

30/08/2020



To The Environment and Planning Committee,

As a resident in the Central West region of Victoria and living close to the Mount Cole Ranges, I am grateful for this opportunity to make a submission for the inquiry into the decline of Victoria's ecosystems.

I have read the **Terms Of Reference** and have based my submission on:

- A) *the extent of decline of Victoria's biodiversity and its impacts.....*
- B) *adequacy of legislative framework.....*

Note: To clarify what follows, within the Mount Cole Range is Mount Buangor State Park. VEAC has recommended it be expanded in area and upgraded to National Park.

Published figures indicate how chronic the situation is regarding biodiversity and ecosystem decline and the alarming increase in the numbers of threatened and endangered species. With this worsening situation, if stronger protection and controls are NOT implemented now, then we will face an even harder and more costly task in the future. This would almost certainly include the further loss of species.

As we know, there are many factors responsible for these declines and are almost entirely "man made." Therefore we are responsible to do our absolute best to not allow this situation to worsen. If we choose not to increase funding for the environment, we are choosing to degrade ecosystems, biodiversity and species.

The previously mentioned factors responsible for the declines include: the continuing expansion of human development into the natural environment, excessive plundering (of all sorts,) habitat destruction, deforestation, pollution, feral animals, invasive weeds, degradation of waterways (a large variety of causes) and of course climate change.

What I find distressing is that while the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) recommendations to the government for the Central West Investigation have been "sitting idle," VicForests has approved new logging coupes in areas that have been recommended to become National Parks. I find it illogical that areas having significant preservation value can be logged or clear felled when there are adjoining sections of State Forest that do not hold the same level of ecological and heritage importance. Not all of Mount Cole's State Forest has been recommended for National Park, only a portion of it has.

Terms Of Reference, B)

I admit to having no knowledge of the existing legislation but it appears to me that VicForests has the final say in matters pertaining to forest management. The Conservation Regulator it seems can only intervene when regulations and laws are not being adhered too and is powerless on the grounds of conservation alone.

I see this as being an injustice to the environment and to rectify this, either:

- areas officially recommended for preservation be excluded from logging, or,
- VicForests' powers be reduced, through legislation if necessary, so that anomalies such as this can be challenged or reversed.

Now on Mount Cole, for example, if the VEAC's recommendations for the Mount Buangor National Park are approved, there will be clear felled areas within a National Park and will be scarred for decades to come.

Within the proposed Mt Buangor National Park there are threatened and endangered species, among which is the Mt Cole Grevillea, (*Grevillea montis-cole*.) This recently listed *threatened species* grows in a few scattered populations including inside at least one of VicForests' new logging coupes.

Thanks to the good work of the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) the authorities have now been informed of the occurrence of this grevillea in the Archies Lookout Road Coupe. There seems to be a problem in that insufficient threatened species surveying was done, if any at all, prior to declaring the coupe or before logging began. This begs the question: Are there more grevilleas growing in these coupes that are not yet mapped? It should be noted that the occurrence of the Mt Cole Grevillea would have been a very relevant factor for this area being recommended to become a new National Park. Clearly there needs to be a review of the criteria for new logging coupes and permits with better regulated and independent surveying and assessment.

Climate Change

This grevillea, as with many species, is at greater risk now than previously on account of climate change. The Mount Cole Range is overall substantially drier than I have seen it over the last forty-five years. As climate change progresses, fire risk will increase and so too will the effects of fire.

Grevillea montis-cole plants are killed outright by fire, as are most grevilleas. The species is then reliant on seed in the ground for its recovery which normally it does very well. It will take usually three years at least for the new generation plants to flower. With the drier conditions now, this will take longer, regeneration will be poorer and fire frequency is likely to increase. If there is a second fire before the plants have flowered and set seed, then that population will most likely be obliterated.

National Parks are a wonderful way of safeguarding species like the Mt Cole Grevillea from some but not all threats. Seed banks and arboretums intended specifically to house threatened and endangered species would be an excellent method of ensuring against extinction. However some genera are extremely difficult to cultivate, although most grevilleas are relatively easy.

Action **IS** the only remedy. Our entire planet is suffering. Tomorrow it will be harder.

Yours sincerely, Bill Blackburn.

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