

Environment and Planning Committee  
Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

29 August 2020

Dear members of the Committee,

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

I was born and raised in France. In 2001, I spent a year as an exchange student in Melbourne in 2001. Australia represented a land of vast untouched open spaces, a free-spirited nation connected to nature and its wildlife. I had the opportunity to travel across the country and soak in Australia's beauty, from the Great Barrier Reef to the forests and mountains of Tasmania.

After I graduated, I spent two years working in Toulouse France, as an aerodynamic consultant for Airbus. I decided to move to Australia in 2004 to live by the coast, be closer to nature and embrace a balanced lifestyle. I now live in Port Fairy and I am an Information Technology professional in the health sector.

In 2018, I learnt about the licenses the Australian government had granted to a number of companies to explore for oil and gas in the Great Australian Bight, including the Norwegian company "Equinor". When brought to my attention that Equinor's plans to drill were progressing and could potentially threaten a unique marine environment home to a variety of iconic species, I decided to join the Fight for the Bight campaign to prevent this exploration from happening and raise awareness amongst our communities. The number of people who had never heard about these plans was greater than I could have imagined, and the majority of them did not support these plans.

I asked myself: "How many other projects that could threaten our environment (our land, our water or our wildlife) are underway and that I am unaware of? How many others?"

In a day and age where climate change is a reality, governments should be leading the way towards a sustainable future and put in place strategies around protecting our forests and ocean.

The catastrophic bushfires Australia has seen at the beginning of the year in New South Wales and Victoria, have destroyed so many trees and so many animals have died or lost their natural habitat. Native forests are our lungs and the most efficient way to store our greenhouse gas.

Following the bushfires, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Australia and we now find ourselves in a bad science-fiction movie. Our economy is suffering, our kids' education is affected and how many lives have we lost? Scientific articles support the link between the destruction of forests and natural ecosystems and the emergence of new diseases in humans and highlight the need to protect ecosystems. This mixture of circumstances – deforestation of natural habitats, human population growth, and inter-species animal contact – is a grave health risk for human society. Even before COVID-19 wreaked havoc with the global economy and national health systems, scientists were warning of the risks posed by deforestation.

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

- Community rights are guaranteed when governments are making environmental decisions, including the right to participate, the right to access necessary information, the right to challenge environmental decisions and the right to transparency in government decision making.
- The rights and interests of Traditional Custodians are recognised in all aspects of land and water management, as well as decision-making in relation to their traditional lands, including traditional management practices such as cultural fire.
- The Victorian state government's commitment to a 2030 native forest logging industry transition is brought forward, including: immediate protection of Greater Glider habitat; a continued moratorium on logging in East Gippsland; releasing support for working people before 2024.
- Plans for recovery of threatened plants and wildlife are implemented urgently and properly resourced.
- Victoria needs a new, independent, well resourced conservation regulator to police deforestation and other destructive industries. The EPA is the independent watchdog for pollution, but currently there is no independent watchdog to ensure industries comply with environmental laws, with numerous breaches to laws continuing to occur and a long history of regulators turning a blind eye.

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

[REDACTED] I agree to this submission being made public.



Sincerely,

Phuong-Dung HOANG

