

Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

31/08/2020

Dear members of the Committee,

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria.

My name is Emily and I live in Panton Hill, Victoria - a small town about 40km north-east of Melbourne; a beautiful leafy community nestled in Wurundjeri country. I am 23 years old and currently studying social work at RMIT which has been the most wonderful and eye-opening course to study with a massive focus on intersectionality. If intersectionality has taught me one thing then it's that environmental destruction will lead to greater social inequality. And if there's anything I can do to counter that, then I will. This is only one reason why I'm writing this submission. The other is my sheer love for the Victorian environment. It is home. I have been lucky enough to grow up in this beautiful town of Panton Hill, surrounded by grey boxes, red boxes, ironbarks and black wattles, amidst the sounds of cockatoos, kookaburras and currawongs. The wattle trees were utterly buzzing with bees a couple of weeks ago. Spring has sprung. Which also means summer is on it's way. A season I now fear. The threat of bushfires has always been a given but the ruthlessness of wildfires is becoming more and more extreme, and more frequent than ever predicted. We cannot keep down this path of environmental destruction and lack of protective laws, unless of course you desire this diverse ecosystem to become nothing but a cinder, or a slab of concrete. Perhaps a piece of paper?

The Warburton Environment group recently held the Tall Trees Festival online and my mum and I spent a cosy day inside watching some fascinating speakers on the environment, advocacy and logging. What stood out to us was David Lindenmayer's presentation on fires and how detrimental and unnecessary post-fire (salvage) logging is. It's even been stated by the companies themselves that native logging is not even economical and they're running out of resources. It blows my mind (yet unfortunately doesn't surprise me) that the Victorian Government has allowed such unnecessary destruction of some of the most valuable ecosystems in the country. We need oxygen more than we need money and I urge that the government protects these native forests and the species that thrive within them.

It breaks my heart that 60,000 + years of caring and managing this land is apparently not enough for the Victorian Government to respect First Nations Peoples' ability to look after the environment and teach non-Indigenous peoples how to manage this unique piece of land. Ongoing colonial practices continue to strip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of not only basic humanity, but their connection to country and culture. And the continuing construction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as inferior to colonial descendants, refuses them a seat at the table in the discussion of their livelihoods and their country. There is so much work that needs to be done here (a treaty would be a good start) but the Victorian Government needs to ensure that First Nations Peoples are at the forefront of any environmental decisions made.

I have faith that with my voice, along with many other yearning and powerful voices, we can turn this ecosystem decline around and set up a sustainable future for all Victorians. And the Victorian Parliament must act now to make these changes.

I am thrilled that this inquiry is happening and really do hope that the Victorian Government will take further action on the results of this inquiry. My suggestions include:

The rights and interests of Traditional Custodians should be recognised in all aspects of land and water management, as well as decision-making in relation to their traditional lands, including traditional management practices such as cultural fire. Aboriginal cultural sites MUST be protected. And not just those recognised by Australian law, but those recognised by Aboriginal peoples themselves. There are so many voices that need to be listened to and these voices not only deserve a chance to speak, but the chance to make decisions.

The devastation inflicted on our wildlife and forests from the 2019 - 2020 bushfires has made forest protection and a rapid logging transition more urgent. The Victorian state government's commitment to a 2030 industry transition must be brought forward. Two immediate priorities are protection of unburnt Greater Glider habitat, and a continued moratorium on logging in East Gippsland.

There are opportunities for the state government to protect forests for all Victorians to enjoy now and into the future. Two community led initiatives are the proposed Great Forest National Park and Emerald Link conservation economy proposal.

In the face of climate catastrophe, Victoria's forests play a critical role in removing carbon pollution from the air we all breathe, nourishing us with clean air and safe, clean drinking water. The Victorian state government must develop carbon accounting and policies that include forests.

The state government must urgently implement and properly resource Action Statements (plans for recovery) for all threatened plants and wildlife. Victoria's plants and wildlife are at risk, with over 2000 recognised as threatened with extinction however only 15% have Action Statements.

Victoria needs a new, independent, well resourced conservation regulator to police deforestation and other destructive industries. The EPA is the independent watchdog for pollution, but currently there is no independent watchdog to ensure industries comply with environmental laws, with numerous breaches to laws continuing to occur and a long history of regulators turning a blind eye.

Community rights must be guaranteed when governments are making environmental decisions, including the right to participate, the right to access necessary information, the

right to challenge environmental decisions and the right to transparency in government decision making.

I really do thank you for your consideration of my submission and hope that there is a leafy future for us all. Please contact me via email for any further discussion - emccar15@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Emily McCarthy



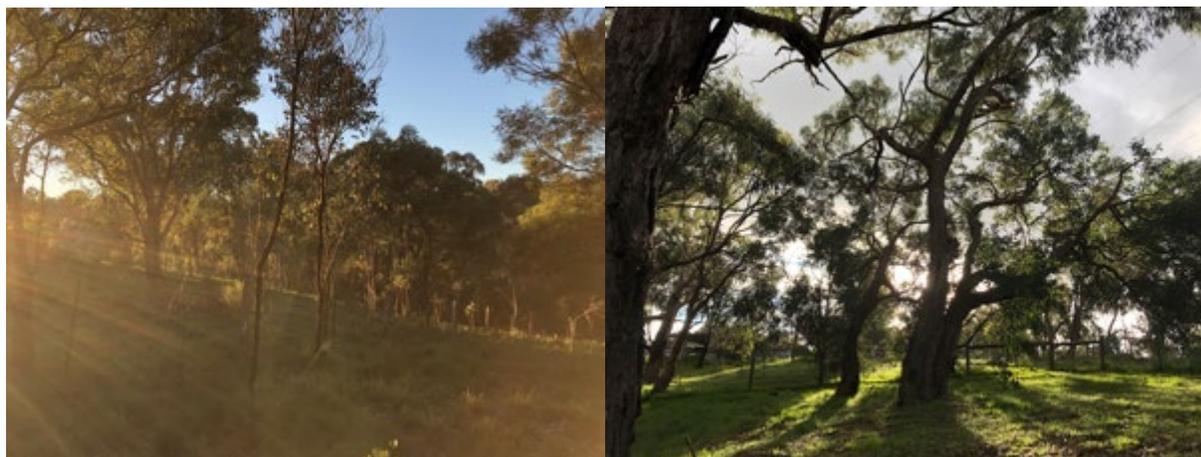
*Amber blood seeps from hearts beaten
Bitter cud will always start eaten
Sap will ooze from wounds of life
A treacling reminder of endured strife*

*A slow kind of life that we refuse to see
But the only life we really need
Lives do weep and seep thick blood
I'd do most anything to get my feet through the mud*

*Slow life. Long life. Deliberate and tough.
But when the mud gets the better of me, I don't cut my feet off*

*We've got so much to learn
Many wounds to heal
I never want to earn
I only want to feel*

*Amber blood seeps from beaten hearts
Long lives weep,
An endless start*



Some photos of home and words written by me, inspired by the resilient trees.