

[REDACTED]

From: Atholie Harden [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 31 August 2020 4:55 PM
To: ecosystems
Subject: Fwd: Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline

Categories: Submissions

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: Atholie Harden [REDACTED]
Date: 31 August 2020 at 4:30:59 pm AEST
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline

From Ms. Atholie Harden

[REDACTED]

I agree to this submission being made public

Dear Environment and Planning Committee,

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline.

My name is Atholie Harden and I am a licensed wildlife shelter operator. I am a practicing psychotherapist and I hold a degree in Indigenous Studies and Australian Studies. I live in Williamstown and I volunteer with several groups who serve to protect and learn more about the environment and who take actions to create and preserve green spaces in a somewhat industrial environment.

I love the Victorian countryside and spend much of my recreational time exploring and enjoying the beauty and wonder of the Otway Oranges and surrounding coastline.

Staying in Apollo Bay I can go outside and see the blanket of stars, smell the earthy, fresh scent of the mountains combines with the sea spray off the oceans. Koalas, seals, black cockatoos, gang gangs, wallabies and numerous seabirds are a few of the multitude of native wildlife that I may observe on my visits.

I have rescued, rehabilitated and released a tiny yellow robin off the side of the road in the Otway's. To see it flutter up a tree at the precise place at which I found it and to see and hear it reunited with its family, gave me immense pleasure and satisfaction. To sit in the Otway's and listen to the sounds of many varieties of birds, who live amongst the delicately balanced environment, and to smell the purity and coolness of the forest air connects me to nature in a primal way. To lose this would be to lose our humanity, and ultimately, to lose all human life as forests, and all that dwell within, are a vital part of the biosphere which sustains us all.

Sadly climate change and human activities are wreaking havoc on our planet. For example, the erosion of the coast line along parts of the Great Ocean Road is so extreme that, after many futile attempts to fix it have failed, a single marine and coastal park authority is being set up to manage and protect the iconic Great Ocean Road (<http://www.racv.com.au>). The forests, oceans and animals of the area are what the 2.7 million visitors a year who are using the Great Ocean Road to come and see and enjoy (<http://www.racv.com.au>). These environments and wildlife are being depleted and damaged too.

The hooded plover, which are a delight to see skimming the rocks and dancing in the waves at Apollo Bay, are now threatened and sightings are uncommon. When I see them now it makes me sad to see them trying to eke out an existence on the beaches. This is particularly so in summer, their breeding season, when the beaches are full of tourists and their dogs. They are enjoying the beach but oblivious to the dramatic attempts made by the little birds to protect their eggs and chicks. The eggs are laid in small sand scrapes and are vulnerable to trampling. At night they are vulnerable to predation by cats, foxes and dogs. Hooded plovers have one of the lowest survival rates of any species in the world and only one chick survives in every 100 (Great Ocean Road Coast Committee, GORCC). While some local groups attempt to save and protect them, this will not be enough without the will and action by the Victorian Government to strengthen environmental laws and to make rapid and enforceable changes to current practices.

The koalas, sleeping in the forks of trees and munching on gum leaves are a delight to see on the hillside Kenneth River walk, also along the Great Ocean Road. However my heart sinks when I often see hungry koalas, in the Apollo Bay township, being chased by a throng of happy tourists with cameras, who are oblivious to the koalas desperate bid to find food and their need to exist without human interference. Their forests on which they depend, are disappearing.

The killing of koalas by industrial logging of plantations has been well documented and it is also important to note that koalas are killed, en masse, through the deforestation and climate change related bush fires. The recent bushfires in Victoria have exposed how little the government has done, through law, to protect koalas in the past and how vulnerable the koala and many other species in Victoria are to extinction. Without tougher environmental laws, animals, like the koala are just not going to make it.

Industry logging, even in the aftermath of the catastrophic bushfires, and even on fire affected habitats, may be the death knell for koalas and other species in Australia. Many species have already been lost. Victoria needs Action Statement Plans for ALL threatened plant and animal species and for these to all require actions upon an accountable timeline. How can the government give approval to ongoing logging of old growth forests and post burn forests when wildlife call these home and have no alternative accommodation? When will priority be given to ecosystems over developers and profits? The cessation of old growth logging in 2030 may sound good but how many species will Victoria have lost to profits by then? Victoria must commit to transitioning out of logging much more quickly or I fear many species will be lost and our children will never see the likes of a majestic mountain ash and all its weeny inhabitants who call it home.

In conclusion, Victoria needs an Independent Office for the Environment and Ecosystems to get this done. DELWP can not be expected to operate effectively in regard to the environment while the department is wearing so many hats. The current state of ecosystem decline is a measure of how the department carries an obvious conflict of interest. The ongoing conflict between stakeholders for industry, development and the economy and stakeholders for the environment and ecosystem health can not be impartial. The environment is coming off second best every time. Victorian ecosystems need immediate changes and sustained accountability for any improvement to be seen.

Thank you for reading and considering my submission.

Sincerely,

Ms. Atholie Harden

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

I agree to this submission being made public

Sent from my iPad