



# PROTECTING OUR PRECIOUS PLACES

## Strong laws and an independent watchdog

Our plan to protect reefs, forests, rivers, wildlife and communities

Australians love our precious places. Yet our natural heritage and wildlife are under threat like never before from mining, logging, tree clearing and global warming. The Greens will deliver a new Environment Act and new independent National Environment Protection Authority, and real funding for nature.

Australia's precious places are under threat from mining, logging, development, invasive species and the impacts of global warming. The Greens will deliver a new *Environment Act*, an independent National Environment Protection Authority and real funding for nature.

Our environment is under attack like never before. Dredging for coal and gas ports and mass coral bleaching are threatening the Great Barrier Reef. New coal and gas mining is threatening our forests and food bowls. Tasmania's incredible World Heritage wilderness is under threat from bushfires driven by global warming. The Kimberley remains under threat from fracking and fossil fuel extraction. The forests of Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania and their unique wildlife including the Leadbeater's Possum, wombats and the Swift Parrot are under threat from logging. Even our beloved koala and Tasmanian devil are facing extinction.

The major indicators of the health of our natural world, including native wildlife, invasive pests and weeds, soil health and protection of freshwater are all worse than they were three decades ago when our national environment laws began.

We need environment laws that will stop the biodiversity crisis, save our threatened species, and protect our precious places. We can protect what we love about Australia, now and into the future.

### > Key points of the Greens' plan

The Greens have a **\$2.6 billion plan over 6 years** (\$1.6 billion over 4 years) to protect nature and fix the rigged system that gives big miners and developers too much power. We will:

- Establish an independent watchdog, the **National Environment Protection Authority** (NEPA), with \$130 million in funding per year (of which \$75 million per year is new money) to enforce the rules, advise on projects requiring federal approval, improve monitoring and

enforcement, conduct inquiries and produce national environmental accounts

- Create a **new Environment Act** as the next generation of strong national environment laws, expanding federal protection and putting tough limits on development to protect nature
- Give Australians the **environmental democracy** they deserve by improving **community rights and access to justice**
- **Re-establish the Biodiversity Fund and double the previous funding** with \$2 billion over 6 years to expand our protected areas, stop the loss of native wildlife, and better manage our established national parks, forests and reserves (*announced on World Environment Day*)
- **Protect our unique native wildlife** by investing \$130 million over 4 years in a *Threatened Species Plan* to **map and protect critical habitat** and fund recovery plans (*announced on World Environment Day*)
- Ensure the **quality and independence of information provided by environmental consultants** with a certification scheme with funding of \$8 million over 4 years from within the new NEPA budget
- **Better protect and manage our World Heritage Areas and Ramsar wetlands** by conducting a review of their management and by boosting funding, at cost of \$63 million over 4 years
- **Phase out native forest logging** and immediate protection for high conservation value forests
- **Stop runaway tree-clearing** and ensure **climate pollution impacts of projects** are considered via a comprehensive federal "climate trigger" in our national environment laws
- **Get the Murray-Darling flowing** with a \$137 million plan including fully committing to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

### > A National EPA: a tough new watchdog

Big miners, developers and companies have too much power over decision-makers, and repeated our environmental regulators like the Department of Environment have suffered repeated cuts. It's time for a tough new cop on the beat.

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The Greens would create a new independent statutory National Environment Protection Authority (or NEPA), modelled on the successful US EPA. It will be a statutory body which will enforce our national environment laws, advise the federal Minister on projects requiring approval, conduct inquiries and produce national environmental accounts and sustainability reports. It will undertake work on its own initiative (not just when directed by the Minister), and will report regularly to Parliament.

We need independent expert environment and sustainability advice, free from the influence of politicians and the big business lobby, to get us on the sustainability track. The community can have confidence that an independent NEPA would bring together high-quality scientific analysis, rigorous assessment and transparent processes.

A coordinated environmental regulator like the new NEPA and stronger, clearer national environment laws makes sense for business too. Unlike the reckless 'One Stop Shop' proposal championed by the Abbott/Turnbull government, a NEPA would raise standards, not erode them.

**The Greens will establish a new independent National Environment Protection Authority, with funding of \$130 million per year, including \$75 million per year in new funding. The NEPA will:**

- **Assess applications for all projects and provide expert, fearless advice** to the federal Minister who must make the final decision under our national environment laws. All of the NEPA's advice will be made public.
- **Monitor and enforce our national environment laws.** The Greens would inject \$35 million in additional funding per year on top of the approximately \$60 million per year currently allocated to environmental regulation by the Department of Environment, which would be transferred to the NEPA, for a total of \$95 million per year in spending on this area.
- **Fact-check and independently review** all environmental impact assessments to make sure there is **independent, evidence-based scrutiny of the claims made by proponents about the social and economic benefits** of major projects;
- Establish and manage a **certification scheme that ensures the work of environmental consultants** preparing environmental impact assessments for proposals is unbiased and of the highest quality. This would be funded at \$8 million over 4 years from within the NEPA's budget;
- **Conduct inquiries** and advise government and the wider community on major national environmental policy issues.
- Help give Australians the environmental democracy they deserve by establishing a **community information unit** to actively support community understanding and engagement under our national environment laws (\$500,000 a year from within the NEPA's budget);
- Oversee timely delivery of **comprehensive national environmental accounts and sustainability reports to Parliament.** We already have independent expert bodies, like the Productivity Commission, to advise on economic

matters. Now is the time to extend this principle to the environment that sustains us.

The independent NEPA will take on the current environmental assessment, compliance and enforcement responsibilities and resourcing of the Environment Department. The Department of Environment would continue to run government programs like Landcare and the restored Biodiversity Fund.

Similar to other Federal agencies the new NEPA would have offices in all Australia's capital cities, with headquarters in Canberra. It will be headed by a Chairperson, supported by between four and eight Commissioners, all of whom would be appointed by the Governor-General for five year terms.

## > Laws that actually protect nature

Our national environment laws, the *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, were meant to protect the places and wildlife which were so important, so fragile, and which mattered to all Australians.

The last 15 years has shown that they have failed. Thousands of damaging developments have gone ahead and many more of our iconic and important animals and plants are in danger of becoming extinct. Global warming is further increasing the pressure on our fragile environment. Our current national laws have failed to protect our precious places and stop our wildlife heading towards extinction.

The Australian Greens want a new generation of national environmental laws that actually protect our natural heritage: laws that will see our biodiversity flourish and halt any further extinction of our unique wildlife, and save our ancient landscapes for generations to come. These laws should be created as soon as possible, and fully implemented within 12 months of the election.

**The Greens will create a new *Environment Act* designed by an Expert Taskforce with \$2 million in funding which will:**

- Limit the **Minister's discretion** to approve environmentally destructive developments by:
  - requiring that decisions under our national environment laws are consistent with the **precautionary principle** and adequately consider **cumulative impacts**; and
  - legislating for **"no go zones"** which would be guided by critical habitat mapping under the Greens *Threatened Species Plan* discussed below, and which would include Endangered or Critically Endangered ecological communities, or critical habitats of threatened species.
- Give the national environment minister responsibility for **all aspects of the environment when the impact is significant**, including **global warming, water resources, national parks and the National Reserve System, wetlands and forests** (supported by \$95 million per year over the forward

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estimates for the independent NEPA to carry out compliance and enforcement);

- Allow **increased community access to justice** by allowing the merits of decisions to be challenged in court. The Environment Act will also implement “open standing” to challenge environmentally damaging decisions in court, and changing court costs rules to **prohibit costs orders and undertakings as to damages** in public interest cases (\$2 million over the forward estimates).
- Make sure **final approval** for Australia’s most **environmentally damaging projects** remain with the federal Minister and cannot be given away to the states;
- Provide greater opportunities for genuine community **consultation** on major projects and reasons published for all major regulatory decisions; and
- Reflect our international obligations, including Paris Climate Agreement, the World Heritage Convention, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Greens’ plan is for laws that deliver clear environmental protection, not the current process of officially sanctioned destruction.

## > \$2 billion Biodiversity Fund for protected areas

Never before in history has our natural environment been threatened with such degradation from global warming, mining, logging, tree clearing and unsustainable land use. Our precious places need protection, and we must re-connect critical habitat to allow our native wildlife to thrive.

[As announced on World Environment Day 2016](#), the Greens will **re-establish and double the Biodiversity Fund, which was axed by the Coalition, with \$2 billion in funding over 6 years and the first \$1 billion to be injected immediately.**

The Biodiversity Fund will support a program to **expand and better manage of our World Heritage Areas, national parks, Indigenous Protected Areas and private land conservation.** It will help to expand our National Reserve System by thousands of hectares every year. The Fund will focus in part on projects with a double benefit – both carbon storage and biodiversity outcomes.

## > Protecting our native wildlife

Australia is recognised globally as “mega-diverse” - over 80% of our mammals, reptiles and flowering plants exist only in Australia. But Australia’s wildlife is facing an extinction crisis. Many of our famous and important animals and plants are classified as in danger of becoming extinct.

The latest State of the Environment Report (2011) reported declines in many of our mammal species in all states, with the situation continuing to deteriorate. Thirty Australian mammals are listed as extinct, and over 20% of our remaining 386

mammal species are threatened with extinction. More than 1,700 species of animals and plants are at risk of extinction.

[As announced on World Environment Day 2016](#), the Greens will chart the road to recovery for Australia’s threatened species and ecosystems with our **Threatened Species Plan that will identify and protect important habitat and increase funding for threatened species management and research with \$130 million plan over four years.**

## > Information the community can trust

Currently too much of the information relied on by Government when deciding whether to approve major projects comes from the project proponent – those with the most to gain from securing a green light for their developments.

There are no national standards for environmental consultants who compile environmental impact statements. Consultants often come under immense pressure from their clients to put the best possible “spin” on a development.

Often this arrangement risks critical information about the damaging impacts of projects being downplayed and economic benefits exaggerated. For example:

- For the Abbott Point coal port expansion the developers’ application to dredge and dump 3 million cubic metres of dredge spoil included ‘modelling’ which ignored the effect of deeper ocean currents which would have spread dredge spoil much further across the Great Barrier Reef. Minister Greg Hunt approved the dredging anyway.
- Indian mining company Adani claimed that their Carmichael mega-coal mine would create 10,000 jobs, but later admitted in court that the real number was 1464 jobs. Minister Greg Hunt approved the mine anyway.
- Whitehaven Coal’s Maules Creek open cut coal mine destroyed large swathes of the Leard State Forest, but the so-called “offset” areas were found to be bogus by a series of independent ecologists’ reports. Minister Tony Burke approved the mine anyway.
- The massive coal seam gas developments in Queensland were approved without rigorous groundwater modelling, despite claims in environmental impact statements that CSG mining was safe.

**The Greens will task the independent NEPA with establishing a certification scheme funded at \$8 million over 4 years for all environment professionals advising on projects being assessed under our national environmental laws.** Supported by audit and compliance mechanisms and working in collaboration with existing State systems, this scheme will make sure all decisions about environmentally destructive projects are based on independently assessed, quality research and analysis, and unfettered by the influence of vested interests.

This will increase community trust in our environmental decision making, and, importantly, level the playing field for the

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many environment professionals across Australia doing the right thing by our environment.

## > World Heritage Areas & RAMSAR Wetlands

The World Heritage Committee's "extreme concern" over the last years regarding Australia's tragic mismanagement of the iconic Great Barrier Reef raises the warning bell for all our internationally important world heritage areas and wetlands.

The Australian Greens are committed to seeing our 19 World Heritage properties and 66 Ramsar listed wetlands properly protected and managed. Many of these areas are under increasing pressures from development, invasive species, global warming - yet many have suffered from inadequate funding and management arrangements – putting their globally important ecological values at risk.

The Greens **\$63 million plan to protect our World Heritage Areas and Ramsar Wetlands** will see:

- The Department of Environment tasked with **reviewing the funding and management arrangements** for each of our World Heritage Areas and Ramsar wetlands and making recommendations to ensure best practice management for these precious places. The review will be supported by \$3 million in funding and consider current and future threats to these areas, will consider how to increase local communities engagement in management, and how to increase **indigenous joint management**.
- The recommendations of the review implemented, including by strengthening our laws as needed, and a grants program for our **World Heritage Areas and Ramsar wetlands of \$20 million per year** to support best practice management of these important areas.

The Greens will task the Department of Environment with revitalising the World Heritage listing process for areas of outstanding universal value across Australia, including Cape York. We will work with traditional owners, landholders and the broader community to make a **nomination for Cape York** as quickly as possible.

## > Phasing out native forest logging

Australia's forests are globally significant as places of great beauty and ecological importance. They are home to precious wildlife; including critically endangered birds and animals. They provide abundant clean water and clean the air we breathe.

But our forest management is stuck in the 19th and 20th centuries. Sadly, clear fell logging of our native forests continues, causing destruction of ecosystems, endangering wildlife, polluting waterways and depleting carbon stores.

**The Greens want a rapid planned transition out of native forest logging, with logging of all high conservation forests**

**stopped immediately.** The Greens will scrap the failed Regional Forest Agreements, which exempt logging from national environment laws and have entrenched clear fell logging and will develop a comprehensive plan for the future of our forests and regional communities. Our full native forest protections package will be announced in the coming weeks.

## > Stopping runaway tree-clearing

Australia cleared an average of one million hectares of native bushland per year between 2000 and 2010, and after slowly declining since 1990, **land clearing in Australia is set to rise rapidly.** We are facing unrestrained clearing in Queensland and a wave of large agri-business proposals across northern Australia.

More tree clearing means more extinctions, more farms destroyed by soil erosion and salinity, and more carbon pollution fuelling dangerous global warming. When trees are cleared and burned, carbon pollution is released, and valuable carbon stores are removed.

**The Greens will legislate for a comprehensive "climate trigger" in our national environment laws** which will ensure all carbon-intensive proposals will have their impacts on global warming considered, including the ability to **stop runaway tree-clearing across Australia**, including in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia where the situation is urgent. This would address the ridiculous situation where coal mines can be approved without considering all their global warming impacts.

Some examples of current or impending destruction from tree clearing around Australia include:

- In Queensland, the bulldozers have returned under Campbell Newman's destructive land clearing laws which the State government is struggling to overturn. In 2014-15 alone, almost 300,000 hectares of native forest was cleared, an area bigger than the ACT.
- In New South Wales, the Liberal-National government is proposing to scrap protections for native bushland, which the NSW Nature Conservation Council says would "spell disaster for nature in NSW".
- In Western Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, native bushland is being lost rapidly, or rollbacks of State-level land clearing protections are being proposed.

Climate pollution from Queensland's tree-clearing is predicted to outstrip the pollution reductions claimed under the Liberal government's so-called 'Direct Action' policy in just four years.

## > Delivering a sustainable Murray-Darling Basin

The Murray-Darling Basin is the lifeblood for the nation's most significant agricultural region. It extends for more than 3,300km, accounts for 40 per cent of the nation's agricultural produce. The Basin also supports an array of precious ecosystems, from

wetlands and lakes to forests and grasslands. The jobs of tens of thousands of people living in rural communities are at risk if we don't commit to a sustainable and healthy river system.

The Greens are committed to the full implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP). Australia is already seeing positive outcomes from the MDBP, including improved freshwater flows. These keep the Murray mouth open, and wetlands replenished, leading to healthier vegetation and increased populations of waterbirds and fish.

The Coalition says they are committed to the MDBP yet they plan to drastically cut funding to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) by 91% from 2017-18 onwards. The CEWH plays a critical role in restoring the health of the Murray-Darling Basin by efficiently using water trade revenue to achieve environmental outcomes. **The Greens will reverse the harsh cuts to the CEWH by committing \$122 million** over the forward estimates so they can continue to work to optimise environmental outcomes.

**One key issue with the Murray-Darling Basin is the notorious European carp.** The species has been so invasive that they now make up 90 percent of all fish in some parts of the river, churning up mud and making the environment uninhabitable for native fish, insects and birds. **The Greens will match the government's commitment to \$15 million** over the forward estimates to support a science-driven program to work on eradicating the invasive species in the Murray Darling Basin.

In addition to supporting the implementation of the MDBP, the Greens will take action on improving rural water use efficiency and urban water use practices so we can reduce our reliance on the Murray Darling Basin and ensure a more water resilient future for Australia.

It is critical that traditional owners have a strong voice in the management of the MDBP. The Greens continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples to advocate for their increased involvement in water catchment planning and management, and in the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water rights and the allocation of water for cultural flows.

## > Environmental Democracy

Australians deserve environmental democracy. We all deserve a say in how our precious places are protected and managed, and how developments that affect all of us are handled. **As discussed above, the Greens would implement the following principles of environmental democracy:**

- **Access to information** via:
  - The **community information unit** to actively support community understanding and engagement under our national environment laws (\$500,000 a year from within the NEPA's budget);

- The **certification scheme** that ensures environmental impact assessments for proposals are unbiased, funded at \$8 million over 4 years from within the NEPA's budget.
- **Comprehensive national environmental accounts** and sustainability reports to Parliament.
- **Community participation:** via
  - Ensuring the **right to advocate** for community organisations to protect their local area. Organisations are currently "gagged" by conditions in Federal funding agreements.
  - Greater opportunities for genuine community **consultation** on major projects and reasons published for all major regulatory decisions under the new **Environment Act**.
  - Protecting the tax-deductibility of donations to environment groups.
- **Access to justice** via:
  - Allowing the **merits of decisions to be challenged** in court;
  - Implementing "**open standing**" for ordinary citizens to challenge environmentally damaging decisions in court;
  - Changing court rules to **prohibit costs orders** in public interest cases and undertakings as to damages (\$2 million over the forward estimates)
  - Provide ample funding for **Environmental Defenders Offices**. Details to be announced shortly.

## > Other plans to protect nature

In addition to this *Protecting our Precious Places* plan, the Greens have already committed to:

- [Act to stop dangerous global warming and build 100% clean energy](#) as soon as possible, including **at least 90% by 2030**. We have a plan to cut Australia's climate pollution by 60-80% on 2000 levels by 2030, and a target of zero pollution by 2040. [Renew Australia](#), is our plan for clean energy and a just transition for workers.
- [Protect our Great Barrier Reef from global warming](#) by stopping the Abbot Point coal port expansion, stopping new coal mines, implementing a \$3 per tonne thermal coal export levy and abolishing fossil fuel subsidies. We would also [boost funding for our Reef guardians](#) by \$90.8 million over 4 years and cut water quality pollution, with further specific announcements in the coming weeks.
- **Save our water and farmland by stopping new coal mines and unconventional gas** including coal seam gas, shale gas and tight gas, by banning fracking and underground coal gasification and giving landholders the right to say 'no' to these activities on their land.
- [Make mining companies clean up their own mess](#) with a plan for to urgently secure jobs in mine site rehabilitation;
- [Call on the government](#) to commit funding to double funding and provide long-term certainty for Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas
- [Boost Landcare funding by \\$722 million](#) over 4 years, reversing Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull's harsh cuts..

- **Protect our marine ecosystems** by reinstating Australia's world-leading network of marine reserves with a \$152 million package for management plans and a fair compensation package.
- **Protect Australia from invasive species** like Yellow Crazy Ants and deadly myrtle rust. The Greens' full biosecurity policy will be announced in the coming weeks.
- Keep **federal environmental protection in federal hands**, stopping the Coalition's plans to put State, Territory and local governments in charge of our national environment.
- Introduced a private members' bill to **give landholders and traditional owners the right to say "no" to coal and unconventional gas** on their land which was voted down by the Labor, Liberal and National parties in March 2014. Since that time, the bill has been re-introduced with a ban on fracking.
- **Secured the creation of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA)** under the former Labor government and we have fought successfully to keep them and defend them from cuts. Both Labor and the Coalition want to cut \$1 billion out of ARENA.

## > The Greens' track record on protecting nature

The Greens have already achieved significant victories for nature in the Parliament. We have:

- Initiated the Senate inquiry on the Great Barrier Reef which, along with the community campaign, eventually resulted in a **historic ban on offshore dumping of capital dredge spoil** in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area. Some loopholes remain, which the Greens are fighting to close, but the Reef is now a critical issue which other parties can no longer ignore.
- Worked successfully to block the **Abbott/Turnbull plans to hand over the 'water trigger'** and other Federal environmental powers to irresponsible State, Territory and local governments by negotiating with other parties and cross-bench Senators.
- Negotiated a **world-leading price on pollution** to tackle global warming before it was axed by the reckless Coalition.
- Secured the creation of the **original \$946 million Biodiversity Fund** under the former Labor government.
- Helped **secure protection for Australia's water resources** from coal and coal seam gas – and moved amendments to extend this protection to shale and tight gas, and underground coal gasification.
- Initiated a **Senate Inquiry into koalas** which resulted in threatened species listing for this national icon.
- Initiated a Senate inquiry into **threatened species management** across Australia, which highlighted the considerable concern of the community and experts alike for the plight of our native fauna

## > Budget implications

Our plan will invest \$1.6 billion over 4 years (and at least \$2.6 billion over 6 years). Sub-totals and existing funding are in *italics*.

<b>Measure (\$ million)</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Taskforce for a new <i>Environment Act</i></b>	2	-	-	-	<b>2</b>
<b>National Environment Protection Authority (NEPA) funding</b>	130	130	130	130	520
<i>Assessment, compliance and enforcement</i>	95	95	95	95	380
<i>Certification scheme for environmental consultants</i>	2	2	2	2	8
<i>Conduct public inquiries</i>	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	30
<i>Community information unit</i>	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	2
<i>Environmental accounts</i>	10	10	10	10	40
<b>Biodiversity Fund - \$2 billion over 6 years</b>	1,000	-	-	-	<b>1,000</b>
<b>Threatened species - habitat mapping</b>	30	30	30	-	<b>90</b>
<b>Threatened species - listing, recovery plans and research</b>	10	10	10	10	<b>40</b>
<b>Costs changes in court</b>	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	<b>2</b>
<b>World Heritage and RAMSAR review and funding increase</b>	3	20	20	20	<b>63</b>
<b>Secure the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder</b>	-	38.5	39.5	44.0	<b>122</b>
<b>European Carp Eradication Program</b>	4.7	4.4	5.9	0	<b>15</b>
<b>Total new funding</b>	<b>1116.5</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>146.5</b>	<b>1611</b>