**Mount Alexander Knitting Nannas**

**Fact File** on native forest destruction, species extinction and habitat loss – compiled by Kirsty McIntyre, March 2025

**What are native forests and where are they?**

Native forests are areas that have not been disturbed or altered by human activity. Mostly in these forests, there is high rainfall. There are many types of native forest found all over Australia: rainforests, melaleuca forests, eucalypt forests, casuarina forests, callitris forests, acacia forests, and mangrove forests. ([www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture)

State native forests are public land, owned by all of us.

**Why are they important?**

They are important in many ways. These places provide habitat for wildlife and plants, some of which are endangered in other parts of the country. As well, these forests are “carbon sinks” which means they absorb greenhouse gases and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This is critical in addressing the climate crisis. (Bob Brown Foundation). When trees are bulldozed or logged, this absorption stops and most of the carbon is released into the atmosphere. Added to this, in many cases, the felled timber is burnt to make way for plantation timber forests to be grown and this causes even more carbon to be emitted. Native forest logging is the highest emitting industry in Tasmania, with annual emissions equivalent to 1.1 million cars. In Victoria, research shows that decades of clear-fell logging is causing forests to burn more frequently and severely. (Wilderness.org.au).

**Which forests are being threatened?**

Unfortunately, in many states, native forests are being logged and cleared. In some states, like Victoria, it is illegal to log native forests but logging still is going on.

**How are they being destroyed and why?**

The agriculture, forestry and land development sectors are primarily driving Australia’s deforestation crisis. These areas are cleared to be able to do these things:

* + to turn a forest into pastures for cows or sheep to graze on, or to plant crops;
	+ to cut and pulp the trees into wood, packaging or paper;
	+ to mine the land that the forest grows on; or
	+ to make way for the construction of roads and buildings for industry or urban development. (Wilderness.org.au)

**What have been the short-term and long-term effects of this?**

**What have governments done? – state governments, federal government – what is their record?**

**Why is it important to stop native forest destruction?**

Along with land-clearing and bushfires, logging results in the loss of eco-systems and many native species. Since colonization, we have lost more than one hundred known species. This is a serious problem for maintaining the biodiversity of life on earth as well as dealing with climate change. (Bob Brown Foundation)

Australia bears the shame of being ranked first in the world in the rate of mammal extinctions and we are the only developed nation classified as a global deforestation hotspot. (World Wildlife Fund).

**What are other areas that are being harmed/destroyed?**

* Last year more than 25,000 hectares of threatened species habitat was approved for clearing for 48 projects by federal environment. In 2024, there was an increase in habitat loss, compared to 2023. (ABC News 21/1/25)
* Over 7.7 million hectares of forest and bushland was destroyed by land clearing between 2000 and 2017. That’s an area the size of Ireland. Australia is the only ‘developed’ country on the list of global deforestation hotspots.
* In Queensland alone, the beef industry has destroyed 1.4 million hectares of forests and bushland in five years. About 70% of the land clearing and deforestation taking place in Queensland is to create pastures to graze livestock—in particular, cattle raised for beef.
* WA’s Northern Jarrah Forests are under threat from mining for bauxite, which is then refined and turned into aluminium products. Rates of deforestation for bauxite have accelerated in the area in recent decades.
* In Victoria’s Central Highlands, only 1% of the mountain ash forest ecosystem remains unlogged and unburnt. This forest is listed by the IUCN as Critically Endangered.
* Even the Great Barrier Reef has been affected by deforestation due to erosion and runoff from coastal farming areas. There is increased sedimentation in the reef, which harms coral and other marine life. In Queensland, 47% of land clearing and deforestation between 2020 and 2021 was in Great Barrier Reef catchments areas, polluting the water in rivers that flow into the reef. (Wilderness.org.au)

**Which animals in Australia are threatened?**

* 42 species of fauna (21 animals) and flora (20 plants) have been added to the national threatened species list in 2024 and one threatened ecological community (King Island), (ABC News 21/1/25). Over 1,900 plant and animal species are threatened or at risk of extinction. (Wilderness.org.au).
* Koalas were listed as endangered in parts of Australia in 2022. In just five years (2015-2020), 724,070ha of "likely or known" koala habitat was affected by clearing activity linked to grazing cattle for beef in Queensland alone. (Wilderness.org.au)
* Deforestation for wood and paper products threatens the survival of many species including swift parrots, leadbeater's possums and greater gliders; and entire ecological communities such as the endangered mountain ash ecosystem. (Wilderness.org.au)
* The quokka and three types of cockatoos are species threatened by the clearing of land in WA.

**Which animal species have become extinct?**

Australia has one of the world’s highest rates of extinctions – about 100 species of flora and fauna lost since colonisation (ABC News 21/1/25)

**Why are they dying?**

Climate change has caused more than a quarter of a million water birds to have disappeared. This is because of dried conditions, as well as building dams and the diversion of water, (Guardian 17/12/24)

**What do we need to do?**

* We need to stop land clearing and logging especially in areas of critical habitats.
* We need stronger federal laws to protect our wildlife (look up the proposed law Tanya P had before overridden by Albo WA). An independent review of The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) concluded that it is outdated and ill-equipped to tackle Australia’s environmental challenges. (World Wildlife Fund).

**What can we do?**

Visit the Vic Forest Alliance website, Bob Brown Foundation website, World Wildlife Fund – sign petitions, send letters to the relevant ministers, get on their mailing list