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From: Martin McAvoy [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 26 August 2020 3:17 PM
To: ecosystems
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Our future, your future, our children and grandchildren's future, and 120 Victorian species of life on the verge of extinction.

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Dear Parliamentary Inquiry,

Our family home is on Kangaroo Island, recently devastated by last summer's bushfires, the worst in living memory. I live now in Melbourne with my partner, not just because we can't return to South Australia with the border closed, but also because our daughter and son-in-law live here with our two grandchildren, who we help look after, mostly our eldest grandson, because the youngest one, born in May with a serious health condition, takes up much of his parent's time just now. Our family, like most families in the world, has been seriously affected by the climate crisis, but I think it has become clearer to those who have witnessed its effects and immediate consequences first hand. We saw the terrible devastation in the west of our island, the enormous destruction of animal lives and habitat, two islander's dead from the fire, and the serious disruption of many people's lives and homes. Returning to Melbourne in the New Year, we experienced a week of toxic air pollution from the fires burning all around. Our health was affected as was the rest of our family. And then came the pandemic.

We know where the pandemic most likely began, in the wet markets of Wuhan. The huge illegal wildlife trade has been estimated to generate two to four new viruses a year as we and it threaten biodiversity by allowing mixed markets of wild and farmed animals, raising the risk enormously of disease transmission.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/25/ourselves-scientist-says-human-intrusion-nature-pandemic-aoe>

How many informed scientists still think there is no connection between the new pandemics and climate change? Not the majority. They've told us that without biodiversity there is no future for humanity. The more species we drive into extinction the more we threaten our own survival by burning "the library of life" and putting our own habitat at risk of depletion and destruction.
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/12/what-is-biodiversity-and-why-does-it-matter-to-us>

What can we do in Victoria? What have we done?

Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia — 66% of our land has been cleared of native trees, shrubs and plants — the habitat that supports our native wildlife. Over 700 native plants, animals, insects and beautiful ecosystems are under threat, with this number growing every day. 120 Victorian species of animals, birds, plants, insects and fish are now at the brink of extinction. More than 70 threatened species make their home in forests that are still being logged.

This summer's fires have dramatically worsened the outlook for the places and creatures that make Victoria such an amazing place. The scale, severity and destruction of these fires was unprecedented. They burned 1.4 million hectares of Victoria, destroyed more than 50% of the habitat for 185 rare and threatened Victorian animals, plants and other creatures, and pushed already critically endangered species like the greater glider, smoky mouse, mountain ash eucalyptus and many others perilously close to extinction.

What can and should we do?

We can care and respect and take responsibility for the state we are in, and knowing it's presently a state of emergency and disaster, we can make it into a good and healthy place to be.

Right now, coming to grips with the economic fallout from COVID-19, it's a perfect time for federal and state governments to spend public money and create jobs looking after people and the environment, protecting wildlife and natural habitats for all living creatures, not just us. But protecting them is protecting us, in both the short and long term of our natural lives.

We can begin by creating

a) An appropriately managed but extensive program of weed and invasive species eradication

Victoria is overrun by weeds and invasive animals, which kill and out-compete our native plants and wildlife. It's a big job to manage them, but it's critical for restoring habitat. We could create thousands of jobs clearing weeds out of rivers, creeks, farmland and national parks, and humanely managing introduced animals like cats, deer, rabbits and foxes.

b) A tree-planting workforce many thousands strong to restore habitat.

Two thirds of Victoria's trees, mangroves, shrubs, and other plants have been cleared since colonisation. Much of what's left is in poor health. We could create thousands of jobs in both the city and the country, replanting trees and vegetation in our parks, streets, rivers and creeks right across our state, but especially in bushfire-affected areas. We could also help landowners plant native vegetation on their land.

c) A dedicated program for reviving species facing extinction

The work of rescuing Victoria's more than 120 species at risk of extinction deserves and needs a dedicated program of funding. NSW has committed \$100 million to a 'Save Our Species' program, which systematically identifies risks to species and goes about addressing them. It also includes action like breeding programs so healthy populations of animals, birds and plants can be restored. Victoria has nothing like this program and spends almost no money on this type of dedicated species recovery work. We also spend very little money on research for our scientists to study new solutions to the extinction crisis. It's time that changed.

d) An end to habitat destruction and strengthened nature laws

We cannot hope to stop extinction unless we stop the destructive activities that are driving it. We need to: Stop native forest logging and transition to a plantation based timber industry. Phase out coal and gas burning, which is making the climate crisis worse and driving devastating extreme events like heat waves, fires and floods. Stop destructive and unnecessary development like the Western Highway Duplication and the proposed Westernport gas ship terminal which continue to bit-by-bit erode the health of Victoria's environment for corporate profits. Change the laws that allow wildlife to be killed, and grasslands and other habitat to be cleared, with little to no ramifications.

We can do all this and everybody wants this, if they really think about it, it's the best way for them to care about themselves and their families, their future and everyone's, every living thing.

We're all in this together for the short term and the long haul, and we need the stamina to build a strong and long-term sustainable society, not one focussed solely on short-term and destructive profit, made from poisoning our air and water and destroying our earth. On KI the fire began with excessive heat, drought and lightning, and ended with a fortunate change of the weather. The firefighters said they'd never seen a fire like it. It was the same at Gospers Mountain, lightning and intense heat and drought began it, and torrential rain stopped it, after destroying an area seven times the size of Singapore. The times are changing. We have to also, before it is too late. All life on earth depends on us now to defend it and not destroy it.

Sincerely,

Martin McAvoy