

Hi,

Today I write to you as an environmentalist, an animal-lover, a climate activist and a seeker of justice for all. Lately, it feels like we stand by a growing list of injustice... whether that be through marginalised communities, a crippling climate, or a vanishing abundance of wildlife. As Australia has shown to lead the global extinction crisis, Victoria as a state sadly clears the path ahead as we have stripped 66% of our state land cover. Despite the adversities that we face today, I remain optimistic as I know that we are capable of change and we can regrow, rejuvenate and foster an improved life if we act fast and we act now.

I am 23 years old, and I am whole-heartedly proud to call the backyard of Australia my home. I feel blessed by the extraordinary uniqueness of our wildlife - as a keen traveller, people far and wide are always mesmerised and fascinated by our wildlife family. I am a lover of the outdoors and enjoy hiking as my senses love to indulge in some of my favourite places - The Dandenong Ranges, The Otway Ranges, Wilsons Promontory, The Mornington Peninsula (my home). We are so lucky to be in touch with the diversity found within our state, but our numbers of diversity are falling and historically we seem to override these natural assets as we prioritise agriculture, timber production, residential property at the cost of natural habitats and ecosystem destruction. We cannot deny the need to safely house and feed all Victorians, but I am confident that there are ways in which we can do this without compromising our other voiceless residents of nature. Please I ask, that as the largest land-clearing state, coupled with our recent bushfires that devastated 1.4 million hectares of Victorian soil, let us reverse our history and pledge to accept our responsibility in working towards a sustainable, just, inclusive future that fosters a home to thriving native species of life rather than supporting their decline out. It is not too late but we need to act now before the change will become irreversible.

By the next decade, I do not want my children to beg for a bedtime story about the “imaginative” spotted quoll or the helmeted honeyeater. I want to take them to my special places and show them all the glorious natural wonders that Victorians are lucky enough to call home. I hope too that when tourists are allowed to safely visit Australia they will not be disappointed by our disappearing numbers of wildlife and vegetation. Imagine an Australia without koalas? Seems ridiculous, but at this rate it may not be an unlikely future. Currently there are 120 flora and fauna species that are on the verge of extinction in Victoria alone. An increase in biodiversity increases the resilience of our eco-systems and can help better prepare us for the changing climate. This is all possible by implementing greater environmental protection and tightening our environmental laws to ensure that planning developments do not degrade our local ecosystems. We need to enforce better stringent guidelines onto the logging industry that for the last 20 years have been exempt from the environment protection law... We can invest in greater weed eradication and invasive species control programmes and build more jobs in tree-planting, species protection and conservation. Please help us to address this injustice and fight for our biodiversity.

Thanks for your patience,

Michelle Baxter