



## HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

Humane Society International Inc.

ABN 63 510 927 032

PO Box 439

Avalon NSW 2107  
Australia

Telephone +61 2 9973 1728  
Fax +61 2 9973 1729  
Email [admin@hsi.org.au](mailto:admin@hsi.org.au)

[www.hsi.org.au](http://www.hsi.org.au)



The Committee Manager  
Standing Committee on Environment and Planning  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

By email: [ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au)

31 August 2020

Dear Mr Baker,

Humane Society International (HSI) welcomes the opportunity to make this brief submission to the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Environment and Planning's *Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria*. HSI is a not-for-profit organisation concerned with the protection and conservation of wildlife and biodiversity, and seeks to create an ecologically sustainable and humane world for all animals and their environments. We have more than 25 years of experience promoting the enhancement and protection of wildlife and their habitats in Australia, and make this submission on behalf of our more than 10 million global and 70,000 Australian supporters.

(a) *the extent of the decline of Victoria's biodiversity and the likely impact on people, particularly First Peoples, and ecosystems, if more is not done to address this, including consideration of climate change impacts;*

In recent decades the challenges facing Victorian, Australian and global biodiversity have increased significantly as climate change driven impacts such as drought and bushfires have become more frequent and intense, and direct impacts from rising human populations and resource use such as land clearing and fragmentation continue. In May 2019 the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)<sup>1</sup> – established in 2012 by more than 100 nations – released a comprehensive report on the state of the world's biodiversity, stating:

*"Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history — and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely"*

This report, compiled by 145 experts from 50 countries, states that one million animal and plant species worldwide face extinction, some within decades if action is not taken. The Chairs of IPBES stated that this is a dangerous, unprecedented decline, and complacency is not the answer, but optimistically noted that it is also not too late and nature can still be conserved through 'transformative change' – characterised as a *'fundamental system-wide reorganisation across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values'*.

The 2019-2020 bushfires have had a significant impact on many of Australia's (and Victoria's) animals and their habitats, with estimates of wildlife losses being in the

<sup>1</sup> Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) <https://ipbes.net/>

billions. These impacts are occurring on top of an already alarming extinction crisis which is impacting the natural systems that both nature and humanity rely on.

Ensuring strong protections and recovery efforts for our environment are in place and comprehensively and ambitiously funded is the only way to deal with the complex and increasing threats native wildlife and their habitats are facing. Only significant investment and positive action can bring about the transformative change required, and the time both is long overdue.

*(b) the adequacy of the legislative framework protecting Victoria's environment, including grasslands, forests and the marine and coastal environment, and native species;*

HSI is aware of several examples that indicate the current legislative framework protecting Victoria's environment is insufficient to arrest and reverse ongoing declines. These include the recent findings of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) independent assurance report to Parliament on Protecting Critically Endangered Grasslands<sup>2</sup>.

The ecological communities the report pertained to, Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain (a listing that resulted from an HSI nomination) and Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain, are Matters of National Environmental Significance which Victoria made commitments to conserve in an agreement with the federal government to streamline environmental approvals within Melbourne's urban growth boundary. However the VAGO report found just 10% of land meant to be preserved for the grasslands, and none of that for the woodlands, had been obtained within the agreed timeframe, indicating that there is insufficient funding, and safeguards within biodiversity offsetting and panning frameworks.

The ongoing treatment of native waterbird species in Victoria through their hunting being permitted is another example of current legislative frameworks being inadequate to protect Victoria's native species. In this instance, negative impacts to the welfare of individual animals and the conservation of native species are being directly facilitated by the state's framework that should be protecting them.

A similar situation is occurring through lethal Authorities to Control Wildlife (ATCWs), which permit the killing of native species for amenity or production reasons. ATCWs are issued for more than 100,000 Victorian animals each year, however a lack of transparency surrounding what type of control they are issues for (lethal or deterrent) makes understanding the impact the system is having impossible. Regardless, by facilitating their control the ATCW framework is not protecting native species.

There are also complex and contradicting legislative frameworks resulting in the mismanagement and ongoing suppression of the dingo, Australia's largest land-based apex predator, which is recognised as a native species and listed as threatened in Victoria through the *Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act 1988*. However the dingo is also included as a pest species under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* with all members of *Canis*, and is also Unprotected under section 7A of the *Wildlife Act 1975*. This results in threatened dingoes being able to be controlled across much of Victoria, which may be severely impacting other threatened species in Victoria due to resulting ecological impacts.

*(c) the adequacy and effectiveness of government programs and funding protecting and restoring Victoria's ecosystems;*

It is HSI's view that some government programs, such as the aerial distribution of 1080 poison baits to control 'wild dogs' and dingoes, are not only inadequate and ineffective at protecting and restoring Victoria's ecosystems, but are detrimental to

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<sup>2</sup> Victorian Auditor-General's Office independent assurance report to Parliament on Protecting Critically Endangered Grasslands - <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/20200617-Endangered-Grasslands-report.pdf>

them. The health of ecosystems relies on their natural function, and indiscriminate lethal control of top predators is disruptive. It may also be allowing greater proliferation of cats in the environment as detailed in HSI's regrettably rejected nomination to have *The cascading effects of the loss or removal of dingoes from Victorian landscapes*<sup>3</sup> recognised as a Key Threatening Process in Victoria.

*(e) opportunities to restore Victoria's environment while upholding First Peoples' connection to country, and increasing and diversifying employment opportunities in Victoria;*

HSI is supportive of the reintroduction of dingoes into the wild as detailed in the 2018 draft strategy for the joint management of six parks and reserves inside Dja Dja Wurrung Country<sup>4</sup>, and believes similar opportunities are likely to exist in Western Victoria. There is also great opportunity for both economic and natural recovery through environmental stimulus projects with a focus on ecosystem protection and restoration throughout the state. Significant investment is required to address the catastrophic losses of wildlife and habitat that occurred in the 2019-2020 bushfires.

Please don't hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED] if any further information relating to this submission is required. HSI does not request it be treated confidentiality and would appreciate the opportunity to give evidence at a public hearing for the inquiry when those schedules are being arranged.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Evan Quartermain  
Head of Programs

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<sup>3</sup> Scientific Advisory Committee Final Recommendation on The cascading effects of the loss or removal of dingoes from Victorian landscapes [https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/435356/The-cascading-effects-of-the-loss-or-removal-of-dingoes-from-Victorian-landscapes-as-a-potentially-threatening-process-PTP.pdf](https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/435356/The-cascading-effects-of-the-loss-or-removal-of-dingoes-from-Victorian-landscapes-as-a-potentially-threatening-process-PTP.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Draft strategy released by Aboriginal community to reintroduce dingoes into Victorian state and national parks <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2018-07-04/dingo-reintroduction-proposal-central-victoria-national-parks/9938330>