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SUBMISSION for ECOSYSTEM DECLINE

Standing Committee on Environment and Planning

Irene Wright, [REDACTED] – 31/8/2020

This submission is based on the seven issues listed by Enviro Justice Aus and includes personal recommendations in response to the growing numbers of dogs on beaches on Phillip Island and the increasing power of dog owners to influence local and state government.

This is based on three decades as a resident of Phillip Island including 10 years as a volunteer working with Phillip Island Nature Park (PINP) to protect hooded plovers from uncontrolled dogs.

The situation has now reached an unprecedented level of aggression from dog owners who have coined the phrase “I own a dog and I vote”. They have candidates at the coming Council elections to increase the number of beaches for leash free dogs.

Anyone who attempts to present a rational view about dog control is publicly insulted.

The local Council conducted an online communications study last year and the result for most sites was in favour of more leash free beaches. This is disastrous for ecosystem decline, especially the hoodies and other native wildlife. It is equally unacceptable for families who go the beach as a means of finding peace and connection to nature.

Council have adopted the “voice of the masses” and now allow more dog beaches with less officer presence. More people are moving to Phillip Island because it is the best area in Victoria for dogs.

How is this possible ?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All dog owners to be registered with the municipality that connects to beach.
2. Registration income is set a level that delivers – honest policing of restrictions.
2. Council to purchase / lease land to have Dog Parks where owners pay a fee and there is no conflict with families on the beach.

ENVIRO JUSTICE AUSTRALIA

There are 7 key points listed by Enviro Justice Aus which must be addressed in the Inquiry into ecosystems decline in Victoria.

The key point is implementation and this can only occur with community support.

1. Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988

Resource and implement the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act is the centrepiece of Victoria's biodiversity conservation legislation. Reforms last year have "refreshed and modernised" the Act, updating the objectives, adding a new duty for public authorities, and introducing new conservation tools. **However, none of these reforms will be worth the paper that they're written on if they are not properly implemented.**

2. Nature protection laws are climate ready

Make sure 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 adaptation must be a part of our legal frameworks.

3. Improve compliance and enforcement

Improve compliance and enforcement with our environmental laws. A significant change was made last year when, following a damning review of timber harvesting regulation in Victoria, the government established the Office of Conservation the Regulator. This move, while a welcome recognition that the implementation and enforcement of our nature protection laws needs to be improved, does not go far enough. We need an independent conservation regulator with a clear legislative foundation and all the legal powers needed to ensure Victoria's conservation laws are complied with.

4. Protect Victoria's precious wildlife

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.

5. Prevent the harmful impacts of new development

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.

6. Stop the drivers of ecosystem decline

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. Stopping native forest logging sooner rather than later, more sustainable water resource management, and new fit for purpose invasive species management legislation are needed of ecosystem decline is to be turned around.

7. Boost ecosystem restoration

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.

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.

CONCLUSION

It is no longer acceptable for land managers to operate under the pretense that they are managing natural ecosystems.

No rules are relevant if they are not properly implemented. It is better to have no rules that for PINP and BCSC to ignore the current rules.

Thanking you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Irene Wright

