

Jo Rye



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Victorian Government
Extinction Inquiry

My name is Jo Rye and I live in Ballarat. I currently volunteer three days a week, at the Hepburn Wildlife Shelter near Daylesford in Central Victoria. My reason for making a submission to this inquiry, is my concern at the perilous state of our unique, iconic wildlife in Victoria (and in Australia more generally).

I would like to outline what I see as the value of this special forest in which I work to save animals, the threats faced by the forest and the animals, and the value of biodiversity more broadly; and to emphasise what has been lost from our cities and towns. I would like to urge the Victorian Government to take active steps to help to arrest this decline in biodiversity.

I have worked at the Wildlife Shelter for the last six years. In that time I have worked with many of the animals common within the Wombat Forest (such as the Common Wombat and Eastern Grey Kangaroo), as well as some which are more rare (such as the Brush-tailed Phascogale and Greater Glider).

I grew up in the suburbs of Melbourne in the 1970s, and of course was unaware for many years of just how much biodiversity had already been lost to urban development. Some species can survive in the radically changed built environment, such as Magpies and Brush-tailed Possums. But specialist species such as koalas and many smaller birds, for instance, will disappear forever and become locally extinct.

I now live in Ballarat, and can see a similar process at play in this region of Victoria. We are lucky enough to have kangaroos and koalas and many other native species close to town; and yet koalas and many species are threatened by the footprint of human development. Koala counts show a diminishing population around Ballarat, under threat from car strikes, dogs and tree clearing for development.

Habitat is critical to the survival of threatened species. The Wombat Forest is home to several increasingly rare species such as the Greater Glider, Powerful Owl and Phascogale. This is despite much logging in the past, and the proximity of this forest to Melbourne. In fact, it is the location of the only population of the Greater Glider west of the Hume Freeway, and is the Western limit of their range.

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Committee (VEAC) have recommended the Wombat Forest become a National Park, despite its proximity to Melbourne and long-term history of logging. Yet despite this, protection has not yet been granted.

Moreover, forests perform water purification and carbon storage services for our environment, functions which are increasingly important in the face of the effects of climate change.

The devastating recent summer bushfires killed billions of animals, many of them in Victoria. Extinction is a real threat for many species in Victoria. We absolutely must not take our natural heritage for granted.

- 120 Victorian 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;
- the recent bushfires burned 1.4 million hectares, just in Victoria, and pushed already critically endangered species like the Greater Glider, Smoky Mouse, Mountain Ash Eucalyptus and many others perilously close to extinction.

As a wildlife carer, these numbers are not just statistics to me; they demonstrate the perilous state of our 'web of life', and represent the suffering of so many creatures as they lose their homes, and their lives.

I take issue with the practice of culling kangaroos where they are deemed to be a 'pest' because they conflict with the land usage of farmers. Our native animals are too often deemed to be 'common', until suddenly they are driven to local extinction. And then an animal is only found in fragmented populations, and decline of the population inevitably occurs. The Duck Shooting season is another instance of a practice which continues because of a non-essential human preference, even though it is pushing some endangered species to the brink (many shooters are unable or unwilling to be careful about what they kill).

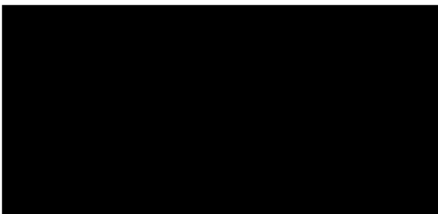
Too often, our native species and their habitat are sacrificed for human purposes, whether it be logging, mining, agriculture and development. And now we face a future of increasing threats from bushfires, drought and climate change; we ignore our impacts on the 'web of life' at our peril.

However, there are many active steps which could be taken to reverse the decline of many species, which could also create many jobs, for instance:

- accepting recommendations by VEAC to establish new National Parks;
- working with indigenous elders to care for country;
- establishing a tree-planting workforce to restore habitat; and
- creating a dedicated programme to revive species facing extinction.

I look forward to hearing about the active steps that the Victorian Government will take to address the extinction crisis we currently face.

Yours sincerely,



Jo Rye.