

ALCA Briefing Note:

Environment Ministers' Meeting

September 2026

Nature and the economy

Environmental decline seriously threatens our economic livelihoods, and Australia continues to run down its natural assets without serious reinvestment to recover our natural capital.

- 49% of Australia's GDP is moderately or heavily reliant upon nature¹. Natural capital stocks are foundational to Australia's ongoing level of economic productivity and prosperity.
- Yet Australia continues to overdraw its natural capital stocks and not invest anywhere near enough to replenish them, operating on the mistaken belief that 'nature will always bounce back' on its own, despite many ecosystems, species, and ecological functions approaching and reaching critical limits and 'tipping points'.
- Commonwealth expenditure on nature is less than 0.1% of the Federal budget² – **less than one thousandth of total Federal expenditure**. This is well below the average OECD investment level³. There is a reason that ATO Income Tax Receipts, that detail where our taxes are spent, never show an 'environment' category – the bar on the graph would be too thin to print on A4 paper.
- Further, despite the consequences of nature's decline being largely absent from national discussions about productivity and economic growth, Australian governments continue to fail to systematically forecast these impacts.
- Reversing the trajectory of the decline in Australia's nature, and the systemic economic risk that this poses, can only be overcome by remedying the chronic underinvestment in nature by government and by business.

Recommendation 1: That the Commonwealth – and that the State and Territory governments urge the Commonwealth – to consider the impacts of the accelerating decline of Australia's nature and stock of natural capital upon national productivity via a Treasury or Productivity Commission inquiry.

Bird flu – wildlife resilience funding

- Australia has one of the world's highest extinction rates⁴ and a history of underinvesting in the recovery of threatened species.
- The announcement by the Commonwealth on 27 August 2026 of only \$20 million to build wildlife resilience in the face of bird flu⁵ is grossly inadequate – merely 10% of the environment sector's calls for \$200 million over 2 years⁶. This barely replaces this year's \$17.2 million cut to the Saving Native Species Program, leaving Australia no better prepared to respond to the one of the most significant emerging threats facing our wildlife.
- This is despite the Federal, State and Territory governments' commitment to "*no new extinctions*"⁷ (Environment Ministers Meeting June 2024). **Business-as-usual underinvestment in nature will lead to more extinctions.**

Recommendation 2: That the Commonwealth – and that the State and Territory governments urgently call on the Commonwealth – to increase its bird flu wildlife resilience funding to safeguard Australia's threatened species, rather than allow continued burden-shifting to the States and Territories for Australia's bird flu wildlife response.

The urgent need for a National Restoration Framework

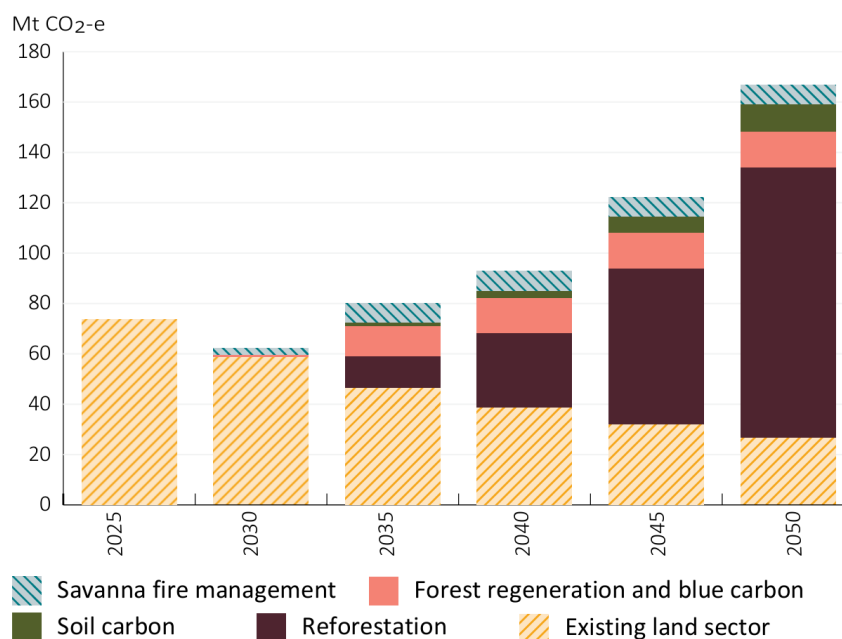
Australia's Strategy for Nature includes a priority target that "Priority degraded areas are under effective restoration by 2030"⁸, a commitment agreed by all Environment Ministers⁹. Despite this, two years after the Strategy's release, and four years after Australia signed on to the Global Biodiversity Framework, clear national guidance and support from the Commonwealth to enable delivery of this target remains absent.

There is a pressing need for a national restoration framework, or equivalent mechanism, to complement the Commonwealth's national roadmap for protection¹⁰. Such a framework should articulate a clear national vision for restoration, provide consistency around key definitions and concepts, and set out a practical implementation pathway for achieving restoration outcomes at scale. **The public release of this framework – together with coordinated leadership and co-investment arrangements that support large-scale reforestation and environmental restoration on private land – is urgently required.**

Importantly, delivering effective restoration at scale will require funding arrangements that extend beyond reliance on the Nature Repair Market and offset-based sources (such as the Commonwealth's Restoration Contributions Holder). As noted on page 1, Commonwealth expenditure on nature is drastically underfunded, at less than 0.1% of the Federal budget. Achieving our restoration target in a meaningful way clearly cannot be achieved without additional funding. **The Commonwealth should provide dedicated co-investment to complement these mechanisms and accelerate restoration across priority landscapes.**

Effective environmental restoration will also be critical to achieving Australia's net zero emissions commitments. The Commonwealth's Net Zero Plan identifies five decarbonisation priorities, including "Net carbon removals scaled up"¹¹. In this context, the Plan recognises that "[l]and-based abatement, particularly reforestation, is the most cost-effective carbon removal option to help reach net zero emissions by 2050".¹² The significant contribution expected from reforestation and forest regeneration is illustrated in Figure 9 of the Commonwealth's Agriculture and Land Sector Plan¹³ (figure below), and clearly supports the need to scale-up action on environmental restoration.

Figure 9 Projected sources of land-based sequestration under the Baseline Scenario



Note: The 'Existing land sector' category refers to the existing net sink, including emissions reductions and sequestration being generated from existing ACCU projects. The decline in this category reflects the ageing of existing vegetation and the related decline in the ability to sequester carbon. The category does not include the sequestration from new sequestration projects incentivised through the Safeguard Mechanism. The sequestration volumes for reforestation, forest regeneration and blue carbon, soil carbon, and savanna fire management represent new sequestration projects in the Baseline Scenario.
Source: Treasury modelling

Recommendation 3: The Australian Government, with input from state and territory governments and relevant experts, must urgently develop and publicly release a National Restoration Framework that provides guidance on key concepts and definitions, as well as details of the implementation pathway.

Recommendation 4: The release of the framework should be accompanied by a national call to action that mobilises and aligns governments, landholders, industry, investors, conservation organisations and other stakeholders around shared restoration objectives.

Recommendation 5: The Australian Government must provide national leadership for implementation of the framework, and dedicated co-investment – beyond any that may be provided via the Nature Repair Market and Commonwealth Restoration Contributions Holder – to support and accelerate private conservation efforts and restoration at scale, and deliver on Net Zero carbon removals.

Fair fringe benefits treatment for Australia's environment sector

Conservation charities are competing for talent in an uneven playing field. When compared with other organisations in the charity sector, let alone the wider workforce, average salaries are significantly less than in Public Benevolent Institutions (PBIs – charities that relieve poverty, sickness, or destitution) for equivalent roles because environmental charities are not afforded the same fringe benefit tax exemptions. This significantly undercuts the conservation sector's ability to tackle Australia's biodiversity crisis while operating at a persistent disadvantage in the competition for talent.

Recommendation 6: The Commonwealth extends Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT) concessions – as currently available to Public Benevolent Institutions (PBIs) – to conservation charities.

About the Australian Land Conservation Alliance

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) is the peak national body representing organisations that work to protect, steward, and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity, and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia.

ALCA member land conservation efforts have influenced over 9.3% of Australia with more than 4,000 landholders. We have over 70,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$400 million. Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance, and funding and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

The list of our twenty-three member organisations can be found online at: www.alca.org.au/members.

Some ALCA members are statutory entities; the views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the views of the Government administering those statutory entities.

You can also learn more about ALCA online at: www.alca.org.au.

Endnotes

- ¹ *The nature-based economy – How Australia's prosperity depends on nature*, Australian Conservation Foundation, <https://www.acf.org.au/news/the-nature-based-economy-how-australias-prosperity-depends-on-nature>
- ² 'ALCA Budget Brunch' (2026-27 Budget analysis), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnLPQgU3ieM>
- ³ p4, *Nature Economics: Analysis of the case for Australian Government investment in nature*, 2025; https://30by30.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/30by30_Nature_Economics28Online29-compressed.pdf
- ⁴ p30, *Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030*; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/australias-strategy-for-nature-2024-2030.pdf>
- ⁵ <https://minister.agriculture.gov.au/collins/media-release/joint-media-release-H5-bird-flu-funding-boost-murray-watt>
- ⁶ <https://www.alca.org.au/news-insights/article/media-release-20m-bird-flu-package-leaves-wildlife-at-risk>
- ⁷ *Environment Ministers Meeting Communique*, 21 June 2024; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/emm-communique-21-june-2024.pdf>; also see: 'Target: No new extinctions', "Prevent new extinctions of native species, support the recovery of threatened species and maintain their genetic diversity", *Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030*; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/australias-strategy-for-nature-2024-2030.pdf>; and Objective 3: New extinctions are prevented, *Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032*; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/threatened-species-action-plan-2022-2032.pdf>
- ⁸ *Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2026*; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/australias-strategy-for-nature-2024-2030.pdf> as aligned with Target 2 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Global Biodiversity Framework; <https://www.cbd.int/article/cop15-final-text-kunming-montreal-gbf-221222>
- ⁹ As above, n4.
- ¹⁰ *National Roadmap for protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land by 2030*; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/30-by-30-national-roadmap.pdf>
- ¹¹ <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/emissions-reduction/net-zero>
- ¹² p11, *Net Zero Plan*; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/net-zero-report.pdf>
- ¹³ p10, *Agriculture and Land Sector Plan*; <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/agriculture-and-land-sector-plan.pdf>