

To the Environment and Planning Committee, I would like to make a submissions to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline

My name is Colleen Smith. I live in Ivanhoe. I grew up in Ballarat and come from a long line of farming and gardening families on both sides and married into another farming family of many generations.

One of my fond memories of visiting my parents in law's farm especially in the cooler weather, was to walk down the driveway track and look across to the paddock through the trees to see what seemed like a very light covering of snow. On closer examination the white was actually created by small spider webs across the grass tips which held moisture droplets. It was a breathtaking realisation that there was such an incredible ecological web creating such a magnificent sight. Unfortunately, just over eighteen months ago the farm was sold and within just two weeks all the trees, which had been hand raised from indigenous seed and hand planted 40 years previously as part of the landcare awareness campaign, and fences were bulldozed and burnt, all the paddocks ploughed, chemically treated and formed ready for broad acre commercial agribusiness cropping. All of the biological diversity gone. No more white snowy like webs on cold mornings.

It is of great concern to me that with the removal of the soil microbiome and insect numbers and biodiversity through the current over use and misuse of chemicals and out dated agri practices e.g. broad acre mono cultures, we are headed for an ecological crash. The health of our soils dictate the diversity and health of our plants which in turn feeds the diversity of insects, birds and small mammals and reptiles which in turn feeds other larger species etc. Long term healthy pasture for commercial livestock raising depends on a healthy soil microbiome not on more and more chemicals with each passing season as the soil fertility declines and the pest issue explodes due to the lack of natural predators contained in a natural self regulating ecological system.

It seems idealistic but there are many examples of sustainable agriculture and farming where ecology is considered the most valuable partner and not some foreign investment company or chemical company. It is known what is needed. Nature knows what to do. We desperately need to prioritise the will to arrest the ecological decline that is so evident. We need proper investment in particular into government policies to support the adoption of ecology as our most important partner. We need ecology to be seen as an investment opportunity to improve economic outcomes. Ask the farmers who are planting trees and doubling their livestock carrying capacity!! We need ecology to be front and centre to arrest the devastation of climate change. We need ecology to be above party politics, self interest "deals" and the inconvenience of having to work through the issues and challenges when taking a longer term view because there just isn't a quick, convenient or simple fix it solution.

Victoria needs an, independent, well resourced ecology and conservation regulator to police deforestation and other destructive practices and industries.

Ultimately it is our community that is paying a huge ecological price and taking from our grand childrens's better future. Community rights must always be guaranteed when governments are making environmental decisions, including the right to participate, the right to access necessary information, the right to challenge environmental decisions and the right to transparency in government decision making. This may not be comfortable. It is probably even really annoying but it is an ecological necessity.

Colleen Smith.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I agree to this submission being made public.