

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Melbourne—Tuesday, 23 February 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Cesar Melhem

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Dr Tien Kieu

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

WITNESS

Mr Patrick Medway, AM, Honorary Secretary, Chief Executive Officer and Treasurer, Australian Wildlife Society (*via videoconference*).

The CHAIR: I declare open the environment and planning public hearing for the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the various lands which each of us are gathered on today and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings.

With that I would also like to welcome any members of the public that are watching via the live broadcast today as well, so welcome. I also want to acknowledge my colleagues who are participating in the hearing today and thank those who have provided apologies.

Also to any witnesses that are appearing today: all evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege, as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament, and all evidence is being recorded.

You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

With that, just at this point in time because you are appearing remotely via video, if you could just please state your name and organisation one at a time so that we can verify your identity on screen.

Mr MEDWAY: Okay. Patrick Medway, Secretary of the Australian Wildlife Society.

The CHAIR: Great. Thanks very much for that. Just before I get you to go through your opening statement, I will just quickly introduce all members of the committee for you. I have with me Dr Sam Ratnam, Cliff Hayes, Melina Bath, Matthew Bach, Andy Meddick and—I will not forget this time—Stuart Grimley, who is appearing via video link.

Mr MEDWAY: I can see Stuart.

The CHAIR: Yes. Fantastic. And of course I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. My name is Sonja Terpstra. With that, we welcome your opening comments, and if you could just please keep your opening statement to a maximum of 10 minutes, that will ensure that we will have plenty of time for discussion and committee members can ask questions of you. We have also read and received your submission as well. If I could please remind members and witnesses to please mute their respective microphones when they are not speaking to minimise any interference. If you have technical difficulties at any stage, please disconnect and dial back in via teleconference. Hopefully everything will go okay. With that, I will head over to you. If you could go through your opening statement, that would be great.

Mr MEDWAY: Okay. Thank you, Chair. My name is Patrick Medway, as I said. We made a submission to the inquiry, and I thank you for the opportunity for us to speak to that. We have enunciated approximately nine items in our correspondence to you.

Just pointing out, I guess, to start with, there are 120 Victorian animals, plants, insects and fish that are now on the brink of extinction, and that is probably our concern, as well as yours. The bushfires have exacerbated that. 1.4 million hectares of land has been burnt and destroyed, 50 per cent of the habitat of wildlife has been destroyed and some 185 rare and threatened Victoria fauna and flora have been destroyed. Now, the outcome of all that is trying to identify those matters that have affected the ongoing reduction of ecosystems throughout Victoria. It comes back to—certainly land clearing, invasive species and logging throughout many of the

Victorian ecosystems and forests have all contributed to the sad state of the decline. At least 66 per cent of Victoria has been cleared since the early settlers. Now, that has destroyed the habitat for the wildlife that we are talking about. Wildlife needs a habitat to live in, and when we are destroying and clearing the land so much, then it certainly leads to the demise of these species, and then that causes the ecosystem to decline right across Victoria—so I touch on those items.

We were delighted when the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* came in in 1988. We thought that was the ultimate answer to try and save the biodiversity of the Victorian fauna and flora. Sadly, I think there have been modifications to that, and while it has been effective in many areas, sadly I think we have continued to develop, to land clear and to log. Certainly development around the cities and the countryside has added to the demise of further bushland habitat in which the wildlife survives. Touching on that, we are all faced with the calamity of climate change and trying to be climate-change ready.

I touched on the enforcement of the laws. It is sad that, while the laws are there, in many cases they are not being enforced. We are quite disappointed that in the case of Victoria many councils allow the destruction of wombats in certain areas. Something like 20 or 30 parishes throughout Victoria allow destruction of wombats by permit. There is no accountability. The farmers see them as a threat or as destroying their environment, their farming communities, but the wombat is part of that big ecosystem, and in other parts of the country we are fighting to preserve them, from Queensland through to Victoria. They are certainly an endeared animal, as are the koalas another one. But in Victoria we are horrified by the fact that it is so easy to get a permit to destroy wombats without much record keeping.

Now, touching on that and touching on the overall, we have a philosophy, I guess, that tourism—people come to Victoria and to other states to see the wildlife, and when you cannot see the wildlife because of the habitat changes from logging and land clearing, then in many cases people are going to have to go back to resorting to zoos or wildlife sanctuaries. And that is a sad state, because our preference, as an Australian-wide conservation society, is that the wildlife lives in its natural state in large tracts of parks and bushland. We touched on that down to the whole effect of development. I guess we cannot stop development because there is a constant push across Australia for development—cities expanding, country towns expanding and land clearing for farming. Then that is totally changing the environment for all the species, and the ecosystems that incorporated them and that survived for so long have literally been destroyed. We touch on the drivers that create this system. Logging of native forests is the worst one in our opinion. Again, there is an economic imperative for the forestry commissions to keep logging, but we think that is an area that needs to be really addressed tightly. There is the unstable use of water resources right along the river systems, and the Murray especially. The damage caused by invasive species—whether cats or dogs or feral horses, they are all contributing to the sad state that is affecting ecosystems.

I run down to consideration of boosting the ecosystem restoration. There is very little evidence where we are actually trying very hard at government level or at local level to restore habitat for wildlife. One we dealt with up here was the Towra Point Nature Reserve in Botany Bay. We spent a lot of time and effort and federal and state money to restore the habitat for migratory wading birds, but it is one of the few examples that you will find where huge sums of money were being spent to restore the original habitat for the native wildlife. I come down to guarantees where the government tried to organise the activities for the environment, and then finally to protecting the wildlife to encourage wider community resources. Certainly there is greater awareness today of the community in relation to conservation, wildlife preservation and fauna and flora. So we commend that to you.

I sum that up by saying we need to preserve the habitat for the native wildlife, and that protects the ecosystem. So I leave myself open if I can help in any way with questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that opening statement. I might just kick off myself with a question. In your submission you say the *Wildlife Act* seems to be out of date. If it was up to you, how would you propose modernising that? What steps would you take?

Mr MEDWAY: The Act covers the protection of wildlife. The problem we see is the actual implementation of it. I mentioned the wombats' destruction by permit. It is the same across other states: you can apply for a permit, particularly where there is an abundance of species, whether they be cockatoos, wombats or wood ducks. The agencies readily seem to issue a permit to destroy huge numbers. Now, in the case of changing the

Act, I think the Act is there and the regulations are there. It is the ability of the agencies to enforce and carry that through to a court situation. Many animals are killed on the road and it is called an 'accident'. Sadly we have had cases where people have deliberately run down wombats and run down kangaroos and killed them but there has never been a prosecution, or very seldom a prosecution. So it is bringing the implementation through to collectively valuing the wildlife and the fauna and flora and then wanting to protect it as a community, and using those acts of Parliament to enforce it. Again, I guess there is not always a priority in some areas to do that.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that answer. Mr Grimley, if you are there, do you have a question?

Mr GRIMLEY: Yes. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Patrick, for your information and your submission. My question is just in relation to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* that you note provides for the Victorian government to assess and approve development that may impact on the environment. However, you warn that state legislation is not necessarily fit for this purpose. Can you elaborate to the committee just on that point, please?

Mr MEDWAY: I will try. I do not profess to be an expert on all the side issues, but regarding the approval for major developments—and now we are talking about offsets and so on—when there is a major project on, the legislation tends to be pushed aside or the conservation side is pushed aside. Whether it is in the Snowy Mountains or in the Sydney Airport—the redevelopment in western Sydney—massive tracts of land are being cleared. While there is a valiant attempt, I suppose, to try and save some habitat, in reality the priority is to make an airport or to clear land for development. The protection is there already at the federal level and the state level, but really it can be pushed aside.

Mr GRIMLEY: So how can these failings be best addressed?

Mr MEDWAY: Well, collectively we need to value the habitat, the environment, right through to the air we breathe and the water we drink. We tend not to value it as highly until there is a shortage of it, whether it is the smoke from the bushfires causing breathing difficulties through to the shortage of water through the drought. Suddenly water becomes an issue, but on a day-to-day basis we tend to take it for granted. We waste water. We pollute the environment, and the prosecutions for polluting a range of issues tend to be in some cases seriously expensive but by and large not that high and to not really act as a deterrent.

Mr GRIMLEY: Thanks, Patrick. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. Thank you for your answer there, Mr Medway. I might go to Dr Bach, a question if you have one.

Dr BACH: On this occasion I might cede my time to my colleague, Ms Bath.

The CHAIR: Of course. Ms Bath.

Ms BATH: Right. Okay. Thank you, Dr Bach. That is very good. Mr Medway, thank you very much for your presentation. I am interested in your comment about timber being a great threat to the environment and species, but I also want to raise a point. You may have read the journal; it is called the *Conservation Biology* journal, and it is put out by the CSIRO. It is on threats to Australia's imperilled species and implications for national conservation response. It goes on to say that invasive species are by far the most common threat to the largest number of Australian species; it talks about how 82 per cent of them—so this is across the whole of Australia—are under threat from invasive species, and it also then goes on to say 74 per cent are from events such as bushfires. I would like to specifically talk about threatened species. Speaking about rabbits may not be new, speaking about foxes may not be new, or dogs and the like, but these are very important issues that still have not been addressed over decades and decades.

Mr MEDWAY: Rabbits have been subject to a lot of research, but we still have rabbits. No matter how hard we have tried to get rid of rabbits, they still keep coming out. The damage they do to the farming community is quite high. Again I suspect to some extent dingoes feed on rabbits, wedge-tailed eagles feed on rabbits, but not to the extent to reduce the numbers below a sustainable group. We have never been able to wipe out any of the invasive species yet, from cane toads to rabbits to foxes or otherwise. Feral cats are a plague on the whole country, and you see pictures in almost any wildlife movie or video referring to feral cats and the damage they

do. Again, they are great survivors. They eat everything from lizards right through to bird species. We have not, despite the money being spent at federal and state and council level, successfully removed feral cats or foxes or wild dogs to some extent. It is just an ongoing saga.

Now, we keep spending money, we keep pursuing it. The ultimate test at the moment is to put in feral-proof fencing enclosures around the country. It seems to be the flavour of the month to feral proof large tracts of land to keep the ferals out. That fencing is very expensive, but it appears to be the only way we can preserve some of the endangered species, whether they are in the Pilbara region up here, in the Scotia around the south-west corner of New South Wales or in other states, is to fence with this expensive 2-metre-high, buried-under-the-ground thing. Now, that is a valiant attempt to try and preserve bilbies, a range of the smaller potoroos and birds to some extent as well, but without trying to address the feral animal issue, which we have been doing for some time. We have not successfully been able to either reduce the numbers or find a way of poisoning, trapping or humanely treating them—and the politics then come into play when we talk about removing the feral horses from the Snowy Mountains area. And you have had the same problem in Victoria as we have had in New South Wales, where there was an attempt to change the legislation to call them heritage horses instead of feral horses—an attempt to overcome the legal restraint to remove the horses from habitat they damaged.

But back to protecting the species, I would hate to think that we have to resort to a zoo-type arrangement to preserve the endangered species, and feral-proof fencing I suppose is the current attempt to try and save colonies of endangered species. It is sad. We spend a lot of money, a lot of time and expertise, yet we still have not been able to reduce the feral cats, the foxes and otherwise, despite our attempts. I do not know the answer, as much as we plead for an answer to be found and try and reduce those numbers. Perhaps Victoria might be more successful.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you, Mr Medway. Mr Hayes.

Mr HAYES: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Mr Medway, for the very interesting submission you have made and for talking to us today. You talk about the drivers on expansion and talk about development pressures, and you say we have to have development. But I suppose my question goes to: at what rate? And talking about an inquiry into species extinction and the effect on wildlife, I just wanted to ask you: since we have expanded our population—we have doubled it over the last 50 years, and the governments both federal and state are looking at it redoubling again over the next 20 to 30 years—do you think this sort of policy, which is something that governments can control but is mainly aimed at boosting the economy by encouraging more and more population, is consistent with trying to protect our wild species?

Mr MEDWAY: Well, it becomes the will of the people to some extent. We have looked at other models overseas. And you look at the money being spent in trying to preserve a particular species, whether it is the condor large eagle in California or the species in Canada and Europe, and the current trend in the UK is rewilding the hills of Scotland with some of those species that have become extinct or have declined to such an extent. The cost to do that is enormous. In this country we want to value, but we have been arguing I suppose for some time that in the end important national parks and important ecosystems will need to be fenced and protected despite the potential cost, and then you offset some of that by making some exclusive, as you do in other places where you have a historical site or a space of special significance where you pay a fee to go in and see that particular object or that habitat. Now, you have got a situation where you can have a koala park big enough to sustain a population of koalas; it is fenced to keep out wild dogs and ferals, and that animal breeds and multiplies in its own particular environment.

And I go back to what I said before about how the feral-proof fencing is the current vogue across Australia, Western Australia has been very successful with their Western Shield. They cut off Shark Bay with a double line of fencing, and inside they removed the feral cats and the feral dogs and so on and then allowed the native wildlife to come back. Then they restocked part of that with some of the threatened species. So they had this large protected area, managed by rangers, and they kept the ferals out. You can go there and see a lot of the wildlife in the wild.

In Victoria, a smaller state, you have probably a better opportunity to find and identify those selected areas that you believe to be very important and resource and protect them for future generations. Again, I do not know the answer about fencing, because you are looking for a cost-benefit analysis if you are going to fence a large park.

We already pay to go into our national parks, and it adds another dimension that you can protect the wildlife inside that park by having a fee or a toll to offset the cost of managing it. I leave that with you.

Mr HAYES: Just a quick follow-up on that—

The CHAIR: Very quickly, because we are running out of time.

Mr HAYES: You say the *Wildlife Act* is out of date and you are talking about battles in courts and tribunals, but I put it to you that maybe it is our planning scheme that is out of date—that it prioritises expansion of more and more people into areas rather than looking at environmental or community health benefits, and the planning Act tends to take priority in VCAT and EESs.

Mr MEDWAY: Talking about the planning, inevitably every time there is a development they will hire consultants to overcome the identifiable problem concerning the environment. Whether it is endangered species, rare species, whether it is green and gold bell frogs in that habitat there will be a consultant report, quite often expensively found, to justify or to overcome the problem so when the whole process goes through for approval all those site issues are covered and inevitably the economic or the growth benefit exceeds the conservation benefit. So the project is approved and then we mop up later on how to—you start land clearing for many major developments, you know without counting every bird, animal, insect is going to be destroyed, while the land is bulldozed and the land is cleared, the drainage system is sent in, and then the development goes there, the shopping centre. The big one in Sydney at the moment is the big Western Sydney Airport. Huge tracts of land have been cleared. All the environmental impact statements have been covered, but ultimately they head towards finding a solution to overcoming the problem. The Act covers that you must protect the environment, you must protect the birds and the animals and the trees, but they overcome that by consulting experts who provide the evidence to give the final authority approval to go ahead with the airport or the building project. So the planning process, you are right, has a role to play. But experts are hired to overcome the problem, so you are faced with that dilemma.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Medway. Dr Ratnam.

Dr RATNAM: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, Mr Medway, for your excellent presentation. I have a couple of questions. I have two questions, if I may, from your presentation. The first one was that you spoke about native forest logging having the worst impact on biodiversity and extinction. Can you explain why you think it is the most damaging?

Mr MEDWAY: Could you just repeat that so I can get the third part of it?

Dr RATNAM: Certainly. You talked in your presentation about native forest logging having the worst impact on—

Mr MEDWAY: Oh yes, yes. Native forest logging, I am with you. If you have been into those areas—and we have and our members have—if you go back 50 years or 100 years, it was unbelievable, pristine forest habitat with a whole ecosystem in place, the birds, the animals, the koalas, the lot. Systematically the need for timber is such that in almost every state the forestry commission or its equivalent in each state has worked its way through to log, selectively log and in some horrible places clear-fell whole environments, and then we counter that by putting in forestry plantations of pines, any of the pine systems that they like, quick-growing pines. They then clear the native forest to replant. New Zealand does it. Canada does it. We do it, because timber is perceived to be an economic benefit. *Pinus radiata* is quick growing. It is logged for timber and goes into housing and woodchip et cetera. But coming back to preserving, ultimately I think there needs to be community pressure that you select the absolute best areas you have and protect them from logging and from feral control to the point of fencing in some way. But again we are talking big tracts of land, and again tourism has the potential where people come to see the beautiful, pristine forest. East Gippsland, up through there, the fires were horrific. They will come back to some extent, but again can you afford not to log? We are rich in iron ore resources. Perhaps if we switch to steel-framed housing rather than timber-framed housing we would be well on the track of saving the need to log and constantly keep logging our forests. It is a big ambiguous, but does that help?

Dr RATNAM: Yes, thank you so much. That is really helpful. One last question. In your submission you refer to the need for government to focus on restorative work, so habitat restoration. We have heard government

departments come before us and say, 'Look, we're doing that. We are focused on restoration', but from your perspective I am interested to know what more needs to be done. Is it more and more quickly or is it just do that work more quickly? What do you think needs to be done?

Mr MEDWAY: Every one of these restoration programs that I have looked at, the cost of doing it is quite high. The range of reports and consulting work are very high. The money being allocated is absorbed so often in what I call administration charges to get the project done. Now, it is as simple as tree planting. There have been several prime ministers over the last 50 years who have talked about massive tree planting projects across Australia, but at the same time, sadly, our members come back to us and say, 'For every time we try to plant trees, somewhere else they are bulldozing another tract of land'. It is the mindset of not wanting to clear land, that we need to protect that habitat. Now, again, you come back to the planning. Once there is development and a growing population—housing estates—we are in a dilemma. I guess we need to value, or try and identify, the very valuable areas and protect them, and I guess, sadly, other areas will be written off as—I will not say wasteland but they will be areas that will be developed. The community will not see them as being important. The big forests of East Gippsland and throughout Victoria that are still there, I think need to be valued and prized and protected. I leave it at that.

Dr RATNAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Meddick.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Patrick, for your presentation and for your submission. I just wanted to let you know something about point 4 in your submission where you talk about the reform of the *Wildlife Act 1975*. I can tell you that it is being reviewed, and the consultations actually begin next month. So if you keep an eye on that, I am sure that we would like to see your submission go into that.

Mr MEDWAY: Will do. Thank you.

Mr MEDDICK: I am not from the government but have consulted with them pretty extensively about this and the need for it, and I was very happy to see their announcement. They have actually done a lot of media on it as well. So you will find on the government websites a lot of the places you can go to for lodging and stuff like that. But that leads me to my first question in that respect. Where you talk about, in point 5, that relationship between the federal and state governments with the EPBC Act, what changes do you think need to happen in that review of the *Wildlife Act* in order to make it fit for purpose if the federal government does hand over administration of the EPBC Act to state governments? I suppose it is a very broad question, and there is not enough time for a full answer here. If you could just cover two quick points on that perhaps. I then have a very quick question after that that is completely unrelated.

Mr MEDWAY: Okay. I draw your attention to a bit of history, the Franklin Dam, where Tasmania was going to do one thing and the federal government intervened and did another thing. Last night on the news there was a big question about Kakadu National Park—federally operated, impacted at the local level and in conflict. Again, one of the complaints there was the degradation of that habitat—through mismanagement they were calling it.

Our society is a national body for all volunteers. We have been going since 1909, and I continue to marvel at that fact—we are still here. Nationally it would be better to have an overall protection of the important parts of our environment, right through. But then you move down to the state level where there is implementation and finally to the local council and the local government level where they actually approve the development of a house or a road or a system. Everyone needs to be aware of what we are trying to do, and that is to protect the environment, keep it clean and preserve the wildlife. There is no one answer—no simple answer. It would be impossible to try and get everyone to agree, working from the top down.

The biggest one that has come up lately is koalas. I have never seen so much publicity on the koala. Following the bushfires and the destruction of vast habitats and the destruction of numbers of koalas, suddenly we are rediscovering koalas. Back in 1923 we fought as a society to stop people shooting them for their skins to be exported overseas for fur. I have got no idea, but they talk about millions of koalas being shot in Queensland and exported for their fur. But today there is a big awareness that we must protect the koala. Now it is not just the koalas, it is the habitat that all the other animals live in as well, and at a federal and state level. I guess we all need to be more vigilant and more aware of protecting the habitat, and we are a part of that habitat. We breathe

the same air, we drink the same water, so it is in our best interests to preserve the environment collectively not just for the wildlife but for ourselves as well. I will leave it at that. Next question.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you so much for that. Just the last question: you spoke about the efforts that have been made in various ways to control introduced species, and you spoke about poisons in particular being ineffective. Some of those are clearly a lot more in the public eye and I guess more cruel than others and more indiscriminate than others. For instance, the one that springs to my mind is, do you believe that sodium fluoroacetate, or 1080 poison, should be banned completely from all states and federally because of its indiscriminate and cruel nature?

Mr MEDWAY: Well, we have had this running battle. I spent 10 years on the New South Wales pest animal control council. The decision there by the experts—and I had to back away and accept the expert advice—was that that was the most effective control of the wild dogs. Now our argument was, while are you putting a poison bait out for wild dogs, every other little carnivore, i.e. the quoll—the tiger quoll or the spotted quoll—is also out there searching for food and will dig it up and eat it. Then the story was, ‘Oh, it’s a native animal, it will not be affected by the 1080 poisoning’. So we did a trial run. We funded a trial with the state national parks of New South Wales to bait and trial with baits and non-toxic bait looking to see. Now, the end result was we found one dead quoll in that experiment which they could not identify whether it died from poisoning, old age or killed by an owl. The sad part was on 1080 I had to back away and say, ‘Look, it’s a horrible way to kill anything’, but the expert advice there was to protect the farming community from wild dogs, the 1080 was the most effective poison to use to remove wild dogs.

There is an ongoing debate with other groups trying to ban it completely, but I do not know unless there is a non-lethal way—and I go way back to the idea of feral-proof fencing and perhaps farms should be better fenced to keep wild dogs out of their farms and off their sheep—but the expert advice we had was that the use of 1080 was the most effective. We backed away from the push to ban 1080 because you cannot sit there and defy the logic or the common sense of scientific reports. We are a science-orientated organisation and we want to back it up with science. It is a terrible way to kill an animal, but unless there is some other way of doing it, we are not in a position to fight that system. Maybe others are, but we are not.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Medway. With that, I would just like to thank you—

Ms BATH: Hang on, Chair, we are not supposed to finish until quarter past. At 12.15 we have a break.

The CHAIR: Okay. All right, well, we do have more time for questions then. I do not have that on my running sheet, sorry, so thanks for pointing that out. Do you have another question then?

Ms BATH: Thanks, Chair. I do appreciate it. Mr Medway, it would be remiss of this inquiry not to challenge some of the comments that our presenters make, and I do so with the greatest of respect.

Mr MEDWAY: Okay.

Ms BATH: I would like to challenge your comment talking about native timber coupes—

Mr MEDWAY: Logging in natural timber forests?

Ms BATH: Yes, native timber coupes in the state forests, the very small percentage that is there for timber harvest. You said that pine trees are planted in those regions. That was my understanding, and I was—

Mr MEDWAY: Yes, well, there are certainly some.

Ms BATH: But I would question that in Victoria. It may be different in different states, but in our Victorian ones, the body does not transplant—once they have harvested native timber—and put down pines, just for the record.

Mr MEDWAY: Okay, thank you.

Ms BATH: Thank you, and then the other question I guess is just a broader question that relates to—you spoke about iron ore being an abundant resource in Australia, and we are lucky to have it, but I guess I would like to have a conversation, and maybe it is tongue in cheek, Mr Medway, about having more steel and less

wood-framed houses. I guess that also raises the point about CO₂ emissions over the course of the life of an industry, so it is a friendly challenge but I just wanted to point that out. Sometimes we need to look at it a holistic look.

Mr MEDWAY: We do, we do. I note that when you said the mining sites, and we have two of the mining sites there and up in the Hunter Valley and down in Victoria, the devastation from mining to the environment is horrific—the size of the holes, the landscape clearing. We look forward one day to when some of the restoration comes back, because there is a promise that when they finish the mine in that area, they will restore the environment. I have yet to see a good example of that.

But again, I was looking for an alternative to protect the forest. Forests collectively protect more wildlife in that area than probably anywhere else. A large forested area has birds, animals and insects—everything you can imagine in those big ecosystems. If that can be protected, then terrific. I despair when I see prime timber being logged, I guess for timber housing. It goes to Eden where the woodchip plant is and is exported—turned into toilet paper and so on. I see that as a great waste of a resource. I would assume you have got pine plantations throughout Victoria somewhere, because that was an economic factor in other states and overseas. They are quicker growing than native plants. I am sure somewhere in Victoria you will have pine plantations where they have cleared the original native vegetation and replanted it with quick-growing pines to be logged every 20 years.

Back to trying to preserve the Australian forest, I know that the replanting and selective logging is the best we could hope for, where you identify trees, take out every second or third or fifth tree and allow the rest of them to grow naturally. It is an ongoing saga. We seem to have this traditional 200-year-old idea of building a timber-framed house. I would have thought perhaps today there are other ways of doing it, and I guess there are. When you look around the big cities: blocks of flats going up, concrete and steel, layer on top of layer, and then building all the boxes. Instead of a single house you have square houses stacked on top of each other to form blocks of apartments and home units. So there are alternatives creeping in. Hopefully we will be able to protect the forest, which takes up the big eco. Your inquiry is about ecosystems. Forests I think represent the most effective, identifiable, important ecosystems we have across the country. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Medway. Thanks for pointing out we have got more time, Ms Bath, so I might ask another question. The Victorian government has rolled out its *Protecting Victoria's Environment—Biodiversity 2037 Plan*. I just want to ask if you are aware of that and whether you are aware of some of the targets within that to protect some of the flora and fauna and some of the things that are endangered.

Mr MEDWAY: No, I am not, not in detail. We were so thrilled, it was almost unbelievable, when you came in with the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*, because the hype around then was, 'We are going to protect all of those plants and animals and insects across Victoria'. Now, I guess we have moved on with time, and you now have the biodiversity, which is a federally organised structure, coming down the line. Help me: are you identifying those Victorian iconic species and emphasising their protection for the long term?

The CHAIR: There are various targets within that plan. It targets a range of ecosystems and plants and animals within those systems.

Mr MEDWAY: Good. Excellent. Collectively we can do a lot. We just need the will to work together from the top to the bottom to preserve the very environment in which we, along with everything else, live. I know we have to have roads, we have to have housing and we have to do estates, but there are times when I raise my eyebrows and say, 'Do we have to clear so much? Do we really need so much farming land? Do we really take so much water out of the environment et cetera?'. Collectively we need to value more, if we can, of those plants, animals, insects and the habitat and put a commitment in there, a heartfelt commitment, to preserve and protect it for the next generation.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. All right.

Mr MEDWAY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: No worries. All right. Thanks, Mr Medway, for your contribution today. It has been very welcome. With that, we thank you for your time, and best wishes.

Mr MEDWAY: My pleasure. Thank you for the opportunity, and I wish you well. I hope some really good things come out of this.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.