



Yarra Climate Action Now

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To whom it may concern,

Re: YCAN Submission to Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into biodiversity loss & extinction

Our native plants, animals and ecosystems bring important economic benefits, are valuable to society and are globally important. Native bushland has cultural, aesthetic and recreational importance to many Australians. Most importantly, the ways in which organisms interact with each other and their environment are important to human survival: we rely on ecosystems that function properly for clean air and water and healthy soil.¹

Our soil resources are an important natural asset, and their degradation is a significant concern to Australian farmers, governments and the general public.¹

The National Land and Water Resources Audit reports that threatened birds are declining across 240 of Australia's 384 subregions, while threatened mammals are rapidly declining in 20 subregions and declining in 174 subregions.¹

Since European settlement, and clearance has been concentrated in certain areas and ecosystems. Generally those ecosystems found on the most fertile soils have suffered the highest levels of clearance, and about 90% of vegetation in the eastern temperate zone has been removed.²

There are 2,891 threatened ecosystems and ecological communities across Australia, with the highest concentrations in the highly cleared regions of southern and eastern Australia. Nearly half of the threatened ecosystems are eucalypt forest and woodlands with shrubby or grassy understorey that have been extensively cleared.¹

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) is a community climate action group based in inner-city Melbourne with a membership of more than 1000 people concerned about climate change and sustainability. Our members live, work or study within the City of Yarra. YCAN is our way to take action into our own hands; we think globally but act locally.

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<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.NSF/46d1bc47ac9d0c7bca256c470025ff87/62c0ccada5421f81ca256e7d0000264b!OpenDocument>

² Frog Decline Reversal Project 2002, The Unwanted Amphibian <www.fdrproject.org/pages/Toads.htm> last viewed 23 March 2004.

YCAN acknowledges the dire statistics of environmental decline and loss of plant and animal species in the state of Victoria. The data is sobering reading and highlights that Victoria has inadequate protections for the natural world that sustains us. Despite the overwhelming evidence that the state is performing poorly in its care for the environment and its species, Victorian legislation continues to facilitate the decline. YCAN strongly advocates for changes to strengthen relevant legislation and protections. We support the Victorian State enquiry into biodiversity loss and extinction and reflect on the horrifying statistics:

- Australia is the second worst country in the world for extinction,³ and accounts for over 40% of the world's mammalian extinctions since 1800.⁴
- Australia is one of the 10 worst countries in the world for deforestation – and the only developed country on the list.⁵
- Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia - 66% of our land has been cleared of native trees, shrubs and plants⁶ – the habitat that supports our native wildlife.
- 75% of the carbon stored in Australia's soils has been lost since colonisation⁷, largely due to land clearing & western farming practices.
- Victoria's recent State of the Environment Report assessed 35 indicators of the health of Victoria's biodiversity. Of these, none were in good health and 60% were in poor health. Most alarmingly, 51% were determined to be deteriorating.⁸

YCAN supports significant improvements to government legislation such as the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. This legislation is currently poorly implemented and protection of threatened species is at the discretion of government ministers, and is subject to other influences. We also raise the following concerns regarding: land clearing as a major driver of habitat loss and the need to review the Regional Forest Agreement system; lack of feral animal population controls, which are implicated in the loss of small mammals by predation, destruction of vegetation and food competition; inadequate public resources allocated to national parks and ecosystem management; unsustainable hunting of native wildlife which includes duck hunting and overfishing and a general decline in environmental health across an array of ecosystems.

Most importantly YCAN is concerned by the failure of government to tackle climate change and strongly recommends the issue is afforded priority attention by the inquiry. Climate change is the multiplier of impacts such as fire, drought and flood, and the potential driver of species and habitat loss. As carbon dioxide emissions continue to increase across community, business and transport sectors, any direct actions that result from this inquiry may produce little more than a bandaid to biodiversity loss. We cannot sustain healthy ecosystems without addressing the elephant in the room that is human induced climate change. The bushfires of the 2019–2020 summer are a stark illustration of the types of habitat destruction likely to take place in the future. We need to cease CO₂ emissions in Victoria immediately while humans still have some control over climate induced habitat loss.

³ <https://environmentvictoria.org.au/campaign/act-on-extinction/>

⁵ <https://theconversation.com/australia-is-a-global-top-ten-deforester-and-queensland-is-leading-the-way-87259>

⁶ www.greens.org.au

⁷ Sue Bestow from the Office of the National Soil Advocate, YCAN webinar 'Soil Health in a Changing World' 20 May 2020

⁸ Australia - State of the Environment Report 2018 <https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/reports/state-environment-2018>

YCAN recommends that the inquiry strong action on climate change to ensure that Victorian ecosystems have a secure future. This can be achieved by:

- Setting a timeframe for the phasing out of coal fired power stations in Victoria and fast-tracking the renewable energy transition.
- Commit to a 'no new gas for Victoria' future. Gas is an unacceptable, high emitting fuel.
- Transport policy to decarbonise the sector by producing incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles and infrastructure.
- All new investment in public transport running on 100% renewable energy.
- Invest in increasing the knowledge base around regenerative farming, which includes sequestering carbon through replanting vegetation and biochar soil improvement.

YCAN recommends the implementation of specific changes in the management of the environment:

- Cease the Regional Forest Agreement system. It is not working and allows the harvesting of trees in high conservation value forests.
- Bring forward the ban on logging in native forests from the proposed 2030 timeline, in line with the recommendations of forest ecologists. Given the destruction of last summer's bush fires, this should not be delayed. The transition to plantation logging needs to occur as soon as possible.
- Formulate action statements and management plans for threatened habitats and species.
- Formulate action plans to prevent further loss of fragmented remnant vegetation and habitat, and implement plans to protect endangered temperate grasslands.
- Adequately declare pest species in legislation and act on creating a state wide funded strategy to eliminate feral animals and plants.
- Work with local Indigenous communities to develop fire management plans including the implementation of 'cool burns' to manage habitat and reduce the risk of uncontrolled bushfires.
- Ensure that relevant legislation 'The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act'- is appropriately utilised to preserve species and given 'teeth' to prosecute, thus creating deterrents to habitat and species destruction.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch should you want to discuss these matters in more detail. We look forward to seeing a report that recognises Victoria's dire position regarding biodiversity loss and extinction, and presents a courageous plan for improvement. Time is running out!

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Ande Bunbury and Lisa Magnusson

Yarra Climate Action Now

