

A CLEANER, GREENER NSW

POLICIES FOR THE 2019 NSW ELECTION AND BEYOND



Nature
Conservation
Council



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INTRODUCTION

The natural environment of NSW is fundamental to the state's people, its economy and cultural identity. Our growing population relies on clean drinking water, clean air and a stable climate to sustain our health and wellbeing.

Our economy benefits from healthy soils to support agriculture, unique landscapes that attract tourist dollars, and investment in renewable resources like sun and wind. The great outdoors is a key part of our Australian lifestyle, whether it be at our famous beaches, our much-visited national parks, or simply our weekend cricket and soccer games at the local park. The natural environment is one of our most precious assets and the services it provides are fundamental to a sustainable future.

Investing in our natural environment should be a priority for the NSW Government. We need leaders that recognise a healthy, functioning environment is essential for the health and wellbeing of the people of NSW. We need to ensure short-term objectives of governments do not undermine the long-term need to conserve and enhance our natural environment and plan for a sustainable future.

The NSW environment is under significant pressure from a growing population, high-impact industries such as mining and agriculture, and increasing pollution levels. As a result, we are facing unprecedented environmental challenges including: carbon pollution and impacts of climate change; loss and fragmentation of native vegetation and wildlife habitat; declining biodiversity and record numbers of threatened species; degradation of rivers, wetlands and water catchments; contamination from pollution and toxic chemicals; and unsustainable consumption; and production of vast amounts of waste.

A Cleaner, Greener NSW outlines priority policies for safeguarding and restoring the NSW environment for the benefit of our people, our economy and our sustainable future. We encourage all parties and candidates to work with us towards a healthy, sustainable NSW.

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- 1.1 SET BINDING CLEAN-ENERGY TARGETS
- 1.2 CREATE A \$2 BILLION REGIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY FUND
- 1.3 PROVIDE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO CHEAP CLEAN ENERGY
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- 10.1 BAN PLASTIC BAGS AND MICROBEADS
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SLASH CLIMATE POLLUTION AND UNLEASH CLEAN ENERGY

Climate change is happening now – our forests, rivers, wildlife and communities are already feeling its effects. Unprecedented heat waves, warming oceans, rising sea levels, changing rainfall patterns and lengthening bushfire seasons are threatening communities and nature.

It's time for NSW to get serious about transitioning away from dirty, outdated fossil fuels to a clean, renewable energy future. In NSW, less than 7% of our electricity comes from the sun and wind, lagging behind other states and countries who are already well on their way to powering their economies with 100% renewable energy.

Our existing infrastructure is ageing and threatening the reliability of the grid, and energy costs are soaring.

The Australian Capital Territory is on track to use only 100% clean-energy in the next five years, while Tasmania already gets 90% of its power from clean sources. We have the technology and abundant resources to break free from polluting, costly energy sources now and to power our lives with cleaner, cheaper, more reliable electricity using the sun and the wind, backed up by storage like solar thermal, pumped hydro and batteries. So let's get on with it!

PRIORITY POLICIES

1.1 SET BINDING CLEAN-ENERGY TARGETS

Set binding clean-energy targets to ensure 65% of our electricity comes from clean, reliable, renewable sources by 2025, and 100% by 2030.

Curb climate change and protect nature and public health by rapidly transitioning the energy system from fossil fuels to wind, solar and storage. The NSW Government should build on programs that provide price certainty and encourage investment in new clean energy plants. Similar programs have resulted in very low power prices in the ACT.

1.2 CREATE A \$2 BILLION REGIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY FUND

Establish a \$2 billion dollar Regional Renewable Energy Fund to catalyse investment in regional NSW and create a transition authority to plan for the orderly and just transition from coal-fired power in the Hunter Valley, Central Coast and Lithgow by 2030.

The NSW Government has recently received \$24 billion from the sale of publicly owned energy assets. Re-investing just \$2 billion of this into renewable energy will help NSW make the clean energy transition, dramatically reduce our climate pollution, push down power bills, and bring jobs and investment to regional NSW. The fund should invest in on-demand clean energy technologies, including solar thermal, pumped-hydro and batteries that make the grid more reliable and reduce price spikes. NSW must also develop a plan to phase out coal-fired power stations by 2030, including funding a transition authority to coordinate its implementation. The plan must give certainty to investors and workers and support the redeployment of power-station workers to other sectors, including the renewable energy sector.

1.3 PROVIDE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO CHEAP CLEAN ENERGY

Make clean energy affordable and accessible for everyone.

The NSW Government must make the transition to renewable energy fair and affordable for all, including renters, social-housing tenants and apartment dwellers. This will include installing solar systems and batteries on public housing, setting energy efficiency standards for rental properties, and providing interest-free loans to low-income households for solar and energy-efficiency upgrades.

1.4 SET A BINDING TARGET OF NET-ZERO CARBON EMISSIONS BY 2040

Set a binding target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2040, and set five-yearly targets towards that goal.

NSW must legislate for net zero-emissions by 2040 so all government decisions consider the impact of policies on reaching this goal. The goal must include clear milestones, including clear five-yearly targets.



MORE INFORMATION

Nature Conservation Council of NSW - www.repowerNSW.org.au

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

nature.org.au/election2019

SAVE LAND, WATER AND CLIMATE FROM COAL, UNCONVENTIONAL GAS AND URANIUM

Coal and unconventional gas projects across NSW threaten public health, clean air and water, productive farmlands and natural areas.

They have resulted in permanent, destructive environmental change, including the clearing of wildlife habitat, depletion of streams and aquifers, and massive volumes of pollution.

Coal mined in NSW and burned in Australia or overseas produces more than 400 million tonnes of carbon pollution annually, undermining international efforts to curb climate change.

The NSW Government has for too long put the interests of the mining industry ahead of communities and the environment. This has resulted in the destruction or degradation of threatened species habitat, streams and swamps, and has displaced entire communities. Unbalanced mining and planning laws have failed to protect the environment and communities from new mines and mine expansions.

Uranium exploration and radioactive waste pose a threat to the people of NSW, with new proposals under consideration. These toxic projects must be ruled out once and for all.

As NSW and the rest of the world transition from dirty fuels to clean energy, it makes sense to end destructive, uneconomical and out-dated mining practices to ensure we protect human health, clean air and water, and conserve and enhance natural environments.

PRIORITY POLICIES

2.1

ISSUE NO NEW COAL EXPLORATION LICENCES OR MINING LEASES

Keep coal in the ground - grant no new coal exploration licences or mining leases.

Australia has joined the international community in signing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the Paris Agreement) that commits all nations to keeping the global average temperature increase to below 2 degrees Celsius. This means more than 90% of Australian coal reserves must remain unburned. With cleaner, cheaper, more reliable electricity available from the sun, wind and storage, we should not continue to dig up dirty, polluting coal.

2.2

BAN UNCONVENTIONAL GAS DEVELOPMENT

Ban the exploration and development of unconventional gas in NSW.

Unconventional gas mining, including coal seam gas, shale gas and tight gas, contaminates and depletes groundwater and surface water. Gas mining pollutes our drinking water catchments and causes significant harm to human health and agriculture. Clearing for gas infrastructure destroys natural areas, including threatened species habitat. Hard fought restrictions on unconventional gas projects exist in NSW, including in the Northern Rivers. However the Pilliga Forest, a biodiversity hotspot, groundwater recharge area for the Great Artesian Basin and the largest remaining temperate woodland in eastern Australia, remains at risk. The NSW Government should ban unconventional gas mining, as Victoria has done, and, if necessary, overturn any production licence granted for the Santos Narrabri Gas Project in the Pilliga.

2.3

MAKE COMPANIES PAY FULL REHABILITATION COSTS

Require companies to fully rehabilitate mine sites and power stations, and ensure they budget to pay the full costs of rehabilitation.

Coal and unconventional gas mining and power generation have significant and lasting negative impacts on the environment and communities, contaminating water and soil, emitting air pollution, disrupting ecosystems and leaving final mine voids that fill with toxic water for hundreds of years. The NSW Government must increase rehabilitation bonds to ensure companies provide sufficient funds to fully rehabilitate coal mines, gas fields, power stations, and associated facilities. This includes requiring the owners of power stations to decommission lakes and ash dams and dispose of ash as hazardous waste so pollutants do not escape into the environment.

2.4

OVERHAUL PLANNING PROCESSES FOR MAJOR PROJECTS

Overhaul the planning process for major projects to ensure that: nature and communities are properly valued; the impacts of proposals are properly assessed; and projects are closely monitored and consent conditions are vigorously enforced.

The NSW Government's processes for assessing and determining major projects puts the interests of corporations ahead of the environment and communities. The system restricts the rights of communities to appeal against approvals (third-party appeal rights); overrides or ignores the advice of expert government agencies (heritage, water, environment); pays lip-service to community consultation; facilitates habitat destruction through a flawed biodiversity offsetting system; fails to resolve land-use conflicts and protect high conservation value areas; and does not vigorously monitor or enforce approvals conditions. There are also excessive penalties for individuals who demonstrate against destructive projects, which should be removed.

2.5

BAN URANIUM EXPLORATION AND NUCLEAR WASTE DUMPS

Reinstate the ban on uranium exploration and oppose national nuclear waste dumps.

Uranium exploration and mining causes severe environmental damage at and around mine sites, including the permanent contamination of water. It poses a health risk to workers and communities through increased exposure to radiation from uranium ore and other materials, including radon gas, heavy metals, acids and industrial chemicals. The ban on uranium exploration should be reinstated. As the Commonwealth Government considers options for a new radioactive waste management facility, the NSW Government should oppose plans to create a national nuclear waste dump in NSW.

MORE INFORMATION:

Nature Conservation Council of NSW - www.nature.org.au/our-campaigns/beyond-coal-and-gas/

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCE:

nature.org.au/election2019



CLEAN UP OUR AIR

Old, dirty coal-fired power stations, coal-mining operations, as well as transport, industry and household emissions contaminate the air we breathe and harm human health.

Air pollution contributes to the premature death of more than 3,000 Australians a year, yet state and federal air pollution standards fall well short of world's best practice. Polluters are still not held accountable for exposing communities to harm.

Toxic emissions, including dangerous dust particles, sulfur-dioxide, nitrogen oxides and mercury are contaminating our air, increasing risks of heart attack, stroke, asthma, lung cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular disease, irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, choking and coughing, and headaches.

Technology exists to reduce emissions but it is not mandatory in NSW. Pollution limits in NSW are inconsistent, and in many cases significantly lower than those in the European Union, United States and China. For example, NSW power stations are permitted to emit double the concentration of small particles (PM_{2.5}) and up to eight times the levels of NO_x allowed in the European Union. They can also emit up to 666 times the concentration of mercury allowable in the United States. Monitoring and enforcement is lax, leaving polluters unaccountable for releasing the toxic chemicals that are putting the health of communities and the environment remain at risk.

NSW must clean up our air and protect our health by setting and enforcing more rigorous standards and mandating technologies that will significantly reduce emissions.

PRIORITY POLICIES

3.1 IMPLEMENT AN AMBITIOUS AIR POLLUTION REDUCTION STRATEGY

Implement an air pollution reduction strategy across NSW to improve air quality by slashing emissions from industry, transport, households, and fuels.

The NSW Government must reinvigorate a whole-of-government strategy to improve air quality across the state. It must include clear targets for emissions reductions in all sectors: power generation, mining, transport, industry and domestic emissions.

3.2 ADOPT BEST-PRACTICE AIR QUALITY STANDARDS

Set air quality standards in line with world's best practice, and improve air quality monitoring.

National air quality standards were set over 20 years ago. Since then, most nations have adopted stricter standards, but Australia has failed to keep up. Australia's 24-hour average SO₂ standard is 10 times higher than the World Health Organisation (WHO) standard, and twice the level set by comparable countries. Australian NO₂ thresholds exceed WHO and European Union (EU) guidelines. NSW must adopt air quality standards equal to world's best practice, and advocate for these standards to be adopted nationally. Further, air quality monitoring networks in the Central Coast, Hunter, Lithgow, Namoi and other significantly affected communities should be expanded and backed up with robust enforcement.

3.3 SLASH EMISSIONS FROM POWER STATIONS

Reduce emissions from coal-fired power stations by installing readily available technology, updating pollution licences and improving emissions monitoring.

Coal-fired power stations are the state's biggest polluters yet the health impacts of these facilities have not been independently assessed. Pollution licences for our five power stations are inconsistent and in most cases use standards significantly weaker than those in the European Union, United States and China. Technology used elsewhere in the world to reduce toxic chemical emissions from coal-fired power stations is not mandatory in this state. It is feasible to reduce these emissions by 90% or more by installing flue gas desulfurisation and selective catalytic reduction. NSW Environment Protection Authority recommendations for reducing emissions and improving monitoring and reporting for coal-fired power stations should be implemented as a matter of urgency.

3.4 MAKE POLLUTERS PAY

Strengthen the NSW load-based licensing scheme by increasing pollution licence fees for harmful pollutants (SO₂, NO_x and mercury) and extend the scheme to include the mining industry.

The NSW load-based licensing scheme is supposed to limit pollution by making polluters pay, but it has been ineffective because fees for emitting SO₂, NO_x, mercury and other harmful pollutants are too low. The scheme also does not apply to coal mining and related industries that are significant air and water polluters. The NSW Government should expand the load-based licensing scheme to include coal mining operations, and increase fees to levels that encourage companies to slash emissions.

3.5 STRENGTHEN VEHICLE EMISSION STANDARDS

Implement policies and provide incentives to reduce vehicle emissions.

NSW should reduce vehicle emissions by adopting standards comparable to those in the European Union and California. The government must create incentives to increase the uptake of electric vehicles, including rebates on registration costs for electric vehicles and registration fees. The government should lead the way by updating its fleet to electric and hybrid vehicles.



MORE INFORMATION:

Nature Conservation Council of NSW - www.nature.org.au/our-campaigns/air-pollution/

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

nature.org.au/election2019

EXPAND AND PROTECT OUR NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDERNESS

National parks and wilderness areas are the main way to ensure nature is protected for future generations. Each year, millions of people flock to our national parks to spend time in nature and be awed by breathtaking landscapes.

These reserves are under increasing threat from logging, grazing, horse-riding, development, population growth and inappropriate recreational use. Funding cuts and significant restructuring of the National Parks and Wildlife Service have made it harder for the organisation to do its job. Meanwhile, the expansion of the national parks estate and dedication of new wilderness areas has stalled.

The protection of natural areas through a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system has long been recognised as critical for maintaining the state's biodiversity and ecological integrity. Yet only 9% of the state is in the reserve system. This is well short of the level advised by international agreements that call for 17% of lands to be conserved and managed through interconnected protected areas and on private land by 2020.

PRIORITY POLICIES

4.1

RAPIDLY EXPAND THE NATIONAL PARKS ESTATE

Develop a funded strategy to achieve protection for 17% of the state in line with Aichi targets, and progress World Heritage listing for NSW rainforests and eucalypt forests.

The expansion of the national parks estate has stalled, with the rate of national park creation having slowed 95% over the past seven years. Investing in the expansion of the national parks estate should be prioritised and must include creation of the Great Koala National Park, Gardens of Stone Stage 2, and Clyde Wild and Scenic River proposal. Proposals for World Heritage listing of NSW rainforests and eucalypt forests must be progressed.

4.2

INCREASE THE NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE BUDGET BY \$150 MILLION BY 2022

Increase the operating budget of the National Parks and Wildlife Service by at least \$150 million over three years.

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service was once ranked among the top-five park-protection agencies in the world, but funding cuts and the loss of many experienced staff with decades of experience have harmed the organisation's prestige and hampered its effectiveness. The NSW Government must invest substantially to revive the capacity of the service to ensure the precious natural landscapes it administers are properly protected and maintained.

4.3

BAN DESTRUCTIVE ACTIVITIES IN NATIONAL PARKS

Legislate against high-impact activities in national parks and wilderness areas, including logging, grazing, horse-riding, hunting and high-impact development.

In recent years and against expert scientific advice, logging, grazing, hunting and high-impact development have been permitted in national parks, and horse riding in wilderness areas has been allowed or proposed. These activities degrade reserves and undermine the conservation objectives these areas have been set aside to achieve. These activities should be banned in national parks and wilderness areas.

4.4

DO NOT RAISE THE WARRAGAMBA DAM WALL

Rule out raising the Warragamba Dam wall to save Blue Mountains wilderness.

Raising the Warragamba Dam wall will drown up to 4,700 hectares of World Heritage-listed national parks and 65km of wild rivers. Flooding these national parks will harm at least 48 threatened species, grassy-box woodland ecosystems, and hundreds of Aboriginal cultural heritage sites. Dam waters will leave the landscape scarred from sedimentation, erosion and invasion of exotic plants. The NSW Government must put preservation of this precious wilderness area ahead of short-term developer interest by ruling out raising the Warragamba Dam wall.

4.5

PROTECT ALL REMAINING WILDERNESS

Complete wilderness declarations under the Wilderness Act 1987 for all eligible wild rivers and landscapes.

About 4% of NSW remains in a wilderness condition yet only half of that is formally protected under the Wilderness Act 1987. Several key areas on the east coast and ranges remain unprotected, while no areas in the Western Division have been formally identified for protection. Very few wild rivers have been identified and protected. The important work of safeguarding our wilderness should be prioritised by the next NSW Government.



MORE INFORMATION:

National Parks Association of NSW - www.npansw.org/

Colong Foundation for Wilderness - www.colongwilderness.org.au/

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

nature.org.au/election2019

END NATIVE FOREST LOGGING AND PROTECT KOALAS

Two million hectares of NSW's state native forests continue to be exploited for commercial logging, with extremely detrimental impacts on native habitat and wildlife, soils, water, and carbon stores.

The Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) that were developed to provide for multiple use of native forests—nature conservation, timber extraction and recreation—expire between 2019 and 2021. This provides an opportunity to re-evaluate how these diverse ecosystems can be protected and managed.

Logging is one of the key reasons koalas are declining in NSW. Between 1990 and 2010, koala numbers in NSW plunged by 33%. The destruction of important habitat by logging, land clearing and urban expansion is interacting with climate change to put our world-renowned wildlife under substantial stress and pushing them towards extinction.

The RFA model has failed to manage public native forests effectively. There is an inherent contradiction between managing forests under Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management principles and maximising wood production and profits. The commercial viability of native forest logging in NSW continues to decline with substantial government subsidies continuing to prop up a failing industry.

NSW has an historic opportunity to shift the use of our native forests from logging to sustainable management, including through the use of skills and knowledge of the Traditional Owners, for the benefit of the people. Our forests can provide safe, well-connected habitats for native wildlife and help the state become a world leader in nature-based tourism, recreation, and outdoor education.



PRIORITY POLICIES

5.1

END NATIVE FOREST LOGGING

Commit to ending native forest logging on public land in NSW when the Regional Forest Agreements expire in 2019 and 2021.

Ongoing logging of native forests is unsustainable, both ecologically and economically. Plantation operations provide a feasible alternative and currently provide 85% of timber in NSW. Consequently, if native forest logging on public lands ceased, the rewriting of NSW Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals (IFOAs), which will dramatically intensify logging throughout coastal NSW, would not be needed.

5.2

MANAGE PUBLIC NATIVE FORESTS AS A MIX OF PROTECTED AREAS

By 2021, commit to funding and implementing a change of management for state forests to a mix of protected area categories for conservation, public recreation, Aboriginal culture, education, and ecotourism.

State forests should become a mix of protected area categories under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and Indigenous Protected Areas. Conservation and sustainability should be primary objectives, while also ensuring people have better access to forests by supporting recreational activities such as dog walking, horse riding and mountain biking as appropriate, eco-tourism and regional events. Aboriginal ownership, joint management arrangements, and traditional management practices should be encouraged, along with opportunities for Aboriginal people to benefit economically from businesses centred on forests. Existing proposals from environment groups, including Forests for All and the Great Southern Forest, reflect this model and should be adopted.

5.3

ESTABLISH THE GREAT KOALA NATIONAL PARK

Establish the Great Koala National Park in the Coffs Harbour hinterland.

The NSW Government should create the Great Koala National Park, which would add 175,000ha of publicly-owned state forests to existing protected areas to form a 315,000ha reserve in the Coffs Harbour hinterland. This biodiversity hotspot includes two nationally recognised koala meta-populations, estimated to contain almost 20% (about 4,500) of NSW's remaining wild koalas.

5.4

PROTECT KOALA HABITAT

Implement a robust koala strategy that protects all known and potential koala habitat.

NSW needs a comprehensive, whole-of-government plan to conserve and manage koalas. The strategy must address all current threats to koala populations, including logging and land clearing, and must provide comprehensive protection for all koala habitat.

5.5

BAN BURNING NATIVE FORESTS FOR ELECTRICITY

Prohibit the burning of native forests and cleared vegetation for electricity.

Burning native forests and cleared vegetation for electricity is unsustainable and should not be permitted as part of forestry operations, as it is not a form of "renewable" energy. Burning wood for power fuels climate change and encourages intensified logging operations, the logging of non-commercial species, and the burning of whole logs.



MORE INFORMATION:

National Parks Association of NSW - www.npansw.org/

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

nature.org.au/election2019

CONSERVE AND RESTORE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEMS

Extensive clearing of native forests and bushland has caused dramatic declines in biodiversity and ecosystem function across NSW. Scientists say that today only 9% of the state is in a healthy, near-natural condition.

Deforestation and land clearing are devastating the environment, driving species to extinction, causing soil erosion and salinity, disrupting rivers systems, diminishing pure water supplies, and reducing the ability of ecosystems to capture and safely store carbon from the atmosphere.

Over the past 230 years, 12 species of bird and 25 species of mammal have become extinct in this state. *The NSW State of the Environment Report (2015)* recorded 999 plant and animal species and 108 ecological communities as threatened with extinction, and that number has continued to climb.

The bulldozing of forests and bushland is the greatest threat that native species and ecosystems face. Invasive species and the impacts of climate change - increasing temperatures, declining rainfall, increased bushfires, rising sea levels - are adding to these pressures.

We are custodians of an extraordinary diversity of native plants, animals and landscapes. We have a responsibility to protect these for their intrinsic value, but also because healthy, functioning ecosystems provide services critical for our wellbeing and way of life.

MORE INFORMATION:

Nature Conservation Council of NSW - www.nature.org.au/our-campaigns/land-clearing-and-wildlife/

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:
nature.org.au/election2019

PRIORITY POLICIES

6.1

END DEFORESTATION AND EXCESSIVE LAND CLEARING

Make laws that conserve and enhance biodiversity in NSW and protect all high-conservation-value land.

NSW needs strong laws that stop the destruction of important native bushland and wildlife habitat, including all high-conservation-value lands. In particular, laws must create a legal requirement to: conserve and enhance biodiversity; protect remnant and high-conservation-value regrowth native vegetation from clearing across all sectors (agriculture, urban development, infrastructure and mining); ensure true environmental impacts are assessed in accordance with an objective scientific methodology, with clear thresholds for rejecting clearing applications; restrict code-based tree clearing; close loopholes that allow the clearing of trees in urban areas; and support effective monitoring, reporting and enforcement.

6.2

ESTABLISH A \$1.5 BILLION LAND AND BIODIVERSITY FUND

Establish a flagship five-year \$1.5 billion Land and Biodiversity Fund to support biodiversity conservation and land-sector carbon projects.

The fund must be overseen by an independent committee to ensure monies are allocated only to projects that clearly improve biodiversity. \$1 billion should be allocated to support farmers to protect trees and native revegetation, create jobs in regional and rural areas in land restoration and carbon sequestration, and prevent erosion polluting waterways. In addition, \$500 million should be invested in biodiversity conservation on public and private land. Funding earmarked for private land conservation must be directed to “in-perpetuity” agreements and for the primary purpose of conservation.

6.3

STRICTLY LIMIT BIODIVERSITY OFFSETTING

Prohibit biodiversity offsetting that does not meet world’s best practice.

Biodiversity offsetting should only be available as a last resort, after all efforts to avoid or minimise impacts have been made. The existing biodiversity offsets scheme must be rewritten in line with best practice to: require clear environmental outcomes for all biodiversity values; require strict like-for-like offsetting; rule out destruction of high-conservation-value habitats; and exclude supplementary measures, mine rehabilitation, discounting and payments in lieu of offsets.

6.4

RETAIN AND CONSERVE CROWN LAND

Prevent the transfer of Crown land from the state to other landholders, and ensure it is managed in accordance with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

Millions of hectares of NSW are public Crown land, much of which remains uncleared. These lands are refuges for remnant vegetation and threatened species, connecting habitat patches across heavily cleared landscapes. High-conservation-value Crown land must be retained by the state (not transferred to other landholders), and managed to protect its important conservation values.

6.5

TACKLE INVASIVE SPECIES

Tackle the growing threat of invasive species by preventing new invaders, eradicating species that are not yet widespread, and mitigating harm from established invaders.

Strong intervention is required to reduce the impact of new and widespread invasive species on the environment. The NSW Government must prevent harmful new invaders by phasing in a “safe list” approach; implementing an eradication program identifying and systematically targeting the highest priority eradicable species; and establishing an innovation fund for developing better methods for mitigating the environmental harm caused by the worst invasive species, including new methods for controlling feral deer. Feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park must be urgently managed to significantly reduce impacts on the park and surrounds and the legislation protecting wild horse populations must be repealed.

SAVE OUR GREEN SPACES AND URBAN TREES

Urban bushland, green spaces and tree canopies have intrinsic aesthetic and environmental values that make cities more livable and provide significant health, economic, and social benefits.

The NSW Government must ensure that as the state's towns and cities grow this "urban forest" of bushland, parks and trees is protected.

Green spaces and trees in towns and cities minimise the urban "heat island effect", reduce heat stress, reduce the costs of energy for cooling, and improve air quality. They also reduce stormwater runoff, providing wildlife habitat, regulating and filter inflows into waterways. The presence of parks and urban bushland promote exercise and healthy lifestyles, improve mental health, and increases property values.

Despite the importance of the urban forest, it is threatened by unbalanced planning laws, weak council tree-preservation orders and the sale or commercialisation of local parks and public land.

These problems are exacerbated by destructive and poorly monitored bushfire clearing policies, the loss of private garden trees to dense development, and new biodiversity laws that allow developers to pay cash for clearing bushland as a so-called offset.

PRIORITY POLICIES

7.1

PROTECT OUR GREEN SPACES IN LAW

Legislate to protect green spaces and fully fund their upkeep.

We need new laws and funds to protect and expand our existing green spaces, including implementation of the Sydney Green Grid, and assure their permanent protection. Remnant bushland is a priority because Australian native habitat is scarce in urban areas.

7.2

MAINTAIN URBAN TREES AND INCREASE THE URBAN TREE CANOPY

Legislate to maintain urban trees and close loopholes that allow tree clearing. Increase Sydney's urban tree canopy by 40% by 2030.

Review laws and policies that allow tree clearing for development and infrastructure and remove provisions that allow unchecked tree clearing (such as the Exempt and Complying Development Code and 10/50 Bushfire Code). Mandate robust, uniform tree-preservation rules for local councils and invest in enhancing green spaces and growing Sydney's urban tree canopy by 40% by 2030. Prioritise areas with low canopy cover and high urban heat impacts and use Australian native tree species.

7.3

ENSURE EVERYBODY CAN ACCESS GREEN SPACE

Implement and fund policies to ensure that by 2030 every household is within walking distance of green space (preferably bushland).

Rapid urbanisation and poor planning is resulting in the loss of green spaces, trees and natural bushland. The NSW Government must recognise the importance of access to nature for human wellbeing and adopt policies that ensure new land releases protect remnant trees and native bushland and allocate space for the creation of green space. These policies must ensure children have access to green space to maximise the health benefits of nature.

7.4

ESTABLISH A THREE-YEAR, \$450-MILLION HEALTHY AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES FUND

Allocate new funds for councils to protect and manage green space, urban bushland and tree canopy and adopt other nature-based solutions to build healthy and resilient communities.

Local councils are an important partner in protecting and managing green space, urban bushland and tree canopy, and building healthy and resilient communities. The NSW Government should support councils to put a value on parks and bushland in their accounting. Councils should also protect green space, urban bushland and trees in local planning rules, and incorporate nature-based solutions (green roofs and walls, vegetated cycle corridors, etc.) into local strategic planning.



MORE INFORMATION:

Total Environment Centre - www.tec.org.au/sos_green_spaces

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

nature.org.au/election2019

RESTORE RIVERS AND WETLANDS AND DELIVER WATER JUSTICE

Healthy rivers and wetlands are essential for native wildlife, Aboriginal cultural heritage, local communities, and a diverse range of industries, from floodplain grazing to tourism and recreational fishing.

The rivers and wetlands of NSW are under extreme stress after decades of catchment degradation, water-course diversion, unsustainable water extraction, and climate change.

Removing water from rivers, wetlands and groundwater systems has caused the collapse of native fish and bird populations and vegetation communities, and increased soil salinity and erosion.

Water in NSW should be managed in a fair, equitable, and transparent manner, respecting basic rights and the environment above economic uses and private interests.

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan must ensure competing values and interests in Western NSW are managed fairly and transparently. Water extraction and use must be managed to ensure there is enough to maintain vital ecological processes and reinstate natural variability of flood and drought.

Attention is also needed on the coast, where coastal rivers, wetlands and estuaries have suffered from a lack of oversight and inadequate water-sharing plans, putting vulnerable coastal environments and wildlife at risk.

PRIORITY POLICIES

8.1 MANDATE ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS

Protect environmental water and river flows throughout NSW river systems, wetlands and estuaries.

Environmental water is allocated to maintain the ecological health of rivers and wetlands. With demand for water increasing, especially from agriculture and industry, water management regimes must mandate flows sufficient to maintain healthy, functioning river systems and wetlands. Water-sharing plans must include enforceable rules and allocations of environmental water. This must be a priority for water sharing plans under the Murray Darling Basin Plan, and a key trigger for a comprehensive review of water-sharing plans on the NSW coast.

8.2 TIGHTEN THE WATER-USE MONITORING REGIME

Implement the ‘no meter, no pump’ objective universally.

Systemic failures have led to poor monitoring and enforcement of water laws, including alleged corruption and criminal activity in relation to improper use and over-extraction of water. The “no meter, no pump” objective must be urgently implemented to require all water extractors to install meters to accurately monitor and report water use. This should be prioritised in high-risk areas and ultimately applied to all users.

8.3 CONTROL FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING

Require an upfront cumulative environmental assessment prior to issuing floodplain harvesting licences, and place limits on extraction.

Irrigators in Northern Basin catchments have built levees and dams to capture and store floodwaters. This prevents water reaching downstream where it provides many environmental benefits, including the recharge of groundwater, the depositing of new fertile soils, and the filling of billabongs, lagoons and wetlands. The granting of new private property rights for water use in the form of floodplain harvesting licences must only occur through a transparent process that includes an upfront assessment of the cumulative environmental impacts, and the setting of strict extraction limits.

8.4 RULE OUT NEW DAMS

Do not build new dams or dam expansions, and promote more efficient water usage.

Large dams and weirs alter natural water flows, significantly degrading the health of rivers. New dams do not create more water, they redistribute water, withholding it from downstream users, aquifer recharge, end-of-system flows and wetlands. Further, recent dam proposals appear to be for the benefit private industry and not in the public interest. More efficient, equitable water usage should be prioritised over new dam or dam extension proposals.



MORE INFORMATION:

Nature Conservation Council of NSW - www.nature.org.au/our-campaigns/rivers-and-wetlands/

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

nature.org.au/election2019

PROTECT OUR OCEAN WILDLIFE

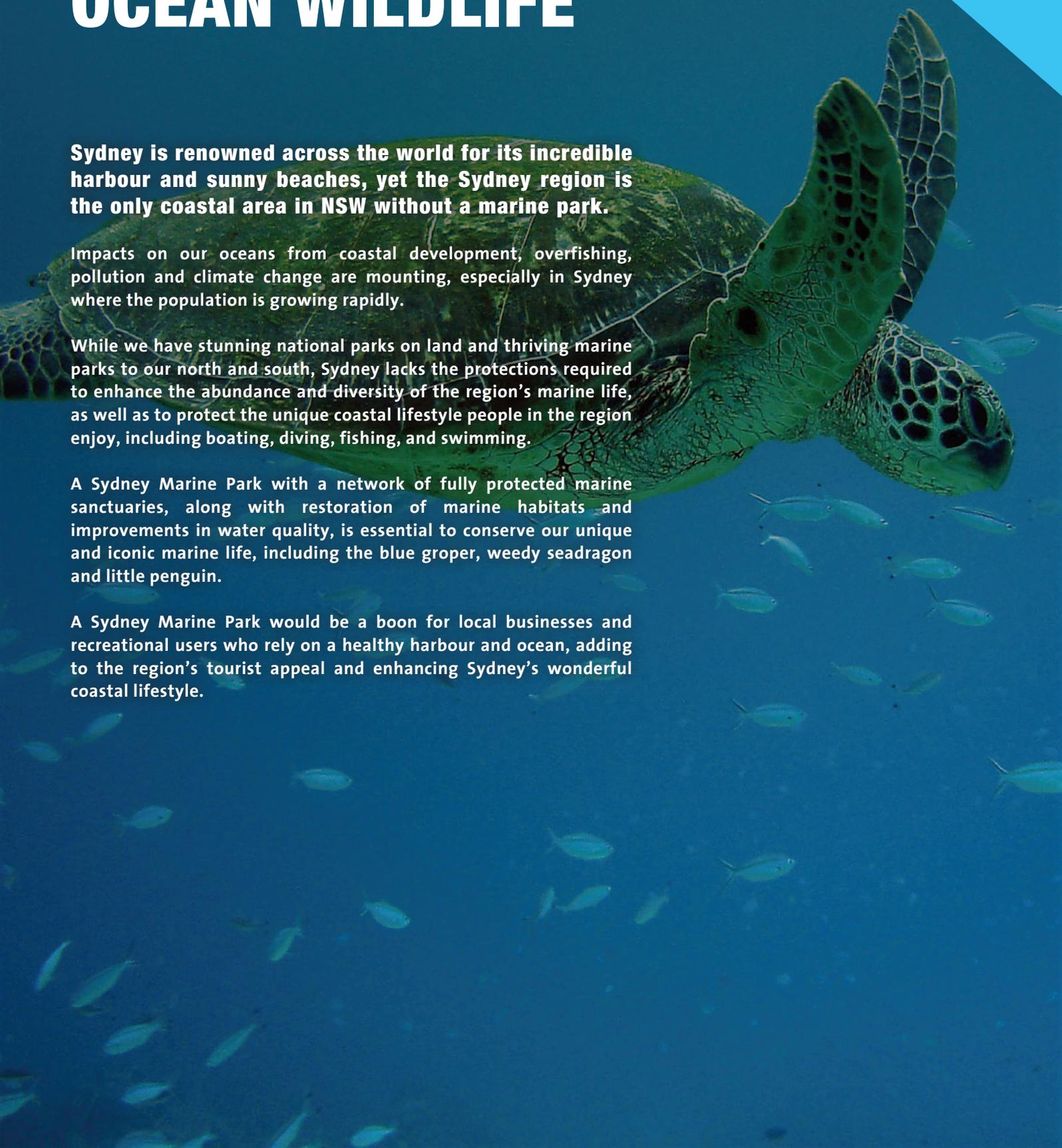
Sydney is renowned across the world for its incredible harbour and sunny beaches, yet the Sydney region is the only coastal area in NSW without a marine park.

Impacts on our oceans from coastal development, overfishing, pollution and climate change are mounting, especially in Sydney where the population is growing rapidly.

While we have stunning national parks on land and thriving marine parks to our north and south, Sydney lacks the protections required to enhance the abundance and diversity of the region's marine life, as well as to protect the unique coastal lifestyle people in the region enjoy, including boating, diving, fishing, and swimming.

A Sydney Marine Park with a network of fully protected marine sanctuaries, along with restoration of marine habitats and improvements in water quality, is essential to conserve our unique and iconic marine life, including the blue groper, weedy seadragon and little penguin.

A Sydney Marine Park would be a boon for local businesses and recreational users who rely on a healthy harbour and ocean, adding to the region's tourist appeal and enhancing Sydney's wonderful coastal lifestyle.



PRIORITY POLICIES

9.1 CREATE A SYDNEY MARINE PARK

Implement a marine park for the greater Sydney region, including a network of sanctuary zones.

A Sydney Marine Park would enhance the abundance, diversity and size of marine life within the central region, currently the only unprotected marine area in NSW. Just like our other marine parks, a Sydney Marine Park would be managed for a range of uses, including recreational and commercial fishing and a network of marine sanctuaries. In order to protect this iconic and much-loved area, we need the next NSW Government to commit to implementing a marine park for Sydney, including a comprehensive, adequate and representative network of sanctuary zones.

9.2 INVEST IN RESTORING MARINE HABITATS

Rehabilitate our coastal and marine habitats and improve water quality.

Our coastal environment is a shadow of its former self after hundreds of years of mismanagement and over use. Emerging problems, such as urchin barrens, are symptoms of an unhealthy, imbalanced system. By rehabilitating our marine and coastal environments, both nature and people will benefit. In conjunction with an expanded network of Marine Parks and extending across our entire coastline, other conservation measures are vital. The next NSW Government must commit to investing in increased water pollution controls and habitat restoration and preservation, as is being trialled throughout Sydney.

9.3 BAN OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS MINING

Ban oil and gas exploration and mining in all NSW waters.

Oil and gas mining in the ocean is dangerous and inappropriate for NSW's sensitive marine environment. The risk of spills is simply too great. Exploration involves seismic testing that is harmful for ocean wildlife and poses a risk to fisheries. The burning of oil and gas exacerbates damaging climate change. The next NSW Government must ban oil and gas exploration and mining in all NSW waters.

9.4 PROTECT OUR MARINE PARKS

Marine parks with fully-protected sanctuary zones are scientifically proven to increase the size and abundance of marine life. They are vital assets for coastal communities who benefit from healthy marine environments for food production, tourism, and recreational opportunities. Our existing marine parks include Cape Byron, Solitary Islands, Port Stephens, Jervis Bay, Batemans, and Lord Howe. Existing marine parks must be maintained and enhanced, and recently removed sanctuary zones within many parks reinstated, to ensure our marine life and coastal habitats receive the protection they require to thrive.



MORE INFORMATION:

Sydney Marine Park - www.sydneymarinepark.org.au

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

nature.org.au/election2019

WAGE WAR ON PLASTICS AND WASTE

Plastic and other consumer wastes are polluting the ocean and our waterways at an alarming rate and increasing our reliance on dirty landfills.

In Australia, an estimated 600 billion pieces of plastic infest our waters and kill marine life. As micro-plastics move up the food chain and onto our dinner plates, a major health crisis looms.

Plastic is made from non-renewable resources such as petroleum, and processed using energy-intensive techniques that release toxic contaminants into the environment and expose workers to harmful chemicals. It ends up in landfill sites or in our waterways, harming wildlife, contaminating soil and water, and infiltrating the food chain.

Plastic is now so widespread that microscopic plastic particles have infiltrated land, water and air. Microplastics are toxic sponges – sucking up persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals and distributing these across the environment and into our food chain.

Other wastes, including electronic, construction, manufacturing, and household waste are also mounting. Our consumerist lifestyle is unsustainable. We are using too much water and energy and other resources in production, and generate mountains of waste that poison the land and oceans. While recycling efforts have improved, a concerted and coordinated effort by individuals, industry and governments is required to make it work effectively.

PRIORITY POLICIES

10.1 BAN PLASTIC BAGS AND MICROBEADS

Ban single-use plastic bags and products containing microbeads.

A ban on single-use plastic bags should apply to all wholesalers, importers and retailers who provide these products to their customers both in shop and online, including all small businesses, and include 'biodegradable and degradable' bags up to 70 microns. Microbeads pose an environmental hazard when disposed of in wastewater. Despite the voluntary industry program, there are loopholes that need to be closed through legislation. The use of microbeads should be banned in cosmetics, personal care products, laundry detergents, cleaning products, and paint.

10.2 SLASH PLASTIC POLLUTION (CONSUMER)

Implement a comprehensive Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan and gazette strong regulations regarding the use of single-use plastic products and plastic packaging.

The NSW Government must implement a comprehensive plastic pollution reduction plan to address the growing problem of plastic in the environment. It should include additional bans on widespread single use products (there are viable and inexpensive acceptable alternatives); incentives for plastic-free events and food outlets; strict regulation to end over-packaging; and effective community education about waste reduction.

10.3 SLASH PLASTIC POLLUTION (MANUFACTURING)

Eliminate nurdle pollution from manufacturing by June 2020.

Nurdles are small plastic pellets used as the raw material to manufacture plastic products. Poor industry practices allow these pellets to enter into the environment, for example by escaping equipment or by being washed into waterways during cleaning. The NSW Government should empower the NSW Environment Protection Authority to use its licensing and prosecution powers to eliminate nurdle pollution by June 2020.

10.4 OVERHAUL THE WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Overhaul the NSW waste management system and rule out new landfill sites and waste-to-energy facilities.

The NSW waste management system is flawed and needs a major overhaul, as has been highlighted by China's ban on co-mingled and contaminated waste imports. The NSW Government must rule out new landfill and waste-to-energy projects because they are unsustainable, waste resources and weaken community support for recycling. The government must also take steps to improve separation of recyclables at its source so materials are clean and can therefore more readily find a market for reprocessing. The domestic recycling market must be supported and expanded through government investment in new technology and facilities, and by strengthening regulations.



MORE INFORMATION:

Total Environment Centre - www.tec.org.au/beyond_pollution

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

nature.org.au/election2019

WHO WE ARE

The Nature Conservation Council is a movement of passionate people who want nature in NSW to thrive. We represent more than 150 organisations and thousands of people who share this vision. Together, we are a powerful voice for nature.

WHAT WE DO

As the state's leading environmental advocacy organisation, it is our mission to protect nature in NSW and create the conditions it needs to thrive. For more than 60 years, we have been at the centre of the state's most important conservation battles and have notched up countless wins for wildlife, bushland, marine life, and local communities. We run campaigns, mobilise communities, and advocate passionately for the protection of our unique wildlife and bushland. We also play a leading role in fire policy, education, and ecology through our Healthy Ecosystems Program.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

NSW is home to an astonishing variety of plants, animals, and living landscapes, from our forests and woodlands to our deserts and oceans. This kaleidoscope of life includes almost 5,500 species of plants and animals, many of which exist nowhere else on the planet.

THE STATE OF PLAY

Sadly, this intricate web of life is fraying under pressure from climate change, industrial development, deforestation, and exploitation. In a little over two centuries, 75 species have become extinct in NSW and 1000 more – about 20% of all the species – face the same fate unless we act. Koalas and 60% of all native mammals – our gliders, quolls, and rock wallabies – are under threat. On land, the destruction of wildlife habitat by 200 years of deforestation and land clearing is the primary threat. Almost 40% of the state's native bushland has been cleared, and only 9% of what is left is thriving, most of it in national parks and reserves. At sea, marine life is suffering from over-fishing, water pollution and a tsunami of plastic. And now climate change is multiplying the threats, on land and at sea.

LET'S TURN THINGS AROUND

While the challenges are daunting, we have hope. There are many instances where humanity has applied its intelligence, tenacity, and compassion to solve seemingly insurmountable problems. We know that nature faces threats on many fronts, but we have confidence that by working together we can turn things around. We have done it before and we can do it again.

MEMBER GROUPS

For a full list of the more than 150 groups who are our members, visit nature.org.au/members





**Nature
Conservation
Council** The voice for
nature in NSW

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The NSW Nature Conservation Council acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waters of Australia. We respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait elders past and present, and aspire to learn from their traditional knowledge to help nature thrive

