

Environment and Planning Committee

Dear Environment and Planning Committee,

REFERENCE: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline.

30/08/2020

My name is Ian Swyer. I am a Retired Surveyor, concerned citizen and the President of my local Friends of Gembrook Bushland Park.

I live in [REDACTED], Victoria .

One of my main concerns is whole scale clearing of native vegetation, not only in Victoria but through out Australia (and the whole planet).

It is ridiculous that volunteers such as myself spend collective tens of thousands of unpaid man hours planting native vegetation whilst industry and primary producers are allowed to clear native vegetation. I believe that there should be a country wide moratorium on any land clearing for the foreseeable future.

In the Dandenong Ranges, early settlement, logging, and the need for timber for heating, houses and fencing has almost totally removed the mountain ash forests. Potato cultivation and grazing now occupy the land. Valleys are incised by the streams and sedimentation damages the habitat of Western Port Bay. Vast areas have lost forests for ever.

The forests that remain are in less accessible areas. Vic Forests is now accessing the Warburton Ranges, closer to Melbourne and more visible to community criticism.

Vic Forests is a statutory authority – beyond reproach on any environmental or legal grounds. The Federal Government is approving laws (08/20) that disallow scientists, indigenous people and interested community members from making legal submissions against Vic Forest' extensive breaches of coupe boundaries, destruction of endangered habitat, detrimental effect on trout fish raising (at Snob's Creek) and tourist amenity.

Due process is NOT being followed for the outcomes of the review of the 20-year-old Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. The authority charged with the review (Professor Graeme Samuel), described the law as "ineffective" and "inefficient" and called for wholesale reform. Samuel recommends "national environmental standards" that are consistent and legally enforceable and set clear rules for decision-making.

In the meantime, the Federal government wishes to streamline environment approvals and fast-track 15 major projects 'to help stimulate Australia's pandemic-stricken economy'.

Our Future

It IS vital that the piece meal and short-term abuse of ecosystems is halted by responsible law. The Federal and State governments must wait for the FULL outcome of the Environmental Bio-diversity Conservation Act reform to be released.

- 1 The devastation inflicted on our wildlife and forests from the 2019 - 2020 bushfires has made forest protection and a rapid logging transition more urgent. The Victorian state government's commitment to a 2030 industry transition must be brought forward. Two immediate priorities are protection of unburnt Greater Glider habitat, and a continued moratorium on logging in East Gippsland; the Central Highlands and Warburton Ranges.
- 2 In the face of climate catastrophe, Victoria's forests play a critical role in removing carbon pollution from the air we all breathe, nourishing us with clean air and safe, clean drinking water. The Victorian state government must develop carbon accounting and policies that include forests.

- 3 The state government must urgently implement and properly resource Action Statements (plans for recovery) for all threatened plants and wildlife. Victoria's plants and wildlife are at risk, with over 2000 recognised as threatened with extinction however only 15% have Action Statements. It is a disgrace that Australia has more species loss than any other country.
- 4 The rights and interests of Traditional Custodians should be recognised in all aspects of land and water management, as well as decision-making in relation to their traditional lands, including traditional management practices such as cultural fire. First Nations - declining ecosystems have profound implications for First Nations.
- 5 Victoria needs a new, independent, well-resourced conservation regulator to police deforestation and other destructive industries. The EPA is the independent watchdog for pollution, but currently there is no independent watchdog to ensure industries comply with environmental laws, with numerous breaches to laws continuing to occur and a long history of regulators turning a blind eye. *These regulations must be nested within a National Approach as suggest in the Samuel Report for the EPBC Act*
- 6 Community rights must 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. *The current plan to silence communities through rushed regulation must be stopped.*

Sincerely

Ian Swyer

"I agree to this submission being made public"