

SUBMISSION TO VEAC STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS

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In this submission I have **highlighted in bold font and/or underlined important points**. I have listed **recommendations** separately below the sections, to facilitate understanding of this submission.

1. DECISIONS ABOUT PRESERVING LAND MADE ON BASIS OF *ad hoc* INFORMATION

To do an investigation properly flora and fauna lists would ideally be prepared for all public land areas, most certainly for reserves. Although this is a mammoth task, species lists are/have been done in an *ad hoc* way, even for places like Croajingalong Biosphere Reserve or Hattah, where some bird lists etc. may be available. Such lists have not always been prepared, either for all fauna and flora, or for all locations. **Flora and fauna lists should be prepared in a systematic way, especially for reserves.** Flora lists may be found as Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC) lists for a number of areas, and some bioregional analysis done, although not necessarily congruent with federal subregions. **A systematic, up-to-date and ongoing review of where reserves fall short in terms of CAR (Comprehensiveness, Adequateness, Representativeness)** is required, and should be analysed for all bioregions, which should be congruent with federal subregions. **In turn CAR interpretations on the basis of bioregional information require more than a broad knowledge of EVCs and fauna for those bioregions, necessitating systematic and ongoing species surveys.**

Over the last few decades **there has been a decline of regional flora and fauna experts employed in the regions.** Mainly flora and fauna surveys are done by expensive and carbon-intensive trips by a limited number of departmental staff from Melbourne, although CSIRO, the universities and private organisations are also involved- for example birds in woodlands have been found to be declining. **The reliance on capital city experts and those from other institutions does not lend towards systematic state surveys, but to further *ad hoc* knowledge acquisition.** Even if one thinks one has a new species, one must ship it to Melbourne for analysis, as there will be few experts in the region to offer an opinion. This trend towards Victoria being represented largely by the Melbourne region has been backed up by the trend in VEAC surveys in recent years, which have been centred almost entirely around the vicinity of Melbourne. This leads to circumstances where many places in the regions have not been looked at since the 1980s for reserve assessments, and even longer for biodiversity assessments, a totally unacceptable situation. **The overall trend towards reductions in regional expertise, concurrent with reductions in regional species surveys, including the cancellation of pre-logging surveys, and the decline in regional reserve assessments leads to the questions:**

- **How can we possibly know if we are meeting CAR requirements properly if surveys are *ad hoc* and centred on efforts by Melbourne staff?**
- **How can we possibly know if species are declining overall, or even regionally, if data is not gathered in a systematic and strategic way?**
- **How can we possibly know what areas are important to reserve if we can't establish the extent of reservation of EVCs or of particular species groups, other than by guesses?**
- **Have we decided that the foremost extent of biodiversity exists in the urban areas of Melbourne where the most people are, and that the regions are too costly and unimportant to deal with?**

Obviously there is sometimes weighty knowledge to be found in the environment department and CMAs, but this can hardly be described as statewide systematic knowledge. Information may be stored in regional researcher's minds or on shelves, so that information may largely be lost. It may be that, as with woodland birds, when next looking after a gap of more than 20 years, many other faunal groups and EVCs are also in decline. This is not proactive management, it is "chasing the tail" management. The requirement for "priority weeds", with decisions about weed management in regional locations made by staff centred in large towns, could mean public land could be over-run by non-priority weeds in any case!

The decline of staff in the regions began during the Kennett government when the state was in financial crisis, but both sides of politics have continued the run-down of both expertise and park management funding since then. This may be due to politicians favouring development, to sloppy management, or to placating party voters. Victoria now resembles an impoverished 3rd world state with no environmental "teeth", where preservation of biodiversity and natural heritage takes a very back seat to the bottom line of preserving money, as though the state was bankrupt. This is more than totally unacceptable, it is failing our international, national and state obligations and is absolutely scandalous.

It is clear that one cannot undo the poor efforts by both sides of government over the last 30 years in a moment, and VEAC will just have to do the best it can with the databases that it has. **The problem is these are likely to be insufficient to make proper determinations about CAR as data has not been strategically and systematically gathered over time. It is therefore long overdue to start doing that statewide now!** So one really does not know if a particular species is on the decline in such and such an area, or whether reserves, buffers or other preservation methods are required to stem that unseen tide.

Instead the state gains *ad hoc* information on select species, with new information arising, and even species being discovered, every now and then. This includes threatened species, for example amongst Lepidoptera, especially moths where many species are poorly known if at all, which occasionally are "discovered", creating the need for instantaneous reservation. Can you see the point that *ad hoc* data gathering leads to *ad hoc* reservation of land, and an endless string of controversies to go with that? It is a "chase the tail" strategy in terms of biodiversity preservation, and thus of determination of CAR requirements for reserves. **For an investigation of statewide reserves, systematic statewide knowledge of flora and fauna and their current requirements is necessary, requiring a strategic approach. This can then feed into ONGOING reviews of statewide reserves in terms of CAR representation, subverting the processes of ad hoc reservation with associated controversies, and unseen biodiversity decline.** It does not mean reviews more than 30 years apart based on *ad hoc* knowledge gained by many institutions in a variety of places over that period, with a departmental focus mainly centred in Melbourne!

Databases should be maintained, fed by continual updates from staff in the regions, and available to the public through the Biodiversity Interactive Map system, which should be maintained or even improved. This should be fed automatically into the federal flora and fauna database, ALA, but also to their Heritage section. Both sides of politics seem to have doomed the National Estates database into the dustbin of environmental protection measures in this country. Although it never had any teeth, the national list at least identified "special" natural places. It was replaced by the federal Heritage legislation (remember the cowboy hat on the Minister?) which involved liaison with groups around the country. But it turns out their final list of natural heritage places in Victorian regions, in spite of being in possession of the National Estate listings, was almost negligible (although it may have improved since)! Therefore the Heritage legislation as it stands is almost worthless without feed-in from state governments, in terms of environmental protection, and might as well be called cultural heritage legislation, leaving no "special natural places" listing at the federal level.

I would recommend not only **setting up a system whereby state flora and fauna databases can be improved and fed into the federal ALA database system automatically, but also examination of the National Estate listings by VEAC.** Such an examination of the listings would give a good idea of what was originally thought to be important in terms of natural heritage places, and which has now been archived for all time. If VEAC is going to examine "values" this might be a good place to start. In any case **it is essential that National Estate listings for Victoria are not completely discarded as they contain many places for consideration of possible reserves etc..**

Therefore I recommend that consideration be given to:

- ***a systematic review of EVCs in terms of CAR representation within each bioregion, with current VEAC decisions made bearing this knowledge in mind;***
 - ***a systematic review of the National Estate listings in terms of natural heritage places with a view to inclusions in reserves and/or values;***
 - ***databases that should be fed by continual updates from staff in the regions, and available to the public (e.g. Biodiversity Interactive Map), and which are fed automatically into the federal ALA database;***
 - ***improved communication about special natural places with the Heritage section of the federal environment department, starting with this Assessment;***
 - ***a requirement for Statewide Assessments to be done every ten years, or 15 at the latest, with regions to be reviewed on a regular basis to feed information into that, perhaps every 5-7 years;***
 - ***building up expertise in the regional department locations, and a planned Strategy for flora and fauna assessments statewide, with a view to knowledge acquisition for future Statewide Assessments, which will aid proper interpretation of the Assessments in terms of international CAR requirements.***
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2. MANAGEMENT POOR AT FEDERAL LEVEL

I have already alluded to decline in regional expertise, poor funding of parks, no strategy for statewide inventories, and a ridiculous approach to weed management as being poor examples of management of our native heritage. One can add the molly-coddling (rather than proactively retraining) workers of the dying forest industry whilst assuming shoddy "codes" are enough to protect species, plus the lack of teeth in the Flora and Fauna Guarantee. **However large problems also arise in two areas stemming from the federal sphere which are discussed below. These are:**

- a) the EPBC Act and its application to forests;**
- b) the EPBC Act and the Bilateral Agreement process.**

Sites of Significance

There were Sites of Geomorphological, Zoological, Biological and Botanical Significance done for some areas in Victoria in studies decades ago by the state government. The Victorian government website lists applications of these e.g. SOS for Wangaratta, and various "Biosites" or Biological Sites of Significance for Melbourne metropolitan areas. But funnily enough, when going to a forested area such as East Gippsland, one would not even know from the state government website, that SOS for zoology, biology and botany were some of the first to be done. This is another example of selectivity, where flora and fauna in the Melbourne region is of vital importance, but the forests are excluded because they threaten a dying industry which is subsidised by Victorian taxpayers to keep going. One can only hope that the welcome initiatives seen in the Melbourne examples can one day be extrapolated out to the wider state zones where they began! It seems useful to **mandate the usage of SOS in all regions when considering area preservation**, not just in the city.

A more serious approach to sites of geomorphological significance is needed too. One example is Lake Tyrrell in north-west Victoria, which is a site of international interest, even to NASA, being an end stage acid-saline example of a possible progression of terrestrial hydrology over the last 3 billion years, and rather like Mars. The terrestrial vegetation and biological crusts (lichen, mosses and fungi), and inshore microbes and fungi, in addition to the dunefields, are of immense interest scientifically. The vegetation is largely replaced by agriculture around the lake, but what little is left is regularly driven over, including roads for local farmers and tourists, and even for rally driving. **It is fairly clear that proper management of geomorphological sites of interest is almost absent in Victoria, and that usage of Botanical and Zoological Sites of Significance is selective in case it threatens a particular resource industry or a development. This is not just a shoddy approach to reserves, it is almost crooked, enhancing the general 3rd world feel!**

Declining forests

Threatened species are exempt from federal protection wherever they reside in forests that come under the RFAs. That is, most state forests in Australia have no federal protection in terms of threatened species legislation, since they are included under the Regional Forest Agreements which are meant to ensure that sufficient areas are reserved under the CAR process, supposedly involving a level of in-depth analysis of flora and fauna. The recent EPBC review was bombarded with requests for the federal environmental protection Act to be changed so that forests were covered by it.

But as usual the "buddy system" misled a few hundred workers who are going to lose their jobs anyway, ensuring they receive more protection than the natural heritage does for a temporary (voting?) period. It is widely acknowledged by many scientists and conservationists that the RFAs for various forests were poorly done on many fronts, especially in Victoria where they started, such as in East Gippsland. There was very little research done into the applicability of CAR in terms of EVCs and fauna requirements, and this is true in other areas. The mandatory review was not done until the recent EPBC review made that embarrassing, and then a very thin shoddy document was produced- for the whole country, hardly an in-depth CAR analysis.

The state and federal Coalition conspired to raise the woodchip quotas in the 1990s, and reduced the power of the Foreign Trade board so that they could be sold to Japan unfettered, in spite of warnings by a 1980s expert review that the forests could not take increases in harvesting. So the industry shifted from a poor outcome in sawlogs to an apparently boundless availability of leftovers from sawlogs, in the form of woodchips, which went via a mill to Japan to be made into toilet paper etc. we would buy back. Now even the Japanese mill has pulled out, and the federal and state Coalition plan is to put forests into the RET, so that they may be burnt for fuel. This plan takes us back to the 17th century, even before coal and the

industrial revolution, and is the reason why some countries have no forests left to speak of. But it may delude the workers yet again that they have a bright future (just long enough for them to vote)! The forests obviously never did, thanks to both political parties, and are now largely degraded. This time the RET will be used to prop the industry up, but this time by erasing the forests altogether by burning them. Even if this rather extreme and seemingly fanciful scenario were not to eventuate, climate change will. The greenhouse effect may also have a similar outcome for the forests, as examined in a university study (NSW) which said that most east coast forests are likely to be gone in 100 years. If we burn them for fuel under the RET, make that 20.

I am therefore recommending here that management at the Victorian level needs to be greatly tightened up for forested areas particularly. An analysis of the CAR needs of EVCs and fauna MUST be done for forests, prior to implementation of management, and reserve boundaries and strategies. Forests are under serious threat whichever way you look at it, and without a serious attempt to implement strategies now, there is little hope of retaining species within Victorian forests that are still logged, since the federal environment act excludes them from protection, and the RFAs are notoriously shoddy.

Serious consideration should be given to the idea of the Great Southeast National Park, which requires the agreement of NSW, but can be initiated on this side of the border, especially since there is highly likely to be a reduction in logging due to the mill closure. I agree with the idea of the Melbourne area forest park too, but is that the only part of the state at risk for losing their forests?

Otherwise VEAC, like the recent EPBC (Hawke) review, may be tarred with the brush of dooming the forests to no future under the scenarios of burning for fuel or climate change. This sham of forest management over the last 30 years must stop, along with deluding the logging industry workers that their future is rosy, thus requiring a re-training initiative to implement the Great Southeast NP and other reserves.

Serious consideration of reserve increases in forested areas is essential as they contain large suites of flora and fauna, and thus a large swathe of biodiversity in the state. If VEAC fails to do this, it will relegate forests and their high biodiversity to decline and degradation, and an earlier demise than predicted due to climate change. The fact that climate change is expected to have such a large impact on forests is enough on its own, without knowledge of their special biodiversity characteristics, to spur some serious and directed action towards them. **The loss in terms of genetic variation, niches and habitat by the long-term forest degradation, not only allowed but promoted in this state by successive governments, only results in an embarrassing loss of biodiversity that VEAC should not align itself with.**

Bilateral Agreements and Wetlands

This is another example of "she'll be right mate" because there is supposedly protection, as in the RFAs, for species. But because the EPBC Act is flawed as in exempting forests, and was originally set up by the Howard government to devolve federal environmental powers to the states under "bilateral agreements", she won't be right at all. Both the RFA exemptions and bilaterals have been heavily argued against in the original federal environment bill draft and its more recent review, by scientists and public alike, to no avail. As expected the re-election of the Coalition at the federal level has meant further weakening of federal powers as the Bilaterals have lately been enshrined in concrete through COAG, so that environmental approvals will largely be done by the states, and little will be referred for federal approval. Just like the RFAs in forests where the ALP tends to support the government because "protections are in place", protections at state level are supposed now to be enough for nearly ALL developments. But there are bound to be occasions, hopefully not too many, where this will not be true.

As an example of how it might work, in my local region a RAMSAR wetlands area was proposed for urban subdivision by the local Shire. Previously this would have automatically triggered a federal EIS, PER or similar inquiry. It is the lands surrounding the wetlands rather than the lakes themselves slated for urban expansion, and now due to bilaterals the approvals for the Shire to proceed may only need to come from the state government. The previous coalition Minister in this area was also the Environment Minister and was not even supportive of the Murray-Darling return of environmental water. So as Minister what is the likelihood he would approve the much-needed "regional development" as proposed by the Shire, right around the RAMSAR lakes? Methinks it is 100%, and property values would go up in the Shire! And don't tell me that there will never be any poor political decision-makers, especially with the fiasco currently going on at the federal level!

Lake Tyrrell mentioned above is also an example of a "Wildlife Reserve" which means almost nothing, except that lots of people go to shoot the Wildlife there. A similar term applies to other places, possibly including Heywood's Lake north of that towards the Murray. Some of these sites are of international significance for migratory wetland birds, or Important Bird Areas, as well. So generally one could say that the State's wetlands protection regime needs to be re-examined by VEAC, as does the forest one.

All that is needed is one poor decision-maker, and like the RFAs, the species, even threatened or internationally protected ones, have no protection in the face of development whatsoever, due to Bilaterals. Both forests and wetlands need an extra safeguard mechanism at the State level as the current federal legislative arrangements are not working. So what I am asking for here, as with the forests, is for an independent protection mechanism instituted via VEAC, for wetlands. That is, there needs to be a re-examination of reserves whereby wetland and forest areas are given particular scrutiny in terms of reserve size, management and legislation.

Therefore I recommend that consideration be given to:

- *a systematic review of the studies of SOS throughout the state in terms of biology, botany and zoology with a view to inclusions in reserves and/or values in the current Assessment;*
- *mandate the usage of SOS in all regions for reserve determinations, which may require further studies of sites of zoological, botanical or geomorphological significance, thereafter giving them special management, the types which could be examined by VEAC;*
- *an analysis of the CAR needs of EVCs and fauna is essential for forests prior to implementation of reserve boundaries and strategies, and management recommendations;*
- *serious consideration of reserve increases in forested areas to guard against poor legislation in other spheres and also climate change. This would include serious consideration of the Great Southeast Forests Park (Victorian side);*
- *a review of sites of geomorphological and geological sites of importance and how they can best be maintained.*
- *both forests and significant wetlands need to be given independent protection mechanisms as a safeguard, as the legislation for both as it stands does not work. This requires additional scrutiny in terms of state legislation, and also examination of reserve size and management.*

3. MINOR RESERVES

By minor reserves I am referring to:

- **Linear Reserves (road and rail);**
- **Bush Reserves;**
- **Corridors;**
- **Buffers Zones;**
- **other small reserves such as Special Protection Zones in forests.**

I would like to see VEAC consider some of these more seriously. **There are many cases in which corridors between small or large reserves would make a difference. Similarly with buffer zones,** such as in the RAMSAR case above, where it might be **illegal to have particular developments** around a lake or national park, or even expansion such as in resort development within parks etc. I understand that many of these reserves are possibly not even listed or gazetted, so a proper **database needs to be established for both small Bush Reserves and Linear Reserves.** The CSIRO and others recommend a "whole-of-landscape" approach and I hope that VEAC attempts to look at the state that way.

I am particularly concerned that the clearing laws do not seem to really work to prevent decimation of even large areas of native forest on private land. I have personally witnessed decimation of quite large swathes of coastal woodland for farming, in spite of the fact the Howard government bribed the international community for carbon credits saying we no longer clear land in Australia. There should be further efforts to come to arrangements with farmers to preserve such pockets of forests on farmland.

The other lie by successive state governments is that we no longer clear rainforest in Victoria. After 30 years of protests, finally the lie that we protect all rainforest in Special Protection Zones etc. under the RFAs was revised, along with the rules for determination of what rainforest is. So now there is at least somewhat better analysis of the flora involved in logging areas- nevertheless, the original scientific definition by a conference of scientists in the 1980s was never properly adhered too. With Old Growth the situation is

similar, with the government using yet another watered down definition in spite of years of work by scientists.

So I have no reason to have faith in the protection given for various types of forest on public or private land within small areas or reserved strips such as Special Protection Zones. But to make matters worse the previous state government actually greatly relaxed the laws for clearing of native vegetation, thankfully under review by this government. To be honest a 3rd world state could do better, so one is back to the general feeling that Australia is rather backward in terms of environmental protection in spite of all the blustering.

The problem is, even in an area where there is only about 10% native vegetation left, mainly on roadsides, railway lines, small bush reserves and farms, as in the Mallee, there is still pressure to clear from farmers. Enough profit is never enough. Not only that but management of these areas by Shires is not what is expected, as whether they contain threatened species or not, the roadside just has to be "cleaned up". And the locals get the bulldozer out at fire season or for rabbit control. This is a triple whammy on an area where nearly all the mammals are regionally extinct, and the flora and other fauna are hanging on for dear life.

When the amount of native vegetation remaining on the roadside may only be several metres across, road widening by contractors (who have apparently slept through their mandatory environmental subject) pulling out whole trees and shrubs on a regular basis, can hardly be considered satisfactory. Neither can pushing the whole lot over for fire management, however well-meaning. Furthermore these thin parcels of linear roadsides or plots on private land may very well contain threatened species.

It is inexcusable, even criminal, to further decimate IN ANY WAY such a remaining small extant of habitat, and the Shire and the State have a tremendous duty of care to ensure any maintenance or farming is done with the utmost care in such regions with little habitat left. Something has to be done about these linear road and rail strips, and VEAC has to do it, in spite of their brief they are not dealing with Shire lands at all (or VLine?).

The Shires are not legally part of the Constitution so they are not federal responsibility, they are legislated for entirely and independently by the States, and only that way are they in any way legal entities, so ultimately they are under the umbrella of the State. It is one thing for the state to say that Shires have to manage all invasive species on roadsides etc. and then renege on any environmental protection prescriptions for the very same lands during a Statewide Assessment! I would probably add that Shire lands surround wetland bodies, including Ramsar sites as discussed above, and so are all these STATE LEGISLATED responsibilities to be completely ignored during this investigation??? **Do we need yet another environmental court case to make the State take responsibility for environmental protection under its jurisdiction?** Several such cases have occurred in the past, but now the situation is worse as we are faced with the most environmentally irresponsible federal government we have ever had, with their Bilaterals trick to hand.

How much is the landscape expected to bear before it becomes obvious that the decline of woodland birds is just a taste of things to come? Already declines have been seen in rodents and owls in forested areas. But areas in the mallee haven't had almost any native rodents or small mammals for nearly a century! Are such regions now subject to state governments that want to avoid responsibility for ensuring the Shires are protecting the little habitat that is left for remaining fauna? **From a legal standpoint, VEAC needs to revisit the issue of Shire lands by discussing this issue with the Minister, since Shires are legislated as State not Commonwealth bodies.** From an environmental protection standpoint, someone (anyone?) must shoulder responsibility for environmental outcomes in such damaged zones. Many roads go through farms where they may not be used, and **some disused roads could happily be preserved in their entirety as the last remaining vegetation of a locality, some containing threatened species, as Linear Reserves.**

Roadsides are virtually the last linear strips of habitat remaining in the largely cleared Mallee in some places, and for VEAC to ignore them as potential reserves, even though Shires are legislated for by the States alone, is very problematic. All roadsides in regions such as the Mallee should be under a linear protection regime, except within urban centres. Similarly all Shire lands which buffer wetlands should be examined as potential reserve areas.

CSIRO is right, without a whole of landscape approach there is very little hope for many regions and their species- a few iconic parks just won't cut it in terms of species decline, particularly with climate change already impacting. Desertification is not a foreign word in semi-arid regions, and salinity has already taken root.

Currently the situation with Bushland Reserves is that there is quite a number of them, widely dispersed, with little to no management whatsoever, including no management plans or funding. They are often treated as rubbish dumps or shooting ranges or motorbike circuits by the public. Other members of the public such as landcare groups battle endlessly to get funding for their local bushland areas to no avail. Meanwhile weeds take over the world.

Furthermore knowledge of these pockets of habitat may be localised, with only a few people knowing what is there. It would be helpful if all disused roads, railway habitat strips, and bushland reserves were put on a database of "Minor Reserves", and consideration given to designation as reserves or proclamation as the case may be. In all cases some sort of management needs to go on- currently "neglected" doesn't seem to cover it. Such examination cannot happen in bioregions with little habitat left, without examining Shire lands. Otherwise we may end up with the scenario of urban development around RAMSAR sites as the best case scenario for otherwise completely neglected vegetation remnants in some regions, with an almost certain decline in habitat and thus species.

Decline in habitat beyond 90% in semi-arid regions with a subsequent decline in species may trend the area towards desertification. Salinisation may just be a hint of the geomorphological game played out over this continent for 3 billion years, in which the extent of aeolian dunefields was at times 80%. Removing biological crusts (biocrusts) and vegetation leads to further drying out after climate change has already reduced soil moisture, leading to more dust events if not desertification.

Therefore I would like VEAC to give some focus to protection measures for Linear Reserves (both road and rail) and small Bush Reserves, and Shire lands surrounding wetland reserves, given that Shires are legally state, rather than Commonwealth, bodies. Protection measures for both Linear Reserves and Bushland Reserves need to be looked at, considering buffers, corridors and other measures, preferably from a whole-of-landscape approach in areas with little habitat.

I would recommend management plans for all Bushland Reserves and preferably designating Linear Reserves from railway easements and disused roads, also requiring management plans. **The issue of desertification in the drylands of Victoria needs to be seriously discussed within the context of a "whole of landscape" approach to reserves, in areas where large swathes of habitat have already been cleared.**

Therefore I recommend that consideration be given to:

- looking at the application of clearing laws, control burns and forestry and considering enhanced definitions and protection for "old growth" and "rainforest";
- buffer zones around reserves or wetlands where certain types of development are restricted;
- restriction of in-park activities such as development for resorts, extraction etc.;
- upgrading the category of Linear Reserves (road and rail), particularly in areas where habitat is scarce or threatened species are restricted to them, and examining protection issues. This might include restrictions or requirements for control burns, invasive species control, roading activities etc.
- establishment of corridors between both small bushland and larger reserves;
- establishing a database for both small Bush Reserves and Linear Reserves and fast-tracking Scheduling of these into law;
- designation of unused roads and railway easements as Linear Reserves;
- increased funding for management for all types of reserves, from National Parks to Linear and Bushland reserves;
- management plans for all Linear and Bushland reserves be mandatory and subject to periodic reviews;
- VEAC needs to use a "whole of landscape" approach especially in the drylands and/or areas that are largely cleared. Concepts of climate change and vegetation/biocrust removal leading to moisture depletion, therefore soil loss and potential desertification, need to be incorporated into the analysis, leading to a "whole of landscape" recommendations for reserves, buffers, corridors etc. in Victorian dryland areas;
- discussion with the Minister about the State's sole responsibility for Shire lands since local government is not a legal entity within the federal constitution, hopefully leading to an expansion of VEAC's brief, in bioregions where habitat is largely removed. This will allow revision of roadsides, disused roads, and rail easements as well as buffer zones around wetlands to become reserves or specially managed areas in areas with little habitat left, enabling a true "whole of

landscape" approach. Otherwise these remnants which constitute a large part of the remaining habitat of some regions are virtually doomed to continue being neglected, thus being degraded habitat for a largely depleted fauna. They may disappear altogether, either being cleared or become urban areas.

Footnote: Don't worry I'll get to categories and other topics next time!