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Review of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988

To the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 is a key piece of legislation that should ensure that Victoria's biodiversity is preserved and allowed to flourish. It has been successful in helping to protect our species and ecosystems over the last 29 years, however there are still opportunities to strengthen some laws and improve the conservation effort in this State. This is especially important considering that Victoria is the most cleared, and consequently fragmented State or Territory in Australia. Some key recommendations to consider for the FFG Act:

1. There needs to be a greater emphasis on public-private partnerships in Victoria. Establishing landscape-scale conservation programs, fostering meta-populations and preserving genetic diversity can only be successfully completed through a network of public and private reserves. Increased collaboration between organizations such as Trust for Nature and Bush Heritage and the department would be highly beneficial. Recent examples of public-private partnerships between Bush Heritage, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and the Queensland Government, helping to conserve the Night Parrot in South-West Queensland are testament to the success of such programs at ensuring the survival of a threatened species. This would allow greater coordination of conservation efforts through the FFG Act.

2. With Melbourne's rapid urban expansion, there needs to be greater emphasis on protecting and retaining vegetation corridors through new suburban areas. The development of new wetlands in housing estates in previous years has been beneficial, and should be encouraged to continue. Where native vegetation is cleared, there needs to be stronger enforcement to ensure that relevant parties offset the loss adequately. There also needs to be some strengthening of existing laws in relation to land clearing, with adequate law enforcement discouraging landholders to illegally clear vegetation. This is particularly important for threatened communities. The protection of Green Wedges in the Greater Melbourne region should also be a priority.

3. The recent increase in fuel reduction burns across the State has been unnecessary in some locations, and has potentially affected threatened species and communities in what are designated protected areas. This has been particularly evident in remote Mallee parks in North-West Victoria, affecting species such as the Mallee Emu-Wren. Annual percentage area targets are not acceptable, and controlled burning should be restricted to areas adjacent to towns, cities and roads. There needs to be more consideration of controlled burning as a threatening process in remote, sensitive areas of public land.

4. Protection of private land should be encouraged through the removal of land tax on properties covenanted through Trust for Nature. This would allow landholders to invest more money in conservation efforts on their property, and lead to a greater number of covenants across the State. Other States such as New South Wales do not tax Conservation properties, and to ensure increased protection of biodiversity Victoria should aim to remove this unnecessary burden on landholders.

5. There needs to be greater emphasis on State-wide invasive species control through the FFG Act, with potential for greater coordination between public and private land at a State Government level. Although Local Governments do implement control programs, there is significant variation in adequacy of policy between Councils. An emphasis on landscape scale solutions together with local efforts would increase the success of controlling invasive species. Greater regulation of activities through the FFG Act, such as increased quarantine checks would be beneficial. Identifying invasive species hotspots (particularly for invasive

flora) and investment in technologies such as weed mapping would lead to more successful control programs.