

From: Lorraine Watt [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 31 August 2020 11:42 PM
To: ecosystems
Subject: Submission into the Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria

Categories: Submissions

Dear committee,

I commend the Victorian government for undertaking an Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria.

I grew up in Heathcote, Central Victoria. My father was a beekeeper. I learnt to respect the natural environment and developed a love of the bush. I learnt how ecosystems were delicately balanced and how they could be irreparably damaged, for example: how the Mallee could simply be blown away in dust storms because our forebears deforested the land; how the soil would become "dead" as a result of deforestation and overgrazing; or alternatively would become salty from rising water tables.

Unfortunately nothing much has changed. Environmental rape and plunder continues. I should not have been surprised to find recently that the very forest I used to visit as a child with my family- the Tallarook State Forest - is slated for logging. Apparently the trees are not big enough for timber so they will probably be clear felled for pulp. What a waste! Why isn't use of recycled copy paper promoted instead of virgin white copy paper? The Tallarook forest escaped the nearby Black Saturday fires. That doesn't mean that therefore it is not worth saving in its current state. It is home to the powerful owl and the greater glider and this forest provides a forest link from the plains to the Great Dividing Range beyond.

Often loss of logging jobs is the reason given for the need to continue logging of native forests. I would suggest with climate change continuing it would be more helpful to allow the forests to continue with their carbon sequestration and for Vic Forests to develop a new department called Forest Carbon Sequestration involving employees planting new native forests and road verges.

Victoria's environmental laws should be the foundation for addressing ecosystem decline in the state which has been a steady and ongoing process since colonisation. Key contributing drivers include land clearing, impacts of urban expansion, over extraction of natural resources such as water and timber, and the introduction of invasive species. Further to this climate change is now amplifying these threats which makes addressing this issue much more urgent.

The Inquiry into ecosystems decline in Victoria should take into account the following reforms to help ensure that we make the most of this opportunity:

1. Resource and implement the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act is the centrepiece of Victoria's biodiversity conservation legislation. Reforms last year have "refreshed and modernised" the Act, updating the objectives, adding a new duty for public authorities, and introducing new conservation tools. However, none of these reforms will be worth the paper that they're written on if they are not properly implemented.

2. Make sure our nature protection laws are climate ready. The past summer's devastating bushfires demonstrate the terrible impact that climate change can have on our wonderful natural places and wildlife. Climate change presents a massive challenge to Victorian ecosystems. Failing to address climate change stops our laws working effectively. Climate adaptation must be a part of our legal frameworks.

3. Improve compliance and enforcement with our environmental laws. A significant change was made last year when, following a damning review of timber harvesting regulation in Victoria, the government established the Office of Conservation the Regulator. This move, while a welcome recognition that the implementation and enforcement of our nature protection laws needs to be improved, does not go far enough. We need an independent conservation regulator with a clear legislative foundation and all the legal powers needed to ensure Victoria's conservation laws are compiled with.

4. Protect Victoria's precious wildlife. Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975 is out of date and no longer meets community expectations when it comes to protecting our precious wildlife. It should be reformed to make sure that it meets the Victorian community's expectations for how our valued wildlife will be protected and preserved for future generations.

5. Prevent the harmful impacts of new development. While the Morrison government is in a hurry to handover responsibilities under our national environmental law - the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act - to state governments, we know that Victorian laws are not fit for purpose. Victoria's planning laws and environmental impact assessment laws need to be brought up to date to make sure that infrastructure projects properly account for their impacts on Victoria's biodiversity before we even think about handing over responsibilities.

6. Stop the drivers of ecosystem decline. Nature protection laws should be a safety net. We need to address the pressure on Victorian biodiversity protection laws by removing key drivers of ecosystem decline such as native forest logging, unsustainable use of water resources, and the impact of invasive species. Stopping native forest logging sooner rather than later, more sustainable water resource management, and new fit for purpose invasive species management legislation are needed if ecosystem decline is to be turned around.

7. Boost ecosystem restoration. Nature protection laws alone will not be enough – our laws must also guide and encourage the restoration of Victoria's ecosystems. With climate change already having a terrible impact on Victorian flora and fauna, the challenge is urgent. Whether it be on public land or private land, our land management must be subject to appropriate obligations to ensure that ecological processes and natural assets are there for future generations to enjoy.

Strong nature protection laws will provide the backbone for a healthier future for Victoria's ecosystems, ensuring the people, places and wildlife we love can thrive for generations to come.

Yours sincerely,
Lorraine Watt

[REDACTED]

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