



BUSH HERITAGE AUSTRALIA

29 June 2007

PROJECT DIRECTOR, LAND & BIODIVERSITY WHITE PAPER PROJECT TEAM
DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT
PO BOX 500
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

Dear Sir/madam,

RE: Submission to Land and Biodiversity White Paper

Introduction

I would firstly like to thank the Victorian Government for initiating the Land and Biodiversity White Paper process and for the opportunity to contribute towards helping to conserve Victoria's fundamental biodiversity values. We look forward to future participation in the process and seeing it deliver tangible outcomes as soon as possible.

Note that Bush Heritage Australia has also contributed to the consultation phase of the process as part of the Victoria Naturally alliance with seven other peak environment groups and wholeheartedly endorse the views and recommendations contained in this excellent submission.

Bush Heritage has been interested in Victorian biodiversity conservation for sometime and has been actively working in the State for many years and intends to continue building engagement and activities. For instance:

- The national office has been recently relocated from Hobart in Tasmania to Melbourne;
- Many of our supporters are located in Melbourne and regional parts of the State;
- One of our five national focal regions (for acquisitions and other conservation activities) is the South East Grassy Box Woodlands which incorporates much of western, central and northern Victoria. Victoria is a national priority for us;
- We have only in recent weeks concluded the purchase of the third stage of our expanding private conservation reserve in north central Victoria – Nardoo Hills, north of Wedderburn and actively part of the local Conservation Management Network;
- We are engaged with other groups such as Trust for Nature (Victoria) in a collaborative project to help conserve Red-tailed Black Cockatoo habitat in Victoria's south west using funds raised by the sale of Karak number plates during the Commonwealth Games.

Biodiversity Crisis in Victoria

Rather than reiterate all points raised in the Victoria Naturally submission, I'd like to make a few key points on our particular specialization of private land conservation, in particular conservation management. However, having said that I would like to stress the point that Victoria really is facing a critical biodiversity crisis. In terms of land clearing and the net impact of post-settlement land use, Victoria is the most impacted State. In other States, notably Queensland and Western Australia, land

clearing was substantially slowed down before virtually all of the arable landscapes were substantially converted to agriculture and other industrial land use (as was the case in Victoria). As much of this clearing has happened in only recent decades in these other States (since the 1980's and 1990's) there is still great potential for recovering biodiversity value over substantial areas with appropriate action and investment. In a sense Victoria has gone further down this clearing track than any other State or territory and is a "guinea pig" in terms of the impact of this experiment on the landscape itself as well as the health and wellbeing of the community. The Victoria Naturally submission well summarizes the damage legacy our land use history has inflicted to date, but the future is very unclear, especially in a time when climate change is predicted to only exacerbate our current problems. We agree that the Green Paper needs to more accurately reflect the reality and severity of the crisis we face and the urgency of the need for it to be addressed in accordance with the *precautionary principle*. Whilst Victoria is currently economically prosperous, there is ample evidence that this is being limited now by biodiversity degradation and will undermine that of future generations.

No less than the future of the State is on the line with this biodiversity crisis – a point that needs to be stressed with the Victorian community through this White Paper process.

Private Land conservation and Bush Heritage – the strength of partnership

Bush Heritage is a national leader in the private land conservation sector and is demonstrable proof of the enormous potential offered by collaborative non-government organizations in efficiently and effectively delivering conservation outcomes. Bush Heritage's primary models - strategic acquisition and co-management of high value conservation land – are built around partnerships with a whole range of government and non-government organizations such as the Commonwealth, all State governments, plus the pastoral sector, philanthropic foundations, Traditional Owners, the mining sector, research institutes etc. The Gondwana-link partnership in South West Western Australia is an example of the kind of successful approach Victoria is already experimenting with via the Habitat 141 project and Conservation Management Networks throughout the State – notably in East Gippsland and North Central Victoria. Further resourcing and scaling up these demonstrably effective multi-tenure, multi-tool (acquisition being only one of many tools) models should be a key element in the solution to the State's biodiversity crisis.

Broad-scale conservation programs in complex and highly populated landscapes are obviously one of the priorities for biodiversity conservation, but are enormously challenging and one of the reasons why success has been limited to date. The partnership approach such as that modeled on Gondwana-link represents a demonstrable solution that government can and should foster in a more indirect.

One of the great strengths of this partnership approach to conservation is the potential for leveraging resources and funding to build much bigger outcomes than would otherwise be possible for groups (including Government) working in isolation. The Commonwealth's National Reserve System (NRS) program has proven to be highly effective for leveraging private and philanthropic investment and delivering consistently high quality conservation outcomes that fulfill government policy. Victoria has itself greatly benefited from the NRS program in the last two decades, but with further, matching investment and greater partnership building with the private sector, the sky is the limit.

Delivering outcomes through these multi-tenure, largely privately-owned networks built on incentives rather than regulatory and punitive measures, not only largely relieves the grantor (often the government) of funds from the burden of on-going management responsibilities, but management is also likely to be much easier and more effective because the reserves are not publicly owned and the land owners are largely encouraged to do the right thing rather than punished for doing the wrong thing. (Although having said that, appropriate environmental regulation such as under the Victorian Planning Provisions must be maintained and strengthened as recommended in the Victoria Naturally submission).

Structured as Market Based Instruments, these incentives have already proved to be successful and could be readily scaled-up with every likelihood of broader success. Programs such as Bushtender, Revolving Funds (such as than run by Trust for Nature (Victoria)) and Biobanking etc. are all examples that should be seriously considered for ramping up through this White Paper process. These and other

models would greatly enhance the level of private land conservation in Victoria and significantly contribute to improving biodiversity conservation with minimal (and often one-off) public investment.

Conclusion and invitation to further assist

We would be happy to engage in further discussions or provide access to further information on our successful partnership activities elsewhere in the country to provide options that could be constructively included in the White Paper process in the Victorian context.

Despite the degrading legacy of land use history on Victoria's biodiversity, there is much to be optimistic and hopeful about. The remaining biodiversity values are unique and extremely valuable and Bush Heritage is very excited about the potential for collaborating further with Victorian organizations and community to help turn the Victoria's biodiversity crisis around and ensure Victoria remains the beautiful, healthy and livable place that is today.

We'd be happy to elaborate on any aspect of this submission as requested.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Foreman

Conservation Program Unit Manager.

Bush Heritage Australia ABN 78 053 639 116

Office Level 5, 395 Collins St Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia Mail PO Box 329 Flinders Lane Melbourne VIC 8009

T +61 3 8610 9100 F +61 3 8610 9199 E info@bushheritage.org.au W www.bushheritage.org.au

100% recycled paper