

# OUR ENVIRONMENT OUR FUTURE

Policies for the 2023  
NSW election and beyond



Nature  
Conservation  
Council

# 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 extractive industries such as logging, mining and agriculture; increasing pollution levels; and unsustainable and growing consumption. 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; unsustainable consumption; and production of vast amounts of waste.

This document 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.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

**Nature Conservation Council of NSW acknowledges the Country that nurtures and sustains us, the places where we live, work and play. We recognise the sovereignty of all First Nations people and acknowledge that it has never been ceded. We pay our respect to Elders past and present, and honour their continuing culture and connection to Country.**

We acknowledge the dispossession of First Nations peoples and the harm inflicted on people and Country in the more than 230 years since European colonisation began in 1788.

We acknowledge the conservation movement of NSW has not always acted in solidarity with First Nations people and has at times worked against the fulfilment of their land rights and of justice – something the conservation movement now seeks to redress.

This platform includes many objectives seeking to have the rights and interests of First Nations people recognised across these topic areas.

We believe it is of utmost importance that First Nations' rights to land, water, and culture are respected.

We believe that the conservation movement is at its strongest when it is guided by First Nations voices, knowledge and wisdom.

We undertake to embrace First Nations people in our movement, organisation and decision-making, and work together to protect, conserve and restore the land, waters, air, wildlife, climate, and culture of the many First Nations in NSW.

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# SLASH CLIMATE POLLUTION

**NSW has been in a climate emergency since the state election in 2019. Communities, threatened species and ecosystems have suffered disastrous drought and unprecedented bushfires and floods. Since 1910, when national weather records began, average temperatures have risen 1.4°C and the rate of heating is gathering pace.**

Responding to community concerns, the NSW Government plans to accelerate uptake of clean renewable energy and storage, and to develop transmission infrastructure to connect these new assets to the grid.

However, coal-fired power generators still contribute 96% of total emissions from the NSW electricity sector, so solar and wind-powered generation must expand further and faster.

Depending on methane gas as a “solution” with no end date is not an option. The NSW Government must develop policies and incentives that wean residential and commercial buildings, as well as key industries like the food and beverage sector, off gas and onto clean energy.

By the end of this decade, we must also decarbonise the agriculture and mining sectors, electrify transport and phase out coal and gas exports.

For policies relating to forest and oceans and their role as carbon sinks, see Sections 4, 5 and 10.

# PRIORITY POLICIES

## 1.1 REDUCE EMISSIONS BY 75% BY 2030

**Set binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the entire economy.**

These include 75% emissions reductions on 2005 levels by 2030, interim five-yearly targets and an accelerated legislated goal of net-zero emissions by 2035. NSW must legislate for net zero-emissions by 2035 so all government decisions consider the impact of policies on reaching this goal. The goal must include clear milestones with five-yearly targets in areas including energy use, transport, agriculture, mining, manufacturing industry, construction, waste, and forestry and land clearing.

## 1.2 MAKE NSW A RENEWABLE ENERGY SUPERPOWER

**Set binding targets to source 100% of electricity from wind, solar and storage, and integrate new renewable energy zones into the grid.**

The rapid transition of the energy system requires coal- and gas-fired power stations to be replaced with clean, renewable energy within the next two terms of parliament. The NSW Government must increase and bring forward renewable energy and storage targets in the NSW Energy Infrastructure Investment Act to meet the 2030 deadline. NSW needs an Offshore Wind Strategy to establish this new jobs-rich industry. This should include targets of at least 2GW by 2030 and 15 GW by 2040, and grants to kick-start feasibility studies. NSW must oppose payment of coal and gas companies under any electricity market capacity mechanism. Incinerating waste and biomass is not clean or renewable so must not count towards the state's 2030 target.

## 1.3 CREATE A \$2 BILLION REGIONAL SUPPORT FUND

**Establish a Regional Diversification Authority by 2027 to catalyse new investment in the regions.**

The NSW Government still has no plan to support communities that host coal mines and power stations. It should establish an authority to plan and oversee the orderly and just transition from coal-fired power and coal mining to renewables and other industries in the Hunter Valley, on the Central Coast, in Lithgow and the Illawarra. A comprehensive plan based on community and industry consultation should give workers, communities and investors appropriate levels of certainty and support. Any plan must include training and redeployment of power-station and coal-mine workers, including to the renewable energy sector, and comprehensive community support. Closed coal-fired power stations should be remediated and repurposed as clean-energy generation or storage facilities.

## 1.4 REPLACE GAS WITH ZERO-CARBON ELECTRICITY AND GREEN HYDROGEN

**Enact a gas substitution roadmap to reach emissions goals.**

By 2025, the NSW Government must develop a plan to end the use of traditional (methane) gas by 2030. From 2024, new buildings should not be connected to gas supplies. The government must ensure sufficient investment the electrification of industrial processes requiring gas, and the development of a climate-friendly hydrogen gas industry to replace methane gas where electrification is not feasible. The government should provide incentives for homeowners and landlords to replace gas heaters with heat pumps and other renewable energy alternatives.

## 1.5 END THE SALE OF PETROL AND DIESEL VEHICLES BY 2030

**Implement policies to reduce vehicle emissions and prioritise clean and active transport.**

The NSW Government must implement measures to ensure all new vehicles registered from 2030 are electric. It should advocate for federal vehicle emissions standards comparable to the European Union's and California's, and provide registration and stamp-duty discounts for cleaner vehicles, including electric cars and trucks. The proposed road-user tax on electric vehicles should be deferred until 80% of new vehicle sales are EVs. The NSW Government should make its vehicle fleet electric by 2025 and require the electrification of local government fleets, including garbage trucks and other heavy vehicles, by 2030. The government should expand public transport, and ensure electric buses, trams, trains, and ferries are made in Australia.

## 1.6 HEALTHY, LOW EMISSIONS HOMES FOR ALL

**Cut energy bills and create healthy homes for all by rolling out solar, batteries, heat pumps, and household efficiency.**

The NSW Government must leave no one behind in the shift to 100% clean energy, especially renters, social-housing tenants and apartment dwellers. The government must set minimum energy standards for rental properties, provide appropriate incentives for owners to upgrade properties, and add solar PV systems and batteries to public housing stock. The energy and rental sectors must develop models for sharing benefits of rooftop solar and battery installation. Households need interest-free loans for solar, batteries, heat pumps and energy-efficiency upgrades. The government must set a target of 300,000 small battery systems, including the use of electric cars, that can distribute power locally.

# END COAL AND GAS MINING

**Coal mines and unconventional gas projects are a significant source of greenhouse gases and a threat to public health, clean air and water, productive farmlands, natural areas and First Nations people's cultural heritage.**

The NSW Government still puts the interests of the mining industry ahead of communities and the environment.

State planning laws are failing to adequately protect nature and people from new and expanded mines.

The burning of coal from NSW mines produces more than 400 million tonnes of carbon pollution annually, which is undermining international efforts to reduce emissions.

Coal and gas projects must be phased out rapidly and the government must reject all new coal and gas proposals, including modifications, expansions and new stages of existing projects that are under consideration.

Besides the significant climate impacts, mining destroys wildlife habitat and depletes and pollutes water supplies.

Of particular concern is the mining of rare-earth minerals, which have serious potential environmental impacts, including the release of radioactive materials.

Such projects should proceed only with community consent and subject to comprehensive and fully funded rehabilitation plans.

The costs of mine pollution must be met by mining companies through payment of adequate bonds, not by local communities and taxpayers.

## PRIORITY POLICIES

### 2.1 **END THERMAL COAL EXPORTS BY 2030 AND ALL COAL EXPORTS BY 2035**

**To keep coal in the ground, refuse new coal exploration licences, mining leases, new mines and expansions.**

Australia has signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the Paris Agreement) to keep global temperature increases below 2°C and striving to limit warming to 1.5°C. To do so, more than 90% of Australian coal reserves must not be burned. A good place to start is to cease any coal mining under our precious water catchments. NSW needs a plan to end its reliance on coal as an energy source and an export. With cleaner, cheaper, more reliable electricity available from the sun, wind and storage, we no longer need to depend on polluting coal and gas for electricity. Emerging technologies will reduce reliance on coal for metallurgy. The NSW Government must establish a transition authority to coordinate the end of the coal and gas industries to give workers, communities and investors certainty and support.

### 2.2 **SLASH GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM COAL MINING PROJECTS**

**Overhaul policy to regulate and minimise fugitive and other emissions from coal mines.**

Direct greenhouse gas emissions from coal mining—Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions—are significant. These include methane emissions from mines and gasfields, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with generation of electricity to power mine sites and ore processing, and emissions from diesel vehicles. In 2018-19, Scope 1 and 2 emissions from mining coal were 16.1 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>-e more than 12% of the state's greenhouse gas inventory. In 2020-21, more than 70% of the largest NSW emitters, after power stations, were coal mines. The Environmental Protection Authority must urgently develop methane and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions standards and effective penalties. Coal mines using grid energy should be required to switch to 100% renewables no later than 2022-23. By 2030, all technically avoidable methane emissions should be eliminated, and mining vehicle fleets electrified or powered by hydrogen.

### 2.3 **KEEP GAS IN THE GROUND**

**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 extraction also pollutes drinking water catchments and harms human health and agriculture. Land clearing for gas infrastructure destroys natural areas, including threatened species habitat. The government has restricted unconventional gas projects in NSW, including in the Northern Rivers, following community campaigns, but other areas remain at risk. Santos plans to develop a massive gas field in the Pilliga Forest, a biodiversity hotspot, Great Artesian Basin groundwater recharge area and the largest temperate woodland in eastern Australia. The NSW Government should ban unconventional gas mining, as Victoria has done, and revoke Santos' Narrabri Gas Project production licences.

### 2.4 **MAKE MINING COMPANIES PAY FULL REHABILITATION COSTS**

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

Coal and unconventional gas mining and power generation have significant and lasting impacts on the environment and communities, contaminating water and soil, polluting air, 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. The government should implement a chain-of-responsibility regulatory framework, like Queensland's, to hold company directors responsible for rehabilitation requirements. Rehabilitation of the full footprints of mine-owned lands in the Hunter Valley provides opportunities. According to consultancy EY, thousands of jobs and more than \$3.7 billion in economic output could be generated in the Hunter from post-mining rehabilitation if it included biodiversity restoration and repurposing degraded mine sites for renewable energy projects.

### 2.5 **DOUBLE ROYALTIES FROM COAL MINING TO 15%**

**Ensure windfall profits from high coal prices help pay for climate impacts on communities.**

As coal and gas exports are phased out, the NSW Government should increase royalties on coal to 15% to provide revenue to fund the transition to a cleaner, safer future. Coal companies in NSW pay royalties at less than half the rate as those in Queensland (7% compared with 15%). The NSW Government should increase royalty rates to match Queensland's and spend the proceeds on climate change resilience measures and climate disaster relief, including flood and bushfire recovery.

# PROTECT HEALTH FROM POLLUTERS

**Everyone who lives in NSW deserves to breathe clean air, but that is not always the case. From diesel cars and trucks to coal power to wood heaters in homes, there are many pollution sources causing unnecessary loss of life. The government must act to vastly reduce this pollution.**

Air pollution in Australia leads to more than 2,500 deaths and costs Australians \$6.2 billion every year.

Wood heaters, diesel and petrol vehicles, and coal power stations are the three largest sources of dangerous air pollution.

Even modest reductions in air pollution will bring substantial health benefits, which is why the conservation movement has made improving air quality an election issue.

New health guidelines from the World Health Organisation in 2021 demand a fundamental rethink of the way we burn fuels and release pollution into the air.

The NSW Government must clean up our air and protect the health of its citizens by setting and enforcing more rigorous standards and mandating technologies that will significantly reduce emissions

This section has been proudly endorsed by **The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand**

# PRIORITY POLICIES

## 3.1 ALIGN NSW AIR QUALITY STANDARDS WITH WHO GUIDELINES

**NSW and Australia's air quality standards have fallen far behind the World Health Organisation (WHO) Guidelines and should be updated.**

NSW can set its own standards to meet the WHO guidelines and advocate to lift national standards to meet these levels. This must be underpinned by a continuous emissions reduction framework that includes:

- Removing the exemptions from the Clean Air Regulation which are currently handed out to keep old, polluting equipment operating.
- Including mining in the load-based licencing scheme.
- Increasing load-based licencing fees to reflect the health costs of pollution.

## 3.2 STRENGTHEN ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE MEASURES

**When local air quality standards are breached, action must be taken.**

NSW requires mechanisms for exceedances of both ambient and point-source pollution, supported by an enhanced air-quality monitoring network. Some communities in NSW, such as in the Hunter Valley and Western Sydney, experience dangerous air pollution levels that breach health standards. Unfortunately, action is rarely taken.

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) should require all licensees that generate air pollution to develop and implement pollution reduction plans for their premises, including requiring large polluters to install best-practice pollution reduction technologies. The EPA should increase the penalties for non-compliance, including by increasing the fines for air pollution and licence breaches.

## 3.3 ESTABLISH A WOOD HEATER REPLACEMENT SCHEME

**The NSW Government should pay households to replace wood heaters.**

Wood heater smoke is the largest source of winter air pollution in many areas, including Sydney and Armidale, even though only 7% of Australian households use wood heaters as their main source of heating. Evidence from Tasmania suggests more people die from wood heater smoke than bushfire smoke, yet consumer research shows more people are concerned by bushfire smoke. Wood heater smoke is a serious risk factor for asthma, both in terms of developing asthma and triggering symptoms. It is also a risk factor for other respiratory illnesses, some cancers, cardiovascular disease, premature birth and premature death.

## 3.4 ENSURE VULNERABLE POPULATIONS CAN ENJOY HEALTHY AIR

**The NSW Government should introduce a subsidy scheme to support access to high efficiency particle (HEPA) filters, and fix air pollution in classrooms.**

These air cleaners should be accessible to all people at higher risk from air pollution, but the poor cannot afford them. The government should provide subsidies for those medically at risk. Remove unflued gas heaters in classrooms and installing energy-efficient heat pumps. Air quality in school classrooms should be regularly tested, and HEPA filters installed where required.

## 3.5 ACCELERATE THE SHIFT TO ELECTRIC VEHICLES AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

**Invest in policies that support uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) and EV-related infrastructure.**

Traffic-related air pollution, including nitrogen dioxide, fine particles, and unburnt hydrocarbons are environmental toxins released close to where people live, work and travel. By accelerating the transition to electric vehicles, the government can substantially improve human health, especially in areas close to main roads.

## 3.6 REDUCE EMISSIONS FROM COAL AND GAS BURNING

**Accelerate the switch to clean, renewable sources of electricity.**

Coal-fired power stations are one of the top three sources of particle pollution in NSW, and their pollution control technologies are out of date. Upgrading to clean sources of energy, and decreasing demand, will reduce particle pollution, nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide, especially in the Sydney Greater Metropolitan area where most people live.

# PROTECT KOALAS

**Koalas were once so abundant they formed the basis of a significant fur trade to Europe. Today, habitat loss and disease has pushed this iconic species close to extinction.**

In 2012, the Federal Government listed koalas as vulnerable in NSW, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory after their populations plunged 26% over 20 years.

The 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires decimated already struggling populations and, in 2022, the NSW Government followed the Federal Government and listed them as endangered at the state level.

Habitat destruction, the main driver of the species' decline, is continuing at an alarming rate, primarily in the form of land clearing for infrastructure, urban and agricultural development, and native forest logging.

Deforestation has accelerated since the Coalition weakened environmental protections under its Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and the weakening of land clearing laws.

Government data show clearing rates after the changes are now 25% higher than the long-term average. More than 27,600 hectares of native bushland were cleared for infrastructure, agriculture and native forestry in 2020 alone.

Future generations will judge us harshly if we allow this iconic species to disappear from our forests.

If the koala cannot be saved from extinction, what hope do any other species have?

We can and must reverse the decline in koala numbers by protecting all remaining koala habitat.

## PRIORITY POLICIES

### 4.1 **TRANSFER CORE KOALA HABITAT ON PUBLIC LANDS TO NATIONAL PARKS**

**Conserving all core koala habitat on publicly owned land is one of the most important steps required to protect this species.**

Significant expansion of the national parks estate to incorporate public land with core koala habitat is one of the most effective things the NSW Government can do to protect the species. Given that fragmentation of koala habitat is a key threat, all large tracts of land with significant habitat values must be protected. Priority additions include:

- Great Koala National Park near Coffs Harbour (175,000ha)
- Sandy Creek Koala Park near Lismore (6,988ha)
- Georges River Koala National Park in southern Sydney (4,000ha)

### 4.2 **STOP LOGGING KOALA HABITAT**

**Place a moratorium on logging koala habitat and end public native forest logging by 2024.**

Native-forest logging is responsible for 62% of total annual koala habitat loss. Harvesting operations are increasingly focused in forests that are koala hubs or core koala habitat. These areas, such as the Lower Bucca, Nambucca State Forest and Kalang Valley, are targeted by Forestry Corporation NSW (FCNSW) because they contain some of the last high-quality sawlogs. An immediate moratorium followed by the permanent cessation of native forest logging would remove a key threat to koala colonies in northern NSW.

### 4.3 **BAN LAND CLEARING OF KOALA HABITAT BY 2025**

**Mining, agriculture and urban development are responsible for 38% of koala habitat destruction every year.**

The NSW Government must immediately legislate protection of koala habitat from these threats. This will require more detailed mapping of koala habitat on private and public lands, which can be used to inform conservation management and habitat protection.

Reinstating the *Koala Habitat Protection State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) 2019* would be a positive step towards protecting vital habitat.

### 4.4 **DOUBLE KOALA POPULATIONS IN KEY AREAS BY 2050**

**The NSW Government should develop recovery plans for every Koala Management Area (KMA) to achieve the government's goal of doubling koala numbers by 2050.**

As part of the recovery plan, the NSW Government should develop a captive breeding and rewilding program for koalas based on veterinary and conservation science, genetics and monitoring. This could bolster struggling colonies or support re-introduction to areas that have experienced local extinctions.

### 4.5 **ESTABLISH A \$1 BILLION HABITAT RESTORATION FUND BY 2023**

**Protection of remaining habitat is important but is insufficient on its own to ensure the species' survival.**

Given the impact of climate change on landscapes and forests, it is essential that koala habitat is expanded through forest restoration and tree planting in suitable areas. Protect existing koala corridors and create new ones by revegetating links between koala colonies.

# END NATIVE FOREST LOGGING

**The native forests of NSW are priceless biodiversity hotspots, carbon sinks and water sources and have enormous potential for recreation and tourism.**

Rather than treasuring and protecting these assets, the NSW Government has mined them for short-term profit.

About 14,000 hectares of publicly owned native forest are logged every year.

Forest species have been pushed to the brink, including the iconic koala and the greater glider whose threat status was increased to endangered in 2022.

The catastrophic impact of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires amplified the harm of unsustainable logging and accelerated the drift of many species towards extinction.

In a few short months, more than 5.5 million hectares of the state burned, including 38% of national parks and 42% of state forests. More than 1 billion native animals perished.

Despite the colossal impacts of the fires, logging has continued unabated in most regions against expert scientific advice, degrading precious wildlife habitat further and impeding the recovery of species.

Logging of public native forests is not only driving the extinction crisis, it is also costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

The native forest logging arm of the government's Forestry Corporation lost \$20 million in 2020-21. Taxpayers are unknowingly subsidising the destruction of their own forests.

## PRIORITY POLICIES

### 5.1 STOP LOGGING PUBLIC NATIVE FORESTS AND SHIFT TO PLANTATIONS

**NSW lags well behind other states that have developed plans to set their forestry industries on an ecologically sustainable footing.**

Victoria and Western Australia are ending native forest logging and transitioning to a 100% plantation-based industry by 2030 and 2024 respectively. NSW must follow Western Australia's lead and end native forest logging of public forests by 2024. Less than 10% of NSW is protected in conservation reserves, far short of the 30% by 2030 High Ambition Commitment made by the Federal Government at last year's climate conference in Glasgow. Protection of public native forests is a common-sense step toward this goal. The NSW Government must begin working immediately with unions, communities and conservation organisations on a transition plan. Any such plan must exclude high-biodiversity-value forests from logging as a matter of urgency and emphasise job creation in native forest rehabilitation and restoration, fire, pest and park management, and the expansion of plantations.

### 5.2 CONVERT STATE FORESTS TO RESERVES BY 2024

**The biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and recreation values of state-owned native forests have always outweighed their value as a timber resource.**

However, the NSW Government has irrationally prioritised the demands of the timber industry above broader social demands to address the biodiversity and climate crises. The NSW Government should urgently reclassify state forests as a mix of protected areas for conservation, recreation, education, and ecotourism under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and Indigenous Protected Areas. The government must ensure 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. Forestry Corporation NSW should be responsible solely for managing plantations.

### 5.3 PROTECT FORESTS TO CAPTURE 1.5M TONNES OF CARBON PER YEAR

**Logging native forests releases millions of tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere each year.**

By ending logging of publicly owned native forests, the NSW Government could immediately cease emissions of around 1.5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. This would contribute significantly to NSW's target of making the state carbon neutral by 2050. The NSW Government should assess the value of avoided CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the opportunities for carbon sequestration from stopping logging.

### 5.4 ENHANCE INDIGENOUS MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP

**Aboriginal ownership and joint management and traditional management practices should be encouraged, along with opportunities for Aboriginal people to benefit economically from businesses centred on forests.**

Transfer of state forests to Indigenous ownership will support reconciliation efforts and work towards First Nations justice. Harnessing First Nations knowledge regarding management of Country for fire and biodiversity will generate positive social and cultural outcomes and help restore forests. It will provide opportunities for Indigenous youth to learn, teach and undertake land management and cultural practices, as well as enhance health and wellbeing. Such programs will generate Indigenous employment opportunities in forest management, and nature-based and cultural tourism.

### 5.5 BAN NATIVE FOREST BIOMASS FOR ELECTRICITY AND HYDROGEN

**Repeal the *Protection of the Environment Operations (General) Amendment (Native Forest Bio-materials) Regulation 2013* to close the loophole allowing the burning of native forest biomass for electricity.**

Burning native forests and cleared native vegetation for electricity is unsustainable and should not be permitted as part of forestry operations. It is not a form of renewable energy. Ban all native forest woodchip and wood pellet exports.

# EXPAND AND RESOURCE NATIONAL PARKS

**National parks and wilderness areas are the most effective way we have of ensuring nature is protected for future generations.**

Each year, millions of people flock to our national parks to spend time in nature, and the desire of people to spend time outdoors increased during our experiences of lockdown.

The national parks estate in NSW has grown significantly over the past three years, but conservation reserves are threatened by logging, grazing, development and inappropriate recreational use.

In 2021-22 nearly 58,000 hectares were added to the NSW national parks estate, but suitable funding for land management has not followed.

Additions to national parks are important, but funding hasn't kept up, making it harder for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to do its job.

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.

In 2021, Australia joined the High Ambition Coalition and committed to the goal of "30 by 30", that is to conserve 30% of Australia's land and seas by 2030.

This positive step at the national level must be matched by action by the states.

Less than 10% of NSW is protected in the reserve system, so we have a long way to go to reach the 30% target.

## PRIORITY POLICIES

### 6.1 ADD 14 MILLION HECTARES TO THE NATIONAL PARKS ESTATE BY 2030

**The NSW Government must add 14 million hectares to the existing 7 million-hectare parks estate to reach the High Ambition Target of protecting 30% of every bioregion in the state by 2030.**

To achieve this, 7 million hectares must be added to the reserve system over the life of the next two parliaments. Creating the Great Koala National Park on the Mid-North Coast and converting Pilliga Forest and southeast forests to national park are top priorities that will help reach the 30by30 target. Logging of public native forests must cease, and all state forests should be added into the national parks estate. Proposals for World Heritage listing of NSW rainforests and eucalypt forests must be expedited, and additional areas of the Greater Blue Mountains currently being assessed for National Heritage listing must be supported by the NSW Government.

### 6.2 BAN LOGGING, GRAZING + IMPACTFUL DEVELOPMENT IN NATIONAL PARKS

**Logging, grazing, hunting and high-impact developments degrade conservation reserves and undermine the objectives these areas have been set aside to achieve.**

The NSW Government must:

- Stop construction of illegal mountain bike tracks in conservation reserves.
- Stop the intensification of resort development in Kosciuszko National Park.
- Rule out exclusive huts in Ben Boyd National Park.
- Abandon the adventure theme park planned for the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area.
- Ban utilities infrastructure (powerlines, etc.) in protected areas without enabling legislation.

### 6.3 DON'T FLOOD BLUE MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS AND WILD RIVERS

**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 woodlands, and hundreds of Aboriginal cultural heritage sites. The NSW Government must put preservation of this precious wilderness area ahead of short-term interests of floodplain property developers by ruling out raising Warragamba Dam wall.

### 6.4 EXPEDITE ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS CLAIMS OVER CROWN LANDS BY 2028

**About 42% of NSW is Crown land, much of which contains critical remnant habitat for threatened species.**

Much for the Crown lands estate is subject to claims under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*. The government must:

- Allocate sufficient resources to resolve these claims quickly.
- Expedite Aboriginal ownership and joint management, and foster traditional management to improve conservation outcomes and optimize economic benefits for Aboriginal communities.
- Help fund restoration of Aboriginal land, much of which has been degraded by clearing, grazing, rubbish dumping, etc.

### 6.5 MANAGE CROWN LANDS FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

**The government's Crown Land Strategic Plan proposes selling Crown land, including TSRs, for economic exploitation. This must not occur.**

These areas are often remnant habitat for threatened species and sites of priceless cultural heritage. To help achieve the goal of protecting 30% of the state by 2030 (30by30), Crown lands with sufficient biodiversity values must be managed under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act*. The NSW Government should conduct a comprehensive assessment of the biodiversity and ecosystem values of unclaimed Crown lands, including state forests and TSRs.

# PROTECT AND RESTORE HABITAT TO SAVE SPECIES

**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.**

NSW has lost millions of hectares of native vegetation since colonisation, including extensive areas of forest and woodland. It is estimated that 39% of the native vegetation cover that existed prior to 1788 has been removed.

Only 61% of the state still has intact native vegetation, and only 9% is close to its natural condition, the rest is in various states of degradation.

Destruction of wildlife habitat continues today at such an alarming rate that WWF has identified eastern Australia as one of the world's 24 deforestation hotspots, along with the Congo and the Amazon. Australia is the only developed nation on the list.

A key driver of habitat destruction has been the NSW Government's weakening of land clearing and habitat protection laws in 2017.

The government repealed the *Native Vegetation Act* and introduced the *Biodiversity Conservation Act* and *Local Land Services Amendment Act*, creating a new legal framework that weakened the regulation of land clearing.

Invasive species and the impacts of climate change – increasing temperatures, declining rainfall, increased bushfires, rising sea levels – are adding to these pressures.

Australia, in signing the Glasgow Leaders' Forest Declaration, has committed to a transition to sustainable land use, and the conservation, protection and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems.

NSW has a responsibility to act in accordance with this declaration.



Photo | Anne Miehs

# PRIORITY POLICIES

## 7.1 STOP EXCESSIVE LAND CLEARING

**The NSW Government must overhaul its biodiversity conservation laws and to stop further losses of critical wildlife habitat.**

The latest Statewide Land and Tree Study (SLATS) data shows 27,610 hectares of native forest were destroyed for farming, forestry and development in 2020.

Land clearing for agriculture, urban development and infrastructure and the logging of native forests are driving species to extinction and the rate of loss has doubled since the government weakened environmental laws in 2017.

The NSW Government must reverse the destruction of wildlife habitat by overhauling the *Biodiversity Conservation Act* and the *Local Land Services Act*, strictly limiting use of self-assessable codes for land clearing and private native forestry.

NSW must also follow Western Australia's lead and end native forest logging of public forests by 2024.

## 7.2 RESTORE DEGRADED ECOSYSTEMS AND LANDSCAPES

**Augment the work of the Biodiversity Conservation Trust by creating Restoration NSW, a new agency prioritising land restoration and carbon abatement projects.**

Government policies in relation to land management, habitat conservation and restoration frequently work at cross purposes.

While the government has spent millions on biodiversity projects and sustainable farming, it has weakened threatened species and land-clearing laws and accelerated habitat destruction to an average 75 hectares a day.

Ending logging and land clearing are vital but more needs to be done to restore degraded habitats and prevent extinctions.

The government must develop a program of wildlife habitat restoration coordinated across land tenures.

We recommend creating a new agency, Restoration NSW, to map areas of high biodiversity value and develop coordinated programs of habitat restoration at landscape scales.

The agency should have seed finance of \$1 billion to fund works in priority areas on private and public lands.

Restoration NSW would also identify ways to synergise conservation and carbon storage objectives.

## 7.3 INVEST MORE IN FERAL ANIMAL AND WEED CONTROL

**Invasive species must be addressed as part of a whole-of-government response to the extinction crisis because they are one of the top three threats to wildlife and ecosystems.**

Established pest species require urgent and sustained attention, but priority must be given to preventing new invaders taking hold.

The government should invest substantially more in invasive species control, research and education, and stringently regulate exotic species with highly invasive traits.

NSW should introduce a safe-list approach to regulating the sale of weedy plants and fund programs to eradicate highest-priority pest species.

The government should establish an innovation fund of \$100 million over 10 years to develop new strategies to minimise harm from a range of invasive species, including cats, feral deer and weeds.

Feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park must be urgently and humanely managed to reduce impacts on the park and surrounds. The law protecting wild horses must be repealed.

# BETTER BUSHFIRE PREPARATION AND RECOVERY

**The 2019-20 bushfire season was devastating for people and biodiversity in NSW. More than 2,000 homes were lost, 38% of the national park estate was burnt and 55 national parks had more than 99% of their area affected by fire.**

The NSW Bushfire Inquiry made 76 recommendations broadly supported by the environment movement as an opportunity for evidence-based reform of bushfire management. Unfortunately, this has not occurred.

Bushfire management in NSW still does not adequately protect environmental assets through planning processes or emergency responses, and its approach to hazard reduction is frequently ineffective and ecologically harmful.

Community engagement in bushfire preparation and post-fire recovery is a long way from where it needs to be.

Rather than adhering strictly to the recommendations of the inquiry, the government has introduced harmful legislation and policies that ignore or misrepresent the bushfire inquiry's recommendations. These measures should be reversed or amended.

The following priority actions will improve the resilience of communities in bushfire-prone areas, maintain biodiversity and prevent species extinctions, as well as determining the role cultural burning can play in the fire management mix.

Changing how we deal with bushfires in NSW requires transparency, deference to expertise, and candour from government. Government and the community should take a big-picture approach to how we live with fire by recognising its role in nature and the need for communities to adapt to a bushfire environment driven by climate change.

This section has been proudly endorsed by **Independent Bushfire Group**

# PRIORITY POLICIES

## 8.1 REPEAL THE RURAL BOUNDARY CLEARING CODE

**The Rural Boundary Clearing Code threatens thousands of hectares of wildlife habitat by allowing landholders to clear 25m strips of vegetation along their boundaries.**

The policy poses a serious threat to nature by potentially allowing thousands of hectares of wildlife habitat to be cleared without independent assessment or monitoring of the ecological impacts. This reform was not recommended by the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and does not reduce fire risk in extreme fire conditions. It is not justified by science or by recent experience. Many bushfire management proposals can result in damaging environmental outcomes, often because fire ecologists, environment stakeholders and the community are not meaningfully engaged or consulted.

## 8.2 REVOKE IGNITION MANAGEMENT ZONES TO PROTECT ECOSYSTEMS

**The NSW Government's new Ignition Management Zones (IMZs) pose significant risk to sensitive ecosystems by mandating ineffective and ecologically harmful hazard reduction on ridgetops in national parks.**

Hazard reduction burning on ridgetops and in wilderness areas was not recommended by the Bushfire Inquiry and there is no evidence IMZs will reduce the risk of bushfires spreading. There is clear evidence, however, that more frequent burning will degrade wildlife habitats and put extinction pressure on threatened species. IMZs should be removed as a hazard reduction option.

## 8.3 PRIORITISE PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL ASSETS

**Recognising cultural and environmental assets in local bushfire management plans by creating a new category of protection for Assets of Intergenerational Significance for special protection was a positive move.**

The conservation movement applauds the initiative and urges the NSW Government to extend these new protections to all threatened species and ecological communities. Furthermore, unburned and partially burnt bushland must be protected as wildlife refuges, and low flammability vegetation that helps to slow the spread of fire must be actively protected. Crude measures like annual hazard reduction targets for agencies should be abandoned and replaced with more nuanced and ecologically sustainable measures.

## 8.4 ELEVATE THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**The Bushfire Inquiry Report recognises the value of well-informed and well-prepared communities to complement the role of land managers and fire agencies.**

However, the lack of community engagement has been a strategic failure, with communities often not engaged until bushfires hit. The NSW Government must develop a state-wide Bushfire Strategic Plan (BSP) that incorporates active participation by local communities in the development of local Bush Fire Risk Management Plans. The BSP should account for the impacts of climate change and provide a uniform approach for identifying environmental and cultural assets that require protection, at local and landscape scales. The government should facilitate delivery of long-term community engagement programs tailored to local needs.

## 8.5 ADEQUATELY RESOURCE RAPID BUSHFIRE SUPPRESSION

**Suppressing bushfires soon after ignition significantly reduces risk to life and property, and minimises the loss of environmental and cultural assets.**

While the ability of key agencies to respond to bushfires has increased since 2019-20, the government still struggles to respond rapidly with sufficient resources to bushfires that start in remote areas. Government and firefighting agencies must develop strategies for the rapid, substantial, temporary increase in fire-fighting capacity to protect wildlife habitat and reduce the use of large-scale, high-risk backburns when bushfires expand to landscape scales. During the Black Summer bushfires, several backburns became uncontrolled, significantly extending the footprint of the original fire without controlling or containing it. Large-scale backburns should be considered only when all ecological and cultural values, and potential impacts of the backburn have been fully considered.

# RESTORE RIVERS AND WETLANDS

**Healthy rivers and wetlands are essential for native wildlife, First Nations cultural heritage and local communities. Rivers support a diverse range of industries, from floodplain grazing and food production to tourism and recreational fishing.**

The rivers and wetlands of NSW have endured extreme stress after decades of catchment degradation, water-course diversion and unsustainable water extraction.

Climate change is no longer a distant threat, it is here now, rewriting the record books.

In the few short years since the last state election, the most severe drought on record has seen perennial rivers shrivel to pools, and a series of devastating floods that were previously unimaginable.

Never has it been more important for water in NSW to be managed in a equitable and transparent manner—respecting basic human rights and the environment above economic uses and private interests.

However, hundreds of billions of litres of water in the Murray-Darling Basin has been given away as floodplain harvesting licences, which means downstream ecosystems and communities are being left short.

On the coast, the volume of water that can be captured in private dams has tripled.

Water is so much more than a commodity to be managed and exploited for profit: it sustains all life and benefits all if managed wisely in tune with nature. There's no life on a dead river.

# PRIORITY POLICIES

## 9.1 MANAGE WATER SYSTEMS AS AN INTEGRATED WHOLE

**Rivers, wetlands, floodplains, groundwater, coastal lagoons and marine systems are connected, and do not recognise state borders.**

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan is a world-first across-borders plan to prevent the ecological collapse of the Basin during the millennium drought. The science dictated that the Basin had to be managed as a connected whole, and all governments agreed. As each state and territory held on to their right to allocate and manage water access, each jurisdiction was required to develop interconnected Water Resource Plans, breaking down the 'silo' style of water management that created many of the rivers' problems. NSW is the only state yet to have an accredited Water Resource Plan, three years after the agreed deadline. In the spirit of collaboration, and with the survival of the Basin rivers and wetlands in mind, NSW must stop the obfuscation and deliver sound Water Resource Plans as a matter of urgency.

## 9.2 BAN THE USE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WATER FOR AGRICULTURE

**Water set aside for the environmental health of rivers in Water Sharing Plans is being used for other purposes, including licensing floodplain harvesting and extraction for agriculture and industry.**

Broadly, there are two types of environmental water in NSW:

- Water held in environmental licences is actively managed to support native fish breeding, ensure rivers connect to each other, and to flood wetland areas.
- Planned environmental water is the water that is left in river after irrigation and all other demands have been met.

The way planned environmental water is described in Water Sharing Plans varies from valley to valley, but should be consistent across NSW. The models that are used to manage water in rivers and groundwater aquifers need to be significantly improved so they can identify and protect environmental water.

## 9.3 WATER TAKE MUST BE ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE AND METERED

**Out-of-date rainfall data is used to work out how much water can be extracted from rivers and groundwater aquifers.**

The climate has moved on, and so must the way limits on water extraction are determined. Extraction limits in all water sources must be scientifically determined, environmentally sustainable and consider the impacts of climate change. For any extraction limit to be meaningful, all water extraction must be metered. The recent increase in water harvesting rights along the coast to 30% of all rainfall is a significant increase in unmetred water take, and a threat to downstream ecosystems and town water supplies. The limit must be returned to 10%. Loopholes in the metering policy must be closed and all water take must be metered, including for smaller pumps, stock and domestic purposes.

## 9.4 RULE OUT NEW DAMS

**The NSW Government must promote more efficient water use instead of expanding dams or building new ones.**

There is increasing awareness of the importance of water, particularly after the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires and the preceding drought. This has led to a public awareness and appetite for water preservation strategies, including purified recycled water. 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, and Ramsar-listed wetlands. Recent dam proposals, like Dungowan Dam, are not in the public interest. More efficient and equitable water use should be prioritised over dams or extensions.

## 9.5 IMPROVE FIRST NATIONS' ACCESS TO WATER

**First Nations people have had their rights to water ignored for too long, despite countless promises by governments.**

Since colonisation, First Nations peoples have been dispossessed of their rights to access water. There exist barriers that prohibit First Nations peoples access to water at levels required to continue cultural practices, protect their sacred sites and strengthen community health and wellbeing. There must be a program of structural adjustment that transfers ownership of water from current licence holders to First Nations communities to meet their social, cultural and economic aspirations.

# SAFEGUARD OCEAN WILDLIFE

**The state's marine estate is a massive area that includes the ocean, estuaries, beaches, dunes, headlands, islands and coastal wetlands, seaward to three nautical miles (5.5km). Marine Parks in NSW extend along 500km of coastline, which is about 30% of the state's coastal edge, yet only 7% of the state's marine waters are conserved as sanctuary zones.**

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

Marine conservation in NSW has gone backwards over the past decade. Sanctuary zones, which should afford marine life maximum protections, have been white-anted by a series of rollbacks.

Fifteen of the state's marine sanctuary zones have been compromised by scientifically unjustified amnesties on illegal fishing.

Shark meshing continues to kill threatened and protected species despite strong community opposition, non-lethal alternatives and no scientifically demonstrable benefit to human safety.

Threats to the marine environment, especially those associated with climate change, are mounting.

The NSW Government must act now to protect our priceless marine ecosystems by expanding the state's network of protected and enforced marine parks and sanctuary zones, including no take areas, by ending shark meshing and by reducing pollution and investing in marine science and community participation.

## PRIORITY POLICIES

### 10.1

#### CREATE MARINE PARKS FOR THE SYDNEY AND EDEN BIOREGIONS

**The coastal waters of the Hawkesbury Shelf Bioregion (Sydney) and the Twofold Shelf Bioregion (Eden) support some of the state's most astonishing marine ecosystems and species.**

Despite these regions' outstanding biodiversity values, they do not enjoy the legal protections and active management they deserve and would receive if they were part of a Marine Park with adequate sanctuary zone protections. The NSW Government in 2018 aborted a process it initiated to create Sydney Marine Park after a misinformation campaign by vocal but limited fishing interests. Little if any progress has been made in relation to the Twofold Shelf Marine Park, even though the *2012 NSW Independent Scientific Audit of Marine Parks in NSW* identified the need for greater protection in that region.

### 10.2

#### DECLARE 30% OF MARINE WATERS SANCTUARY ZONES

**The Commonwealth Government has committed to the international target of protecting 30% of marine waters by 2030. NSW must play its part by protecting 30% of state waters and marine bioregions in sanctuary zones.**

Sanctuary zones give marine life the highest level of legal protection, like national parks do for wildlife. Protection of 30% of marine waters is required to ensure essential ecological processes are self-sustaining. The state's network of sanctuaries must protect all types of habitats, species and ecological communities in order for them to adhere to the principles of comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) reserve design. Any CAR reserve system must include resourced and policed marine protected areas that safeguard the waters around Sydney (Hawkesbury Shelf Bioregion) and Eden on the far south coast (Twofold Shelf Bioregion).

### 10.3

#### END THE AMNESTY ON ILLEGAL FISHING IN SANCTUARY ZONES

**In 2019, the NSW Government lifted a fishing ban in many sanctuary zones in marine parks, declaring an amnesty on illegal fishing.**

This change—made against scientific advice and without wide community consultation—has not been formalised and the future of the sanctuary zones remains unresolved. The first round of cuts to marine sanctuary protections began in 2013. A third round of sanctuary cuts is underway and government review processes lack rigour and transparency. Conservation groups are alarmed by the prospect that the review of marine park zoning expected in the second half of 2022 could remove more sanctuaries. The NSW Government must lead the conservation agenda with a bold vision for the marine estate that includes more and larger marine parks and sanctuary zones.

### 10.4

#### INVEST \$20M TO ESTABLISH FIVE MARINE SCIENCE CENTRES

**Communities in regions adjacent to marine parks are clamouring for marine science education and research centres to enhance local appreciation of the need for marine conservation and to leverage the power of citizen science.**

While community support for marine conservation and sanctuary zones is very high, general understanding of the state's marine environments is still very limited. Community education is key to maintaining public support and deepening community engagement in marine conservation. The NSW Government should invest \$20 million over the next 10 years in Marine Science Education and Research Centres attached to the state's five mainland marine parks — Cape Byron, Solitary Islands (Coffs Harbour), Port Stephens-Great Lakes, Jervis Bay and Batemans. These centres will be hubs for community science projects that will help refine marine management policies and practices specific to the needs of each region.

### 10.5

#### INVEST \$80M OVER 10 YEARS IN MARINE CONSERVATION RESEARCH

**Funding for expert scientific input into marine conservation policy formulation and decision making has declined significantly over the past decade and must be restored.**

Southern Cross University (SCU) Marine Science Centre has lost its director and the SCU Lismore campus has lost its marine scientist, leaving Cape Byron and the Solitary Islands marine park committees without university-led scientific representation. The Batemans Marine Park has had no scientific staff for several years. The nearest NSW marine park scientist is at Port Stephens and the nearest coastal research centre is at Wollongong University (UOW). The NSW Government should fill the gaps created by the withdrawal of federal funding by providing \$8 million a year over 10 years to the University of Technology Sydney, SCU, UOW, and the Sydney Institute of Marine Science (SIMS) to provide expert advice on parks management and advise on the creation of marine parks for the Sydney and Eden regions.

# PLANNING LAWS FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE

**All development in NSW—from the smallest home renovation to the largest multi-billion-dollar infrastructure project—occurs within the framework of state planning laws and development approval processes.**

Development has profound and far-reaching consequences for nature and communities. Planning law should mandate ecological sustainability as a prime consideration rather than be just a regulatory instrument to accommodate growth. The environment movement has a deep and abiding interest in planning law reform and a commitment to genuine public participation in decision making at every level.

Enhanced public participation in planning decisions was, in fact, a key plank of the platform the Coalition parties took to the 2011 state election. Sadly, the new government quickly abandoned that commitment and tried to impose a new planning act that would have increased developer rights, diminished community rights, and accelerated environmental degradation.

The bill was blocked in the Upper House after a powerful community campaign.

Little of consequence occurred after that until former planning minister Rob Stokes two years ago proposed a Design and Place State Environment Planning Policy (SEPP) that would have dragged urban design standards into the 21st century and prepared communities for the impacts of climate change, including extreme heat.

However, just weeks before extensive public consultation was due to end, the developer lobby intervened to protect its financial interests by having the minister removed and the proposed SEPP scrapped.

A decade has been lost. Whoever sits on the government benches after March 2023 has much work to do.

With the twin climate and extinction crises now upon us, it has never been more important to reform our planning system to serve the interests of the people by urgently operationalising the principles of ecologically sustainable development and empowering the people to determine what shape their world takes over the next 100 years.

## PRIORITY POLICIES

### 11.1

### SLASH EMISSIONS AND MAKE COMMUNITIES CLIMATE READY

**The planning system must be further reformed to urgently address the challenges of climate change.**

**Emissions:** The planning system must do this by reducing carbon emissions at all stages of the planning process, construction and use by mandating carbon-neutral building construction materials and practices; mandating passive solar design and setting more rigorous minimum thermal performance standards; and ruling out gas connections for new dwellings.

Major projects should require climate impact statements that set out their emissions, including downstream emissions, and climate change impacts and risks.

All new buildings and precincts must be designed to achieve zero operational carbon emissions, reduce running energy costs, and be powered with 100% renewable electricity.

**Adaptation:** The government must set best-practice building and urban design standards to protect communities from climate extremes, including flood, bushfire, rising sea levels, and extreme heat.

All planning instruments, including land-use zoning, must be reviewed and updated every five years to reflect the latest climate science to protect communities, especially those on floodplains, on the bushland fringe and along waterfronts.

The government should prohibit urban development in high-risk zones and coordinate the orderly and socially equitable relocation of affected communities.

### 11.2

### RESTORE COMMUNITY INPUT AND EXPERT AGENCY CONCURRENCE

**Community input into planning and development decisions has diminished over the past 10 years while the rights of property developers have increased.**

To ensure the planning system serves the interests of the community, not developers, it must be reformed to guarantee public participation at key moments in strategic planning and development assessment.

This includes restoring third-party merits appeal rights that were once enshrined in the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* so communities affected by development have at least equal standing with the property development industry.

Public appeal and review rights should apply to all State Significant Development (SSD) and State Significant Infrastructure (SSI), including mining, coal seam gas, and petroleum extraction and exploration proposals.

Significant developments must not be approved by the Planning Department without concurrence of agencies with expertise in health, water, biodiversity, bushfire, heritage and other disciplines.

### 11.3

### OVERHAUL AND STRICTLY LIMIT USE OF BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS

**The government's biodiversity offset scheme, introduced with the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, is plagued with flaws. The NSW Auditor-General found that it was dysfunctional, lacked integrity and transparency and failed to protect nature.**

More than 1,020 plants and animals are now threatened with extinction in NSW, about 20 more than when the latest offsets scheme was introduced. The system is clearly failing.

The government has conceded the offsets calculation methodology is deficient and ordered a review. This will not address the fundamental shortcomings of the scheme.

A core problem is the system attempts to reduce nature to financial formulas that can never capture the true value, complexity and interconnectedness of ecosystems.

The government must impose an immediate moratorium on new offset trades, and conduct a comprehensive, independent review. The government must also rule out use of offsetting to permit destruction of high-conservation-value habitat, including of critically endangered ecological communities. Any future offsets scheme must be based on best-practice principles and be strictly limited to offsetting losses accrued as a result of genuinely essential and unavoidable development impacts.

# STRIVE FOR ZERO WASTE

**We are polluting our waterways and oceans with plastics at an alarming rate. NSW generates 800,000 tonnes of plastics every year, yet only 10% is recycled.**

While much of this material is deposited in landfill, a significant fraction escapes the waste stream and ends up choking our waterways, littering bushland, and posing a serious threat to wildlife. Micro plastics have now even entered our food chains and are compromising human health.

State and federal governments have responded to these challenges, at least partially, in the past few years. The Federal Government has stopped the export of some unprocessed wastes and state and federal governments have partnered with business to invest in more domestic recycling capacity.

The NSW Government has banned some single-use plastics and adopted a *Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041* and *Plastics Action Plan* (June 2021) that seeks to reduce the total waste each person generates by 10% by 2030.

The strategy includes targets to recover 80% of all waste, reduce litter by 60% and reduce plastic litter by 30% by 2025, and triple the plastics recycling rate by 2030.

While all these measures are welcome, NSW still lags other states on the road to a circular economy, where production and consumption is minimised by maximising product reuse, repair and recycling.

## PRIORITY POLICIES

### 12.1

#### **BAN HEAVIER PLASTIC BAGS, SET A REUSABLE STANDARD BY 2023**

**The NSW Government banned lightweight plastic bags in June 2022—the last state to do so.**

The government has unnecessarily delayed the phase-out of so-called “reusable” heavyweight plastic bags (used only once or a very limited number of times) and plastic cups (non-EPS) until consideration in 2025. Under pressure from the retail lobby and manufacturers, NSW has slowed this transition. WA and Qld are moving much quicker as are some major retail chains. The NSW Government should commit to bringing forward a ban on these heavier bags to December 2023. Key to this move is adoption of a reusables standard as proposed by the Boomerang Alliance.

### 12.2

#### **DIVERT >50% OF FOOD & GARDEN ORGANICS FROM LANDFILL BY 2026**

**Across Australia, 14.3 million tonnes of organic wastes (primarily food organics, garden organics, timber and biosolids) was generated in 2018-19, with 6.87 million tonnes deposited in landfill.**

Disposing of food and garden organics (FOGOs) in landfills not only accelerates the depletion of landfill sites, it squanders a valuable raw material for making fertilisers and generating energy. It also means food that has taken energy and water to produce and transport is wasted. As Australia’s most populous state, NSW generates a significant bulk of the nation’s FOGO and must play a leading role in the wise use of this resource. This includes ensuring investment in food rescue and consumer education strategies that support halving food waste by 2030. While the NSW Government is aiming to have FOGO recycling by 2030, we are yet to see a detailed implementation plan. An interim target should be a 50% diversion rate by 2026.

### 12.3

#### **OPPOSE ENERGY GENERATION FROM WASTES OTHER THAN FOGOS**

**Corporate interests are exerting increasing pressure on governments to approve large waste-to-energy plants that use thermal or chemical processes to generate electricity.**

Energy plants that use non-organic wastes as fuel generate toxic waste, and do not progress NSW towards a circular economy, where product reuse, repair and recycling are optimised. Waste-to-energy plants will potentially divert material from recovery and recycling streams for up to 25 years through long-term supply contracts. The plants should be opposed by government not given subsidies or special planning permissions.

### 12.4

#### **EXPAND THE RETURN AND EARN SCHEME**

**Since its introduction in 2017, the NSW Government’s container refund scheme, Return and Earn, has collected billions of containers through more than 600 return points.**

The scheme has significantly reduced the number of containers that end up in our parks and waterways and on our beaches. However, there is still much to do. The government should expand the scheme to include wine and spirit bottles and non-beverage containers, particularly plastics and reusable containers, by the end of 2023. It should audit the safety of small refund sites and negotiate with supermarkets to establish return-to-retail sites across the state.

### 12.5

#### **LEGISLATE MATERIAL USE TO ENHANCE RECYCLING**

**Much is said about contamination of recycling bins in the home, but various labels are confusing.**

Rather than put the onus on consumers, the government should require manufacturers to simplify the mix of materials they use in packaging.

The government should use new powers in the state’s circular economy legislation to require producers to improve product design to better enable source separation and recycling.

## ABOUT US

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 almost 70 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.

## OUR WINS

We take inspiration from our past wins. Since we were formed in 1955, we have driven the expansion of the state's national parks system, which now protects millions of hectares of precious bushland and wildlife habitat on land and almost 30% of our coastal waters.

We have helped formulate laws that preserve our unique native plants and animals and protect stunning landscapes and wildernesses areas.

We have been the driving force behind better bushfire management, new measures to control pollution and deforestation, and strong laws that protect the water we drink and the air we breathe.





Photo I Max Phillips

## This platform has been proudly endorsed by:

Australia New Guinea Fishes Association NSW Inc. (ANGFA NSW)  
Australian Conservation Foundation - Shoalhaven Branch  
Australian Wildlife Society  
Better Planning Network (BPN)  
Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.  
Boatharbour Landcare  
Brooman State Forest Conservation Group  
Caldera Environment Centre Inc.  
Canobolas Conservation Alliance  
Clarence Environment Centre Inc.  
Climate Action Monaro  
Climate Action Newcastle Inc.  
Climate Action Burwood/Canada Bay  
Climate Change Australia Hastings (CCA-H)  
Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle  
Comms Declare  
Cumberland Bird Observers Club Inc.  
Dubbo Environment Group Inc  
ECCO (Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange)  
EcoNetwork-Port Stephens Inc.  
Fit for Life Mudgee  
Friends of Berowra Valley Inc.  
Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment Inc (FOKE)  
Friends of Malabar Headland  
Friends of the Forest (Mogo)  
Friends of the Koala Inc.  
Friends of the Mongarlowe River, The  
Green Shareholders  
Hawkesbury Environment Network  
Healthy Rivers Dubbo  
Humane Society International Australia  
Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.  
Indigenous Justice Advocacy Network  
K2WLink Incorporated  
Kyogle Environment Group  
Lake Wollumboola Protection Association Inc.  
Lismore Environment Centre  
Lithgow Environment Group  
Manyana Matters Environmental Association Inc  
Mudgee District Environment Group Inc.  
My Outdoor Recreational Group  
National Parks Association of NSW Inc.  
Native Bird Liberation Alliance  
Nature Coast Marine Group  
Nimbin Environment Centre  
North Coast Environment Council Inc.  
North East Forest Alliance (NEFA)  
North Head Sanctuary Foundation (in principle)  
North Lismore Plateau Protection Association Inc.  
Northern Rivers Guardians Inc.  
NSW Bush Carers  
NSW Wildlife Council Inc.  
Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society  
Parramatta Climate Action Network (ParraCAN)  
Protecting Your Suburban Environment Inc (PYSE)  
Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales  
Ryde Hunters Hill Flora & Fauna Preservation Society Inc.  
Ryde-Gladesville Climate Change Action Group  
Rylstone District Environmental Society (RDES)  
Saving Sydneys Trees  
South Coast Health and Sustainability Alliance (SHASA)  
South East Region Conservation Alliance (SERCA)  
STEP Inc.  
Surfrider Foundation Australia  
Sustainable Living Armidale  
The Coastwatchers Association Inc.  
The Goulburn Group  
The Point ESG News Site  
The Word Agency  
Total Environment Centre Inc.  
Transition Dubbo  
Tree Veneration Society  
Tweed Water Alliance  
Wando Conservation and Cultural Centre Inc.  
Willoughby Environmental Protection Association (WEPA) Inc.  
Wolli Creek Preservation Society Inc.

Nature Conservation  
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## CONTACT



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