

Submission to the Victorian Extinction Enquiry, June 2020.

Name: Anda Banikos



I agree to this submission being public.

I have been privileged to spend time in many Victorian wilderness areas. I have observed with fascination and wonder the interlinked ecology that keeps the wilderness going – each tiny interdependent creature and plant has its own role to play in the overall survival of the ecosystem.

For me, the qualities of native forest I prize most highly are:

- \* harmony, regenerative power and beauty of the natural world
- \* native forest as a repository of as yet undiscovered plant and animal species (some of which may be of medicinal use)
- \* cleaning and filtering of water
- \* cleaning of air

During my lifetime, the areas of wilderness in Victoria have contracted significantly due to agricultural land clearing, logging and urban expansion. 66% of Victoria has been cleared of native plants, trees and shrubs. This has placed increasing pressure on each individual species that makes up our native forest community. Many of these species have already succumbed to extinction, over 700 species are currently threatened and 120 Victorian animals, birds, plants, insects and fish are now at the brink of extinction. More than 70 threatened species live in forest that is still being logged. This includes our state faunal emblem, Leadbetter's Possum.

The situation dramatically worsened due to the fires last summer, when 1.4 million hectares of our state was burned. This destroyed more than 50% of the habitat for 185 rare and threatened species, including Leadbetter's Possum and the Greater Glider. Some of these critically endangered species are now, through such extreme habitat loss, being pushed to the brink of extinction. It would be tragic to lose even one of these species, but to allow our faunal emblem to become extinct would be unforgivable – especially as we have the power to prevent this by immediately halting logging and land clearing in all native forests and researching and supporting the survival of our at-risk species.

Even before the vast and horrific fires of this past summer, it was of critical importance that all our remaining native forests should be immediately protected. Now, with the added destruction wrought by the fires it becomes imperative that we protect and restore these national treasures.

Protecting and restoring our native forests, habitats and wildlife can be achieved through programs of

- \* weed and invasive species eradication (this would create more jobs in Victoria)
- \* tree-planting (this would create more jobs in Victoria)

- \* dedicated threatened species restoration programs, perhaps something similar to the NSW \$100million “Save our Species” program(this would create more jobs in Victoria)
- \* immediate cessation of native forest logging – the vast majority of timber currently harvested in Victoria is already plantation grown.
- \* stronger legislation to protect native forests, wildlife and habitat and an independent council to oversee with powers to enforce such legislation

Protecting our natural treasures does not mean fewer jobs for Victorians – it can mean more and different jobs for Victorians – as well as a cleaner and healthier state, which is to all our benefit!