

2010 FEDERAL
ELECTION
Your environment, your future, your vote



Federal Environment Policy Priorities



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Your environment, your future, your vote

The current mass extinction of the world's species is creating a lonelier planet and the damage to Australian landscapes, rivers and marine environments is creating a less healthy and sustainable one. Climate change is unleashing massive changes, stressing the already delicate balance of life. Widespread loss of habitat and degradation of our air, water and soil is undermining the resilience of nature.

The Wilderness Society is a community based environmental campaigning organisation, dedicated to the protection, promotion and restoration of wilderness and natural processes across Australia. We are unaligned politically, and we use public education and empowerment, advocacy and negotiation, and research to promote and support sound conservation decisions.

WildCountry is the Wilderness Society's response to the challenges threatening Australia's environment and our future. It's a bold, continent-scale vision for conservation in Australia that involves both *protecting* the best of what is left of Australia's natural environment, and *restoring* important areas. Only a continental wide network of core wild areas, wildlife corridors, and intact lands can protect the continental-scale flows of nature.

This cannot be achieved without Federal Government support.

Australia's environment needs Australia's leaders to:

- Protect the Forests of Southern Australia
- Safeguard our Marine Environment
- Care for the future of Northern Australia lands and waters
- Manage Rivers and Water
- Develop Indigenous Conservation opportunities
- Secure nature's carbon stores
- Stop new uranium mines and phase out existing uranium mines



Protecting the forests and woodlands of Southern Australia

The forests of Southern Australia are among Australia's most valuable national assets. They store carbon and provide habitat for our native plant and animal species. But every year, around 60,000 hectares of Australia's forests are logged, flattened, burned and destroyed.

NATIVE FORESTS AND WOODLANDS CONTINENT-WIDE

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Ban the burning of native forests and woodlands for power Australia-wide.

TASMANIA'S FORESTS

There are significant opportunities to resolve the long running conflict over forests and forestry in Tasmania and to build a sustainable, plantation-based industry that enjoys broad public support. Representatives from the conservation movement and the logging industry are currently in discussions that aim to reach a lasting agreement that delivers this resolution.

While the environmental costs of native forest logging in Tasmania are widespread and well known, market pressures and community conflict have driven the Tasmanian timber industry to the point of collapse. A solution is both necessary and achievable.

To facilitate this solution, the next Federal Government must assist with support for an agreed plan that delivers:

- The immediate protection of Tasmania's high conservation value forests that are vital for protecting biodiversity, climate and water
- A rapid transition of industrial logging out of Tasmania's native forests
- Support for landowners to permanently protect native forests on private land
- The development of a strong, sustainable timber industry based on the existing plantation estate
- Reform of the management of plantations in Tasmania to ensure they are environmentally and socially acceptable, including an end to all subsidisation of plantation establishment and the aerial spraying of chemicals
- Recognition and support for the contribution phasing out native forest logging could make to Australia's Greenhouse Gas emissions reduction.



VICTORIA'S FORESTS

Given the substantial overlap between the Tasmanian and Victorian native forest sectors, the Federal government must work with the Victorian government in the lead up to the November 27 state election, to expedite a transition plan for Victoria's native forest logging industry into its plantation resource.

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Protect the high conservation value forests of eastern Victoria by immediately, and permanently, removing logging from all high conservation value, old-growth and domestic water catchments. Manage these areas to maximize their value for carbon sequestration, water production and biodiversity conservation.
- Support timber dependant communities' transition to sustainable industries. Working closely with communities, industry and local stakeholders, to develop transitional arrangements to assist the native forest sector to either exit the industry or use plantation logs for suitable applications.
- Abolish VicForests and reconfigure its role to manage public native forests for ecosystem services that maximize water production and carbon carrying capacity, and minimize the frequency and intensity of firestorms.
- Maximise wood supply and value from plantations. Commit to immediately move native forest commodity production into plantations, particularly in western Victoria, and assist Victoria's plantation sector to supply current purchasers of native forest pulpwood and sawn timber. Encourage the development of value-added processing of Victoria's plantation estate.
- Improve management of plantations. Undertake rigorous water quality testing for toxicants in all domestic water catchments containing broad-acre plantations, making results publicly available. Ensure new plantations are rigorously assessed for their likely surface and groundwater usage, with caps on plantations put in place in over-utilised catchments.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S FORESTS AND WOODLANDS

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Work with the WA government, industry, local residents and conservation groups to protect identified high conservation value forests including Chester, Helms, Mundlimup, Quindanning and Warrup.
- Ensure new proposals for large-scale bauxite strip-mining covering tens of thousands of hectares of WA jarrah and karri forests are rejected, eg. Bauxite Resources Ltd.

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GREAT WESTERN WOODLANDS - LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Work with the WA government, Traditional Owners, conservation groups, scientists and mining companies to recognise, protect and manage the Great Western Woodlands through landscape-scale conservation planning.

NSW

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Work with the NSW government to transition NSW's native forest logging industry into plantations.

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Safeguarding our marine environment

Australia's marine life is globally significant, but under threat. Pollution, over fishing, entanglement in nets and destruction of important habitat are just some of the many threats to Australia's remarkable marine life. If this continues, we risk joining the unprecedented global collapse in our oceans where two-thirds of the world's coral reefs are dead or dying and 90% of the world's large fish have been fished-out.

Australia lays claim to the third largest marine jurisdiction of any nation on Earth, and a marine area almost twice the size of our continent. Yet less than 1% of the 'Commonwealth' waters off SA, WA and the Northern Territory are fully protected. Our iconic marine species such as dolphins, turtles and dugong are at risk from fishing and other extractive activities. The evidence is clear: Large migratory marine wildlife such as whales need large marine sanctuaries.

LARGE MARINE SANCTUARIES PROTECTING OUR MARINE LIFE

A representative network of large marine sanctuaries need to be established in the South West, North West and North Marine Regions by 2012 so that at a minimum national and international scientific standards for protection of all habitats such as that demonstrated at Ningaloo Reef and the Great Barrier Reef are met. Where appropriate, this should be delivered with the full, free, prior and informed consent of Traditional Owners.

These standards will be applied to each planning region as a whole.

The South West marine region extends from Kangaroo Island to Kalbarri, and is home to a unique mix of tropical and temperate marine animals and plants courtesy of the mighty Leeuwin Current. Most of the marine life found in the coral reefs of the Houtman-Abrolhos, the huge Perth Canyon, the deep and mysterious waters of the Naturaliste Plateau and Diamantina Fracture Zone and between the islands of the Recherche Archipelago is found nowhere else in the world. These are some of eleven iconic and special areas which are to be afforded high levels of protection within a representative network, the others being the Kangaroo Island Canyons, Kangaroo Island Pool, Great Australian Bight, Albany Canyons Group, Geographe Bay and Rottneest Shelf.



In the north west, the region's extensive continental shelf, diverse coral reefs, canyons, islands, shoals and seagrass meadows provide feeding, breeding and stopover points along a marine life superhighway used by threatened whales, whale sharks, marine turtles, migratory shorebirds and countless other species. Iconic and special areas to be afforded high levels of protection within a representative network include areas of Shark Bay, Carnarvon Canyons, Ningaloo and Canyons, Exmouth Plateau, Dampier Peninsula, Rowley Shoals, Scott Reef, Browse Island and Depression Seamounts, Ashmore Reef, North and East Kimberley and Bonaparte Basin.

In the North, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Arafura and Timor seas comprise the region which is host to some of the last healthy tropical ecosystems in the world. The habitats within the region's canyons, reefs, basins, islands and shallow and deep waters are internationally significant for turtles, dugongs, sea snakes, saw fish, sharks, rays and tropical seabirds. Iconic and special areas to be afforded high levels of protection within a representative network include: Joseph Bonaparte Anson and Fog Bays, Bonaparte Basin and Van Diemens Rise; areas around the Tiwi Islands, Timor Canyons, Dhimurru, and North east Arnhem Land; areas within the Gulf of Carpentaria Basin, off western Cape York and the southern Gulf reefs.

LOOKING AFTER FISHERS

Properly caring for our marine environment and shifting toward sustainability will require change, but bring with it an increased economic resilience and diversity. Activities within the fishing industry that are displaced from fishing grounds by the creation of marine sanctuaries should be adequately financially assisted where appropriate.

BRINGING THE COMMUNITY ALONG

Australia's marine life and resources need to be properly protected in perpetuity through good management and effective compliance in protected areas. Duplication will be minimised and government efficiency maximised by working closely with State governments to ensure that they have the local capacity to properly manage and monitor the network of marine sanctuaries. Well-resourced community programs will raise awareness of the importance and management of marine sanctuaries.

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Establish a representative network of large marine sanctuaries in the South West, North West and North Marine Regions by 2012, including high-level protection for iconic and special areas, adequate financial assistance for the fishers who are required to shift their operations, and resources for strong management and compliance.

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Conserving Northern Australia's lands and waters

Stretching 2,500 km, from the Kimberley region in Western Australia across to Cape York Peninsula in far north Queensland, Northern Australia forms a vast arc of forests, woodlands, wild rivers and monsoonal wetlands. It includes one of the largest and most intact tropical savannah found anywhere. But the decline of many bird populations, invasion of exotic animals, the threat of climate change and a wave of proposals to expand irrigated farming, land clearing, mining and dams has left one of the world's greatest wilderness areas on the verge of devastating change.

A significant portion of northern Australia is Aboriginal land or subject to native title and land claims. A key principle of conservation in the North, as elsewhere, is the recognition of Indigenous rights and interests and involvement of the region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to ensure the protection of this vast region.

CAPE YORK PENINSULA

Cape York Peninsula is one of the last great wild places on Earth, and has long been recognised as a region worthy and capable of qualifying for World Heritage listing. Its myriad landscapes, rivers and coastlines, incorporating rainforest, savannah, woodlands, white sand country, wetlands and plains are home to one third of all Australian mammal species and half of our entire bird species and endemism is high: 264 plant species and 40 different animal species occur only on Cape York. On a damaged planet it is remarkable that the inter-connecting ecosystems of this vast Peninsula remain largely healthy and intact across the whole regional landscape. Cape York Peninsula is also a place where Indigenous peoples' connection to their Country is active and strong, where cultural heritage is also significant and abundant.

There are already a number of important conservation initiatives on Cape York to provide new protected areas, river basin protection, land justice and support Indigenous conservation and management. World Heritage listing would augment these, and provide enormous social and economic opportunity around tourism and sustainable development.

The Queensland and Commonwealth Governments have previously agreed to work together to identify and protect Cape York's World Heritage values, and a 'road map' for how community consultation, Indigenous engagement, and achieving Traditional Owner consent has been jointly produced. However, for the future World Heritage protection of Cape York to be successful, the Commonwealth government must strengthen its commitment to take a strategic leadership role to support the state's work, provide practical and financial support to enable this, and ensure the nomination process is seen through to conclusion.

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Provide a clear commitment regarding future World Heritage Listing of Cape York Peninsula to (a) support the current work being done by Queensland under the Queensland-Commonwealth Roadmap through to completion, and (b) conditional on Traditional Owner consent, make the actual nomination for listing within the next term.
- Allocate \$3.5m over 3 years for cultural and natural heritage-related work which will contribute to the nomination development work (matching what the Queensland Government allocated in its recent state budget).
- Commit funding to establish and support future management of a Cape York World Heritage Area (\$5-10m).
- Put in \$20m for Cape York tenure resolution (CYTRIG) processes and other Cape property acquisitions (which would include \$10m retrospective CYTRIG funding and \$10m for new acquisitions funds via NRS).
- Allocate new funds (\$10m) and commitments for Indigenous conservation (including Indigenous Protected Areas, and natural resource management) on Cape York.
- Commit to actively and practically supporting sustainable Indigenous development, and assisting the establishment and expansion of a 'conservation economy' on Cape York.



KIMBERLEY

A perfect storm is gathering over the Kimberley region of northern WA. Years of neglect and mismanagement have created major environmental problems but even bigger threats are now looming over the region, in the form of plans for large-scale gas, mining and agricultural industrialisation of the Kimberley.

The Kimberley region of northern WA is one of the world's great natural and Indigenous cultural regions. Its vast savannah landscapes, wild rivers, extensive wetlands, spectacular coast and rich marine environments provide a multitude of habitats that are home to an extraordinary diversity of species. The amazing wildlife of the region includes the recently discovered Snubfin Dolphin, Humpback Whales (which give birth on the Kimberley coast), Gouldian Finches, Northern Quoll and the Golden Bandicoot.

Incredibly, the far north-west Kimberley sub-region is the only part of Western Australia, and one of very few in Australia, that appears to have retained its complete native fauna species diversity without extinction since European settlement.

However, new plans for large-scale industrialisation, together with climate change and the arrival of cane toads (which crossed the border last wet season), raise both the immediacy and scale of threat. They will add to the regional impacts of a hundred years of mismanagement (over-grazing by cattle) and neglect (uncontrolled wildfires, weeds and feral animals). If these threats are not addressed urgently, the Kimberley is destined to become yet another region of Australia that we have allowed to be degraded from rich diversity to impoverished wasteland.

The next Federal Government needs to:

MOVE THE BROWSE BASIN GAS/LNG HUB OUT OF THE KIMBERLEY

- Undertake a full and transparent examination of LNG processing options outside Kimberley – including floating LNG and use of existing industrial facilities in the Pilbara.
- Remove/rescind the Browse Basin gas lease renewal conditions imposed by Minister Ferguson and designed to pre-empt the environmental impact assessment process.
- Develop a long term Commonwealth (Browse Basin royalties) financial benefits package for Kimberley Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities that is independent of the location of any Browse LNG processing facility.
- Oppose WA government compulsory acquisition of James Price Point.

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IMPLEMENT NATIONAL HERITAGE LISTING FOR THE KIMBERLEY

Based on the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) nomination and the complimentary nomination from environment and conservation groups which includes the Mitchell Plateau region; Fitzroy River catchment and Dampier Peninsula.

COMMIT TO IMPROVED INDIGENOUS CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

- Expand Indigenous land management and Rangers programs throughout all of the Kimberley via an injection of an additional \$20 million per annum over ten years.
- Assist Indigenous 'conservation economy' opportunities, especially in tourism and carbon management.
- Ensure Indigenous programs such as health, housing and education are not dependent upon Traditional Owners giving up Country for large scale destructive industrial projects.



COMMIT TO ADDRESSING CHRONIC AND EMERGING THREATS TO THE KIMBERLEY'S ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY, ECONOMY AND LIFESTYLE

- Assist in addressing uncontrolled wildfires, introduced pests, over-grazing and over-fishing through the immediate injection of an additional \$20 million per annum over ten years for management, monitoring and regulation.
- Upgrade regulation and compliance enforcement of oil and gas industry operations in the Commonwealth marine environment to ensure that disasters like Montara never occur again.

COMMIT TO UPGRADED KIMBERLEY PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM – WITH INDIGENOUS CONSENT

- Ensure a minimum of 50% of the area of each marine and terrestrial bioregion in the Kimberley is managed for conservation using landscape-scale conservation principles and including the Mitchell Plateau bioregion, Fitzroy River and Dampier Peninsula.
- Implement Commonwealth NRS commitments in the Kimberley.
- Increase support for Indigenous Protected Areas and other mechanisms that address Indigenous rights and facilitate Traditional Owner engagement in protected areas through management and sustainable enterprises.

COMMIT TO COMPLETING THE COMMONWEALTH NORTH-WEST MARINE BIOREGIONAL PLAN

- Develop a representative network of large marine sanctuaries in Australia's North-West by 2012 that meets or exceeds the national and international scientific standards for protection of all habitats such as that demonstrated at Ningaloo Reef and the Great Barrier Reef.
- Ensure the plan includes sanctuary (no-take) zones large enough to protect marine biodiversity and ecosystem processes – and meets or exceeds Australian and international standards.
- Compensate 'displaced effort' where necessary to enable the creation of sanctuary zones.
- Ensure Traditional Owners are consulted at all stages.

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NORTHERN TERRITORY

The Northern Territory (NT) has some of the most amazing, ecologically intact and culturally important rivers in Australia, and indeed the world, including the famous Daly River, home to the iconic pig-nosed turtle.

The NT is also the target for unsustainable large-scale agriculture development and toxic uranium mining – including the Ranger uranium mine currently polluting Kakadu National Park and a proposed new uranium mine near Alice Springs which threatens the town's water supply.

As highlighted in later sections, the next Federal Government needs to:

- Prevent new uranium mines (eg. Angela Pamela mine near Alice Springs) and protect Kakadu National Park by rapidly phasing out the existing toxic Ranger uranium mine.
- Protect the Daly River from unsustainable large-scale land clearing and irrigated agriculture.

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Managing Rivers and Water

Australia's rivers provide life-giving water to the driest inhabited continent on Earth. Rivers and their banks are essential habitats for native species like fish, trees and mammals. They feed wetlands where birds come from all over the world to breed and feed.

The next Federal Government needs to:

DALY RIVER

- Prevent the degradation of the Northern Territory's famous Daly River by rejecting plans for large-scale land clearing and irrigated agriculture.

FITZROY RIVER

- Permanently protect the Fitzroy River in the Kimberley from proposed coal mining, dams and large-scale irrigated agriculture.

TILLEGRA DAM

- Publicly acknowledge the serious environmental concerns associated with the proposed Tillegra Dam, including the most recent evidence provided by Professor Richard Kingsford regarding the serious impacts on nearby RAMSAR listed wetlands. Commit to a full and rigorous assessment process, which includes all the information available.
- Rule out any Federal facilitation of the dam, including funding.

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Developing Indigenous Conservation opportunities

Aboriginal land rights, Indigenous ecological knowledge, and the land management expertise of many Traditional Owners, combined with the present-day conservation agenda, have produced one of the most important developments in environmental policy and practice in Australia.

Indigenous ecological knowledge and the expertise of Indigenous Traditional Owners are creating new ways to address Australia's environmental challenges. Indigenous Traditional Owners exercise custodianship over country around Australia, from Queensland's Cape York, to WA's Kimberley and Great Western Woodlands, to the oceans of South Australia. These include important conservation initiatives like the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) Program, Aboriginal owned or cooperatively managed National Parks, ranger programs and other natural and cultural resource management initiatives. Support is needed for these initiatives including secure funding and cooperative arrangements for what will be leading edge conservation into the future.

The next Federal Government needs to:

INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS

- In recognition of Aboriginal rights in Sea Country, develop Marine IPAs as a major outstanding area of program development.
- Introduce three-year Indigenous Management Agreements for IPAs, plus 20% increase to ongoing funding.
- Invest in people, with an expansion of on-ground, technical and legal support for Indigenous Protected Areas.
- Provide \$20m for land acquisitions (with the States) for IPAs, and other Protected Areas managed with Traditional Owners.

INDIGENOUS LAND MANAGERS AND THE CARBON ECONOMY

- Commit \$120m to create 400 new ranger positions under the Caring for our Country program.
- Extend landscape-scale fire management projects with Aboriginal land managers to include all regions with significant Aboriginal lands, adding a further 200,000h above the Northern Australia target.
- Recognise fire management on Indigenous-owned and controlled lands in domestic carbon schemes – further support / incentives for Indigenous carbon programs.

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Securing nature's carbon stores

Natural ecosystems, particularly our forests, woodlands and wetlands store vast quantities of carbon. Degrading activities such as land clearing, logging and inappropriate fire regimes release large amounts of carbon pollution into the atmosphere each year. Australia could significantly increase its GHG emissions reduction targets by reducing or eliminating these degrading activities.

As noted in the Final Garnaut report (p543), preliminary analysis by ANU suggests that the sequestration potential from allowing logged native forests to recover their natural Carbon Carrying Capacity is 136 million tonnes CO₂e each year for one hundred years (equivalent to 24% of Australia's annual GHG emissions).

The scale of possible emissions reduction due to more appropriate fire management in landscapes where long term carbon storage is adversely impacted by human induced intensive fires is still unknown. Analysis by CSIRO suggests that the emissions reduction potential for this sector is in the order of 5 million tonnes of CO₂e per year based on an assumption of annual emissions of 10 million tonnes per year (Garnaut p 543) – a likely underestimate.

The most recent data from the Queensland Government indicate that 123 000 hectares are still being cleared in Queensland alone each year and that annual emissions associated with clearing are in the order of 24 million tonnes CO₂.

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Develop a comprehensive approach to protecting and restoring carbon stores in the natural landscape including:
 - Protect native forests and woodlands;
 - Increase the size and improved management of protected areas;
 - Control land clearing and encouraging ecological restoration on private land;
 - Improve fire management particularly across the tropical savannah and inland woodlands; and
 - Restore degraded landscapes.
- Ensure that avoided emissions and sequestration associated with increased forest protection and restoration are counted towards increased Greenhouse Gas Reduction targets.
- Encourage landscape scale, multi tenure, connectivity conservation initiatives to improve the chances of wildlife and natural systems surviving the impacts of climate change.

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Stop uranium mining

Uranium mining is a long lasting toxic threat to many ecosystems and communities across Australia. Abandoned uranium mines like Rum Jungle (NT) continue to pollute river systems with radiation and heavy metals. The infamous Ranger uranium mine in Kakadu National Park is uncontrollably leaking millions of litres of contaminated water into surrounding ground water systems and wetlands. Proposed new uranium mines in Western Australia threaten our fragile outback environment with long lasting radiation contamination and groundwater depletion and pollution.

The next Federal Government needs to:

- Reject proposed new uranium mines in WA (eg. Yeerlirrie), the Northern Territory (eg. Angela Pamela) and further uranium exploration in the mountains of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary in SA.
- Rapidly phase out the existing Olympic Dam uranium mine in SA and Ranger mine in Kakadu National Park.

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Ranger Uranium mine, Kakadu, NT | photo : John Carnemolla /shutterstock

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