

## Points for Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline

- Housing development has had a massive impact on the environment by displacing native vegetation, particularly grassland. This results in a world filled with people and no space for native species to live. At present moment there is no legislative framework providing adequate protection to anywhere from housing development. I believe that the best way to solve this problem would be to house more people in the cities in tall buildings so that there is less land space taken up by each person. It would also be helpful if population growth was to come to a halt.
- Mining is an issue that seems to be rearing its head at the moment. In the Wombat State Forest there is some exploratory drilling going on. If gold and/or other precious metals are found in reasonable quantities, mining will likely commence. This will cause the direct destruction of areas of vegetation and the indirect pollution of others. The resources that could be taken out of any mine are far less valuable than the vegetation that lies on top.
- Logging is an obvious issue that has a massive impact on ecosystems. At the moment the only reason logging is continuing, is to provide jobs. The government is actually subsidising logging companies so that they can continue without going into debt. Clearly these jobs are on life support. It would be much more beneficial if instead, the ecosystems being logged were giving this financial support. Instead of creating jobs destroying ecosystems, the government could create jobs protecting them. The employment balance is still the same, but the world is a better place.
- Fire is possibly the factor that has caused the most modification of vegetation in this country for a very long time. Despite this, it has been greatly ignored and misused since European settlement. The evidence suggests that this has led to many of the extinctions that we have seen in the last 200 years. This is probably one of the most important things for this inquiry to address. Current practices are not working, but there were once practices that did work. Today there are still some Aboriginal people who retain the knowledge of how to burn properly, such as Wurundjeri man, David Wandin. There are also several books that can be used to get an idea of the problem and how burning was once done. These books include *The Biggest Estate on Earth* and *Dark Emu*.  
One of the things that makes fire so difficult to get right is all the red tape surrounding the issue. At Stanley Park Bushland Reserve, it took about ten years of back and forth to get about a soccer pitch worth of grass burnt. This area needs to be burnt about every two years. There are also other parts of the park where burning is being neglected entirely because the paperwork is not being done by Council officers, and only highly qualified people are allowed to conduct the burn. Burning on private land can sometimes be even more difficult because fire restrictions usually prevent burning at the appropriate time of the year and getting a permit is nearly impossible. This red tape is because of a fear of fire, but people need to realise that preventing fire just means that when the fire that cannot be prevented comes, it is much much worse. This fire is the only one to be feared, all others should be encouraged. There should be no red tape surrounding fire, just education.
- Weeds are a major cause of ecosystem decline in Victoria by competing with native species. At present moment there is not enough funding available from the government to put a substantial dint in the weed problem. If there was enough funding available, this would create a massive employment opportunity and the problem could be easily solved.
- Invasive animals are a similar situation to weeds. There are some major differences though. For example, current legislation and laws make the removal of invasive animals rather

difficult. Where anyone can go to a working bee and remove weeds, if the same thing was done for invasive animals people would be breaking laws. This should not be the case. Anyone should be allowed to go on to public land and remove any invasive species. Obviously, the use of firearms for this in many cases would be unsafe, but that does not mean that people should not be allowed to trap rabbits or round up feral goats on public land. A major flaw in the legislation is that deer are a protected species. Deer are an invasive species and no invasive species should be protected.

- There is a good quote that might help guide this process. It goes “It is much easier to protect what is, than to replace what was”.