

Newlands Friends of the Forests submission to:

The Independent Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act

June 2021

Who are we?

Newlands Friends of the Forests is an unincorporated civil society group of people living in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. The group formed from the necessity to defend our State forests from destruction, because of our love for their beauty and need for their value as habitat, water and oxygen supply and carbon storage. We are a dynamic and diverse growing community group of people who see the links between our biodiversity and our own lives here in Melbourne's North.

We hold events and highlight the importance of biodiversity and forest protection for native wildlife fresh air, water supply, safe climate, recreation - our life support system, particularly facing the wildlife extinction and climate emergencies affecting Melbourne.

Areas where State Government can improve the current Wildlife Act:

- 1) Remove protection of the exotic invasive species like deer and feral horses, which damage habitat of true wildlife, as well as farmland, across the State.
- 2) Pivot to protecting native wildlife, by reforming the non-transparent Authority to Control Wildlife permit system.
- 3) Increase penalties for those who commit an offence under the Act. The community has been disgusted at the mass killing of Wedgetailed Eagles, so leadership is required.
- 4) Re-classify native birds (ducks, other water birds and native quails, from game to wildlife, protecting them on public land from recreational shooters.
- 5) Directly protect wildlife habitat under the legislation. This would require withdrawing from Regional Forest Agreements, which over-ride legislative protection for rare and endangered species.

Victoria's Biodiversity

Victoria leads the world in mammalian species [extinction](#) (1), but during this [biodiversity collapse](#), lacks the ecologists to measure, and the conservation effort that could protect species (2). Past State Government's removal of the ecology staff results in Victoria's [biodiversity indicators](#) not being measured (3). The [United Nations](#) state that the climate emergency threatens biodiversity (4). Already threatened species in Victoria had further habitat destruction with the 2019/20 bushfires, in addition to their direct deaths (5). Ward's group (5) showed how these [mega fires](#) devastated species and forests and were exacerbated by the climate emergency. Horrifying estimates of the 3 billion bushfire-related wildlife deaths have recently been published by the [BBC](#). We must preserve what habitat is left for our iconic and endangered native wildlife. State Government can do this.

Adequacy of the legislative framework protecting Victoria's Wildlife

Victoria has the [Office of the Environmental Regulator](#) , which is incapable of compelling VicForests to operate within the law, recent court cases brought by volunteer activists have shown (6). Environmental groups are doing the Government's work by generating Court decisions forcing protection, but of course we lack the power to protect biodiversity and endangered species.

The Victorian Government has power to protect wildlife, particularly in State forests, but has vacated its responsibility by rolling over Regional Forest Agreements, which exempt State forest industrial logging from wildlife protection. This arrangement locks in biodiversity loss. We call for biodiversity and climate protection to be given precedence, and the Regional Forest Agreement cancelled. World-leading ecologists call for "more stringent protection" of forested lands, in response to the bushfires, climate and extinction emergencies (7).

Adequacy and effectiveness of government programs and funding protecting Victoria's Wildlife

Past Victorian Governments have stripped out the ecology and conservation workforce (2), and restoring these jobs and careers will be necessary to achieve protection and restoration of Victoria's wildlife. We oppose the State Government funding forest destruction. Current Victorian government funded programs are damaging wildlife habitat and making bushfires more likely. Victoria unfortunately leads the world in mammalian extinction, so we recommend urgent transition to safe renewable forestry and energy practices.

References

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3. Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, Government of Victoria (2018) State of the Environment 2018. www.ces.vic.gov.au/reports/state-environment-2018
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6. Cox L (2020) VicForests breached threatened species laws with central highlands logging, court rules. The Guardian published online [Federal Court](#)
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