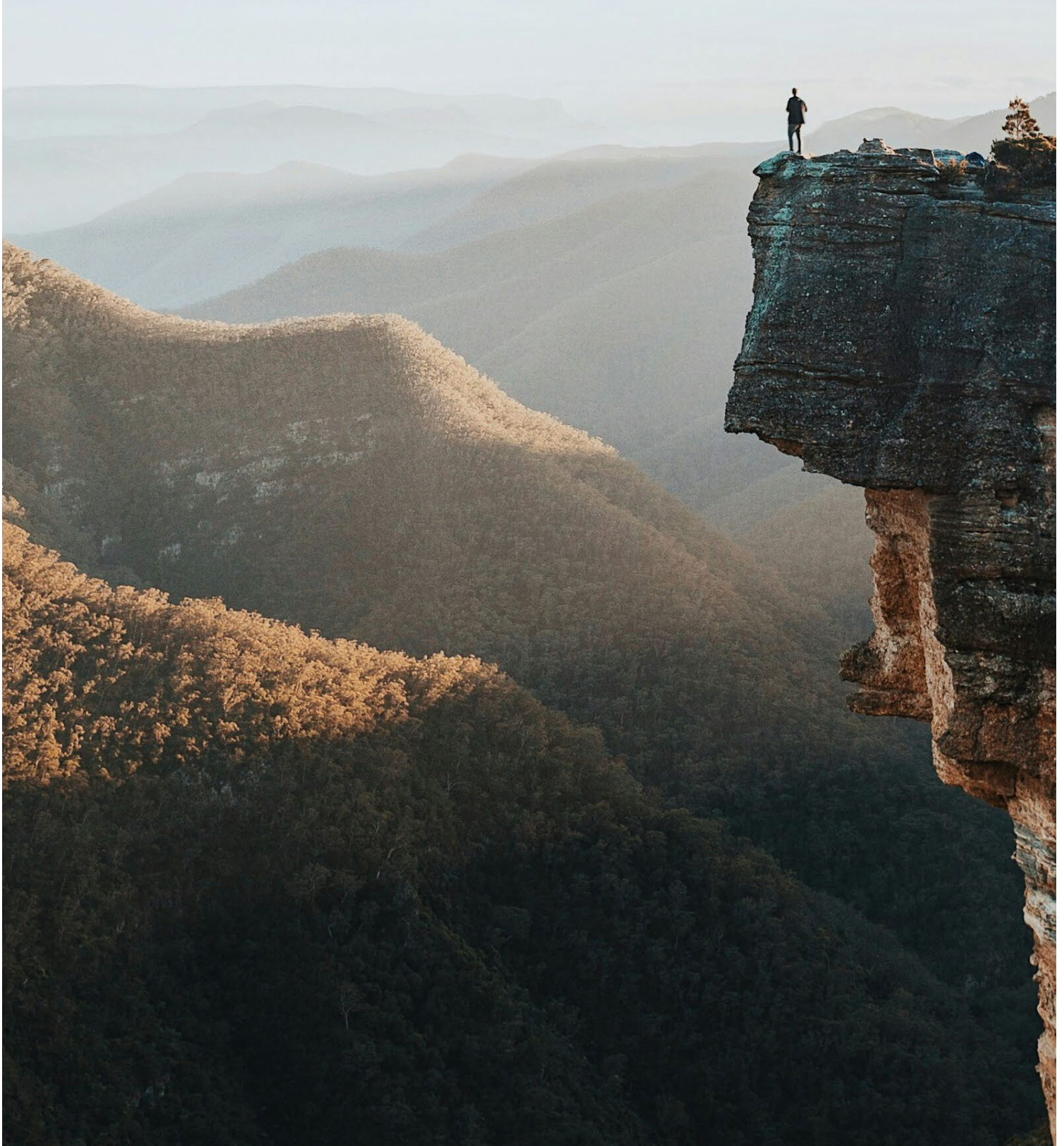




WWF

AUSTRALIA

# TOWARDS NATURE POSITIVE: WWF POLICY ASKS FOR THE NEXT AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT







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# TOP 5 COMMITMENTS NEEDED TO BUILD A NATURE POSITIVE AUSTRALIA

Ahead of the 2025 Federal Election, WWF-Australia is calling on all political parties and independents to take immediate and decisive action to shift away from nature negative practices towards a nature positive, net zero future. This document outlines WWF-Australia's full recommendations to tackle Australia's climate and biodiversity crises. Of these, we believe the following five commitments are most critical to catalysing the transition to a Nature Positive Australia:

## 1 Invest 1% of the budget into nature

Less than 0.1% of the budget is spent on biodiversity. A significant increase in nature funding is urgently needed to halt and reverse nature loss, including significant investment for First Nations communities to manage Country. WWF-Australia joins calls from scientists and conservation groups for at least 1% of the federal budget to be allocated towards nature protection.

## 2 Complete the reform of Australia's nature laws

Weak national nature laws continue to allow the destruction of habitats critical to threatened species, exacerbating our extinction crisis. Five years after an independent review, progress on these essential reforms has been minimal. Urgent protection of our fragile environment is needed to halt the decline of our wildlife by completing the reform of Australia's nature laws as a national priority.

## 3 Catalyse global and regional ocean protection

Multiple and cumulative threats are severely impacting our oceans, as well as the livelihoods of communities and marine life. Australia has historically been a global leader in ocean conservation, but over the past decade, our international standing has declined. To restore Australia's reputation as a true world leader in ocean conservation, urgent and coordinated action to protect oceans at both a national and regional level and conserve key marine species through blue corridor conservation is essential.

## 4 Build a nature positive economy

Australia's economic and financial systems continue to rapidly degrade nature. To reverse this, Australia must address the underlying economic drivers of nature loss, and reform the economic rules of the game. Aligning economic incentives, policies, and financial flows with nature positive goals is necessary to build a nature-positive, net zero economy.

## 5 Replace fossil fuels with renewable energy

A healthy and stable climate underpins all life on Earth, supporting nature and people alike. But Australia and the world's rapidly changing climate is seriously threatening the safety of people and causing the loss of so many of our natural wonders. The Australian Government must do everything possible to stabilise global heating to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels. We need a just transformation to renewable energy, increased energy efficiency and improved energy access alongside a phase-out of all fossil fuels. This is the most impactful way to limit emissions rapidly and keep 1.5 °C within reach.

# Acknowledgements

WWF-Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of lands, waters and sky throughout Australia. We honour their strong connection to Country, and the protective relationship that connection inspires. We pay our respects to Traditional Owners' deep expertise in managing and protecting Country over thousands of generations, and to Elders, past, present and emerging.

WWF-Australia has been working to create a world where people live in harmony with nature since 1978. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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Great Barrier Reef © Giorgia Doglioni/ Unsplash





## INTRODUCTION

All of us depend on nature. From our food, water and resources to protection from extreme weather and natural disasters and disease; our natural environment underpins Australians' health, happiness and prosperity.

But we have taken nature for granted. Our activities are destroying nature at a rate far faster than it can replenish itself, resulting in an unprecedented, deeply interconnected climate and biodiversity crisis. These issues are inextricably linked. The rapid loss of nature is amplifying the impacts of climate change, while climate change is accelerating the destruction of our natural systems.

This is why Australia and nations of the world have committed to global goals for a thriving, sustainable future, including halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity (under the Convention on Biological Diversity, or CBD) and capping global temperature rise to 1.5 °C (under the Paris Agreement). The Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted by 196 countries in 2022, including Australia, commits countries “to take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030” and provides a clear path forward with 23 targets for action. Together, these two global agreements provide a roadmap for navigating a transition to a nature positive, net zero world.

But despite these global ambitions, Australia's national commitments and actions on the ground fall far short of what's needed to meet our targets for 2030. With less than six years to this deadline, the actions we take now will determine our success in turning the tide on both greenhouse gas emissions and the destruction of nature.

The next election is a decisive opportunity to make nature a priority; to shift away from nature negative practices towards a nature positive, net zero future. The next Australian Government needs to commit to clear policies that incentivise this transition and invest significant resources in nature's recovery.

The solutions outlined in this document are at our fingertips. What is needed now is the courage and determination to implement them. Taking these steps will not only drive economic growth and job creation, but also safeguard Australian communities and protect our iconic reefs, forests and wildlife.



## 1

# ELEVATE FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP FOR HEALTHY COUNTRY AND PEOPLE



Gudjuda Rangers, Giringun Rangers and JCU staff attaching GPS trackers to hawksbill turtles at JCU Turtle Health Research Facility.  
© WWF-Aus / Woody Spark

In Australia, Indigenous Peoples have prospered on Country longer than any other known society in the world. First Peoples speak of ‘healthy Country, healthy people’ and understand the truth and implications of this saying in a way that many Australians do not. The Indigenous-led Heart of the Reef statement sums up the health of our environment in clear terms: ‘Today Country is sick...we are all suffering, and we can’t continue this way’. Following extreme levels of environmental harm since colonisation, healing Country is needed more urgently than ever before. This is a job for all Australians, working together with elected representatives and governments.

In recent decades, Australia’s governments have started to integrate First Nations leadership into policymaking and management to care for Country. While not a panacea for healing Country, these efforts are a critical step towards inclusive conservation; and they are also a recognised driver of Closing the Gap targets on employment and legal rights or interests in the sea. While Australia tragically leads the world in biodiversity loss, there is hope. By embracing First Nations leadership and knowledge, and solutions such as participatory decision-making, equitable and durable funding, job creation, gender equity in conservation roles, and legal reform to help restore Country, halt further destruction, and drive continued action toward a thriving, nature-positive future.



## 1.1 GROW AND ENHANCE INDIGENOUS RANGER ROLES

There is a significant conservation need for more Indigenous rangers, and a strong desire from Indigenous communities to participate. WWF-Australia welcomes the Government's commitment to create 3,800 roles by the end of the decade and advocates a further expansion of the Indigenous ranger program to 5,000 Indigenous rangers, with a major focus on increasing the numbers of Indigenous women rangers. In many Indigenous communities, women have distinct roles and responsibilities in caring for Country, with many important aspects of land management and biodiversity protection considered women's business. However, women represent only one-third of Indigenous rangers in Australia<sup>1</sup> and face numerous obstacles to participation and professional advancement. To enter and excel in this male dominated workforce, Indigenous women Rangers need access to Culturally safe support, professional networks, leadership opportunities and equal resources for their duties. To achieve gender equity by 2026 there is the need for targeted and tailored support for Indigenous women Ranger Programs. WWF urges a strong focus on equity and inclusion to ensure women have equal rights and participation in caring for Country.

Indigenous rangers should also be better supported by providing equal and fair pay, enabling opportunities to take on enforcement and compliance responsibilities on their Land and Sea Country, and ensuring they have the resources and training needed to do so.

### WWF Recommendations

- A commitment to create and employ 5,000 Indigenous ranger roles by 2030.
- A commitment to achieve gender equity in the Indigenous ranger program by 2026.
- Ensure rangers are provided with the opportunity to assume responsibilities for enforcement and compliance activities on their Land and Sea Country.
- Ensure the national Rangers award meets at least the minimum wage.

## 1.2 EXPAND AND FUND AN INDIGENOUS WOMEN RANGERS' NETWORK

Achieving gender equity in the ranger program and embracing the vital role women play in caring for Country needs a dedicated support program and appropriate funding. WWF-Australia calls on the next Australian Government to support the expansion and operation of a truly national Indigenous women rangers' support network. Dedicated investment in women rangers would enable expansion of the network into southern and eastern states by engaging new coordinators and establishing new hubs, provide funding certainty to existing hubs, facilitate a national women Caring for Country forum and governing board, and resource new opportunities for professional development and knowledge exchange.

### WWF Recommendation

- Support the expansion and operation of a truly national Indigenous women rangers' support network - *\$10 million over four years.*

<sup>1</sup> NIAA, *Indigenous Rangers*, <https://www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/environment-and-land/indigenous-rangers>



## 1.3 ESTABLISH A COMMISSIONER FOR COUNTRY

WWF-Australia, alongside a collective group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders representatives from leading NGOs, are calling for a voice of Country to end the ongoing environmental damage to Country. The lack of consideration for Indigenous knowledge in decision-making is why there is a strong need for an independent, authoritative Indigenous voice that guides the protection and management of natural and Indigenous cultural heritage values protected under national law. The Commissioner for Country will be an empowered public champion that provides a geographical voice to protect, restore, manage invasive species, and repair Country - a voice of Country. This voice does not replace or supersede the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but elevates and empowers those seeking to care for Country.

### WWF Recommendation

- Establish a Commissioner for Country - *\$42m per annum.*

## 1.4 INCLUDE FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES IN THREATENED SPECIES RECOVERY

First Nations peoples attribute tremendous value to animals, plants and ecological communities, with culturally or spiritually significant species being indicators of healthy Country. Currently there are few funded First Nations identified positions that coordinate cultural knowledge into threatened species recovery. To support the inclusion of First Nations perspectives, the Government should fund First Nations staffing positions that support the integration of First Nations cultural ecological knowledge on threatened species recovery, rather than relying on the goodwill of First Nations people. WWF-Australia calls on the government to commit to integrating First Nations perspectives on Culturally Significant Entities (CSE), by funding Indigenous-led research that highlights the importance of Indigenous-led management of CSE in biodiversity conservation; with a view towards supporting a national CSE baseline data set and the subsequent inclusion of the condition of CSE in State of Environment reporting.

### WWF Recommendations

- Integrate First Nations' perspectives and knowledge in Australia's threatened species recovery by funding First Nations recovery positions - *\$35m a year for five years.*<sup>2</sup>
- Invest in Indigenous-led research that supports the recognition of culturally significant entities through State of Environment reporting processes to document trends in condition - *\$3m over five years.*

<sup>2</sup> This would cover 44 recovery coordinator positions who would be responsible for integrating First Nations perspectives into threatened species recovery for the Government's 110 threatened species (approx. 2.5 species per coordinator role) for five years.







Girringun Aboriginal Corporation's Cindy-Lou Togo on the Great Barrier Reef, QLD © WWF-Australia / Woody Spark



# 2 INVEST 1% OF THE BUDGET TO PROTECT AND REPAIR AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



Greater Glider GPS Collaring, Tallaganda State Forest, NSW.  
© Kailas Wild / WWF-Australia

Australia's ongoing nature crisis is a direct result of decades of insufficient funding for environmental protection. Less than 0.1% of the budget is spent on biodiversity.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the Australian Government is estimated to spend \$26.3 billion – 50 times more – per year on subsidies for activities that are likely to harm nature.<sup>4</sup>

This lack of environmental spending is not only detrimental to Australia's biodiversity but presents a significant economic risk. The World Bank has estimated that countries such as Australia are at risk of losing almost AUD\$17 billion per annum from biodiversity impacts by 2030.<sup>5</sup>

Australia is party to the Global Biodiversity Framework and is taking action on several of the key targets through the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-30). This includes commitments to: no new species extinctions; protecting and conserving at least 30% of Australia's land and sea areas by 2030 (the '30x30' target); reducing invasive species impacts in priority landscapes; and restoration of degraded land, fresh water and marine ecosystems by 2030. Despite these essential commitments, new funding has been virtually absent.

WWF-Australia calls on the next Australian Government to significantly increase nature funding to halt and reverse nature loss. WWF-Australia joins calls from scientists and conservation groups for at least 1% of the federal budget to be allocated towards nature protection. While the amount needed to protect and repair nature is far greater than this and will require action from a range of stakeholders, the Government needs to step up and take the lead role in investing in nature's recovery.



## WWF Recommendations

Allocate at least 1% of the federal budget to the environment that prioritises funds to;

- **Stop extinctions and recover Australia’s threatened species.** Includes investing in coordinated and inclusive conservation planning, landscape scale management, cultural burning and species-specific recovery actions including habitat restoration and species reintroductions. Includes specific funding for threatened species recovery teams.
  - *At least \$2 billion a year ongoing*<sup>6</sup>
- **Address invasive species and create island safe havens.** Includes better management of invasive species and specific funding for eradicating invasive species off priority islands.
  - *At least \$404 million over four years*<sup>7</sup>
- **Protect 30% of Australia’s land by 2030.** Includes the establishment of a new dedicated fund for the purchase of land of high biodiversity importance to protect ecologically representative vegetation types across Australia, by creating new public, private or Indigenous protected areas.
  - *\$5 billion dedicated land fund*<sup>8</sup>
- **Resource Indigenous Rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs).** Includes investment for effective management of Australia’s IPAs and support for first Nations communities to manage Country.
  - *Approximately \$1 billion a year ongoing*
- **Restore degraded landscapes.** Includes the establishment of a new dedicated program to systematically restore Australia’s degraded lands for the benefit of agriculture, species and the climate.
  - *At least \$2 billion a year ongoing*<sup>9</sup>

See WWF-Australia Federal Pre-Budget Submission 2025-26 for further detail on funding allocation.

<sup>3</sup> 30by30, 2024, *The Price of Nature*, <https://30by30.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/The-Price-of-Nature.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Biodiversity Council, 2024, *Nature-negative – the federal government’s subsidies harming biodiversity*, <https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/news/nature-negative-the-federal-government-subsidies-harming-biodiversity>

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, 2021, *Economic Case for Nature: A Global Earth-Economy Model to Assess Development Policy Pathways*

<sup>6</sup> Wintle et al. 2019, ‘Spending to save: What will it cost to halt Australia’s extinction crisis?’, *Conservation Letters*

<sup>7</sup> Invasive Species Council, 2024, *Federal Funding Proposals*

<sup>8</sup> Fitzsimons J, Picone A, Partridge T, Cornish M. 2023, ‘Protecting Australia’s Nature: Pathways to protecting 30 per cent of land by 2030’, The Nature Conservancy, WWF-Australia, the Australian Land Conservation Alliance and the Pew Charitable Trusts

<sup>9</sup> Mappin, 2021. ‘The costs and benefits of restoring a continent’s terrestrial ecosystems’, *Journal of Applied Ecology*

# 3

## COMPLETE THE REFORM OF AUSTRALIA'S NATURE LAWS TO REVERSE THE DECLINE OF AUSTRALIA'S WILDLIFE



Koala mother and joey seeking refuge on a bulldozed logpile, near Kin Kin Queensland. © Briano / WWF-Australia



Australia's animals are the most distinctive in the world. 86% of Australia's mammals can't be found anywhere else. Despite this, Australia has the shameful title of world leader in mammal extinctions. Since colonisation, at least 104 species have gone extinct. Today, more than 2,000 of our unique Australian animals and plants are at risk of extinction. Weak national nature laws, with exemptions for the logging industry, continue to enable destruction of threatened species' habitat which is exacerbating our extinction crisis.

Cultural Heritage sites of enormous significance to First Nations people have been destroyed or degraded because our nature laws and cultural heritage protection laws are inadequate.

The current Government came to power promising to overhaul Australia's national environment and cultural heritage protection laws, following a damning independent review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Five years on from this review, there is very little to show of the much-needed reform to protect our fragile environment. WWF-Australia recommends that reforms to Australia's environment and cultural heritage protection laws be implemented in full as an immediate priority.



## WWF Recommendations

Commit to releasing exposure drafts of legislation to strengthen nature and cultural heritage laws in the first 100 days of the new government that would;

- Protect threatened species and their habitats with clear legal protections and the prevention of harmful activities like deforestation and conversion, and forest logging.
- Establish a national Environmental Protection Agency that is effective, independent and accountable.
- Introduce an overarching objective of Nature Positive defined as "Halt and Reverse Nature Loss by 2030 on a 2020 baseline, and achieve full recovery by 2050.
- Establish an agency to provide essential datasets and track and report progress against the Nature Positive objective.
- Create National Environmental Standards in consultation with First Nations peoples and key stakeholders, and include a definition of unacceptable impacts.
- Consider the climate impacts, including from the burning of exported fossil fuels, of proposed projects on matters protected under the Act.
- Reform offsets policy so they are a last resort and demonstrably achieve an absolute net gain outcome.
- Protect Aboriginal cultural heritage from development impacts.
- Give communities a genuine voice in decision-making and enshrine Free, Prior and Informed Consent of First Nations peoples.

# 4

## END DEFORESTATION TO PROTECT THE PLACES SPECIES CALL HOME

Our native forests and other native vegetation habitats are home to some of the most unique wildlife and plants on Earth. But the ongoing rate of forest destruction and land clearing sees Eastern Australia listed as one of 24 global deforestation fronts, the only developed nation in the world on the list. It's estimated that approximately 70 million trees are cut down or damaged each year.<sup>10</sup>

Preserving our trees and keeping our forests intact is critical to maintaining the health of our planet, and vital for a sustainable future. Not only do trees provide habitats for countless species of wildlife, but they also play a crucial role in mitigating climate change and provide a wealth of ecosystem services essential for our well-being and economic prosperity and provide connection to Country for First Nations People.

### 4.1 END NATIVE FOREST LOGGING IN AUSTRALIA

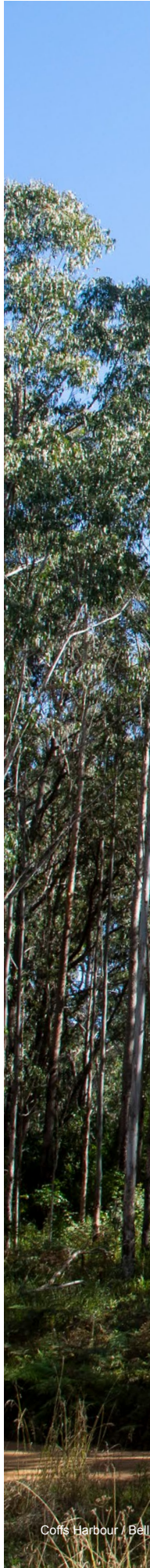
Native forest logging carries profound negative repercussions for our environment and economy. It disrupts ecosystems that are home to unique and often threatened species and has put iconic animals like the koala and greater glider at risk, pushing them closer to extinction.

Australia has made positive commitments to protect and restore trees at recent international fora. At COP28 Australia committed to *“enhanced efforts towards halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030.”* This followed Australia signing the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use to work *“collectively to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030.”* Continued native forest logging in Australia is not in line with these international commitments.

The next Australian Government must work with the remaining logging states – NSW, Tasmania and Queensland – to provide structural adjustment packages to assist communities transition to a fully plantations-based timber and fibre sector. Support should include infrastructure investment (e.g. upgrade mills to harvest softwood plantation timber, wood manufacturing plants, tourism facilities in former state forests), boosting supply chains (e.g. expansion of plantations, value-adding through diverting woodchips to engineered wood, improved forest fire management, seed production), and developing high-integrity carbon and biodiversity markets.<sup>11</sup>

#### WWF Recommendations

- Commit to end native forest logging and transition to a plantations-based timber industry.
- Investment to end industrial native forest logging by 2030, and transition to a plantations-based timber and fibre industry with innovative wood manufacturing - \$2bn over 5 years.



Coffs Harbour / Bell





## 4.2 IMPROVE DATA AND TRANSPARENCY TO DETECT DEFORESTATION

There is an urgent need for a monitoring and reporting system on native vegetation loss and regrowth in a timely and nationally consistent way. The Commonwealth is already mapping land use change for carbon accounting through the National Carbon Accounting System (NCAS). However, when compared with monitoring undertaken by some states, such as Queensland's Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS), the degree of inaccuracy is significant. This risks substantial under-reporting of land sector emissions, deforestation and habitat loss.

Habitat loss and clearing are the second most significant causes of extinction of Australian species.<sup>12</sup> The NCAS mapping does not reflect how land use is modifying native vegetation habitat, and there is a lack of clarity about the extent of and reasons for the clearing. Regular, transparent and rapid monitoring of human-induced changes to native vegetation across Australia would accurately report on the impact land clearing is having on Australia's emissions and biodiversity, measure progress towards national goals and international commitments, and support Australian farmers to verify that their produce has not been produced on deforested land.

### WWF Recommendation

- The establishment of a national native vegetation mapping and monitoring system - \$10 million over four years.

<sup>10</sup> WWF Australia and Doctors for the Environment. 2023, *Trees: The forgotten heroes for our health*

<sup>11</sup> The federal government has previously supported such initiatives, notably in 2011 via the 'Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement', <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/forestry/national/aus-govt-tas-forests#:~:text=Under%20the%20agreement%20%24277%20million,to%20exit%20native%20forest%20harvesting>

<sup>12</sup> DCCEEW, 2021, *Australia State of Environment 2021*



# 5

## BUILD THE HEALTH AND RESILIENCE OF OCEANS

The perception that our oceans are immune to human pressures has been proven a myth. In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that multiple and cumulative threats are severely impacting our oceans – as well as people’s livelihoods and marine life. These include global warming, overfishing, industrial coastal developments, and pollution. Scientists confirmed that in 2023/24, coral bleaching, caused by climate change, occurred in at least 62 countries and territories worldwide. 2024’s mass bleaching event will likely constitute the worst ever of its kind. Globally, nearly 1,500 marine species are listed as being at risk of extinction, and in Australia, more than half of our shallow reef species have declined in numbers over the past decade alone.

Historically, Australia has been a global leader in oceans conservation. But in the last decade, Australia’s global standing has diminished at a time when oceans conservation has become increasingly prominent and more urgently needed. To regain Australia’s track record as a true world leader in oceans conservation and sustainable management, concerted action across a range of areas is greatly needed.



The Great Barrier Reef ©Daniel Palaez Duque/Unsplash





## 5.1 CATALYSE 30X30 IN AUSTRALIA AND OUR REGION

The Australian Government has agreed to the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) goals and targets at the global level, which includes protecting and conserving at least 30% of land and sea areas by 2030. Australia's network of marine protected areas (MPAs) covers nearly half of Australia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). However, less than a quarter of the total area covered by Commonwealth MPAs is highly protected and free from all extractive use. This leaves swathes of vulnerable and precious ecosystems and habitats lacking in sufficient protection, risking further degradation and nature loss.

Through Australia's Sustainable Ocean Plan, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-30) and the next review of Australia's marine park network, the next Australian Government should ensure at least 30% of Australia's degraded marine areas and waterways are under restoration, and plans are advanced to fully protect at least 30% of Australia's EEZ by 2027. This is a policy well supported by the public with 93% of Australians believing it is important to ensure 30x30 protection on land and at sea.<sup>13</sup> The Coral Sea and the region covering Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands are amongst the most precious and iconic sites in Australia's oceans. They need a significant increase in protection and WWF recommends this should be a priority focus in the first term for the next Australian Government.

In addition to our domestic ocean protection responsibilities, Australia is well positioned to influence and catalyse ocean conservation and sustainable management in the southern hemisphere. WWF-Australia advocates approaching the marine component of 30x30 from a regional perspective. Under such an approach, well-resourced countries such as Australia should lead by example in high-level protection within its own EEZ, as well as championing and supporting efforts within our region and internationally. The Australian Government should respect and partner with Pacific leaders on ocean and nature conservation. This should include building investment in and collaborating on key regional initiatives and shared commitments under the GBF and towards high seas marine protection under the new High Seas Treaty.

### WWF Recommendations

- Fully protect (including prohibiting all extractive activities) 30% of Australia's EEZ by 2027, prioritising the Coral Sea and the region covering Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands.
- Double the area of the contribution that Sea Country Indigenous Protected Areas make to the 30x30 target from 5.5 million hectares to 11 million hectares.
- Establish a \$150 million marine parks package to support marine park reviews that are informed and supported by scientific research, comprehensive stakeholder engagement, and fisheries related grant programs.
- Develop and implement a fully funded plan to restore at least 30% of degraded coastal areas.
- Work with Asia-Pacific states to collectively prioritise areas for conservation at regional level.

<sup>13</sup> Biodiversity Council, 2024, *2024 Biodiversity Concerns Report: A survey of community attitudes to nature conservation*

## 5.2 ESTABLISH A WESTERN PACIFIC ‘BLUE CORRIDOR’ FOR WHALES

Growing scientific evidence shows whales are a crucial species helping to maintain the health of our oceans. However, one in four of the world's cetaceans – whales, dolphins and porpoises – are threatened with extinction.<sup>14</sup>

WWF-Australia recommends the next government prioritise the protection of critical habitats and migration routes for whales and dolphins through establishment of a Western Pacific ‘blue corridor’ for whales. Blue corridors are migration superhighways for marine megafauna like whales and link ecologically interconnected areas – often global – where they breed, feed, socialise and migrate, and are essential for their survival.

A Western Pacific blue corridor would create a network of protection for whales and other key ocean species from the Pacific, through Australian waters and down to Antarctica. It would help address the key threats that whales and other marine species face including major hazards from fisheries bycatch to impacts of overfishing; ship strikes; chemical, plastic and underwater noise pollution; habitat loss, unsustainable use; illegal trade; irresponsible marine tourism, and climate change. As our understanding of whales’ migratory routes and the threats they face evolve, our approach to conserve and restore whale populations across their entire range must also evolve.

### WWF Recommendations

- Develop and implement a Western Pacific Whale Blue Corridors by 2028, working collaboratively with Pacific countries, scientists and other stakeholders.
- Ratify the High Seas Treaty (the UN agreement on biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction) before June 2025.
- Establish a ‘blue corridors’ fund to address knowledge gaps for data-poor marine species’ habitats and migratory pathways, including turtles, rays, sharks and cetaceans – *\$10 million*.

## 5.3 PROTECT THE GREAT BARRIER REEF FROM FURTHER DECLINE

2024’s coral bleaching event was the most widespread seen on the world’s biggest reef system. The initial data on coral mortality are sobering – the area around Cooktown and Lizard Island lost more than a third of its live hard coral – the biggest annual drop in 39 years of monitoring. WWF-Australia is deeply concerned that the complete Reef-wide survey data to be released in 2025 will show similar levels of bleaching across the entire World Heritage Area. Coupled with extreme heat warnings from the Bureau of Meteorology this 2024/2025 summer, especially in our oceans, the need for new and bold government action for our Reef has never been more compelling.

### WWF Recommendations

- Formulate an emergency coral bleaching and cyclone response plan ready for the 2024/2025 summer with clear actions and funding.
- Rapidly transition the Queensland coral harvest fishery out of the Marine Park.
- Establish an independent review of the Great Barrier Reef Zoning Plan.
- Re-establish the joint Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council to enable national and state leadership to protect the Reef.
- Drive decarbonisation efforts aligned with 1.5 °C to comply with Australia’s duties under the World Heritage Convention to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the Reef.<sup>15</sup>



## 5.4 ELIMINATE PLASTIC POLLUTION AND REDUCE PLASTIC CONSUMPTION

Australians generate more single-use plastic per person than any country other than Singapore.<sup>16</sup> Plastic pollution poses significant threats to Australia's wildlife. An estimated 15,000-20,000 turtles have been entangled in fishing gear in the northern Gulf region.<sup>17</sup> Around half of all marine turtles have ingested plastic, and ingesting just one piece increases a turtle's chance of dying by 22%.<sup>18</sup> Many marine species are susceptible to injury, disease and death resulting from plastic pollution, with certain types of plastics known to be particularly deadly.

The prospect of transition to a circular economy for all materials, across the economy, provides a clear opportunity to reduce over-consumption of all materials and in the case of plastics, ensure that the most polluting products and harmful chemicals are kept out of nature. The Australian Government is currently consulting on stricter rules to mandate packaging requirements and reduce single-use plastic waste. This aligns with commitments made by all environment ministers to reform packaging regulation by 2025.<sup>19</sup> Ministers have also agreed to mandate obligations for packaging design based on international best practice and to make industry responsible for the packaging it places on the market.

To facilitate a structured transition toward a circular economy, WWF-Australia recommends that the next government implement a combination of the reform options currently underway: an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme with financial incentives to drive change, where the Government would charge varying fees based on the environmental impact of the packaging with the proceeds being reinvested into driving a circular economy for packaging. This should be combined with national mandatory requirements, including regulations to ban any packaging that is not needed to protect, transport or make a product safe to handle, as well as requirements that packaging be designed to prevent commonly littered components, such as screw cap lids, tear packaging and peel-off seals.

This is a critical opportunity to address the harmful environmental impacts of packaging, reduce Australia's single-use plastic consumption, and ensure that all businesses are on a level playing field so that innovative reuse and zero-waste businesses are not financially disadvantaged.

### WWF Recommendations

- Establish an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme, to ensure a level playing field for all businesses.
- Mandate a 20% reduction in disposable packaging by 2030.
- Establish industry-specific for 40-70% of all packaging to be reusable by 2030, supporting sustainable packaging systems and circularity.
- Advocate for plastic product and chemical bans and complementary trade restrictions within UN plastic pollution treaty negotiations.

<sup>14</sup> Braulik et al. 2023, 'Red-list status and extinction risk of the world's whales, dolphins, and porpoises', *Conservation Biology*

<sup>15</sup> To read WWF-Australia's full suite of detailed recommendations, see the *WWF-Australia Great Barrier Reef briefing paper* (June 2024): [https://assets.wwf.org.au/image/upload/file\\_briefing\\_paper\\_great\\_barrier\\_reef\\_june2024?\\_a=ATO2Ba20](https://assets.wwf.org.au/image/upload/file_briefing_paper_great_barrier_reef_june2024?_a=ATO2Ba20) and M. Meinhausen & Z. Nicholls, *Updated assessment of Australia's emission reduction targets and 1.5 °C pathways* (Climate Resource for WWF-Australia, 2023).

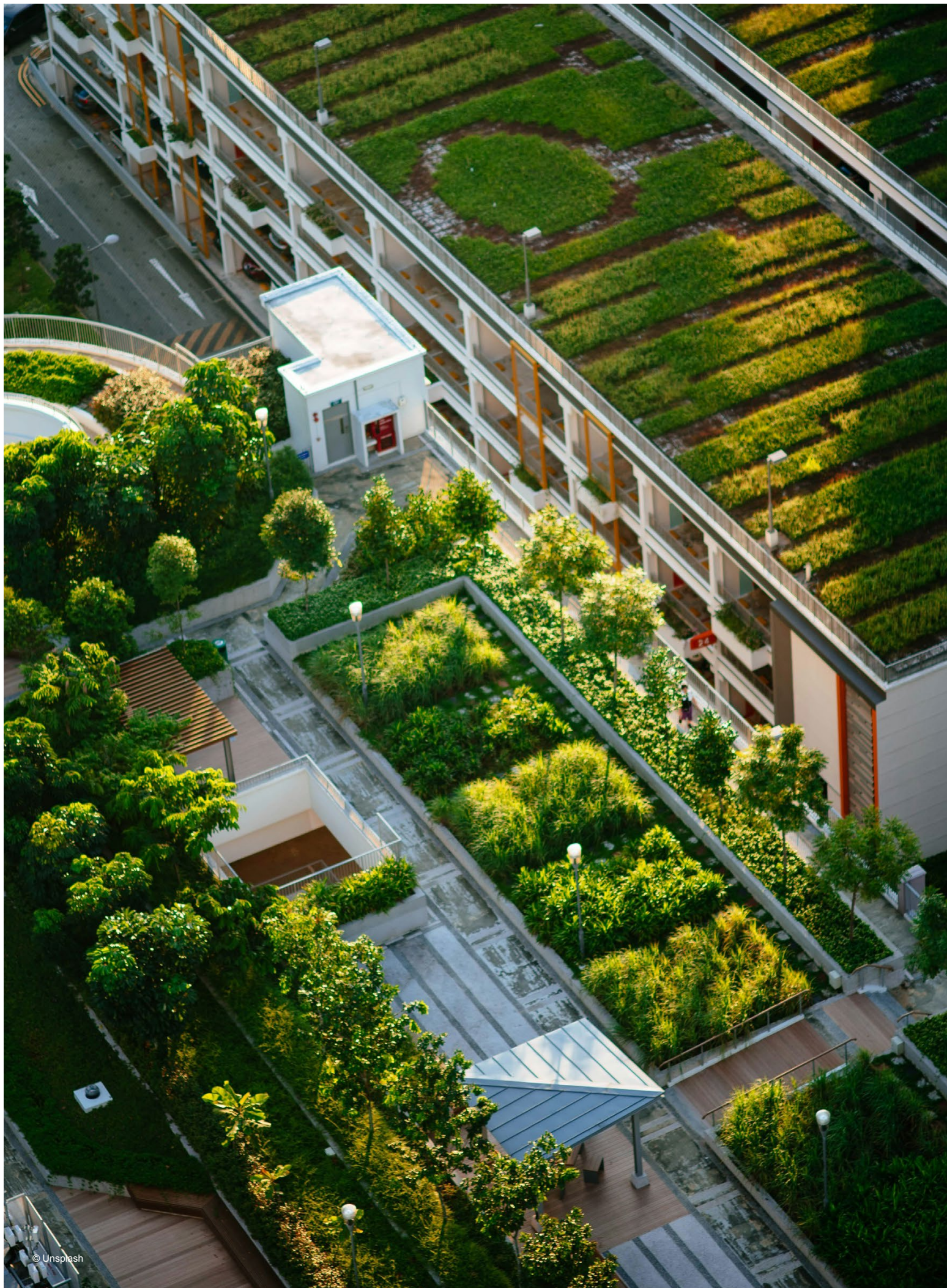
<sup>16</sup> Charles, D., Kimman, L., and Saran, N., 2021. The Plastic Waste Makers Index, Minderoo Foundation

<sup>17</sup> Wilcox et al. 2015, 'Understanding the sources and effects of abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear on marine turtles in northern Australia', *Conservation Biology*

<sup>18</sup> Wilcox, et al. 2018, 'A quantitative analysis linking sea turtle mortality and plastic debris ingestion', *Scientific Reports*

<sup>19</sup> DCCEE, 2022, Environment Ministers Meeting Communique (media release) <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/emm-communique-21-oct-2022.pdf>





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# 6

## BUILD A NATURE-POSITIVE ECONOMY

Our nature-negative economic and financial systems continue to rapidly degrade nature. Public financing alone will not be sufficient to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 in Australia. Addressing this requires policies, incentives, and finance necessary to realise an economy that is nature-positive as well as net zero.

### 6.1 LEGISLATE A NATURE-POSITIVE GOAL AND DEVELOP SECTORAL PATHWAYS FOR ALL SECTORS TO ACHIEVE THIS

Australia has signed up to global biodiversity targets via the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and must now implement these targets at a national level. However, there is still insufficient clarity and a national vision on what is needed to deliver a nature-positive transition for Australia.

Transitioning to a nature-positive economy will not happen overnight. Similar to Australia's climate targets, Australia needs a clear nature-positive goal to help align government policy, incentives, and financial investments towards achieving the GBF targets. Committing an overarching goal of nature-positive in legislation would enable and incentivise greater action across all of government and other portfolios which are necessary to the nature-positive transition. It is vital the definition of nature-positive aligns to the global goal to "halt and reverse nature loss by 2030 on a 2020 baseline, and achieve full recovery by 2050" – any national definition that deviates from this would be out of step with Australia's commitments to the GBF plus other international initiatives such as the Science Based Targets Initiative and Accountability Framework Initiative.

The transition pathway to a nature-positive economy in Australia must be mapped out. This includes defining what a nature-positive economy in Australia means, and what industry transition pathways look like to achieve nature-positive. To deliver this, the next Australian Government should support the development of nature-positive sectoral pathways. Developing these pathways will ensure an orderly and just transition, and make the Australian economy more resilient, sustainable and competitive. Given there are only five years to 2030, these should be integrated with the development of the sectoral pathways to transition to net zero by 2050 and made an immediate priority for the next Government to not delay business investments and actions.

#### WWF Recommendations

- Legislate a nature-positive goal that aligns to the global goal and sets a clear vision for Australia to achieve the GBF targets.
- Commit to developing nature-positive sectoral pathways.



## 6.2 LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD THROUGH THE REMOVAL OF NATURE NEGATIVE SUBSIDIES

It is estimated that the Australian Government provided subsidies of \$26.3 billion in 2023 to projects that have a medium to high adverse impact on nature and biodiversity.<sup>20</sup> This is 50 times larger than the funding from the Australian Government for nature and biodiversity. Such significant incentives for activities that negatively impact and destroy biodiversity act as a major impediment to turning Australia's economy nature-positive. At a minimum, the playing field should be leveled through the removal of subsidies so that nature-positive practices can compete with those which are nature negative. Beyond that, harmful subsidies must be redeployed toward activities that regenerate nature and direct the Australian economy toward being nature-positive. Australia currently has no plan to achieve Target 18 of the Global Biodiversity Framework: reduce harmful subsidies and scale up positive incentives. To understand the size and impact of government spending that impacts nature, WWF-Australia recommends the next Australian Government commits to a Productivity Commission inquiry that investigates the size and impact of nature negative subsidies in Australia.

### WWF Recommendation

- Commit to a Productivity Commission inquiry that identifies and assesses the monetary value and impact of nature negative subsidies, and develops a pathway to both reduce these subsidies and transition them toward nature repair and nature-positive business practices.

## 6.3 REQUIRE BUSINESSES TO REPORT ON THEIR IMPACTS TO NATURE

Half of the world's Gross Domestic Product is moderately or highly dependent on nature and biodiversity.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, companies and investors face enormous nature risks, which will only get worse under business-as-usual scenarios. The World Economic Forum predicts that biodiversity will have the second biggest impact on businesses over the next decade, following climate change. But these risks and impacts are rarely measured or disclosed, and largely excluded from corporate and financial decision-making, regulation and supervision.

To integrate nature into decision making and shift financial flows towards nature-positive outcomes, the next Australian Government must commit to making nature disclosures in the next term of Government. The template on nature-related disclosures has been prepared, and aligns with climate disclosures, which are mandatory for large Australian business from 2025. Providing clear direction and defined timeframes will not only support nature but also improve resilience and reduce risks for Australian businesses, employees, and investors.

### WWF Recommendation

- Commit to making nature disclosures mandatory for large Australian businesses and financial institutions in the next term of government.

<sup>20</sup> The Biodiversity Council, 2024, *Nature-negative – the federal government's subsidies harming biodiversity*, <https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/news/nature-negative-the-federal-government-subsidies-harming-biodiversity>

<sup>21</sup> World Economic Forum, 2020, *The New Nature Economy Report*



## 6.4 REFORM PRIVATE MARKETS TO INCREASE THEIR POSITIVE IMPACT FOR NATURE

The government has so far created two market-based mechanisms that can drive private capital toward nature; the Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) Scheme and the emerging Nature Repair Market (NRM). Whilst these markets can play an important role in increasing finance for nature, the Australian Government needs to do more to increase the impact and efficacy of these schemes for nature.

As the largest single purchaser of carbon credits in Australia, the Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF) can play an important role in providing price signals to the market. The ERF currently focuses on purchasing lowest price point ACCUs and not on valuing or paying for co-benefits, such as benefits for nature. The lack of price signal makes carbon projects focused on improving nature financially unfeasible. A strategic allocation of ACCU purchases from the ERF, paid at a premium, for projects having high and verified nature impact would play an important role in directing more funding toward efforts to reduce carbon and benefit nature. In addition, the Government can help support the establishment of the NRM at least in the initial years, by committing funding to purchase biodiversity certificates. This would help underwrite and provide liquidity whilst the market takes shape. Government purchases on the demand side were crucial in the establishment of the ACCU scheme, and the same approach must be applied to the NRM.

### WWF Recommendations

- Support carbon methods that have high nature impact by making more strategic purchases from the Emissions Reduction Fund.
- Commit funding to the demand side of the Nature Repair Market.





# 7 SEIZE AUSTRALIA'S OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS DANGEROUS CLIMATE CHANGE

A healthy and stable climate underpins all life on Earth, supporting nature and people alike. But Australia's climate is rapidly changing, in large part due to the delay of successive governments in phasing out fossil fuels for clean energy, seriously threatening the safety of people and causing the loss of so many of our coral reefs, mangroves, forests and wildlife. To save communities, species and the natural world on which our health and wellbeing depends, the Australian Government must do everything possible to stabilise global heating to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.

The most important thing Australia can do to avoid climate catastrophe is to accelerate a fast, ecologically sound and just transition to renewable energy, and stop funding and approving new and expanded fossil fuel projects and fossil fuel infrastructure. Hosting COP31 offers an opportunity for Australia to demonstrate bold steps on climate action in response to calls from Pacific leaders and start healing the harm caused to people and communities from many decades of delay and disruption of climate action. To ensure Australia is a credible host and partner for COP31 and to prevent the worst effects of climate change, stabilising global average temperature rise to 1.5 °C must be the scientific standard and cornerstone of policy priorities of the next Australian Government.

## 7.1 SET AN AMBITIOUS 2035 CLIMATE TARGET

Setting an ambitious 2035 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target is crucial to maintaining the possibility of stabilising warming to 1.5 °C. Australia and the world have only five years left to 2030, to turn the tide on global emissions.<sup>22</sup> The best available climate science shows that for Australia's new 2035 nationally determined contribution (NDC) to be aligned with pursuing efforts to limit temperatures to 1.5 °C, it must be at least 90% below 2005 levels by 2035 and net zero by 2038.<sup>23</sup>

WWF-Australia acknowledges that increasing Australia's decarbonisation action to align with 1.5 °C requires a big lift in ambition, however, there are multiple opportunities to improve the speed and scale of emissions reductions across Australia this decade.<sup>24</sup> Strong climate targets catalyse investment and expand new low emission industries. For example, Deloitte Access Economics estimates that Queensland has a \$430 billion economic opportunity from a transition to meet its new bipartisan 75% emissions reduction target by 2035.<sup>25</sup> Further to those findings, recent research from WWF-Australia with leading experts sets out the significant opportunity for Australia in developing a green iron and steel industry. That research finds that Australia's emissions reduction targets must align with and step up to global leadership, if we are to be the low-emission investment destination of choice. Doing so provides investors with clarity, certainty and confidence.<sup>26</sup>

### WWF Recommendations

- Commit to a new Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement of at least 90% below 2005 levels by 2035 and net zero before 2040 and legislate that commitment in the Climate Change Act 2022.
- Update the Federal Climate Change Act 2022<sup>27</sup> to commit to reviewing Australia's 2030 emissions reduction target by December 2025. That review must take account of the best available science and update the 2030 target to a minimum of 67% below 2005 levels.<sup>28</sup>
- Adopt clear national targets and plans for methane reduction, aligned with the Global Methane Pledge that Australia has signed up to and aligned with the 1.5 °C goal of the Paris Agreement.

22 United Nations Environment Programme, 2023, Emissions Gap Report 2023: Broken Record: Broken Record – Temperatures hit new highs, yet world fails to cut emissions (again)

23 Meinshausen, M. and Nicholls, Z., 2023. *Updated assessment of Australia's emission reduction targets and 1.5 °C pathways*. Independent expert report commissioned by WWF-Australia, [https://www.climate-resource.com/reports/wwf/20230612\\_WWF-Aus-Targets.pdf](https://www.climate-resource.com/reports/wwf/20230612_WWF-Aus-Targets.pdf)

24 For example, Climateworks Centre released detailed decarbonisation scenario modelling in 2023 showing Australia can reduce emissions by 85% below 2005 levels by 2035 and reach net zero by 2039. Climateworks Centre, 2023, *Climateworks Centre decarbonisation scenarios2023*, <https://www.climateworkscentre.org/scenarios2023>

25 Deloitte, 2023, *Towards a Net Zero Queensland*, <https://www.deloitte.com/au/en/services/economics/analysis/toward-net-zeroqueensland.html>

26 Bowen, J, Wyche, N, 2024, *Australia's Green Iron Key* [https://assets.wwf.org.au/image/upload/file\\_WWF\\_Green\\_Iron\\_Report?\\_a=ATO2Ba20](https://assets.wwf.org.au/image/upload/file_WWF_Green_Iron_Report?_a=ATO2Ba20), page 8.

27 See the Climate Change Act 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2022A00037/latest/text>. Section 10(1)(a) sets Australia's 2030 emissions reduction target as 43% below 2005 levels by 2030. Section 10 (4) (b) confirms this does not prevent or limit the exercise of the executive power of the Cth to adjust Australia's 2030 NDC in accordance with para 11, Art 4 of the Paris Agreement.

28 Meinshausen, M. and Nicholls, Z., 2023. *Updated assessment of Australia's emission reduction targets and 1.5 °C pathways*. Independent expert report commissioned by WWF-Australia, [https://www.climate-resource.com/reports/wwf/20230612\\_WWF-Aus-Targets.pdf](https://www.climate-resource.com/reports/wwf/20230612_WWF-Aus-Targets.pdf)





Flood at Windsor, Western Sydney, NSW, Australia, July 5, 2022 © Wes Warren / Unsplash

## 7.2 END THE EXPANSION OF FOSSIL FUELS AND WIND DOWN EXISTING FOSSIL FUEL FACILITIES EARLY

The science is clear that fossil fuels are at the root of climate change. WWF-Australia calls on the next Australian Government to support the Port Vila Call and commit Australia to a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Treaty campaign is a global effort, spearheaded by a block of Pacific nations, to foster international cooperation to accelerate a transition to clean energy for everyone, end expansion of coal, oil and gas, and equitably phase out existing production.

A fast, ecologically sound and just transition to a 1.5 °C aligned decarbonisation pathway for Australia requires that people, communities, workers and the economy remains strong as fossil fuels are phased out. The Australian Government must swiftly implement the policies and funding to develop clean exports and clean manufacturing out of fossil fuels.

### WWF Recommendations

- Do not approve any more fossil fuel developments or fossil fuel infrastructure and phase out fossil fuel exports (including ending subsidies for coal, oil and gas projects).
- Redirect public money from fossil fuels towards renewable exports (see recommendation 8.2) and end public money for Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) for fossil fuels production.
- Commit Australia to the global Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.



## 7.3 SUPPORT A NATURE-POSITIVE, CLIMATE RESILIENT ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

How the Australian Government responds in our region and globally in the next Parliament will have direct consequences for communities and countries on the frontlines of the climate crisis. To achieve the urgent increase in climate action needed to keep global heating to 1.5 °C and to support poverty alleviation and sustainable management of global biodiversity, Australia must substantially increase its ambition. This means urgently meeting fair shares of the existing USD \$100 billion climate finance goal<sup>28</sup> and growing financing to meet its fair share of the new USD \$300 billion global finance goal agreed at COP29 in Baku.

While the recent pledge of AUD \$50 million to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage is a welcome commitment, Australia's global climate finance commitments continue to fall well short of its fair share, which puts vulnerable communities at risk. We ask that the next Parliament supports developing countries and their communities through needs-based predictable, transparent, and accessible public finance that unleashes climate action and delivers on a 1.5 °C compatible plan.

This is essential if Australia is to continue to build genuine and respectful partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region, to foster trust in global negotiations and institutions, to support community and economic resilience, and restore the ecosystems upon which all of society depends.

### WWF Recommendations

- Grow Australian climate finance to developing countries in line with our fair share of the new USD \$300 billion global finance goal agreed at COP29 in Baku, including funding for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage.
- Commit to increasing Australian Official Development Assistance to 1% of the Federal Budget in the first budget, with a crosscutting commitment to mainstream community-led nature-based solutions and nature-positive development into the development program.
- Establish a dedicated civil society funding window of at least \$100m over a ten-year period to help communities in developing countries to strengthen their social, economic, and ecological resilience through high-integrity, community-led nature-based solutions to climate change. This should include a strategic focus on ensuring that women, youth, children, people living with disabilities, and other at-risk groups are supported to lead and equitably benefit from nature-based solutions.





Albany Wind Farm in Western Australia. © Adobe Stock / WWF-Australia





# 8

## BUILD A RENEWABLE ENERGY FUTURE

Australia has a once in a generation opportunity to build enough renewable energy to decarbonise its economy whilst also replacing fossil fuel export industries with renewable energy exports, making Australia a renewable energy superpower. Energy accounted for around 85% of Australia's net emissions in 2022-23, with electricity alone accounting for around a third of emissions.<sup>29</sup> Australia can and should aim for meeting and beating its 82% target by 2030 for renewable electricity generation. The shift is well underway, with Australia already reaching almost 40% of the total energy delivered through the National Electricity Market in the first half of 2023.<sup>30</sup>

But even with some of the best sun, wind, and critical mineral resources in the world, and a geographical advantage positioned close to the major economies of Asia, this opportunity will only be realised with the right investment, policy settings and ambition. The economic and policy priorities of the next Australian Government should be focused squarely on supporting rapid domestic decarbonisation and new clean exports. The energy transition must be done in a way that addresses both our climate change and nature-positive goals and maximises the opportunities to regenerate nature at the same time.

<sup>29</sup> DCCEEW, 2024, *Electricity and Energy Sector Plan*

<sup>30</sup> AEMO, 2024, *2024 Integrated System Plan – A roadmap for the energy transition*, <https://aemo.com.au/-/media/files/major-publications/isp/2024/2024-integrated-system-plan-isp.pdf?la=en#:~:text=The%20shift%20to%20renewables%20is,share%20on%2024%20October%202023>





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## 8.1 POWER OUR ECONOMY BY 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY BY 2035

The Australian Government has a key role to play in accelerating the deployment of renewable energy and helping our electricity system reach as close to 100% renewable energy by 2030 as possible and our broader economy by 2035. There is a strong need to decarbonise other economic sectors such as transport, built environment, industry and resources through investments and enabling policies in energy efficiency and electrification. The Australian Energy Market Operator forecasts that all coal plants in Australia will be retired by 2038, yet Australia is one of only five OECD nations to not have an official coal phaseout timeline or plan. Shifting to 100% renewable energy sources as soon as possible is the cheapest, and most reliable way to deliver energy for Australia going forward. However, this needs Government support and intervention to realise.

### WWF Recommendations

- Commit to a comprehensive investment package to power our economy by 100% renewable energy by 2035 with a mix of programs, incentives and policies including:
  - \$50 billion over the next 10 years to repower Australian homes and communities with rooftop solar, batteries, electric appliances and thermal improvements.
  - Continuing the \$20 billion Rewiring the Nation program to modernise our electricity grid and deliver new and upgraded transmission infrastructure to build the grid we need.
  - \$10 billion to support electrification, fuel switching and energy efficiency in other sectors of the economy.
  - An official nationally transparent target to completely phase out all coal plants in Australia by 2035 and plan to reduce reliance on gas and liquid fuels through strong electrification and energy efficiency measures.



## 8.2 ACCELERATE AUSTRALIA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY EXPORT OPPORTUNITY, AND BECOME A DOMINANT PLAYER IN GREEN IRON FOR EXPORT

Australia must build world-leading renewable export industries to capture the economic opportunity of the energy transition, while doing our part to help the world combat climate change. A fundamental step to achieve this is the development of a National Renewable Energy Exports Strategy that develops renewable industries domestically and unlocks export opportunities. The Strategy should identify Australia's natural advantages, existing commitments and gaps and priority investments to maximise the economic opportunities of replacing fossil fuel exports with renewable exports.

A vital element of Australia's export opportunity is transitioning to green iron and steel production. The steel sector alone is responsible for up to 9% of global greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>31</sup> Iron ore is Australia's most valuable export commodity and Australia remains well-placed to become a major green iron producer with the right policy support and investment. Australia could forge a 'green iron key' to help our major trading partners decarbonise their steel supply chains through the joint planning and investment of a new green iron industry in Australia. It requires a blend of sophisticated green energy statecraft, R&D collaboration and investment strategies that shows we understand the future needs of our trading partners, and that future-proofs Australia as the strategic partner of choice. WWF-Australia is calling for a green iron program with a domestic support package to decarbonise the existing iron ore and steel industry and prioritise the development of export-focused green iron projects.

### WWF Recommendations

- Develop a National Renewable Energy Exports Strategy.
- Establish a domestic support package to decarbonise Australia's iron ore and steel industry *\$10 billion*.

31 World Steel Association, 2021, *Climate change and the production of iron and steel*, <https://worldsteel.org/publications/policy-papers/ climate-change-policy-paper/>



## 8.3 PRIORITISE NATURE-POSITIVE OUTCOMES FROM THE ENERGY TRANSITION

To achieve the emissions reductions needed to address the impacts of climate change on nature, Australia needs lots of large-scale, clean energy infrastructure. Our energy transition needs to be fast to respond to the climate crisis, ecologically sound so that it does not worsen the nature crisis, and does not leave anyone behind.

WWF-Australia recommends the next Australian Government strengthen environmental assessments based on national environmental standards (see Section 3) and increase resourcing to undertake these thoroughly but efficiently. Strategic planning and assessment will be needed to facilitate Australia's energy transition including in Renewable Energy Zones and for critical minerals development.<sup>32</sup> To enable these strategic approaches to be undertaken efficiently and produce nature-positive outcomes, new investment in data and mapping will also be critical.

The significant levels of investment occurring in regional Australia through the energy transition are a critical opportunity to be harnessed and directed towards both 'protecting what's left and restoring the rest'. This means moving beyond projects working in isolation to identify offsets for their impact, which is often leading to a no net loss or worse a net loss situation. Through coordination and incentives, there is a potential for the Federal Government to bring together developers and communities to deliver landscape scale 'net gain' environmental outcomes.

WWF-Australia recommends a 'renewables for nature' grant program to support pooled regional environmental outcomes within Renewable Energy Zones. This would provide financial incentives for developers to go beyond what is required to meet their planning and environmental approvals including offset obligations. This could be best provided by an \$100m funding program for companies to access that would be co-funded. Critically, access to this funding should require strong local partnerships such as with First Nations organisations, NRM groups and Landcare. This would provide broader community benefits, help to grow the capacity and skills Australia needs to meet its GBF targets and ensure that local ownership improves the longevity of these environmental outcomes.

The energy transition also needs to build stronger social license. The most effective way to do this is to empower local communities to have the capacity to engage with new projects in their region through Local Energy Hubs. This would see the Federal Government fund 50 independent local outreach centres in regional areas that supports communities with the right information and capacity to engage with the transition to renewables.

### WWF Recommendations

- Strengthen and resource environmental assessment processes for renewable energy infrastructure and energy projects including investing in at least \$500 million in data and mapping to facilitate strategic environmental assessment and regional planning for Renewable Energy Zones and critical minerals.
- Establish a dedicated \$100 million renewables for nature grant program to deliver long-term landscape-scale priority conservation projects within Renewable Energy Zones.
- Invest \$88.5 million over four years to fund an initial 15 Local Energy Hubs in key renewable energy zones.

## 8.4 SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT AND UPTAKE OF LOW EMBODIED CARBON MATERIALS IN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

New renewable energy and green industry projects will create significant demand for building and construction materials. The demand could be leveraged to drive the uptake of low embodied carbon materials with a particular focus on concrete, steel, aluminium, engineered timber, and composite materials. Material suppliers are preparing their businesses to respond to higher decarbonisation ambitions. The Materials and Embodied Carbon Leaders' Alliance (MECLA) provides support and encourages greater collaboration across the demand and supply side of the building and construction industry and should be further supported to scale up addressing embodied carbon materials. Direct government investment towards this collaboration would help mainstream embodied carbon requirements across all levels of government, across all jurisdictions.

### WWF Recommendation

- Invest in MECLA to further the uptake of low embodied carbon materials - *\$250,000 per year for 4 years.*



<sup>32</sup> Regional planning as proposed under the Government's 'Nature Positive Plan' could be a useful approach if it is designed to be demonstrably nature positive.



**THE CRITICAL DECISIONS  
WE MAKE TODAY WILL  
SHAPE AUSTRALIA'S  
TOMORROW.**



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