



WWF's policies for the 2016 Australian election

The environment is set to be a major factor in this election campaign.

Global warming is causing mass bleaching of our national icon – sounding alarm bells about the need for change.

Meanwhile, our species are in danger, with Australia having the worst rate of mammal extinction on Earth.

It's now time for our leaders to commit to decisive new policies in three key areas: protect Australia's iconic threatened species; protect the Great Barrier Reef, and halt dangerous global warming.

WWF-Australia is putting forward six detailed policy proposals, and calling on all parties to adopt them.

The policies are:

- Threatened Species
 - Strong National Environment Laws, Policies and Institutions
 - A Threatened Species Recovery Fund
- Great Barrier Reef
 - Clean Waters for the Reef
 - A Strong Reef Champion
- Climate Change and Renewable Energy
 - A Target and Plan to Net-zero Pollution
 - A 100% Clean Renewable Energy Plan

WWF is a science-based conservation organisation and is strictly non-partisan.

THREATENED SPECIES

1. Strong National Environment Laws, Policies and Institutions

Rationale

Our national environmental law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), was written when pervasive threats to our environment were less well known. This disconnect undermines Australia's productive base and deprives future generations of their ecological and cultural inheritance.

The Commonwealth should lead development of a new national system of protection, drawing on strengths from each level of government to deliver effective protection, drive improvements and reduce duplication.

The Places You Love Alliance is an alliance of over forty environment groups including WWF, which collectively represent more than 1.5 million Australians. As part of our election platform, we have developed a detailed guide for these key reforms in the next term of government – leading to a new generation of strong national environment laws, policies and institutions. Our proposal outlines the need for reform, the outcomes it should deliver and a costed, timed proposal for delivery.

Key Components

1. Implement a new Commonwealth *Environment Act* within two years, providing national leadership on environmental protection.
2. Expand Commonwealth oversight within 12 months to climate, water and reserves, harmful invasive species, and accountability of states for delivering nature protection objectives.
3. Create an independent *Environment Authority* to administer national environment law and coordinate national nature conservation strategies. The *Authority* will be the regulatory body that delivers the new Environment Act through a simpler, more strategic approach.
4. Enshrine accountability, integrity and transparency in decision-making including open standing provisions, extend standing to merits review of decisions and improve protections for costs associated with legal proceedings held in the public interest.

2. Threatened Species Recovery Fund

Rationale

Australia promised the world that “By 2020, the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained.”

Australia is not on track to achieve this goal. A dramatic change is needed in support for threatened species recovery if we are to save our unique wildlife.

The *Threatened Species Strategy* highlights an approach based on science, action and partnership to achieve the long-term goal of reversing species declines and supporting species recovery.

However, support for the targeted actions to address threats, protect habitat and key populations, and secure the long-term survival of threatened species is still required.

Key Components

1. A dedicated fund is essential to support the *Strategy* with a strong focus on protection and restoration of critical habitats and the reduction of pervasive threats.
2. A review of already existing recovery plans demonstrates this requires \$100 million/year for five years to protect critical habitats, deliver landscape-scale threatened species recovery and threat abatement actions, with a priority for enduring reductions in feral cat populations.
3. At a minimum, this program will 'lock in' the improved trajectories for the 20 bird and 20 mammal species identified in the Threatened Species Strategy for immediate action.

GREAT BARRIER REEF

3. Clean Waters for the Reef

Rationale

Polluted run-off is one of the key reasons we have lost over half the Great Barrier Reef's coral cover. Catchment pollution feeds crown of thorn starfish outbreaks, and make corals more vulnerable to coral bleaching.

However, we know that precision farm practices can cut pollution while boosting profits. With the right incentives, widespread uptake of these Reef safe practices can help give the Great Barrier Reef the clean water it needs to rebuild its coral gardens and be resilient to climate impacts.

The Australian Government has committed to the World Heritage Committee to achieve Reef safe water quality by 2025 – this includes farm pollution cuts of up to 80%. Much greater action and investment will need to be demonstrated by the end of 2016 for Australia to avoid being brought back to the next World Heritage Committee meeting in 2017, and to avoid an 'in danger' listing in 2019.

A major clean water investment package will not only restore the Reef's health but will bring significant economic benefits to the agricultural and tourism industries, and the communities that rely on them.

Components

The next Australian Government can meet its commitment to the World Heritage Committee to deliver clean water for the Great Barrier Reef through:

1. Legislating a cap on pollution entering Reef waters and reduce it over time to achieve the Reef 2050 Plan clean water targets.
2. Establishing a multi-billion dollar fund, through private and public sources, to create incentives for implementing farm practices and catchment repair which reduce water pollution.

4. A Stronger, Independent and Better Resourced Reef Champion

Rationale

The primary objective of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act* is to ensure the 'long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region'.

Sadly the scale of the problems facing the Great Barrier Reef has outgrown the current government agencies' and structures' ability to achieve this objective.

Australian and Queensland Governments have committed to the Reef 2050 Plan to address these threats, but without a stronger, independent and better resourced Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) to lead implementation, its objectives also won't be met.

Components

To meet these challenges, GBRMPA should have the following roles, powers and resources:

1. **Independence:** Governed by an independent chair and an expertise based board of international stature who are accountable for GBRMPA's performance under law and report direct to the Commonwealth and Queensland Parliaments.
2. **Strong:** Ensure GBRMPA has approval powers for all developments and activities that are likely to have a significant impact on World Heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region, either separately or cumulatively when considered with other existing or likely pressures.
3. **Leadership:** As the government champion for the Great Barrier Reef, GBRMPA should be given responsibility to lead and coordinate the implementation of the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan and the associated investment strategy.
4. **Smarter Government investment:** To enable GBRMPA to fulfil its existing and new responsibilities, the Authority's annual budget should be increased by up to \$20 million over the forward estimates. Most current funding for Reef programs in the federal Department of Environment should be reallocated to GBRMPA in line with the change in roles and responsibilities of the two agencies. Government subsidies for port development should be ruled out.
5. **On-ground:** To better protect target and threatened species such as turtle and dugong, increase commercial fishing vessel tracking, resourcing and effectiveness of the field management, permitting and compliance programs in order to eradicate the current high levels of non-compliance with Great Barrier Reef marine park regulations.
6. **Innovative:** Establish a Great Barrier Reef research strategy by 2017 that facilitates coordination and collaboration between the major Great Barrier Reef research institutions, management agencies and investment funds so that the critical research required to underpin effective management of the Great Barrier Reef and adjacent coastal ecosystems is delivered.
7. **Transparent and accountable:** Enhance the independence and credibility of the 2019 Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report, given its crucial role for deliberations by the World Heritage Committee in 2019/2020. GBRMPA should be responsible for reporting on the effectiveness of all major Reef management programs.

CLIMATE CHANGE and RENEWABLE ENERGY

5. Target and Plan to Net-zero Pollution

Rationale

Australia's future prosperity is strongly aligned with achieving carbon pollution reduction targets that are consistent with achieving net-zero pollution before 2050 and implementing a long-term stable plan to achieve the targets and build a better, cleaner, more sustainable future.

Pollution from burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, and deforestation is causing global warming that is posing a serious threat to the people and places we love. Last year over 190 countries agreed to work together to cut pollution to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees and pursue a 1.5 degree limit. As a high polluting, wealthy country Australia must do its share.

Our current carbon pollution reduction targets are weak and policies to cut carbon pollution have undergone constant change. This has created considerable uncertainty, lost investment and job opportunities, and a rise in carbon pollution. Forecasts have shown that weak or delayed action will increase future costs shifting the burden on to the next generation – our children.

The good news is Australia can be a major benefactor of strong action to cut carbon pollution. Australia can build a cleaner, healthier, better future by harnessing technologies that exist today, reforest degraded areas, grow incomes and jobs, and strengthen regional communities.

Key Components

In addition to implementing targets and a plan to achieve 100% clean renewable energy:

1. Commit to a **target of net-zero carbon pollution before 2050**.
2. Commit to **milestone carbon pollution reduction targets** of: 25% on 2000 levels by 2020; 45-65% on 2005 levels by 2025; 65-85% on 2005 levels by 2030.
3. **Price and limit on pollution:** A portfolio of policies is required to achieve net-zero pollution including regulation, incentives and market based mechanisms. The centrepiece should include a mechanism that limits and prices carbon, to provide confidence that targets are met. Rather than rely on government budgets, a carbon price can be revenue neutral, with money generated invested to support business, households and communities transition to cleaner technologies. Such mechanisms drive innovation, provide certainty and are scalable to effectively manage tightening carbon pollution caps over time.
4. **Carbon farming and land initiatives** to halt landclearing, grow forests and reduce farm emissions:
 - Reduce clearing through a greenhouse gas trigger in national environment laws, proactive enforcement of existing laws, COAG reform of existing Native Vegetation Framework potentially linked to financial incentives/penalties to states.
 - Establish a *Carbon Farming and Land Sector market* to maximise co-benefits and prioritise new methodologies, utilizing a mix of existing public funds and private investment.

6. 100% Clean Renewable Energy Plan

Rationale

The biggest opportunity for Australia to cut carbon pollution is to transition away from heavy reliance on dirty fossil fuels like coal to a build a modern clean energy system powered by 100% renewable energy, like solar and wind.

The transition has already started. Globally, renewable investment outstripped new capacity in coal, oil and gas in 2014, and is set to accelerate with the advancement of new battery storage technology which will allow renewable energy to become a source of continuous power generation.

Polling continuously shows renewable energy in Australia is popular, with over 1 million households already invested in solar, giving households greater control of their bills and energy use.

Modelling shows we could achieve 100% renewable electricity by 2035 and, when transport and industrial process are included, 100% total renewable energy before 2050. It would drive billions of dollars' of investment, thousands of jobs, reduce pollution, and position us for export advantage.

Key Components

1. Commit to a target **100% renewable electricity by 2035**.
2. Commit to targets of at least **50% of total renewable energy** (electricity, transport, and industrial process) **by 2030** and **100% before 2050**.
3. **Implement mechanisms to transition out coal-fired power plants before 2035** – Many of our coal-fired power plants are nearing the end of their natural life but lack incentive to close to make way for growth in renewable energy. A measured transition is required to close old inefficient coal power stations and facilitate the transition of workers and regional communities. This could include a mix of market mechanisms for regulated closure and emissions performance standards.
4. **Implement enabling policies for renewable energy growth, that include:**
 - **Financing Innovation** – Retain and expand grant making under Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) and financing under Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC).
 - **Price certainty** – Expand Renewable Energy Target (RET) to 100% out to 2035 to provide a long-term goal. Introduce national renewable energy capacity auctions within the expanded RET to ensure there is a secure mix of different technologies to meet Australia's energy needs and ensure integrity of the grid.
 - **Kickstart community renewable power** – Resource community efforts to build clean renewable energy in towns and suburbs across Australia.
 - **Support distributed power generation:** Establish a mechanism to reward distributed generators (households and businesses) for the full value of distributed electricity exported to the grid.
 - **Drive electric vehicle uptake:** This includes a mix of targets, emissions standards, tax incentives, government purchasing, and financing for infrastructure.

- **Modernize electricity network:** Make changes to regulatory environment including the National Energy Market (NEM), network pricing, and network access.
 - **More efficient and productive economy:** Initiatives which promote world-class energy efficiency, including standards on vehicles and fuels, new buildings, and incentives for existing infrastructure retrofits.
5. **Phase out fossil fuel subsidies** – More than \$7.7 billion a year in taxpayer funds are provided to business which increases the consumption and production of fossil fuels that cause global warming. Polling conducted in April and May show strong public support for phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and investing the revenue in clean renewable energy. WWF is calling for the phase out of these subsidies including the non-agriculture fuel tax rebate, fuel rebate for airlines, and statutory cap on accelerated depreciation for oil and gas companies.