



AUSTRALIA

## FEDERAL PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

2026-27

# WWF PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2026-27

The World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF – Australia) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the development of the 2026–2027 Federal Budget. This submission outlines targeted recommendations and priority investment areas designed to accelerate Australia’s transition toward a nature-positive, net-zero economy, delivering benefits for both people and the environment.

As part of the global WWF Network, one of the world’s largest and most respected independent conservation organisations, WWF-Australia is committed to protecting threatened species and ecosystems, addressing the impacts of climate change, and fostering a future where humanity and nature thrive together. With over 30 million supporters worldwide and operations in more than 100 countries, WWF brings unparalleled expertise and credibility to this mission.

This submission sets out WWF-Australia’s recommended investment priorities for the Federal Government. These investments are essential to help secure a healthy planet for people and nature, and to safeguard Australia’s economy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Australia's unique landscapes and biodiversity are the foundation of our nation's prosperity, wellbeing and global identity, yet federal spending on biodiversity remains less than 0.1% of the total budget.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Australian Government allocates an estimated \$26.3 billion each year to subsidies for activities likely to damage nature, outspending nature protection by a factor of fifty.<sup>2</sup> This imbalance is accelerating environmental decline and leaving Australia increasingly vulnerable to growing climate, economic and social risks.

Healthy ecosystems provide essential services—clean water, pollination, climate regulation, soil productivity and disaster resilience—but these systems are deteriorating. Habitat loss, invasive species and climate-related disasters are pushing wildlife towards extinction, degrading landscapes and threatening cultural and economic values.

The Government has made important commitments through the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), including halting extinctions and protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030.<sup>3</sup> Meeting these goals requires substantial and long-term funding. Conservation scientists and leading organisations agree that allocating at least 1% of the federal budget to nature is the minimum needed to halt and reverse biodiversity decline.<sup>4</sup> This investment would support coordinated species recovery, landscape restoration, invasive species management, Indigenous-led conservation and new protected areas.

Investing in nature is not only an environmental imperative; it is a nation-building opportunity. It creates regional jobs, strengthens climate resilience, supports First Nations leadership and underpins Australia's emerging nature positive and renewable energy aligned industries.

At this critical juncture, the Federal Government could reverse decades of underfunding. Committing 1% of the federal budget to nature is an achievable and economically sound step towards securing a healthy, climate-resilient and nature-positive future for Australia.

### Priority Areas for Federal Government Investment

1. Elevate First Nations Leadership for Healthy Country and People
2. Australia's Nature Laws and Implementation
3. Invest to Protect and Restore Biodiversity and Nature
4. Build the Health and Resilience of Oceans
5. Tackle Climate Change by Replacing Fossil Fuels with Renewables
6. Support a Climate Resilient Asia-Pacific Region

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<sup>1</sup> 30by30, 2024, The Price of Nature, <https://30by30.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/The-Price-of-Nature.pdf>

<sup>2</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>3</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/4>

<sup>4</sup> <https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/news/top-scientists-call-on-australian-government-to-allocate-federal-funding-towards-nature-protection-and-management>

# 1. Elevate First Nations Leadership for Healthy Country and People

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. Today, healing Country is needed more urgently than ever before.

WWF-Australia supports First Nations leadership and knowledge. Solutions that include participatory decision-making, equitable and durable funding, job creation, gender equity in conservation roles, and legal reform all play a role in helping to restore Country, halt further destruction, and drive continued action toward a thriving, nature-positive future.

## 1.1 Grow and enhance Indigenous ranger roles and resource Indigenous Protected Areas.

WWF-Australia supports the Australian Government's current commitment through the Indigenous Rangers Program (IRP) to double the number of Indigenous rangers from 1,900 to 3,800 by 2035.<sup>5</sup>

Expanding the number of Indigenous rangers must be matched with better access to the resources, equipment and training they need to succeed. Ensuring fair and consistent pay is essential, as is empowering Indigenous rangers to carry out enforcement and compliance responsibilities effectively.

Australia's Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) network consists of 95 IPA's covering 108 million hectares throughout Australia. Currently IPAs receive only a fraction of the funds that are available to manage national parks. Increasing the level of funds for IPA management will enhance the delivery of environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits.

### WWF Recommendations:

- The current Indigenous Rangers Program (IRP) that supports the existing and growing workforce investment is \$260 million per year. Increase funding for the IRP for an additional \$25,000 per ranger per year for pay, resources, training and equipment. This increased investment ranges from \$47.5 million per year for 1,900 rangers to \$95 million per year for 3,800 rangers.
- Increase investment for effective management of Australia's Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) and support for First Nations communities to manage Country. Funding of IPA's currently equals \$32.6 M per year. Increase funding for IPA management by \$67.4million per year to equal investment from the federal government of a total of \$100million per year.

## 1.2 Expand and fund national Indigenous women caring for Country network.

The roles of Indigenous women in Australia are uniquely different from men working on Country. Despite this, women currently represent less than 25% of the Indigenous ranger workforce.

Indigenous women have unique knowledge which is essential for proper care of key environmental and cultural assets/sites and species. Additionally, the intergenerational transfer of this knowledge is different from men working on Country. Women's work on Country varies by cultural protocols, landscape, language, location, funding and resources, but across Australia it is essential to protecting vast estates of high biodiversity.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.niaa.gov.au/news-and-media/indigenous-rangers-program-expansion-round-two-outcomes-announced>

WWF-Australia has welcomed the government's commitment to double the number of Indigenous rangers, and we support the target for achieving gender equality within the Indigenous ranger program. Achieving gender equity in the ranger program requires dedicated support and appropriate funding. To overcome the unique barriers to women's full participation as rangers, women need a culturally safe space where they can access emotional and professional support, pursue new opportunities, share knowledge, and unite their voices on common issues.

This need could be addressed by scaling the existing work of the Women Rangers Environmental Network (WREN). WREN began in 2017 with Kimberley Land Council & WWF Australia exploring ways to support the unique role of Indigenous women working for healthy country planning and delivery. Today, WREN links more than 560 Indigenous women, primarily in the north of Australia, through regional coordinators, state and territory forums, national programs and global opportunities. Nationally, the WREN Knowledge Exchange program and Professional Development Program supports new and emerging women rangers, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experience, career development and emerging leaders in conservation.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- Commit \$8.35 million over four years to support the expansion and operation of a truly national Indigenous women rangers' support network. This investment would enable expansion of the Women Rangers Environmental Network (WREN) into southern and eastern states by engaging new coordinators and establishing new hubs, provide funding certainty to existing hubs, and resource new opportunities for professional development and knowledge exchange.

**1.3 Establish a Commissioner for Country**

On countless occasions, the world has seen the social and economic good that comes when Indigenous peoples are supported to care for Country. To have Healthy Country, we must invest in it. We must support First Peoples access to resources and opportunity to exercise cultural authority they<sup>6</sup>knowledge and practices. 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.<sup>7</sup>

There is a strong need for an independent, authoritative Indigenous voice at the federal level 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. This position does not replace or supersede the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but elevates and empowers those seeking to care for Country. This position will be an independent voice outside of existing departmental structures but can be supported by departmental staff, like the Threatened Species Commissioner.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- \$2 million funding for Commissioners Office and Commissioner..

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.commissionerforcountry.org.au/>

#### **1.4 Include First Nations perspectives in threatened species recovery.**

First Peoples attribute tremendous value to animals, plants and ecological communities, with culturally or spiritually significant species being indicators of healthy Country. 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:**

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

## **2. Australia's Nature Laws and Implementation**

Federal nature laws such as the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) provide an important contribution to reducing biodiversity loss. The reform of these laws by the parliament late in 2025 was therefore welcomed.

The real success of these laws in reducing land clearing and helping threatened species survive, will depend on implementation which is only just starting. This includes the establishment of new institutions, development of national environmental standards, policy and guidance materials and further technical work to enable the new provisions to be enacted in the way intended.

### **2.1 Set up the National Environmental Protection Agency for success.**

The establishment of the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) is one of the key reforms in the new Act. It is to be established by 1 July 2026 and has a broad mandate. The success of the new EPBC reforms lie in large part on the effectiveness of the NEPA, and that in turn requires adequate resourcing to fulfil the broad functions of the agency.

The new NEPA will require specialist regulatory staff, establishment of a brand and identity, the ability to use a wide range of tools and powers (from education and guidance to assessment and decisions, to enforcement) and an independent organisational operating model covering regulatory functions, finance, people and culture, accommodation, vehicles, travel arrangements and legal and prosecution teams. Existing EPAs, for example in Vic and NSW, provide important learnings for how to be effective. Funding for NEPA needs to be sustained at least over the forward estimates.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- \$500 million over 4 years.<sup>8</sup> As a new independent national regulator that is fundamental to the success of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act reforms, the National Environmental Protection Agency will require significant resources to be established and successful.

**2.2 Converting recovery plans to usable protection statements.**

Recovery plans for nationally threatened species and ecological communities are a critically important statutory tool for implementing the EPBC reforms. However, they are variously incomplete, out of date and inconsistent and certainly not on a platform that enables readily accessible and searchable data for users. All recovery plans need to be modernised and updated to include the latest information that is referenced in the EPBC reforms and necessary for their implementation. These include descriptions of critical habitat (new legislated definition) and irreplaceable habitat (as needed for the new legislated definition of unacceptable impacts), and a clearly prioritised list of recovery actions appropriate for offset actions.<sup>9</sup> The introduction in the reformed EPBC Act of Protection Statements provides opportunity to streamline this process, however the same basic work needs to be done to modernise the information and make it fit for purpose with the new Act.

A program to prepare Protection Statements from Recovery Plans is required to create these fit-for-purpose new legislative instruments. This will require completion and/or updating of all recovery plans, so they provide current, accurate information in service of the new definitions and criteria in the Act. The platform for Protection Statements (and/or Recovery Plans) will also need to be modernised so they are readily accessible and data is searchable.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- \$100 million over 4 years, \$5 million/year ongoing to enable regular review and updating of Protection Statements from Recovery Plans.

**2.3 Enabling Environment Information Australia.**

The new Environment Information Australia (EIA) will play a critical role in acquiring and making available strategic datasets to support implementation of the reformed nature laws, servicing the public and NEPA, as well as reporting on Australia's environmental performance and establishing environmental-economic accounts. Although it exists already as a Division of DCCEE, it has an existing full work program and high expectations for new work now the nature law legislation has passed. This includes supporting further development of critical tools such as VMAP (<https://vmap.au/>) a national vegetation mapping and deforestation monitoring platform.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- \$50 million over 4 years.

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<sup>8</sup> Assumption: actual cost will be greater than this, but assumes some existing resources transferred from other departments to make up the difference, \$300-400 million/year ongoing (depending on level of cost-recovery).

<sup>9</sup> Many existing recovery plans group multiple recovery actions together under a "priority 1" category without discretion as to which ones should be prioritised for offset actions. As offset actions are now likely to be chosen on the basis of the highest priority in a recovery plan, a more nuanced approach is needed.

## 2.4 Supporting critical technical and policy development.

Beyond the strategic work of EIA, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) will need to accelerate technical work including spatial datasets identifying irreplaceable, critical and other Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) habitat, surveying for MNES and assessing RFA areas for transition to new regulatory requirements, development of guidance materials for users and updating significant impact guidelines. Further policy work will include development of regulations, defining and operationalising Regional Planning for example. This is in addition to the development of standards that is already underway, and the technical materials and guidance required to implement these. Robust, respectful consultation processes will be critical as will the development of sector specific guidance and communication materials.

### WWF Recommendation:

- \$20 million over 2 years, to cover contracted science and departmental expertise/resources.

## 3. Invest to Protect and Restore Biodiversity and Nature

Australia is party to the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), adopted by 196 countries in 2022. It establishes 23 global targets for action to 2030 designed to give effect to the global goal to Halt and Reverse Nature Loss by 2030 against a 2020 baseline and achieve full recovery by 2050.<sup>10</sup>

Australia is taking action on several of the key targets through Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-30, which also reflects the need to halt and reverse biodiversity loss across Australia by 2030.<sup>11</sup> This includes commitments to no new species extinctions; protecting and conserving at least 30% of Australia's land and sea areas by 2030; 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 mostly absent.

Australia is well placed to deliver on these targets' dependant on significant new budget allocation. This budget is critical to this mission, given the goal and targets need to be met by 2030.

### 3.1 Stop extinctions and recover threatened species.

Australia, like many nations, maintains lists of threatened species and pledges to recover them. Despite these commitments, most of our endangered species continue to decline or become extinct. A major driver of this failure is chronic underinvestment in conservation management. Addressing this requires urgent action: funding for species recovery must be significantly increased and made transparent. This requires at least \$2 billion a year ongoing.<sup>12</sup> Yet the Government's successful Saving Native Species program finishes in June 2026. This is a time to scale up and sustain these critical investments, not cut them. Without clear, accountable investment, Australia cannot meet its biodiversity commitments or halt the trajectory of threatened species toward extinction.

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<sup>10</sup> CBD (2022) COP15: Final text of Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, CBD/COP/DEC/15/4. Decision 15/4: <https://www.cbd.int/decisions/cop?m=cop-15>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/conservation/publications/australias-strategy-for-nature>

<sup>12</sup> Wintle et al. 2019, 'Spending to save: What will it cost to halt Australia's extinction crisis?', *Conservation Letters*

### **WWF Recommendations:**

- \$225 million over 4 years. Continue to fund the Saving Native Species program at least at its current funding level.
- \$35m a year for four years. Allocate specific additional funding for threatened species recovery teams for the Government's 110 priority species.
- Progressively scale up to invest at least \$2 billion a year ongoing to stop extinctions and recover threatened species. This will include coordinated and inclusive conservation planning, landscape scale threat management programs, cultural burning and other cultural restoration practices, as well as species-specific recovery actions including habitat restoration and species reintroductions.

### **3.2 Protect 30% of Australia's land by 2030.**

Australia has made meaningful progress toward protecting and conserving at least 30% of its land and sea areas by 2030. The announcement of the \$250 million Saving Australia's Bushland program in 2025 was welcomed for its contribution to achieving the land component of the 30% target.<sup>13</sup> However the commitment falls short and will be unable to address the need to ensure underrepresented ecosystems are protected, a concept inherent to the target and to Australia's commitments.<sup>14</sup>

A significant increase to the Saving Australia's Bushland program would enable the program to be effective in closing the gap on the 30% target. It would also provide critical resources needed to protect high value conservation areas identified and excluded from development through the EPBC Bioregional Planning mechanism, where these align with 30x30 program criteria. Such resources may be delivered via top-up funds to the EPBC Restoration Contributions scheme or used directly for acquisition of high priority areas.

### **WWF Recommendation:**

- Invest an additional \$500m in the Saving Australia's Bushland program to hasten progress towards protecting 30% of land by 2030.

### **3.3 Restore degraded landscapes.**

The restoration of degraded landscapes has significant benefit for people and nature, contributing to soil fertility, drinking water, climate change mitigation and species habitat, while potentially providing a revenue stream for private landholders. Critically, landscape-scale restoration also supports First Nations aspirations for healthy Country, recognising the deep cultural, spiritual and ecological connections and the importance of restoring ecosystems in ways that uphold these values.

Landscape scale restoration is a critical complement to the protection of intact areas to stop extinctions and promote recovery of threatened species in the longer-term.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.dceew.gov.au/environment/land/achieving-30-by-30>

<sup>14</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

The GBF target which calls for restoration across “at least 30 percent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems” with priority areas under effective restoration by 2030,<sup>15</sup> is estimated to cost \$2 billion per year for 30 years.<sup>16</sup>

While the Australian Government made specific commitments to the restoration target in 2024, including identification of priority restoration areas as a first step, there has been no progress, and the allocated funding for systematic restoration is absent. As well as being an imperative for Australia, a dedicated restoration program will also enable top-up payments to the EPBC Restoration Contributions scheme, where this provides critical mass to achieving restoration priorities, including with Bioregional Planning areas.

#### **WWF Recommendation:**

- \$2 billion a year ongoing. Includes the establishment of a new dedicated program to systematically restore Australia’s degraded lands for benefit of First Nations healthy Country aspirations, agriculture, species and the climate.

#### **3.4 End deforestation and logging 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. Though 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.

Deforestation and logging in Queensland and NSW overlap with the Forests of East Australia, which were listed as the 35th Global Biodiversity Hotspot in 2011. This Global Biodiversity Hotspot supports 1,500 plus species of endemic plants and animals, though still is under threat with greater than 70% of the area cleared or degraded.<sup>17</sup>

It is estimated that 70 million trees are cut down or damaged each year nationally.<sup>18</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.

#### **WWF Recommendations:**

- Provide \$1 billion to support landholders and states to retain native vegetation on farms, including through supporting development of natural capital markets and diverse incentive programs such as the Victorian Trees on Farm program, to reduce deforestation, improve landscape resilience and diversify regional economies. This budget item should focus to achieve landscape level healthy Country aspirations regardless of land tenure. This may also assist land managers within Bioregional Planning “no-go” areas to protect and manage their biodiversity values, where this is not available through offset arrangements.
- Provide \$1 billion to 2030 in grants, industry support and concessional loans to support a fair and just transition from native forest logging to regenerative construction fibres, including:
  - expanding sustainable certified timber plantations by 200,000 hectares by 2040,

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.dceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/conservation/strategy>

<sup>16</sup> Mappin, 2021. ‘The costs and benefits of restoring a continent’s terrestrial ecosystems’, *Journal of Applied Ecology*

<sup>17</sup> Williams, K.J. *et al.* (2011). *Forests of East Australia: The 35th Biodiversity Hotspot*. In: Zachos, F., Habel, J. (eds) *Biodiversity Hotspots*. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-20992-5\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-20992-5_16)

<sup>18</sup> Blanch, S, and Taylor, M, 2019. *Towards Two Billion Trees*. A report by WWF-Australia, Sydney.

- providing redundancies to timber workers and mills,
- Improving data and transparency,
- boosting engineered wood production, value-adding (e.g., diverting woodchip exports to mass wood), and prefabricated modular homes,
- establishing industrial hemp, bamboo and mycelium sectors to support farmers and regional communities to produce non-timber construction fibres.

## 4. Build the Health and Resilience of Oceans

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 supercharged by Australia’s continued coal and gas expansions, overfishing, industrial coastal developments, and pollution. The world’s coral reefs, including the Great Barrier Reef, have suffered the most intense global coral bleaching event on record, caused by the world’s current reliance on fossil fuels. 84% of the world’s reefs in 82 countries and territories have suffered climate damage.<sup>19</sup> Globally, 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 of ocean warming.<sup>20</sup>

### 4.1 Catalyse 30x30 in Australia and the region.

The Australian Government’s commitment to designate 30% of Australian waters as marine sanctuaries (IUCN category I/II) is warmly welcomed and puts Australia on course to achieve an important goal of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). WWF-Australia also welcomes the prompt commencement of reviews of Australia’s Marine Park Management Plans to achieve this.

#### WWF Recommendations:

- Establish a \$150 million marine parks package to support marine park reviews that are informed and supported by scientific research, comprehensive stakeholder engagement, and detailed analysis of the socio-economic impacts and opportunities from these reviews.

### 4.2 Western Pacific ‘blue corridor’ for whales.

Blue corridors are migration superhighways for marine megafauna like whales and link ecologically interconnected areas where they breed, feed, socialise and migrate. These superhighways are essential for their survival. WWF-Australia recommends the government prioritise the protection of critical habitats and migration routes for whales and dolphins through establishment of a Western Pacific ‘blue corridor’ for whales from the Pacific through Australian waters and down to Antarctica. It would help address the key threats that whales and other marine species face during migration.

<sup>19</sup> <https://icriforum.org/4gbe-2025/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-023-05833-y>

This would require significant collaboration and investment across sectors, from shipping through to tourism, fisheries and offshore development. Australia is hosting the meeting of the International Whaling Commission in 2026 (IWC70), providing a timely opportunity to regain our historic leadership on whale conservation.

**WWF recommendation:**

- Establish a \$25 million ‘blue corridors’ fund to support cross-sectoral collaboration and implementation to safeguard whales’ and other migratory species’ migration routes, in Australian waters and throughout the Pacific region. These funds will also help address knowledge gaps for data-poor marine species’ habitats and migratory pathways.

**4.3 Fund a Great Barrier Reef Emergency Response Plan to protect the Reef from further decline.**

Mass coral bleaching events are becoming more frequent and severe on the Great Barrier Reef. The federal government has responded through its science and management agencies by planning for, monitoring and reporting on these events, however, so far, the government has not introduced a proactive emergency management response plan to alleviate local pressures on the Reef during and immediately after such events. WWF-Australia and Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) have worked with leading Reef experts to recommend priority actions to relieve pressure on the ecosystem during and immediately after the next mass bleaching or extreme weather event.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- \$100 million in funding to formulate and deliver a Great Barrier Reef Emergency Response Plan with clear actions.

**4.4 Extended Producer Responsibility scheme.**

Single-use plastic items and plastic packaging consistently comprise the most littered items in Australia. Plastic debris has been detected in all parts of the planet’s marine environment, with devastating effects on wildlife and ecosystems. WWF-Australia supports the use of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes to ensure that brand owners are held responsible for the packaging they place on the market. When paired with mandatory requirements and financial incentives, EPR schemes discourage the use of unnecessary and problematic plastics. Countries with well-established EPR schemes achieve high recycling rates and maintain effective waste management systems.

The advantage of implementing an EPR scheme for the Australian Government is that once established the ongoing requirement for public funds is minimised as the program is funded through ongoing industry contributions. While these costs would be passed onto consumers, recent research has found price increases would be marginal (0.1% increase to product costs<sup>21</sup>) while economic and environmental impacts would be significant. This includes stimulating private capital investment, job creation and pollution reduction. An EPR scheme for packaging can deliver on circularity and pollution reduction targets with minimal ongoing cost to taxpayers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Rennie Advisory (2025), Securing Australia’s Plastic Packaging Recycling Future, report prepared for Australian Council of Recycling, December 2025.

<sup>22</sup> Rennie Advisory (2025), Securing Australia’s Plastic Packaging Recycling Future, report prepared for Australian Council of Recycling, December 2025.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- \$250-350 million over three years. Although the cost of administering a federal Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme has not been published, WWF-Australia recommends an allocation of \$250m-\$350m over three years (approximately \$80m-\$110m per year) based on the allocated cost of establishing the Victorian Container Deposit Scheme with similar elements to those of a federally administered EPR scheme. Depending on the design of the Federal EPR scheme, there may be opportunities for cost recovery of the initial government investment.

**4.5 Implementing the High-Seas Biodiversity Treaty (BBNJ)**

2026 marks a major milestone for global ocean protection, with the High Seas Treaty coming into force and the first Conference of the Parties (COP). This treaty regime establishes the framework to create marine protected areas (MPAs) on the high seas and requires environmental impact assessments for activities outside of national waters. To date, Australia has played a substantive and constructive role in negotiating the Treaty text; adequate investment is now required for Australia to expand this leadership role through implementation. This should focus on leading (in our immediate region) and supporting establishment of high seas MPAs to protect the highly unique and economically important biodiversity in Australia's region, and globally.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- \$20 million over the forward estimates to support Australia's national contributions; engagement in relevant international forums; proactively advancing high seas marine protected area proposals in Oceania; Research Vessel (RV) Investigator resourcing to support ocean floor mapping and biodiversity research, and associated analysis.

**5. Tackle Climate Change by Replacing Fossil Fuels with Renewables**

To contribute to global climate action and ensure Australian trade competitiveness in a decarbonising economy, it is imperative to halt the approval of new fossil fuel developments and implement a clear plan to phase out fossil fuels. Public funding should be redirected away from fossil fuel subsidies and projects, including Carbon Capture and Storage for fossil fuel production, and instead prioritise investment in renewable energy exports to secure Australia's position as a leader in clean industry energy. Furthermore, Australia should formally commit to the global Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, signalling its dedication to a just transition and international efforts to limit fossil fuel expansion.

**5.1 Accelerate Australia's renewable energy export opportunity.**

Shifting Australia's fossil fuel exports to clean industry exports is an economic, energy security and geostrategic imperative. In an increasingly fractured and multipolar trade environment, it is also critical for Australia to demonstrate to its closest trading partners the mutually beneficial nature of the transition to a net zero economy.

A Future Made with Australia can bring lasting security, economic, social and environmental benefits to our nation and the wider region. Australia needs a renewable exports strategy to coordinate government efforts, mobilise capital and ensure investor confidence, build and invest in green export markets, identify and act on renewable opportunities and showcase national leadership on clean industries with our major trading partners in the region.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- Allocate \$20 million to develop a whole-of-government renewable exports strategy.

**5.2 Australia's Green Iron opportunity – First-of-kind green iron project.**

Steel production accounts for around 9% of global emissions, making decarbonising steel one of the world's most urgent climate challenges. Supplying over 50% of the world's iron ore and having world-class renewable energy resources, Australia is uniquely positioned to lead, and benefit from, the transition to low-emissions and truly green steel.

A flagship first-of-kind green iron project would:

- Anchor a new clean manufacturing industry in regional Australia,
- Demonstrate commercial viability for near zero steel supply chains,
- Position Australia as a preferred supplier in a globally competitive market with increasing demand for low-carbon materials,
- Establish the Clean Commodities Trading Initiative as a specialist division within an existing government body (EFA, NRF or CEFC) in the 2026-27 Budget, with an initial operating budget of approximately \$6 million a year over 4 years.

**WWF Recommendations:**

- Commit \$10 billion to deliver Australia's first large-scale green iron project, enabling global steel decarbonisation and securing a long-term export industry compatible with net zero trade requirements.
- Approximately \$6 million a year over 4 years: Establish the Clean Commodities Trading Initiative as a specialist division within an existing government body (Export Finance Australia (EFA), National Reconstruction Fund (NRF), or Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) in the 2026-27 Budget, with an initial operating budget.

**5.3 Support sustainable procurement and uptake of low embodied carbon materials in infrastructure projects.**

The built environment produces around 25% of Australia's emissions, with hard-to-abate materials—steel, cement and aluminium—responsible for a significant share globally. The Materials & Embodied Carbon Leaders' Alliance (MECLA) plays a critical role in transforming markets, supporting supply-chain alignment, and accelerating uptake of low-embodied-carbon construction materials. The secretariat is run by WWF-Australia, Climate-KIC and Presync.

MECLA convenes over 190+ organisations across the construction value chain, driving systemic change in a hard-to-abate sector. It supports market transformation by providing a pre-competitive platform for demand and supply-side players to align with their Paris Agreement aligned targets which can also support the government's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets for 2035. Government investment unlocks significant private co-investment and is vital for expanding MECLA's reach, particularly among SMEs and across regional supply chains.

**WWF Recommendation:**

- Invest \$500,000 per year for three years (\$1.5 million total) to support The Materials & Embodied Carbon Leaders' Alliance (MECLA) continued cross-sector industry and government leadership to accelerate

market transformation of construction and infrastructure in Australia including driving demand, manufacture and adoption of low-embodied-carbon materials and avoiding the loss of coordinated industry action essential to meeting the government's 2035 emission reduction targets and circular economy ambitions.

#### **5.4 Ensure a nature positive renewable energy transition.**

The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy presents a critical opportunity for Australia to meet its climate commitments while reversing nature loss. If approached strategically, Australia's energy transition presents a triple opportunity: to reduce emissions, safeguard our unique natural environment and deliver tangible benefits for communities. The concept of a Nature Positive Renewable Energy Zone (NP-REZ) is a strategic approach to identifying and coordinating nature protection and restoration priorities.

##### **WWF Recommendation:**

- Fund a comprehensive \$150 million Nature Positive Renewable Energy Zone (NP-REZ) package. This would help achieve climate and nature win-wins by:
  - Establishing dedicated regional NP-REZ taskforces to set environmental priorities.
  - Providing Nature Positive Energy Facilitators to broker partnerships to and support the work of the taskforces.
  - Financially incentivise developers to integrate innovative conservation measures into projects.

#### **5.5 Reform Australia's Fuel Tax Credit Scheme to deliver on international commitments.**

Reforming Australia's Fuel Tax Credit Scheme is a critical step in aligning domestic fiscal policy with international commitments to phase down fossil fuels. The Port Vila Declaration, endorsed by Pacific leaders, calls for an end to fossil fuel subsidies and a transition away from coal, oil and gas in line with a 1.5°C pathway. At COP28 in Dubai, countries collectively agreed to "transition away from fossil fuels" and accelerate electrification across all sectors.

Updating the Fuel Tax Credit Scheme to progressively phase out subsidies for diesel and other fossil fuels—while creating clear incentives for electrification in mining, agriculture, transport and construction—would give effect to these international commitments. It would modernise Australia's tax settings, reduce long-term costs for industry, and demonstrate to Pacific neighbours that Australia is acting consistently with its global climate pledges.

##### **WWF Recommendation:**

- Introduce a \$50 million annual cap on Fuel Tax Credit claims per corporation and establish a reimbursement mechanism for firms up to the value of additional tax paid—conditional on demonstrated investment in electrification and decarbonisation infrastructure, including zero-emissions equipment, charging networks and clean industrial technologies.

## 6. Support a climate-resilient Asia-Pacific region

Pacific Island nations and other developing countries are on the frontline of the climate crisis, which Australia's International Development Policy recognises as "the greatest shared threat to all countries"<sup>23</sup>. They face the most severe impacts of global heating, despite contributing the least to the problem and having the fewest resources to respond.

Many of these countries are also home to ecosystems that the entire world depends upon to avoid climate catastrophe. For example, the Indo-Pacific is home to some of the world's most potentially climate-resilient reefs – complex ecosystems that provide carbon sequestration, protection from storm surges and saltwater intrusion, and food security and livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people, but are themselves threatened by the impacts of climate change and unsustainable development.

The gap between what these countries need to cut emissions, protect and sustainably manage these climate-critical ecosystems, adapt to worsening climate impacts, and recover from loss and damage, and what is currently available, remains vast. Closing this gap requires a significant scale-up in international climate finance to protect lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems as global heating accelerates.

### 6.1 Close Australia's Climate Finance Gap

The Australian Government has an opportunity to demonstrate genuine climate finance leadership. With countries agreeing to mobilise at least USD \$1.3 trillion annually by 2035 for climate action at COP30, Australia must at least triple current contributions, and ensure these funds are additional to the aid budget. Only then can Australia begin to close the gap. All climate finance should be new and additional to the aid budget. This funding should primarily be delivered as public, grant-based finance, with all climate finance being new and additional to Official Development Assistance (ODA).

#### WWF Recommendations:

- Commit AUD \$11 billion in climate finance for 2025–2030, aligned with the tripling of the global climate finance goal.
- Increase the proportion of international development assistance with a principal focus on climate change to 30 per cent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2030.

### 6.2 Design and Establish a Pacific Climate Adaptation and Resilience Fund

Australia is the Pacific's largest development partner. As other partners reduce their commitments due to fiscal tightening, Australia's role has become even more critical. This places a responsibility in Australia to deepen its support for Pacific climate resilience—particularly for community driven initiatives that deliver tangible, locally led adaptation outcomes. A flexible fund for Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and local communities to propose and deliver climate adaptation and resilience projects in the Pacific, with a focus on nature-based solutions, and co-designed through a tripartite process between Australian Government, Australian NGO's and Pacific civil society organisations, would enhance Australia's climate resilience and development objectives through scalable solutions that are fit for purpose and responsive to community needs and priorities.

#### WWF Recommendations:

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<sup>23</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2023) *Australia's International Development Policy: for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific* p.18.

- \$400 million over four years to establish a Pacific Climate Adaptation & Resilience Fund co-designed with NGOs and Pacific civil society, prioritising nature-based solutions.
- Initial investment of \$40 million in 2026-27 (as part of the \$400 million) to design and implement the fund which should be co-designed through a tripartite process between Australian Government, Australian Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and Pacific civil society organisations.

### **6.3 Support Pacific-led Loss and Damage Priorities**

Pacific Island countries have been leading global advocacy to secure predictable, dedicated funding for Loss and Damage—to support recovery and reconstruction where climate driven impacts exceed communities' ability to adapt. This is not theoretical. In Vanuatu in 2023, two Category 4 cyclones hit within 24 hours, affecting 80% of the population and causing devastating losses. The Pacific has been clear that addressing Loss and Damage is a matter of justice, solidarity, and trust. Australia recently pledged \$50 million to loss and damage—a welcome and significant step. However, Pacific leaders and experts have been explicit that contributions must be ongoing, scaled up, and commensurate with Australia's responsibility as one of the world's largest fossil fuel exporters.

#### **WWF Recommendation:**

- \$300 million over five years to increase loss and damage funding, fill the shortfall in Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) funding, and provide finance to support the Pacific region to transition to 100% Renewable Energy.

### **6.4 Support Civil Society Engagement in COP31**

With COP31 to be hosted by Türkiye in Antalya, Australia has committed to advancing the Pacific's interests through its role as President of Negotiations.<sup>24</sup> Ensuring robust and inclusive participation of Australian and Pacific civil society – both at COP31 itself and in the key preparatory fora - is essential to achieving outcomes that genuinely reflect the needs and priorities of the communities on the frontlines of climate change.

#### **WWF Recommendation:**

- Provide at least \$10 million per year in this year's budget to support Pacific and Australian civil society engagement in COP31 and through the transition to COP32.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/cop-be-hosted-turkiye-australia-leading-negotiations>

**Table One: WWF Investment Recommendations: Summary**

<p><b>1. Elevate First Nations Leadership for Healthy Country and People</b></p>
<p><b>1.1 Grow and enhance Indigenous ranger roles and resource Indigenous Protected Areas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase funding for the Indigenous Ranger Program for an additional \$25,000 per ranger per year for increase in pay, resources, training and equipment This increased investment ranges from \$47.5 million per year for 1,900 rangers to \$95 million per year for 3,800 rangers.</li> <li>• Increase funding for Indigenous Protected Areas management by \$67.4million per year to equal investment from the federal government of a total of \$100million per year.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.2 Expand and fund national Indigenous women caring for country network.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commit \$8.35 million over four years to support the expansion and operation of a truly national Indigenous women rangers’ support network. This investment would enable expansion of the Women Rangers Environmental Network (WREN) into southern and eastern states by engaging new coordinators and establishing new hubs, provide funding certainty to existing hubs, and resource new opportunities for professional development and knowledge exchange.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.3 Establish a Commissioner for Country.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$2 million funding for Commissioners Office and Commissioner.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.4 Include First Nations perspectives in threatened species recovery.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$35 million a year for five years. Integrate First Nations perspectives and knowledge in Australia’s threatened species recovery funding First Nations recovery positions.</li> <li>• \$3 million over five years. Invest in Indigenous-led research that supports the recognition of culturally significant entities through State of the Environment reporting processes to document trends in condition.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Australia’s Nature Laws and Implementation</b></p>
<p><b>2.1 Set up the National Environmental Protection Agency for success.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$500 million over 4 years.<sup>25</sup> As a new independent national regulator that is fundamental to the success of the EPBC reforms, the National Environmental Protection Agency will require significant resources to be established and successful.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.2 Converting recovery plans to usable protection statements.</b></p>

<sup>25</sup> Assumption: actual cost will be greater than this, but assumes some existing resources transferred from other departments to make up the difference, \$300-400 million/year ongoing (depending on level of cost-recovery).

- \$100 million over 4 years, \$5 million/year ongoing to enable regular review and updating of Protection Statements from Recovery Plans.

### **2.3 Enabling Environment Information Australia (EIA).**

- \$50 million over 4 years.

### **2.4 Supporting critical technical and policy development.**

- \$20 million over 2 years, to cover contracted science and departmental expertise/resources.

## **3. Invest to Protect and Repair Biodiversity and Nature**

### **3.1 Stop extinctions and recover threatened species.**

- \$225 million over 4 years. Continue to fund the Saving Native Species program at least at its current funding level.
- \$35m a year for four years. Allocate specific additional funding for threatened species recovery teams for the Government's 110 priority species.
- Progressively scale up to invest at least \$2 billion a year ongoing to stop extinctions and recover threatened species. This will include coordinated and inclusive conservation planning, landscape scale threat management programs, cultural burning and other cultural restoration practices, as well as species-specific recovery actions including habitat restoration and species reintroductions.

### **3.2 Protect 30% of Australia's land by 2030.**

- Invest an additional \$500m in the Saving Australia's Bushland program to hasten progress towards protecting 30% of land by 2030.

### **3.3 Restore Degraded Landscapes.**

- \$2 billion a year ongoing. Includes the establishment of a new dedicated program to systematically restore Australia's degraded lands for benefit of First Nations healthy Country aspirations, agriculture, species and the climate.

### **3.4 End deforestation and logging to protect the places species call home.**

- Provide \$1 billion to support landholders and states to retain native vegetation on farms, including through supporting development of natural capital markets and diverse incentive programs such as the Victorian Trees on Farm program, to reduce deforestation, improve landscape resilience and diversify regional economies.
- Provide \$1 billion to 2030 in grants, industry support and concessional loans to support a fair and just transition from native forest logging to regenerative construction fibres.

## **4. Build the Health and Resilience of Oceans**

### **4.1 Catalyse 30x30 in Australia and the region.**

- Establish a \$150 million marine parks package to support marine park reviews that are informed and supported by scientific research, comprehensive stakeholder engagement, and detailed analysis of the socio-economic impacts and opportunities from these reviews.

### **4.2 Western Pacific ‘blue corridor’ for whales.**

- Establish a \$25 million ‘blue corridors’ fund to support cross-sectoral collaboration and implementation to safeguard whales’ and other migratory species’ migration routes, in Australian waters and throughout the Pacific region.

### **4.3 Fund a Great Barrier Reef Emergency Response Plan to protect the Reef from further decline.**

- \$100 million in funding to formulate and deliver a Great Barrier Reef Emergency Response Plan with clear actions.

### **4.4 Extended Producer Responsibility scheme.**

- \$250-350 million over three years. Although the cost of administering a federal Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme has not been published, WWF-Australia recommends an allocation of \$250m-\$350m over three years (approximately \$80m-\$110m per year) based on the allocated cost of establishing the Victorian Container Deposit Scheme with similar elements to those of a federally-administered EPR scheme. Depending on the design of the Federal EPR scheme, there may be opportunities for cost recovery of the initial government investment.

### **4.5 Implementing the High-Seas Biodiversity Treaty (BBNJ).**

- \$20 million over the forward estimates to support Australia’s national contributions; engagement in relevant international forums; proactively advancing high seas marine protected area proposals in Oceania; Research Vessel (RV) Investigator resourcing to support ocean floor mapping and biodiversity research, and associated analysis.

## **5. Tackle Climate Change by Replacing Fossil Fuels with Renewables**

### **5.1 Accelerate Australia’s renewable energy export opportunity.**

- Allocate \$20 million to develop a whole-of-government renewable exports strategy.

### **5.2 Australia’s Green Iron opportunity – First-of-kind green iron project.**

- Commit \$10 billion to deliver Australia's first large-scale green iron project, enabling global steel decarbonisation and securing a long-term export industry compatible with net zero trade requirements.
- Approximately \$6 million a year over 4 years: Establish the Clean Commodities Trading Initiative as a specialist division within an existing government body (Export Finance Australia (EFA), National Reconstruction Fund (NFC), or Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) in the 2026-27 Budget, with an initial operating budget.

**5.3 Support sustainable procurement and uptake of low embodied carbon materials in infrastructure projects.**

- Invest \$500,000 per year for three years (\$1.5 million total) to support The Materials & Embodied Carbon Leaders' Alliance (MECLA) continued cross-sector industry and government leadership to accelerate market transformation of construction and infrastructure in Australia including driving demand, manufacture and adoption of low-embodied-carbon materials and avoiding the loss of coordinated industry action essential to meeting the government's 2035 emission reduction targets and circular economy ambitions.

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#### **6.4 Support Civil Society Engagement in COP31**

- Provide at least \$10 million per year in this year's budget to support Pacific and Australian civil society engagement in COP31 and through the transition to COP32.



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