



Ecosystem decline inquiry hearing, August 2021

# Ecosystem decline inquiry

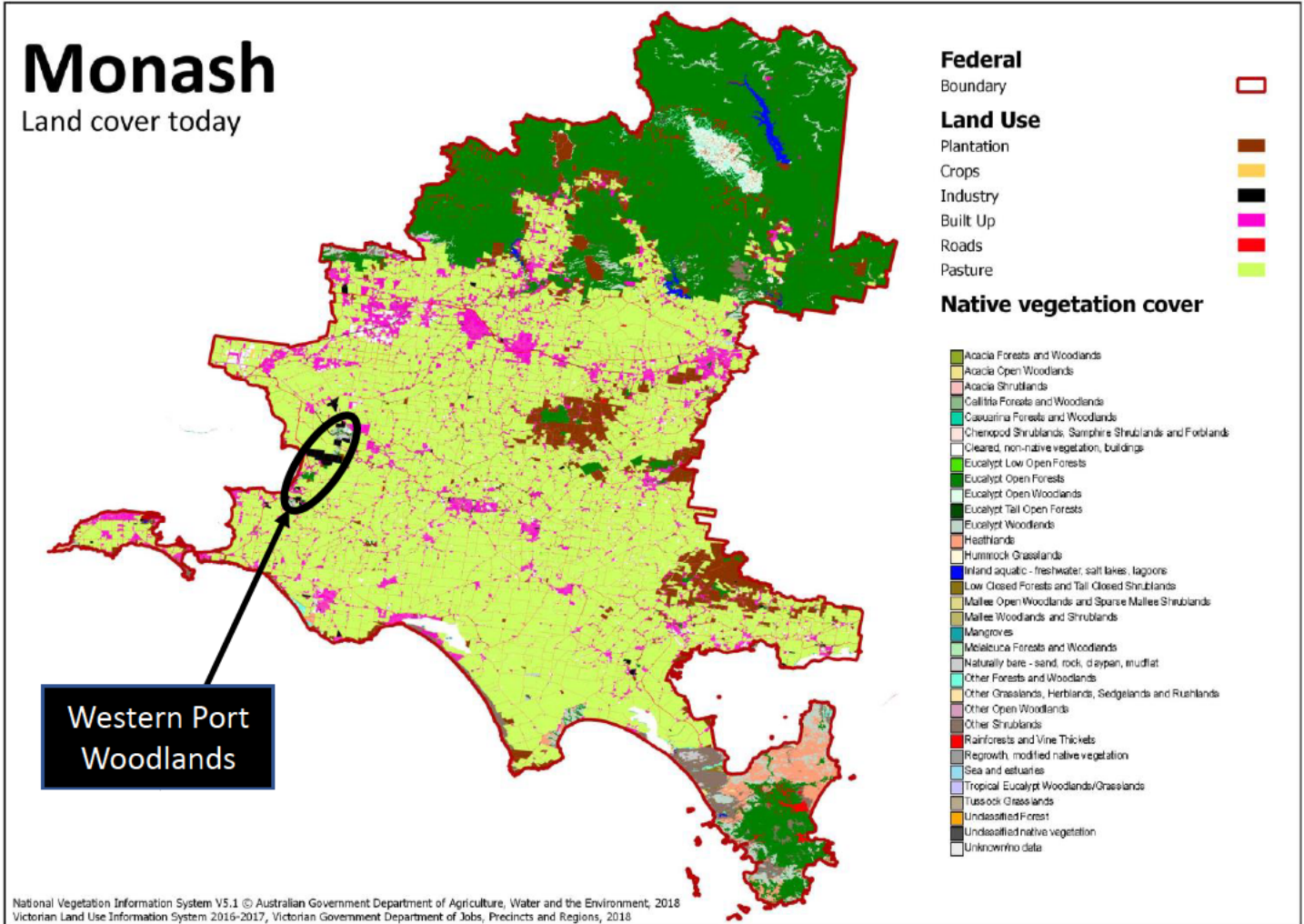
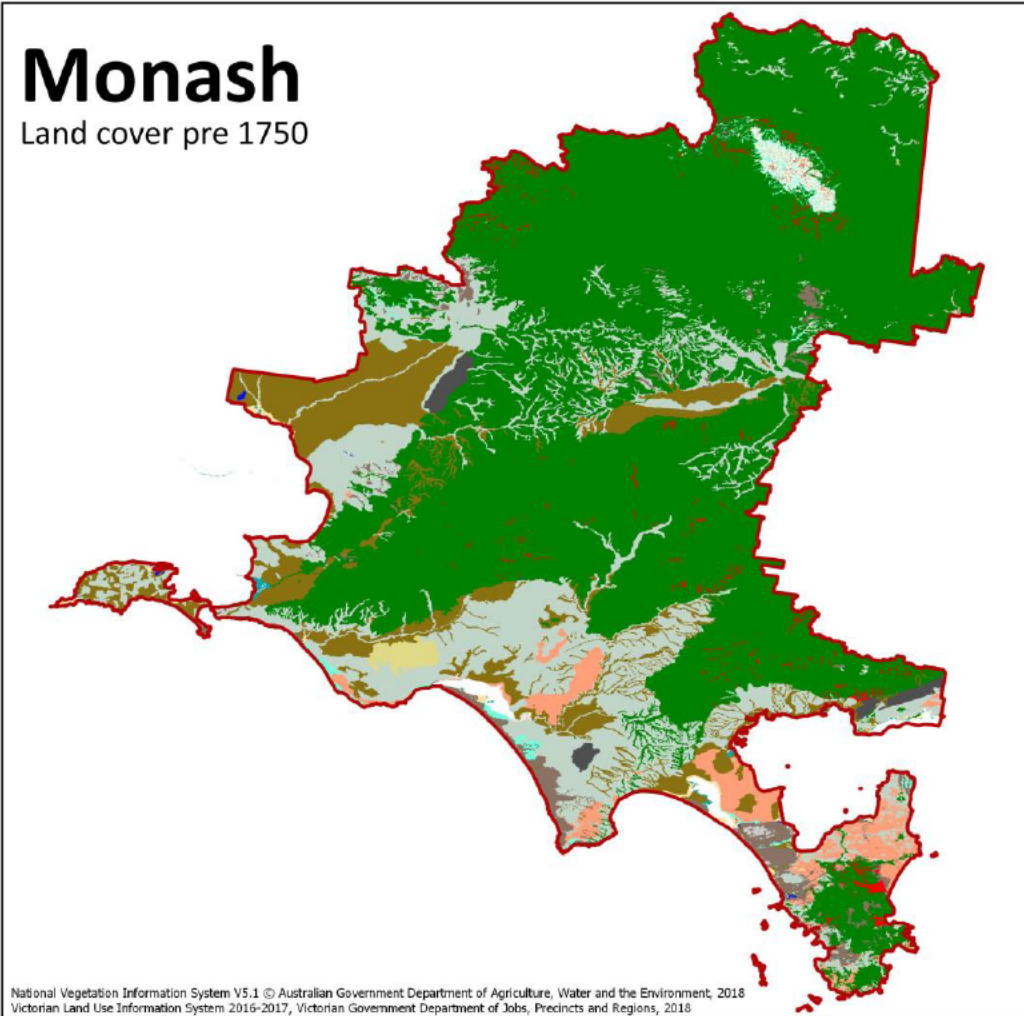
Despite legal frameworks in place (EPBC Act, FFG Act, EE Act, Native Vegetation Removal), and various policies over time, habitat decline continues (SoE 2018).

## ***Why?***

To explore why I'll share a contemporary case study: *Western Port Woodlands*.

# Ecosystem decline inquiry

South Gippsland landscape.





Western Port Woodlands

Region EVCs	Gippsland Plains Bioregion Statistics									
	EVC Name	EVC Code	Bioregional Conservation Status	Geographic Occurrence	1750 Extent ha	Current Extent ha	Total Remaining %	Protected Area Network %	Other Public Land %	Private Land %
	Wet Heathland	8	Depleted	Common	11,102	4,166	38	20	4	13
	Lowland Forest	16	Vulnerable	Common	119,673	41,132	34	5	11	18
	Swamp Scrub	53	Endangered	Common	152,442	31,407	21	2	6	13
	Swampy Woodland	937	Endangered	Common	20,037	2,893	14	0	4	10
	Herb-rich Foothill Forest	23	Vulnerable	Naturally Restricted	9,760	3,566	37	3	4	30
	Swampy Riparian Woodland	83	Endangered	Common	27,465	7,580	28	1	9	18
	Grassy Woodland	175	Endangered	Common	59,220	8,327	14	0	2	11
	Damp Forest	29	Endangered	Minor	7,127	2,973	42	6	10	26
	Heathy Woodland	48	Least Concern	Common	60,564	38,439	63	24	20	20
Damp Heathy Woodland	793	Vulnerable	Naturally Restricted	3,633	1,176	32	10	4	18	
Wetland Formation	74	Endangered	not applicable	1,290	1,050	81	32	12	38	
Riparian Scrub	191	Vulnerable	Common	12,578	7,818	62	15	33	14	
Riparian Forest	18	Vulnerable	Naturally Restricted	2,648	1,350	51	3	26	22	

Region Threatened Flora	Scientific Name	Common Name	Count of Records (post 1990)	Count of Records (pre 1990)	Last Record	EPBC	FFG	VROT	FFG Act 2020 Assessment	Locations	Data Source
	Caladenia aurantiaca	Orange-tip Finger-orchid	1	-	6/10/1995	-	-	R	EN	VF/HPG	ALA
	Corybas aconitiflorus	Spurred Helmet-orchid	10	1	13/07/2018	-	-	R	VU	Gurdies, Lang Lang EA, Bass Coast Shire Site	ALA
	Pterostylis grandiflora	Cobra Greenhood	28	6	18/05/2020	-	-	R	EN	Gurdies, Grantville NCR	VBA, ALA
	Eucalyptus strzeleckii	Strzelecki Gum	1	-	22/03/2001	VU	L	VU	CR	HPG	VBA
	Pterostylis chlorogramma	Green-striped Greenhood	25	1	8/07/2009	VU	L	VU	EN	Gurdies, Adams Ck NCR, Nth Hurdy Gurdy	VBA, ALA
	Acacia leprosa var. uninervia	Large-leaf Cinnamon-wattle	1	-	12/05/2005	-	-	R	EN	Adams Ck NCR	VBA
	Hypocrepis amplexans	Tee-tree Fingers/Clasping Hypocrepis	23	-	28/11/2019	-	L	VU	CR	Grantville NCR, Adams Ck NCR	VBA, ALA
	Caladenia tessellata	Spider Orchid	6	1	10/10/2017	VU	-	vu	EN	Gurdies	ALA
	Eucalyptus brookeriana	Brooker's Gum	1	-	20/11/1993	-	-	R	EN	East Lang Lang EA	ALA
	Eucalyptus fulgens	Green Scentbark	3	-	26/02/2019	-	-	R	CR	Along South Gippsland Highway	ALA
	Thelymitra malvina	Mauve-tufted sun orchid	1	-	10/11/1995	-	-	VU	EN	South Adams Ck NCR	ALA
	Avicennia marina subsp. australasica	Grey Mangrove	-	1	3/01/1964	-	-	R	EN	North Grantville NCR	ALA

Region Threatened Fauna	Scientific Name	Common Name	Count of Records (post 1990)	Count of Records (pre 1990)	Last Record	EPBC	FFG	VROT	FFG Act 2020 Assessment	Detection Locations	Data Source
	Phalacrocorax varius	Pied Cormorant	1	-	10/01/2018	-	-	NT	na	Almurta	VBA
	Numerius madagascariensis	Eastern Curlew	1	-	17/10/1993	EN	L	VU	na	Hurdy Gurdy Crk NCR	ALA
	Gallinago hardwickii	Latham's Snipe	1	-	26/09/2008	-	-	NT	na	HPG	VBA
	Nycticorax caledonicus	Nankeen Night-Heron	1	-	7/12/1994	-	-	NT	na	Grantville	VBA
	Accipiter novaehollandiae	Grey Goshawk	3	-	18/02/2007	-	L	VU	EN	Sth Grantville BR	ALA
	Ninox connivens	Barking Owl	1	-	1/01/1995	-	L	EN	EN	Grantville	VBA
	Ninox strenua	Powerful Owl	10	-	2/01/2019	-	L	VU	VU	SE VF/HPG, Grantville NCR, Gurdies, Bass Coast Shire Site	VBA, ALA
	Lathamus discolor	Swift Parrot	2	1	26/09/2008	CR	L	EN	CR	HPG, Gurdies	VBA, ALA
	Hirundapus caudacutus	White-throated Needletail	6	4	24/02/2019	VU	L	VU	na	Grantville NCR, Gurdies,	ALA
	Sminthopsis leucopus	White-footed Dunnart	3	-	13/04/2012	-	L	NT	VU	HPG	VBA
	Cercartetus nanus	Eastern Pygmy-Possum	1	-	4/05/2005	-	-	NT	na	Gurdies	VBA
	Varanus varius	Lace Monitor	17	-	25/02/2019	-	-	EN	EN	Adams Ck NCR, Gurdies, Lang Lang EA	VBA
	Pseudophryne semimarmorata	Southern Toadlet	6	-	3/05/2005	-	-	VU	EN	NE Hurdy Gurdy Crk NCR	VBA
	Megascolides australis	Giant Gippsland Earthworm	1	2	1/01/1991	VU	L	EN	EN	Nth Grantville NCR	VBA, ALA
	Larus pacificus	Pacific Gull	10	-	14/02/2018	-	-	NT	na	Grantville NCR	VBA
	Isoodon obesulus obesulus	Southern Brown Bandicoot	51	8	2/05/2019	EN	L	NT	EN	Adams Ck NCR, W Reserve, Gurdies, Grantville NCR	VBA, ALA
	Ardea alba	Great Egret	1	-	23/08/2013	-	L	VU	DD	Sth-Est Adams Crk NCR	ALA
	Antechinus minimus maritimus	Swamp Antechinus	2	2	1/01/1996	VU	L	NT	VU	Nth Grantville NCR, Gurdies	GGR Fauna report, ALA
	Mugilogobius platynotus	Flatback Mangrovegoby	-	1	5/12/1989	-	L	-	EN	Colbert Ck BR	ALA
Litoria raniformis	Growing Grass Frog	-	2	1/01/1981	VU	L	EN	VU	Lang Lang EA	ALA	
Candalides heathi heathi	Rayed Blue	-	3	1/01/1973	-	L	-	EN	Nth Nyora RS	ALA	
Significant species - not currently listed											
Phascolarctos cinereus	Koala	12	4	7/11/2018	na	na	na	na	Grantville NCR, Gurdies, Adams Ck NCR	VBA	
Perameles nasuta	Southern Long-nosed Bandicoot	11	1	21/09/2012	na	na	na	na	HPG, Lang Lang EA	VBA	
Trichosurus cunninghami	Mountain Brushtail Possum	9	-	12/11/2012	na	na	na	na	VF/HPG, Gurdies	VBA	

\*Western Port Woodlands – Wildlife corridor or sand pit?, VNPA (2021)



French Island

Corinella

Grantville

Glen Forbes

M420

The Gurdies

Lang Lang

C434

Nyora

A440

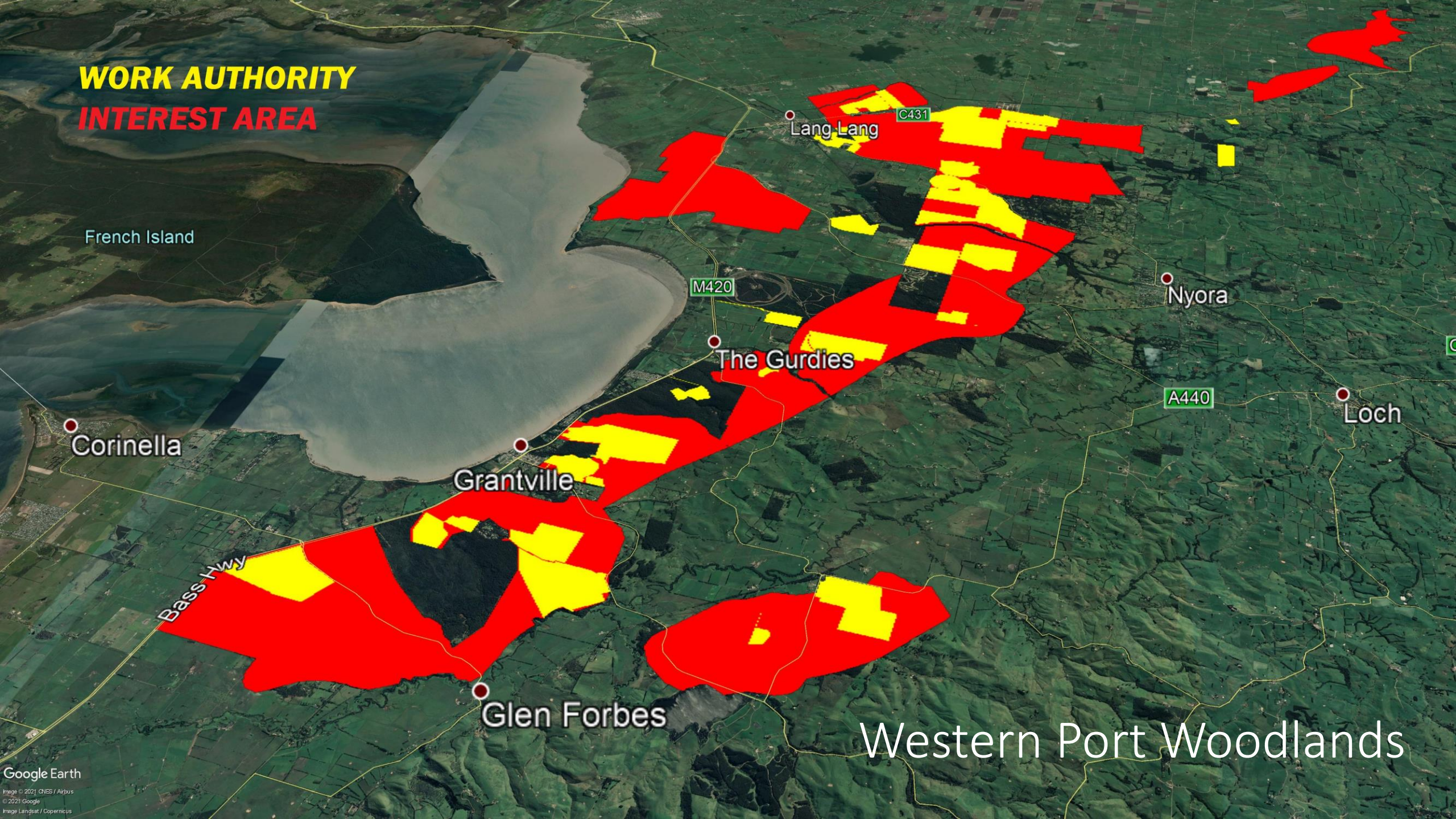
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Loch

Bass Hwy

Western Port Woodlands

**WORK AUTHORITY  
INTEREST AREA**



French Island

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Grantville

The Gurdies

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C431

A440

Western Port Woodlands





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Despite legal frameworks in place (EPBC Act, FFG Act, EE Act, Native Vegetation Removal), and various policies over time, habitat decline continues (SoE 2018).

## **Why?**

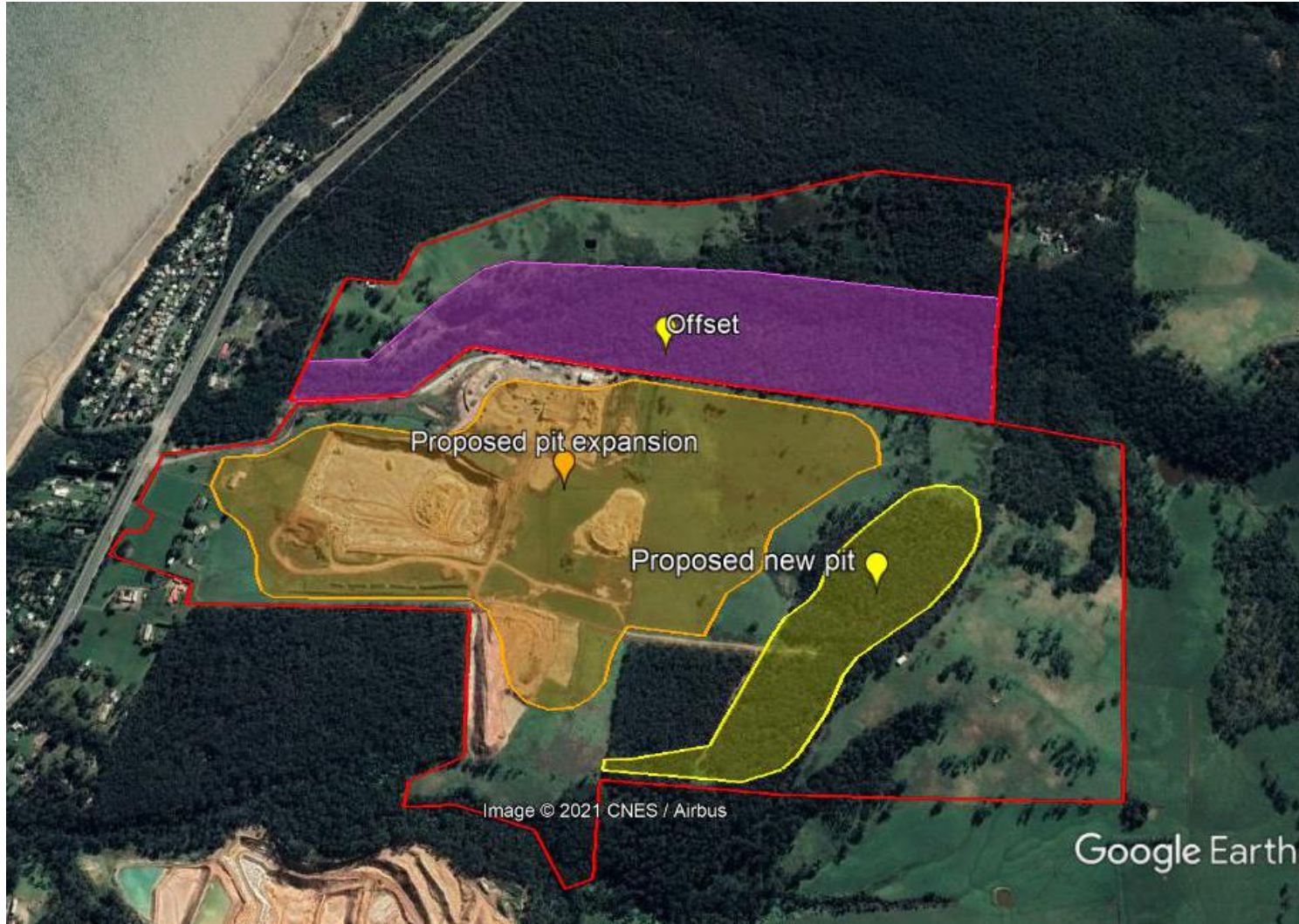
### **Always the lowest priority**

- Mostly private land tenure, with poor observation records and improvement is a conflict of interest for title holder. EPBC requires developer to make EPBC referral (conflict of interest). FFG requires critical habitat designation or conservation order from Victorian Government.
- Threats are cumulative from each incremental quarry. But sites are assessed one by one providing convenient diffusion of threats by each applicant. There is no mechanism to assess a cumulative threat.
- Generally subject to Native Vegetation Removal regulations, however, industry is exempt in the planning scheme. This is administered by ERR instead (conflict of interest).
- Process provides a closed loop of decision making within the Victorian Government where long term environmental protection may be in conflict with generalised “economic development” or short term political imperatives (BIG BUILD!).
- This becomes a choice whereby administrative culture and prioritisation becomes evident.

### **Native Vegetation Removal (“Net gain” offsets)**

- An example...

# Ecosystem decline inquiry



## Offset example

- Currently vegetation cover = **81ha**
  - Importantly, ***all*** of this vegetation requires an offset if removed
- Vegetation cover after “net gain” offset = **68ha**
- Habitat net gain = **-13ha**

This clear net loss is most obvious from this contained first person “offset”, but could equally be translated to the whole state.

If this was a investment fund where you received \$68 from an \$81 investment you would not feel like this was a net gain.

**You would feel like you were ripped off!**

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### **Native Vegetation Removal (“Net gain” offsets)**

- Vegetation offsets are a fraud perpetrated against the natural world. These transactions are designed to boost liquidity and reduce cost of clearing permits on behalf of developers (lest their habitat destruction be prevented or slowed).
- By design, “net gain” offsets always lead to habitat loss.
- Mal-administration of this devious scheme further erodes habitat. Local government are typically responsible but they are entirely focussed on front end approvals paperwork and have no capacity for long term compliance.

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Despite legal frameworks in place (EPBC Act, FFG Act, EE Act, Native Vegetation Removal), and various policies over time, habitat decline continues (SoE 2018).

## ***Why?***

### **Always the lowest priority**

#### *What change would be effective?*

#### **Overarching administrative culture**

- Prioritising the long-term protection of our life support system.
- Removing conflict of interest from decision making.
- Funding adequate to bring effect to laws in place.
- Build a culture of compliance from the top down.

### **Native Vegetation Removal (Net loss offsets)**

#### *What change would be effective?*

#### **Specific changes to laws and regulations**

- Overhaul the fraud of biodiversity “offsets”.
- Allocate the cost of the compliance burden to those responsible (ideally upfront bonds).