

New Submission to Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

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To: ecosystems <ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au>

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Mr Paul Handley



SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Thank-you for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry

Status

I write as a concerned resident of the western suburbs, long aware of environmental issues, but becoming more active as I observe that minor gains on environmental issues are much outweighed by harm done elsewhere. I acknowledge my limited knowledge of the subject, limited understanding of the complexities encountered, and am respectful of those who are professionally involved in this field.

Concerns expressed

1. A staunch defender of public open space is required. If one already exists, they may need to be bolstered.
 2. While inevitably situations may arise where different arms of government have conflicting interest, ecosystem protection should be afforded a high level of protection, and as a result, only jeopardised in extreme situations.
1. A local case study.

My local case study of this relates to the plans for the removal of the Level Crossing in Fitzgerald Rd, West Sunshine. As things stand, this looks like becoming a case study of the failure of the system to protect a small, but significant, part of our ecosystem

As I write the 'confirmed plan' involves a road over rail solution. This will require a banked road descending from an overpass, through a grassland that has been undisturbed since European settlement. The part of the grassland affected (along with established non-indigenous trees) covers an estimated 4 hectares. I understand another submission is being made in relation to concerns

with this project, and intend to make some comments on supplementary issues I feel most concerned about.

I understand that there would be many issues to consider in the planning of the removal of a level crossing. Inevitably there will be an easiest and most cost effective solution. This will depend much on the value given to nearby assets.

As a resident of West Footscray, the area of the Fitzgerald Rd Level Crossing, is rarely encountered by road. It appears as a something of a wasteland. It is dominated by traffic – with the Ring Road overpass, level crossing, and Forrest St/Tilburn Rd. The rail line creates a barrier to the residential areas to the south of Forrest St. There is no 'destination' in the vicinity, giving the area a sense of alienation.

It is this 'alienation' that perhaps conspires against the grassland at 274 Forrest St. It is in fact the only part of the parkland (stretching to Ballarat Rd) that is undisturbed – much of the open space was once utilised by the Ardeer chemical factory. Additionally, the parkland links to Kororoit Creek, an extensive green corridor in the area.

By bicycle, the impression is not particularly good either, due to poor management. The area is infested with thistles, management seems to be occasional slashing either side of the pathway. Nevertheless the grassland is part of an extensive network of cycling paths and is valuable in that role. The provision of improved cycling connections as a result of the proposed project is insignificant compared to the damage done.

This value is not evident to the casual observer, and it has only been through the enthusiasm of Penny Webb that I have come to appreciate the significant value of this land.

A staunch defender of public open space is required. If one already exists, they may need to be bolstered.

This defence must not be compromised if the site is out-of-sight, neglected, in poor condition, or otherwise unattractive, particularly if it is in a metropolitan area. Instead, it seems where system failure occurs, it seems to be falling on individuals in the area to make the case, as the horse bolts, and potentially at much higher cost to the community.

If this open space were correctly valued, it would have been afforded more 'weight' in considerations. In such a situation, a solution with virtually no impact (rail under road) would presumably have had more chance of being a viable alternative to the road over rail solution that has a footprint of approximately four hectares.

A local positive case study: In contrast to the situation in Ardeer, I acknowledge the progress that has been made on VicTrack land in Braybrook. This also is remnant grassland, that has in the last three years or so been enclosed in a rabbit proof fence, thistles eradicated, and continues to be slowly rehabilitated. It is my understanding that much more could be achieved if the landholder would increase resourcing beyond the very modest levels currently provided.

In any case, it demonstrates what could be possible at 274 Forrest St. What went right in Braybrook, a site that shares many of the challenges of Ardeer? Maybe the adjacent residential development, and increased visibility due to the addition of a bike path?

2. Un-greening the West?

In becoming aware of the threat to 274 Forrest St, the program known as Greening The West came to my attention. GTW is a collaboration of Local Government and State and community agencies. While it sees greening to have health, environmental and economic benefits, the Strategic Plan Overview documents states "it should be noted that the express priority of Greening the West is the health and wellbeing of residents." (p4).

Further, on page 5 it states "Planting vegetative barriers will assist in filtering and capturing the diesel particulate matter, thereby reducing residents' exposure to these toxic emissions. In this regard, targeting transport corridors will be of special importance."

Despite this statement, we have a government department removing existing trees, and bringing traffic into closer proximity to housing.

While inevitably situations may arise where different arms of government have conflicting interest, ecosystem protection should be afforded a high level of protection, and as a result, only jeopardised in extreme situations.

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File1:

File2:

File3: