

15 January 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Conservation
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

**BUSHWALKING VICTORIA (BWV) SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE
SENATE INQUIRY INTO EXTREME WEATHER AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on extreme weather and climate change.

BWV represents the common interests of over 70 Victorian bushwalking clubs, with in excess of 8,000 members. BWV also aims to proactively represent the interests of all recreational walkers in Victoria as well as walkers visiting from interstate and overseas. One of the common interests of BWV clubs and their members is the conservation of the ecosystems and natural landscapes through which they walk, so that they can enjoy the maximum variety of native flora and fauna and unspoilt scenery and ensure their preservation for future generations. Founded in 1934, BWV has a long history of active interest in conservation, including being one of a group of like-minded organizations pressing for legislation to create a comprehensive system of national parks in Victoria as early as the 1940s.

BWV has serious concerns about the effects of climate change on bushwalking in Victoria and throughout the nation and indeed the world. These effects will have serious outcomes for walker numbers, with flow on impacts on community prosperity, health and wellbeing. Issues of most patent impact are set out below.

Outcomes of increased global warming are expected to include very high daytime temperatures, and increased severity and frequency of bushfires and storms. These will deter bushwalkers from heading outdoors because of the danger of being caught in wildfires or weather likely to bring down trees and flood streams normally fordable. Walkers will also be deterred from venturing on hikes by temperatures likely to produce dehydration and heat stroke or by torrential rain. With increasing temperatures, they will also have to carry more water, and therefore more weight, particularly on extended walks, as water availability and quality cannot be assumed in conditions of increasing desiccation. These will further deter potential walkers from venturing out.

In its train, global warming will bring increased fragility of ecosystems, linked with declining faunal and floral populations which would normally represent attractions for bushwalkers. Ecological moonscapes are unlikely to attract walkers. Furthermore, a need

Bushwalking: At a natural pace in a natural place

may arise to curtail bushwalking in many areas to protect rising numbers of species endangered by growing desertification of their habitats.

The walking trails themselves will also suffer from the effects of extreme weather. More trees are likely to come down on established tracks, while with increased runoff of intermittent torrential rainwater from baked surfaces, landslides and severe gully and sheet erosion will wipe out significant lengths of track. These effects will not only create nightmares for authorities like Parks Victoria and DSE and the volunteers and contractors who work with them to restore damaged walkways, but again provide disincentives to walkers. There will also be similar effects on roads, with access to trailheads severely diminished.

All in all, the effects of extreme weather and climate change on the bushwalking community will be significant. As bushwalking contributes very considerably to community health, both physically and mentally, and to the local economies in the areas in which it takes place, a decline in that activity will have noticeable effects in the larger population, and must be considered a matter of national concern.

Accordingly we would urge the Inquiry to do everything in its power to mitigate the greenhouse gas pollution that is accelerating the natural warming cycle, so that the kinds of effect enumerated above will be minimised, with beneficial outcomes for both the environment and the community at large.

BWV trusts that you will take its concerns into account when deciding upon appropriate action.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Towers
President
Bushwalking Victoria