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Land Project Director  
& Biodiversity White Paper Project Team  
Department of Sustainability & Environment  
PO Box 500  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Sir or Madam

**Re: Land & Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change**

Please find attached a joint submission from ANGAIR Inc., Friends of Eastern Otways and the Surf Coast Shire Flora and Fauna Action Unit in response to the call for submissions in relation to the development of a White Paper on land and biodiversity by the Victorian Government.

Sincerely

Joyce Wright  
Hon. Secretary



Secretary  
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29 May 2007

Project Director  
Land & Biodiversity White Paper Project Team  
Department of Sustainability & Environment  
PO Box 500  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Sir or Madam

**Re: Land & Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change**

The Friends of Eastern Otways (Great Otway National Park) Inc., ANGAIR Inc & the Flora and Fauna Action Unit of the Surf Coast Shire congratulate the State Government on taking the initiative to look at the environmental, social and economic values provided by healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the impacts of climate change on their value.

We base our submission on the fact that so much of Victoria's native vegetation has been lost to housing and commercial development, grazing, agriculture and mining, that what remains can only be regarded as remnant vegetation. Special efforts are therefore required to manage and conserve the integrity, biodiversity and conservation values of the existing flora and fauna.

We recommend that the following issues be addressed as threats to this biodiversity:

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**Issue 1 FRAGMENTATION OF NATIVE VEGETATION & PROTECTION OF  
ROADSIDES**

The continual fragmentation of native vegetation caused by clearing to make way for development is destroying plant communities and reducing habitat and increasing the threat of extinction of our native fauna species. Additional fragmentation has occurred recently by the Government's initiative to provide extensive firebreak clearing around townships and also further afield including the Otways. There is a real problem how to deal with increased fire risks and the effects that this will have

on biodiversity. Roadsides are often the only sites of remnant indigenous vegetation e.g. orchids and other rare species.

**Recommendations: -**

That the Government explores avenues to protect and restore native vegetation on private land, rehabilitating degraded bushland and providing more extensive corridors to foster flora and fauna biodiversity.

That the Government supports Preservation Covenants on private land – providing grants to agencies that carry out this work and reducing land and local taxes on these parcels of land.

That the Government considers opportunities to buy back land of high environmental value, upgrade it where necessary, and return it to public ownership.

That indigenous vegetation should be protected on roadsides – fencing, appropriate signage, and barriers should be installed to prevent environmental damage.

That any removal of indigenous vegetation on public or private land be kept to an absolute minimum.

That firebreak clearing as currently being carried out on both public and private land in the Otways should only occur following extensive biodiversity assessments and consultation with the public and local conservationists.

**Issue 2 PRESERVATION OF HEALTHY SOIL**

Clearing of vegetation also results in greater run-off of water, erosion and increased salinity. Each of these issues needs to be addressed when considering any vegetation removal. Weed invasion into natural bushland also occurs as a result of vegetation clearing. Invasion by escaped garden plants increases nutrition levels (eutrophication) in the soil.

**Recommendations: -**

That clearing of indigenous vegetation on both private and public land be kept to an absolute minimum.

**Issue 3 WEED INVASION**

Weed invasions pose the greatest threat to the survival of indigenous flora and fauna in our area. We are continually striving to prevent the spread of environmental weeds, and we are anxious to see significant outcomes from this paper to control

environmental weeds in our national parks, reserves, and also within our residential communities. Particularly in this time of drought, the impact of stronger introduced species is having a marked effect on our smaller, more delicate indigenous species. The beauty of the Great Ocean Road, the most visited and scenic route in Australia, is certainly marred by the corridor of environmental weeds through which it passes.

**Recommendations: -**

That additional finance should be made available to the responsible agencies for weed control eg Vic Roads, Parks Victoria, so that a real effort can be made to remove environmental weeds from along roadsides and from within our parks and reserves. The agencies need to work more cooperatively together in weed control. Perhaps there should be one basket of funds for weed control that all agencies could access. Alternatively weed management should be independent of land tenure.

That environmental weeds on roadsides maintained by Vic Roads or Parks Victoria be targeted so that seeds do not spread into adjoining reserves, bushland or private properties. Weed management should not just focus on noxious weeds and those identified by the Catchment Authorities, but should include all species that are non-indigenous.

That additional finance should be made available for weed invasion following fuel reduction burns, ecological burns, and bushfires. Volunteers can help but a real and substantial commitment should be made by the Government. Large areas that have been burnt in the Anglesea district this year will require major funds once regeneration occurs.

That local councils should be expected to provide residents with information regarding environmental weeds that is relevant to their area. Councils should then be expected to have and enforce by-laws that prevent the sale, propagation and planting of these species, and residents should also be encouraged, perhaps through an incentive program, to gradually remove these declared species from their properties.

That local councils should be expected to have as their aim that there will be no declared environmental weeds growing in any council reserves or along council maintained roadsides and suburban nature strips. Additional finance should be provided by the State Government to enable local councils to undertake systematic weed removal of this kind.

That additional finance be made to the Catchment Management Authorities to ensure that initiatives such as the Community Involvement Program implemented by the Corangamite Catchment Authority continues to function effectively. This program enables Conservation Volunteers Australia to support community conservation groups in their efforts to control environmental weeds

#### **Issue 4 CONTROL OF *Phytophthora cinnamomi***

This disease is of major concern in our area where so many of our grass-trees have been lost with many other plant species also being affected. The fact that the spread of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* from infected sites into parks or reserves, including roadsides, under the control of a state or local government authority has been listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act as a potentially threatening process emphasises the importance of the control of this pathogen.

Under the current drought conditions the spread of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* has been retarded but once the rains come it is certain to become active once more.

#### **Recommendations: -**

That the Government follows the recommendations already published by Dr G Weste, Dr B Wilson et al.

That the Government funds research to determine why certain species can tolerate the pathogen and to extend research generally.

That land managers and the public are kept informed of any positive results in the treatment of the pathogen.

That the Government does everything possible to educate agencies and to ensure that effective measures of hygiene are taken at all times when roads or tracks are constructed or repaired.

That the public is educated to take precautionary measures eg advice on keeping to tracks in infected areas, cleaning shoes after walking in an infected area.

## **Issue 5 PROTECTION OF NATIVE FAUNA & CONTROL OF FERAL AND DOMESTIC ANIMALS**

With a third of the State's wildlife either extinct or threatened it is high time that the State Government took action to protect our indigenous fauna and to control feral animals.

### **Recommendations: -**

That habitat of threatened species eg Hooded Plover be fully protected – fenced and off limits for people and dogs.

That speed limit restrictions be placed on roads where there are large numbers of road kills – eg extending the 80kph section on the Anglesea Road towards Bellbrae.

That relocation of koalas be carried out from over populated areas, eg Grey River area. There are alternative sites such as Moggs Creek and Distillery Creek picnic grounds where there is appropriate habitat and where tourists would love to see these animals. Additional funding and importance should be given to this program.

That wildlife care shelters should be funded by the Government with decisions being made on appropriate telephone information signs that will result in action when used by the public.

That control of feral animal programs be strengthened. We would like to see the East Gippsland 'Southern Ark' program – the large-scale fox control initiative extended throughout the State, involving the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria, local communities and other government agencies in the regions.

## **Issue 6 NON-IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL, STATE & FEDERAL REGULATIONS**

The Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act, the Environmental Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act, the National Parks Act, the Code of Practice for Fire Management on Public Land, as well as local regulations should provide full protection for threatened flora and fauna.

### **Recommendation: -**

That the Government ensures that the requirements of these Acts are met at all times, and that Local Government is encouraged to ensure that any local regulation, eg non-planting of declared environmental weeds, is enforced.

## **Issue 7 MANAGEMENT OF NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES**

There is a complexity of management between management of Great Otway National Park and the Otway Forest Park. The stewardship agreement that has been documented should assist in communication between the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria and we certainly hope that this will occur. Management of land becomes even more complex when Local Shires and other statutory authorities such as the Great Ocean Road Coastal Committee are considered. The management of our national parks and reserves is obviously hampered by lack of personnel and limited financial resources.

### **Recommendations: -**

That the Department of Sustainability and Environment & Parks Victoria use the same database and IT equipment – it should also be compatible with that of the Local Government to enable communication to occur more freely.

That relieving staff be appointed to cover any rangers or field staff on extended leave so that day to day management of parks and reserves can function effectively.

That more comprehensive enforcement is implemented to ensure that trail-bike riders, mountain bike riders and horse-riders remain on formal tracks at all times and do not damage the environment by riding off track.

That more finance should be made available to upgrade 4WD tracks that are in need of maintenance. There are currently safety issues as well as environmental damage (including the possible spread of *Phytophthora cinnamomi*) caused as drivers deviate around eroded sections of the tracks.

## **Issue 8 PRESSURES FACING COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS**

Publicity via the media as well as increased coastal populations is placing very high pressures on the coastal ecosystems. There is very little infrastructure to cope with increased numbers of visitors to the area, and the dunes and roadsides are used as toilets with resultant trampling of delicate dune vegetation and fouling of the environment.

### **Recommendations: -**

That the State Government provides funds to install and maintain public toilets at appropriate places along the coast.

That the State Government uses the lease money from developments on coastal crown land eg Erskine House, Lorne, for the conservation and protection of biodiversity values of the coastal crown reserves in that area.

#### **Issue 9 APPROPRIATE BURNING REGIMES**

Burning regimes as well as being used as fuel reduction measures should also be considered as ecological burns to enhance biodiversity.

#### **Recommendations: -**

That consideration be given to enhancing biodiversity when controlled burns are implemented eg fire frequency, timing of burns in specific areas.

That needs of indigenous fauna be addressed when implementing controlled burns eg nesting time of birds, habitat of powerful owls and other rare species.

#### **Issue 10 INADEQUATE FUNDING TO PROVIDE APPROPRIATE RESOURCES AND A POWERFUL WORKFORCE**

The successful implementation of any aspect of the provision of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity depends upon the State Government providing the necessary finance.

#### **Recommendation: -**

That the State Government recognises the importance of Victoria's flora and fauna biodiversity, and provides the necessary funds to manage and conserve the integrity, biodiversity and conservation values of our existing flora and fauna.

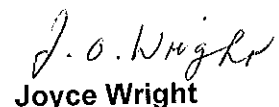
#### **CLIMATE CHANGE**

We agree that in this time when Victoria faces a changing and unpredictable future climate that it is essential that all Victorians and agencies develop an approach to deal with the impact of climate change on our ecosystems. We are looking for leadership and action from our elected Government.



**Margaret MacDonald**

Hon. Secretary Friends Eastern Otways (Great Otway National Park) Inc  
Chairperson Surf Coast Shire Flora & Fauna Action Unit



**Joyce Wright**

Hon. Secretary ANGAIR Inc