

JOINT STATEMENT

SAVE THE BUSH: VICTORIA'S WEAKENED LAND CLEARANCE LAWS THREATEN THE STATE'S SUSTAINABILITY & BIODIVERSITY



This joint statement has been signed by 105 ecologists and scientists alarmed by the impacts of Victoria's Native Vegetation Reforms.

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As ecologists, scientific experts, industry groups and community-based environment groups, representing thousands of Victorians, we are alarmed at the State Government's dilution of Victoria's native vegetation policy and are concerned that they will lead to increased land clearing

We value, care for and conserve the various habitats across the state and expect to see our government doing the same. We want to see native vegetation policy in Victoria strengthened, not weakened.

The new native vegetation policy significantly weakens the protections for habitat, threatening the state's biodiversity and sustainability. Additionally, it compromises the value of native vegetation for landscape stability and amenity.

This comes on top of pressures from both urban and regional growth as well as agricultural intensification and fire management, which are currently impacting on the vegetation remaining on freehold land across the State. None of these issues were duly considered in developing the reforms. Furthermore, there are increasing pressures on vegetation within public land, such as the large-scale clearing of large old trees along fire trails.

We have the sad legacy of being the most cleared state in Australia. This includes 80% of the original native vegetation cover on private land¹ with a corresponding loss of biodiversity leading to a high proportion of threatened species².

Native vegetation not only provides a home to wildlife, it provides a safety net for all of us. A 2002 study for the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council³ found that native vegetation in Australia provides approximately \$1 trillion per year in value for preventing land degradation, and providing basic services like pollination and tourism value.

State and federal governments spend tens of millions of dollars a year on restoration and habitat protection supported by the community through Landcare and other regional networks. Tree-planting and habitat restoration is important, but must be done in conjunction with protecting remnant bushland – for both ecological and economic reasons. Reducing or stopping clearing is the best strategy we have and native vegetation regulation is an efficient way to do this. Native vegetation regulation was estimated to cost the Victorian economy \$41 million per annum⁴, this being significantly less than the amounts spent on land restoration.

Despite receiving over 200 submissions to the draft

Consultation Paper for the Native Vegetation Reforms, of which the vast majority (approx. 80%) expressed concern at the proposed reforms, these concerns were disregarded and Victoria's native vegetation permitted clearing regulations released without further opportunity for comment.

The reforms will create a new system where we will see:

- A cash for clearing approach, where in almost all cases, permits will be granted provided an offsetting fee is paid.
- Flawed maps for decision making based on biased and inadequate data and irresponsible assumptions.
- Nature losing its safety net, formerly provided by on-site expert assessments – how do you know what's there if you don't look?

WE CALL ON THE MINISTER AND PREMIER TO:

- Move on from this flawed native vegetation policy and develop new standalone legislation that will truly ensure Victoria's unique natural values will be conserved on private land.
- Make sure that decisions to clear native vegetation are based on the actual vegetation on the site, rather than flawed mapping. If mapping is to be used to help decision makers, then make sure it accurately reflects habitat values.
- Set a vision for biodiversity and native vegetation across the state. This will address the gaping hole in current policy to guide subordinate policy of this kind.
- Make the Victorian Government and public land managers subject to the same rules as private land.
- Provide better planning support upfront to ensure that native vegetation is considered and large-scale clearing is avoided. For example, when state government decisions are being made about urban and regional land use and growth.
- Provide upfront guidance for land managers who are seeking to intensify their agricultural production to ensure that native vegetation is considered upfront in their planning.
- Support local government efforts to strengthen their local planning schemes, undertake compliance and enforcement and better administer any native vegetation policy that falls within their primary responsibility.

REFERENCES

1. Department of Sustainability and Environment (2008) Native vegetation net gain accounting first approximation report. State of Victoria, Melbourne.
2. Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (2010) Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation Discussion Paper, VEAC, East Melbourne.
3. Possingham H, Ryan S, Baxter J and Morton S (2002) Setting Biodiversity Priorities: a paper prepared as part of the activities of the working group producing the report Sustaining our Natural Systems and Biodiversity for the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council.
4. Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (2009) A Sustainable Future for Victoria: Getting Environmental Regulation Right Final Report, VCEC, Melbourne.

WE'VE SIGNED THIS STATEMENT: ECOLOGICAL EXPERTS & SCIENTISTS

- **Ian Wheatland**, Botanist and Ecologist
- **Dr Matthew Wood**, Ecologist
- **Dylan Osler**, Botanist
- **Christine Connelly**, PhD Candidate, (Wildlife Ecology)
- **Mathew Hardy**, PhD Candidate, (Biodiversity Conservation)
- **Professor Roger Jones**, Strategic Economist
- **Gabrielle Graham**, Ecologist
- **Dr Naomi Davis**, Ecologist
- **Jake Urlus**, Zoologist/ecologist
- **Austin O'Malley**, Ecologist
- **Karl Just**, Ecologist/botanist
- **Peter Gannon**, Ecologist
- **Robyn Giles**, Botanist
- **Dr Yung En Chee**, Quantitative Ecologist
- **Kate Bennetts**, Botanist
- **Ruth Marr**, Ecologist
- **John Aberton**, Ecologist, retired
- **Sue Ablitt**, Botanist
- **Ben Roberts**, Ecologist
- **Alice Ewing**, Zoologist, Ecologist
- **Justin Pegg**, Ecologist
- **Lincoln Kern**, Ecologist
- **Will Parker**, Ecologist
- **Michelle Savona**, Ecologist
- **Zoe Jellie**, Botanist
- **Mark Trengove**, Ecologist
- **Ian Davidson**, Independent Wildlife Biologist
- **Damien Cook**, Ecologist
- **Shannon Dwyer**, Ecologist, Botanist
- **Brian Bainbridge**, Ecological Restoration Planner
- **John Kershaw**, Botanist
- **Dr Jeff Yugovic**, Biologist
- **Shannon Braun**, Honours Student (Landscape Ecology)
- **Andrew Stephens**, Ecologist
- **Michael Fendley**, Ecologist
- **Louise Rodda**, Botanist
- **Sarah Maclagan**, PhD Candidate (Zoology)
- **Dr Euan Ritchie**, Ecologist
- **Dr Christopher Ives**, Ecologist
- **Yasmin Kelsall**, Ecologist
- **Pia Lentini**, Applied Ecologist
- **Connie Warren**, Honours Student (Ecology)
- **Bernie Fox**, Private Landscape Restorer
- **Kasun Ekanayake**, PhD Candidate (Environmental Science)
- **Kim Downs**, Zoologist
- **Luke Johnson**, Ecologist
- **Evelyn Chia**, PhD Candidate (Ecology)
- **Dr Fiona Coates**, Plant Ecologist
- **Stephen Mueck**, Botanist
- **Tamara Leitch**, Ecologist
- **Greg James**, Botanist
- **Doug Frood**, Botanical Ecologist
- **Fiona Sutton**, Botanist
- **Katherine Whittaker**, Ecologist
- **Marty Gent**, Coastal and Climate Adaptation Specialist
- **Shannon Braun**, Honours Student (Ecology)
- **Chris Lindorff**, Ecologist
- **Natasha Robinson**, PhD candidate (Fire Ecology)
- **Brett McDonald**, Ecologist
- **Bianca Aquilina**, Ecologist
- **Laetitia Kernaleguen**, PhD Candidate (Environmental Science)
- **Luke Hynes**, Ecologist
- **Jane Currie**, Ecologist
- **Maria Cardoso**, Ecologist
- **Edwin Adamson**, Landscape restorer and ecologist
- **Adam Rigg**, Ecologist
- **Melanie Conomikes**, Ecologist
- **Katherine Smedley**, Ecologist
- **Blair Luxmoore BSc**, Ecologist
- **Joab Wilson**, PhD Candidate (Ecology)
- **Elycia Creasey**, Student (Conservation and Land Management)
- **Coral Miller**, Ecologist
- **Daniel Brindley**, Bushland Restorer and Ecologist
- **Paul Foreman**, Ecologist and Botanist
- **Dr Mick Aberton**, Ecologist
- **Annette Aboltins**, Zoologist
- **Matt Aquilina**, Ecologist
- **Lisa Crowfoot**, Botanist
- **Nicola Barnes**, Botanist
- **Michael Cincotta**, Biodiversity Coordinator
- **Shona Arber**, Botanist
- **Dr Melanie Birtchnell**, Ecologist
- **Shannon LeBel**, Botanist
- **Marc Freestone**, Botanist
- **Deborah Thomas**, River and Wetland Ecologist
- **Tanya Loos**, Biodiversity Conservation Facilitator
- **Jason Sonneman**, Ecologist
- **Aldo Penbrook**, Independent Vegetation Assessor
- **Dr Kylie Annett**, Ecologist, Wildlife Biologist
- **Mark Stockdale**, Ecologist
- **Sarah Bekessy**, Ecologist
- **James Kidman**, Ecologist
- **Bronwyn Teesdale**, Ecologist and Restoration Specialist
- **Nic McCaffrey**, Ecologist
- **Jessie Szigethy-Gyula**, Botanist
- **Cassie Wright**, Ecological Facilitator
- **Madeleine Yewers**, PhD Candidate (Evolutionary Biology)
- **Dr Cindy Hauser**, Environmental Scientist.
- **Brett Murphy**, Researcher (Fire Ecology)
- **Bonnie Wintle**, Quantitative Ecologist
- **Cassia Read**, Ecologist
- **Dr Jane Catford**, Plant Ecologist
- **Gregor Sanders**, Researcher (Ecosystem Science)
- **Thomas Fairman**, PhD Candidate (Forest Ecosystem Science)
- **Alison Oates**, Ecologist

WE'VE SIGNED THIS STATEMENT: CONSERVATION & COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Andersons Creek Catchment Area Landcare Group
- Apollo Bay Landcare Group
- Australian Native Plants Society (Australia)
- Australian Plants Society Victoria Inc
- Australian Plants Society, Grampians Group
- Australian Wildlife Protection Council Inc
- Balcombe Estuary Reserves Group Mount Martha Inc
- Ballarat Field Naturalists
- Bendigo and District Environment Council
- Birdlife Australia
- Black Range Landcare Group
- Bunyip Landcare Group
- Cardinia Catchment Landcare
- Central Highlands Action Group
- Environment Defenders Office
- Environment East Gippsland
- Environment South East Alliance
- Environment Victoria
- Environmental Farmers Network
- Friends of Banyule
- Friends of Box Ironbark Forests
- Friends of Eastern Otways
- Friends of Edgars Creek
- Friends of Glenfern Valley Bushlands
- Friends of Merri Creek
- Friends of Sassafras Creek
- Friends of the Grampians Gariwerd
- Friends of the Inverleigh Flora and Fauna Reserve
- Friends of the Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve
- Friends of Warrandyte State Park
- Friends of Wyperfeld National Park
- Geelong Environment Council
- Geelong Field Naturalists Club
- Gippsland Environment Group Inc
- Green Wedges Coalition
- Hamilton Field Naturalists Club
- Healesville Environment Watch Inc
- Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association
- Jackson's Creek EcoNetwork
- John's Hill Landcare Group
- Jumping Creek Catchment Landcare Group
- Kingston Conservation and Environment Coalition
- Kowree Farm Tree Group
- Lawyers for Forests Inc
- Montrose Environmental Group Inc
- National Trust
- Nepean Conservation Group Inc
- Otway Conservation Council
- Peninsula Field Naturalists Club
- Peninsula Speaks Inc
- Phillip Island Conservation Society Inc
- Pinkerton Landcare and Environment Group
- Port Campbell Community Group Inc.
- Southern Brown Bandicoot Regional Recovery Group
- Southern Dandenongs Landcare Group
- Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association
- Southern Ranges Environment Alliance
- St Arnaud Field Nats
- The Wilderness Society
- Toomuc Landcare
- Victorian Field Naturalists Victoria
- Victorian National Parks Association
- Warringal Conservation Society
- Werribee River Association
- Western Melbourne Catchments Network
- Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council
- Wombat Forestcare
- Wonga Park Environment Group
- Yarra Ranges Landcare Network
- Yarra Riverkeeper Association

