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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Miss Kate Arnold



**SUBMISSION CONTENT:**

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Some of my most treasured memories are about being immersed in Victoria's diverse natural habitats. I thank you for this opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria. This State is home to some of the world's most beautiful habitats and unique wildlife. I have spent a lot of time exploring the Otway's, Southern Highlands, Grampians, Yarra Ranges, Wilson's Prom, Gippsland, Cathedral Range state park, Mount Dandenong to name a few Victorian locations which are very dear to me.

The fact that we are now holding this enquiry and that Victoria rates poorly on most environmental indicators (CES VIC. State of the Environment 2018 report) is testimony that we as a state urgently need to change how we manage our ecosystems.

The three key factors I wish to address the increases in vulnerability for threatened wildlife species in my submission are:

1. The strength of current environmental laws.
2. Ending native logging.
3. Climate change mitigation and adaption.

Present and future Victorian's depend on our government to turn this paradigm of decline around. All life depends on a healthy ecosystem and the ecological services nature provides. Our future and the future of all wildlife is directly impacted by the degradation and destruction of our natural environment. We depend on our ecosystems to filter the air we breathe and the water we drink, sequester carbon dioxide, chemical cycling, provide ecological services essential for growing nutritious food. A healthy natural environment is essential to our mental wellbeing.

Our good intentions are currently not supported with strong laws and legislation. When it comes to our Victorian ecosystems, it is an expectation that the Victorian Government appoints decision makers who are either qualified to manage our natural environment or if not, act based on the strongest independent scientific advice available. The

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 is an example of this.

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 was created for the protection of our threatened flora and fauna. However, Environmental Ministers can make discretionary decisions which contravene this legislation. These laws have proven to be weak and ineffective as ever since they came into existence there has been a continued increase in the number of endangered species. The Victorian Government should make it mandatory decisions which impact threatened flora or fauna uphold critical habitat determinations.

Victorian Government has committed to ending all native forest logging for plantation timber production by 2030. Bush fires devastating large areas of native forest and wildlife recently but our government still proceeded to renew its Regional Forest Agreements for another 10 years. This was done in full knowledge the bushfires had burnt through more than three million hectares of CAR reserves. With this large decrease in CAR which is the main mechanism to protect these ecosystems in the RFA's and the expectation that future bushfires are imminent and increasing in both frequency and intensity due to climate change, these RFA's should not have been renewed.

Without the help of government grants the native logging industry makes no sense economically. Tax funded grants such as the \$3.3 million to Western Community Forestry due this year need to be abandoned in preference for Government investment in transition plans for workers to move into alternate industries and creating new industries including in the regions where communities few alternatives.

Victoria is the most cleared Australian state with most of our remaining healthy ecosystems on public land. This state has over 2000 species on the threatened species advisory lists, the highest number between Australian state. The relentless fragmentation of habitats resulting from development on what were wildlife corridors is overwhelmingly contributing to this.

We need stronger laws which ensure that new development proposals meet the Biodiversity 2037 plan. New developments should be required by law to uphold critical habitat determinations for the area of potential commercial development or be rejected. If we fail to do this, we can expect to see the destruction of our ecosystems. The Victorian government estimates a gap in additional protected areas required to meet Australia's criteria for an adequate reserve system is 2.1 million hectares. The Victorian Government's current progress is currently too slow to prevent further decline and to save many of the endangered wildlife populations and ecosystems now known.

Our declining ecosystems are directly contributing to global temperatures exceeding the upper thresholds at which life on earth will be severely impacted. The increased occurrence and severity of bushfires are a preview of worst to come, and the implications of this to the wellbeing of all life. I hope that our state government prioritise the restoration of habitats and create economic opportunities that embrace a new paradigm for Australians which includes emission reductions, habitat restoration and protection.

Current and future Victorian's are now depending on our government to turn this paradigm of degradation and destruction of our ecosystems around by making our environmental laws stronger, abandoning old outdated industries such as native forest logging and showing a true commitment to restoring the wildlife corridors and ending habitat fragmentation which places huge pressure on the survival of ecosystems.

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File1:

File2:

File3: