a discussion about whether or not we need better and more effective laws to defend nature.

If you zoom out and look at the broader picture, Victoria's natural places form part of the intricate web of life that is integral to the survival of all life on Earth. In these times where people are seeking refuge as a result of devastation wrought by the changing climate and destruction of our environment, we must act as the global citizens we are and do everything we can to safeguard our future as one with clean air, water, food, and places of spiritual nourishment. We need to do everything in our power to protect and restore nature, including recognising the rights and practices of Traditional Custodians, who have been managing these landscapes for the past 60 000 + years.

As you undertake this important inquiry into Victoria's extinction crisis, I urge you to ensure that:

- Community rights are 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.
- The rights and interests of Traditional Custodians are 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.
- The Victorian state government's commitment to a 2030 native forest logging industry transition is brought forward, including: immediate protection of Greater Glider habitat; a continued moratorium on logging in East Gippsland; releasing support for working people before 2024.
- Plans for recovery of threatened plants and wildlife are implemented urgently and properly resourced.
- The government protects forests and native bushland for all Victorian's to enjoy now and into the future including protecting the existing Strzelecki Biolink in the Strzelecki Ranges in Gippsland from industrial scale wind plants.
- 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 recognized as threatened with extinction however only 15% have Action Statements.
- 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.
- The State Government need to develop legislation that prevent industrial scale wind facilities from being built in areas that contain native wildlife biolinks.
- The State Government need to implement the Wind Farm Commissioners recommendations that they are built in open farming and grasslands.

I agree to this submission being made public, with my personal information redacted.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission, and I invite any further discussion via email at:

[REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Jacinta Van Eede

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