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# Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

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# Terms of Reference

## Indicators of Ecosystem Decline

## Factors of biodiversity decline well-established

- Critical urgency of response
- Tipping points; climate change & extreme events

## Impacts on Victorian Community:

- Socio-economic; Intergenerational
- Traditional Owners & Aboriginal Victorians - Connection to Country



# Submission Focus

## Focus on Legislative and Policy Reforms

### Positive steps:

Reforms in biodiversity protection (Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act, review Wildlife Act; significant reforms in aquatic ecosystems)

*Climate Change Act 2017*: Climate mitigation and adaptation legislation and regional planning initiatives

### **BUT**

- Gaps around biodiversity and ecosystem decline –robust bioregional protections required for at risk ecosystems such as grasslands and forest due to extreme events and increasing human impacts
- Not marginalise ecosystem protections and measures for restoration from central planning processes for COVID recovery



# Adequacy of the legislative framework protecting Victoria's environment ...

Existing legislation – not '**mainstream**' biodiversity protection AND ecological restoration into decision-making for govts. & private sector

**ESD** objectives no longer fit for purpose

'balance model' = assumption of development

- ecosystem viability and dependent economic and social structures at risk

**Duty of care:** *Environment Protection Act 1970* reforms could apply to ecosystems

- Inter-generational and inter-species equity

Emergent impact on ecosystems

## **Emergency Management**

- What happens to ecosystem protections in bushfires, floods, droughts
- Who has responsibility for 'species' in disasters? What role for civil society?

## **Fire regimes**

- Interplay with planning laws
- Leadership on Biodiversity priorities?

## **Air and water quality**

- Coastal impacts - Regionalisation
- Marine – e.g. petroleum exploration, windfarms



# Adequacy and effectiveness of government programs and funding

**Underfunding** of core response to ecosystem decline in critical areas such as national parks

- Role for Independent Entity in review?

**Investment** in green infrastructure, e.g. wildlife corridors in regional and urban/peri-urban areas AND long-term maintenance

- (job creation? gender equity?)

Lack of adequate **monitoring and compliance** build on-ground staff and capacity building, e.g. invasive species controls

Develop **new enforcement measures**

Review key **habitat-related** policies and programs;

- terrestrial, riverine, marine and coastal with climate adaptation planning

Examine how legislation and policy ‘works together’ to deal with **cumulative effects on ecosystems** across sectors and regions

- Native Vegetation Clearance Framework
- Offsets policy; ‘conditions on development’
- Expand responsibilities of **Independent regulator?**

# Working with Traditional Owners

Develop models to **realise partnerships** and Indigenous governance

Ecosystem protections:

- Connection to Country
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage protections

Engagement with Traditional Owners

Progressive Pathways:

- Water pathways
- Stronger pathways for Co-management Agreements

Increasing and diversifying employment opportunities in Victoria

Cultural economies



Property as habitat



# Opportunities

## Critical time frame for intervention

Triage model for many species

- Environmental Effects Act: strengthen reqs. for EIA - ecosystem impacts, climate change extreme events
- Expand Disaster Management for biodiversity protection
- Independent agency to coordinate ecosystem protections and restoration????

EPBC Act 1999 (C'th) recommendations

- if devolution to states, Victoria has opportunity to invest in robust standards for EIA and approvals, and biodiversity protections
- information, monitoring and compliance

## Planning and Environment Act 1979

- Review Anthropocentric legislative purpose and rebalance the amenity construct
- Measures for stewardship and RESTORATION activities – regional employment creation?
  - Catchment & Land Protection Act and Planning and Environment Act

Embed ecosystem financial measures in legislation: Incentives –e.g. expand concessions for wildlife covenants?

- All of community responsibility not just landholders.

## Corporate sector – social licence

Reporting on biodiversity and ecosystem impact outcomes?



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**Thank you for the opportunity to  
appear before the committee.**

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