

**The Committee Manager
Standing Committee Environment and Planning
Parliament House, Spring Street
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I wish to thank the Committee for this opportunity to have our say to the inquiry into ecosystems decline in Victoria.

Living in the midst of our so- called environment to the north west of Melbourne I have witnessed its decline for the last twenty years. I live at Mount Macedon.

It is a horror story of erosion of all of the values that kept this unique environment intact for decades and now it is sinking fast.

The main contributor to its decline is the so-called “Visitor Economy”. It is hardly an economy when hoards descend on this small town, it’s surrounding Regional Park and nearby small Bushland Reserve. The damage and erosion of its eco systems is significant. It is impossible to manage and protect an area like this so close to Melbourne, and the hoards keep coming in. How can anyone protect areas of significance when visitors treat our forests as object for vandalism and marauding, the damage is significant.

A nearby Bushland Reserve in Mount Macedon has been targeted by visitors in significant numbers for over twenty years. The visitors destroy the vegetation, destroy infrastructure, interfere with fauna and destroy habitat. Their main target for damage and destruction is our waterway, this battle never ends. This waterway, the Turitable Creek, is constantly under siege from visitors. We no longer conduct revegetation projects along this waterway, we conduct visitor mitigation works and in utter desperation now install feral animal fencing to protect the waterway, the banks of the creek, the vegetation and surrounding habitat.

Similar issues can be found in the nearby Macedon Regional Park. The management of this Regional Park. I have expressed my concerns to the CEO of Parks Victoria with regards to the lack of effective management of the park. This area in recent years has been invaded by tourists in massive numbers, when is capacity going to be recognised. The Regional Park Regulations are ignored. I see dogs running loose near the café at the top yet the ranger just ignores this. Bush walkers bring dogs into the Regional Park off leads yet at the start of the walking trails Parks Vic still have not installed

appropriate signage for the hoards of visitors arriving – still no regulations. On Mount Towrong, a part of the Macedon Range, camp sites were discovered. There were several tee pees with fire pits inside. There was also a large retaining wall and fire pit plus a large pile of firewood for the fire pit, surrounding trees had been cut down. What was visible was the damage to the surrounding flora, there were native grasses and wildflowers everywhere. Additionally, in this same area a cairn has been developed, visitors apparently leave a rock to commemorate their walk. To do this large moss- covered rocks are removed from area, this cairn is now two metres high and two metres by two metres and now covers the formed walking track. Walkers now veer off trail onto native vegetation to by- pass this site. The Regional Manager of this area condones this activity. All the above was reported to the local Ranger who did nothing. I was forced to lodge a complaint to the CEO of Parks Vic to get some action on these issues. You can't protect this environment from decline.

At the top of Mount Macedon where the Memorial Cross is, a new Master Plan was recently adopted. One significant part of the Master Plan is to remove the *eucalyptus pauciflora* – snow gums – from below the cross because these trees block the view from the cross. This stand of snow gums is one of only two stands on Mount Macedon and in this location are rare. You can't protect this environment from decline. Our native forests need protection now, they cannot wait.

Altered water regimes. This has been a devastating concern for twenty years at Mount Macedon. In 2009 the Turitable Creek on Mount Macedon had no water in the creek for over six months. The lack of water resulted in 100 metres of creek embankment die- back killing all the vegetation and trees on the creek banks. The trees were the revegetation that had grown since the "Ash Wednesday Bushfires". At first we thought that it was the drought that caused the lack of water. We later discovered that it was upstream property owners that were sucking the creek dry for the benefit of their lawns and gardens. **Please note: All of these properties are on town water, they are not Domestic and Stock.** Now we are constantly faced with water shortages every year. The water authority responsible for extraction put restrictions on the creek yet they are very backward about monitoring and policing. So, every year, we don't have any water at Stanley Park to support the native vegetation along our waterway. This also means that there is no water for the fauna that lives in the reserve, the animals that visit daily, the birds that live there and the migratory birds that fly in from China and the Solomon Islands to breed every year. When the water stops flowing for months every year, we regularly see animal footprints in the creek beds of animals looking for water. You can't protect this environment from decline.

Feral animals also pose a significant issue in Victoria as well as at Mount Macedon. For years we regularly see foxes, cats, both domestic and feral, rabbits, goats and pigs. In recent years deer have started turning up in the Regional Park as well as in our back yards and on our small country lanes. The deer populations are blowing out of control

in many parts of Victoria. A permanent solution must be found and not come up with a solution being that of allowing sport for deer hunters.

Mount Macedon is a small town in Victoria and sadly in recent years we have seen inappropriate housing development occurring. For such a small town with very few building blocks remaining it has been devastating to see permits being issued for houses of such large sizes that don't fit the block of land, that breach planning regulations, that cause significant damage to the environment, habitat trees and surrounding native vegetation, all of this and we are in a Rural Conservation Zone. Our Council supports this and VCAT backs them up. It is impossible to fight this both through Council and other authorities.

The Minister for Planning stated the Mount Macedon was now protected as being a "**Distinctive Area**". What has happened?.

Finally, all I can say is that unless better protection for all of our eco systems are put in place you can't protect this environment from decline.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to have my say.

Helen Kalajdzic

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