

Maeve Bannister

From: David Redfearn <campaigns@good.do>
Sent: Monday, 31 August 2020 10:44 AM
To: ecosystems
Subject: Submission into the Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria

Categories: Submissions

Dear committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria. I write to you as one who has been involved with urban environmental activities for some years which have attempted to reverse decline in ecosystems as well as actively restoring them where possible. I make the following points which are in line with those proposed by Environmental Justice Australia but make several of my own towards the end with reference to my one local area.

Victoria's environmental laws should be the foundation for addressing ecosystem decline in the state which has been a steady and ongoing process since colonisation and our environmental laws should be the underpinning for addressing this. Key contributing drivers include land clearing, impacts of urban expansion, over extraction of natural resources such as water and timber, and the introduction of invasive species. Further to this climate change is now amplifying these threats which makes addressing this issue much more urgent.

The Inquiry into ecosystems decline in Victoria should take into account the following reforms to help ensure that we make the most of this opportunity:

1. Resource and implement the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act is the centrepiece of Victoria's biodiversity conservation legislation. Reforms last year have "refreshed and modernised" the Act, updating the objectives, adding a new duty for public authorities, and introducing new conservation tools. However, none of these reforms will be worth the paper that they're written on if they are not properly implemented.
2. Make sure our nature protection laws are climate ready. The past summer's devastating bushfires demonstrate the terrible impact that climate change can have on our wonderful natural places and wildlife. Climate change presents a massive challenge to Victorian ecosystems. Failing to address climate change stops our laws working effectively. Climate adaptation must be a part of our legal frameworks.
3. Improve compliance and enforcement with our environmental laws. We need an independent conservation regulator with a clear legislative foundation and all the legal powers needed to ensure Victoria's conservation laws are complied with.

4. Protect Victoria's precious wildlife. Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975 is out of date and no longer meets community expectations when it comes to protecting our precious wildlife. This act should be reformed to bring it up to date

5. Prevent the harmful impacts of new development. Victoria's planning laws and environmental impact assessment laws need to be brought up to date to make sure that infrastructure projects properly account for their impacts on Victoria's biodiversity before we even think about handing over responsibilities.

6. Stop the drivers of ecosystem decline. Nature protection laws should be a safety net. We need to address the pressure on Victorian biodiversity protection laws by removing key drivers of ecosystem decline such as native forest logging, unsustainable use of water resources, and the impact of invasive species. Stopping native forest logging sooner rather than later, more sustainable water resource management, and new fit for purpose invasive species management legislation are needed of ecosystem decline is to be turned around.

7. Boost ecosystem restoration. Nature protection laws alone will not be enough – our laws must also guide and encourage the restoration of Victoria's ecosystems. With climate change already having a terrible impact on Victorian flora and fauna, the challenge is urgent. Whether it be on public land or private land, our land management must be subject to appropriate obligations to ensure that ecological processes and natural assets are there for future generations to enjoy.

Strong nature protection laws will provide the backbone for a healthier future for Victoria's ecosystems, ensuring the people, places and wildlife we love can thrive for generations to come.

I have been involved in activities on the Merri Creek in Melbourne's North since the 1980s and have seen where community and government have worked very well together to reverse the severe ecological degradation of this waterway. The Merri catchment contains part of the Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain, a highly fragmented, critically endangered ecological community which has been severely diminished since the days of colonisation through pastoral expansion and industrial development in urban areas to the point where remnant communities are now less than 5 % of the the pre-European distribution and there are still areas under threat due to urban expansion.

The restoration of the Merri began by turning around community perceptions of the creek catchment leading to a serious commitment to investment in this waterway and its ecological communities. Our successes which are considerable point the way to what done but to maintain these gains and to ensure that there are no further losses we need to be confident that there are strong policy and legislative tools backed up with a strong commitment to compliance and, critically, resources. This cannot happen on the cheap or with short cuts; the commitment must be wholehearted and total otherwise it is a complete waste of time and resources and also self deceiving.

If we don't protect these and other areas under threat they are gone for eternity. While this may seem just a small part of the broader scheme of things, the cumulative impacts of the destruction of these small parts ultimately pose a major threat to the well being of all species on the planet including humanity.

Strong nature protection laws will therefore provide the backbone for a healthier future for Victoria's ecosystems, ensuring the people, places and wildlife we love can thrive for generations to come.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely,

David Redfearn

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