



Expert Advisory Panel
Parliament House, Spring Street
East Melbourne
VIC 3002

Via Engage Victoria

30th June 2021

Dear Panellists,

Re: Review of the Victorian Wildlife Act 1975

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on an issue of great importance to our group's members.

Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc. is a community ENGO based in Healesville. We conduct field activities such as stag-watching, nest-box provision and placement, supplementary feeding and habitat regeneration and identification, as well as education and advocacy. Our group, whilst advocating primarily for Leadbeater's Possum, sees it as a "flagship" species. Decline in its habitat is decline in an entire ecosystem and affects all the other species that rely on the forest for survival, including listed threatened species such as the Greater Glider.

The Wildlife Act reflects archaic attitudes of the mid-20th Century and is no longer fit for purpose in 2021. In a time of global climate change and biodiversity loss, the primary objective of the revised act must be unambiguously the protection of native wildlife. It should pay particular attention to the protection of species of cultural significance to First Nations Peoples, such as Wallert (Leadbeater's Possum), a totem of the Taungurung.

There should be no clause allowing native wildlife to be "unprotected", such as the current S. 7A which in recent years was invoked by landholders to promote wombat shooting as a tourist attraction¹.

Nor should the shooting of native wildlife be permitted in the name of sport. The shooting of native ducks should be explicitly banned. Perversely, the current Sections 58 C, D & E protect duck hunters, not ducks!

It is inappropriate for a Victorian Wildlife Act to protect non-native animals such as deer, which have the potential to damage habitat on which native species depend.

¹ FLbP notes that the particular incident cited was not in a parish in which wombats were unprotected. We are not aware that the results of any inquiry have been made public. The principle remains.

A revised Wildlife Act should protect wildlife in native forests from the destruction of habitat by the logging industry. There need to be strong penalties and active enforcement to ensure the law is effective. Through its case in the Federal Court, Friends of Leadbeater's Possum -v- VicForests, our group has been "overwhelmingly successful" in showing that logging has been conducted in breach of Victorian legislation² but neither the Victorian government nor the Office of the Conservation Regulator has taken any action.

In order to ensure effective enforcement the revised Act should establish a truly independent, properly funded and empowered regulator which is not a segment of another government department, as the OCR is under DELWP.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S Meacher', written in a cursive style.

Steve Meacher
President

² VicForests v Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc (No 2) [2021] FCAFC 92 - The final outcome of the case remains subject to appeal but the findings relating to breaches of state law are not disturbed.