

Dear Senators,

Re: The effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this long-overdue inquiry.

For decades I have bushwalked in the mountains that surround where I live in Healesville, part of the Central Highlands of Victoria - and watched with increasing dismay as the biodiverse ecosystems within the tall mountain ash forests are destroyed systematically by clearfell logging.

It saddens me deeply to know that my 8 beautiful grandchildren will not have the opportunity to observe the native fauna that live here in their natural habitat, because that habitat is being systematically converted into single species monocultures that do not support the threatened species of native fauna that exist only within these forests.

I find it difficult to understand the cultural mindset of those who oversee this terrible destruction - the denial of peer reviewed science, the fire hazard exacerbated by the logging, the refusal to acknowledge the disastrous consequences of this monumental conversion for our biodiversity, climate, economy, health and well-being.

Loss of habitat is primarily caused by political decisions that deny reputable science and the reality that our economy resides within our environment. These forests are now worth far more to our Victorian and national economy as carbon sinks, because mature mountain ash trees are the most carbon dense on earth. Clearfelling them is absurd.

I quote from a recent article by Professor David Lindenmayer, internationally respected authority on native forests within South East Australia, who has spent almost four decades researching the forests within the Central Highlands.

“Clear-felling is the conventional form of logging in Mountain Ash forests. Under the Victorian Government’s Timber Release Plan, 412 coupes- or 17,640 ha of Mountain Ash – will be logged to 2016. This is out of around 38,000 ha of 1939-regrowth-aged Mountain Ash forest that is available for logging.

Clear-felled areas do not support viable populations of large old trees. These trees are typically destroyed in logging operations or, if retained, they die or collapse soon after logging. Logging areas therefore do not support habitat for Leadbeater’s Possum.” ... and

“Public natural resources should always be managed for the maximum public benefit. The current loss-making approach clearly fails where an alternative carbon value approach can succeed.

The future pathways are clear in Victoria. We can choose a 1950s pathway: clear fell forests in ways that lose large amounts of money, degrade the forest, erode water catchment yields, increase fire risks, and drive the state’s faunal emblem to extinction.

Or we can reform (and significantly reduce) the loss-making pulpwood and timber industries, capitalise on the massive financial values of maintaining carbon in these forests, improve the

water catchment values for Melbourne and protect the globally endangered Leadbeater's Possum.

If Leadbeater's Possum goes extinct, it will not be because we did not have the science. It will be because we chose the wrong path."

With almost 50 percent of available 1939 regrowth Mountain Ash forest scheduled to be logged between now and 2016 - and with less than one percent of old growth forests remaining in the Central Highlands, it is clear that the Victorian Government agency, VicForests, is driving this disaster.

Therefore it is the responsibility of our federal government to step in without delay and put a stop to the insanity that makes no economic or environmental sense - and is morally bankrupt.

I can only hope that this Senate Inquiry will result in genuine, positive and timely action to reverse the rapid downward spiral of habitat protection, for the sake of my grandchildren and their children - and for the biodiversity that supports all life on earth, including humanity.

Thank you,

Lorraine Leach