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News - Letters

LETTERS

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ENVIRONMENT

Provide staff, not tokenistic grants

IT IS heartening that the poor state of the National Rhododendron Gardens at Olinda has been highlighted ("Call to raise garden's status", The Age, 10/4). The demise of the garden's quality and the influx of weeds is a clear demonstration of how the Victorian government manages public land.

Public submissions in the development of Department of Sustainability and Environment policies highlighted poor management practices, poor co-ordination of environmental issues, lack of resourcing and the rampant increase of pest plants and animals on public land.

The government relies too heavily on volunteers and "friends" groups to care for many areas of public land, providing tokenistic grants rather than adequately trained staff, resources and expertise to manage public land for all of Victoria.

Over the past few years the gardens have deteriorated considerably. They should be declared botanic gardens and afforded correct horticultural care rather than primitive "slash and burn" practices.

I recently noted cages set up with what appeared to be poisoned oats in situ to control rabbits. Unfortunately these oats were scattered outside the cages — readily accessible to possums, wombats, parrots, lyrebirds and any other fauna. In other areas of the state, landowners are warned to ensure dogs and cattle do not eat these poisoned oats.

David Howell, Armadale

Possible showpiece

PENNY Wong says UN climate talks are too slow (The Age, 10/4). We agree. But here's a novel idea.

Rather than using an endless succession of inconclusive negotiations as an excuse for inaction, what about some real action? I don't mean yet another fiasco involving rebates and scams but some real engineering on the scale of the Snowy Mountains Scheme — using solar, wind and geothermal resources coupled to large-scale storage. It can be done with today's technology.

With the will and support of the federal government, Australia could be the world's showpiece of renewable energy technology. Ms Wong, please contact the Melbourne Energy Institute at the University of Melbourne, or Beyond Zero Emissions, or Derek Abbott of the University of South Australia for examples of how Australia could go to zero carbon dioxide emissions at a price we could easily afford.

Peter Seligman, Essendon

Clear-felling proposal

VICFORESTS proposes to massively increase clear-fell harvesting in unburned and lightly burned forests adjacent to fire-devastated areas. Having obtained the release of large tracts for salvage logging after the 2009 fires, it now seeks an additional 148 coupes in the Central Highlands alone. In the Marysville area, 30

new coupes amounting to 1335 hectares are planned for harvesting in 2010-11. Forests around the Upper Acheron (close to what remains of the magnificent Acheron Way forest drive) and in the Rubicon State Forest west of Snob's Creek are especially targeted. If allowed to go ahead, it would amount to the clear-felling of up to 40 per cent of available unburned forests in local areas.

Impacts on wildlife recovery, landscape, carbon emissions and water catchments have not been considered, despite VicForests' stated aim of providing "best community value" in logging publicly owned forests. In fact VicForests is way behind in its commitment to regenerate forests harvested over the past four years. It appears VicForests is not even economically viable, having sustained a \$2.4 million loss in 2009 and being unable to pay government dividends in recent years. This means taxpayers are subsidising the destruction of our own precious forest resources while artificially keeping afloat a failing and certainly unsustainable business enterprise.

The bushfire recovery authority should poke its nose into the decision-making on VicForests' application: the now-struggling tourist industry and people's morale are certain to be affected. The DSE must reject the proposal, at least until a public assessment has been made of ecological, economic, water quality and global warming consequences and VicForests has fulfilled its legal duty to regenerate after clear-felling.

Jill Sanguinetti, Narbethong

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