The Secretary
Senate Environment and Communications Committee
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
CANBERRA
ACT 2600

I am writing because I am concerned about the proposed handing over of the care of our precious environment to the States. I feel that Burke has done as much for the environment since he took over the Environment Portfolio, as he has been given the opportunity to do. Allowing this sensitive issue to become clouded and bogged down by 7 different opinions would make decisions more difficult, controversial and divisive.

This would fragment the care of the environment as the States have different approaches to many issues and the care of the environment would, in many instances, cross state lines as plants and animals do not care which side of an invisible line they are on. This would cause both confusion and conflict of interest which we need to reduce, not enhance.

On 24th November I joined a group of people who travelled by bus up into one of Victoria's catchment areas near Toolangi in the Central Highlands. The devastation that greeted us when we stopped for the first time at a coop that had been logged was horrifying. I had no idea of the extent that Victoria's native forests were being decimated and was even more stunned to hear that this clearing of native forests was for the manufacture of paper, such as Reflex, which could so easily be made out of farmed or plantation trees. The manufacturer of this paper, The Australian Paper Company continues to use old growth timber despite promises that it will change to a more sustainable supply. Most of the remaining timber is sent overseas as wood chips where it is made into goods which Australia purchases back at a vastly inflated price.

Much of the true nature of the timber industry has gone from this area and saw mills have closed down. Numerous local people, who were once protective of the forest industry, have now moved into tourism and no longer support the destruction that is taking place.

Another issue that greatly concerned me was the burning of so much of the 'so called waste.' Huge branches and the canopy are dried out before they are burnt. Much of the recently disturbed earth and also the ash then washes into our catchment area and fills in some of the dam area as the silt drops to the bottom. This process, when it gets into our river system, clogs and pollutes the rivers.

While Vic Forests maintain that the areas are re seeded and returned to native forest, this is not true. Only Mountain Ash are left to reseed because these are the only trees that are required for paper and chips. This starts a mono culture which does not support the local animal or insect life. Also possum, owls and many other small creatures need old growth trees which have holes in the trunk so they can safely avoid predators. As the trees are cleared every few years they never reach the age for this to happen so the lives of any animals that try to live there are at best, high risk.

On top of these disappointing issues the reduction in rain over the catchment area because of the removal of trees, and the increase of sediment in the water, we are losing enormous amounts of water during the hot weather. Approximately 1000 litres is lost *per second an*d this is not including the measurement of evaporation. No wonder we are building a desalination plant; our Victorian government, with the aid of *our taxes* is supporting and encouraging this situation. If the present Victorian Baillieu Government is allowed to control this situation we will have leases that are 20 years in length not the present 5 year terms. At least 5 year terms allows for a change of policy after a reasonably short period if, through education, the public see a need for change. A change which must inevitably come because we need our forests for our water, our health, for beauty and tourism.

I have left to last the issue of the declining habitat for all creatures but in this area in particular, the Leadbeater Possum and the Sooty Owl are at risk. What a disgusting thing it was to see where Professor David Lindenmayer's area of research, taking place over the last 30 years, into the life and numbers of this delightful little possum, was completely razed by Vic Forests. Not only was it razed but a poster was tied to a tree telling Professor Lindenmayer, 'this is where your possum boxes used to be.' How cruel and how belittling of this man's life work. No wonder we lost this wonderful scientist.

It is time the Victorian Forestry Commission was made accountable for the damage it is doing and for regular government check ups to be *implemented and enforced* where guidelines are not respected or indeed followed at all. EG: the logging of mountain tops causing erosion and disfigurement of the area. Also so that the fragmentation of logging is stopped and the unnecessary building of roads through pristine country can cease; both because of the cost, and the damage it does compacting the area unnecessarily.

It was sad to hear Sir Rupert Hamer's two daughters speak at an environmental meeting recently. Both were shocked and disappointed at the inroads the Baillieu government is making to the far sighted provisions that their father had made for the protection of Victoria's environment. These inroads included the possible building of hotel and other facilities in the Green Wedge, the destruction of our catchment areas and the extinction of endangered species..

We need the Federal Government to have the final, and hopefully more knowledgeable and understanding say, to control and override when necessary, a State Government that is not using the tax payers money either wisely or with the blessing of the overall majority.

Another area of concern is The High Country, where the Victorian Government wants to return cattle to graze.
Also important is the ongoing care of the Murray Darling Basin.

Yours Sincerely
Joan Spittle