

**Environmental and Planning Committee
Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria**

17/7/20

Dear members of the Committee,

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

I have grown up in Barwon Heads, Victoria, surfing, swimming and exploring our unique coastlines ever since I can remember. I am incredibly passionate about ocean conservation and sustainable living. I have been a part of The Wilderness Society's South East Melbourne group since its founding in 2018. I am also a Surf Life Saver at Thirteenth Beach SLSC. I always feel most content and at home in the ocean. No matter where I am in the world, if the ocean is in sight, I feel incredibly secure. The humbling roar of waves, the indescribable feeling of being carried by the ocean when surfing, exploring eclectic arrays of coral and witnessing gentle giants of the deep blue has shaped the young woman I am today. Unfortunately, despite having only spent 20 years on this planet, I have witnessed serious decline within the natural environment. Particularly the diminishing of oceanic health.

The protection of marine species and ocean conservation is something I care deeply about. In the past 5 years I have noticed depletion in the quality of my surrounding natural environment, in particular fish stocks. When I was younger, I would ride my bicycle to the pier, cast my rod out and have bites within seconds. A simple childhood normality is now a distant memory. Nowadays due to the rise in commercial fisheries and overconsumption of this finite resource, 'Fishless Oceans' are predicted for 2048. I witness the oceans integrity being tarnished in many other forms. Single use plastics failing to be properly disposed. There are not enough bins around Victoria's coastal regions. I would like to see more marine protected areas. 'The Bluff' in Barwon Heads is where I first discovered the magic of rockpools. A location proving that when given the chance, nature can heal itself. I would like to see proper waste disposal management, and more regulations on cleaning products that use dangerous ingredients such as phosphates.

I care passionately about this issue because I am aware of how perfectly balanced the marine eco system is and to disrupt this harmony would trigger major consequences. 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.

Plans for recovery of threatened plants and wildlife are implemented urgently and properly resourced.

The government protects forests for all Victorian's to enjoy now and into the future including supporting the Emerald Link conservation economy proposal for East Gippsland.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission, and I invite any further discussion

[Redacted]

Sincerely,

Sammy Sutherland

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