

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Shepparton—28 April 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

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Mr Tim Quilty

WITNESSES

Mr John Pettigrew, Chair

Ms Louise Costa, Committee Member, Goulburn Valley Environment Group

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee 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 lands upon which we are gathered here 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. I would also like to welcome any members of the public who are with us in the room today, not at this point in time, but welcome nonetheless if they are watching the proceedings as well – if they are watching the room. I will take this opportunity to introduce committee members to you. I am Sonja Terpstra, I am the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. Clifford Hayes is the deputy chair. Joining us via Zoom is Dr Samantha Ratnam. Back in the room, Ms Melina Bath and Dr Matthew Bach.

Now, all evidence that is being given today 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 from 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 the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. All evidence is being recorded and 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. If I could just get you, for the Hansard record, if you could please state your name and the organisations you are appearing on behalf of.

MR PETTIGREW: Yes. John Pettigrew, Goulburn Valley Environment Group.

The CHAIR: Great, thank you.

MS COSTA: Louise Costa, Goulburn Valley Environment Group.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. And, with that, I will ask you to present your opening comments. Keep it to 5 or 10 minutes, I know there is both of you. So, over to you, and however you would like to present. So, away you go.

MR PETTIGREW: I will lead off, if you do not mind. We also pay our respects and acknowledge Elders past, present and future and emerging from the Yorta Yorta Nation, on whose Country we meet today. I would like to thank the inquiry for coming to Shepparton and for our opportunity to meet with you. If we show some frustration, and perhaps anger, during the proceedings it is more the frustration comes from the business we are in, protecting the environment, and the processes that we probably have to go through. Both Louise and myself have been representing Goulburn Valley Environment Group for decades. I am currently president, Louise is a past president. And so, with that, an up-front apology.

The CHAIR: No, no.

MR PETTIGREW: Hopefully it will not be needed. But we commend our submission, we reviewed our submission, it was done back in – quite a while now, or it seems quite a while. We are very happy with it. As it sits today, we would not change a word in it. I think, from our point of view, that critical is the last paragraph and I would just recommend that to you. It reads: Victoria has an excellent blueprint for nature conservation with the release of the government's 20 year biodiversity 2037 plan.

However, we just want to get on with that. We recognise there is more to be done and it has to be done faster, but we have a blueprint there. And part of our frustration is why not just get on with it? We, like the previous

speakers, would believe the state regulations offer little protection for the significant and endangered vegetation in this area. The Goulburn Valley, about 98 per cent of the native veg, natural native veg, has been cleared.

We are in an irrigation area, probably one of the highly cleared areas in Victoria. Victoria being one of the most highly cleared states. We recognise that we are certainly a productive irrigation area. More important to protect what native vegetation is left than probably in other areas, we contend.

A bit on the Goulburn Valley Environment Group; we have been going since 1990, over 30 years. It started with pressure on salinity, salinity issues in the Goulburn Valley. We are all volunteers. All volunteers, we have an impressive collection of qualifications and experience within our membership, ranging from past directors of SPC Limited, Goulburn-Murray Water, Goulburn Broken Catchment Management. We have scientists, we have engineers, farmers, irrigators. All with a common link, and that is a passion for the environment and protecting what remnant of that we have here in the Goulburn Valley.

I think part of our issues is being able to represent the environment's point of view on all the committees and that that we are called on to take part in as Catchment Management Authority committees, local government committees, other government authorities, we try to represent the community's interest in the environment on these committees. It takes its toll; it is an enormous role to expect people to take. And I know we are not alone in this, there is a lot of other groups also called on, but it is a significant thing.

In our submission you will note – and I have passed around a pamphlet on threatened species, which is topical today. We have history in this area as a group, the Goulburn Valley Environment Group in 1994 received a grant to conduct a survey of flora and fauna in the Broken Creek system, which is an amazing system just north of Shepparton, up near Numurkah. It was to identify threatened plants in that area at that time. We got an amazing outcome from that, it was scientifically conducted, it also published a paper from that.

It led to the formation of the Broken-Boosey State Park in that area. So it had an immediate effect within years of being published and we are very proud of that role. More recently we had the opportunity to apply for funding to review those surveys, working from the base we had 20 years ago to now. And we received that funding and went ahead with a survey to re-survey - not all of it, we did not have the funding to do that – the most important sites. And the results were disturbing: 22 species had declined or disappeared in the last 20 years in spite of protection works and fencing, there had been a lot of work done because it was created, the state park, and not a lot of work done for many years, but initially there was. Only 18 of 54 threatened species had maintained or increased their numbers over that period of time.

And I think it is an indication of what you are hearing from other areas as well. We are putting a lot of effort in. We are putting a lot of effort in. We are not making a difference much at all, we are still going backwards in most areas. And I think this is the most – the recent report of the latest project and that is for your information.

Goulburn Valley Environment Group have a history of advocacy in campaigning. More recently we have been involved in the basin plan, heavily involved in that through the development stages and implementation stages. We are currently debating flow levels for the Goulburn River and we are heavily involved in that with the Victorian Government looking at setting summer flow limits on the Goulburn to protect it.

The problem is that the development has shifted downstream; there is a lot more water for irrigation being demanded downstream and, unfortunately, our Goulburn is being called to supply that. It is not much more than a delivery channel in summer when it should be low, sand bars should be exposed. The Red Gum National Parks, we played a major role in that, involved in the creation of the Red Gum National Parks in the Murray, Goulburn and Ovens Rivers.

We are currently involved in the removal of feral animals from the Barmah National Park. All feral animals are a problem up there. We see the brumbies as being the biggest issue at the moment. As a group we have been working with the community and governments on committees for over a decade on the issue. We have a report there now, we have recommendations; we are keen to just get on and do the job.

The native forest harvesting also is an area. We have close links to the Strathbogie Ranges and the groups over there and we have certainly played a role in that. The other issue, and it is a longstanding one and there is a lot of trees at risk, is the Shepparton Bypass. I will hand over to Lou and she will carry on the remainder of this opening presentation.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Thanks, John.

MS COSTA: John may have been apologising for me when he said some of us are angry. So I joined GVEG 25 years ago, so half my life ago, because of the bypass issue, so that is what spurred me on, I was inspired by that campaign and joined it with great gusto. And, to this day, still campaigning about road development and roadside reserve protection. So it is 25 years of trying to protect roadside reserves. Because in part they are some of the last remaining areas where big old trees exist in the landscape. So we can look across the landscape and we might see some scattered trees in paddocks and that sort of thing, but they are isolated trees and the lineal reserves that we drive past every day are some of the only trees left in the landscape with hollows, so habitat.

So I am not just representing GVEG, and we have quite a few members of GVEG, but I am also representing my family and, I guess, myself, because I can only speak for myself. I am not an ecologist, I am just an observer of the changes that have occurred over my lifetime. And I guess it is not just about campaigning, it is the work we do, and this is a commitment for life, it is the digging holes, it is the planting trees, it is the nest box construction and installation, it is the observation, the citizen science stuff that we do.

It is also – you know, my husband and I bought 100 acres of land just to put a conservation covenant on it because we feel that is something we can do, while all around us the landscape is disappearing at a rate of knots that we can see in real time. So we talk about an inquiry into ecosystem decline, which is why we are all here, but to me that is the definition of managed decline, the fact that we are here today doing this.

I mean in our opening statement we have had the biodiversity report, so that is already a few years old. We have had the State of Environment Report 2018, we have had the state-wide Assessment of Public Land discussion paper 2016, and the CSIRO Investigation 2012. How many times do we need to do this before we are going to take action? Because the next time we have an inquiry it will be about ecosystem loss, not ecosystem decline, because it is happening. It is happening in real time and we are seeing it with our own eyes.

I mean, I live in the bush and I have never seen a curlew. Have any of you ever seen a curlew? I mean, we have got this, it is fantastic, but it is a piece of paper. And the only people that I know that have seen a curlew are the CWA ladies who are in their 80s, in Rushworth, and they tell me that they used to be (indistinct). The regent honeyeater is on its way out, and its forest type is the Box-ironbark forest where I live and I have only ever seen one. And they are saying it is on the brink of extinction now, this amazing bird. And there is so many other species like that.

So if this is the definition of managed decline, managed decline is either irresponsible or incompetent, and that is the way I feel because I am seeing it happen. And I offered to back John up today because I stuck my hand up as a GVEG committee member to come along and I thought, 'Oh, yeah, I'll go along and support John'. But the more I have thought about coming today, the angrier I have become about the fact that we are even doing this, because while I am sitting here I could be out tree guarding, or I could be out filling rabbit holes, or I could be out trapping cats, because they are all the things that we do in real life ways that actually help the environment. And yet here we are again at another talkfest. I am not saying I do not appreciate it, because I do. I am just saying how much of this are we going to do before we take action?

And, as John said, it is all here. What we have got to do is all here. We have just got to support, better support, the people that are doing real things. And I spoke to the Landcare facilitator this morning and he is at the end of his tether, he knows other Landcare facilitators that are at the end of their tether because of the hoops they have to jump through just to get funding.

Now, Landcare is a recognised institution, a peak environmental group, if you like, that is out there doing work on the ground. They have to apply for funding every single year and it is weeks of their time just to apply for funding, and they might not even get it. And, if they do, they get a fraction of what they have asked for. So the frustration is coming out, as you can see. And there is ways that we can address this, and I think the only ways we can address it are by working together, identifying the issues and making the community, and society in general, more excited about the prospect of creating healthier environment.

Because until we do that we are going to have large scale depression, because there is people like us that are getting depressed. It is people like us that are wondering what our children's lives are going to be like and getting depressed about that. If we are talking about that issue, a healthy environment leads to healthier people,

it is natural, we are just part of the environment. And the healthier it is, the healthier we are. So that might do for me. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Until you have got a question. All right, thank you both very much. Dr Bach, you first.

DR BACH: Thanks, Chair. And thank you both for being with us today. I was really interested in your submission to read about fire and your views about the appropriate use of fire. Like you, I am really concerned about the impact of invasive weeds and other invasive species. You were talking about feral cats, and we have heard a lot about feral cats.

I am wondering if you might just briefly talk to us about the extent of the threat from invasive weeds in the Goulburn Valley, exactly what you see the potential role of ecological fire. We had a particular focus yesterday on fire. And then I note also that there have been blockers in the past, in your view, to the sort of approach that you advocate being taken up more broadly. I wonder also if you might give us your thoughts about why there are those blockages and what we may do to seek to remove them.

MS COSTA: Yes. So it is our understanding that a percentage of land has to be burnt each year, regardless of the type of forest. And I think Stuart just touched on that earlier, that forest types are different from Box-ironbark where I am. And, seriously, there is hardly any understorey. There is hardly any leaf litter on the ground. It is not like the mountain forests where you cannot walk through them. You can walk through the Box-ironbark forest and you will not trip over a stick, there is that little woody debris, there is that little leaf litter, and yet the Forest Fire Management Victoria, which sort of came out of bushfires, before that it was DELWP.

They are just burning a percentage regardless of whether it needs – regardless of the risk. So this is the issue. We are burning habitat, so we are removing habitat, and ecosystem decline is all about loss of habitat, let us not mistake that. It is all about loss of habitat. We are actually taking part in the removal of habitat through the controlled burn system that is not adequately assessing risks to the community. And as, it is in our report, the studies that have been done that you can refer to, to look at those different forest types and forest communities, that should be burnt and should not be burnt.

DR BACH: Yes.

MS COSTA: So in our situation they were burning during a time where ground dwelling animals were nesting.

DR BACH: Right. But when you talk about ecological burning, you are talking about a very different approach from the approach that currently is undertaken that you are now describing.

MS COSTA: Yes and no. So there is some ecological burning taking place in Box-ironbark forests at the moment. And, as I said, there is nothing really to burn. So anything they are burning is not – it is not coming back. So areas that had been burnt a few years ago where there was an abundance of diversity have not been restored. The evidence is there; they are just not coming back to their natural – is that the question you asked me?

MR PETTIGREW: Matthew, I think ecological burning is in its infancy in Victoria. We do not understand it fully. We fully support the Yorta Yorta moves on it, we work with them. In many ways they are getting their advice from further north where it has been more widely used. Stuart cast some doubts over just how widespread it was. And I think it is in its infancy here. We are learning. Unfortunately, it is being linked to public safety and fire risk, and the two should not be combined. They should not be combined. We need to work more closely with local communities. The Shepparton community could tell you exactly where their fire risks were coming from. And most communities are the same; they know which direction to look on a serious fire danger day.

The CHAIR: Just to follow up on your questions, I think – and to fill you in, because we heard yesterday from First Nations people about the use of fire on the landscape, and some of the themes that came out of that were the right fire in the right forest at the right time.

MR PETTIGREW: Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: So they are the sort of things I think you are speaking to, Matt, which is, you know, there is a time for burning, and there is not a time for burning, and you have got to look at the landscape and know the landscape.

MR PETTIGREW: Yes.

The CHAIR: So that is the sort of theme. So are you saying that you are not convinced about that? Or can you unpack that a bit for us?

MR PETTIGREW: No, no, I am convinced about it.

The CHAIR: Yes.

MR PETTIGREW: I am just saying that we are in our infancy in Victoria.

The CHAIR: Right, here. Yes.

MR PETTIGREW: I believe we are on a learning curve. The biggest threat, I think, to achieving that are targets.

MS COSTA: Prescriptions.

MR PETTIGREW: Mandatory targets that have to be burnt each year.

The CHAIR: Because it would seem to conflict with what we are talking about.

MR PETTIGREW: Yes. No, that is right. I do not disagree you need targets, you need objectives, but they can bring out the wrong results.

MS BATH: It is the right type of fire.

MR PETTIGREW: Yes, in the right place.

The CHAIR: Yes, the Traditional Owners did talk about asset protection as well. So there was an acknowledgment yesterday in a presentation we had that sometimes there is a need to look at that as well.

MR PETTIGREW: Yes.

The CHAIR: So I think it is, as you say, it is a complex picture, but learning a lot about it here in Victoria and we had a fantastic demonstration about that yesterday.

MR PETTIGREW: Okay.

The CHAIR: Did you have a supplementary —

DR BACH: No, simply to say that I was really interested by the link between fire.

The CHAIR: Yes.

DR BACH: Because, that is right, I am only learning, too, also of course, as you say we all are, about the potential greater role, appropriate role, of fire. But that linkage to weeds, which is also something we heard about yesterday and something which we have talked about at length as a committee and the need to be far better to control invasive weeds and the impact on ecosystem decline of invasive weeds.

MR PETTIGREW: Weeds are top of mind in most areas you go to. Personally, I think they are higher up the list, there is far more bigger threats. But we are not different to any other area, in fact we probably have a greater selection of weeds in an intensive irrigation area and area of development like this. But I think it is the ones we have not got yet, or are not established here, that are probably the bigger threat at the moment. We seem to manage with what we have.

DR BACH: All right, thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Hayes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, Chair. Yes, you mentioned frustration right at the beginning, and I pick up on that and share your frustration, too. But I think it is a very hard thing to get through to some of us that live in the city where things seem to be going very well and we talk about we are increasing our population while all the other species are in decline. And economically we think we could – we are even talking about doubling the human population over the next 20 or 30 years. And some government departments say we will meet our objectives environmentally even if we do that.

But they have not been meeting the objectives over the past 15 or 20 years anyway, so that worries me. And I just wanted to ask you, because you talk of frustration and you talk about representing communities doing heaps of hard work on committees, you have a history of advocacy on issues in the local area, many reports have been put out.

What do you find, when you are working on these committees and advocating, what do you find the major problem that you come up against in committee work that we do not seem to meet the objectives even though you have done all this work in the committees? And I am not saying there is some fault with what you are doing, I am just wondering, there must be something wrong with the process that does not lead to adequate conclusions.

MR PETTIGREW: I think it is a myriad of things here. One of the areas that limit our ability to take part on committees and have – you may have had a much broader representation sitting at this table today if people working in local government, in government authorities, had more freedom and could speak out. It is an issue. As a group we represent landholders who have not got – in their view do not have a voice in some issues. And it is because of peer pressure.

Peer pressure in local country communities is enormous, and if you have got a neighbour who has applied for a permit to knock out 50 trees to put in a travelling irrigator that is going to, in theory, create half a dozen jobs or something, if you are the neighbour it is very, very different to put in a planning objection and service that objection. We get called on to do all that.

Now, I do not think we will ever overcome that peer pressure, but we have to give people the ability to speak up, even if they are playing a role in a government authority, in council, in those areas. I think that is a limiting factor. We could get much better results. I think we have people who will not go on committees because they do not find them fulfilling, no outcomes. I have had to knock back the Murray-Darling Basin; they have been around looking for representatives to take part in community forums. I have had to say no, because our last experience was just too demoralising, and it is my job partly to protect members. Am I answering your question?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Sort of, yes. So it is often alternative points of view that are struck in the committees, or that the committees are not getting the right evidence from the right people?

MR PETTIGREW: I think it is every committee only goes so far. It is when you get to the boards of those authorities, it is a government appointed board.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Right.

MR PETTIGREW: They are dictated by the government policies on the day, the government (indistinct) of the day. So I was a past acting chair of the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

MR PETTIGREW: I spent six years on that authority. One of the reasons I did not apply again was it was too limiting, I could not speak. Could not speak. Could not speak out. I am a cleanskin now and I have no ties, no limiting, nothing limits my —

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes. So it is sort of attachment to government processes and then public servants who are reluctant to speak to, or?

MR PETTIGREW: Well, a lot of those authorities, to even put out a press release, have to go back through the departments to get virtually every word cleared, every word cleared. And it can take weeks.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

MR PETTIGREW: They are just tied up. It was not always the case.

MS COSTA: Can I expand? As an example, John's talking about people that are in compromised situations, so during – I am just going to use an example of a campaign, a campaign to protect roadside vegetation, so a VicRoads – anti VicRoads campaign. And we were embarking on this campaign not really knowing whether we were doing the right thing, because it is a big thing to take on an organisation like VicRoads. We started getting all these kind of little whisperings, little phone calls, little support, people saying they support us, from the background, so from the CMA, from DELWP, from VicRoads itself, saying, 'You're doing the right thing. Keep going. But don't use my name!'

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

MS COSTA: 'Keep going, you're heading in the right direction, but don't say that we said that.' So it ends up being people like us who are taking the burden of confronting a large organisation often – so it is either VicForests or VicRoads, often, who we are up against, so David and Goliath stuff. And we cannot call on the support of the CMA or DELWP in its entirety because they are part of government departments. So that is a burden for committee members and it is a big thing to take on. It is a big commitment.

And, for example, the Barmah National Park campaign, that was 10 years, almost to the day, that we launched the campaign, 10 years to declaration. That is a long time that you have to say, 'Okay, I am just going to do that for 10 years, and not much else', without the support of those government departments. But, at the same time, they are whispering in your ear saying, 'Yeah, keep going. Keep going!'

But you are not just going, you are coming into conflict with the opposition, so it is you in the firing line. It is Monica Morgan's face on a poster over the weekend of the Barmah Muster with a sign under it saying, 'This is the woman responsible for killing horses', her face. That is what we are up against in the media, in our communities, with our neighbours. So committees are hard work and—

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It is a huge cultural—

MS COSTA: It is absolutely, yes.

MR PETTIGREW: In all communities there is diverging opinions on most issues.

MS COSTA: GVEG is pretty good, though.

MR PETTIGREW: We are usually right.

The CHAIR: Dr Ratnam, question?

DR RATNAM: Certainly. Thank you so much, Chair. Thank you so much, John and Louise, for your incredible work over so many years and decades. Your submissions presented to us here today and that you have supplied to the committee as well, you have given us a very, very powerful account of how much of the burden of responsibility has fallen onto individuals and communities to do the work of protecting our planet and our biodiversity ecosystems, and that is been heard loud and clear. So thank you so much for that and your passion.

You talk about, in your submission, and today you have touched on the loss of native vegetation and the concerns you have about this, and the flaws with the current approach to managing this. I wonder if you could talk through your experience and what you would do to improve the approach to manage the loss of native vegetation and to stop the loss of native vegetation.

MR PETTIGREW: Perhaps I will start off. Samantha, we are happy with what we entered into our submission there.

DR RATNAM: Yes.

MR PETTIGREW: We believe that we need a state-wide body. At the moment it is piecemeal, it is certainly acting from a state policy level, but each council has to implement their interpretation to some degree. In the Goulburn Valley here we have been working closely with the Greater Shepparton Council on planning applications. We have had many objections that we think we have improved. Most of the planning issues that we have here is upgrades to irrigation systems and things like that.

But we think there is an argument for an overarching body over all those councils. Councils might be commissioned to play the role of administering it, but we need a uniform body over the top and we see that as one of the areas that we would be recommending. The community consultation, I think is critical. I am not satisfied that most of the areas that we were discussing we are pushing for really – really engage with the community in a fair and reasonable way. It is difficult. It is easy to criticise consultation. It is difficult. There is so many issues to be consulted on, and that is part of the problem. Do you want to add to that?

MS COSTA: Yes. We could even go so far as to suggest who that independent body might be, that is the Environment Protection Authority, which could be funded through the municipal and industrial landfill levy, which we know has got a good funding base behind it and it has some decent money to spend on the environment. And is supposed to be spending money on the environment.

And I will just use an example of when you rely on local government to try and manage these issues, I have just got the latest issue of the Campaspe Times here, which is my local government area, and they have got their budget just released, and the last priority in their budget is environment, and it gets 0.66 cents in \$100. Sixty-six cents for every \$100 is spent on environment, and that is the lowest priority on the list.

So that is what happens when you leave it in the hands of local government. I do not think it is their fault. I think that they have got a lot to manage, but I know for a fact that Campaspe Shire Council only has one environmental officer. They do not have an Environment Department. But they cover the Box-ironbark Forest. So that is what happens in local government.

If we look at this in a state-wide way, which is how we should be looking at it, I mean ecosystem decline is a Victorian issue, not a Campaspe Shire issue, then it needs to be managed with some grunt similar to the way that we have managed the COVID-19 pandemic, with a concerted effort, a focused effort, and take it seriously. We need to take this seriously because we cannot continue to ignore or deny this is happening without repercussions. And the repercussions are climate change.

MR PETTIGREW: Samantha, I do not think we can overlook funding and resources, it is probably the biggest issue here. Enforcement. Enforcement, councils have not got the ability or the will, often, to go in with enforcement. An independent body would overcome those sort of issues.

DR RATNAM: Thank you so much.

MS COSTA: And that would be funding made available for Landcare, the CMA, all of those areas of the community that should be more easily funded and allowed resources, Parks Victoria to look after our parks better. Our parks are criticised by the community because they are getting run down or the signs look old, and that sort of thing, but the broader community does not realise that the funding is being pulled from those areas all the time. So less and less funding, less people on the ground, the place is starting to look run down. The toilets are not clean, that kind of thing.

DR RATNAM: Thank you. Thank you, great.

The CHAIR: Now, we have two minutes left, so—

MS BATH: I will make a 25 second (indistinct words). Thank you. I am really interested to hear your very active work. Earlier on in the inquiry we had Wilderness Society Victorian members say that they have thousands of members but no direct active programs to do with pest and weed eradication. I am very pleased to hear about your feral cats trapping, about your trees, et cetera. But you mentioned Landcare, and I think Landcare volunteers are a very integral part and they often live and work and all of those things in the

community, and you mentioned some recommendations that you would like this committee to hear in terms of Landcare.

MR PETTIGREW: It gets back to funding. Funding again. I am sorry to come here and harp on money. But facilitation is critical to Landcare. Communities often do not have the capacity or the confidence to go ahead with grants, some of the grant applications are complicated. Some of the obligations that come with it are onerous. We need more facilitation in those areas. And it is good value for money because if you can get people like us out working for nothing—

MS BATH: You have got an army of volunteers.

MR PETTIGREW: Yes. No, it is a matter of empowering them.

MS COSTA: Yes and no. Once again, volunteer labour is becoming pretty thin on the ground.

MS BATH: Yes, yes.

MS COSTA: And I think that is because people just are not able to get excited about projects. We are not talking this up enough, we are not getting the community involved enough because the funding is just trickling in and the Landcare facilitators themselves are not excited because, oh, they wanted 10 grand but they got two, so they cannot do the project properly. And if they have not got enough money, well, it is only a small little project and how can you get the community involved and excited if it is no big deal, you know? So the volunteer issue, I think, is one that needs exploring. And because it is across the board, that is across the whole state.

MS BATH: Thank you.

MS COSTA: You are welcome.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for your presentation and your contribution to our work and the work of the committee today, it has been a real pleasure to have you. You have got a document you would like us to have? Yes.

MR PETTIGREW: For the parliamentary library.

The CHAIR: Yes.

MR PETTIGREW: It is a publication of history of the Goulburn Valley Environment Group.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, that is wonderful.

MR PETTIGREW: Celebrating our 25 years, yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for that. And I really appreciate you coming along today. And if we have any other questions for you we will submit them on notice. But, yes, thank you again for coming along.

MR PETTIGREW: Okay. Thanks.

WITNESSES WITHDREW.