

I have been a resident of Victoria since March 2019 after I relocated to Melbourne from Brisbane. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Ecology and Conservation Biology and am a current student of the University of Melbourne studying a Master of Environment. My love, and subsequent concern, for the environment has been a persistent theme throughout my life and greatly defines my ideals and morals as an individual and as a voting member of Victoria.

Australia has the worst rate of extinction, particularly mammalian extinction, of any developed country in the world, despite the comparatively short time since its formation as a 'modern nation' recognised by Western ideals. In Victoria alone we have seen drastic levels of deforestation and habitat loss that have resulted in less than 1% of native grasslands intact and significant declines to biodiversity throughout every ecosystem within Victoria. In order to effectively safeguard the intrinsic value of these ecosystems, as well as effectively mitigate the impacts of climate change, numerous changes are desperately needed.

1. The retention of remnant vegetation, particularly old growth, hollow-bearing trees, must be protected and enhanced through revegetation planting and restoration efforts. Despite Australia possessing no active ecosystem architects, such as woodpeckers to create hollows, a disproportionately high number of Australia's endemic fauna rely on tree hollows for survival. In Australia's climatic conditions, hollow formation requires, on average, a minimum of 120-150 years and without urgent investment into protection strategies, as well as research regarding possible artificial habitat options, many of Australia's unique species will go extinct or face the risk of extinction in the coming decades. Furthermore, a prioritisation of establish diverse vegetation communities that benefit a wide suit of native species should be prioritised in order to maximise available habitat for species and improve connectivity between habitat patches in an otherwise extremely fragmented landscape.
2. Dingoes must be recognised as a native top order predator that is threatened with extinction. The utilisation of the term 'Wild Dog' as a smokescreen to justify the continuous baiting, trapping and shooting of dingoes is detrimental to ecological health of Victoria. Dingoes are a unique species, *Canis dingo*, and future legislation needs to reflect this. Reputable dingo research and conservation organisations must be included in future discussions surrounding management decisions and conservation action plans and funding allocation to these organisations should reflect their integral role in the conservation of Victoria's native ecosystems. In addition, the continued use of 1080 poison must be stopped immediately. 1080 is an indiscriminate toxin that targets every organism that metabolises oxygen. It is used in New Zealand to control Australian Ring-tailed Possums and so the current claims that it does not target Australian species is false. Through biological accumulation, the use of 1080 poison has the potential to cause devastating impacts to Australia's ecosystem across all trophic levels, particularly in the aftermath of the recent bushfires that have already placed pressure on otherwise already stressed ecosystems. As a top order predator, Dingoes play an active role in regulating the populations of feral and introduced predators and their continued protection and reintroduction is likely to have wide reaching beneficial impacts that mirror the current results seen from reintroduction of wolves to both Yellowstone National Park in the USA and also into Europe.
3. Australia is a nation that is highly multicultural but more significantly a nation from which the sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples was never given up to British colonists. While the inclusivity of Indigenous Peoples in policy decision making and implementation should not be limited to environmental management, by including Indigenous voices in the discussion throughout decision making process, Victoria can ensure that a more accurate reflection of demographics is upheld but also can facilitate the construction of cross-cultural system that

is able to utilise knowledge from a variety of sources to establish adaptive conservation strategies that do not lead to loss of empowerment or cultural knowledge. Cultural burning practices as well as other forms of Traditional Ecological Knowledge have been proven to be incredibly effective strategies of ecological management.

4. Victoria's freshwater systems need to be prioritised. In the highly fragmented, agricultural landscape of Victoria, it is often the riparian vegetation along river and creek banks that forms the bulk of intact vegetation, as well as major corridors between larger forest fragments. As a result, these valuable ecosystems are relied upon heavily by a plethora of native species and any further losses could see dramatic declines in biodiversity. In order to safeguard these systems for the future, protection should be granted to larger and intact remnants. Restoration can also play a valuable role in increasing the benefits provided by riparian vegetation. The Campaspe Project in Victoria's north is doing a fantastic job restoring river systems to a healthier and more ecologically stable state. Continued incentives to landowners and key stakeholders to revegetate river systems and provide buffer zones between agricultural/urban development and the river itself should be prioritised. Additionally, when utilised, Environmental Flows should be investigated in order to reduce stress throughout periods of drought and natural flood regimes should be maximised as much as prioritised to avoid unintended ecological change, particularly in the fact of climate change.

The state of Victoria's ecology and biodiversity is in dire need of further protection in order to avoid irreversible degradation and species extinction. In order to effectively adapt to changing environmental conditions, more adaptive strategies for protecting and enhancing the ecology of Victoria that also establishes a framework in which cross-cultural collaboration and knowledge partnerships can be established. This is an incredibly important time in Victoria's history and unless we are able to make sound and informed decisions that recognise the intrinsic value of our ecology and establish protocols and management plans that improve and enhance remnant patches then we will continue to see declines in biodiversity in coming generations. Although we cannot change historical land clearing and persecution of native species, we now have the opportunity to become a national leader in environment and biodiversity policy and decision making. But only if we act now!