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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Mr Sean Marler

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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To whom it may concern

It's an honour to write a submission in 'ecosystem decline in Victoria'.

My submission is quite personal , and tells my story , seen through my eyes.

It is my hope that it might assist policy makers to look at the bigger picture of our natural environments, as places of monumental importance, containing a wonderful soup of threatened flora and fauna.

It is my dream that policy makers lobby those above them like never before, to prioritise ecosystem decline before it gets too late. Without stronger legislation laws to protect our dwindling natural environments, we will cross that ominous threshold where ecosystem decline leads to total collapse.

I was born in 1973 and have just rolled into my 47th year. As a kid, I grew up in suburbia , about 30km east from Melbourne city. Fortunately, my young years were filled with camping trips, on weekend and school holidays, with uncles and aunties and a bunch of like minded cousins.

These young years were absolutely fabulous and I loved nothing more than going bush , on family trips, into the wilds, climbing trees, getting muddy and swimming in creeks.

As a child, we camped a lot throughout the Central Highlands and Gippsland areas, often in a forest setting, near a river or creek , surrounded by nature.

Our uncles and aunties loved seeing the joy us little kids received from immersing in nature, and I have fond memories of just watching them smile, as us little cousins ran around in the wilds.

To further our environmental education, they would run spotlighting tours at night, to observe tree dwelling possums, gliders, owls and frogmouths all out and about.

Just on dusk, I recall with glee tiny micro bats being pointed out, doing circle work, emerging for a meal, chasing moths.

Put simply, us kids lived in bliss, and I was totally spell bound by the immense magic of nature and the various sounds of the wilds.

Throughout my teenage years, I camped when ever the opportunity arose, and was lucky to explore new regions that supported such different and diverse ecosystems.

The deserts of north western Victoria, the alpine high country in the east, the volcanic plains past Geelong, and coastal delights around Wilsons Prom. I just adored all aspects of nature and I realised how happy being in it made me feel.

These experiences eventually led me to pursue a career in nature, and I completed an environmental science degree (majoring in ecology) in 2006. The course was very challenging and at times I considered throwing it in. But a conservation calling kept me on track and after 6 years of part time study, I fulfilled my dream and got my degree.

Since I was a child, I've noticed extensive changes to our environments. Much of the once wet mountain forests we camped in has been logged, mainly for woodchips, to fulfill the very controversial 30 year "Wood Pulp Agreement Act", to supply native forest pulp to make copy paper.

Around the world, I have seen wildlife populations greatly reduced, glaciers retreat and river levels plummet.

Locally, as a kid, I recall the amount of insects that splattered on our vehicle windscreen when we drove at night. These days, the window stays generally clean - where have the insects gone?

Once clean, clear rivers and creeks we drank from as kids are now running brown from turbidity, from logging and land clearing upstream. Illegal logging and clear breaches of the forestry code by VicForests don't make it any easier for these ecosystems and the threatened species they support.

Bush fire has scorched many areas we once enjoyed and played amongst. Many damp fern gullies I recall as a child seem to have dried out and are not the same.

When I was about 12, in the mid 1980s, I was very proud of a big square sticker I had that read 'Department of Conservation'. I was thrilled that the Vic Government had made such cool stickers, and seemed to care. After the next election though, that department was rebranded, and the word "Conservation" was withdrawn. From what I can glean, it doesn't look likely to appear in a departmental name anytime soon.

At university, I became active in the 'environmental club'. The other members were really great people and like me, we all cared for nature. We did local campaigns and raised awareness on national and global issues. One campaign was about saving frog species from a human transmitted fungus. Sadly, that went belly up, and I read in later years that certain species became locally extinct.

It's wonderful to reflect on those formative childhood days, of what seemed like endless forests, and bird life galore around our camps. Sadly, that's no longer. I've lived and seen such rapid changes even in my short young years.

As our state, nation and indeed the planet faces a fair chunk of strife through climate change and the like, it'd be great to see the Victorian Government get fair dinkum and become a national leader in ecosystem decline.

As stated earlier, that is my hope. I'll hold onto that for the rest of my days.

And I'll keep dreaming that utopian thought, that our elected leaders (and those in opposition) stand in unity, to one day, address and act on ecosystem decline.

Sean Marler
31 August 2020

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File2:

File3: