

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Environment and Planning
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Monday, 31 August 2020

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Enquiry into Biodiversity Loss and Ecosystem Decline

I wish to make a submission to this Enquiry not as anyone of particular expertise in this domain, but as someone who has learned to appreciate the symbiosis that we all have with the natural world and all its inhabitants.

I am greatly disturbed by the continued pressures on our wild spaces, and the plants and animals whose intertwined roles are so subtle and yet critical to survival of life on Earth.

I will not seek to add anything to the voluminous evidence that has been presented by prominent scientists in areas of biology and ecosystems over the years and to that which is already submitted to this Enquiry. But I will state that it seems that once again, the human penchant is comparable to Nero of the adage where he, "...fiddles while Rome burns."

I will briefly discuss observations that I have made in areas of great environmental sensitivity located adjacent to the urban sprawl in which I live.

TOR (a): "the extent of the decline of Victoria's biodiversity and the likely impact etcetera..." Define the Problem

On the western flank of Wodonga's Regional Parkland there is a small pocket of woodland that is habitat to the Smooth Darling Pea—*Swainsona Galegifolia*—which is listed as threatened taxa on schedule 2 of the Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act of 1988. This reserve has the only naturally occurring presence of this native plant in Victoria.

The Parkland in which it grows, named Swainsona Reserve after the endangered plant, is encapsulated by cleared land that has been in continuous use for grazing by domesticated animals since settlement.

Its scarcity in our State's landscape serves as a tangible example of what life looks in the moments before it is about to become extinct. It also serves as a microcosm of what is happening across the country on a much larger and incomprehensibly diverse scale.

The Parkland is currently under the care and management of Parklands Albury Wodonga.

Native fauna in these reserves are present but their numbers are not abundant. The casual walker can easily observe a population of kangaroos of less than a dozen living in the same area of Parkland.

Around Wodonga, kangaroos are being killed at an alarming rate through the contributions of road trauma, domestic animal farmers who see them, along with DEWLP, as grazing competitors and pests to be killed and removed from this already altered and degraded landscape, and by sadistic community members who derive perverse enjoyment from mowing them down with their bull-bar-fitted cars.

Populations of all native animals, including echidnas, are stressed by the pressure of animal agriculture and while woodlands provide partial protection, the animals are not constrained to this region.

TOR (b), (c), (d) : “the adequacy of the legislative framework...the adequacy and effectiveness of government programs and funding...legislative, policy, program, governance and funding solutions...” Assess Key Instruments & Tools

Some of the aforementioned areas being grazed is land that was handed back to the City of Wodonga upon the termination of the Albury Wodonga Development Corporation which bought large swathes of private land during the Whitlam era, to then on-sell to the market to encourage the growth of the cities. However, in the long term, this did not meet the time nor financial targets set by Government. When the AWDC land was handed over to City of Wodonga the grazing land was leased back to the landholders from whom it was originally purchased by the AWDC.

This land is still in use by those in animal agriculture, but it is, to my understanding, public that is zoned to allow this activity and abuts the land with significant environmental value. Nearby areas continue to be placed under pressure by housing development.

There is currently an independent assessment being conducted across Albury Wodonga by a private company, the Albury Conservation Company in partnership with local councils, to gauge remnant populations of all species in this region.

Legislation, funding and clear goals—based on stated values to be established by the State—appear to be inadequate to address the urgency of change required to protect and expand this habitat for native species.

TOR (e), (f): “opportunities to restore Victoria’s environment...any other related matters...” Discuss Solutions

Laws to protect the environment should become a priority and Government should regard Industries’ interest in diluting such laws as a profit-driven, self-serving perspective. The oft-promoted notion of ‘sustainability’ so adeptly co-opted by Industries has not served us or the environment and its inhabitants well at all. The time to repair past damage is upon us. The great potential for nature-based tourism as a viable income should not be forgotten for those whose traditional employment may suffer as a result of this change.

Our local parkland needs to increase its land allocation, expanding the already linked ‘Retained Environment Network’ corridors with replanting and rewilding taking place. Animal agriculture, which places significant pressure on this vulnerable area, should be scaled back and the landscape given the opportunity to regenerate and expand with ongoing assistance from Parklands Albury Wodonga and other environmental agencies.

Currently there are walking and cycling trails that traverse the grazing areas, encouraging community members and visitors to connect to areas of nature while seeking to minimise the impact of these activities to those sensitive zones.

Government needs to embark on a public education campaign that places the value of biodiversity front-and-centre in the public mind, dismissing any voices of those with profit as their priority and that regard our native fauna or flora as pests or invasive.

The Community would benefit by remembering its once default position, where our wildlife and parks were valued. Now the voice of industry—only concerned with short-term financial profits—drowns out those who have raised warning flags over our deteriorating or failing ecosystems. Industries' voice needs to be curtailed and other solutions for its activity should be removed from these areas of environmental significance.

I thank the Committee members for their consideration of my views.

Yours sincerely,

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Michael Fuery

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