

Submission to the 2020 Victorian Inquiry in Extinction (of natural species).

The situation in Victoria is dire for the survival of significant proportions of our species diversity and for people to avoid living in a land sterilised by overdevelopment:

- Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia - 66% of our land has been cleared of native trees, shrubs and plants and its wildlife.
- Over 700 native plants, animals, insects and beautiful ecosystems are under threat, with this number growing every day
- 120 Victorian animals, birds, plants, insects and fish are now at the brink of extinction

From the same central causes as these statistics, Victoria's recent fires were at a scale, severity and destruction that was unprecedented. These catastrophic fires have:

- Burned 1.4 million hectares in Victoria
- Destroyed more than 50% of the habitat for 185 rare and threatened Victorian animals, plants and other creatures
- Pushed already critically endangered species like the greater glider, smoky mouse, mountain ash eucalyptus and many others perilously close to extinction.

I am afraid I may never see even the remains of Toolangi forest before it is razed for a relatively small numbers of short-term jobs. Growling Grass frogs we found as children are gone from where I live. The fat-tailed dunnarts are now scarce here. The water rats never visit our dam anymore. Brolgas are scarce now. An increasingly intense farming chequerboard surrounds me and increasingly tattered remnants. A road is planned through the middle of Gariwerd Park to service the toilets at glampers' campsites. The rich volcanic soils around Ballarat is being consumed 50 hectares at a time to be covered with more houses. The Ramsar wetland at Cribb point is threatened with a gas import terminal. The roundabout at Ravenswood is nearly one kilometre around, all for short term jobs and growth at permanent long term physical and emotional costs.

I feel under siege and it is not an illusion. The current underlying cultural plan for us all is to soothe ourselves in the built environment or a vehicle.

I want government to take the situation very seriously. Victoria's planning laws are designed to only issue "licences" to destroy habitat. They do not even stop logging of the home of Victoria's faunal emblem the Leadbeater's possum. The law is not adequate to respond to the situation and the ecological imperatives. For example, decisions to permit an area of loss of habitat is often discussed if a certain area loss per year is sustainable, as though the habitat is an annual crop, rather than the loss

being recognised as a cumulative harm to impact natural populations, along with other harms.

Please strengthen the Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act so that it actually protects the remnants from the State's increasingly powerful machinery fleet that could destroy the isolated remnants many times over.

Please strengthen the Planning and Environment Act so that it recognises the multiple sources and multiple harms from development, and its incremental, cumulative and “collaborative” impacts

Please give both strengthened Acts the funding they needs for enforcement and compliance.

Please fund sensitive restoration projects and biolinks that connect remnants. Compared with funding heavy infrastructure, these are a far more positive and sustainable ways of creating jobs, leaving a strengthened country to support livelihoods. Around 8 times as many jobs can be provided per funding dollar compared with construction jobs which are very resource-heavy.

The expansion of the human population, the total amount of physical infrastructure and all current efforts to carry out all social functions, such as justice, health and education, are currently achieved using a supply of resources from a once-only extraction episode. For strong environmental laws to be effective, this dependence must be transformed. Strong laws must be combined with education about the need for the laws.

Please fund independent, scientifically based public education about the real-world economics – the figures about the rate at which we are using up resources and how much is left, how fast this rate of consumption is increasing or decreasing and what some the options are to change course.

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Submission not confidential