



Biodiversity Inquiry Victoria

Newlands Friends of the Forests is an unincorporated civil society group of people living in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. The group formed from the necessity to defend our State forests from destruction, because of our love for their beauty and need for their value as habitat, water and oxygen supply and carbon storage. We are a dynamic and diverse growing community group of people who see the links between our biodiversity and our own lives here in Melbourne's North.



We hold events and highlight the importance of biodiversity and forest protection for fresh air, water supply, safe climate, recreation - our life support system, particularly facing population growth and the bushfire and climate emergencies affecting Melbourne.

To address the terms of reference:

a) Victoria's Biodiversity

Destruction of habitat, the home environment, drives extinction of species by reducing populations to levels below which they cannot continue to survive. The [Biodiversity Bank](#) article (1) shows Victoria's State forests are in this process, and even if offsets were implemented, species would continue to be lost to the earth forever. Australia leads the world in mammalian species [extinction](#), which can be also expressed as biodiversity loss (2). Australia is still enduring [Continental level collapse](#), but has removed the ecology workforce that could be monitoring this, and the conservation management workforce that could ensure species protection (3). The resulting lack of good quality data on almost all of Victoria's [biodiversity indicators](#) and trends (4) has failed to completely obscure the extent of biodiversity loss.

Impacts of species extinction and its precursor, biodiversity loss, result in collapse of ecosystems, including and particularly the forests of Australia (5). The most relevant and recent research demonstrates that industrial logging in Victoria's state forests contributes to our climate emergency by depleting stored carbon and encouraging [bushfires](#) (6). The terrible impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires in southeastern Australia on human health and animal death are still being documented (7, p.14). But the contribution of State logging to increasing the severity and likelihood of bushfires is now a proven, not a potential harm (6).

Victoria's Mountain Ash ecosystem is [critically endangered](#), as are beautiful animals that depend on them, the Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) and the Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*) (8).



(b) Adequacy of the legislative framework protecting Victoria's environment

Victoria's state forests are essentially unprotected, because the current Regional Forest Agreement exempts the application of State and Federal environmental laws (7). By enacting Regional Forest Agreements, the Government of Victoria has abdicated power to control or measure the effects of industrial State forest logging on biodiversity, species extinctions, greenhouse gas and particulate pollution. Recent [Federal Court](#) decisions challenge these exemptions from National protection (9)

The [Office of the Environmental Regulator](#) has proven to be functionally inadequate, allowing VicForests to log State forests illegally. This is the finding of three different High Court Judges in independent court cases decided in 2020 (9).

(c) Adequacy and effectiveness of government programs and funding protecting and restoring Victoria's ecosystems

The Victorian Government has generously funded its industrial logging program run through its fully owned subsidiary VicForests. Ecosystem protection is not being pursued effectively by Government in the case of our tall forests in Victoria (7, 8).

(d) Legislative, policy, program, governance and funding solutions

Ecosystem and species protection could be most cheaply and readily achieved in Victoria by immediately enacting the planned transition from native forest logging to plantations. Timber release plans will have to be re-negotiated, and there is abundant scope for dialling down commitments given the decimation of supply by the recent bushfires. Funds saved by withdrawing subsidies to VicForests can be used to create VicCarbon.

(e) Restore Victoria's environment while upholding First Peoples' connection to country, and increasing and diversifying employment opportunities in Victoria

Research on the world's best practice in carbon sequestration recommends cessation of logging and establishment of new forests. VicCarbon can facilitate rural and regional people, including Aboriginal people, to create a climate safe future with long-term rural and regional jobs in agroforestry, Park maintenance and revegetation, tourism (food, wine, cycling, bushwalks) and ecological research.

The opportunities for meaningful jobs caring for country by local Aboriginal people have been under-developed to date. Victoria can look to the highly successful and popular ranger program in Barmah National Park, on Yorta Yorta lands. Very recently, Wathaurong people including Reg Solomon have founded fascinating and highly constructive projects on their grasslands near Lara. The National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Innovation (NIKERI) Institute at Deakin University has gathered and trained the national talent base of students and graduates with its Graduate Diploma of Land and Sea Country Management (10). Aboriginal Victorians could be employed in community-controlled organisations or VicCarbon, under new Closing the Gap strategies. The deeply damaging alienation from their land continues for Aboriginal people up to this day, and could be addressed.



References

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