

Michael McCormack

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30<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Victorian Parliamentary Extinction Inquiry,  
Parliament House,  
Spring Street,  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Members of the Inquiry,

I am writing to express my support for this Inquiry and hope that it can create real action to stop Victoria's extinction crisis. As you will no doubt know, since European Settlement there has been an enormous change in the natural environment in this State: a huge rise in population and in the use of land for urban and agricultural development has meant that two thirds of Victoria's land had been cleared of forests, shrubs and native scrub, with most of its natural grasslands lost and its streams and rivers put under severe stress. All of this has been driving massive numbers of our precious and unique animal, bird and fish species to be threatened with extinction across our State: 70 are currently on the verge of extinction, and ten times that number are threatened, with the number growing by the day.

Last Summer's catastrophic bushfires across the country (and especially in the Eastern part of Victoria) and the terrible loss of forests and wildlife were sadly just an acceleration of what has been the depressing trend of our country's – and in particular, Victoria's - continued environmental destruction. We need to put a stop to this as quickly as we can.

My personal connection with Victoria's remarkable flora and fauna comes from having spent many Summers with my family visiting my grandparents' farm outside Wodonga and later bushwalking and visiting the towns and forests of the region. I also grew up near the foothills of the Dandenongs and my school was in Lysterfield, and I spent much time visiting the State Parks nearby and walking and driving with family through the forests up in that beautiful area. Growing up I was lucky to experience nature firsthand and interacted directly with native animals and birds: there are no words that can express the joy that I felt as a child spotting a koala up a tree or seeing a platypus swimming in a stream for the first time and I want this experience to continue for future generations.

I continue to visit our scenic National Parks and areas of natural beauty and continue to bushwalk with friends as well as visit natural reserves. I think I speak for many of my friends, family and people within the community that protecting our natural heritage is both valuable and necessary and stopping the extinction of our precious and unique wildlife is absolutely critical.

Here are some suggestions of things that I believe the Inquiry should consider to stop the Victorian Extinction Crisis:

- 1) Accelerate the current plan to phase out logging in State Forests and move to a sustainable plantation model of forest management, with a generous compensation package for the businesses and workers affected by ending logging. Not only would this action directly save many threatened species, but it would create the conditions for others to start recovering and regrouping.
- 2) Create a Great Forests National Park to protect the remaining forests of the Central Highlands and expand the protected range of current State Parks in the region. This will protect breeding grounds for endangered species in this area such as the Leadbetter's Possum. An added benefit beyond the long-term increased protection of our forests would be to generate tourism and other related industries and hence employment and economic opportunity for the area. <https://www.greatforestnationalpark.com.au/>
- 3) Establish a firm Urban Growth Boundary around Melbourne and legislate for Green Wedges that cannot be re-zoned. There has been a huge loss of grasslands and forests to urban sprawl within the greater Melbourne area and this needs to be curbed as a matter of priority. There are many ways we could expand the city's population by using available land better as well as by encouraging population to move to regional centres. Another benefit would be a major reduction in the loss of arable farmland near Melbourne.
- 4) Create a well-funded Bushcare Program to remove weeds and invasive species everywhere across the State – in streams, rivers, fields and forests, whether publicly or privately owned. Invasive weeds threaten local plants and we need a properly funded program to locate and remove them. The Bushcare Program would need to be properly funded and would require a considerable long-term sum by government to be effective, however it could have a dual purpose of creating many direct jobs as we recover from our current CoVID-19 economic contraction.
- 5) The Bushcare Program could also focus on removing feral animals across Victoria. The aim would be to remove these feral animals (including horses, foxes, cats and deer) from Victorian ecosystems in humane ways and would therefore allow the recovery of natural fauna and flora.
- 6) The Bushcare Program could also embark on a massive program of tree planting across the State, including working with farmers to replant trees on their land. Increasing tree cover would be a great way to increase species' habitats and hence reverse their decline.
- 7) Expand Marine National Parks and restrict fishing to sustainable levels across Victoria's coastal waters and in its river systems.
- 8) Create well-funded captive breeding programs for endangered species and on scientific research into species and how to aid their recovery. This needs to be a coordinated program and would need a long-term vision: perhaps a dedicated State Centre could be established? It could use the NSW "Save our Species" Program as a guide but should be on a much bigger scale given the nature of our State's Extinction Crisis.

- 9) Strengthen our laws around protecting nature and implement sanctions and fines for people and businesses who, for example, kill protected species, clear native forests and that flout environmental laws. It would be beyond this Inquiry to go into this in detail, but it could encourage the government to develop and implement a stronger legal framework to protect the environment.
- 10) Ban the hunting of game ducks and other native wildlife – especially in State Forests and reserves. Hunting these species places their populations under huge stress and has major environmental impacts. Hunting should be restricted to pest and feral animals only and hunters' assistance could be incorporated into a Bushcare program mentioned above.
- 11) Legislate for Councils to strengthen the criteria for cat owners across the State to be required to keep their cats inside at night and encourage owners to develop inside cat runs. This would restrict cats from killing birds and other native fauna, which causes huge loss of wildlife each year.

Acting on these suggestions would, I believe, lead to a marked fall in the current destruction of Victoria's flora and fauna and perhaps start to recover some of our natural ecosystems in the short and medium term.

However, given the need for a longer-term view, the Inquiry should also encourage the Government to continue to develop policies that:

- 12) Continue to address the huge threat of Climate Change, which is of extreme importance in stopping the destruction of habitats and species into the future: a potential projected rise in average temperature of 4 Degrees Celsius by 2090 would be catastrophic to all of Victoria's (and Australia's) flora and fauna species – including, obviously, our own species. I recognize this is already being considered in other forums but it needs reiterating that Climate Change is an existential threat and we should continue to encourage the switch to renewable energy power sources, close coal-fired plants and further restrict fossil-fuel mining and fossil-fuel based energy systems in our energy mix. This includes discouraging the use of gas in Victoria's energy system, given its still high Carbon Emissions and the unsustainable environmental effects of gas drilling on the environment.
- 13) Continue to encourage the recyclables industry to slow the use of landfills. I am pleased that the government's recent Inquiry into Victoria's Recycling and Waste Management has led to many useful outcomes such as a container deposit scheme. There are many other practical ideas to reduce the creation of rubbish and waste, that encourages industry to use less materials and that increases recycling. Not only does this mean that the environment comes under less threat (and hence supports species' ecosystems) but it has other beneficial effects, such as lowering Carbon Emissions.
- 14) Move towards an economic system that places sustainable development at its core. There are many inspiring and practical suggestions of how we could achieve this beyond the scope of this Inquiry but that are worth keeping in mind to encourage a strategic and sustainable long-term view of our economy and our society.

Obviously, there are many more ideas that could be considered, and I have barely gone into any detail for my suggestions above, but I strongly believe that rapid action is needed to tackle our current Extinction Crisis. I hope that you will consider my suggestions and please feel free to contact me if you would like me to go into any further detail on them.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to present some of my ideas and my fervent hope is that you may all help create a solution to this Crisis.

Yours Sincerely,

Michael McCormack