

From: [REDACTED]
To: [ecosystems](#)
Subject: Submission to Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline
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Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria.

I grew up in a beautiful town on the Bellarine Peninsula called Breamlea. The first few years of my life were spent in Carlton, so the change of scenery was a big one. I remember making a deal with my parents (bold at 6 years old) that if we didn't like it in 6 months' time, we would move back to Melbourne. Of course, living a stone's throw from the beach, we never looked back.

It's hard to pick a particular moment or a memory to share; I have so many great ones. More than anything, this beautiful place taught me the importance of protecting nature, as well as the inadequacy of the current protections in place. Like the fact that each year during duck shooting season, hundreds of native birds seek refuge in the protected wetlands in Breamlea; at once demonstrating the importance of wildlife protections, as well as the devastating impacts of human activities like duck shooting.

Breamlea is a beautiful place with many different ecosystems; wetlands, estuary, sand dunes and ocean, and each of these must be protected. Our beach is home to two pairs of hooded plovers, a vulnerable sea bird native to the south-east coasts of Australia. They lay their eggs in little mounds on the sand, between the shoreline and the dunes. When their chicks hatch, they are left to fend for themselves and forage for food. As both eggs and chicks, they are at serious risk from foxes, feral cats, horse riders, dogs and their walkers, not to mention rising sea levels.

These beautiful little birds scuttle around the beach, blissfully unaware they may be among the last of their species. A dedicated group of volunteers go out each year, finding and marking nests and encouraging dog walkers to keep their dogs on the leash, with mixed success. Invasive species, and careless policies like allowing dogs, horses and four-wheel drives on beaches, have all but wiped these beautiful birds out. Sometimes volunteer efforts pay off and a few little chicks live long enough to fledge. But we need government investment if we are to save these little birds, and other vulnerable and endangered species. It is possible, if we invest in eradicating invasive plants and animals, restoring native habitat, and protecting vulnerable and endangered species.

The final memory I would like to share is a magical one.

One evening we walked down to the beach. The sun had set, and there was no moon. We stumbled along as our eyes adjusted. All of a sudden, we noticed a glow coming

from the water. Unable to believe our eyes, we watched the waves glow green as they broke. We watched our footsteps create sparkling galaxies as we tip toed along the wet sand. This magical experience was caused by a bloom of bioluminescent plankton. I've seen it just twice in my life and have been spellbound each time. But planktons are at risk due to rising sea temperatures and pollution, especially from plastic. These tiny plants and creatures are crucial to marine ecosystems, and without them, everything is thrown out of balance.

We need new laws that will protect these ecosystems; we cannot hope to stop extinction until we stop the destructive activities that are driving it. Some of the necessary steps, to protect native species in Victoria are:

- Trust the knowledge and expertise of First Nations People, who have cared for country for time immemorial
- End native forest logging and land clearing for development and agriculture
- Stop the use of damaging chemicals such as harsh pesticides, which kill bees and leach into waterways
- Phase out coal and gas burning, which makes climate change worse, and drives extreme weather events like bushfires, cyclones, and heat waves
- Stop destructive and unnecessary development like the Western Highway Duplication and the proposed Westernport gas ship terminal which destroy Victoria's environment and prioritise corporate profits rather than nature
- Change the laws that allow wildlife to be killed, and grasslands and other habitat to be cleared, with little to no ramifications.

How lucky I feel to have so many beautiful memories of the place I grew up, as well as so many other beautiful places in Victoria. Nature is something we must protect, for all our sake.

I am happy for this submission to be made public, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Maxwell

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