



As the organisation representing environmental professionals across Australia and New Zealand, we urge all political parties and politicians to do more to develop and implement laws, policies and management practices that protect and enhance environmental values.

Australians are stewards of vast areas of the planet's land, sea and sky. As a community, we have a responsibility to protect and maintain these environments as a basis for a vibrant economy, healthy society, and a planet that sustains life in all its forms.

The issue of ecologically sustainable development has been on the national agenda since 1992, when the Australian, State, and Territory governments entered into the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment and the "National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development" was published.

The September 2018 University of Melbourne study "Examining the most important issues in Australia: similarities and differences across two generations",<sup>1</sup> reported that participants ranked 'the environment' as the top concern out of ten. A lack of leadership on environmental issues was identified by participants as a key driver of their concerns.

Recent studies have shown that:

- 63% of Australians now agree that they are an environmentalist at heart (compared to 55% in March 2000 and 57% in March 2013).
- A high proportion of Australians (68%) believe that a healthy environment and a prosperous economy go hand in hand, and 20% believe that the environment needs to be protected even if it impacts economic prosperity.<sup>2</sup>
- 77% of small businesses and 74% of medium sized businesses are concerned about the environment and sustainability.<sup>3</sup>

Environmental law, policy and management are core issues of concern to Australians that cannot be ignored by political parties and politicians.



## Australia needs strong environmental leadership

All political parties and politicians must actively lead their constituencies towards a positive environmental future for Australia. Without a healthy environment, the nation's prosperity and resilience is harmed.

Australia's future depends on effective and consistent leadership on environmental laws, policies, and management practices. This leadership needs to:

- be evidence-based, using the best and most recent science;
- incorporate expert advice and stakeholder views;
- consistently follow the well-established principles of ecologically sustainable development;
- be future focussed having regard to population and climate change; and,
- have both domestic and global dimensions.

The EIANZ seeks a strong commitment from all political parties and politicians to give priority to leading the renewal of environmental laws, policies and management practices that bring about positive national and global environmental outcomes.



## Environmental practitioners are part of the solution

An important step in improving the implementation of environmental law, policies and management practices can be achieved through the engagement of suitably qualified and experienced environmental practitioners. The burden of environmental regulation has for too long fallen solely to governments.

Every day, environmental practitioners undertake the practical work of protecting species, undertaking environmental monitoring and research, and managing diverse environments. They advise decision-makers on the environmental threats, risks, and opportunities associated with their decisions. Environmental practitioners work in all sectors and at all levels.

The "Australian Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Science Survey 2017"<sup>4</sup> ranked scientists among the top four leading contributors to the wellbeing of society, along with doctors, engineers and farmers. The Australian Government Job Outlook<sup>5</sup> for environmental scientists reports that the profession grew moderately over the past 5 years and is expected to grow very strongly over the next 5 years: from 25,900 in 2017 to 31,600 by 2022.

The last three decades has seen the environment profession emerge as an ethical, skilled, self-regulating contributor to the implementation of environmental laws and management of the environment. Members of the profession are affiliated with relevant professional organisations, and have their proficiency certified through robust, independent, peer-based programs. They are held accountable to rigorous codes of ethics and professional conduct which is assured through independent disciplinary processes.

Environmental practitioners are capable of regulating environmental performance through ethical and professional practice standards. By authorising documentation, they can ensure that environmental impacts are properly assessed, monitored, managed and remediated in accordance with the law. Contracting standards can ensure that environmental practitioners are engaged to oversee the environmental performance of works and services.

The EIANZ calls on all political parties and politicians to commit to mandating the use of suitably qualified and experienced practitioners in environmental approvals, monitoring, reporting, and management practices.

## Key challenges requiring urgent action

Australia faces many environmental challenges as it adjusts to a world challenged by continuing population growth and changing climatic conditions. The most urgent of these challenges are:

- **Climate change** – Australia must create stable, credible laws, policies and institutions that deliver effective action to substantially reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions over the medium term.
- **Threatened species and communities** – Australia's unique species are under pressure from threatening processes such as pest plants and feral animals, habitat destruction and pollution. Well-coordinated, long term, national effort is required to reverse the loss of biodiversity, particularly threatened species and ecosystems.
- **Water management** – The episodic and unpredictable nature of water flows in the Australian environment are particularly challenging. Increasing demand for water is placing pressure on ground waters, rivers and wetlands. Implementation of a long term national strategy is required to ensure that Australia's water resources are sustainably managed.
- **Environmental law and policy** – Australia's environmental regulatory regime needs an overhaul, because the existing system is not aligned and does not adequately protect the environment. The next generation of national environmental laws, policies and management practices require the same effort and community engagement that shaped the development of the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development 1992.<sup>6</sup>



# Climate Change

The nation urgently needs stable, credible laws, policies and institutions that deliver effective actions to substantially reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions over the medium-term. If Australia fails to implement such activities, its businesses, people, and environments will be diminished. The evidence is clear – it is more cost effective to facilitate climate adaptation than to wait until it is a dire necessity. The Australian business and private sector is already showing the way with the adoption of renewable energy generation and storage technologies, and lower carbon automotive technologies. It is time now for effective political leadership and governance.

The divisive political debate on climate change adaptation policy must cease. Importantly, the misleading debate on the fundamental scientific basis of climate change must stop. A [recent survey](#) commissioned by the Australian Government found that over 80 per cent of Australians accept that there is solid evidence that the Earth has been 'getting warmer over the last few decades', and over two thirds of these respondents were of the view that this was mostly due to human activity.<sup>7</sup>

There is community support for the outcomes of the Paris Conference of Parties on Climate Change.

Decision-makers at all levels must work to understand the latest climate science and the anticipated impacts of climate change effects on ecosystems and the human environment. For example, the recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change outlines the risks and likely impacts of a 1.5 degree increase in temperature versus higher alternatives<sup>8</sup>.

## The EIANZ calls on all political parties and politicians to:

- Support immediate development and implementation of policies and programs that ensure substantially reduced domestic carbon emissions. This must include policy innovation in the areas of:
  - Energy generation and efficiency
  - Enforceable pricing of carbon emissions across all sectors of the economy
  - Transition to low or no carbon emission technologies, particularly in transport and industry
  - Removing disincentives and subsidies that act against achieving emission reduction targets.
- Support scientific research and technological innovation that improves understanding of the impacts of climate change and adaptive capacity.
- Prioritise the development and implementation of policies and programs that build adaptive capacity and resilience to climate change impacts, particularly in relation to infrastructure and land use practices.
- Demonstrate international leadership on climate change adaptation, particularly through support of climate change adaptation strategies by neighbouring states in South East Asia and Oceania.



# Threatened Species and Communities

**Australia is home to unique species and ecological communities, and we are responsible for ensuring their survival. Australia's special flora and fauna can successfully live and grow with human activities and communities, provided that development is sustainable and environmental impacts are appropriately managed.**

Australia's landscapes, ecosystems, and the species of which they are composed are under pressure from pest plants and feral animals, habitat destruction and pollution. Key drivers of these pressures are human population growth and climate change. These pressures are evident at large and small scales, from the Great Barrier Reef and the Murray-Darling Basin system, to individual threatened species. Reducing these pressures requires a strategic

national approach based on good scientific research, investment in conservation and recovery programs, and monitoring and reporting of achievements.

We note the success that has been achieved by the national "Threatened Species Strategy".<sup>9</sup> We also note that the strategy set goals to be achieved by 2020, and that the annual reports to the Minister by the Threatened Species Commissioner indicate that there are activities that are at risk of not meeting performance targets.

Australia needs strong leadership and investment in the effective protection and (where possible) restoration of our flora, fauna, and landscapes.

## The EIANZ calls on all political parties and politicians to commit to:

- Increase Australian Government funding for the national Threatened Species initiative.
- Double the 2017/2018 level of investment made by philanthropic organisations and business enterprises through the Threatened Species Prospectus initiative.
- Increase Australian Government investment in systematically documenting the diversity, status and habitats of Australia's flora and fauna.
- Engage and enlist rural property owners in the landscape scale eradication of feral cats.
- Strengthen investment in community-based citizen science and conservation of threatened species and habitats through the National Landcare Program.



# Water Management

The 2016 State of Environment Report<sup>10</sup> recognised the ecological significance of Australia's above and below ground inland waters. Looking to the future, the report highlighted the risks associated with changing climatic conditions, the intensity of extreme rainfall events, and extended periods of drought conditions.

Proposals for significant national infrastructure development, particularly in the Snowy Mountains and northern Australia, risk surface-water regime change, habitat destruction and ecological changes to rivers and wetlands. Similarly, the continued development of the coal seam gas industry brings risks of surface-water pollution and changes to groundwater levels.

In its 2017 Report into the National Water Initiative,<sup>11</sup> the Productivity Commission observed that given our dry and highly variable climate, it was imperative that Australia managed its water resources well. While there was evidence of improved ecological outcomes from water reform, there is a need to prevent erosion of hard-won reforms through a return to outdated policies. The report pointed to the need for continuing policy reform to ensure that assessments of new storages and allocations from water resources focussed on environmental sustainability and financial viability.

Under the banners of 'food security' and 'renewable energy' proposals are emerging for the development of new water storages for irrigated agriculture, hydro-power generation, and pumped hydro-power generation. Environmental assessment at a strategic and project level are essential for such national policy initiatives.

## The EIANZ calls on all political parties and politicians to commit to:

- Assessing all new interventions, and modifications to existing interventions in major rivers for their strategic environmental impacts at a landscape scale as well as on a project basis.
- Ensuring that the continuing focus in the Murray-Darling Basin is on securing the environmental flows that are necessary to sustainably return the health of Australia's largest river system.
- Developing a national understanding of the impacts of climatic change and productive use on Australia's groundwater resources, their resilience, and that of their associated dependent ecosystems.
- Developing and implementing a national reporting system for the ecological health of Australia's river basins and groundwater.
- Developing a long-term strategy to sustainably manage the productive use of the Australian landscape through drought conditions without impairing its ecological health.



# Environmental Policy and an informed community

**Australia's legislative and regulatory regime needs an overhaul, because our existing systems are not adequately protecting our environment.**

The effectiveness of our environmental laws, policies and management practices needs to be founded on values of integrity, transparency and accountability.<sup>12</sup> In the view of the Australian Panel of Experts on Environmental Law, Australia's environmental laws, policies and management practices are complex, inconsistent and often duplicative.

Australian environmental law does not acknowledge well the interests of Indigenous Australians, in a way that respects their existing and evolving legal rights regime. Nor does it deal with environmental impact assessment in a way that focusses attention on the landscape scale cumulative impacts of projects and policies. These are the realm of strategic environmental assessment, a too little used method of policy and project assessment.

The complexity of Australian environmental law makes it difficult for business and the community to achieve consistency of environmental outcomes across different jurisdictions. At the very least, there should be collaboration between the Australian, State and Territory governments in the development of bilateral arrangements and National Environmental Protection Measures that establish rules-based principles for environmental assessment and compliance. These should include a general environmental duty to prevent, minimise or repair environmental harm, the precautionary principle, a prevention of environmental harm principle, and a principle of applying good practice environmental management to regulated activities.

Good governance for the protection and management of environmental values is complex. The understanding of Australians about the environment and the ways in which impacts can be mitigated has improved markedly through education, citizen science and community based environmental management programs. There is scope for the Australian Government to do more to develop and implement policies and programs that foster an engaged and scientifically literate society.

## **The EIANZ calls on all political parties and politicians to commit to:**

- Giving thorough consideration to the work of the Australian Panel of Experts on Environmental Law and its recommendations for a new generation of national environmental laws policies and management practices.
- Improving environmental performance standards by providing for more rigorous national environmental monitoring, reporting and compliance.
- Develop and implement both formal and informal environmental education programs to broaden the environmental and scientific literacy of the community.

# About EIANZ

Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ) members have the professional skills required to deliver on these initiatives. The organisation's membership is drawn from all areas of environmental practice, and includes people with industry, government, community, and academic careers.

It is a member-based organisation that:

- requires that its members adhere to a code of ethics and professional conduct
- certifies the proficiency of environmental practitioners
- advocates for good practice environmental management
- accredits academic training for those seeking to enter the profession
- publishes a respected academic journal dealing with environmental management.

In 2017, EIANZ celebrated three decades of building a practitioner community dedicated to ethical and competent environmental practice. The EIANZ connects governments, industry and the community as a source of professional advice on environmental policy and good practice environmental management.

## Notes

- 1 Examining the most important issues in Australia: similarities and differences across two generations" (2018), J Chesters, J Cook, H Cuervo, and J Wyn, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Victoria - [https://education.unimelb.edu.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/2887895/Most-important-issues-report-final-Sept-2018.pdf](https://education.unimelb.edu.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2887895/Most-important-issues-report-final-Sept-2018.pdf) (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 2 "Australian Attitudes to Nature 2017 – Report prepared for WWF-Australia" (2018), Roy Morgan Research, Australia - <http://www.wwf.org.au/ArticleDocuments/353/pub-backyard-barometer-australian-attitudes-to-nature-05jun18.pdf.aspx> (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 3 HP Australia Environmental Sustainability Study 2018" (2018), Hewlett Packard Australia and Planet Ark, Australia - <https://breakdownthebeast.com/report.pdf> (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 4 "The Australian Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Science Survey" (2017), Australian National Centre for Public Awareness of Science, ANU, Canberra - <https://www.science.gov.au/community/Documents/REPORT-SCAPA172001-CPAS-poll.pdf> (Accessed 25/9/2018)
- 5 "Australian Government Job Outlook – Environmental Scientists" - <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupation.aspx?code=2343> (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 6 "National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development" (1992), Ecologically Sustainable Development Steering Committee, Council of Australian Governments, Canberra - <http://www.environment.gov.au/about-us/esd/publications/national-esd-strategy> (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 7 "The Australian Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Science Survey" (2017), Australian National Centre for Public Awareness of Science, ANU, Canberra - <https://www.science.gov.au/community/Documents/REPORT-SCAPA172001-CPAS-poll.pdf> (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 8 IPCC Report 'Global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius – summary for policy-makers' [http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15\\_spm\\_final.pdf](http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf) (Accessed 7/11/2018)
- 9 "Threatened Species Strategy" (2015), Australian Government, Canberra - <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/51b0e2d4-50ae-49b5-8317-081c6afb3117/files/ts-strategy.pdf> (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 10 "Australia – State of the Environment 2016" (2016), Australian Government, Canberra - <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/overview> (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 11 "National Water Reform" Report# 87 (2017), Productivity Commission, Canberra - [https://www.pc.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/228177/water-reform-overview.pdf](https://www.pc.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0009/228177/water-reform-overview.pdf) (Accessed 25/09/2018)
- 12 "Blueprint for the Next Generation of Australian Environmental Law"(2017), Australian Panel of Experts on Environmental Law, Melbourne - <http://apeel.org.au/> (Accessed 25/09/2018)

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