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21/06/2007 08:59 PM

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Subject Submission to land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate
Change White Paper

Submission attached.

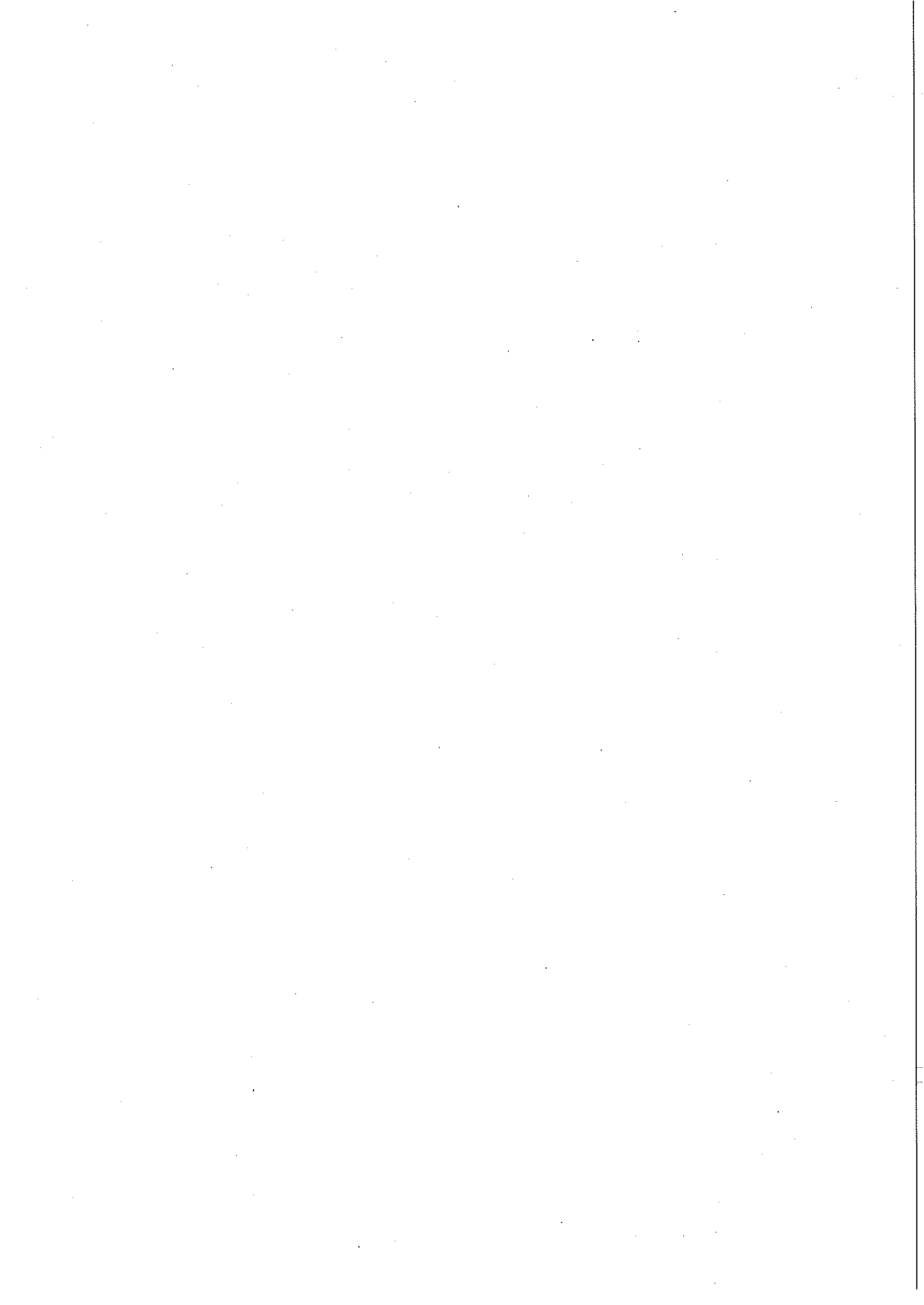
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Land and Biodiversity White Paper.

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Introduction

Since the arrival of Europeans, biodiversity in Victoria has been in continuous decline. Land clearing for agricultural purposes, logging, damming and diversion of rivers, draining of wetlands, inappropriate management of public land, and the introduction of pest plants and animals has resulted in the extinction of a large number of species of native flora and fauna, and to the serious decline of even more species, to the extent now that a great number of species are endangered, vulnerable, rare or threatened

With the recent recognition that climate change is now upon us, it is imperative that the maintenance of biodiversity is given the highest priority if we are to embrace good stewardship and pass on the land and all its natural inhabitants to the generations that will follow us.

In western Victoria, only 13% of the original Portland-Horsham forests remain – and yet, incredibly, the Department of Sustainability and Environment still seeks to exploit the little that remains. Today, less than 0.5% of the original native grasslands remain and again, incredibly, the State Government sees the development of new housing estates as being more important than preserving the few remaining remnants.

Current Problems

Sadly, both the State and Federal Government see the economy – in particular an ever-increasing Gross Domestic Product, as being far more important than the conservation of biodiversity. But the resources of Planet Earth are finite and must be managed in a sustainable manner, rather than pursuing a policy of ‘short-term gain for long-term pain.

Although Victoria has some very good national parks, the current management practices carried out in many of them does not contribute to the conservation of biodiversity. In particular, the current practice of large-scale fuel reduction burns, without any sound scientific research or monitoring, is contributing to both the increase in carbon-dioxide emissions and to the loss or reduction in the distribution and relative abundance of native species of flora and fauna.

Incredibly in Australia, there is still no national park protecting the iconic Red Gum forests – even more incredible is the State Government’s proposal to further deplete what remains of our Red Gum forests in the cutting of 300,000 Red Gum sleepers for the upgrade of the Mildura railway line.

Apart from diminishing the integrity of even more of our remnant native forests, and the associated loss of biodiversity, such a senseless act will also contribute to the pollution of the atmosphere with thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Recommendations

1. Any activities, which lead to the loss of biodiversity, must cease. Where legislation currently exists, such as the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, it must be rigidly enforced and, where there is need for additional protection of biodiversity, the State Government must legislate accordingly.
2. The management of national parks, reserves and other public land must change and embrace only management practices that are based on sound scientific research, which aims to protect biodiversity. And all management practices must be monitored for an extended period of time, to ensure that the desired outcomes of management practices are achieved.
3. To allow for a radical increase in the scientific management and monitoring of our national parks, reserves and public land, there must be a significant increase in funding by the State Government, to allow 'best practice' management to be achieved.
4. The State Government must provide adequate funding to compensate and reward landholders who protect bushland on their properties, as well as for those who wish to restore, enhance and enlarge habitats for native plants and animals.
5. There needs to be more efficient, more enlightened and well resourced agencies established to manage biodiversity across Victoria. This would, hopefully, overcome the entrenched mindset of so many managers currently holding positions of power in the Department of Sustainability and Environment who, in many cases, appear to strive to maintain their authority at all costs and resist any suggestion of change, usually to the detriment of Victoria's biodiversity.
6. The establishment of biolinks, connecting areas of high conservation value, is essential to the conservation of biodiversity. The Sate Government must engage, encourage and support community groups to establish large-scale biolinks in many already identified areas, such as the Portland-Horsham Forests and the Little Desert- Grampians areas.

