

## LAND AND BIODIVERSITY SUBMISSION

The values of maintaining a healthy ecosystem and biodiversity are adequately expressed in your paper advising of the preparation of a Land and Biodiversity White Paper. Our quality of life depends on our environment.

We assume that we are already experiencing some impacts of climate change if perhaps exacerbated by drought. The impacts of these are quite obvious in our region (Bendigo) with the advent of continual hot summer days, hot dry winds increasing fire risks and unpredictable storms and rain events.

The Box-Ironbark forest in our area has degraded in the last ten dry years; quite obviously in the last twelve months. It is now in a quite fragile state – particularly the understory – but, mainly because of population growth, it is placed under greater stress. We can assume that with climate change any degree of recovery would occur only by removing or reducing the impacts of inappropriate uses and abuses.

Regulations, by-laws, etc. already exist to protect the flora and fauna of the area but are not being fully enforced. Lack of staff at the grass roots level is probably the biggest problem but regulations become meaningless if not enforced.

Some examples: Trail bike riding is not allowed but still occurs – mainly at weekends when Council staff are not available. New tracks are created causing erosion in already stressed areas.  
Domestic cats, probably registered, roam the forest at night despite set curfews.  
Bees invade tree hollows and nesting boxes. Not all come from registered apiarists.  
Rubbish dumping is not allowed but still occurs. Garden rubbish often includes invasive weed species.  
Well intentioned residents abutting bushland often plant weed species which escape from gardens and invade bush areas. Nurseries could be banned from selling problem plants.

A major attitude change is needed to remove these stresses. The tales from the past of “My Grandma picked armfuls of wildflowers in the bush” – “My Dad and his mates cut down trees and build a cubby up the hill” were inappropriate at the time and are totally unacceptable today. With about 15% of the forest left and many of our flora and fauna threatened or extinct, we must attempt to retain or improve what we have. Improved and better targetted education programs must be introduced.

These comments are restricted to some specific items within our local area. We don't understand the intricacies of water and carbon emission trading, nor understand the economics of establishing population growth centres but recognise that some balance must be achieved between agriculture, industry, commerce and the environment. We believe that statements and actions by Government and industry leaders placing greater emphasis on the economy is not the way to go. A healthy economy is not sustainable without a healthy environment.

