

# Big ideas to promote nature as a climate solution

## Factsheet

December 2022

Image: YACHATDAC

Australia is a global extinction hot spot and an under-performer in conserving our unique plants and animals. We lag behind other countries in setting and reaching greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. But we don't have to.

Promoting nature as a climate solution and seeking Indigenous leadership to care for Country can reduce emissions while benefiting communities, the economy and our natural and cultural heritage.

**Here's how.**

### Empower Indigenous leadership to restore damaged Country

Caring for Country through Indigenous leadership can contribute to Australia's climate change response.

We can create more opportunities for Caring for Country approaches that return carbon to the land and encourage sustainable fire, land and water management.

Hundreds of First Nations peoples groups have cared for Australia for millennia and continue to do so.

Changed fire management, western agriculture, altered waterways, urbanisation and many other landscape transformations cause ongoing harm to Country and its people.

Indigenous-led approaches that restore Country can guide how we nurture our lands, seas and skies return carbon to the soils and plants. These approaches nurture Indigenous livelihoods, support wellbeing, promote education and get people back on Country.

Investing in and creating incentives for Indigenous-led management will help us achieve national climate change, social and biodiversity goals.

“Guided by the oldest culture on earth, we have the opportunity now, with the addition of positive vision, leadership, resourcing, and regulation, to stand up and secure a future rich in nature and culture that we'll be proud to endow to future generations.”

*Nature as a Climate Solution, 2021*



Image: YACHATDAC

# Big ideas to promote nature as a climate solution

## Look after what we have

Land and ocean-based actions to retain, protect, restore and sustainably manage ecosystems can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We can avoid greenhouse gas emissions through tighter environmental laws that protect our vegetation and ecosystems and restore the damage done.



Image: Dave Blair

Land clearing and deforestation cause a quarter of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. They are the primary cause of species extinction worldwide.

Preserving and restoring vegetation on the land and in the oceans is the easiest and cheapest way to reduce emissions and preserve the benefits we get from nature.

Stronger environmental protection laws and regulations, and their enforcement, will reduce vegetation loss from development, agriculture and land clearing.

Resourcing and mobilising local communities to tackle local ecosystem challenges can help protect what we have, build climate resilience and provide environmental, social and cultural benefits.

## Map pathways to use nature and culture to achieve net zero

Strong national policy, based on consultation with Indigenous communities and all levels of government, is critical to enhance and protect our unique plants and animals, stop ecosystem degradation and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We can embed Country, culture, community and nature into national policies and plans towards net zero emissions.

The lack of a strategy and leadership to reverse the loss of plants, animals and ecosystems and reduce emissions damages Australia's global reputation.

A visionary national plan that embeds local communities and Traditional Owners in its design and sets us on a course towards net zero would reduce emissions, protect our plants and animals and restore Australia's reputation as a nation rich in cultural and natural heritage that we care for.

A national strategy towards net zero would provide coordination, leadership and investment across our states and territories. It would allow culture and nature-based emissions reduction approaches to be embedded in community development, urban infrastructure, adaptation and catchment management strategies.

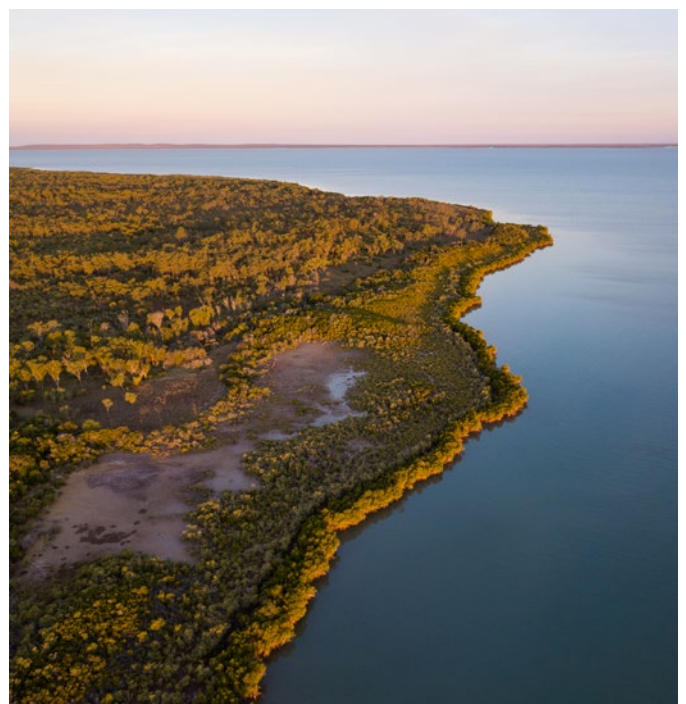


Image: Nicolas Rakotopare

“Retaining vegetation keeps local environments cooler and wetter, prevents coastal and terrestrial erosion, reduces costs of clean water production and increases resilience to natural disasters such as bushfires, floods and storm surges.”



## Measure the things we value to demonstrate success

Effective monitoring and reporting of values and benefits ensure emissions reduction projects and programs deliver what they promise and attract investment.

We can hold projects accountable for the benefits they claim and encourage the inclusion of cultural, social and biodiversity values.

Cultural, social and biodiversity benefits must be documented components of emissions reduction projects and incentive schemes, so that we can hold projects accountable for their claimed benefits.

Projects should also be assessed on their benefit to Indigenous people, the wider community and to the diversity of plants and animals they support.

We need a coordinated national assessment of natural and cultural values to track the true value of projects. Ways of measuring the benefits of emissions reduction projects must be culturally appropriate and measure the right things in the right ways.



Image: Nicolas Rakotopare

## Simplify access to carbon markets and incentive schemes

Making biodiversity stewardship and carbon credit projects easier to administer will make them more attractive to smaller organisations and communities.

There are many local and Indigenous-led emissions reduction projects that are successful at integrating biodiversity, social and cultural values. Making programs more accessible can ensure stewardship, emissions reduction, and carbon credit opportunities are accessible, equitable and culturally appropriate.

**“Empowering local people to care for their landscapes and Country will grow the number of carbon projects that are good for communities and nature.”**

Nature as a Climate Solution, 2021

The costly and complex methods used to produce carbon credits through government emissions reduction schemes are a barrier for small organisations and less-resourced communities.

Reducing the administrative burden will allow more integrated, locally-driven emissions reduction projects. It will increase accessibility and empower Indigenous and community-based projects that benefit people, plants and animals.

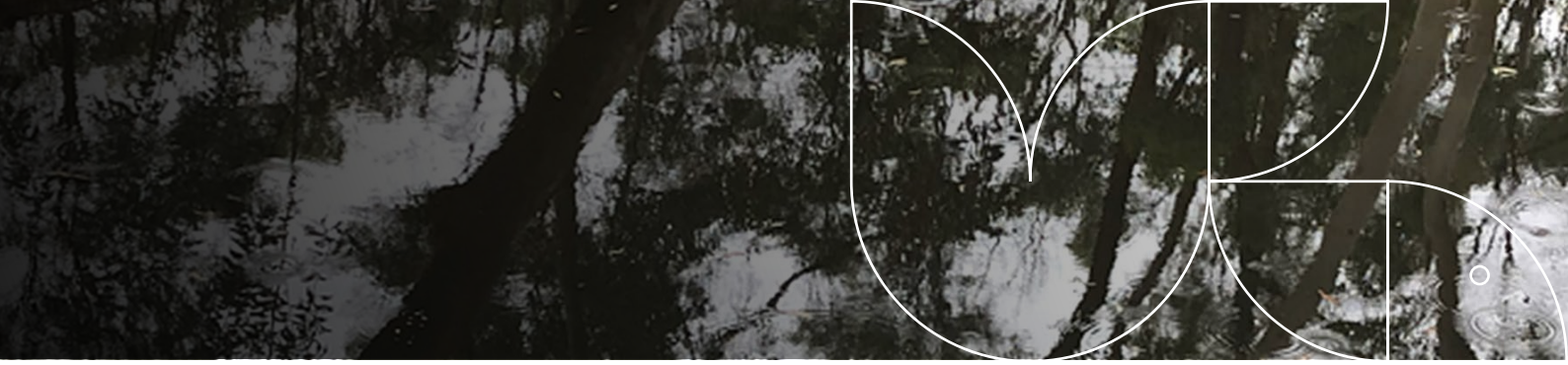
Supporting a wider range of activities under these schemes, with appropriate accountability, will help expand restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems, and direct investment toward opportunities and projects that benefit culture, Country and nature.



Image: Susanna Macbeth

**“We urgently need better accountability to ensure emissions reduction projects and programs deliver the benefits they claim. Robust monitoring also helps create premium carbon products.”**

The Conversation, 2021



## Wildlife, plants and natural places are intimately linked to protecting our climate.

The loss of our unique plants, animals and special natural places exacerbates climate change by reducing the ability of natural ecosystems to absorb and store greenhouse gases. In turn, climate change increases the loss of plant and animal species and degradation of ecosystems through harsher conditions that harm habitats.

In Australia, climate change and biodiversity are dealt with through separate policies, legislation, regulation and resourcing.

We can use nature-based and Caring for Country solutions to contribute to both emission reductions and the restoration and protection of our plants, animals and ecosystems.

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Now is the time to promote nature as a climate solution and recognise the multiple benefits to our communities, environment, economy and natural and cultural heritage.

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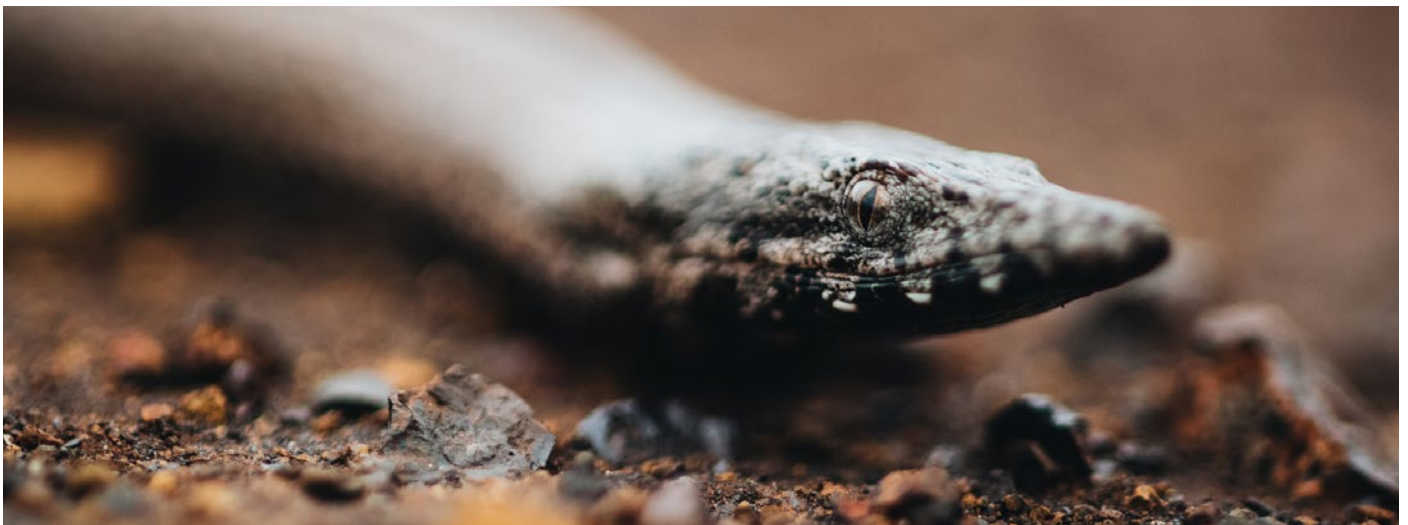


Image: Nicolas Rakotopare

### READ MORE

REPORT: [Nature as a Climate Solution](#) (2021) by Rachel Morgain, Brendan Wintle and 25 co-authors from 15 organisations. <http://conservationfutures.org.au/publications>

ARTICLE: [5 big ideas: how Australia can tackle climate change while restoring nature, culture and communities](#) (2021) from The Conversation, by Rachel Morgain, Brendan Wintle and 3 co-authors from 2 organisations. <https://theconversation.com/5-big-ideas-how-australia-can-tackle-climate-change-while-restoring-nature-culture-and-communities-172156>

The Biodiversity Council has been established to connect Australian communities and decision-makers with knowledge and solutions to protect our unique biodiversity. It is founded by 11 universities including its host the University of Melbourne, with support from The Ian Potter Foundation, The Ross Trust, Trawalla Foundation, The Rendere Trust, Isaacson Davis Foundation, Coniston Charitable Trust and Angela Whitbread.

Story by Rachel Morgain and Brendan Wintle from the University of Melbourne

