

The State of the Environment - Government's Policies and Commitments

Introduction

On the 19th of July 2022, the Australian State of the Environment Report was released. Overall, the state and trend of the environment of Australia are poor and deteriorating as a result of increasing pressures from climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and resource extraction.

An overview of the report can be accessed [here](#).

During her National Press Club Address, the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP committed to a series of measures to help protect, restore and actively manage the natural environment. The Federal Government's major commitments are outlined below.

Legal Reform

Samuel Review

In 2020, Professor Graeme Samuel AC released the Final Report of the Independent Review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

The report made 38 recommendations after finding the EPBC Act failed both the environment and developers and contributed to the unsustainable decline of Australia's habitats.

The Government has committed to providing a full response to the Samuel Review by the end of the year. This is the first time since the release of the Samuel Review that a timeline for a response has been given.

Federal Environment Protection Agency

The Federal Government has committed to establishing a new Environment Protection Agency (EPA) that will have two major divisions:

- A compliance and assurance division to:
 - Ensure compliance with environmental laws
 - Improve processes for proponents
- An environmental data, information and analysis division to help:
 - Store and Centralise data collection and analysis

- Reduce transaction costs for environmental assessments.
- Inform decision-making and policy development

The government intends to introduce legislation to Parliament to establish an Environmental Protection Agency in 2023. Prior to this, the Government will undertake formal public consultations to ensure the EPA is fit for purpose.

Wellbeing Budget

The Government will release a “well-being budget” alongside the Federal Budget in October 2022. The well-being budget measures mental health outcomes, liveability, social inclusion and more. Plibersek today announced that the well-being budget will also include environmental indicators.

Native Flora and Fauna

Saving Native Species Program

The Government will establish a Saving Native Species Program to help reduce species decline and restore the populations of endangered plants and animals. \$224.5 million will be invested over the forward estimates. The program will:

- Help clear the backlog of overdue recovery plans
- Help create a national koala conservation strategy with the states and territories
- Expand koala hospitals and services and invest in koala chlamydia vaccines and fertility projects.
- Boost protection for native species and combat invasive species

Urban Rivers and Catchments Program

The Government’s \$200 million Urban Rivers and Catchments Program will provide grants for community groups, and local and state governments to fund projects including but not limited to:

- Citizen science and education projects for preschoolers and school-age children
- Removing cement walls and returning them to natural riverbanks
- Creating wetlands to slow water flow and filter stormwater before it reaches the rivers
- Revegetation and tree planting

It is expected the fund will provide grants for approximately 100 projects.

Reef Protection

The Government has committed \$1.2 billion for reef preservation and restoration:

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- \$85 million over the forward estimates for shovel-ready catchment and reef restoration projects.
- A one-off grant of \$15 million for the Coastal and Marine Ecosystems Research Centre at CQ University in Gladstone, to boost local research.
- Re-instating and double funding for the Reef 2050 Plan, which currently ends in mid-2023, with an additional \$94.5 million over the forward estimates.
- \$100 million of reef protection and restoration work will be allocated to Indigenous ranger organisations by the end of the decade.

The 1.2 billion will also include funding to:

- Advance research into thermal tolerant corals to help climate adaption, in partnership with the Australian Institute of Marine Science.
- Work with farmers on more efficient fertiliser use, boost precision agriculture, install real-time water quality sensors, and create on-farm and land restoration jobs.
- Protect turtles, dugongs and dolphins from threats including plastic pollution, egg predation, illegal poaching and accidental take, as well as work with the fishing industry to ensure a sustainable fishing sector.
- Protect key coral reefs and tourism sites by expanding Crown of Thorns culling programs.

World Heritage

The Government will:

- Take steps to maintain World Heritage status for Australia's currently listed sites, including the Great Barrier Reef.
- Pursue the World Heritage listing of Murujuga and the Flinders Ranges
- Look into the expansion of World Heritage protection for the Cape York Peninsula and West Kimberley
- Look into adding cultural and Indigenous heritage values as part of World Heritage and National Heritage listed areas, including the Daintree.
- Deliver \$276 million for the Kakadu national park.

First Nations

The Government has committed to:

- Doubling the number of Rangers by the end of the decade to 3,800.
- Working to increase First Nations peoples' ownership of water entitlements in the Murray Darling Basin by providing a full response to the Productivity Commission's recommendations in its National Water Reform report.
- Boosting funding for the management of Indigenous Protected Areas by an additional \$10 million each year.

- Delivering the \$40 million of cultural water promised to First Nations Peoples

Oceans and Water

The Ocean

To protect the oceans which surround Australia, the Government will:

- Work with stakeholders to complete the management plans for the new marine parks in the Christmas and Cocos/Keeling Islands.
- Provide \$4 million to state and territory governments, to address existing capacity shortcomings in managing state marine parks.
- Renew efforts to establish a marine park in the East Antarctic Region.
- Undertake timely and properly resourced reviews of the marine park management plans for Heard and McDonalds Islands and for Macquarie Island.
- Ensure the statutory review processes of the national marine parks network are carried out in a timely and consultative manner, with any changes considered on the basis of science and stakeholder consultation.
- Work with states to assess the adequacy of the protection that covers breeding and feeding grounds, including coastal zones and ecosystems like seagrass, kelp forests, mangroves, and offshore sites like reefs and zones where ocean currents meet.
- Consider a framework that addresses the importation of seafood from fisheries that involve illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing practices.
- Play an active leadership role in supporting negotiations towards an international agreement on the High Seas and on Marine Litter and Microplastics.

Conclusion

Plibersek's National Press Club Address acknowledged the destruction of Australia's biodiversity is being supercharged by the changing climate change. A summary of the government's Powering the Australia Plan, which outlines the Government's plan to tackle climate change, can be accessed [here](#).

For more information, please contact Hawker Britton's Managing Director Simon Banks on +61 419 648 587.