Thank you for the opportunity for the Australian Conservation Foundation Macnamara Community Group to make a submission to the **Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria.**

The Australian Conservation Foundation Macnamara Community Group is a community-based group in the Port Phillip Council area who are very concerned about the impacts of deforestation, loss of biodiversity and climate change on the natural world. We are passionate about engaging with our state and local council representatives and encouraging greater action on habitat restoration and climate change. The Australian Conservation Foundation has 7,521 supporters in the federal electorate of Macnamara and x in the electorate of Albert Park.

We are very concerned about three key issues:

1. Ending logging and protecting our native forests
2. Reducing the impacts of ecosystem decline and
3. Minimising the impacts of climate change on flora and fauna

Ending logging and protecting our native forests

Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia and much of our key habitat remains on public land. While public land only covers 40% of the state, it contains 70% of the highest biodiversity values. While we commend the announcement of the government before Christmas to transition out of native forest logging, the goal posts have since shifted. A massive amount of these forests has been burned over the last 20 years, with the 2003 fires and Black Saturday, while the most recent mega-fires decimated huge tracts of this irreplaceable habitat. We do not have enough forest left to sustain what creatures are left, continuing to log these areas will likely herald the extinction of many of these unique animals. Our eastern forests are home to dozens of threaten species, impacted by native forest logging, feral predation and bushfires, including key iconic species like the state faunal emblem the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum.

We need to rescind the Regional Forest Agreements (RFA's) as VicForests have been found to be not abiding by state laws and are therefore in breach of the agreement. The coupes with injunctions should immediately be removed from any future logging and new national parks should be established in the proposed Great Forest National Park area. Logged and high intensity burned areas are desolate, soul-destroying areas to visit, devoid of any animal life and cant be allowed to continue. The financial figures of VicForets show that it is losing money and has done for many years. Victorian taxpayers are essentially subsidising the destruction of these amazing habitats.

Last year, following a thorough review and extensive consultation, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council recommended establishing new national parks in the central west. The new park recommendations include almost 60,000 hectares of new national park and reserves for the Mount Cole and Pyrenees Ranges (near Beaufort and Avoca), and the Wombat (near Daylesford) and Wellsford (near Bendigo) Forests. Numerous recreational activities are actively encouraged in these areas, including camping, bushwalking, horse riding and mountain biking and it would be a great win for both the ecosystems in this region, as well as the people of Victoria. It would also help protect the vulnerable Mt Cole /Langhi Ghiran Grevillia.

We need to transition out of native forest logging within the next 12-18 months and prevent salvage logging of firs affected areas and ensure legislation is strengthened to grow the national parks. The review inquiry should also recommend that state forests are further protected for their recreational uses, contribution to water quality and ability to help mitigate climate change.

Reducing the impacts of ecosystem decline

The 2018 State of the Environment review for the Victorian Government clearly demonstrated dismal results for biodiversity. The vast majority of results were poor, from net gain and condition of native vegetation; to distribution and abundance of fish and frogs; to vascular plants, vertebrates and invertebrates; to trends in number and population of threatened species. Only 20% of indicators were 'fair' and none were 'good'. In the whole report only six items were good. This is unacceptable. We are clearly failing and something needs to drastically change in order to not just stabilise these results, but to show recovery of species and habitats. Greater accountability and financial penalties for governments not achieving more than 50% off all markers at 'good' should be implemented.

The review of the federal EPBC Act has shown that nationally, ecosystems have declined at an alarming rate and all laws have failed to protect our unique native plants, animals and ecosystem. Many species are on the verge of extinction, particularly following the devastating bushfires. Stronger laws are urgently required at the state and federal level to actually address climate change, land-use change, habitat fragmentation and degradation and the continued impacts of invasive species. Substantial additional investment and stronger regulation of existing laws is required.

Recovery action statements and management plans are required for ALL threatened species. As the saying goes, 'If you can't measure it, you can't monitor it' – and you cant stop the accelerating decline. There is still too much discretion available from ministers to override the existing legislation and no real accountability. There needs to be legal obligations to protect threatened species and significant consequences for those found to be flouting the legislation.

Minimising the impacts of climate change on flora and fauna

The vast majority of Australians consider climate change to be a current threat causing droughts, bushfires and extreme weather events. The world is currently on track for a 4-7 degrees Celsius of warming by the end of the century if we do not curb our emissions from fossil fuels. The risks of climate change are clear.

Climate change is making the summer hotter and drier and increasing the likelihood and intensity of bushfires. We know that more needs to be done to reduce deforestation across Australia and better manage the unique and vital wilderness areas, particularly given that trees are the only proven, scalable carbon capture and storage option currently available in Australia. Australia is also the only developed nation in the world's top ten major deforestation fronts (WWF Living Forests Report 2015). As Victoria continues to log native forests and to clear bushland and farmland for urban development, we put increasing pressure on our natural systems and further exacerbate the risks of climate change and the likelihood of catastrophic fires.

In summary

We would encourage the enquiry to ensure

- A rapid and just transition out of native forest logging into appropriately planned plantations, by 2022;

- Ruling out damaging salvage logging in fire affected areas and ensure unburnt forests aren't targeted for logging in the future;

- Abandoning the Regional Forest Agreements (RFA's) as these agreements are not abiding by state laws and are therefore in breach of the agreement and are both illegal and unsustainable as well as economically unviable;

- Strengthening state legislation and regulation, to ensure state forests are valued for their many uses (such as water yield and quality, recreational uses and climate change mitigation), not just native forest logging;

- Forest protection is used to help meet and reset climate emission reduction targets;

- New national parks and reserves are created in East Gippsland, the Central Highlands and the Central West;

- Develop recovery action statements and management plans for all threatened species and communities and ensure these are funded and implemented;

- Reduce ministerial discretion in overlooking significant biodiversity destruction;

- Set minimum standards for the State of the Environment Review and financial penalties for the state for not achieving these. There needs to be more accountability for the continued decline and lack of substantive action to halt the loss.

- Develop a thorough understanding of the implications of climate change on ecosystems, and detailed modelling to be able to predict potential changes and instigate mitigation strategies.