I am president of Lawyers for Forests Inc. (LFF)

LFF is a not for profit organisation incorporated in October 2000. It is an voluntary association of legal professionals working towards the protection and conservation of Australia's remaining old growth and high conservation value forests.

Victoria has the highest number of threatened species by subregion in Australia. It is also the most cleared state in Australia with 66% of our land cleared of native vegetation.

Victoria has a poor track record of protecting its native forests and endangered species. This was highlighted in a recent Federal Court decision[1] which found that VicForests' conduct of forestry operations was illegal and likely to have had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the Greater Glider and the Leadbeater's Possum, both endangered species. "Not only do VicForests' forestry operations damage or destroy existing habitat critical to the survival of the two species, they also prevent new areas of forest from developing into such habitat in the future," the case summary says.

The Court in this case also found that is it well accepted on the expert scientific evidence that there are large and presently unaddressed risks to our native from climate change.

The government's prolonged destruction of our native forests together with permitted private land clearing has seen devasting effects on our native flora and fauna species. Of the 3,330 known Victorian species, 49 are extinct and 2,097 (63%) are on the Threatened Species Advisory Lists. More than a quarter of Victoria's wetlands have been lost since European settlement, and the remaining are mostly in poor and degraded condition, particularly following the recent massive bushfires. With the consequences of climate change and the recent devasting bush fires, these statistics are set to become much worse unless the government takes swift and meaningful action.

In addition, regional communities have been devasted by the recent unprecedented bushfires and the coronavirus. Supporting "green jobs" in activities such as revegetation and other programs in distressed regional areas would help to create regional economic benefits and also have multiple other benefits such as:

(i) creating wildlife corridors thereby contributing to the protection of Victorian flora and fauna species. One key driver of ecosystem decline in Victoria is habitat fragmentation, which the creation of wildlife corridors would help address;

(ii) helping to protect and maintain our waterways and water storage systems. For example, experts say that continued logging of the Thomson Catchment for Melbourne could lead to a 20% loss of water yield (the amount of water that flows though the catchment). This is equal to the water use of around 600,000 people every year[2]. Australia is at risk of further prolonged and sustained drought and we must do everything we can now to help prevent this;

(iii) protecting our land and ecosystems for future generations ensuring there is generational equity;

(iv) creating carbon sinks thereby helping prevent the most devasting effects of climate change. The results of NASA's international research team on this point are consistent with recommendations made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in

[1] Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc v VicForests VID 1228 of 2017

[2] www.sbs.com.au/news/the-feed/expert-opinion-logging-must-stop-in-melbourne-s-biggest-water-supply catchment, David Lindenmayer and Chris Taylor, researchers at the Australian National University.

2018 which found 950 million hectares of new forests could help limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2050[3].

LFF submits that the Inquiry recommend that the Victorian government, as a matter of priority, should undertake the following actions:

1. Immediately cease native forest logging and instead support a swift transition of regional industries and workers to jobs focused on plantation logging, land restoration and revegetation. Ending native forest logging can not wait until 2030. All or most demand for wood products can and must be met from existing plantation forests only and all paper products should be manufactured from recycled material and not our native forests.
2. Support large scale employment programs (initially focussing on unemployed and regionally-based workers) to plant and maintain nature corridors along existing waterways as an initial priority and undertake effective weed and invasive species eradication programs.
3. Update its environmental laws to ensure biodiversity is protected and to arrest and reverse species decline by immediately—
    a. repealing of the **Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996** (which allows logging of native forests beyond what our native forests can bea)r;
    b. ending Victoria's agreement with the Commonwealth regarding the discredited Regional Forest Agreements (all logging must be subject to the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999);
    c. strengthening species protection by implementing major structural reforms to the **Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988** and prioritising enforcement of that Act.

We hope that this inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria results in tangible and meaningful changes for Victoria's biodiversity and we thank you for the opportunity for submitting this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Danny Cash

President, Lawyers for Forests.

[3] Https://climate.nasa.gov/news.gov/news/2927/examining-the-viability-of-planting-trees-to-help-mitigate-climate-change