Senate Enquiry Session – The effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia.

I am a volunteer member of Friends of the Leadbeaters Possum in Victoria. I spent a year helping supply supplementary feeding to a colony of possums at Lake Mountain near Melbourne. Following the February 2009 bushfires the possums needed extra food because most of their food source was destroyed by the fires. I have also been involved with monitoring nesting trees and artificial nest boxes for the presence of Leadbeaters Possum. Many volunteers have put a lot of time and effort into trying to preserve current populations and get an increase in these possum numbers. However last year one of these groups of possums at Lake Mountain had to be captured and taken to Healesville Sanctuary because of real risk they would all die if left in the wild.

I am very concerned that Australia's laws are not adequately protecting threatened species and special ecological communities. For example I am concerned that the Victorian government is not doing enough to preserve, and indeed prevent the extinction of the Leadbeaters Possum. From what I have heard it continues with unsuitable forestry and logging practices in the Leadbeaters Possum habitat. This is threatening current populations and making it harder for these animals to increase in numbers and remain viable into the future.

The government should be taking advice from independent experts on the Possum such as Professor David Lindermayer. Instead, I understand Professor Lindenmayer resigned from the Victorian government scientific advisory team looking into the management of Leadbeaters Possum because he believed the steps needing to be undertaken to save this species from extinction are not being done in a timely manner. He is Australia's foremost authority on this Possum and if the Victorian government was serious about trying to save this possum the government should have worked to see that his recommendations were seriously looked into and acted on in a timely manner.

Also I believe various state government plans to allow hunting, cattle grazing and commercial development in National Parks is a backward step in managing these special and sensitive places. While looking at the newspaper this morning I read about plans by the NSW and Victorian Governments to selectively thin Red Gums in National Parks along the Murray River and remove the wood off site. Is it not enough that the majority of Austraila's vegetation has been cleared for urban development, agriculture, mining and industry? Why do we need to now move into national parks with these intrusive ventures? It seems to me that economic growth and employment concerns are placed before ecological concerns in most decisions relating to landuse in this country. These things are important of course for society, but I believe there are places where ecological concerns should be placed before economics, such as national parks and other places of ecological significance.

I believe Australia's remaining natural environment should be protected, and I believe the Federal government should strengthen its laws to protect sensitive land and flora and fauna. We are a very affluent country and I believe we can afford to look after it.

Peter Berbee, 13 December 2012

Bulleen