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ABSTRACT SPECIFICATIONS

Title: Protecting the Outback- The need to think big in conservation

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Abstract: The Outback is one of the few vast natural places remaining intact on Earth. It covers 73% of the Australian continent. It includes a wide range of ecosystems deserts, Mediterranean woodlands, tropical savannah, rainforest and wetlands. While the ecosystems vary there are similar set of threats, industries, tenures and geo-politics across the whole of the Outback. Consequently, conservation and development solutions in one region will tend to be of value throughout. The Outback is facing two main types of threats: extensive degrading threats and more localised but destructive threats due to intensive industrial and agricultural projects. The degrading threats are predominantly changed fire regimes and introduced invasive species. A key problem in many regions is now a lack of active human management to control wildfires, and introduced plants and animals. To ensure the best resilience to global warming, maintenance of ecological processes and connectivity across the Outback, major increases are required in protected areas, combined with sustainable off-reserve management. However, approaches to conservation of its vast landscapes have often relied on using piecemeal approaches for conservation developed for largely cleared and fragmented areas of more settled parts of Australia. New approaches are needed that are the reverse of the usual approach of place by place environmental assessments for industry, while leaving large areas empty of active management. Instead, a range of types of protected areas are needed over vast landscapes, within which more intensive industry nodes are permitted outside areas of high conservation value. This is already happening in parts, especially through the creation of huge new Indigenous Protected Areas. However, 'development' in the Outback needs to move beyond more 19th century models of simple extraction-based economies that do not build lasting social, economic or environmental development in remote Australia.