

Dear Environment and Planning Committee, I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline.

I am 75, grew up in the Goulburn Valley, moved to the city to live, but bought a small property adjoining State forest in the Strathbogie Ranges in 1977. At the time average annual rainfall was around 30 inches. It was around the time that huge areas of the Strathbogie forest was being clear felled and replaced with pine plantations. The forest near our property remained. It had been logged in the 1930s. Over the years I watched that forest gradually change from a dark, wet forest to an open dry forest. In the 1970s-80s the gullies with multiple tree ferns at their centre were impassable wide fern filled, boggy, wet areas. Tall blackwood trees grew uphill from the ferny lower lying areas. Under the thick forest canopy signs of lyrebirds could still be observed, there were many different wild flowers including numerous orchids and a huge variety of fungi. The forest was alive with bird song particularly in the spring and summer. Flame and scarlet robins could be relied upon to arrive in the adjoining cleared areas around the first of April each year. Even just alongside our property in the roadside vegetation greater gliders, sugar gliders, koalas, brush tail, bobuck and ringtail possums could all be observed. Zoology students studied some of these on occasions.

That forest and roadside are now no longer bursting with every kind of life. I believe that it is due to climate change exacerbated by the massive destruction of the Strathbogie forest caused by clearing, turning into pine plantations, continued logging and more recently control burning. With its much reduced canopy it is now open, dry, and becoming more weed infested; the gullies are now crisscrossed with animal tracks, just a narrow channel where the smaller amount of water is still flowing. Trees are gradually dying, those in the thinnest soil near the hill tops were the first to go. Large older trees which were first dropping branches are now falling at an alarming rate. The forest can now be as silent as a pine forest. Few robins turn up, the animals in the diminished roadside vegetation have disappeared. Feral animals, cats, wild dogs, pigs and deer are causing further havoc to what remains.

Having observed such major and disturbing changes to just one small ecosystem and knowing that the same changes are taking place throughout the country over just half a life time compels me to urge the Victorian government to develop much stronger laws to reverse these life destroying trends.

While the Strathbogie community has fought to stop further logging in the area, I am also extremely concerned that a lack of water will become a dangerous issue in the near future. There is no doubt that forests hold water and is confirmed by the scientific studies of David Lindenmayer and others.

Thus, along with the devastation inflicted on forests from the 2019 - 2020 bushfires it is essential that all remaining forests be protected immediately. The Victorian state government's commitment to a 2030 industry transition must be brought forward.

To ensure industries such as Vic forests comply with environmental laws Victoria urgently needs a new, independent, well-resourced conservation regulator to police deforestation and other destructive industries.

Thanking you for the opportunity to make a submission on such a vital issue

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