



The Victoria Naturally Alliance – a shared vision

MEDIA RELEASE

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Victoria failing obligation to protect grasslands

The Victorian Government is failing to reverse the destruction of one of Australia's most endangered ecosystems, a Department of Sustainability and Environment report has revealed.

The report shows that despite government policy to reverse the loss of native vegetation across Victoria the state has been losing its endangered grasslands at a rate equivalent to more than three football fields a day.

Charles Sturt University's grasslands expert Associate Professor Ian Lunt says Australia can't afford to lose any more grasslands, one of the country's most threatened ecosystems.

"Less than five per cent of Victoria's original grasslands remain and only a small fraction are in high quality condition," Assoc Prof Lunt said. "The current rate of loss would be seen as totally unacceptable for any other type of ecosystem."

The report shows Victoria lost at least 40,000 hectares of native vegetation between 1994 and 2004, with the state's few remaining grasslands suffering the greatest loss – some 32,000 hectares.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment's *Native Vegetation Net Gain Accounting – First Approximation Report* also reveals native vegetation on private land is suffering "chronic and long-acting degradation problems", suggesting we will see more species vanish if no action is taken.

The Victoria Naturally Alliance, a coalition of leading environment groups including the Victorian National Parks Association, Australian Conservation Foundation and Environment Victoria, has called on the State Government to fulfill its policy objective of reversing the long-term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation.

"The State Government's *Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change* White Paper is a key opportunity to address the failings leading to a loss of native vegetation across the state," the alliance's Carrie Deutsch said today.

"Since European settlement heavy grazing, development and agriculture have taken their toll on our grasslands. Now less than one per cent of the grasslands on the Victorian Volcanic Plain west of Melbourne remain."

Eight of the 26 mammals that depended on those grasslands have become extinct from the Plain, including the Eastern Quoll, Rufous Bettong and Eastern Hare-wallaby.

"Grasslands may not have the same visual pulling power of an old-growth forest but in terms of plant and animal species they are some of the state's richest places," Ms Deutsch said.

"The continued deterioration of Victoria's grasslands is a wake-up call for the State Government. It must realise its obligation to protect our share of the country's fast-disappearing grasslands."

The alliance is calling on the State Government to boost resources for protecting and restoring grasslands on both private and public land through a range of measures.

Ms Deutsch said the government's Plains Tender stewardship program was a welcome way of engaging private landholders in grassland conservation, but lacked funds and the reach so urgently needed.

"Government also needs to buy up high-quality native grasslands and give them strong protection. With less than 5000 hectares of this dwindling ecosystem protected on public land in Victoria every blade of native grass is precious," she said.

For further comment contact:

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The Victoria Naturally Alliance wants to see Victoria's native plants and animals protected from threats including climate change and habitat loss. For more information go to www.victorianaturally.org.au.