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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Dear Sir/ Madam

Yarra Ranges Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Environment and Communications References Committee on “The effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities’ protection in Australia”.

Yarra Ranges Council is located on Melbourne’s eastern fringe, and covers an area of almost 2,500 square kilometres. It is the seventh largest local government area in Melbourne in terms of population size and largest in geographical area which encompasses 51% of the Yarra Catchment and headwaters of the Dandenong Catchment. Yarra Ranges can be described as an interface Council, home to over 55 suburbs, townships, and small communities in a mixture of rural and urban areas.

Biodiversity conservation and the protection of natural values are of strong importance to our Council and the local community. Yarra Ranges has long been recognised as a special place for its natural beauty and diverse habitats, containing some of the most environmentally important areas in Victoria. The combination of national parks, state forests, private gardens and its location on the doorstep of Melbourne all combine to make the area unique in its natural, cultural and amenity values. This is a significant factor in attracting residents and tourists to the region, with over 4 million tourists visiting each year.

The mountainous landscapes and the Yarra River valley contain significant areas of remnant native vegetation, much of which is botanically and zoologically significant, providing important habitat for wildlife. The region is often referred to as the “lungs of Melbourne”, and provides world class quality water that supplies the majority of Melbourne’s water requirements.

Yarra Ranges is also home to over 1,365 indigenous plant species and 375 animal species. Large numbers of these species are at varying levels of threat of extinction due to land clearance, habitat fragmentation and modification, and predation.

Yarra Ranges municipality’s most famous threatened species is the Helmeted Honeyeater which is listed as Critically Endangered nationally. However there are a much larger number of flora and fauna that are rare or threatened.

Threatened flora species recorded in the municipality total 108 species including 7 species listed as Nationally significant under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

Rare or threatened fauna species total 62 with 41 being nationally significant under the EPBC Act.

Although all levels of government including our Local Government are actively working on turning around the decline for these species, there is no evidence suggesting we are being successful. The recently released report, State of the Environment Report for Australia, details that even more species are likely to be threatened in the future.

Ecological Communities as represented by Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC's) in the municipality are under varying levels of threatened status due mostly to historic land clearance. The most threatened EVC's in our municipality are those associated with the fertile floodplains such as Floodplain Riparian Woodlands and wetlands.

Yarra Ranges Council has strong experience in working with Government agencies for the coordination or investment in threatened species improvement projects. A key example of a collaborative project we have partnered in is the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority's Yarra4Life Program.

This program is centred around the protection and enhancement of nationally threatened Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeaters Possum habitat as well as the creation of long term, significant, wildlife corridors at a landscape scale.

The program is achieving some great outcomes by improving the use of quite limited resources more effectively via collaboration. However the scientists monitoring these species in the subject area still have concerns for both species as their populations are small and quite vulnerable.

Yarra Ranges Council is supportive of all levels of government partnering with the community to protect and enhance threatened species. The following areas for improvement are recommended for the Committee's consideration to assist our efforts in retaining our threatened species and ecological communities:

- a) The level of investment by State and Federal Governments in threatened species and ecological communities needs to be increased.
- b) There needs to be a consistent long term funding stream in order to leverage voluntary support for conservation of threatened species on private land.
- c) There needs to be a stronger science based decision of priority actions to maximise the effectiveness of turning around the decline for the maximum amount of threatened species and ecological communities.

- d) There needs to be a considerable investment in the collection of high quality and recent data on threatened species and ecological communities for the preparation of action statements and to also measure the success, over time, of management actions
- e) There needs to be a greater alignment of threatened species criteria and lists between Federal and State governments.

Yours sincerely

David Harper

Manager Environment Department