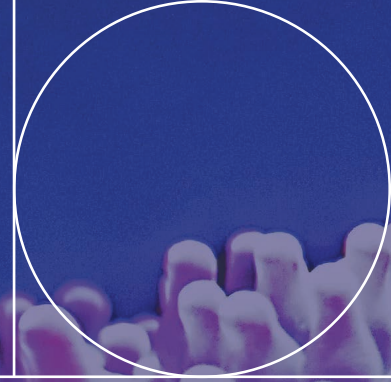




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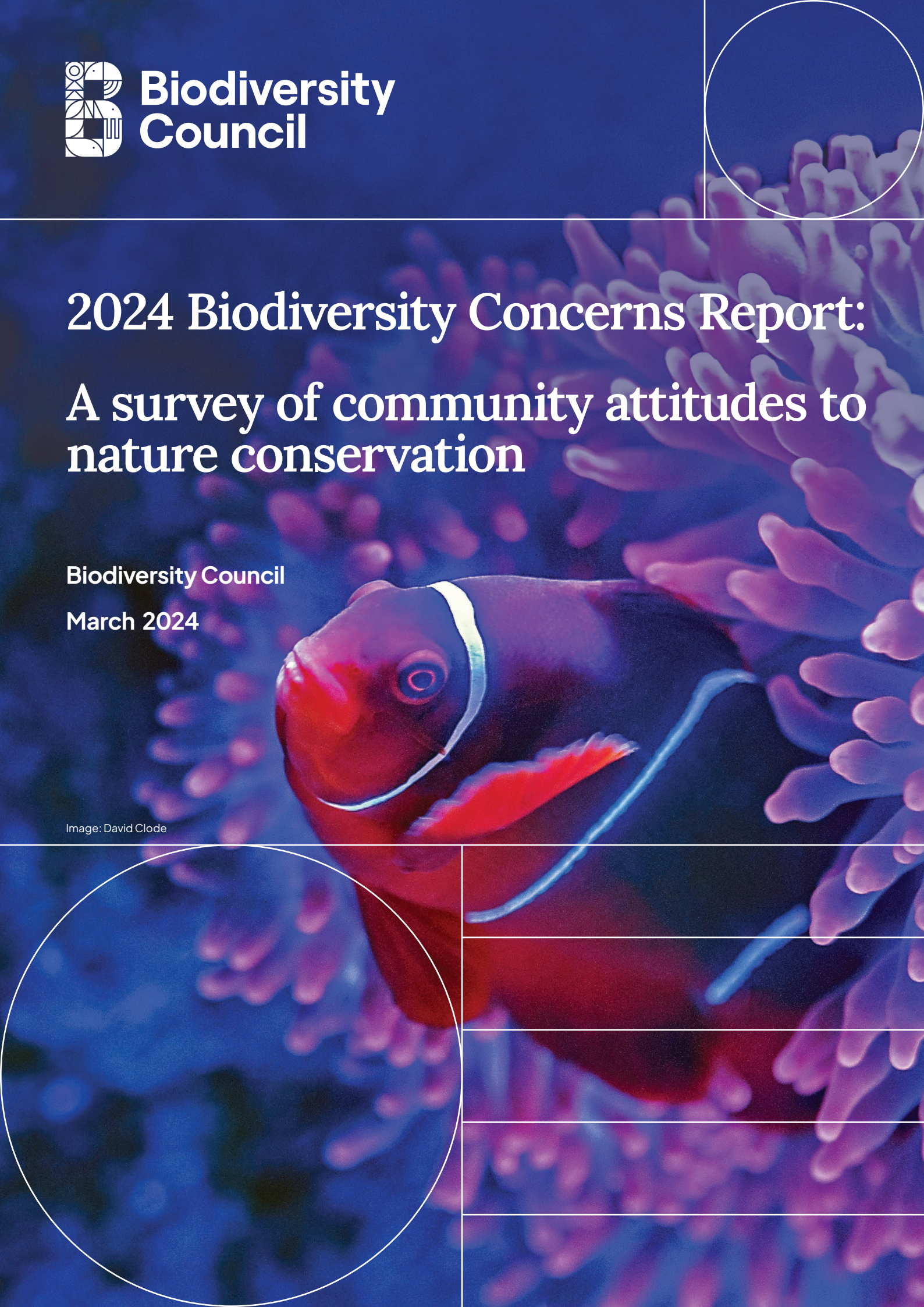
2024 Biodiversity Concerns Report:

A survey of community attitudes to nature conservation

Biodiversity Council

March 2024

Image: David Clode



Acknowledgement

The Biodiversity Council acknowledges the First Peoples of the lands and waters of Australia, and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and future and expresses gratitude for long and ongoing custodianship of Country.

Further information

For more information

Contact: enquiries@biodiversitycouncil.org.au

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In brief

The second annual Biodiversity Concerns Survey has shown that Australians care deeply about the state of nature, with a strong majority wanting the federal government to greatly increase its investment in conservation programs and implement stronger national environmental laws.

This year's study, which surveyed more than 3,400 Australians in late 2023, canvassed major environmental policy issues state and federal governments are likely to face in 2024. The findings provide valuable insights into community attitudes and demand, including:

National environmental reforms

- After learning that the government currently spends less than 1% of the Federal budget on protecting the natural environment, **almost all Australians (95%) wanted a better budget for nature**, and 75% wanted at least 2% or more of the federal budget spent on nature. This would represent more than a five-fold increase of current investments.
- There is **majority support for strengthening environmental laws** to support nature (73%), protecting native species habitats from development (69%) and reducing the use of biodiversity offsets through better planning (67%).
- 60% of Australians **support the establishment of an independent federal Environment Protection Agency (EPA)**, and only 16% believe that the Federal Environment Minister should be able to override an independent federal EPA.
- The majority of Australians (63%) support the **mandatory assessment and consideration of carbon emissions on major project proposals** through national environmental law (through a mechanism such as a climate trigger).

International obligations

- The majority of Australians believe it is **very important** to uphold Australia's international obligations as a signatory of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* to **stop or reduce the extinction of animals (64%)**, **ensure at least 30% of land and seas are protected (58%)** and to **reduce the impact of invasive species (57%)**, in line with the *Global Biodiversity Framework* adopted in 2022.
- The majority of people also believe it is **very important** for Australia to uphold its international obligations under the *World Heritage Convention* (63%), *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands* (58%)

and the *Paris Agreement* (51%).

- **57% of Australians believe it is very important for renewable energy infrastructure to minimise impacts on nature**, and 96% of Australians believe it is at least **moderately important**.

Species and wildlife management

- **9 in 10 Australians want more listed threatened species actively recovered**, and almost half (46%) believe the Government should aim to protect and recover all listed threatened species. Currently the Australian Government prioritises 5% (110 species) through its threatened species action plan.
- There is majority support (81%) for implementing measures to protect Australian wildlife of cultural significance, such as the platypus, along with establishing a duty of care for governments to protect future generations from environmental harm (71%).

Business and nature

- There is majority support (64%) for requiring businesses to report their impacts on nature, indicating strong public appetite for measures such as those released by the *Taskforce for Nature Related Financial Disclosures* in late 2023.
- There is majority support (63%) to establish new financial systems that allow businesses to invest in supporting nature, highlighting that there is public support for the government's proposed Nature Repair Market reforms.

Public concern and everyday actions for nature

- The majority of Australians indicate that it is **important to them to know nature is being looked after (85%)** and indicate that nature conservation issues would **influence how they voted** in future elections (89%).
- As shown in the previous survey, the majority of Australians feel connected to nature and almost all Australians are at least moderately concerned about biodiversity issues, including **increasing waste and pollution (90%)**, **loss of natural places (89%)**, and **the decline/extinction of insects and pollinators (86%)**.
- While many Australians are already acting for nature (e.g. 50% consider themselves sustainable consumers), many more indicate that they are willing to take further action for nature. For example, **46% of Australians indicate they are willing to begin advocating for nature**.

Research purpose and approach

The Biodiversity Council brings together leading experts including Indigenous knowledge holders to promote evidence-based solutions to address Australia's biodiversity crisis.

Biodiversity is the scientific term used to describe the richness and diversity of plants and animals in nature. We are currently undergoing a biodiversity crisis, with recent evidence suggesting that the rate and trajectory of biodiversity loss and resulting extinctions pose an even greater threat than previously thought.

In 2022 the Biodiversity Council undertook its first benchmark study to understand Australians' concern, current actions, and policy support for biodiversity conservation. The survey found that **97% of Australians want more action for nature** demonstrating a public mandate for greater action from policymakers and other decision-makers (e.g. business owners).

This year's study surveyed more than 3,400 Australians in November–December 2023, to monitor ongoing public concern and action for nature, and gain greater understanding of public support for potential reforms relevant to current policy agendas. The team surveyed Australians' level of connection with and concern for nature, actions Australians are taking for nature, and the extent of public support for potential government action and policies improving protections and recovery of nature. This 2024 Report reveals crucial new insights relevant to potential government actions and policies on the horizon for this year.

See the appendices for more detail around survey methods and the survey sample characteristics.

The arrival of invasive species is one of the reasons that many Australian species now require ongoing conservation investment to ensure their survival. Pictured: A boodie being released at cat- and fox-free Newhaven Sanctuary. Credit: Brad Leue/Australian Wildlife Conservancy



Results

Australians' perceptions of the state of nature

Australians are generally **more optimistic than they were about the state of nature in 2022** with 65% of Australians believing that the state of Australia's environment is 'good' or 'very good' (up from 60%). 72% of Australians believe the state of their local environment is 'good' or 'very good'.

The most common information sources about the state of nature and the environment are television media (57%), documentaries on the TV or internet (49%), and particular friends and family (32%), followed by government websites (29%), social media (29%), and print media (28%).

Australians are both connected to, and concerned about, nature

Australians generally feel connected to nature with the majority highlighting recreation, well-being and mental-health as important factors driving connection.



Kids enjoying time in nature. Image: Marcus Wallis

Over **83% of Australians are at least moderately concerned about biodiversity issues**, and 59% are 'very' or 'extremely' concerned. Issues that currently concern Australians the most include:

- Increasing waste and pollution (71% are 'very' or 'extremely' concerned)
- Loss of natural places (68%)
- Decline / extinction of insects and pollinators (66%)

How Australians connect with nature

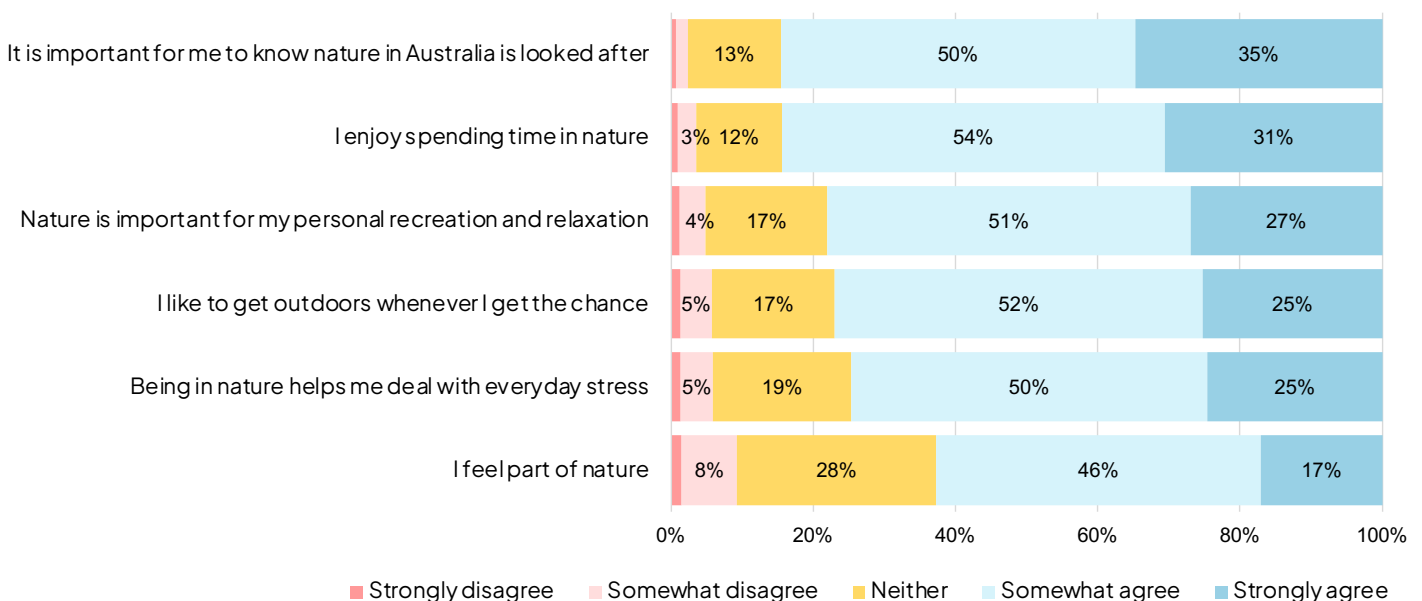


Fig 1. This graph shows how much survey participants agreed with statements about being connected to nature. The results show that the majority of people value and feel connected to nature (blue groups). The proportion of people who do not value or feel connected to nature (red groups) were very small for all statements.

Concern about biodiversity issues

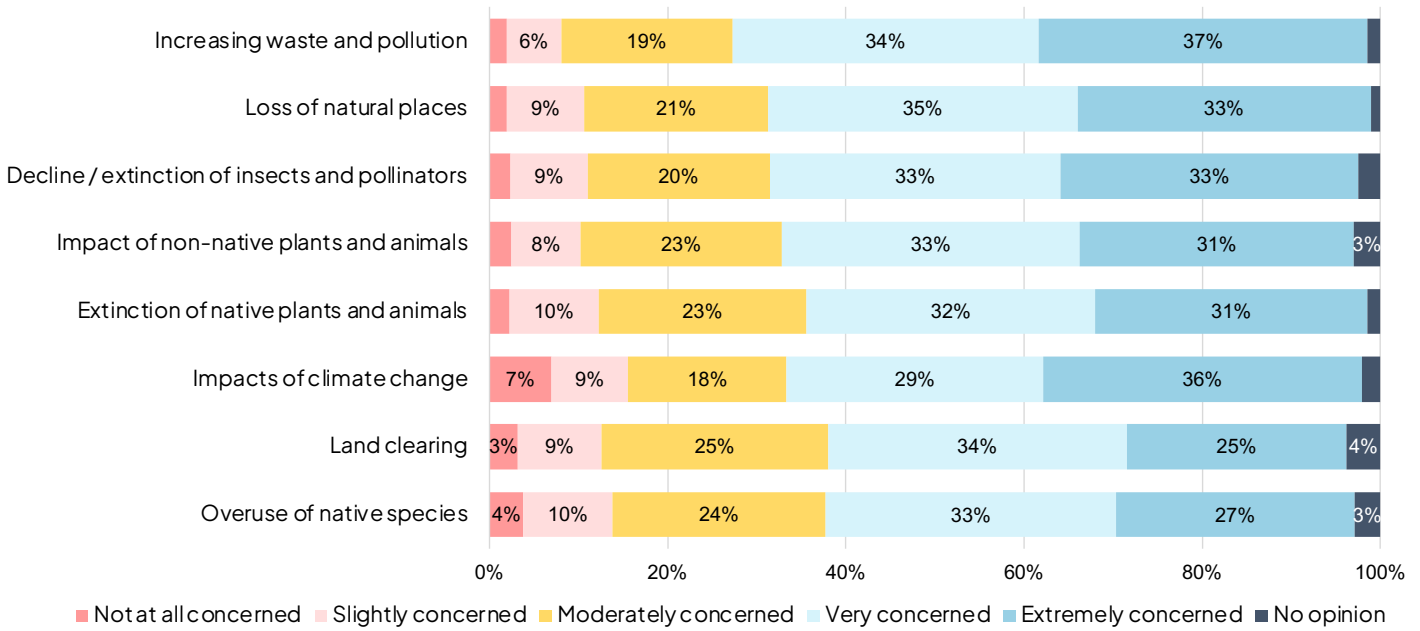


Fig 2. This graph shows how concerned participants were about a range of biodiversity issues. A majority of people were very concerned or extremely concerned (blue groups) about all issues presented.

Australians tend to be more concerned about biodiversity if they:

- Are more connected to nature
- Have a poorer perception of the state of the natural environment in Australia, or
- Believe the environment has been poorly looked after

85% of Australians agree that it is important for them to know nature in Australia is looked after, and 67% of Australians believe Australia's natural environment has been looked after at least 'moderately well'. However, repeating the trend found in the 2022 survey, **97% of Australians still believe more action is needed.**



Almost all Australians are concerned about increasing waste and pollution. Image: Ocean Image Bank, Naja Bertolt Jensen CC BY NC

Do Australians want more action for nature?

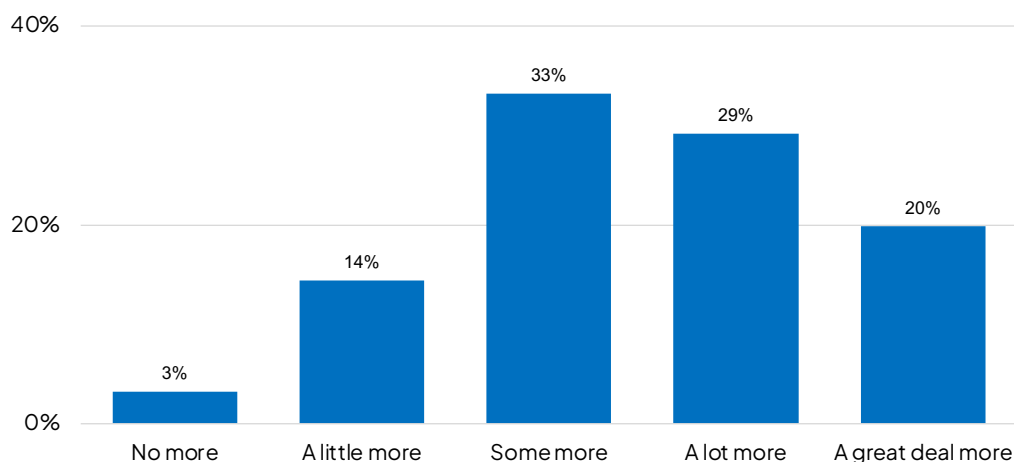


Fig 3. This graph shows how much more action participants think needs to be taken for nature protection and recovery. Results show that the vast majority (97%) believe at least some action is needed, with only 3% indicating that 'no more' is needed. 49% of Australians believe either 'a lot more' or 'a great deal more' is needed.

Australians are taking action and willing to do more for nature

Many Australians are already taking action for nature. Common actions being taken by many Australians include managing pets / gardens for nature (e.g. keep cats inside, plant a native garden for wildlife) (71% of pet owners/gardeners), and spending time in nature (70%).

A significant proportion of Australians also indicated a willingness to do more for nature, through actions such as making big decisions that support nature (e.g. changing bank, super fund, or voting preference) (48%), getting involved in protecting nature (e.g. volunteering, attending council meetings) (47%) or advocating for nature (e.g. join a campaign, talk to a member of parliament) (46%).

How are Australians acting for nature?

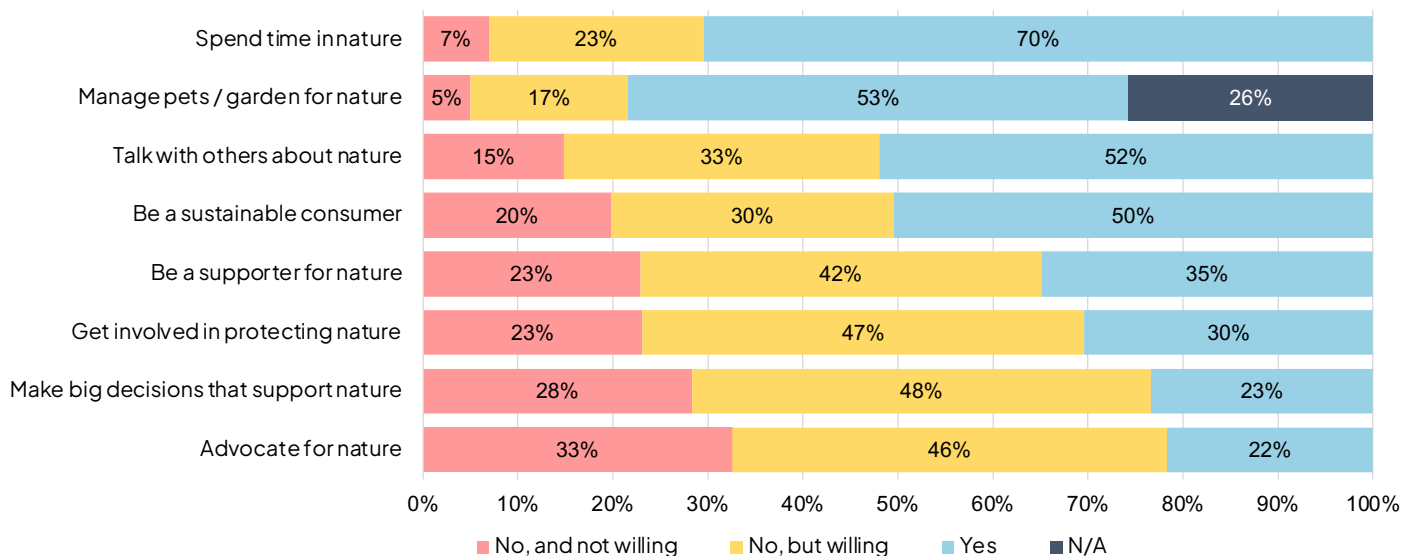


Fig 4. This graph shows the proportion of Australians who are already taking certain actions for nature (blue bars), are willing to try certain actions (yellow bars), or are not willing to perform these actions (red bars).

Australians believe governments must take greater action for nature

6 in 10 Australians (61%) believe that Federal, State and territory and local governments are **most responsible for taking action** to protect Australia's natural environment.

9 in 10 Australians (89%) indicate that conservation issues would influence **how they would vote in future elections** at least slightly. For 35% of Australians, this influence is 'strong' or 'very strong'.

The performance of both the Australian Government and State/Territory Governments in protecting nature were rated higher by Australians in 2023 compared to 2022. However, most Australians believe more action still needs to be taken, including increasing spending, protecting more species, and upholding Australia's international obligations.

In Australia, all levels of government have responsibilities to care for the environment. Pictured: A Brisbane City Council sign announcing a creek restoration project. Image: John Robert McPherson CC BY SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons



Australians support increasing the budget to protect the natural environment

Australians believe that **more money needs to be spent to protect and recover more species.**

Most survey participants (77%) estimated that 1% or more of the Federal budget was currently being spent on nature protection. Only 23% correctly

indicated that less than 1% was currently being spent.

When told the current budget spend was less than 1%, almost **all participants (95%) felt that more should be spent on nature. 75%** indicated that 2% or more of the budget should be spent. This would represent more than a five-fold increase of current investments.

What budget do Australians want for nature?

Estimate of current budget spend

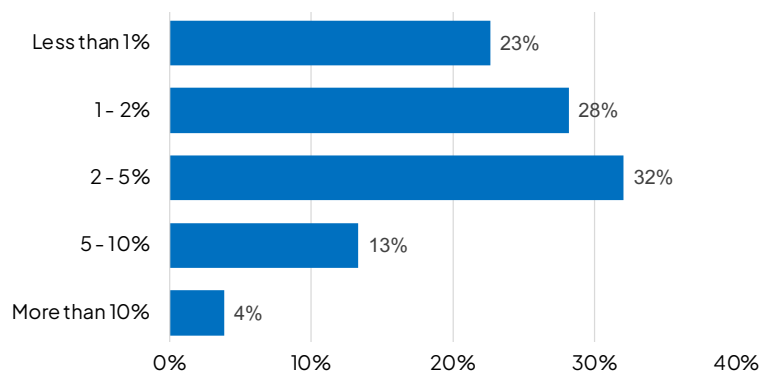


Fig 5a Participants were asked to estimate the proportion of the national budget that is currently spent on nature. 2-5% was the amount that most people believed the Australian Government currently spends.

Nominated budget spend

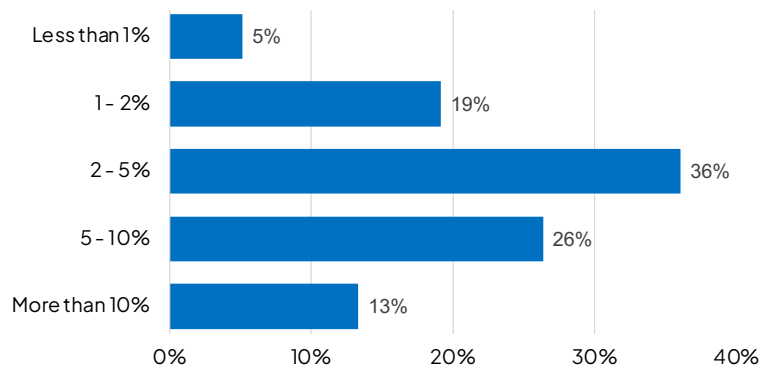


Fig 5b. Participants were told that the actual proportion of the national budget spent on nature is less than 1%, and were then asked to nominate what proportion they believed should be spent on nature. 2-5% was the amount nominated by the most people.

There are approximately 2,000 species listed nationally as threatened with extinction. **9 in 10 Australians (92%)** believe at least 10% or more of these species should be protected. **Almost half (46%) of Australians believe that the Federal government should aim to protect and recover all 2,000 species listed nationally** as threatened with extinction. Current national environmental policies prioritise 5% (110) of these species through the Threatened Species Action Plan.

What proportion of threatened species do Australians want protected?

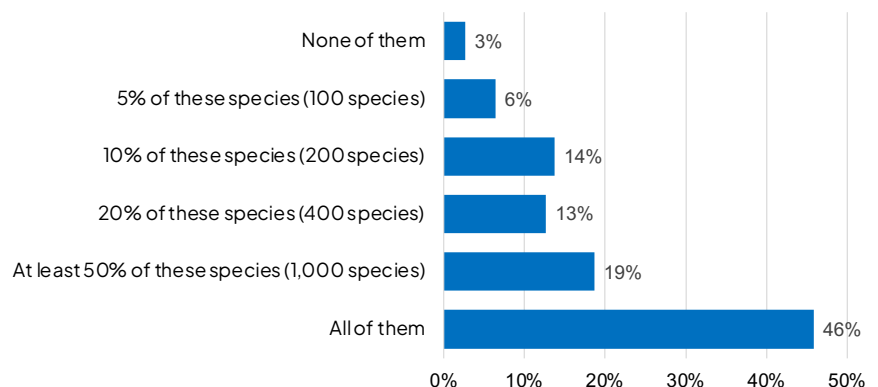


Fig 6. Australia has more than 2000 nationally listed threatened species. Participants were asked to nominate what proportion of these species should be protected and recovered. Roughly half of survey respondents said that all of them should be protected and recovered.

Australians support new policies to protect nature

Overall, the majority of Australians are supportive of new and better enforced policies to protect nature. Highly supported policies include **strengthening environmental laws (73%)**, **ensuring decision-makers have a duty of care** for protecting future generations from environmental harm (71%), **protecting native species' habitat from developments (69%)**, and enforcing better planning and design of development projects to **reduce the use of environmental offsets (67%)**.

Australians also strongly support introducing protections for **Australian wildlife of cultural significance** such as the platypus (81%). This has significant implications for the protection of totemic species of cultural importance, such as dingoes or other Australian wildlife of importance to First Nations communities.



Only 8% of people (less than 1 in 12) are opposed to policy requiring cat owners to keep their cat contained to their property. Image: Jaana Dielenberg

Many of these highly supported policies have clear implications for decision-makers and businesses. For example, there is strong support for businesses reporting their impact on nature and for greater private investment in nature recovery and protection, repeating similar findings of strong support in last year's survey (see 2022 Biodiversity Concerns Report).

What pro-biodiversity policies do Australians support?

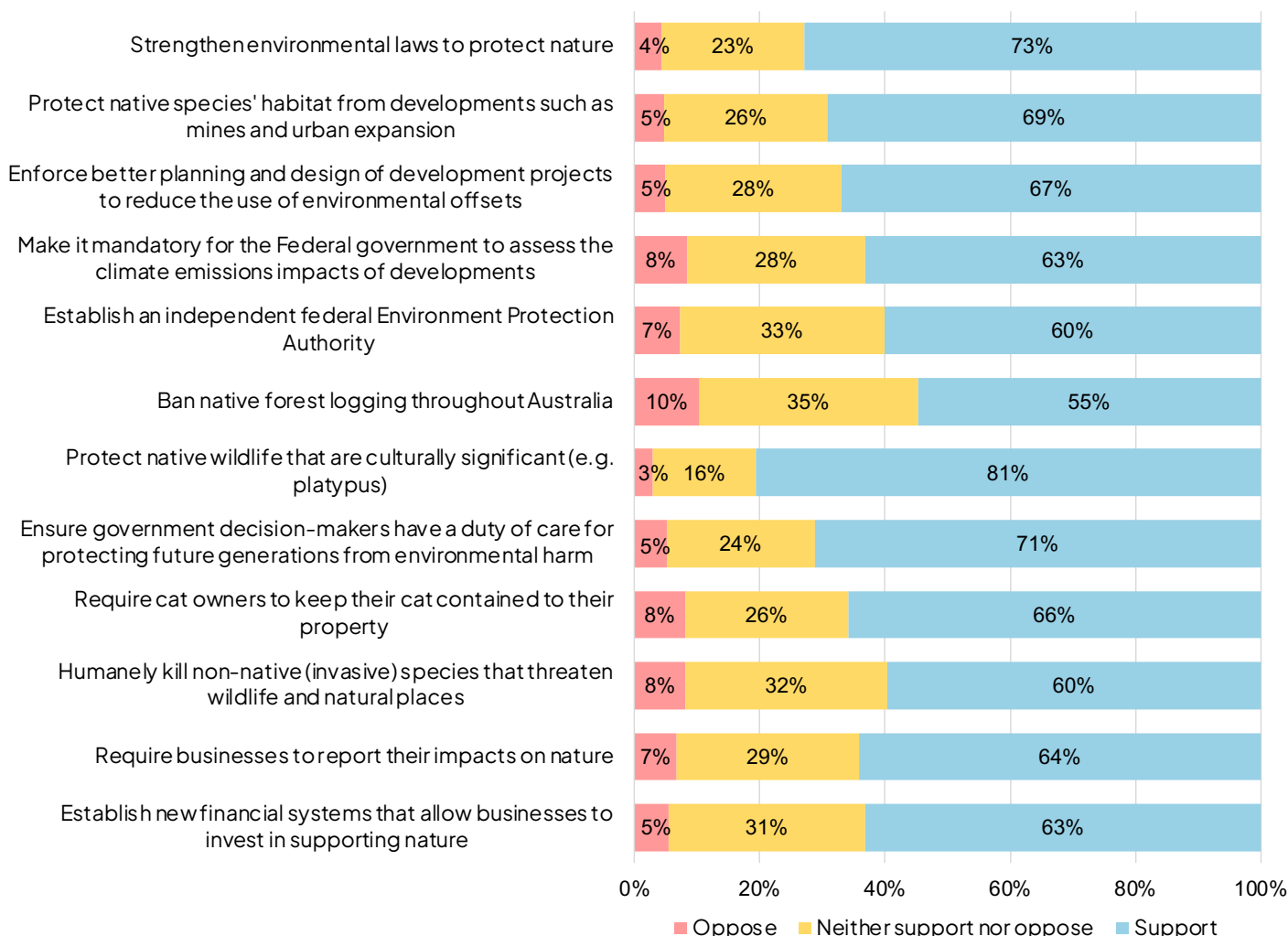


Fig 7. This graph shows levels of community support for a range of policies aimed at helping biodiversity. For each policy, a strong majority support the policy (blue bars), while some Australians neither supporting nor opposing (yellow bars), and a small percentage oppose the policies (red bars).

Only 1 in 6 Australians (16%) feel the Environment Minister should be able to override decisions made by an independent Environment Protection Authority (EPA). 3 in 10 (30%) feel the Minister should **not** be able to override decisions made by an EPA. Remaining Australians indicated that this 'may be' appropriate (35%) or that they were 'not sure' (19%).

The **overwhelming majority** (96%) of participants believe it is important ('moderately' or 'very') that **renewable energy infrastructure is built in areas that minimise impacts on nature. 57% of Australians believe it is very important.**

Australians support upholding our international obligations

About 9 in 10 Australians believe upholding Australia's global obligations to protect nature was at least moderately important, and the majority believe it is 'very important'. This includes commitments to stop or reduce the risk of extinction of plants and animals, protect natural World Heritage Areas and internationally important wetlands, and ensure at least 30% of land and sea are protected by 2030.

Which international obligations are important to Australians?

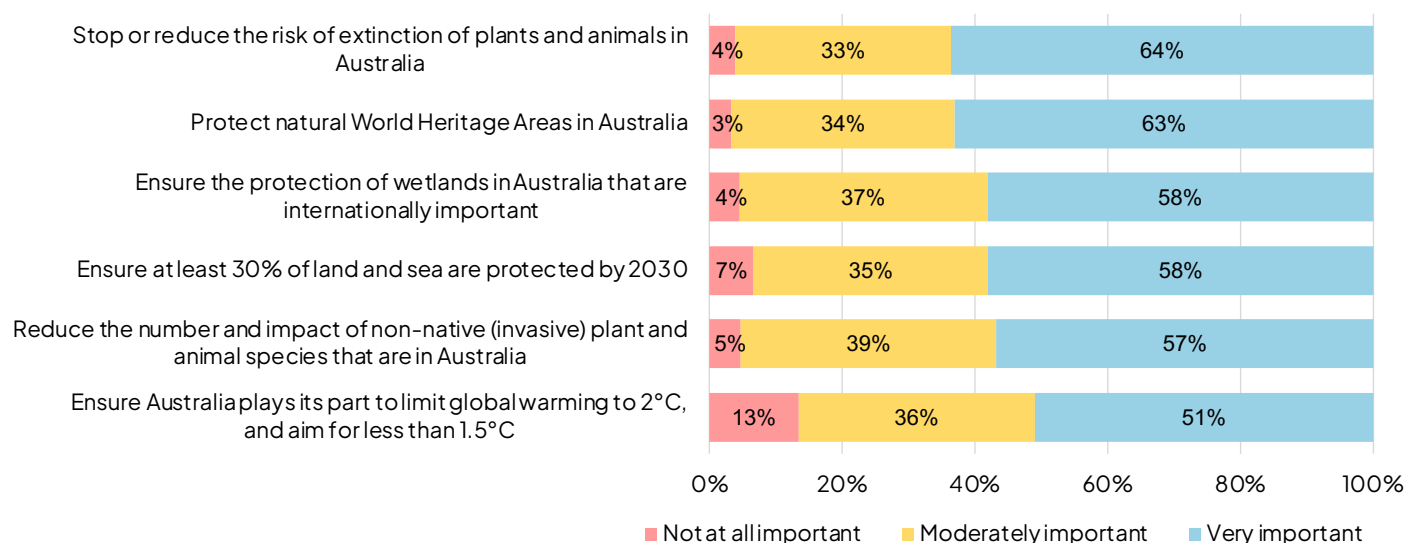


Fig 8. This graph shows to what extent Australians believe Australia upholding key international obligations is important. The majority of Australians consider all the obligations 'very important' (blue bars), with a decent proportion considering them 'moderately important' (yellow bars), and a small percentage 'not at all important' (red bars).

Should renewable energy infrastructure be built in areas that minimise impacts on nature

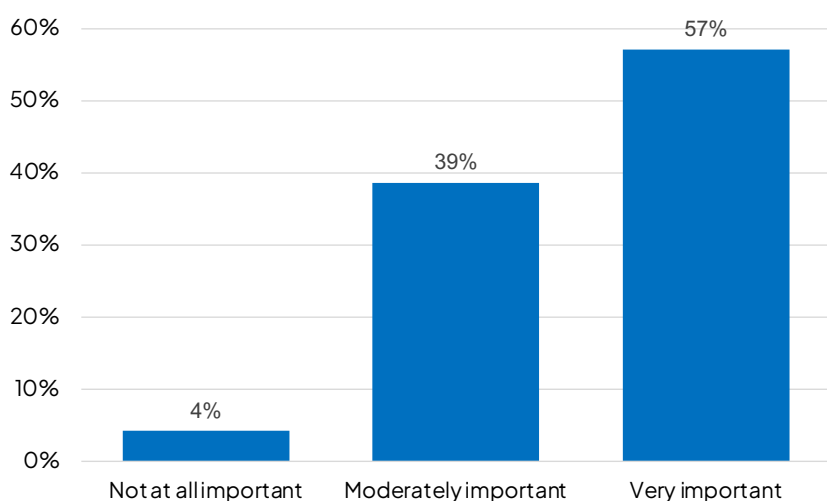


Fig 9. Almost all (96%) Australians believe it is important to build renewable energy infrastructure in areas that minimise impacts on nature. 57% believe it is very important.



95% of people say it is important to protect internationally important wetlands. Pictured: Black-fronted Dotterel. Image: Patrick Kavanagh CC BY 2.0 DEED via Flickr

Appendices

Survey methods

In total, 3421 Australians completed the survey in November and December 2023, recruited via an online research panel through the Qualtrics platform. The survey took around 10 minutes to complete on average. The sample was benchmarked against Australian census data for age, gender, and location (see Table 1).

Demographic characteristics

Table 1. Demographic characters of survey participants.

Demographic characteristics		valid %
Age	18–24	11%
	25–34	18%
	35–44	18%
	45–54	16%
	55–64	14%
	65–74	12%
	75+	10%
Gender	Man	49%
	Woman	51%
	Non-binary / gender diverse	0%
	My gender identity isn't listed	0%
	Prefer not to say	0%
	Prefer not to answer	7%
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	Yes, Aboriginal	7%
	Yes, Torres Strait Islander	1%
	Yes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	0%
	No	92%
	Prefer not to say	0%
Country of birth	Australia	81%
	Other country	19%
Language	Only English	88%
	Other language(s)	12%

Demographic characteristics		valid %
State	NSW	32%
	VIC	25%
	QLD	19%
	WA	11%
	SA	8%
	TAS	3%
	ACT	2%
	NT	1%
Area type	Inner metropolitan	17%
	Suburban	49%
	Peri-urban	7%
	Regional centre	22%
	Rural / remote	5%
	None of the above	0%
Employment status	Employed full-time	37%
	Employed part-time	14%
	Employed casually	4%
	Self-employed	5%
	Student only	2%
	Student and working	1%
	Engaged in home duties or volunteer work	6%
	Retired	24%
	Unemployed	7%
Highest level of education	Did not attend school	0%
	Primary school	1%
	High school: year 11 or below	14%
	High school: year 12	18%
	Certificate, diploma, or advanced diploma	29%
	University undergraduate	27%
	University post-graduate	10%
Household income	\$1–\$25,999 per year	7%
	\$26,000–\$51,999 per year	21%
	\$52,000–\$77,999 per year	18%
	\$78,000–\$103,999 per year	17%
	\$104,000–\$155,999 per year	16%
	\$156,000–\$207,999 per year	8%
	\$208,000–or more per year	6%
	Negative or nil income	1%
	Prefer not to answer	7%



Biodiversity Council

The Biodiversity Council brings together leading experts including Indigenous Knowledge holders to promote evidence-based solutions to Australia's biodiversity crisis. It was founded by 11 universities: The University of Melbourne, The University of Western Australia, The Australian National University, The University of Adelaide, The University of Sydney, The University of Queensland, Deakin University, The University of Canberra, Monash University, Macquarie University, and The University of New South Wales. It is host by The University of Melbourne. It receives support from The Ian Potter Foundation, The Ross Trust, Trawalla Foundation, The Rendere Trust, Isaacson Davis Foundation, Coniston Charitable Trust and Angela Whitbread.

Image: People enjoying Twin Falls pool in Springbrook National Park, Qld. Image Jaana Dielenberg