

Environment and Planning Committee
Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria
28 August 2020

Dear members of the Committee,

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

My name is John Curtis I live in [REDACTED] a leafy north eastern suburb of Melbourne.

I am a mechanical engineer by training but have spent most of my working life as a software engineer.

I guess my story begins many years ago when I was 21 on a break from university and travelling in India, I picked up a nasty virus and was on my back for 4-5 days with raging fever and flu symptoms.

I slowly recovered then later fell into a massive heap and just managed to get myself home - in time to be bedridden for nearly six months. A myriad of tests, at the old Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital, I got a diagnosis of post viral fatigue syndrome.

Something that is now again topical with patients recovering from Covid 19.

Initially frustrated, soon boredom and resentment crept in - I was more surprised than anyone to find the thing that helped the most - was the surrounding greenery - slow walks in the parks and gardens of Balwyn with our old Labrador - grounded me.

Unfortunately, I have had to battle chronic fatigue on and off since that time. Anyone with a chronic illness can tell the story: your world shrinks, friends drift away, isolation & depression can creep in. Time and time again the simple act of digging in the garden or walking through the local park would lift my spirits.

About 12 years ago after living and working in Fremantle for 18 years my wife and I decided to move to Melbourne for a new start and to escape the mining boom!

The main requirement for our new place was space for a decent garden, so we chose Ivanhoe. Our place has plenty of space for gardening and real connection to nature - albeit a heavily sloped connection - with a small creek at the rear.

Paradise – not only a beautiful garden but also the sound of running water along with the bird and insect life. It is hard to believe that we are less than 10 kilometres from the CBD.

I have even learned to embrace a regular visit from our local tiger snake - turns out Ivanhoe is tiger snake central.

I had been aware of Australia's poor stewardship of the environment but only in a background sense. I lived in WA as Bunnings cleared the forest of the south west - my wife, who was raised there, talks about the waterways around their farm going from fresh water when she was a girl, to salt now, 40 years later.

But the problem really hits home when it is literally in your backyard - our little creek, the Donaldson, made me starkly aware of how bad things are. After any sort of rain, you can see literally tons of plastic and foam rubbish shoot past on its way to Port Phillip Bay via the Darebin Creek & the Yarra.

On top of the rubbish we regularly see the creek go bright orange or blue on a Sunday when the EPA are not operating. I have come to realise that our experience is just a microcosm of much broader problems.

It is 2020. We should be wiser than this. It does not make sense to me that a wealthy country like Australia cannot protect and treasure our stunning environment.

Melbourne has the best water of any major city alongside unrivalled green spaces – why are we putting all that at risk – to save a few dollars? For a few unsustainable jobs? It seems a type of insanity.

Close family members lost houses and friends in the Black Saturday fires and climate change will only increase extreme fire risk so let us act now and start to reverse environmental decline and safeguard the future - one with a pristine environment, clean air, water & food.

As you undertake this important inquiry into Victoria's extinction crisis, I urge you to ensure that:

Community has a real say when governments make environmental decisions, including the right to participate, access necessary information and challenge decisions. There should be complete transparency in government decision-making with none of the usual "commercial in confidence" nonsense.

The logging of native forests is stopped immediately, and any workers affected are helped to transition to more sustainable jobs.

Endangered species are protected and plans for recovery of threatened plants and wildlife are implemented urgently and properly resourced.

The EPA have increased funding and legal backing to properly protect waterways throughout Victoria.

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

[REDACTED]

Sincerely,

John Curtis

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