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My Ref: EcosystemDeclineInquiry-27Aug20

27 August 2020

ATT: Secretariat: Ecosystem Decline in Victoria Inquiry

Victorian Legislative Council

Victorian Parliament

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VICTORIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO ECOSYSTEM DECLINE IN VICTORIA

Dear Members,

Thank you for your interest in our future and the work you do to secure it.

The synthesis of my submission is that significant advances can be made in strengthening Victoria's plant and animal survival by local councils being assisted to support residents who foster local indigenous flora and fauna through discounted native plants and discounted native bird and animal nesting boxes.

I am sure Members are aware or will be made aware of the unsatisfactory state of the first three references you are considering. I am, but I will let others better placed to address them.

I wish to convince you of the merits of allowing Victorians themselves to do their bit voluntarily to contribute their environment. I want to explain why.

I undertook Science, Arts and Law degrees and subsequently became a barrister as a consequence of spending time in the Victorian Coalition Party Room in 1988 over a number of weeks as an employee of the Victorian National Parks Association, explaining, educating and convincing members to pass legislation to create the Alpine National Park and to recognise wilderness as a legitimate land zoning in Victoria.

I have appeared in most Victorian courts and tribunals advocating for the interests of plants and animals that have limited voice. With mixed results.

I've taken action locally, domestically and internationally to help our environment. Those actions still require attention. My proposition to promote native flora and fauna is aimed at taking direct, simple people focussed action to help achieve greater goals.

As Melbourne City Councillor and Chair of the MCC Environment Committee I convened an expert panel that spent one year developing a 50 year plan for the City of Melbourne called Growing Green, which promotes a balancing of native and exotic flora. The science is clear that native flora create the greatest habitat potential for native fauna.

In January 2002, on behalf of Melbourne City Council, I sponsored APEC's first environment initiative of a Zero Net Greenhouse Gas Plan for Melbourne by 2020 to Wuhan, China, making the intellectual property available free of charge to over half the world's population to adopt.

In 2003, as Chair, I secured a 20 year water management plan called Watermark, which set reduction targets of 12% by 2020 across the municipality, compared to an estimated business-as-usual approach resulting in a 100% increase by 2020.

After nearly 40 years of doing what I can to help secure everyone's future, I am left with a more moderated optimism than which I began.

My 1st class Science Honours on climate change in 1995 left me concerned. We are currently experiencing an average approximately a 1.1 °C increase in global temperatures. Many scientists privately say rather than the hopeful 1.5 °C to 2 °C rise, 4 °C, with worst case scenarios of 7 °C in the face of inaction are possible.

Australia is already the driest inhabited continent on the planet. Increasing temperatures and changes in established weather patterns are likely to see deterioration in the existing downward trend in rainfall.

Members may appreciate the tragic loss of human life, potential and opportunity in last summer's bushfires, in conjunction with the estimated 3 billion animals who perished may not be the last time that occurs.

I am aware that many submissions will make good arguments for action on your first 3 references, which my history implies I support wholeheartedly,

I want to argue that ecosystem and species protection, restoration and recovery and employment opportunities can easily be boosted by helping Victorians to take the initiative to do their bit.

Helping native flora in urban and regional areas will help potentially in a myriad of ways: ecosystem stability by reducing the prevalence of exotic and invasive species; reduce water use through more drought tolerant indigenous species; reduce urban temperatures by reducing the heat island effect of denuded landscapes; encourage citizens to actively engage in their own bit of conservation; help local businesses to promote their regions identity; and, potentially grow pride in people's involvement in their local environment.

The idea is not new. The scope of it is.

Banyule Council has provided residents with an annual coupon system that allows them to purchase up to 10 native plants annually on a 'buy one get one free' basis from their local nursery. The costs are moderate, with Banyule's annual cost being in the \$10-15,000 range. Resident's provide their own labour, love and water as they typically use the plants for their own residences.

Booroondara Council offers a similar scheme, as I am sure others do. I have recently helped Yarra City Council adopt a similar approach through the Victorian Indigenous Nursery Co-operative.

Nothing should stop a similarly scoped scheme being available to small businesses, such as cafe's, restaurants and other small businesses, who can improve their businesses with the selective use of native plants.

While I think the promotion of indigenous plants is a simple and effective means of restoring Victoria's ecosystems, I also think there is scope for selective promotion of native bird and animal nesting boxes.

La Trobe Wildlife Sanctuary at La Trobe University, provides purpose built nesting boxes for public purchase for selected native birds and animals. I have spent three years

exploring the idea of Councils providing subsidised nesting boxes to residents, in a similar way that they do with compost bins and worm farms.

If the State Government adopted and/or supported such initiatives, Victorian citizens could choose to do their bit for native flora and fauna and their environment. This would have benefits of people being voluntarily engaged in promoting native flora and fauna, providing their own labor for the benefit of themselves and the community and help increase the general awareness and buy-in of people's care for their environment.

The annualised cost would be minimal, encourage community participation at a local and potentially State level. With good fortune, it could take on the positive flavour of LandCare initiatives, which encourage, guide and assist people to contribute in challenging times to a more secure future for their own community.

I thank the members and Parliament for their time and efforts.

Please feel to contact me on email [REDACTED] or mobile [REDACTED] if you want to discuss anything.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

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