



# OUR ENVIRONMENT, OUR FUTURE

» Policies for the 2015 NSW Election and Beyond - Updated February 2015











# OUR ENVIRONMENT, OUR FUTURE

We, the leading environmental advocacy organisations in New South Wales, are united by a vision of a state in which our society lives sustainably, recognising the limits and services provided by nature and mobilising our capacity for innovation and investment in the future.

We have a vision of a state where:

- » Clean air and fresh water are valued more highly than the demands of powerful vested interests.
- » Our leaders' responsibility to protect the health of citizens is not compromised by fiscal calculation and bureaucratic inaction.
- » Our communities live within natural limits, using precious natural resources wisely and harnessing clean, renewable energy from the sun and wind.
- » Healthy forests, rivers and oceans are populated by thriving populations of native plants and animals.
- » Wild nature is valued for its own sake, and for the inspiration and solace that it provides for so many, from all walks of life.
- » We don't throw resources away after a single use but recycle and reuse.

This vision will not destroy the economy and jobs, as some out of touch with reality and community aspiration might claim. It can create a new economy, that is not reliant on 'short-termism' and backroom deals; and which produces many thousands of sustainable jobs for the future.

In the broad sweep of human history, our generation is the first to be confronted with a stark choice - take urgent action to reduce carbon and other pollution; retain the benefits of the natural systems which give us clean air and water and food; and contribute to stabilising the earth's climate - or face unprecedented changes to our way of life.

The NSW Government has a critical leadership role to play in Australia's diverse economy with its great capacity for innovation, investment and care for the environment.

It's time for our political leaders to chart a new course by adopting a bold, positive vision for environmental protection and nature conservation in NSW.

## Conserving and restoring nature

New South Wales is home to an extraordinary diversity of wildlife, plants and living landscapes.

From the arid red lands of the interior to the sweep of woodlands, and from the sandstone ranges to the deep blue of our oceans, this intricate web of life is fraying under increasing pressure from unsustainable land use, extractive industries, climate change and over-exploitation of natural resources.

It's time to reverse the decline by:

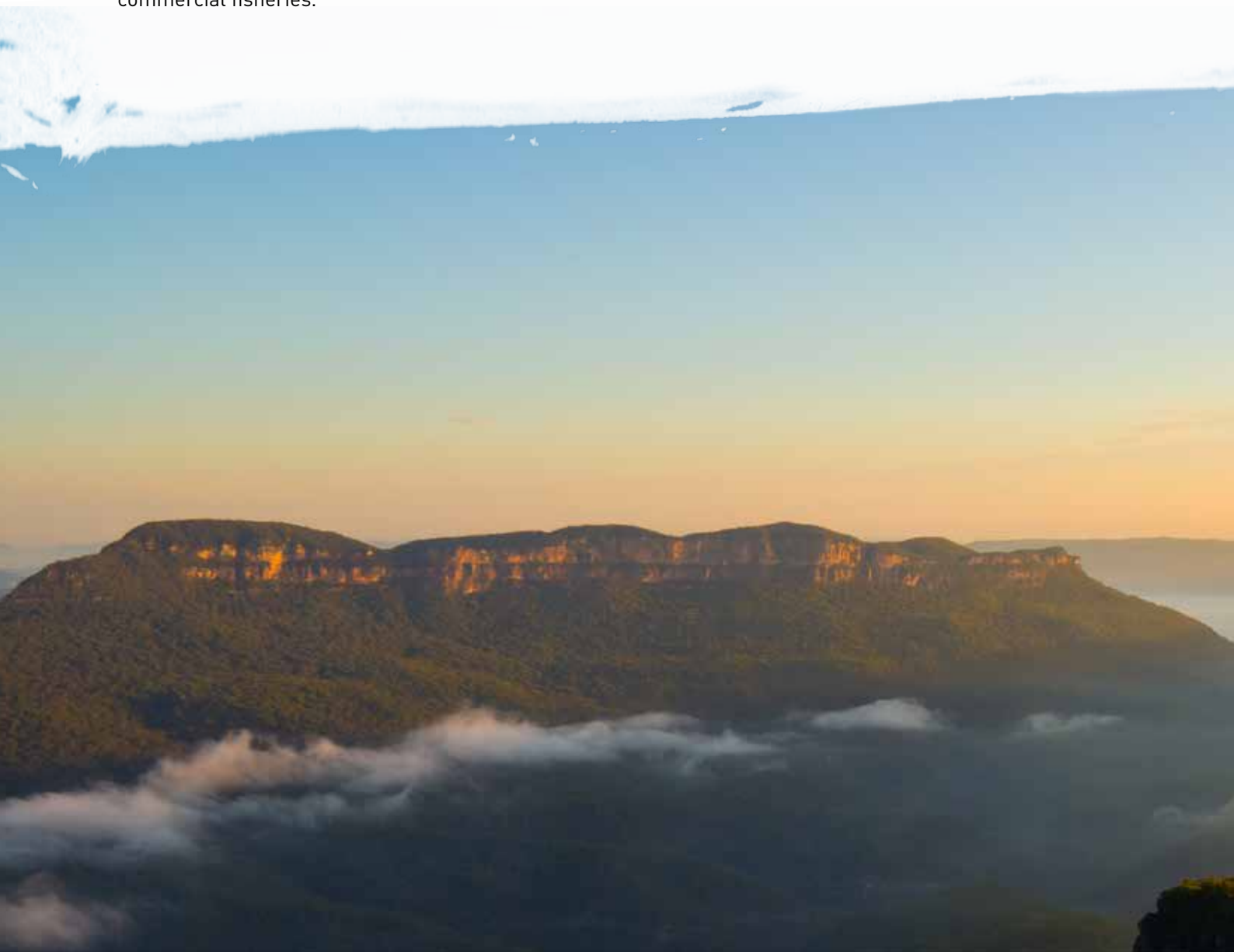
- » Protecting our forests and woodlands for their natural diversity, beauty and rich carbon stores.
- » Investing in action to restore living landscapes and bring threatened species back from the brink.
- » Securing the long-term health of our rivers and wetlands by returning more water to the environment and protecting water catchments.
- » Protecting our oceans by expanding marine sanctuaries and improving management of commercial fisheries.

## Making the switch to clean energy

Rapid improvements in technology and pricing present fresh opportunities to replace polluting energy sources like coal and coal seam gas with energy from the sun, sea and wind. By using energy more wisely and harnessing the power of renewable energy NSW can create opportunities for new employment and economic growth, foster regional development, and reduce our contribution to global climate change.

It is time to make the switch to a clean energy economy by:

- » Driving investment in clean, genuinely renewable energy and committing to a timetable for replacing polluting coal-fired power stations.
- » Committing to an ambitious program for reducing carbon emissions and improving energy efficiency.
- » Ceasing fossil fuel subsidies and putting an end to unrestrained mining and gas expansion.



## Building a sustainable society

With effective political leadership and progressive environmental policy, our state has an opportunity to build a more open, transparent and environmentally responsible society that engages local communities in visionary decisions to protect the environment and create a sustainable way of life.

It is time to protect the environment and live within its natural limits by:

- » Restoring balance, integrity and legitimacy to the planning and development process.
- » Reducing pollution and waste through strong targets and effective policy.
- » Making our urban areas liveable and sustainable by increasing energy and water savings, and expanding active and public transport opportunities and open green space.

**We challenge all political parties and candidates to adopt our call to action on the 25 policies in 'Our Environment, Our Future' so that the next NSW government, working with the community, can make a difference.**





# 1 NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDERNESS

New South Wales has a wonderful system of national parks and wilderness areas. We are a fortunate community to have such magnificent and diverse parks, and people from crowded countries are spellbound by them. Decision making must protect national parks and benefit nature conservation. Growing population pressures, miners, loggers, graziers, commercial developments and even recreational users are causing degradation of these precious areas. We must stop the damage.

Our system of national parks is the cornerstone of conservation in NSW; vital living islands in a sea of developed land. The number of plants and animals that can survive in our parks will continue to shrink unless they are kept intact and linked by conservation efforts across the entire landscape.

Our great parks are not just a scientific storehouse of biodiversity, or places of beauty igniting human creativity and spiritual peace; the future of these precious wild places is bound up with the quality of all life.

## Government track record

Over the past three years, the NSW Government made small additions to the protected area system, by upgrading Dharawal and Berowra to national park status, some additions to existing parks and significantly extending the Nattai Wilderness.

However, the rate of national park establishment has collapsed. New South Wales, once a national leader in nature conservation, is now lagging behind the rest of the country. Our state has the second lowest percentage of land protected in the National Reserve System (9%) after Queensland (7.5%).

Then in April last year, the outgoing Environment Minister approved a trial of horse riding in wilderness, ignoring the Wilderness Act, 1987 and putting the ecological integrity of these areas at risk.

## Solutions

By 2020, at least 17% of NSW ecosystems, especially those of high conservation value, should be conserved and managed through interconnected protected areas and effective nature conservation measures on private land<sup>1</sup>.

Sound nature-focused management of national parks can make them accessible and can draw visitors to appreciate pristine areas, without favouring damaging activities. Visitors do not come to NSW to see parks with grazing cattle, logging and over-developed visitor and commercial facilities.

We call for:

- » **The reservation of new parks and wilderness areas**, including those identified as priority reserve proposals [see Text Box opposite].

- » **Full and timely implementation of the NSW National Parks Establishment Plan**, by directing the National Parks and Wildlife Service to develop funded reserve proposals, allocating additional resources for management of the reserve estate. The establishment plan incorporates the targets for comprehensiveness and representativeness endorsed by the Commonwealth and all states and territories under the Natural Resources Management Ministerial Council's *Directions for the National Reserve System* (NRMCMC 205):

- **Comprehensiveness:**  
Examples of at least 80% of the number of extant regional ecosystems in each bioregion will be represented by 2015
- **Representativeness:**  
Examples of at least 80% of the number of extant regional ecosystems in each sub-bioregion will be represented by 2020.

- » **Management of wilderness to maintain, and where necessary restore, ecological integrity** by excluding visitor facilities and recreational horse riding. Re-establish the Wilderness Unit and a Wilderness Working Group to re-examine NSW wild rivers, and establish a Western Division wilderness reservation program.

<sup>1</sup> Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 under the International Convention on Biological Diversity (ratified by Australia, 1993) [www.cbd.int/sp/targets](http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets)



We call for the following priority reserve proposals to be implemented in the next five years:

- » **The Great Central Woodlands near Bathurst.** This area represents perhaps the greatest concentration of remnant grassy woodlands left in the otherwise heavily converted and cleared south-eastern highlands.
- » Completion of the **linkage from the Dorrigo Plateau to the Border Ranges** to protect priority forest ecosystems, and a significant concentration of future habitat for threatened species like the koala.
- » Draw together the Paroo Darling reserves into a huge **Heart of the Darling Basin protected area near Wilcannia.**
- » Create the **Tinderry Forest Link** to provide a southern link in the Great Eastern Ranges, linking together a chain of state conservation areas and nature reserves to Namadji in the ACT and Wadbilliga National Park to the east.
- » Acquire **Otford Valley Farm to add to the Royal National Park.** These lands form part of an important wildlife corridor between Royal National Park, Garawarra State Conservation Area and the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area and also form part of the Great Eastern Ranges initiative.
- » Reserve the **Gardens of Stone stage two proposal** on the western escarpment of the Blue Mountains. This would protect the most spectacular pagoda landscapes in Australia. Associated with these pagoda landforms are large caves, mazes, ancient montane heathlands, endangered upland swamps, snowgums, grassy woodlands and moist gullies that contain tree ferns, stands of old growth forest and rainforest, and in some places, slot canyons.
- » Upgrade the protection of the Special Areas by **extending Nattai National Park to include the Jellore State Forest, Bargo, Nattai, Burragorang State Conservation Areas and the Upper Nepean State Conservation Area** to a nature reserve to protect the water supply catchment from mining threats and reject the proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall, to protect the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.
- » Reserve lands to form a **corridor in the Upper Lansdowne escarpment**, Mid North Coast, north-east of Taree.
- » Declare **the Drip Gorge part of Goulburn River National Park.** The Drip and Corner Gorge are part of a river corridor that is culturally and aesthetically significant to the region and used for recreational and educational purposes.
- » **Declare the following wilderness areas:** Murrumbidgee wilderness in the Blue Mountains; the coastal wilderness areas of the Moors (Myall Lakes), Sandon and Woolli catchments (Yuraygir NP); the Deua Valley in the Southern Escarpment Forests, the Pilliga in the Brigalow, Tabletop and the Main Range in Kosciuszko National Park, and Coolangubra and Tantawangalo in the South East Forests.
- » In northern NSW acquire and protect **Carrai, Mann River, Timbarra and Cataract wilderness areas.**
- » Establish a **reserve system for koalas**, including the Coffs Harbour-Guy Fawkes and the Bellinger-Nambucca-Macleay koala meta-populations.
- » **Continue to fund the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative** beyond the current commitments to ensure that this good work can continue to deliver excellent conservation and community outcomes for NSW.



# 1 FORESTS, WOODLANDS AND WILDLIFE

The NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee has identified loss and fragmentation of habitat as a key threat to more than 360 threatened species, including 26 critically endangered species.

Land clearing laws have played a critical role in protecting remnant vegetation, reducing erosion and salinity risk, improving catchment health and safeguarding essential wildlife habitat. After decades of unsustainable land clearing the NSW Parliament passed the Native Vegetation Act in 2003, enshrining the principle of ending broad-scale land clearing and applying the 'maintain or improve the environment' test to clearing proposals.

Current logging activities in our native forests are fundamentally unsustainable. Over-allocation of timber resources has resulted in timber being logged faster than it can grow, and limited opportunities for ecologically sustainable forest management. The recent international publicity around wombats being buried alive in Glenbog State Forest has highlighted

the fact that there are no effective laws against animal cruelty in logging operations.

## Government track record

Since coming to office in 2011, the Coalition Government has announced a series of changes to our essential environment laws that have imperiled critical environmental protections.

These include:

- » Commissioning a review of biodiversity laws that recommended replacing the Native Vegetation Act with a new biodiversity framework, which if not done well will result in a huge increase in the amount of native vegetation clearing that is allowed.
- » Overturning the long-standing prohibition on burning of native forests for electricity with the intention of maintaining the woodchip industry and encouraging mass clearing of regenerating native bush.
- » Proposing changes to forestry approvals, including a steep

slope cable logging trial, that represent a substantial erosion of existing environmental protections, with corresponding risks for environmental values in the public native forest estate.

- » The Government has also proposed changes to the management of Crown Land in NSW, with an unbalanced emphasis on the potential financial revenue in crown lands. Historically, there has been a significant failure to recognise areas of high conservation value and the diverse environmental, social and cultural values of Crown Land, including opportunities for low impact recreation, education and scientific research.
- » Introducing the '10/50 rule' which allows all trees within 10 metres of a house in 'bushfire-prone' areas to be cleared. While the affected area was recently reduced, Sydney and other towns are still losing thousands of trees without real bushfire safety benefits.







“When an area of native bushland is lost, the resident wildlife does not simply move elsewhere. Land-clearing starts a devastating ecological chain reaction. Many animals die immediately from injury or trauma associated with the clearing. Others survive for a time before succumbing to starvation, predation, accidents or disease as a result of losing their home and struggling to find a new one.

Following the commencement of the Native Vegetation Act 2003, approved clearing fell precipitously from about 80,000 hectares to only 911 hectares a year, on average, which represents an 88-fold reduction... some 53,000 fewer native mammals have been killed each year since the law changed.”

NSW Native Vegetation Act Saves Australian Wildlife, Martin F J Taylor – WWF-Australia, Professor Christopher Dickman, University of Sydney (2014).

## Solutions

We call for:

» **Improved protection for forests, woodlands and wildlife** by strengthening land clearing, forestry and threatened species laws. The important laws that protect our forests, woodlands and wildlife are under attack. In order to maintain and enhance existing protections: self-assessable codes for the clearing of native vegetation should be removed and the Native Vegetation Act, Threatened Species Conservation Act and National Parks and Wildlife Act retained or improved; the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Agreements should be remade to improve environmental outcomes; the Government should undertake

a transparent, science based process for identifying significant conservation values contained within the Crown lands estate before it implements its changes to the Crown Lands Act; there must be an immediate moratorium on clearing and logging in areas of Bell Minor dieback and areas recognised as at risk of Bell Minor dieback; there must be an immediate moratorium on clearing and logging of recognised koala habitat, including in areas impacted by the Pacific Highway upgrade.

» **Restoration of the prohibition of burning native forests for electricity.** The recent lifting of this prohibition creates significant risks for forests, woodlands and native wildlife,

by promoting the intensification of logging operations and the logging of non-commercial species.

» **Firm commitment and clear timeline for a transition from native forest logging into sustainable plantations,** supported by a structural adjustment package for industries and communities dependent upon native forest logging. In NSW, an overwhelming majority of logged native forest ends up as low-value woodchips, with small amounts of value adding and high levels of controversy. Native forests provide far greater value for their ecosystem services and long-term carbon storage.



# MARINE CONSERVATION

The NSW marine environment is home to a rich diversity of life including majestic sea turtles, powerful whales, colourful reef fish, diverse kelp forests and abundant rocky reefs. A unique mixing of coastal currents off our coast means that about 80% of our marine plants and animals are found only in Australia.

Multiple use marine parks with no-take sanctuaries are a scientifically proven way to protect our marine life. Our existing marine parks are already delivering great results for our environment and regional communities alike. Yet these achievements are under threat. Overfishing, pollution, climate change, introduced marine pests, emerging diseases, and inappropriate developments are endangering our marine life.

In NSW we have a strong connection to the ocean. The majority of our population enjoys a coastal lifestyle, and the marine environment is the foundation of many regional economies.

There is strong support for marine conservation. In January 2014, Galaxy Research found that the overwhelming majority (93%) of NSW residents support no-take marine sanctuaries.

## Government track record

In its first three years of government the NSW Coalition has significantly reduced vital protection for our marine environment:

- » Revoked changes to the Solitary Islands and Jervis Bay Marine Parks leading to significantly less marine protection.
- » Reduced protection for the critically endangered Grey Nurse Shark.
- » Removed protection for no-take marine sanctuaries by allowing recreational fishing from the shore in sanctuaries for nearly two years, with ten sanctuaries still remaining unprotected.
- » Declared a five-year moratorium on the establishment of marine parks.
- » Ceased the publication of annual Status of Fishery Resources reports which provide vital information on the stock status of commercially harvested marine life.
- » Closed the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre resulting in the loss of significant scientific knowledge and expertise in fisheries and coastal management.
- » Disbanded the Marine Parks Authority, and transferred significant ministerial oversight from the Minister for the Environment to the Minister for Primary Industries.

New South Wales now faces the prospect of being one of the only places in the world moving backwards on the protection of our marine environment.

## Solutions

We call for:

- » **Returning marine sanctuaries to areas protected from extractive activities like fishing.** Marine sanctuaries are vital safe havens for marine life and allow us to explore our coastal environment and wildlife in its most natural state.
- » **Improving the network of marine parks by ending trawling in all marine parks and establishing a Sydney Marine Park with a network of no-take marine sanctuaries.** The Sydney region has long been recognised as lacking protection. This can be fixed by establishing a marine park for the greater Sydney region.
- » **Prohibiting targeted shark fishing, removing shark nets from NSW beaches, and establishing marine sanctuary zones in a 1,500 metre radius surrounding critical habitat and aggregation areas for the Grey Nurse Shark.** Sharks and rays are slow to reproduce and have few young which makes them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of fishing. Sharks play a key role in marine ecosystems as apex predators and changes in their population numbers impact broader marine ecosystems. The Grey Nurse Shark is a critically endangered species.
- » **Establishing a framework and timeline to implement ecosystem-based and precautionary fisheries management, and conduct annual Status of Fishery Resource reports.** Irresponsible fishing is impacting many species of fish and marine life in NSW. Monitoring and enforcement are essential requirements for healthy and sustainable fisheries however a comprehensive assessment of NSW fish stocks has not been completed since 2008-09.



Marine sanctuaries are delivering great results for NSW. Despite being only seven years old, science shows that within no-take marine sanctuaries of the Batemans Marine Park there are 38% more fish compared to fished areas.<sup>i</sup>

In January 2014, 220 marine scientists signed a statement calling on the government to remove fishing from marine sanctuaries.

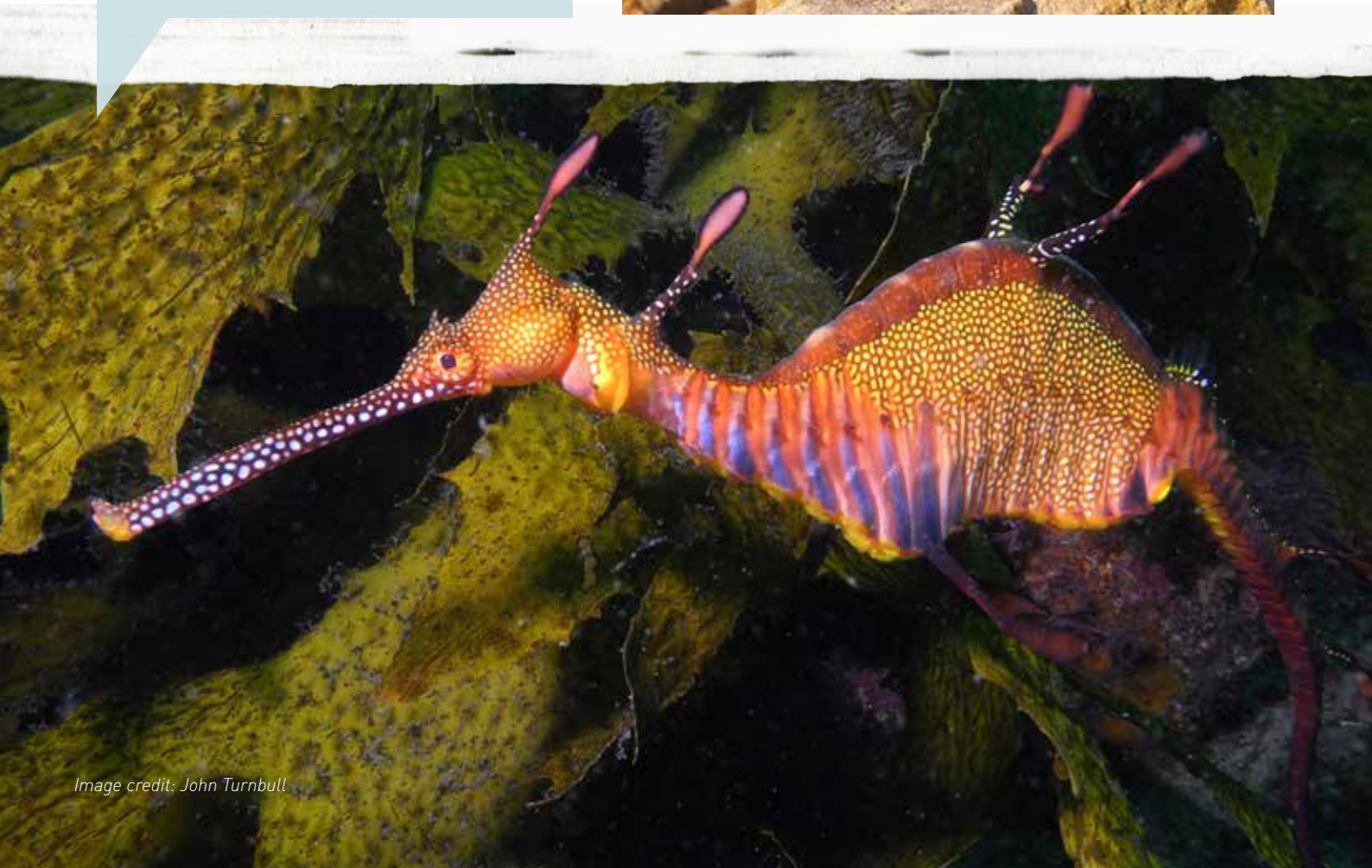
There is strong support for marine conservation: 93% of NSW residents support no-take marine sanctuaries to protect our marine environment, with 70% opposed to fishing in these essential areas.

The Jervis Bay Marine Park has brought over \$2.4 million to the local economy in increased marine tourism revenue.<sup>ii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Kelaher, B. P., Coleman, M. A., Broad, A., Rees, M. J., Jordan, A. & Davis, A. R. (2014). Changes in fish assemblages following the establishment of a network of no take marine reserves and partially protected areas. *PLoS One*, 9 (1), e85825-1-e85825-13

<sup>ii</sup> [www.mpa.nsw.gov.au/review/JBMPSocialcultecon08179.pdf](http://www.mpa.nsw.gov.au/review/JBMPSocialcultecon08179.pdf)

*Image credit: Attila E Kaszo*



*Image credit: John Turnbull*



# RIVERS AND WETLANDS

Healthy rivers and wetland systems are core to sustainable communities and landscapes.

Efficient use of good quality fresh water while maintaining sufficient water for environmental functions of rivers and wetlands is key to healthy communities and industry.

The river and wetland systems of NSW have suffered long term degradation through the over allocation of water resources; profligate waste of an essential resource and pollution. New South Wales is the largest user of water in the Murray-Darling Basin and many coastal river and aquifer systems are stressed from overuse.

The cost of poor water quality with increased salinity and chemical pollution is a major economic impost on communities.

Wetlands provide a range of ecosystem services that have been undervalued. Both coastal and inland wetland systems have suffered a significant decline in health and extent due to unsustainable development and water extraction activities.

While the water reform process initiated through a Council Of Australian Governments agreement in 1994 has gone some way to address these issues, the NSW Government is in the process of reversing these achievements.

The announcement of the Needles Gap Dam on the Belubula River is a backward step, with major implications for river degradation in the Lachlan catchment and the Murray-Darling Basin.

## Government track record

In the past three years the NSW Government has undermined the success of the water reform process by approving water sharing plans developed under the former government that do not provide adequate protection for environmental water, by creating new access to water and by holding up the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

These actions include:

- » The gazettal of the Barwon-Darling water sharing plan that increased pumping access for the irrigation industry.
- » Approval of the Macquarie River Pipeline to the city of Orange in central western NSW.
- » Demanding that the Federal Government cap the purchase of environmental water at 1,500 GL in the Murray-Darling Basin.
- » Increasing the amount of water that can be extracted by mining and gas projects from inland groundwater systems.
- » Exempting the mining industry from rules that protect the environment and other water users.
- » The proposal to develop a new water access right by issuing floodplain harvesting licenses that can be traded.

The Lower Hunter Water Plan rejected construction of a new Dam on the Williams River and construction of a permanent desalination plant. Introduction of

permanent Water Wise Rules and an emphasis on demand management and more efficient use of existing supplies are a positive step, however more emphasis could be placed on recycling and stormwater harvesting.

Current pricing structures for urban water place a high reliance on fixed charges. These reduce the ability of customers to control their bills and diminish the water conservation signal sent by per kilolitre (volumetric) usage charges.

Current operating rules for Sydney's desalination plant provide for the plant to be switched on when supply levels fall to 70% and switched off if levels reach 80%. With desalination representing an expensive, energy intensive and environmentally damaging supply source it would be preferable to operate the plant only in severe drought situations i.e. plant activated if supply levels fall to 30% and deactivated once they reach 40%.

Recent changes by the government to the Water Industry Competition Act (WICA) will allow private sector operators to access water from public utilities such as Sydney Water. This paves the way for privatisation and renewed pressure on environmental regulation; and eliminates a key driver for new recycled water sources.

The scene appears to be set for unsustainable urban water management and proposals to construct more dams across the state will have a detrimental impact on river health, wetlands and other downstream water users.

<sup>2</sup> [www2.mdbc.gov.au/about/tour\\_the\\_basin/riverine.html](http://www2.mdbc.gov.au/about/tour_the_basin/riverine.html)

<sup>3</sup> [www2.mdbc.gov.au/nrm/water\\_issues/water\\_quality/?MySourceSession=a946a783e36a73e4e3bafd5696f09f84&maintain\\_session=1](http://www2.mdbc.gov.au/nrm/water_issues/water_quality/?MySourceSession=a946a783e36a73e4e3bafd5696f09f84&maintain_session=1)

<sup>4</sup> [www2.mdbc.gov.au/salinity/land\\_and\\_water\\_salinity.html](http://www2.mdbc.gov.au/salinity/land_and_water_salinity.html)



The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment gave wetlands a global value of US\$15 trillion in 1997.

The natural resources of the Murray-Darling Basin provide a basis for many recreational activities. In total, tourism in the Basin is worth over \$3.4 billion<sup>2</sup>.

The 1991-92 blue-green algae outbreak along the Darling River brought major costs<sup>3</sup>. In NSW alone, there was an estimated \$2.4 million loss of revenue to the tourist industry. Up to \$2 million was spent on alternative water supplies.

Salinity in the Basin – costs up to \$270 million each year<sup>4</sup>. Overall, the estimated annual costs are substantial: \$130 million in agricultural costs, \$100 million in infrastructure costs, and \$40 million in environmental costs. These include impacts on productivity, land values, aesthetics, remediation, damage and loss of wetlands and habitat for wetland species.

*Source: Murray Darling Basin Commission*

## Solutions

We call for:

» **Water management policy that includes the improvement of river and wetland health.**

Water sharing plans gazetted in 2004 are now up for a ten-year review. This review must include a comprehensive assessment of the health of the river and groundwater systems and associated wetlands. This can be achieved through the reinstatement of the State Water Management Outcomes Plan and the Integrated Monitoring of Environmental Flows program. The development of Water Resource Plans under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan provides an opportunity to solve

physical and policy constraints to efficiently and effectively deliver environmental water at the appropriate time. Water recycling and reuse programs need to be encouraged through government policy and programs, including integrated water cycle management. Any proposals to divert coastal rivers inland should be prohibited as unsustainable and severely damaging to the health of our coastal waters.

» **Prohibition on coal seam gas exploration and extraction that threatens inland and coastal groundwater systems.** Coal seam gas exploration across NSW threatens inland and

coastal groundwater systems, and the full impacts of these activities are not known. Healthy rivers and wetland systems are core to sustainable communities and landscapes and our important groundwater systems must be protected.

» **Reforms to water regulations.**

Reform operating rules for the Sydney desalination plant to ensure that the plant is only operated in emergency drought situations and price structures for residential water users. Ensure that private utilities licensed under the WICA are required to obtain their supplies from sources other than public utilities.



# CLIMATE AND ENERGY

The evidence is clear: by burning fossil fuels and destroying forests, we have disrupted the balance of the earth's atmosphere, leading to changes in the world's climate. The predicted impacts of these changes on people and nature are serious and far reaching.

Urgent action is required to reduce global carbon emissions. In the absence of a strong international response to climate change, countries around the world face devastating environmental, social and economic impacts.

In Australia, achieving deep cuts in domestic emissions will require a range of strategies, including protecting carbon-rich native forests, controlling land clearing, improving industrial efficiency and most importantly, making a transition away from fossil fuels.

Burning of fossil fuels is the single largest contributor to global climate change. National and international scientific institutions have warned that proven fossil fuel reserves contain many times more carbon dioxide than we can afford to burn.

In NSW, 90% of our electricity is produced by polluting coal fired power stations, but rapid improvements in technology present fresh opportunities to replace polluting energy sources like coal with energy from the sun and wind.

Increasing power prices, combined with the falling cost of solar cells, has sustained rapid growth in rooftop solar power: more than one million households across the country have made the switch to solar, generating more than 3,000 MW of energy.

Funded by the current government, construction will soon begin on two large solar farms near Nyngan and Broken Hill. These solar farms will be the largest in Australia, powering 50,000 homes and creating employment for more than 400 people in construction and manufacturing.

Over the past few years, emissions from the electricity sector have declined, due to reduced demand and increased renewable energy generation. The tide is turning, but strong public policy is needed to accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy.

## Government track record

New South Wales was once an international leader on climate change policy, introducing the first mandatory carbon emissions trading scheme in the world in 2003.

The current government claims to accept the science of climate change, but has failed to take meaningful action to reduce carbon emissions since it was elected in 2011.

Over the past three years, the NSW Government has:

- » Comprehensively failed to deliver a credible strategy for reducing carbon emissions in our state.
- » Undermined investment certainty for the renewable energy sector by introducing restrictive planning guidelines for wind farms.
- » Publicly opposed the carbon price.

We welcomed closure of Munmorah power station, termination of the Cobbora coal supply contracts and funding for solar farms at Nyngan and Broken Hill, but much more remains to be done.

We also welcomed the Government's commitment to energy efficiency measures, improvements to the energy efficiency savings scheme, and support of the Federal renewable energy target.



## Solutions

By using energy more wisely and harnessing the power of renewable energy, our state can create opportunities for new employment, foster regional development, and reduce our contribution to global climate change.

We urge the parties contesting the 2015 election to:

» **Make our economy more competitive and less polluting by implementing proven measures to improve commercial and industrial energy efficiency.** Investment in energy efficiency increases productivity and reduces energy infrastructure costs by keeping demand down. Following

recent cuts in federal energy efficiency funding, it is time for the State Government to step up to the challenge, by scaling up investment in proven energy efficiency programs and mandating energy efficiency programs for industry and the electricity transmission sector.

» **Reduce pollution and deliver employment in regional areas by providing funding and a stable investment environment for renewable energy.** There is more than \$20 billion in renewable energy proposals in the pipeline for NSW. Government investment in renewables, combined with a stable and supportive policy

environment, will help to unlock large scale investment in renewables, creating economic activity and employment in regional areas.

» **Protect carbon rich ecosystems by strengthening land clearing laws and ending native forest logging.** Land clearing laws have played a critical role in stabilising carbon emissions in NSW over the past decade, offsetting increased emissions from transport and electricity generation. Protecting native forests and woodlands is a rapid, cost effective way to reduce carbon emissions, conserve water catchments and safeguard precious wildlife habitat.





# COAL AND GAS

In NSW coal and gas mining threaten – and destroy – the things we can't live without: our clean water, best farmland, wild places and our health.

Coal and coal seam gas development continues to expand across NSW. Years of short-sighted bad planning has resulted in exploration licences and mining leases granted over tens of millions of hectares of our state. Public lands are at particular risk: mining and gas titles cover more than half of our state forests and nearly two thirds of our state conservation areas.

Coal and coal seam gas expansion present an unacceptable risk to our land, water and communities. Vital groundwater, the lifeblood of rural NSW, is being lost to coal mining and threatened with contamination by gas extraction. Drinking water catchments in Sydney, the Illawarra and the Central Coast continue to

be damaged by longwall mining. Coal dust pollution from open cut mines and coal wagons near our towns is linked to heart and lung disease, and even early death. Special natural places like Leard State Forest and Great Dripping Gorge are threatened by expanding coal mines.

The laws that are supposed to protect the environment and communities are failing us, time and again. Rural communities are facing large open cut coal mines a few hundred metres from their homes and rural residents face the prospect of invasive gas fields in their villages and farms.

There is overwhelming public support for reform: recent polling by Lonergan Research found that most respondents (73%) want coal and gas development banned in our water catchments and 66% want to see it banned on productive agricultural land.

## Government track record

Current and former governments have indulged in suspect decision making. Three former NSW mining ministers, Eddie Obeid, Ian Macdonald and Chris Hartcher have been investigated by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). So far two have been found to have acted corruptly.

Under pressure from the mining industry the NSW Government changed the mining State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) to weaken already inadequate protections when Rio Tinto lost its case in the Land and Environment Court against the town of Bulga to expand its inappropriate Warkworth open cut coal mine. Former Minister Hartcher's changes to the SEPP require making the economic significance of the resource the consent authority's principal consideration, putting industry interests ahead of local communities and the environment, fundamentally biasing the decision making system.

When in opposition, former Premier O'Farrell promised he would not allow mining in water catchments. However he broke that promise in 2013 when the government allowed for the expansion of BHP Billiton's Dendrobium mine in Sydney's drinking water catchment special area. Further inroads are threatened.

The recent announcements by Energy and Resources Minister Roberts to buy back coal seam gas exploration licences and suspension of further exploration near Gloucester are welcomed first steps but much more needs to be done to deliver lasting protection for our land, water and local communities.



## Solutions

We call for:

- » **Enforcing coal and gas no-go zones** to protect our productive farmland, special wild places, water resources, and communities – in law.
- » **Implement ICAC's recommendations for tighter controls on mining** to improve accountability of government ministers and MPs, and reduce the likelihood of corruption; and enshrine the rights of local communities and landholders, especially the right to say no.
- » **Impose clear limits on pollution** that take into account cumulative impacts; and entrench an independent, objective and transparent assessment system that does not fast-track projects.

Recent polling by Loneragan Research found that most respondents (73%) want coal and gas development banned in our water catchments and 66% want to see it banned on productive agricultural land.





# 7 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Environment protection, conservation, natural resource management and social wellbeing are fundamental to planning and ecologically sustainable development.

A planning system that seeks to maintain the natural environment and increase its resilience to development pressures is critical to resolving both known and future environmental challenges, including: loss and fragmentation of native vegetation and wildlife habitat; degradation of rivers, wetlands and water catchments; urban sprawl, traffic congestion, urban air pollution; protection of parks and bushland and tackling climate change.

The community credibility of planning and development decisions is absolutely essential to the political sustainability of the system, yet changes to the NSW planning system over the past decade have led to a significant weakening of environmental protections and community alienation from the processes and outcomes of planning and development decisions in NSW.

There is more to a planning system than processing timeframes, and development approval rates, and poor quality planning decisions are not in the public interest and do not achieve a triple bottom line. Sustainability goals including clean air and water; reduced car dependency; energy and water efficiency; and protection of biodiversity are fundamentals for our quality of life.

## Government track record

Both the ALP and Coalition Governments have been responsible for major changes to the NSW planning system that have advantaged developers over the community and the environment.

The former Part 3A of the Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979, was criticised for increasing power and discretion with the Minister for Planning, overriding important environmental approvals and restricting of third party merit appeal rights, with respect to the assessment and approval of major projects. The O'Farrell government repealed Part 3A, and reintroduced State Significant Development, but in doing so failed to address these key community concerns. It also undermined environmental protection provisions in Local Environment Plans and put developer rights above the public interest with respect to spot rezonings.

The major review of the planning system by the current government has failed to meet one of its key objectives - to address the risks and perceptions of corruption and restore focus on community engagement, accountability and the public interest. After amendments to the new proposed law in the Upper House, the government has stalled reform. It now has a chance to go in the right direction.

## Solutions

We call for:

- » **A clear commitment to ecologically sustainable development. Ecologically sustainable development** is a key tenet of Australian environment and planning law as set out in the *National Conservation Strategy for Australia and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (1992)*.
- » **A planning framework that maintains the natural environment and supports community well-being** through long term strategic and regional planning, robust environment protection and genuine community participation. [see Text Box opposite]
- » **Clear mechanisms for increased transparency and accountability in environment and planning decisions.** Recent ICAC findings and investigations have highlighted the need for reform to address corruption risks in the NSW planning system. Third party involvement in environment and planning decisions must be retained and supported, including restoring funding to the Environmental Defenders Office NSW and to legal aid, to provide assistance to third parties bringing legal proceedings in the public interest.



## Key Planning Principles

The following key principles are integral for a NSW planning system that protects and enhances the natural environment and supports community well-being:

1. A legislative commitment to Ecological Sustainable Development.
2. Legislative mechanisms for achieving environmental outcomes.
3. Mandatory requirements for genuine and meaningful public participation in decision making throughout the system, including for both strategic planning and development assessment.
4. A framework for effective strategic planning across state, regional and local levels that includes: strategic environmental assessment, assessment of cumulative impacts, and integration of key natural resource management and environmental policies.
5. Mechanisms for ensuring the integrity of environmental impact assessment including:
  - independent appointment of environmental consultants,
  - robust offences for providing false and misleading information (recklessly or intentionally) and for deceptive conduct, and
  - comprehensive assessment and scrutiny that reflects the scale of impacts.
6. Code assessment must only be available for genuinely low impact development.
7. Prescribed objective decision making criteria including mandated environmental impacts that must be considered during development assessment.
8. Mechanisms for managing climate change by building in mitigation and adaption requirements throughout the system.
9. The concurrence and approval of key agencies must be paramount. The planning system must not override important environment approvals and licence requirements.
10. Mechanisms for ensuring accountability, including third party appeal rights and open standing for breaches of the legislation, and better enforcement by way of robust tools, penalties, resources and monitoring.





# WASTE AND POLLUTION

Effective waste management and clean air are essential parts of urban and economic sustainability, and are issues that resonate with the community. Recycling not only saves increasingly scarce resources but also the energy costs in creating material from virgin resources and creates far more jobs than landfilling; while air pollution causes significant health costs and family disruption.

While recycling has made significant advances there is still much to do as millions of tonnes of recoverable resources are still sent to landfill. Unless the recycling rate improves, the amount of landfill will increase as the population grows. Recycling remains one of the most popular home environmental activities, however particular waste types such as food and kitchen waste, recycling by the commercial sector, and product stewardship for problem wastes such as batteries and tyres, are still challenging. Litter is an ongoing public concern with the 'bin and education' strategy unable to make further

major progress in particular for drink containers. This is apparent with drink containers becoming the most collected item on Clean Up Australia Day, despite representing the most easily recyclable stream of the litter mountain.

There is strong public endorsement of container deposits with over 84% support (12% against) in NSW (Newspoll, November 2013).

Millions of people, particularly in western Sydney are exposed to unhealthy air especially particles and ozone, which are largely derived from motor vehicles. The NSW State of the Environment Report states: "Air pollution can cause a wide range of health symptoms, from coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath, to more serious impacts for those with pre-existing respiratory and cardiac conditions, such as asthma attacks, hospital admission and premature death. It has been estimated that air pollution from motor vehicles alone accounts for more than 500 early deaths in the Sydney Region per annum and over 1,000 hospital admissions."<sup>5</sup>

## Government track record

New South Wales has had the Action for Air Strategy for over a decade. Some measures have been implemented but they have not addressed the main contributor – motor vehicles – to any significant extent. This is largely due to the fact that vehicle emission standards are set nationally.

There is the additional issue of the development of car-based suburbs and needing to catch up with better public transport in existing areas. The NSW Government is certainly making efforts in this regard with improved public transport programs but the rate of growth of Sydney and the legacy of inaction in key regions means that policy should also act strongly on motor vehicle emissions. Additionally, the government's promotion and funding of major city road projects such as WestConnex is short-sighted.

We recognise the positive waste management initiatives introduced by Minister Parker, including the new state waste strategy and funding, and proposed rules to prevent illegal and environmentally damaging management of used tyres. The recent proposed changes to the Waste Regulation are also welcome and should, over time, address the problems of waste stockpiles (masquerading as imminent recycled material), waste tracking and transport outside of NSW.





## Solutions

We call for:

- » **Legislation for a state based container deposit scheme in 2015 and scheme started by the middle of 2017.** With a national scheme unlikely to eventuate, the two most populous states with the greatest amount of wasted and littered drink containers can effectively introduce the system. Importantly a deposit system will quickly lift recycling to above 80%; create the viable business case for recycling depots in rural and regional areas; and improve the recycling capacity of the commercial sector.
- » **Continued regulatory and compliance action against rogue operators in the used tyre and construction and demolition waste areas** which require strong action to eliminate illegal operators. We also oppose voluntary product stewardship schemes as they fail to capture key parts of the market (free riders) and adopt weak targets. The government should support co-regulatory or regulatory schemes (at state level if necessary) rather than wait for voluntary programs to (inevitably) fail to make substantial gains.
- » Our state leaders **should demand the federal government enact regulations for the introduction of the highest emission standards for passenger and commercial motor vehicles.** As all vehicles will soon be imported, this should not cause any domestic manufacturing cost issues to arise.

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[www.nature.org.au](http://www.nature.org.au)

Founded in 1955, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW is the peak environment organisation for NSW, representing more than 100 community environment groups across the state.



[www.npansw.org.au](http://www.npansw.org.au)

The National Parks Association of NSW is a not-for-profit conservation charity formed in 1957, seeking to protect, connect and restore the integrity and diversity of natural systems in NSW. NPA includes a network of 18 branches and more than 20,000 supporters.



[www.tec.org.au](http://www.tec.org.au)

The Total Environment Centre was established in 1972 as an action and information centre. It has run more than 100 successful campaigns, protecting the environment and improving urban sustainability. It alerts society about environmental problems, provides solutions and works with the community, business and government on an independent basis.



[www.wilderness.org.au](http://www.wilderness.org.au)

Established in 1976, The Wilderness Society is a national, community-based, not-for-profit environmental advocacy organisation whose purpose is to protect, promote and restore wilderness and natural processes across Australia for the survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth.



[www.bluemountains.org.au](http://www.bluemountains.org.au)

Formed in 1961, the Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a voluntary organisation with approximately 900 members. Its mission is to help conserve the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains. The Society runs conservation programs, a nursery, a bushcare group and bushwalking programs.





[www.colongwilderness.org.au](http://www.colongwilderness.org.au)

The Colong Foundation works to ensure all wilderness and large natural areas in Australia are protected, well managed and held in high public regard. The Foundation's campaigns have secured more than a million hectares of national parks, most of which is wilderness.



[ncec.wordpress.com](http://ncec.wordpress.com)

Formed in 1976, the North Coast Environment Council is the peak umbrella environment group in northern NSW for over 40 member groups, campaigning to protect natural areas, for social justice and ecological sustainability.



[www.cwecouncil.com](http://www.cwecouncil.com)

Central West Environment Council is an umbrella organisation for environment groups, field naturalist societies and individuals with an interest in conserving the natural environment in central west NSW.



[www.serca.org.au](http://www.serca.org.au)

South East Region Conservation Alliance is an umbrella organisation for conservation, environment and for citizens' groups who want to conserve and protect the natural environment of south-east NSW, Australia.

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