Biodiversity Council

Pre-budget submission to the 2026-27 budget

30 January 2026

About The Biodiversity Council

The Biodiversity Council brings together leading experts including Indigenous knowledge holders to promote evidence-based solutions to Australia's biodiversity crisis. The Council was founded by 11 universities with the support of Australian philanthropists.

Introduction

The Biodiversity Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a 2026-27 Pre-budget Submission.

Australia has consistently underinvested in the protection and recovery of nature, relative to other developed nations and relative to its importance to our economy, culture, well-being and national identity.

The Biodiversity Council calls on the Australian Government to commit to immediately lifting investment to at least 1% of current government expenditure on nature protection and restoration priorities and to make further investments in biodiversity monitoring and research.

Alongside this broader uplift in funding, there is an urgent need to maintain and strengthen existing conservation programs that are already delivering on-ground outcomes. In particular, the **Saving Native Species Fund must be continued beyond 2025–26**, with a further multi-year funding commitment made to ensure stability, effectiveness and continuity in threatened species recovery.

This funding must, as a minimum, match the previous commitment for the Saving Native Species Fund, and be increased in line with the best available evidence for the cost to recover Australia's imperilled wildlife. Without sustained, predictable investment, Australia risks losing hard-won conservation gains and accelerating extinctions that are both preventable and economically reckless.

"*Don't tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value.*"

— **Joe Biden**

Economic prosperity and a healthy environment are inextricably linked

Economics Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta from the University of Cambridge, in his 2021 review to the UK government,[1] debunks the fundamental assumptions built into economic models of growth and development that the natural environment can be treated separately from the economy and that scientific and technological progress will sustain ever increasing growth.

The World Economic Forum has identified biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, together with climate change as the top three risks for the global economy over the next decade. [2] The Forum outlines that this will have severe consequences for the economy and society more broadly due to the destruction of natural capital.

The World Health Organisation notes that biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation are becoming major health concerns.[3] Biodiversity can mitigate or reduce ill health by providing food and medicines; reducing harms caused by environmental stressors such as air pollution and extreme heat; and supporting wellbeing.[4]

The economy is a subsidiary of the environment, not the other way around.[5] An estimated *minimum* of one half of Australia's GDP (49.3% or $892.8bn), is moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services.[6] This is consistent with global estimates.[7] Biodiversity loss and ecosystem changes can have significant impacts on individual businesses. Industries like tourism, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, food product manufacturing, construction and waste and water services have a very high dependence on nature and may be directly impacted.[8] However, sectors with a lower direct dependency are still at risk from nature loss through impacts on their value chains, loss of customers or markets, and legal action or

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[1] Dasgupta, Pl. (2021) *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review*, London: HM Treasury. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962785/The_Economics_of_Biodiversity_The_Dasgupta_Review_Full_Report.pdf

[2] World Economic Forum (2024) The Global risks Report 2024. 19th Edition. Insight Report. https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/digest/

[3] World Health Organization (2025) *Biodiversity* Factsheet https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/biodiversity

[4] Marselle, M. R. et al. (2021) Pathways linking biodiversity to human health: A conceptual framework *Environment International* **150**: 106420. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412021000441

[5] Erickson, J. D. (2022) The inconvenient truth of Herman Daly: There is no economy without environment. *The Conversation* Published: November 11, 2022. https://theconversation.com/the-inconvenient-truth-of-herman-daly-there-is-no-economy-without-environment-193848

[6] Pelle, N. (2022) The Nature-based Economy: How Australia's Prosperity Depends on Nature. A report prepared by the Australian Conservation Foundation supported by Pollination and Australian Ethical Investments. https://assets.nationbuilder.com/auscon/pages/20826/attachments/original/1665019942/2208_Nature_NatureDependencyReport_FINAL-2.pdf?1665019942

[7] World Economic Forum (2020) Nature Risk Rising: Why the Crisis Engulfing Nature Matters for Business and the Economy. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_New_Nature_Economy_Report_2020.pdf

[8] Pelle 2022.

regulatory changes.[9] Demand for goods and services is exceeding the ability of the biosphere to sustainably provide them.[10]

Australia continues to have one of the highest rates of species decline and extinction among countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.[11] The 2021 State of Environment Report shows that Australia's environment is poor and still deteriorating.[12] More than 2,000 Australian species and ecological communities were known to be threatened and at risk of extinction[13] and 19 ecosystems, from the tropics to Antarctica, are already showing signs of collapse.[14] Given the dependence that many industries have on nature, the loss of biodiversity is a significant threat to Australia's economic resilience.

More government investment is needed

Australia has consistently greatly underinvested in the protection and recovery of nature, relative to other developed nations and relative to its importance to our economy.[15] Consistent with previous years,[16] in 2025, only 0.1% of the Federal budget ($474 million) was spent on nature protection[17] and the majority of Australians want far more to be spent.[18]

As a sovereign nation and economy, and hence in line with core economic principles, the Australian Government can afford to fund environmental protection and repair, just as it funds other high priorities.[19] Businesses and philanthropists cannot be relied upon to address funding shortfalls, because economics and experience demonstrate that, in the

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[9] WEF 2020.

[10] Dasgupta, P., 2021, *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review*, London: HM Treasury. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/602e92b2e90e07660f807b47/The_Economics_of_Biodiversity_The_Dasgupta_Review_Full_Report.pdf

[11] Cresswell, I., Janke, T. and Johnston, E. (2022) Australia state of the environment 2021: overview, independent report to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. DOI: 10.26194/f1rh-7r05. https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/

[12] Ibid.

[13] Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2024) Species Profile and Threats Database EPBC Act List of Threatened Fauna https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicthreatenedlist.pl and EPBC Act List of Threatened Florahttps://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicthreatenedlist.pl?wanted=flora accessed 28 January 2026.

[14] Bergstrom, D. M. et al. (2001) Combating ecosystem collapse from the tropics to the Antarctic. *Global Change Biology* **27**(9): i-ii, 1689-1991 https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.15539

[15] Waldron, A. et al., 2017, Reductions in global biodiversity loss predicted from conservation spending *Nature* **551** (7680): 364-367. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29072294/

[16] The Price of Nature. Report: Australian nature in crisis due to lack of funding. 27 May 2024. https://30by30.org.au/blog/2024/05/27/the-price-of-nature/

[17] Biodiversity Council (2025) What's in the 2025-26 federal budget for nature? https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/news/what-s-in-the-2025-26-federal-budget-for-nature:

[18] Biodiversity Council, 2025, *2025 Biodiversity Concerns Report: A survey of community attitudes to nature conservation*. March 2025. https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/admin/uploads/2025_Biodiversity_Council_Community_Concerns_Report_ee239c6469.pdf

[19] Ritchie, E. and Chee, Y. E., 2024, Nature conservation is a public good, not a market. https://360info.org/nature-conservation-is-a-public-good-not-a-market/

absence of government intervention, too little is done to conserve nature.[20] And, we simply can't wait and hope for greatly increased philanthropic investment in the future, too many species and ecosystems are in urgent need of conservation and management interventions.

It is concerning that the government is looking to private investment to address the biodiversity funding shortfall. This isn't a new idea. For over 20 years, there has been discussion about directing private capital to address biodiversity protection and restoration, but it has largely failed to deliver.[21]

Voluntary investment is unlikely to close funding gaps. In Australia, philanthropic contributions to biodiversity conservation are minimal (less than 1%) compared with the level of investment made by philanthropists in the United States.[22] The Nature Repair Market will not materially address this problem. There is a lack of intrinsic demand outside regulatory obligations. Investors and financial institutions have limited incentives to acquire biodiversity credits, as they are not recognized as risk-reducing instruments and do not generate cash flows. Biodiversity credits are complex and the outcomes that they represent are difficult to communicate simply and credibly to consumers.

The recently amended *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* now enables offsets to be included in the Nature Repair Market. This is expected to stimulate demand for on-ground conservation work. The legislative amendments have also introduced a new financial compensation option ('restoration contributions charges') for proponents to use to address offset obligations. These mechanisms can be viewed as a convenient way to address immediate funding shortfalls. However, in practice they amount to cost shifting rather than the creation of genuinely additional resources.[23] This risks masking the scale of the problem rather than solving it. Simply compensating for ongoing degradation does little to halt, let alone reverse, biodiversity loss.

Biodiversity co-benefits delivered through carbon credit schemes are also unlikely to address species extinctions. A recent analysis found that projects under the Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme are not delivering habitat restoration for threatened species, as areas most cost-effective for carbon abatement do not align with regions of highest biodiversity need.[24]

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[20] Perrings, C. et al., 2009, The economics of biodiversity and ecosystem services. In S. Naeem, D. E. Bunker, A. Hector, M. Loreau & C. Perrings (Eds.), *Biodiversity, Ecosystem Functioning, and Human Wellbeing: An Ecological and Economic Perspective* (pp.230–247), Oxford University Press, Oxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199547951.001.0001

[21] Dempsey, J. (2025). Bake Sales to Save Nature: Why Wall Street Conservation Survives. *Development and Change* https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.70035

[22] Wintle, B.A. et al., 2019, Spending to save: What will it cost to halt Australia's extinction crisis? *Conservation Letters* **12**(6): e12682 https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.12682

[23] Narain, D. and Maron, M. (2018) Cost shifting and other perverse incentives in biodiversity offsetting in India *Conservation Biology* https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/cobi.13100?saml_referrer=

[24] Engert, J. E. and van Oosterzee, P. (2024) Limits to the ability of carbon farming projects to deliver benefits for threatened species *Nature Ecology & Evolution* **9**:134-141. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-024-02580-9

Reform subsidies to deliver double-dividend

Every year, countries transfer billions in government support to different economic sectors.[25] Increasing evidence demonstrates that well-intended subsidies and government support that target socio-economic goals (food security, energy security, etc.) may have unintended negative and costly effects on the environment, including biodiversity,[26] and negatively impact the economy through distorting prices and markets, generating negative distributional effects, and threatening long-term competitiveness.[27]

International experts on environmentally harmful subsidies state that a significant proportion of the $2.6 trillion spent globally could be repurposed for policies that benefit people and nature.[28]

The Biodiversity Council has estimated that the total monetary value of Australia's direct and indirect subsidies, which are likely to have a medium to high adverse impact on biodiversity, was $26.3 billion in 2023-23. This is over 50 times larger than the average of $475 million per annum that the Australian Federal Government has invested in biodiversity over the last decade.[29] We are calling for an investment of at least 1%, or $7 billion per year, of the Federal budget on biodiversity. This funding could be found from redirecting even a third of subsidies that are having an adverse impact on Australia's biodiversity, thereby delivering a double dividend.

Recommendation 1: That the Australian Government invests $3 billion per year to address the extinction crisis by tackling major threats, such as invasive species, and restoring and protecting threatened species on land and in our oceans.

[25] Matthews, A. and K. Karousakis (2022) Identifying and assessing subsidies and other incentives harmful to biodiversity: A comparative review of existing national-level assessments and insights for good practice OECD Environment Working Papers, No. 206, OECD Publishing, Paris, https:// doi.org/10.1787/3e9118d3-en

[26] BIOFIN (2024). The Nature of Subsidies: A Step by-step Guide to Repurpose Subsidies Harmful to Biodiversity and Improve their Impacts on People and Nature UNDP: New York https://www.biofin.org/

[27] European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, VVA, Porsch, L., Klebba, M., Camboni, M. et al. (2022), A toolbox for reforming environmentally harmful subsidies in Europe – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/391004 ; German Federal Environment Agency, Burger, A., Bretschneider, W. (2021) Environmentally Harmful Subsidies in Germany https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/publikationen/environmentally-harmful-subsidies-in-germany-1 ; Pickering, J., B. Coolsaet, N. Dawson, K. M. Suiseeya, C. Y. A. Inoue, and M. Lim (2022). "Rethinking and Upholding Justice and Equity in Transformative Biodiversity Governance." In Transforming Biodiversity Governance, Cambridge University Press https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108856348.

[28] Greenfield, P. (2024) Global spending on subsidies that harm environment rises to $2.6tn, report says The Guardian 18 September 2024 https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/sep/18/spending-subsidies-environment-deforestation-pollution-fossil-fuels-aoe

[29] The Price of Nature.

Address the species extinction crisis

We are in a biodiversity crisis. Most ecosystems are in decline and population sizes of threatened species are rapidly falling. The populations of Australia's threatened species are, on average, less than half the size they were in 2000.[30]

In October 2022, Minister Plibersek announced the Saving Native Species Fund Program with a commitment to spending $224.5M over 4 years.[31] That was the number in the media announcements. The budget papers show that there were large underspends of allocated funding in the Saving Native Species Program in its first two years, (underspent by $16.8M in 2022-23 and by $26.7M in 2023-24) and the underspend was not carried forward as usually occurs. Resourcing for the Saving Native Species Fund has been reduced from $63.1M in 2024-25 to $38.3M in 2025-26, with no funding beyond that. Once forecast spending for this year is included, the program will spend a total of $161.1M over 4 years before it ends in 2025-26. This is $63.4M or 28% less than originally committed to.

The government must provide sufficient, sustained funding to recover our threatened species. Studies show that targeted investment can stop and reverse declining trajectories of wildlife, with the United States having delisted 39 species due to well funded threatened species recovery programs.[32] Annual spending on threatened species programs is currently only 15% of what is needed to avoid extinctions and recover threatened species.[33] We need a dramatic increase in public investment in conservation and threatened species recovery, noting that this spending will not only prevent avoidable extinctions but will uplift many regional communities.

Recommendation 2: That the Australian Government invests $3 billion per year to address the extinction crisis by tackling major threats, such as invasive species, and restoring and protecting threatened species on land and in our oceans.

Increase funding to achieve the 30 by 2030 targets

In the 2025-26 budget, investment to expand Australia's conservation reserves network was the main biodiversity item to receive substantial new funding, with $250M committed over the next five years delivered through a new Australian Bushland Program. This is a small step toward delivering Australia's commitment to the global target of protecting at least 30% of

[30]The Australian Threatened Species Index 2022. https://tsx.org.au/tsx2022/
[31] Plibersek (2022) Media Release: Minister launches Threatened Species Action Plan: Toward Zero Extinctions. 4 October 2022. https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/plibersek/media-releases/minister-launches-threatened-species-action-plan-toward-zero-extinctions
[32] Ibid.
[33] Wintle, et al. 2019.

land, inland waters and marine areas by 2030.[34] It has been estimated that 20 times that amount is needed to deliver the full commitment of a connected and protected area network that represents all key ecosystems.

To achieve this goal, it is not enough to simply reserve cheap, available land or reserve parts of the sea where few resources are being extracted. To effectively halt biodiversity loss, the protected areas must represent all natural diversity, be of sufficient size and well-connected with other parks and reserves, and be effectively managed.[35]

Recommendation 3: That the Australian Government invests $1 billion per year over 5 years to protect and manage 30% of land by 2030. This should include right-way fire management and control of priority invasive species.

Expand the network of safe havens

The government should also continue to expand the network of safe havens in two ways. First, ongoing expansion of predator-free islands and mainland sites with predator-exclusion fences, to protect more threatened species from introduced cats and foxes. Research has provided guidance on priority regions that would expand protection across the set of over 65 mammal taxa most at risk of extinction from cats and foxes.[36] This information, combined with input from conservation managers, should be used to shape investment in new havens. For example, new havens in northern Australia could offer protection to several species that are currently not, or minimally represented in the existing network. Second, the safe haven concept should be expanded to include animal taxa affected by invasive species other than cats and foxes. Recent research has identified these critical safe haven requirements.[37]

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[34] DCCEEW, 2024, Pathway to protecting and conserving more of our precious land by 2030. 14 October 2024. https://www.dcceew.gov.au/about/news/pathway-to-protecting-conserving-more-precious-land-by-2030#:~:text=Minister%20Plibersek%20has%20announced%20the,the%2030%20by%2030%20target.

[35] Fitzsimons J., Picone A., Partridge T. and 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. https://report.30by30.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/11/Report3030_FINAL_web-1.pdf

[36] Ringma J, Legge S, Woinarski JCZ, Radford JQ, Wintle B, Bentley J, Burbidge AA, Copley P, Dexter N, Dickman CR, Gillespie GR, Hill B, Johnson CN, Kanowski J, Letnic M, Manning A, Menkhorst PW, Mitchell N, Morris K, Moseby KE, Page M, Palmer R, and Bode M (2019) Systematic planning can rapidly close the protection gap in Australian mammal havens. *Conservation Letters* **12** (1): e12611. https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.12611

[37] Woinarski J.C.Z., Chapple D.G., Garnett S.T., Legge S.M., Lintermans M., and Scheele B.C. (2023) Few havens for threatened Australian animal taxa that are highly susceptible to introduced and problematic native species. *Biodiversity and Conservation* Woinarski JC, Chapple DG, Garnett ST, Legge SM, Lintermans M, and Scheele BC (2023) Few havens for threatened Australian animal taxa that are highly susceptible to introduced and problematic native species. *Biodiversity and Conservation* **33**; 305-331. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10531-023-02750-4

Recommendation 4: That the Australian Government invests $20 million to expand the safe haven network in priority locations.

Restore degraded ecosystems

It is also not enough to simply protect intact vegetation parks and reserves; if Australia is to put biodiversity on a path to recovery, it must strategically restore degraded ecosystems in ways that are responsive to climate change. Further, many ecosystems are degraded from the impacts of invasive species, such as rabbits, tramp ants, pigs, trout, foxes, cats and myrtle rust; integrated management of invasive species over large landscapes should be part of the restoration effort. Without high-quality restoration, the ecosystem services provided by our soils, vegetation communities, water systems, and faunal communities will be impaired.[38] The government should commit to restoring 30% of native vegetation in areas with extensive clearing to maintain species diversity and ecosystem function,[39] and should develop similar targets for freshwater and marine ecosystems in areas where gains in natural capital are greatest.

Recommendation 5: That the Australian Government invests $2 billion per year over 30 years to restore 13 million hectares of degraded land and ensure that all of Australia's degraded terrestrial ecosystems have 30% vegetation coverage.

Invest in climate resilience

Climate change is one of four mega-threats driving the rapid decline of Australia's biodiversity.[40] A 2021 study found 19 ecosystems in Australia and its territories that showed local collapse.[41]

Traditional approaches to conservation and natural resource management will need to adapt to the current and future challenges of climate change.[42] Climate adaptation is about adjusting to life in a changing climate or preparing for future changes. Despite being one of the most vulnerable countries in the world due to the projected impacts of climate change,[43]

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[38] Wentworth 2024.

[39] Andrén, H., 1994 Effects of Habitat Fragmentation on Birds and Mammals in Landscapes with Different Proportions of Suitable Habitat: A Review *Oikos* **71**(3): 355-366 https://doi.org/10.2307/3545823; Banks-Leite, C. et al., 2014, Using ecological thresholds to evaluate the costs and benefits of set-asides in a biodiversity hotspot *Science* **345**(6200): 1041-1045. https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.1255768

[40] Legge, S., Rumpff, L., Garnett, S. T., Woinarski, J. C. Z. (2023) Loss of terrestrial biodiversity in Australia: Magnitude, causation, and response *Science* **381**(6658): 622-631. https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adg7870

[41] Bergstom.

[42] Wentworth 2024.

[43] Steffen, W., Rice, M., Hughes, L. and Dean, A. (2018). The good, the bad and the ugly: Limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C. *The Climate Council or Australia.* https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CC-IPCC-report-1.pdf

Australia has so far focussed on adaptation research rather than taking action to increase resilience.[44] Regional plans, strategic assessments and other strategic planning must consider climate change and include environmental adaptation and resilience measures. Ongoing funding is required to support Regional Nature Resource Management and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to undertake climate adaptation planning with community and stakeholders,[45] to plan for species and community changes in response to changes in threats, such as changing fire regime and disease risks, and to test proactive management techniques such as genetic management of locally native species,[46] and to undertake emergency response for threatened species, such as those affected by bushfires.[47]

Despite the clear need for climate adaptation, investment is inadequate. The Centre for Policy Development has calculated that on average the Australian Government spends $1.6 billion each year on disaster recovery, yet budgets for just $215 million, creating a gap of $6 billion across forward estimates.[48] In 2021, the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities has calculated that natural disasters will cost Australia $73 billion by 2060, under a low emissions scenario.

The Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding (the Colvin Review) calculated that 87% of the Australian Government's disaster funding is spent on recovery programs. Greater investment in preparation prior to disaster events to reduce vulnerability and build resilience is required. Climate adaptation is a long-term process requiring ongoing capacity building and engagement with communities to plan and implement, but there has been a tendency to fund short-term climate adaptation initiatives at State and Federal levels.

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience has estimated that 'for every one dollar invested in resilience before a disaster, we can save between $3 and $8 in recovery'.[49] This is consistent with international estimates for adaptation investment - the World Economic

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[44] Perugia, F., Rowley, S. and Swapan, M., 2023 *Improving Australian climate change adaptation strategies: learning from international experience*, AHURI Final Report No. FR 411, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-11/AHURI-Final-Report-411-Improving-Australian-climate-change-adaption-strategies-learning-from-international-experience_1.pdf

[45] For example, see: https://adaptnrm.csiro.au/adaptation-planning/#:~:text=Climate%20adaptation%20presents%20a%20range,planning%2C%20potentially%20via%20innovative%20solutions.

[46] For example: https://www.bushheritage.org.au/blog/nardoo-climate-ready-project

[47] For example, see: https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/australian-first-centre-bringing-frogs-back-brink and https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/15/dinosaur-trees-firefighters-save-endangered-wollemi-pines-from-nsw-bushfires

[48] Toby Phillips, Warwick Smith and Guy Debelle (2025) *Budgeting for Natural Disasters: Transparency and accuracy in the fiscal treatment of disaster recovery*, CPD discussion paper, Centre for Policy Development. https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Budgeting-for-Natural-Disasters.pdf

[49] Australian Senate (2024) *Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience: Boots on the ground: Raising resilience.* August 2024. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Disaster_Resilience/DisasterResilience/Report/Chapter_2_-_Responding_to_natural_disasters#_ftn8

Forum has calculated that for every $1 spent, there are $2-$10 in benefits while the World Resources Institute estimates it is 10:1.

Despite knowing the potential impacts of climate change, adaptation has fallen victim to political cycles which have stalled policy development and research. Australia has world-leading adaptation expertise, but key programs have been defunded or dismantled (such as CSIRO's climate Adaptation Flagship 2008-2014 and the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility 2008-2019). Without sustained funding, there has been a loss of capability and climate literacy, reduced organisational capacity as experts (including scientists, consultants, government and industry specialists) work on other problems, fewer adaptation analyses and less adaptation planning and resulting loss in community engagement. This has added to the difficulty of building political consensus on necessarily ambitious targets as expertise withdrawal has allowed ideological invasion of the contested space.

Recommendation 6: That the Australian Government invests $200 million per year to build the resilience of the natural environment and climate adaptation.

Restore nature in towns and cities

Research has shown that urban biodiversity offers a range of benefits, including improved human health,[50] enhanced liveability,[51] economic advantages,[52] and the restoration of human-nature connections that have been diminished in urban environments.[53] Access to nature in cities promotes better mental and physical health, reduces stress, and increases overall well-being. It also contributes to more attractive, vibrant, and liveable urban spaces, which in turn can boost community cohesion and quality of life.[54] To maximize these

[50] Marselle, M. R., Lindley, S.J., Cook, P.A. and Bonn, A. (2021) Biodiversity and Health in the Urban Environment*Built Environment and Health* **8:**146-156. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40572-021-00313-9#Sec12
Aerts, R., Honnay, O. and Van Nieuwenhuyse, A. (2018) Biodiversity and human health: mechanisms and evidence of the positive health effects of diversity in nature and green spaces *British Medical Bulletin* **127**(1): 5-22. https://academic.oup.com/bmb/article-abstract/127/1/5/5051732?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false#131998760

[51] Parker, J. and Simpson, G. D. (2018) Public Green Infrastructure Contributes to City Livability: A Systematic Quantitative Review *Land* **7**(4): 161. https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/7/4/161

[52]Elmqvist, T. et al. (2015) Benefits of restoring ecosystem services in urban areas *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* B14: **101-108.** https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877343515000433#abs0005

[53] Campbell-Arvai, V. (2018). Engaging urban nature: improving our understanding of public perceptions of the role of biodiversity in cities *Urban Ecosystems* **22:** 409-423. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11252-018-0821-3#Sec2

[54] Peters, K. Elands, B. and Buijs, A. (2010) Social interactions in urban parks: Stimulating social cohesion? *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening* **9**(2): 93-100.

benefits, cities should prioritize strategies such as regenerating degraded habitats, implementing urban greening projects, and establishing habitat corridors that allow wildlife to thrive. Forward-thinking city planning that integrates biodiversity goals is crucial for creating sustainable urban environments. Additionally, increasing public awareness about the threats urbanization poses to wildlife and promoting private land conservation initiatives can help protect local ecosystems. However, achieving these outcomes requires ongoing financial support. Adequate funding is essential to drive the development, management, and completion of projects aimed at improving urban biodiversity, ensuring that the benefits to both Australians and nature are sustained over time.[55]

Recommendation 7: That the Australian Government invests $200 million per year for restoring nature to Australia's towns and cities, with a focus on climate resilience and urban biodiversity restoration.

Support for Indigenous research

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are custodians of a knowledge system that connects the spiritual and physical elements of Country and describes a detailed understanding of how and why Country should be managed.[56] This custodianship supported Australia's high level of biodiversity for thousands of generations. Governments are increasingly relying on the Indigenous Estate and Traditional Ecological Knowledge for monitoring and recovering species, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples often do not have a strong voice in the national science agenda, are often not given a real say in decisions that affect them and their Country, and are not adequately resourced to manage Country.

Through the National Environmental Science Program, the Australian Government has invested $1,276,000 in the development of a proposed National Indigenous Environment Research Network. The Network has been designed as an Indigenous-led strategic organization to ensure 'right-way science' (best practice partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and researchers).[57] The Network's primary objectives will be to: a) drive the establishment and adoption of best practice principles, b) ensure environmental research is user-focused, relevant, innovative and measurable, and c) deliver research outcomes that have enduring economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits for Indigenous Australians and the wider community. A detailed business case has been prepared and costed at $24 million over 5 years.

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https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1618866709000855?casa_token=oIfftDa5IYYAAAAA:WkCen_QBw3RhECAEe6eylTJ17AvaEUDA2AHviQLHKwuqsiCnnI85-Q-skUUf4Dp9jJ_1WCxibg#aep-section-id21

[55] https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/conl.12946

[56] Biodiversity Council, 2023, *Protecting Country and conserving our Culture.* Biodiversity Council. Melbourne, Australia. https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/resources/protecting-country-and-conserving-our-culture

[57] Ibid.

Recommendation 8: That the Australian Government invests $24 million over 5 years to establish the National Indigenous Environment Research Network.

The Southern Australian Aboriginal Land and Sea Management Alliance (SAALSMA) is a newly formed non-profit organisation dedicated to advocating for, facilitating, and brokering collaborations and knowledge exchange among southern Aboriginal communities and key stakeholders. SAALSMA's mission is to advance southern Aboriginal environmental and economic priorities. SAALSMA needs support to develop and grow.

Recommendation 9: That the Australian Government invests $4 million over 3 years to support the operation of the Southern Australian Aboriginal Land and Sea Management Alliance.

Increase funding for indigenous desert management

Australia's desert region—home to more than 30 Indigenous languages, globally significant biodiversity, and deeply connected Aboriginal communities—relies on Indigenous ranger programs to sustain cultural knowledge and care for Country.

The Indigenous Desert Alliance (IDA) leads an active network for Indigenous ranger teams in Australia's desert region. The IDA provides significant capacity building, operational and research support to desert ranger teams through the Right-Way Desert Fire Program, covering 1,450,000 square kilometers of the desert, and the Significant Species Program, which helps the protection and recovery of the Great Desert Skink, Night Parrot and Bilby. Funding for the Right-Way Desert Fire Program has not been committed beyond this financial year. Funding for the Significant Species Program is uncertain beyond 2026, because the Saving Native Species Program is due to end.

An investment of $11 million over five years for the Right-Way Desert Fire Program and $7 million over 5 years for the Significant Species Program would enable these important programs to continue and build on achievements to date. Without sustained funding, there is a risk of going backwards as environmental conditions degrade and there is loss of staff capability and capacity.

Recommendation 10: That the Australian Government invests $18 million over 5 years to support the Indigenous Desert Alliance's Right-Way Desert Fire Program and Significant Species Program.

Increase funding for sustained biodiversity monitoring and conservation-focussed research

Actions to protect and restore nature must be evidence-based and outcomes robustly monitored and assessed to assess return on investment. Without effective monitoring, we do not know if species are declining, increasing or stable, if management actions are working, or which are the highest priority species and places for investment. There is currently a large gap in the monitoring of Australia's threatened and near-threatened species and threats that require new government investment to address.

A survey of monitoring programs for threatened species across the country found that one-third had never been monitored and that monitoring of the remaining species was often inadequate to guide management decisions.[58] This includes factors such as the monitoring only occurring for a short time in the past, or only covering a small part of the species' range. A lack of monitoring of unlisted species has meant that many species that are declining and at risk of extinction are not able to be listed due to a lack of data to demonstrate that they meet the listing criteria.

There is a strong need to establish new monitoring centres and programs to meet key gaps in the Australian Government's environmental monitoring investments. For example, while the citizen science collected data collated by the Atlas of Living Australia can make a valuable contribution for some situations, it has many limitations, such as citizen scientists not being active across all regions, and not having the required equipment, skills and training to identify and detect all species of interest. While programs such as Australia's Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network field collect and remote sense data on environmental variables (predominantly related to soil, carbon and flora specimens), they do not collect data on plant or animal populations that are suited to the identification of population trends or changes in the area of occupancy.

Recommendation 11: That the Australian Government increase funding for biodiversity research including:

- ***A. $20 million per year over 10 years for experimental threatened species management research testing out conservation inventions by recovery teams.***
- ***B. $20 million per year over 10 years to complete the classification and the listing of Australia's threatened ecosystems.***
- ***C. $10 million per year over 10 years to support research on nature metrics that will support the nature repair market.***
- ***D. $8 million per year over 5 years to research poorly known invertebrates, reptiles and fish to assess their conservation status.***

[58] Threatened Species Recovery Hub (2019) Monitoring threatened species and ecological communities. Research findings factsheet. Project 3.2. National Environmental Science Program. https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/media/hxznnldv/3-2-monitoring-findings-factsheet_f.pdf

E. $7 million per year for ongoing monitoring of threatened species and ecosystems through a targeted centre, to provide quality data to guide recovery planning, policy and investment decisions.