

SUBMISSION TO THE VICTORIAN ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY (EPA) INQUIRY

Since the EPA came into being in 1971, it has been limited by its initial design in being able to deal with many environmental hazards and challenges. Much of its funding has relied on levies from waste, which has created possible conflicts of interest and has caused the EPA to become largely a fixer-upper and punisher after the fact rather than a preventer of pollution and other environmental hazards.

What is needed is funding that is independent and laws that are clear and directed towards prevention rather than punishment of infringements. This will require the political will to strengthen the Act to increase the powers and authority of the EPA, and also to develop a funding model that is preventive rather than responsive so that prospective polluters/infringers will take seriously the fact that they must seek permission before they commit potentially environmentally harmful actions.

The Act needs to recognise a general duty not to pollute; enforce clear standards laid down to protect Victoria's environment; enable individuals and communities affected by the EPA's decisions to have access to the relevant information and a role in making decisions that affect them; protect the health and well-being of the people of Victoria and its lands, rivers and oceans; require physical restitution as well as financial, for example mine rehabilitation or water quality restoration. It is very important that the funding available enables the EPA to enforce these requirements.

We, the people of Victoria, are aware of the Government's aims for sustainability and economic growth, but this must not be at the price of our health and well-being. It is imperative that the EPA, with a stronger legal basis and adequate, independent funding, will act as a strong safeguard to protect our environment.

Governments normally tend to think in the short term, but it is important to remember that sustainability and economic growth and the environment in which they take place are inter-dependent. Like a vegetable garden, if the soil is dead and there is no rain, there will be no growth of any kind.

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