

Personal Submission to Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

To: Members of the Environment and Planning Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria

Dear Members,

I am a 74 year old Victorian and feel most strongly about these issues, and trust that you will take the time to read my submission (below) and consider the points I raise.

Thanking you, in anticipation,

Yours sincerely
John Renowden

In general, I support all of the Victorian National Parks Association key submission points - they are factually based and highlight the continuing decline of our biodiversity. As I see it, the biggest threat to our wildlife and flora is the *ongoing habitat destruction* that is taking place.

Members of the committee need to make strong and unambiguous recommendations to the government and its various departments that will arrest this debilitating cancer of continuous habitat destruction and degradation. Because that is surely what it is - if we keep going as we are, in 100 years time we will undoubtedly have lost many irreplaceable fauna and flora species.

I would like to highlight 4 areas of particular concern below:

1. Wetlands

As a former secretary of the Australasian Wader Study Group for 2 years, I can attest to the ongoing decline of our wetlands and our migratory birds, a number of which are now seriously threatened. Much stronger actions need to be taken to protect them, now and into the future.

2. Native Forests

Our native forests have been ruthlessly overexploited for decades and there is possibly less than 2% old-growth forest remaining, if that.

East Gippsland is an area I am very familiar with since the 1970s and it is totally depressing to see the way so many of the great shining gum/mountain ash/cut-tail ash/alpine ash and mountain grey gum forests, with their inspirational giant trees, have been destroyed by industrial scale woodchipping, predominantly for low-value exports, over 40 years.

VicForests and industry lobby groups claim their logging is sustainable, but it is clearly not. They use euphemisms like "harvesting" for the total destruction of established ecosystems (you harvest peaches from a peach tree, leaving the tree intact).

When combined with the effects of wildfire, our native forests have been substantially degraded in terms of their complexity, their number of extant giant trees, their structure, their biodiversity and the opportunity to provide hollows for hollow dependent fauna.

We need to transition the native forest logging to plantations well **before** 2030 if we are to have any worthwhile areas of native forest remaining, particularly in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland with their industrial scale logging. We should consider 2025 at the latest as the end of native forest logging. I would strongly urge you to recommend this revised cut-off date to the government for the reasons above.

In the meantime, existing Regional Forest Agreements should be reviewed as a consequence of the landscape-scale fires we have experienced, and **all** key areas of remaining old-growth forest should be protected.

3. National Parks

I totally support the VNPA's recommendation that state government funding for the resourcing and proper management of national parks and conservation reserves be increased to at **least 1%** of the state's annual expenditure. After all, these reserves are the unique heritage of all Victorians, and it is our responsibility to manage them properly and preserve them in good condition for future generations. If we don't, we will have failed in our duty.

There should also be funds set aside, like there use to be, to make important additions to the national park estate and to allow for the establishment and enhancement of wildlife corridors. Finally, it is important that the government declares the 60,000 hectares of new national parks in Victoria's central west, as recommended by the Victorian Environment Assessment Council, without further delay. These proposed reserves lie in an area that has been heavily exploited over the years and has poor habitat representation. The new national parks will protect a number of unique and threatened species, as well as some significant ecosystems.

4. Effective legislation and action

The current threatened species legislation - The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 - has been totally ineffectual. Public authorities and departments have never shown the will to take effective action. The only solution is for it to be made mandatory that the relevant minister and departments take effective action where endangered species and habitats are threatened.