

Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria.

Attention - Standing committee on Environment and Planning

Dear Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry.

I write to you on behalf of the community of Princetown, Victoria.

The Victorian Governments website states, in regard to the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, *“Victoria’s biodiversity target is a net improvement in the outlook for all species by 2037. The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (the FFG Act) is a key tool in achieving this target.*

It is the key piece of Victorian legislation for the conservation of threatened species and communities and for the management of potentially threatening processes..”

This may be so, but if the government agencies in charge of the conservation of threatened species and communities and the management of potentially threatening processes, choose to ignore the legislation, then this key tool is useless and ineffective.

There is no doubt that there has been substantial effort and investment into research, monitoring, and producing legislative frameworks in order to protect Victoria’s environment, but in reality, and in our community’s experience, it is all too easily ignored by the government agencies and responsible authorities if development is preferred.

We thought the best way to explain our concerns, is to use a real example, happening now.

In the case of the proposed Montarosa development on the Princetown Wetlands, a patch of vegetation is proposed to be cleared. The vegetation itself is a listed, threatened vegetation community, but it also harbours many rare and threatened species, both nationally and state listed.

DEWLP have the advisory position to the responsible authority for environmental protection issues in regard to this proposed development, yet it has taken 3 years for them to admit in their reviews, that threatened species actually exist there and that they will be impacted.

Only after 3 years of community outrage and hiring of Victoria’s leading ecologist, Geoff Carr, whom has studied this very patch of significant flora for over 40 years, did DELWP finally admit, (against the responsible authorities advice), that the area to be cleared is not a weedy patch of vegetation with ‘no conservation value’, like the developers reports wrongly assessed, but in fact is an area of very high conservation value.

If not for the community, this patch of threatened vegetation harbouring many rare and threatened species, would be cleared by now, with no legislative framework in sight.

And in spite of the communities efforts, this patch is still not safe and efforts are still being made to circumnavigate the environment legislations by the developer and responsible authority, Corangamite Shire and DELWP, to proceed in clearing.

The problem here is not with the legislative framework itself, but instead with DELWP, the government agency charged with upholding the legislation, when they do not do their job, simple as that.

Maybe the amalgamation of government agencies, like environment and planning under the one umbrella, has blurred the lines, and aided the blatant ignoring of listed threatened species in planning decisions, but whatever the reason, unless the legislations are actually used and enforced, Victoria’s Ecosystems will not be protected and the objectives that aim to conserve all of Victoria’s native plants and animals, are not worth the paper they are written on.

Please ensure this inquiry affects real change in the current corrupted system.

Kim Morton

Princetown Wetlands and Estuary Preservation Inc

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