

Submission to the Independent Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975

By Kinglake Friends of the Forest Inc



Submission date: 30/06/2021

Contact: Kinglakefriendsoftheforests@gmail.com

Kinglake Friends of the Forest Inc (KFF) is a not for profit environment organisation established for people who want to learn about, discuss and advocate for the preservation of the native forests in Kinglake and the Central Highlands. Our group was established in Dec 2018 and incorporated in August 2019.

We are calling for an urgent overhaul of Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975 to bring it into accordance with the needs of native wildlife in Victoria, contemporary community expectations, and the Act's own guiding principles.

Wildlife are heading towards extinction in Victoria. This is a damning indicator that the Act is not working according to two of its key purposes: "*the protection and conservation of wildlife*", and "*the prevention of taxa of wildlife from becoming extinct*". The Act should be redesigned to actually protect our native wildlife.

Essential to the survival of wildlife is clear protection of wildlife *habitat*. Many threatened species rely on the unique resources of wet and damp forests, including the Greater Glider, Yellow Bellied Glider, Leadbeater's Possum, Sooty Owl, Smoky Mouse, and Spotted-tail Quoll. The current Act provides no direct protection for wildlife habitat, and the regulations give exemptions to the logging industry. This exemption is incompatible with the survival of threatened species and we will only see the threatened and endangered species lists grow unless urgent changes are made to the Act. We need clear laws that prohibit damaging, disturbing or destroying wildlife habitat, and native timber harvesting operations should be held accountable to these laws.

The Greater Glider provides a sobering example of habitat decline leading to population decline. In Victoria timber harvesting is widespread in the eastern and central parts of the state. This is also the main distribution and habitat of the Greater Glider. The [Victorian Scientific Advisory](#)

[Committee](#) has advised the Government that "Wood production practices are known to substantially deplete Greater Glider populations and gliders usually die if all or most of their home range is intensively logged or cleared (Menkhorst op. cit.)." Studies by [Lindenmayer et al. 2010](#) have shown an "annual decline of sites occupied by the Greater Glider in the Central Highlands averaging 8.8% per year in the period 1987 to 2010" (a rate that if extrapolated over the 22 year period relevant to this assessment is 87%). This decline was attributed to logging practices, lower rainfall, and fire. In regards to the impact of logging; "We also found that the probability of observing the Greater Glider was significantly ($\chi^2 = 9.40$, d.f. = 1, $P = 0.002$) higher on our sites located in the Yarra Ranges National Park than in forests broadly designated for pulp and timber production. We identified a significant positive relationship between the abundance of the Greater Glider and both the age of the forest and the numbers of trees with hollows on a site (Wald statistic, $\chi^2 = 11.4$, $P = 0.039$)."

The [Threatened Species Scientific Committee](#) advised the Federal government on the listing of the Greater Glider as threatened, which the Minister approved on 02/05/2016, including the species in the Vulnerable category. The committee emphasised that higher rates of decline were recorded in forests subject to logging than in conservation reserves, and declines were also associated with major bushfires and lower-than-average rainfall. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee also highlighted surveys undertaken by Lumsden et al. (2013, p. 3): "A striking result from these surveys was the scarcity of the Greater Glider which was, until recently, common across the Central Highlands". The example of the Greater Glider and its continued decline highlights the vital importance of protecting habitat in order to protect wildlife and ensure the survival of species into the future.

Protections for exotic species need to be removed from the Act. Exotic species are causing immense damage to habitat needed by native wildlife, including our forests. The sambar deer is one example of an exotic species causing damage that receives protection under the current act. [Davis et al](#) have shown that deer spread weed seeds through our forests and have been shown to reduce vegetation cover, tree regeneration, plant biomass, sapling growth and plant species diversity. "Further, a study comparing vegetation at locations with high (>20 deer km⁻²) and low (<10 deer km⁻²) densities of rusa deer suggested that they reduce understorey plant diversity". A Senate inquiry has called on all states to register deer as a pest species – it's definitely time to unprotect the estimated 1 million deer in Victoria.

Currently the regulator of the Act, the Office of the Conservation Regulator, lacks independence, functioning as an administrative unit within the Department. This status limits, if not undermines, the OCR's legal and apparent independence: for example, the OCR is vulnerable to future changes in policy. The Authority to Control Wildlife System requires far greater transparency, monitoring, enforcement and much more severe penalties.