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**From:** POV eSubmission Form <ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, 31 August 2020 12:20 PM  
**To:** ecosystems  
**Subject:** New Submission to Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

**Categories:** Submissions

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Mrs Virginia Wallace

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## **SUBMISSION CONTENT:**

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I have been on two Catchment Management Authority Boards and am currently on the Board of Conservation Volunteers Australia. I am also working on establishing a not for profit called A Feral Free Australia 2050, a community organisation devoted to removing our worst feral predators so that we can save our wildlife. On Friday I appeared at the Federal Environment Committee's hearing into the problem of feral and domestic cats and I have also been working with Odonata (Mount Rothwell) in their business incubator program to progress environmental ideas. I am also involved with the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, a volunteer group committed to improving the outcome of the State Bird emblem, endemic to Victoria and found only in Yellingbo. I have also caught feral cats when I lived in regional Victoria.

Victoria has the highest number of threatened species by subregion in Australia. Since European settlement there has been a progressive rate of native animal and plant extinctions with Victoria losing 18 mammal species, 2 birds, 1 snake, 3 freshwater fish, 6 invertebrates and 51 plants. Of the 3,330 known Victorian species, 49 are extinct and 2,097 (63%) are on the Threatened Species Advisory Lists.

Invasive species have major impacts on Victoria's native flora and fauna and are a serious conservation concern. Species of animals can be declared as an established pest animal in Victoria under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994. The Act requires all landowners to prevent the spread of, and as far as possible eradicate, established pest animals. The Act applies to both public and private land.

In Victoria foxes and cats have already contributed to the extinction of a number of small native marsupials and are threat to many remaining threatened species. Australia's native wildlife has not evolved to survive alongside predation by cats and foxes and many birds and mammals are vulnerable particularly if they have small populations in fragmented areas.

It was only in 2018 that feral cats were listed as an established pest animal (on specified Crown Land). The control of feral cats and foxes is currently an urgent land management priority to protect fragile populations of various mammals and birds that are recovering from fire. The Port Philip and Westernport CMA is still looking for \$330,000

to help fund the removal of the remaining feral cats to help endangered species on French Island, a trifling amount to secure endangered species on what is effectively an Island Ark.

Introduced herbivores can also be highly destructive to ecosystems. Grazing by pest animals such as rabbits, deer and horses can limit the regeneration of trees, shrubs and grasses, alter the composition of plant communities, and allow weeds to establish in disturbed areas. They also compete with native mammals and birds for food and alter, trample and destroy habitats. The European Rabbit is declared as an established pest animal, mandating its control. However, there are other significant pest grazing animals, such as deer and horses that are not declared. When I have participated in plantings for the Helmeted Honeyeater it has been inside a two metre cyclone fence with star pickets and fencing running for a metre along the ground, otherwise the revegetation is pointless as it is completely destroyed by deer. Also deer have been found in Park Orchards, a mid-outer suburb in Melbourne.

Over a million deer are wreaking havoc in Victoria's state forests and national parks, and instead of being managed as a serious pest, deer are oddly protected under the Wildlife Act 1975 in order to support hunting interests. (See the VNPA's submission on the Victorian Government's yet to be released deer management strategy.) The government released a poorly written draft deer strategy in late 2018, and a final has yet to be released, well over year later. Meanwhile deer are creating havoc.

Feral horses are also trampling and exerting grazing pressure on critical habitats in the Australian Alps and "degradation and loss of habitats caused by feral horses" is listed as a threatening process under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

There has been an increasing trend in the number of critically endangered and vulnerable vertebrate groups, specifically reptiles, and an increase in the number of endangered vertebrates. Of the known species, those that are threatened include: 22% terrestrial mammals, 19% birds, 30% reptiles and 43% amphibians.

More than a quarter of Victoria's wetlands have been lost since European settlement, and the remaining are mostly in poor condition.

Native vegetation continues to be lost at approximately 4,000 habitat hectares per year. Some action that can be taken in relation to feral and invasive species include:

Adequately declare invasive pest animals and plants in legislation.

Legislate a cat curfew, that cats must be desexed, and no more than two cats per household.

Specifically declare deer a pest species, and release a detailed state-wide deer control strategy.

Significantly expand funding and planning for control measures and mitigating impacts.

Regards, Virginia Wallace

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