

To the EPA Ministerial Advisory Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We welcome Government recognition of the importance of the EPA, the Inquiry, the public meetings and discussion paper.

I for one are not impressed with the EPA's hands off, low profile meagre existence. From a initial good beginning in the 1970's the EPA's role has slipped to one of becoming an after the fact weak enforcer of watered down laws. If Victoria is going to have a goal of sustaining 8 million residents over the coming decades, and still have a viable healthy environment I believe the EPA is will have to move into the front line of environment protection enforcement and education and look at it's role as a health provider via the environment and provide sustainable living benchmarks.

*Port Phillip is the entrance to Australia's busiest port; it covers 1,930 square kilometres, and is one of Victoria's most popular recreational destinations. The Bays total area: 1.3 million hectares and is 24 metres deep at its deepest central point 50. Its narrow entrance, 'the Rip', is three kilometres wide and reaches depths up to 94 metres. The narrow entrance, to the bay creates significant tidal currents within the lower part that help to sustain environmental values such as sponge communities. Over 4 million people (more than two thirds of Victoria's population, 1.4 million dwellings, 180,000 business locations) The catchment area of the Bay has a Gross value of annual agricultural production of more than \$1 billion (4,500 commercial agricultural holdings produce 15% of Victoria's gross value of agricultural production). Around 340 of the region's flora species and around 200 mammal, amphibian, bird, fish and reptile species are considered under threat of local or total extinction. The Bay is surrounded by a populated region with urban and agricultural activity, making it particularly susceptible to catchment based inputs. The rivers that run into Port Phillip Bay include the Yarra River, with other inputs from the Maribyrnong, Werribee, Patterson and Little rivers, from Kananook, Mordialloc and Kororoit creeks and from a multitude of stormwater drains. "The Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA)"*

Melbourne has grown considerably since the inception of the EPA. Melbourne is expected to add many millions more in population in the coming decades. Melbourne and Geelong are situated on Port Phillip Bay and the ever growing suburbs from these two major centres have and continue to spread along the coastline, river valleys and creek lines and around the wetlands areas, and outwards capturing most of the immediate hinterland. It is not impossible to visualise that within the next few decades almost all the coastline of Port Phillip Bay will be entirely fringed with suburbia and industrial development. The once natural waterways and the stormwater drains, that pass through and drain these developed and developing areas will flow into the Bay. With this in mind I believe that one of the EPA's greatest challenges for now and in the near future will be to keep Port Phillip Bay as a viable healthy water body. If the Bay was to become a grossly polluted it could suffer frequent toxic algal blooms, further and a more rapid increase in extinctions of species, the loss of recreation amenity and also become a public health risk, the ramifications for Greater Melbourne and Geelong could be dire.

*The EDO has witnessed how Victoria's environmental laws are implemented and enforced for over 20 years through our advice to and representation of the community on environmental law issues. Over that time we have become aware of countless environmental laws that are in force but are not effectively used by government to protect or improve the environment. Page 1. Walking the Talk? Implementation and enforcement of the Environment Protection Act 1970 14/10/2011*

It would be good to see the EPA have a boost in funding and be enabled it to rise to the level of having input in to of all levels of government, firstly to enforce existing environmental laws, and

secondly to propose new and add further protection to our existing regulations and laws through science based studies or reports.

City Councils are generally lax or can have a conflict of interest in enforcing their local environmental bylaws, they often fail to enforcing permeability percentage levels or adequately control sediment run off from building sites into the stormwater system, few local council regulate or have policies on the use of biocides in public areas or on private property etc. City Councils are increasingly becoming users of outdoor synthetic surfaces for their sporting fields as a panacea to their problems being caused by the drying climate and public over use of their grass areas. They seem to have little or no understanding of the heavy metal contaminates these material can produce.

If this inquiry is serious about protection people, the best way is to protect the local environs where people live. Clean air, clean water, and clean food within a biodiversity rich environment regardless of post code is the best way to do this. There are causal health risks from people living in degraded or poor environments. Chronic ill health and mental illness from living in stressed on degraded environments should not be surprising. Environmental related illness can be often alleviated or prevented by providing higher environmental standards.

I believe the EPA should be at the forefront of environmental health enquiry through science based research, this can seem expensive, but a healthier population can only create a healthier wealthier Victoria.

I believe if the EPA is ever going to be a true environmental protection agency with the public expectation and the confidence that it is keeping residents and our environment as safe as possible from hazardous material, pollution in air and water. To achieve this the EPA will have to become a linking body that works closely with local government, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Port Phillip and State wide Catchment Management Authorities, and to a lesser extent other bodies such as Department of Primary, Retail Water Companies and Port of Melbourne Corporation. I would like to see the EPA empowered through law for it to be able to have a larger more integrated role in protection and enforcement our environmental regulations and laws to achieve the goal of becoming a sustainable society or achieving sustainable living.

The review should make it possible for the EPA to acquire the right tools and the proper resourcing to develop the powers be able to tackle the environmental challenges of today and tomorrow. Only such powers of investigation and enforcement will give the public the faith in the EPA that it currently lacks today.

sincerely,

Paul Caine.



Glen Huntly, 3163

VIC.

[sspj@optusnet.com.au](mailto:sspj@optusnet.com.au)