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Categories: Submissions

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Mr Daniel Caffrey



SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this very important issue. I am the secretary of the Latrobe Valley Sustainability Group, but due to time constraints I can't do a researched submission on behalf of our group, so this is my private submission. We all know that climate change is one of the main drivers of loss of biodiversity as conditions change, susceptible species are more severely impacted. I can think of flying fox populations in Southern Victoria, where a few years ago, extreme heat on a particular day killed 1600 at Bairnsdale and another 900 at Maffra. Extreme heat, droughts and mega bushfires are all well known causes for loss of species and require state and Federal Government leadership and cooperation across the nations of the planet to fight it. However, there are situations where Government actions or lack of action is also driving species loss. An example is controlled burning in state forests. In the mid 1990's, the responsible department did some fuel reduction in the Avon Wilderness area north of Maffra. Prior to this, one could always encounter lyre birds when traversing tracks in this area. After the controlled burn, which was widespread, there were virtually no lyre birds left. These birds actually help to fire-proof an area as they turn over the soil and embed litter which would otherwise build up on the surface of the soil into the soil structure as hummus and preventing some fuel rich species of plant from germinating, so reducing the fuel load. Since then, this area has been burnt out numerous times by extremely hot bushfires. If it was necessary to reduce fuel in this area, then aboriginal land management techniques should have been employed, not the clumsy instrument of fuel reduction burning that seems to be still the norm. That is the lesson that we must heed. I also note the loss of flying insects in the last 10 years. There are fewer bees and other insects such as butterflies and dragon flies and even bush flies as well as a host of smaller and less easily identifiable insects. While not necessarily a bad thing, there are fewer sparrows, probably as a consequence of less insect prey. I do not know specifically why this is the case, but one suspects climate change and the introduction of newer type of insecticides which are longer lasting in the environment. I believe this loss of flying insects is a world-wide phenomenon, but it needs to be researched and investigated. Finally, the issue of land clearing is leading to the mass disappearance of koalas and other mammal, reptile, amphibian and fish species and also iconic invertebrates like yabbies and the Giant Gippsland Earth Worm.

Governments can legislate to make land clearing in such high value ecological areas illegal or so as to comply with conditions that would allow co-existence with these creatures.

Governments could also ensure that government agencies like VicForests work within appropriate, scientifically formulated guidelines and that they do not breach these guidelines.

Time permits only the above thoughts, but the whole idea of my concern is that the natural world is not infinite. It is not immune to what several billion humans have done to the planet and can potentially do in the future. We need laws now which will ensure the ultimate survival of the precious natural places and the species that live there and nowhere else in the world and that our generation has an obligation to protect our natural world so that future generations can also enjoy the life-giving value that these species provide to humans.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this discussion.

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