

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry to the Extinction Crisis

I am writing to express my deep concern about the great number of Victorian flora and fauna that are under threat of extinction: there are some 700, and even more when species of fungi are taken into account. Moreover, there are 120 species that are in imminent danger of extinction, right on the brink. I would ask the Victorian government to address this situation urgently through taking emergency action on climate change, restoring habitat through reforestation, the cessation of logging and other measures as outlined below.

I am an amateur naturalist and I have spent almost 30 years as a volunteer regenerating native vegetation in the Merri Creek catchment. I have seen first hand the impact of global heating on our catchment. For example, two years we tried to propagate some rare native elderberry, now only found in the Galada Tamboore gorge in Campbellfield, in a shady and well watered zone in Merri Park Wetland, Northcote. Sadly, the two summers that followed were far too hot and the majority of these plants did not survive in their new positions. Last year we planted some seedlings of *Cullen tenax*, a flowering plant now extinct in the catchment, near Strettle Reserve. Some of these have so far survived, but they too are threatened by extreme heat. *Cullen tenax* and *Dianella amoena*, another flowering plant, which is endangered in Victoria, attract native pollinators such as the blue-banded bee and the native hover fly. When these die out, so do the pollinators who use them for food. Bush remnant vegetation in turn loses an important mechanism necessary for its survival and thus biodiversity is lost. These are examples from Merri Creek, but of course climate change-related rising temperatures and heat have greatly affected native forests in other areas of the state.

We conservation volunteers felt the indirect impact of bushfires on the Merri Creek catchment even before last year's apocalyptic conflagrations. In the months following the Black Saturday fires of 2009, we noted large flocks of yellow-tailed black cockatoos were turning up in Merri Park Wetland to attack black wattle branches in a search for food. These cockatoos had not been seen in the lower catchment for many years. We believe they had lost their usual habitat in the Kinglake area to the fires, but fortunately some older birds remembered the food sources along the Merri and were able to lead the way. In the last several years, we have also seen the arrival of many inland birds we never used to see along the waterway, including the crested pigeon, driven towards our revegetation works and the creek by heat, drought and bushfires.

Merri Creek has become a delightful bird sanctuary full of refugee birds, much appreciated by people who have discovered the riparian paths and trails for the first time during the lockdown. However, I have never seen so many territorial disputes among flocks of birds as this I have this spring. Recently, a noisy group of long-billed corellas tried to dislodge an aggressive flock of rainbow lorikeets from long established roosts in a stand of Canary Island Palms in Merri Park, Northcote. Last year, Merri Creek Management Committee and a group of locals, recognising the lack of old growth trees in the area, set up artificial nesting hollows in trees in Merri Park. These were designed for

smaller fauna, such as microbats and spotted pardalotes. However, in at least one of the hollows, rainbow lorikeets squeezed their way in. These are signs that we urban environmentalists along the lower Yarra and its tributaries simply do **not have the capacity** to plant and care for enough habitat to compensate for the losses in Victorian forests in the regions, which have been damaged or destroyed outright by climate change, bushfires and logging.

Fungi: Where global heating and bushfires are concerned, I would like to reference the work of mycologist Sapphire McMullan-Fisher. In a recent talk, she pointed out that only 7% of vegetation can be seen above the ground. Subterranean fungi are absolutely crucial to assisting many species of native trees and shrubs to grow. In many of Victoria's remaining forests, heatwaves and fire have killed off many species of fungi, to great detriment to the plants. Any plan for restoration of habitat for endangered species of fauna should take account of the role played by fungi.

Sadly, while our native forests have been under threat from climate change, drought and increasingly dangerous megafires, deforestation through logging and land clearing have gone on apace. Victoria has become our most cleared state with about two-thirds of the state now bereft of native trees, shrubs and plants. Unfortunately, logging of native trees by Vic Forests is set to continue until 2030. I would ask if by that stage there will be any native trees left?

Possible solutions:

- 1) The Victorian government must declare a climate emergency and take drastic action to reduced greenhouse emissions at once. We need to stop burning fossils (coal, oil and gas). Why are highly polluting coal-fired plants like Yallourn still open? Meanwhile, our recovery from the pandemic should be based on large-scale renewable energy and not gas. Gas is NOT a 'transition fuel'. It is highly greenhouse gas producing at every stage from extraction to shipping. The government should also urgently legislate to set reduction standards in other sectors such as transportation, construction and energy efficiency (of homes and appliances).
- 2) Victoria should immediately cease native forest logging and undertake a transition to a plantation industry with financial support for workers.
- 3) Victoria needs a comprehensive and fully funded program to remove introduced plants and animals and a massive and well designed planting program to restore habitat across the state. The resulting green jobs would be a wonderful and restorative way to employ Victorians as we rebuild our economy in the aftermath of COVID-19. Please note that a reintroduction of fungi may be needed in some areas.
- 4) We need a save our species program with a plan specific to each and every endangered animal or plant.
- 5) The Victorian government must purchase the areas of grassland and woodland reserves outlined in the Melbourne Strategic Assessment plan by December 2021.

- 6) Please give the Flora and Fauna Act some real teeth. Intervention to protect the environment is currently discretionary: it should be compulsory. ‘Make ecocide illegal!’ as they say in Extinction Rebellion.

Thank you for organising the Inquiry, calling for submissions and reading this one. I’d like to remind everyone that we humans ourselves are not exempt from going extinct. Extinction is forever. Time is running out. Several global food bowls are threatened by the conditions I addressed above. Let’s act now, because as COVID-19, drought and the megafires have clearly demonstrated, nature is coming to get us.

Kind regards,
Leslie Fraser



I am happy for my submission to be made public.

The statistics concerning last year's bushfires are sobering. The fires burned 1.4 million hectares of Victoria, including more than 50% of the habitat for 185 rare and threatened Victorian fauna. Some critically endangered species I would like to single out are: the greater glider, smoky mouse and mountain ash eucalyptus. Meanwhile, I found it distressing to find out that despite the considerable logging and clearing of native vegetation