



**Wathaurung
Aboriginal
Corporation**

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trading as Wadawurrung
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To the Committee Manager
Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Via email: ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au

RE: Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline

Thank your letter of 26th May advising us of this Inquiry. Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation (trading as Wadawurrung) is a Registered Aboriginal Party under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and representative body for Wadawurrung Traditional Owners.

Prior to European settlement, Wadawurrung Country was rich in natural habitat, plants and species across lands, waters and skies covering a diverse variety of landscapes. Wadawurrung Country includes Volcanic Plains, the Bellarine and Surf Coast. The Country provided a vast amount of food, medicine, water and living spaces for our Ancestors. It is Wadawurrung Lore to care for Country and in return the Country will care for us.

After European settlement, the health of Country declined dramatically due to a variety of reasons such as, but not limited to, the gold rush, introduction of invasive plants and animals, grazing of sheep and cattle that destroyed the crops of Wadawurrung Ancestors, introduction of diseases, diversion of waterways, destruction, hunting and removal of habitat of rare native plants and animals, and, of course, the forced removal, land dispossession and the massacring of Wadawurrung People – severely damaging the spirit, connections and traditional practices that carefully nurtured and managed ecosystems for tens of thousands of years.

Imminently, Wadawurrung will release its Healthy Country Plan, *Paleert Tjaara Dja* (Let's Make Country Good Together). The release of this plan will identify key threats to Wadawurrung Country and ways forward that we see as viable and practical solutions. Accordingly, we look forward to government engaging deeply, respectfully and genuinely with Wadawurrung once the plan is released. It is imperative that Wadawurrung People are listened to, so the health of Wadawurrung Country can once again improve.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Davis
CEO