

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



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

- Costal 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

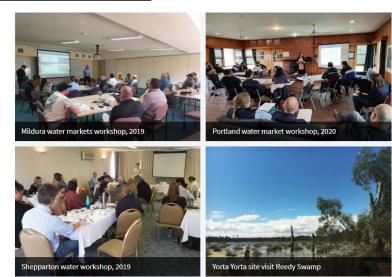
Engagement with Traditional Owners

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?



Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee.

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