

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Ecosystem decline in Victoria
ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au

Submitted by John Henry Iser [REDACTED]

In this submission, the **Terms of Reference** numbered (a) to (e) and other related matters (f) will be addressed.

TOR 1 (a)

Biodiversity has declined dramatically in all Australian states including Victoria, particularly over the last 70 years. Causes of this decline are well-known and numerous and include loss of species habitat from deforestation and bushfires, urbanization, land degradation, pesticides, herbicides, loss of coastal shelters and fish breeding areas, loss of inland wetlands, predators, excessive opening-up of pristine areas, resource extraction and climate change. An additional concern emerging in the last 2 decades has been plastic waste which has found its way into waterways and thence into marine creatures and bird-life.

Biodiversity is the backbone of ecology which is the balance of forces existing between the myriads of species. However, as the number of species diminishes, the opportunity for this balance to be disturbed in so many ways, some subtle and some obvious, is beyond measure. One notable example at present is that the number of species of insects and the number within species is reported to be in marked decline in the northern hemisphere and there is no reason why Australia will be protected. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320718313636> Insects serve as a valuable food in nature's food chain and are crucial for pollination. Biodiversity and intact ecosystems are the central pillars for all life on the planet, including human life. <https://www.cbd.int/health/doc/Summary-SOK-Final.pdf> The biological world supplies food and essential nutrients, clean water, medicines and a window into structures which can be copied by technology (biomimicry).

The decline in biodiversity is a hugely complex problem. There is of course no one single fix so that governments need to recognize, provide research funding, co-ordinate and articulate the problem repeatedly. Ideally these issues should be addressed by the federal government but, unfortunately, it is currently not up to the task. Therefore, the Victorian government has to assume the default position and establish programs in conjunction with all the local and interested NGOs.

The effects of climate change must also be taken into account because climate change has major impacts on species survival, as most cannot adapt their temperature tolerances sufficiently quickly. Although Victoria has actively created policies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and has a goal to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, there has been a noticeable absence (even before COVID) of endeavours recently to achieve this goal. Climate change needs to be addressed more vigorously to counter advocacy by the fossil-fuel industry and federal government inaction.

I am not aware of the impacts on first nations people in Victoria, but I imagine they would suffer frustration and feelings of hopelessness (solastalgia) as the country is changing around them in ways that are to their detriment and not of their making.

TOR 2 (b)

I am not aware of the legislated details that are required to manage the multiple factors. However, I do know there has been disquiet over the management of Victorian forests where there were

incursions into protected areas. Vic Forests has a very convincing web-site describing its emphasis on research and species protection, so it would seem there needs to be more stringent oversight and greater accountability.

The one area of legislative deficiency is in the control of GHG emissions which impact biodiversity through climate change. The Victorian government would be fully aware that all levels of society have to rein in emissions urgently. Until recently Victoria has been one of the vanguards in emissions reductions but is losing its way with the promotion of methane gas. There are countless assessments which show that we do not need new gas and that we can manage with re-direction of current supplies, demand management, new storage (batteries and pumped hydro), urgent transmission and network upgrades and increasing electrification of households with cheaper renewable energy. Gas cannot compete on price. <https://aemo.com.au/-/media/files/major-publications/isp/2020/final-2020-integrated-system-plan.pdf?la=en>

TOR 3 (c)

Is there ever enough funding? Perhaps the Victorian Government could devolve more responsibility to those on the ground in rural areas. There is bound to be resistance to the many measures required of landowners and perhaps they would be more inclined to listen to locals, for example, those who have recently retired from farming. While there are certain regulations and limitations on land-use eg clearing and riparian land management, there would need to be sufficient work-force to monitor regulations.

TOR 4 (d)

In relation to climate change, apart from emissions reductions, the recommended approach would be to maintain forest and woodland corridors and copses and insist that all lands have at least 20-30% of woodland on their property. Evidence suggests that woodland benefits farming through providing havens for pollinators and refuge for both farm animals and wildlife on hot days <http://www.fao.org/3/w0312E/w0312e05.htm>– which will become more frequent in future. <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/change/#tabs=Tracker&tracker=timeseries>

There is also evidence that degraded land near natural waterways can be better managed to restore fertility and biodiversity. <http://www.nsfarming.com/workshop/documents/PDF/NSF%20%20Paper%20abstract%20Peter%20Andrews%20%20David%20Goldney%20et%20al..pdf>

TOR 5 (e)

Attention to biodiversity and ecology will naturally lead to improving first nation's peoples' connectivity with land. One practice which we are always slow to learn is to have indigenous Australians involved in local planning and decision making on care of land and country. Not only might this help to some extent in bushfire management (although climate change is the major factor) but it gives our first peoples some recognition and a sense of belonging which has been sadly lacking in any steps to improve their lives. The indigenous citizens of Australia need adequate public funding to set up programs. Funding has decreased from \$106 M in 2011-12 to \$81 M in 2015-16. <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/land/topic/2016/resources-and-capacity-management>

Tor 6 (f)

Any other related matters.

Management of biodiversity and ecological “mayhem” (Sir David Attenborough) is extraordinarily complicated and as well as the contributing factors mentioned above, there are two others to be considered. The first is excessive consumerism particularly by the wealthy who are adding to pollution and climate change out of all proportion to their numbers. Australia’s Earth’s Overshoot day, when Australia has exceeded its capacity to regenerate resources it has used for the year, is one of the earliest in the world and in 2019 was March 21, whereas for the Earth generally it was July 29 in 2019. These observations underline the gross environmental injustice experienced by the indigenous and lower end of the socio-economic scale.

One other factor is overpopulation. For Victoria, the problem is urban spread without sufficient plans for green spaces and corridors. Housing development is still totally unimaginative with relatively large houses on small blocks leaving little space for greenery. Victoria has long talked about encouraging people to move to regional centres. This policy needs to be pursued more vigorously and to be aimed at small centres as well as the major ones.

Signed

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of John Iser.

John Iser

.....