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TO: The Environment Planning Committee

RE: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Attention: The Committee

16th October 2020

I head up a number of vertically integrated renewable energy ventures that have developed a closed-loop business model based around “energy crop farming”, where oil crops are grown close to the point of use and converted into biofuels for transport, agriculture and electricity generation.

The initiative provides carbon-neutral energy security, soil quality improvement and stabilisation of surrounding ecosystems due to a number of flow-on effects. Producing fuel and electricity at the point of use reduces the transport fuel overhead in a fossil fuel dependent economy such as Australia, which has been identified as a key driver in the increasing impact of fossil fuel use on climate change. The concept of energy crop farming is easily integrated into existing farming and ecosystem repair programs as part of a long-term national sustainability strategy.

The present regulatory environment in Victoria is prescriptive in nature and does not really provide any forum where industry can incubate and pitch proactive and innovative sustainability programs with the support of open, informed discussion and debate.

There has been interest from various industry sectors in the concept of energy crop farming and local energy delivery, however the benefits and implementation of such a proposal are complex to present through the narrow channels available to commercial entities under the present land use approvals framework. The idea could be used to provide jobs, green energy and regenerative soil programs as part of other land use cases such as forestry and mining, however the details get lost in red and green tape and rarely make it through as part of an overall land use application.

Consequently, there are a number of areas of developing concern from an ecological standpoint that could be much better addressed if industry and the public had a better and more inclusive platform for engagement. I am aware there is some discussion around the creation of a Victorian Public Land Use Commission and have read one proposal describing the features of such a Commission.

I feel that the Commission as described would be an improvement over the existing regulatory framework in Victoria. I see it as a key step in opening the door for better ecological outcomes and improved sustainability of Victoria in general and wish to voice my support for the creation of such a structure.

Yours Sincerely,

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