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May 12, 2016

The Hon. Lisa Neville MP
Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water
Submission: Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2036.
haveyoursay@delwp.vic.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Re: Community Consultation Submission to 'Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2036', Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance Inc.

Thank you for your initiative and commitment to the development and implementation of 'Protecting Victoria's Environment-Biodiversity 2036' and for the opportunity to contribute via this Community Consultation phase.

CVB background:

Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance (CVB) was instigated in 2010 by a range of regional community conservation groups in recognition of the need for large-scale landscape restoration to halt environmental decline and species extinctions in Victoria; through better coordination of effort, improved knowledge and know-how, and developing new, more effective conservation strategies.

Our member networks are spread from the northern Grampians in the west to the Strathbogies in the east, and from the Murray River to Mount Macedon. We are also a partner of the Great Eastern Ranges (GER) network, one of the largest connectivity projects in the world, and many other concerned groups and influential individuals (see lists attached). With GER funding we recently ran a very well attended forum on Gliders. Victoria's inaugural 'Glideways Symposium' brought together both glider scientists and practitioners in what the 100+ attendees said was an exciting and well worthwhile day. We believe this combination of big-picture knowledge sharing and on-ground know-how is in demand and the right formula for building community conservation capacity into the future.

CVB has identified a unique role for itself as a capacity and partnership building organisation aiming to ensure the significant momentum around Community-driven Conservation on public and private land in central Victoria is strengthened with better support, coordination and innovation. Put simply, CVB helps central Victorian conservation groups to learn from each other, and from the experts, to 'do conservation better'.

Comments on 'Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2036'

As a leader of the Community Conservation movement across central Victoria, we strongly believe CVB is in a unique position to represent the views of many organisations and individuals that are passionately committed to protecting and restoring our local environment and biodiversity.

Firstly, we applaud the Victorian Government's commitment to protecting our environment by initiating this process to develop a long term biodiversity conservation plan. In particular we welcome the central tenant of the strategy to encourage greater and more active community engagement in working towards improving the health of our natural environment.

In our view, helping to build human connection with nature and increasing the community's capacity to be smarter and more effective conservationists, must be central to the plan's success. We argue this point for a range of reasons:

- Firstly, in the age of citizen science and community conservation, more local and regional groups are becoming increasingly organised and sophisticated in their aims and means, but remain primarily lacking in expertise and resources. There are any number of groups with 'shovel ready' conservation plans and associated management systems, plus teams of eager volunteers poised to help play their part in the big picture solution once adequate resources are available to implement the solutions at the right scale. There is no shortage of enthusiasm, good ideas and long term commitment, it's just the lack of adequate resourcing to deliver the well thought out plans at the right scale and in alignment with neighbours and partners further afield that is holding them back;
- Secondly, given the Government was responsible for helping set up many of Victoria's first CMNs in partnership with Parks Victoria, Trust for Nature and four Catchment Management Authorities (East Gippsland, Goulburn Broken, North-Central and West Gippsland), it only make sense to maintain the commitment to building Community Conservation capacity by continuing to help resource them. We strongly endorse the theme of community participation and capacity building in 'Biodiversity 2036' and urge you to make the adequate, on-going resourcing and support for these groups a central element of its final recommendations; and
- Finally, we believe it is smart policy to invest further in building the capacity of existing conservation groups (such as Landcare groups and networks, Conservation Management Networks, Friends-of groups), because not only does it help to better engage local communities, but it also leverages greater outcomes via the massive kind contributions and the detailed preparation and thinking already done; the plans and strategies groups have already established spelling out the 'roadmaps' for local environmental repair and biodiversity conservation. There is no question this approach would represent an investment both in getting effective work done on-ground AS WELL AS better 'connecting people to nature.' A significant increase in the support for these organisations by increasing grant funding, including for building capacity and for further refining plans, would be a very efficient way of contributing to the two major goals of 'Biodiversity 2036'. The most effective outcomes would come from multi-year funding and must include both capacity building, not just on-ground delivery, in order for this important sector to grow.

In addition to this key issue of providing further resourcing and support for building the capacity of Community Conservation, we would also like to emphasis a number of additional points:

- Ecological Outcomes – We strongly believe that 'Biodiversity 2036' must also be founded on the concept of ecological outcomes (not just outputs); making a difference for our most rare and

threatened species, habitats and environments. Thus we would like emphasise the need for measurable ecological targets linked to these clearly specified goals that are well supported by science and the best independent research;

- Overall Funding – We strongly concur with the DELWP staff who presented during the consultation ‘roadshow’ last month that biodiversity has been ‘grossly underfunded’ in Victoria over recent decades. In particular, we are aware that Victoria is significantly lagging behind comparable states such as NSW in the area of conservation and biodiversity support. We strongly believe our shared goal of ensuring that Victoria’s natural environment is healthy (and to encourage more Victoria’s to value and actively protect nature) must be backed up with a significantly greater increase in funding across the board; and
- Looking after the Protected Area Network – Both the public land estate (especially the National Parks and conservation reserves managed by Parks Victoria) as well as private reserves owned or covenanted by groups like Trust for Nature and Bush Heritage Australia are the ‘jewels in the crown’ of Victoria’s natural places and biodiversity, and as such must be well managed. There is a great need to boost resourcing for the restoration and long term protection of these irreplaceable places as well as its future expansion.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Community Consultation phase of ‘Biodiversity 2036’ and we look forward to working with you towards ensuring Victorian’s natural environment is healthy into the long term future.

Sincerely,



Paul Foreman
Chair, Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance Inc.

Board Members:

Paul Foreman (Chair), CEO Blue Devil Consulting
Judy Croker (Vice Chair), Facilitator Mid-Loddon Landcare Network
Dr. Peter Mitchell (Secretary) Ecologist, Executive member of Landcare and Environment Groups in Mitchell Shire
Karen Alexander, OAM, (Treasurer) ex-President of Bush Heritage Australia, co-founder Victoria Naturally Alliance
Simon Cammell, Group Financial Controller, Australia Post
Ann McGregor, Strategic planning consultant; co-founder and President Friends of Merri Creek
Dr. Michael Moore, Research Fellow Australian National University, Chair of Wedderburn Conservation Management Network
Leigh Blackmore, Organisational development, Project manager Grampians to Pyrenees Biolink project
Amanda Gauci, Horticulturalist, President of Federation of Environment and Horticulture Macedon Ranges
Dr. Sophie Bickford, Landscape ecologist, Committee member of Upper Campaspe Landcare Network
Dr. Simon Cook, Ecologist, Lecturer Federation University
Anthony Duffy, Farmer and Conservation Biologist, President Moorabool Landcare Network

Member Groups:

Landcare networks: Mid Loddon LCN, Upper Campaspe LCN, Moorabool LCN, South West Goulburn LCN, Project Platypus, Upper Goulburn LCN, Loddon Plains LCN

Conservation management networks: Wedderburn CMN, Strathbogie CMN, Kara Kara CMN, Connecting Country

Friends of and environment groups: Friends of Wombat Forest, Ballarat Environment Network, Jackson’s Creek EcoNetwork, Federation of Environment and Horticulture Macedon Ranges, Bendigo and Districts Environment Council

Ambassadors:

Doug Humann AM (Fundraising and project development and indigenous relationships)
Brian Snape AM (Environmental philanthropist)

Advisors:

Professor Kate Auty, 2014 VC Fellow Melbourne University and former Vic Govt Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability
Toby Ralph, Marketing and fundraising strategy
Deepend Digital, Communications and website
Michael Fogarty (ex-ACF and BHA), Fundraising
Rohan Wishart (ex-Oxfam, BHA), Fundraising

Partnerships:

Great Eastern Ranges initiative, Regional delivery partner
RMIT, Advanced Creative Advertising, Fundraising Campaigns
Wimmera and Glenelg Hopkins CMAs, G2P Biolink Plan
Parks Victoria, G2P Biolink Plan
Trust for Nature, Project scoping
DEWLP, G2P Plan
Bush Heritage Australia, Project scoping, planning
Melbourne University, Project scoping
Federation University
Arthur Rylah Institute, Data support
Victorian National Parks Association, Key early partner
Australian Conservation Foundation, Our Great Dividing Range program
The Wilderness Society, Early partner under their landscape program
City of Bendigo, In-kind support
Indigenous groups, Partnership development a high priority