

This is a localised example of the fox guarding the hen house!

In this submission I wish to describe the ecosystem decline by gradual destruction over fifteen years of a naturally vegetated area of specific significance, natural beauty, interest and importance in Woodvale central Victoria. This area is opposite the Greater Bendigo National Park which provides habitat for many EPBC listed as 'endangered' species. Hence the private land in this Woodvale area opposite the national park has a Vegetation Protection Overlay 2 and Aboriginal Heritage Overlay.

Despite dozens of reports and evidence of breaches from myself, the City of Greater Bendigo (CoGB) compliance authority has enabled the destruction of large areas of this valuable ecosystem over a period of 15 years. The destruction continues this week.

The provision of protective legislation in the form of defined overlay protections on private land does nothing to protect ecosystems when compliance management systems are inadequate for whatever reason. The following localised central Victoria example demonstrates the failure of legislation to protect against the decline of Victoria's ecosystems because compliance practise accountability does not exist.

1. The Legislation (protection overlays)

1.1

42.02 VEGETATION PROTECTION OVERLAY 31/07/2018VC148

Shown on the planning scheme map as VPO with a number.

Purpose

To implement the Municipal Planning Strategy and the Planning Policy Framework. To protect areas of significant vegetation.

To ensure that development minimises loss of vegetation.

To preserve existing trees and other vegetation.

To recognise vegetation protection areas as locations of special significance, natural beauty, interest and importance.

To maintain and enhance habitat and habitat corridors for indigenous fauna. To encourage the regeneration of native vegetation.

A permit is required to remove, destroy or lop any vegetation specified in a schedule to this overlay. There are a few exemptions for emergencies etc.

1.2

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OVERLAY

2. Evidence of the Destruction of Large Areas of this Protected Ecosystem

For approximately fifteen years I have submitted written reports to the City of Greater Bendigo Planning Dept and CEO, describing the ongoing breaches of the legislation and providing evidence of those breaches.

Those reports have included requests of council to provide me with any associated information about planning permits that might apply (there are a few exemptions in the legislation) and so allow for the removal of the protected vegetation and habitat. That detail has never been made available to me. It is doubtful that permits have ever been applied for and/or granted during the fifteen year period.

During this time I have also made numerous requests in writing to meet in person with the planning/compliance staff, CEO and local council members to discuss these ongoing breaches of the legislation. No meetings have ever been granted.

There is no evidence that the CoGB have required the revegetation of some areas. They have refused to catch and restrain sheep and goats that have broken through fences and started to destroy vegetation on my property and in the national park. Some of the vegetation destroyed by the runaway stock was replanted vegetation funded by a grant from the Catchment Management Authority.

Approximately 10 years ago the Department of Land Water and Planning (DELWP) held a public meeting in Bendigo to discuss the same/similar issue 'Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria' with an emphasis on what was occurring locally. At that public meeting with I made a presentation about the same local Woodvale ecosystem destruction.

Despite drawing attention to this matter publicly ten years ago the destruction has slowly but surely continued year after year without any improvement in management practices by local government (the compliance authority). Local land owners have removed areas that contain all the components of a mature healthy Box Ironbark ecosystem. They have used bulldozers; chainsaws; fire; motorbikes; goat and sheep overgrazing; etc.

Historical aerial photos (Google Maps etc) clearly show the historical and ongoing destruction and decline without permits of these highly significant localised ecosystems.

3. Conclusion

This example shows clearly that the provision of protective legislation in the form of defined overlay protections on private land, do nothing to protect ecosystems when compliance management systems (such as the CoGB compliance authority) are inadequate for whatever reason. I welcome an opportunity to speak to the Environment and Planning Committee regarding my submission and to provide evidence accumulated over many years that supports my submission. The fox guarding the hen house does nothing to protect our Victorian ecosystems from rapid decline.

Vanessa Richardson
Mediator and conciliator, [REDACTED]

August 31, 2020

NB
Please note that this is my 2nd completed submission as my first submission submitted and accepted online was lost/misplaced by the Department of Environment and Planning.