



**From:** POV eSubmission Form <ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au>  
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**Subject:** New Submission to Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

**Categories:** Submissions

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Ms Mara Pacers



**SUBMISSION CONTENT:**

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Thank you for accepting this submission into the decline of bio-diversity and eco-systems in Victoria.

I have lived here for over 20 years, on the banks of the Gellibrand River, and wetlands near Princetown Victoria.

Over and over again I have witnessed, environment protection take a back seat to the political and economic interests of private development agendas. Having attempted on many occasions to raise issues of environmental concern, it has been a constant up-hill battle. At worst, I have encountered active obstruction from even getting issues to the attention of Authorities, including the EPBC.

Of particular concern in this area, the Corangamite catchment, are 2 issues in my immediate vicinity.

- 1) Continual, daily, diversion of water from the Gellibrand River (no off stream storage) to service ever expanding residential developments from Geelong to Warrnambool.
- 2) The planning permit exemptions and 'rubber stamping' of a private tourism resort development by Montarosa, on the Gellibrand river estuary, which constitutes a clear breach of EPBC guidelines.

1) Daily flows of the Gellibrand River. One of the things that makes it so difficult to ensure that guidelines are followed is the manipulation of information, data, and benchmarks over time. For example; Research into the minimum required flows of the Gellibrand river, conducted pre-2000, are at a much higher level than those found in reports in later years. Originally, a 'mistake' was found in the transposition of a number from one report, to a later report. This was reported at the time, but nothing was done to rectify the situation. Rather this new, lower daily flow, was then taken as the benchmark for all future reports. Given that that was almost 20 years ago, it becomes almost impossible to do anything about - the error is perpetuated.

Not only was there this 'downsizing' of minimum flows originally, but subsequently the amount has been reduced further. This appears to be as a result of needing to extract more water, to service the increasing developments of rural towns, and is not based on what is actually the minimum flow required for river health.

I have records of 20 years that show the decimation of migratory bird species over this time (birds specified in international migratory bird breeding agreements). The very nature of the flooding cycles has altered. Yet when trying to communicate these things, one is met by endless obstructions from the responsible authorities. No-one wants to know.

What is worst, is the misleading double standards, asking for input, stating that it is about ensuring balance and protection, but yet acting from what appears to be a completely contradictory agenda. I cannot count the weeks and months of effort (all voluntary on top of normal jobs etc) that go into providing information and data, which is then ignored.

A local group took local Water Companies to VCAT about even more ground water extraction. They withdrew their applications at that time, but continue to work in the background. They have professional staff dedicated to finding ways around the problem (and often it is we the people who live here and have the best first hand knowledge, who are identified as the problem).

2) The Planning Permit process for the proposed development by Montarosa, is a clear example of the failure of effective environment protection. The land upon which the development is slated, has always been deemed to be unsuitable for the building of any residential structure what-so-ever, even a small cabin. Yet with exemptions for 'tourist developments of significant economic benefit', they were encouraged in the process by council, and tourism bodies.

There is absolutely no necessity for the private developer to build on top of the wetland, on top of the water table that supplies town water, and right in the estuary of a nationally and internationally significant wetland, and in the National Marine Park. There are ample parcels of land, within sight, that would not jeopardise the environment. Indeed, the entire process to date appears to be corrupt, with zero attention to any environmental issues.

For example this large scale development couldn't get approval regarding waste treatment from the EPA. Instead they applied to the Local Government Planning Authority to remove all sewage and waste by tanker trucks, daily, which the Council planning authority approved. This is for a development with a 300 seat food hall/restaurant, day spa, hotel with swimming pool, and private villas. There isn't even a plan for how to transport the sewage and waste water around the site, where will it be collected and how it will be transferred into trucks etc. This was approved... This is all on a site subject to regular flooding both from the ocean and from river flooding, on the water table, in the wetland and in the estuary of a National Marine Park, with multiple endangered species

We couldn't even get the Environment Department to accept an application re the EPBC, even though there are numerous species that will be affected. There were 152 submission (in a small rural environment) made voicing serious, well researched concerns about this project, and were all ignored. This isn't some rag tag group of disaffected individual 'troublemakers', as has been made out, - but a group of committed scientists and field naturalists, as well as long term residents, who are conscientious and well informed, who want the best outcomes for the region - a win:win for development AND for the environment.

Indeed participating in this process, one can no longer believe that there is any desire by those bodies who are tasked with ensuring a balanced and educated approach to ensure that crucial aspects of eco-systems, or sustainability and environment protection are taken seriously at all.

It is extremely disheartening, and impossible to have faith in the mechanisms, that have been set up to protect our environment, to work at all.

Regarding the Montarosa proposed development, the issue has also been taken to VCAT. However the enormous differential in financial and legal resources creates a completely uneven playing field. Ultimately, even with the extensive conditions imposed by VCAT, rubber stamping by planning authorities makes a mockery out of these processes.

I have masses of detailed information available to substantiate the points that I have raised in this submission, and am happy to supply details upon request.

I sincerely hope that something can be done to address to systemic failure of Environment Protection guidelines and legislation, to move it from 'words on paper' to enable it to make better choices and protect and ensure the sustainability of our environment.

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File1:

File2:

File3: