

From: Maria-Pia Bernardi [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 31 August 2020 2:17 PM
To: ecosystems
Subject: re: Submission into the Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria

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The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Environment and Planning
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria.

As a doctor and surgeon in Geelong, I am driven to make a submission by my grave concern for the ecosystem and biodiversity decline in Victoria and its link to human health. Ecosystems are the foundations of biodiversity and support our health through the many essential services that they provide. These include filtration of our air, fresh food and water, regulation of our climate, including protecting against the spread of diseases and pests.

In 2018, the Victorian State of the Environment Report found that two-thirds of the state's indicators for land-based biodiversity were assessed as poor. Victoria's environmental laws should be the foundation for addressing ecosystem decline in the state. Key contributing drivers include land clearing, impacts of urban expansion, over extraction of natural resources such as water and timber, and the introduction of invasive species. Further to this, climate change is now amplifying these threats which makes addressing this issue even more urgent, especially in light of last summer's bushfires.

As a member of Doctors for the Environment Australia, I would like to add my voice to their detailed submission which draws on a sound Biodiversity policy. In particular, I believe this inquiry should strongly consider the following reforms to ensure we make the most of this opportunity to improve our state for future generations:

1. Ensure our nature protection laws are climate ready. The past summer's devastating bushfires demonstrate the terrible impact that climate change can have on our wonderful natural places and wildlife. Climate change presents a massive challenge to Victorian ecosystems. Failing to address climate change stops our laws working effectively. Climate adaption must be a part of our legal frameworks. Part of this includes the need to urgently decide on science-based Emission Reduction Targets for 2025 and 2030. Victoria is part of the global community and needs to be part of global efforts to keep global temperature rise under 1.5degreesC.
2. Protect Victoria's precious wildlife. Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975 is out of date and no longer meets community expectations when it comes to protecting our precious wildlife. It should be reformed to make sure that it meets the Victorian community's expectations for how our valued wildlife will be protected and preserved for future generations.
3. Prevent the harmful impacts of new development. While the Morrison government is in a hurry to handover responsibilities under our national environmental law - the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act - to state governments, we know that Victorian laws are not fit for purpose. Victoria's planning laws and environmental impact assessment laws need to be brought up to date to make sure that infrastructure projects properly account for their impacts on Victoria's biodiversity before we even think about handing over responsibilities.
4. Stop the drivers of ecosystem decline. Nature protection laws should be a safety net. We need to address the pressure on Victorian biodiversity protection laws by removing key drivers of ecosystem decline such as native forest logging, unsustainable use of water resources, and the impact of invasive species. Victoria is one of the most cleared states in Australia with 66% of our land cleared of native trees and plants. Stopping native forest logging sooner

rather than later, more sustainable water resource management, and new fit for purpose invasive species management legislation are needed if ecosystem decline is to be turned around.

5. Boost ecosystem restoration. Nature protection laws alone will not be enough – our laws must also guide and encourage the restoration of Victoria’s ecosystems. With climate change already having a terrible impact on Victorian flora and fauna, the challenge is urgent. Whether it be on public land or private land, our land management must be subject to appropriate obligations to ensure that ecological processes and natural assets are there for future generations to enjoy.

Biodiversity is well understood to be a foundation for human health and wellbeing. As a doctor, the health of people is one of my priorities. However, I recognise that without healthy ecosystems, human health is at risk. Strong nature protection laws will provide the backbone for a healthier future for Victoria’s ecosystems, ensuring the people, places and wildlife we love can thrive for generations to come.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Pia Bernardi

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I want my submission to be public with name (no contact details)