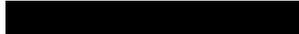


Submission to the Environment and Planning Committee of the Legislative Council

Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

from Geelong Environment Council Inc

PO Box 771 Belmont 3216 26/8/2020

gecinc@bigpond.com 

Geelong Environment Council (GEC) wishes to make the following comments on the concerning and unacceptable decline in species, habitats, EVCs, valued natural areas, farmlands and the coast in Victoria.

There are 2000 'Threatened Species' in Victoria all of which have an insecure future. The current loss and decline of our irreplaceable natural assets and environmental capital must be turned around with management processes and financial support provided.

Management practices, processes and biodiversity restoration must be addressed and set in place immediately.

The following threatening processes to which GEC has contributed to with comments, submitted to authorities, become aware of the losses or have witnessed ongoing environmental degradation are likely to increase in the immediate future unless urgent action is taken. GEC was established in 1972 with issues of river protection and disastrous clear-fell logging in the Otway forests.

The following processes present major threats to a healthy environment on which our community depends –

Logging in tall Eucalypt forests.

A number of both plant and marsupial species are at risk of extinction with long term restoration of the forests taking more than a century. Australian National University has shown that there is no lack of timber for Victoria's requirement which requires VicForests to continue to log native forests.

Climate Change, Sea-level Rise and Rainfall and Temperature changes.

Species distribution as a result of changing temperatures and rainfall. Larger and connected areas of natural habitat must be protected and expanded to allow for migration of species.

Loss of coastal wetlands or environmentally important vegetation such as Moonah woodlands requiring a need for replacement areas.

Sporting activities in natural area. Kite sailing has become a problem on Swan Bay, with kite sailors moving into the protected area with threats and disturbance to the birdlife.

Trail bikes, mountain bikes and 4WDs . All these have caused serious damage to forested and bush areas by making tracks, causing stream erosion and damage. Unfortunately, there are inadequate control or mechanisms or penalties for natural area and public land destruction or damage.

Removal of Water from river systems. The Moorabool River continues to suffer from water diversion for Geelong and Ballarat. This is reputed to be the most distressed river in Victoria. GEC

supports full scale treatment of waste water to a potable standard, Currently Barwon Water disposes of 20,000 Gl of treated water to Bass Strait at Barwon Heads.

Aquifer and bore water extraction. Large area of surface swamp in the Otways has been destroyed by overuse of aquifer water for Geelong. Anglesea borefield will be used as needed. The nationally significant heathland could be detrimentally affected.

Planned or controlled burning has caused the loss of a number of ground level and understory species in the Otway NPs as a result of sever burns to supposedly protect from bushfire. The largest species to recover is frequently bracken. This has been observed in the eastern Otways forest areas.

Bushfire destruction and Salvage logging as a result of extensive bushfires will cause a loss of wildlife and difficulty in recruiting, particularly when the burnt area is logged. GEC objects strongly to this practice.

Urban spread into Grasslands. Development of the grassland and grassy plains around Melbourne has resulted in only 1% of grasslands ecosystems remaining. This should cease and all remnants protected and enhanced.

Removal of Paddock Trees and old trees with hollows. Protection by law must be given to protect the trees which provide essential habitat for many species. They are fast being removed with no replacements required.

Roadside Vegetation This is constantly being reduced by road widening, tree removal, weed incursions. These vegetated areas are the only remaining example of the original vegetation of the area and source of seeds. Roadsides provide a linkage between patches of habitat and corridors for animal movements.

Inadequate regulations and laws have resulted in reduction of biodiversity. The small fines are easily paid for by developers who find regulations easy to break.

Fragmentation of habitat , both for developments or utilisation of the resource contributes to loss of species renewal.

Duck Shooting Season This a disgrace in Victoria and must be outlawed.

Neglect of Ramsar Wetlands which should receive the highest protection. In this region some areas are subject to a shooting season, have urban development with very little buffer between the shore and houses

Pest Species in the Victorian Alps and forested areas. Brumbies and deer, wild pigs and goats must be eradicated from natural areas, the alpine region, forests where deer abound with National Parks a priority

Proclamation of the VEAC recommended Central and Western National Parks. It is most unsatisfactory that a year has passed since these parks were recommended. In the meantime mining applications are going ahead and adequate NP management is not in place.

Inadequate Funds to Manage our Biodiversity Assets Management and protection should be a high priority in the business of the state. On an economic scale our natural assets, flora and fauna provide a major income to Victoria, however our natural capital and assets are more essential for all life than economic gain. For ecological health and human survival an improvement in biodiversity health is essential and must become a priority.

Education and Community awareness of the looming disaster for much of Victoria's biodiversity must be worked on and achieved.

Joan Lindros

GEC Secretary