

Biodiversity Concerns Community Survey

Summary for decision makers

June 2023

Image: Rufous-banded honeyeater by Summerdrought CC BY-SA 4.0

In brief

We surveyed over 4000 Australians in late 2022 about their views on Australia's biodiversity and how well nature is cared for. The survey was targeted to be representative, including seeking representation across states, between urban, regional and rural communities and seeking responses from people of diverse backgrounds.

We asked how people feel about nature and how well it is protected, about concerns and whether more action is needed to conserve biodiversity, about government performance and key policy responses, and about political affiliation and voting patterns.

Our findings show that the overwhelming majority of Australians are concerned about nature, want more action, and see governments as holding the most responsibility of any specific sectors. Around three quarters of Australians support a wide raft of policy initiatives, including tougher laws on land clearing and an end to native forest logging. And three quarters view nature conservation as likely to influence how they will vote in the next election, with swing voters particularly likely to be influenced by these issues.

The overwhelming majority of Australians are concerned about threats to nature

- **95% of Australians are concerned** about a wide range of threats to nature, with **85% moderately or highly concerned**, particularly about:
 - Increasing levels of waste and pollution (92% moderately or highly concerned)
 - The extinction of native plants and animals (88%)
 - The loss of natural places (89%) and pollinator species (87%)
 - Land clearing (86%)
 - The impact of climate change on biodiversity (85%)

Over a third of Australians are extremely concerned about these issues.

Increasing waste and pollution is of high concern across all regions. In addition to waste and pollution, people in **regional, rural and remote** areas are also most concerned about **loss of pollinators**, while people in **capital cities** are most concerned about the impacts of **climate change**.

People in **peri-urban areas** are highly concerned about a wide range of these issues, and expressed the highest levels of concern of any regions about **extinction, loss of natural places and land clearing**.

How concerned are Australians about biodiversity issues?

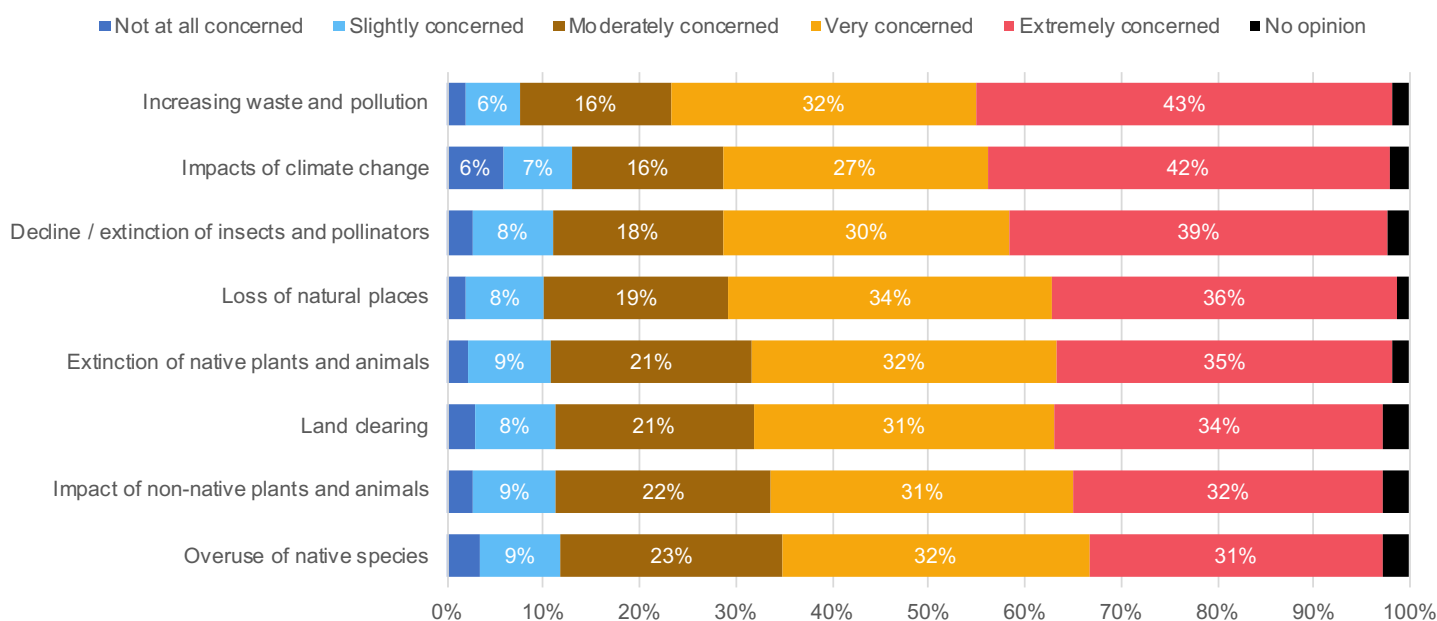


Figure 1. Levels of concern for a range of biodiversity issues

Overall, **Australians rated as below average** how well we **look after our natural environment**, with people over 55 and people living in rural areas most likely to feel the natural environment has been looked after poorly.

Nature conservation issues will have at least a moderate influence on how **7 in 10** Australians will **vote** in the next Federal, state/territory and local government elections, and a **strong influence** on the **voting decisions of over 2 in 5 Australians** (41% in Federal elections, 46% in state/territory elections and local government elections).

Swing voters are significantly more likely to be influenced in how they vote by nature conservation issues, with **three quarters** stating these will have **at least a moderate influence** over how they vote, and **half of all swing voters** stating these issues would have a **strong or very strong influence** on how they vote in elections at all levels of government.

More action is needed

- 97% of Australians want more action to look after Australia's natural environment.

Voters across all political parties were in wide agreement that more action is needed for the environment.

More than half of Australians across all states and territories feel that a lot more action is needed, with swing voters significantly more likely to affirm this.

Governments are seen as most responsible, but as showing average or poor performance

Most Australians consider that 'every person in Australia' has a responsibility to act, in addition to all levels of government needing to act.

Survey respondents were given options for groups they felt are most responsible for ensuring Australia's natural environment is protected. More than two thirds affirmed that every person living in Australia is responsible, with several commenting that it is a shared responsibility requiring a collective effort.

Of the specific groups and sectors named, the largest majority of respondents (60%) feel that **key responsibility** lies with the **Australian Government**. A majority also attributed key responsibility to **state and territory Governments** (56%), and **local councils** (55%).

The largest group (42%) rated the **Australian Government's performance** in protecting the natural environment as **average**. More people rated the government's performance as poor or very poor (27%) than good or excellent (24%).

People living in inner metropolitan areas in the capital cities, people employed full time and people in 25–44 age brackets are the only major demographic groups more likely to rate the government's performance as above average than below.

Australians living in rural and remote areas were most likely to rate the Australian Government's performance negatively (34% compared with 21% in inner metropolitan areas).

People who have changed the party they voted for in the past few elections (swing voters) also look less favourably on the Government's performance.

People in all states except New South Wales rate their state or territory Government's performance similarly or slightly more favourably than the Australian Government's.

Australians across the board support a wide range of policy responses

Australians across regions and across the political spectrum support the wide range of policy responses they were asked about.

More than **8 in 10** Australians support **tougher enforcement of laws** to protect wildlife and biodiversity including:

- Tougher fines and stronger laws to stop illegal tree clearing and forest / habitat destruction (81%)
- Increasing fines for high polluters (83%)
- Increasing fines for people caught importing / smuggling illegal wildlife or products (84%)

By contrast, only 4–5% of people oppose these measures, with the remainder neither supporting nor opposing these.

85% support **restoring water to wetlands and rivers**, with less than 3% of Australians opposing this measure.

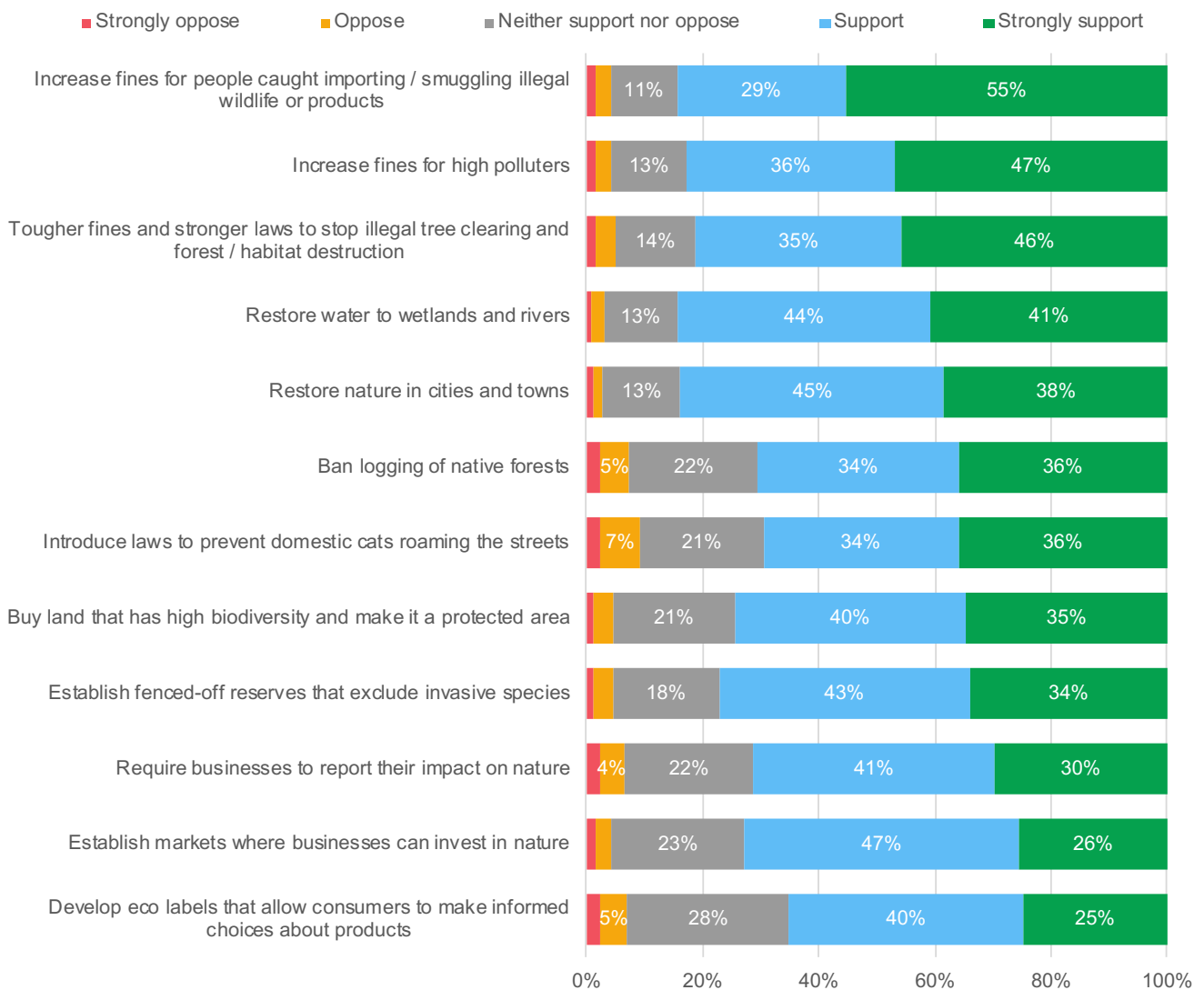
7 in 10 Australians support **banning native forest logging** (70% with only 7% opposed); **requiring businesses to report their impacts on nature** (71% with 6% opposed) and introducing laws to **prevent domestic cats roaming** the streets (70% support with 9% opposed).

Australians also overwhelmingly **support restoration actions**, including:

- restoring nature in cities and towns (84%)
- establishing fenced reserves (77%) and
- buying high biodiversity value land to create more protected areas (75%)

Figure 2. Levels of support for a range of pro-biodiversity policies

Support for policies



There is also clear support for **market-based approaches** including:

- establishing markets that allow businesses to invest in nature (73%)
- developing eco-labels to allow consumers to make informed choices about products (65%)

A clear majority of Australians support these policies across **all states and territories, all political alignments**, and **all regions** from urban to rural areas and regional cities.

Most people think more money should be spent on protecting the natural environment

Most Australians (72%) feel that **more money should be spent to protect the environment**. Only 6% believe less money should be spent.

The initiatives most frequently supported for greater investment were:

- Protection of habitats and special places during and after bushfires
- Programs to prevent extinction
- Incentives for organisations to reduce pollution

Other supported policies included incentives for landholders to protect and restore nature on their land, invasive animal control, community activities (e.g. tree planting days and citizen science), Indigenous cultural fire and land management, fuel reduction burning, programs encouraging people to spend more time in nature, and Indigenous Ranger programs.

Implications for business

A significant majority of Australians support more regulation and laws ensuring businesses limit their impacts on natural places, including strong support for fines for pollution and illegal clearing, and ending native forest logging.

There is also strong support for laws requiring businesses to report their impacts on nature.

Many Australians support incentives, markets and consumer eco-labels for businesses to invest in and demonstrate their benefits for nature.

In addition to governments, a significant minority (30%) of Australians feel that farmers have a particular responsibility for ensuring natural places are cared for. While our survey did not ask about responsibility

of businesses as a whole, a substantial proportion of the comments received from respondents on this question noted businesses as bearing key responsibility for the natural environment.

Where Australians receive their information from

The most common **information sources** participants used to learn about the state of the environment were documentaries (60%, online or on TV), mainstream news media (55%), and online media (32%, blogs, YouTube, and social media).

A significant minority also receive information from:

- Government websites (29%)
- Friends and family (25%)
- Local environment and community groups (25%)
- Environmental advocacy organisations (24%)

Note: some data are available across each jurisdiction and for many electorates and local government areas. Please contact enquiries@biodiversitycouncil.org.au to inquire about making these available.

READ MORE

Borg, K., Smith, L., Hatty, M., Dean, A., Louis, W., Bekessy, S., Williams, K., Morgain, R. & Wintle, B. **Biodiversity Concerns Report: 97% of Australians want more action to protect nature**. The Biodiversity Council, June, 2023.

This summary was written by Dr Rachel Morgain.
The collaborating organisations in this research are:



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 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.