Halfway to 30x30

AUSTRALIA'S PROGRESS ON PROMISED PROTECTION

Pew

The Nature Conservancy

alca
Australian Land Conservation Alliance

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Front cover image:
The Simpson Desert's vast red sand dunes and spinifex grasslands provide habitat for distinctive desert wildlife. Image Credit: Alamy

Back cover image:
Field of cows bordering the Capertee Valley, a large canyon in New South Wales abundant in flora and fauna. Image Credit: Tammy Walker

Acknowledgments:
This report has been informed by the collective expertise across many organisations and individuals. This includes co-authors of the 2023 Pathways to 30x30 report Thalie Partridge and Michael Cornish, as well as James Watson from University of Queensland, Angela Pursey and Tim Norton from The Pew Charitable Trusts. Maps and spatial analysis provided by Hong Jiang from The Nature Conservancy.

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ACKNOWLEDGING, RESPECTING AND ENABLING FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia as the First Peoples of our nation. We recognise and respect the enduring relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with these lands and waters and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

The centrepiece of global best practice for protected area growth is the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) reflects this in speaking of "recognising and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories".

We acknowledge and support the application of principles that can give effect to First Nations leadership in protected areas planning and implementation, such as for example the outcomes of the Reimagining Conservation Forum - Working Together for Healthy Country (2022): rights based approach; economic opportunities; managing Country together; equity in managing Country; weaving knowledge systems; and valuing culture and recognising indigenous cultural authority. We recognise the importance of ongoing capacity building and effective resourcing.

We recognise that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, nature and culture are inextricably connected and we value the role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to play in managing Country today.

The organisations supporting this report recognise that there is still much to learn and improve as we work together to achieve outcomes for people and planet.

Split Rock Escarpment overlooking the Kennedy Valley near Laura, QLD.

Image Credit: Kerry Trapnell

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, Australia was one of 196 countries committing to protect and conserve at least 30 per cent of land, inland waters, and coastal and marine areas by 2030 under Target 3 of the Convention on Biological Diversity's Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

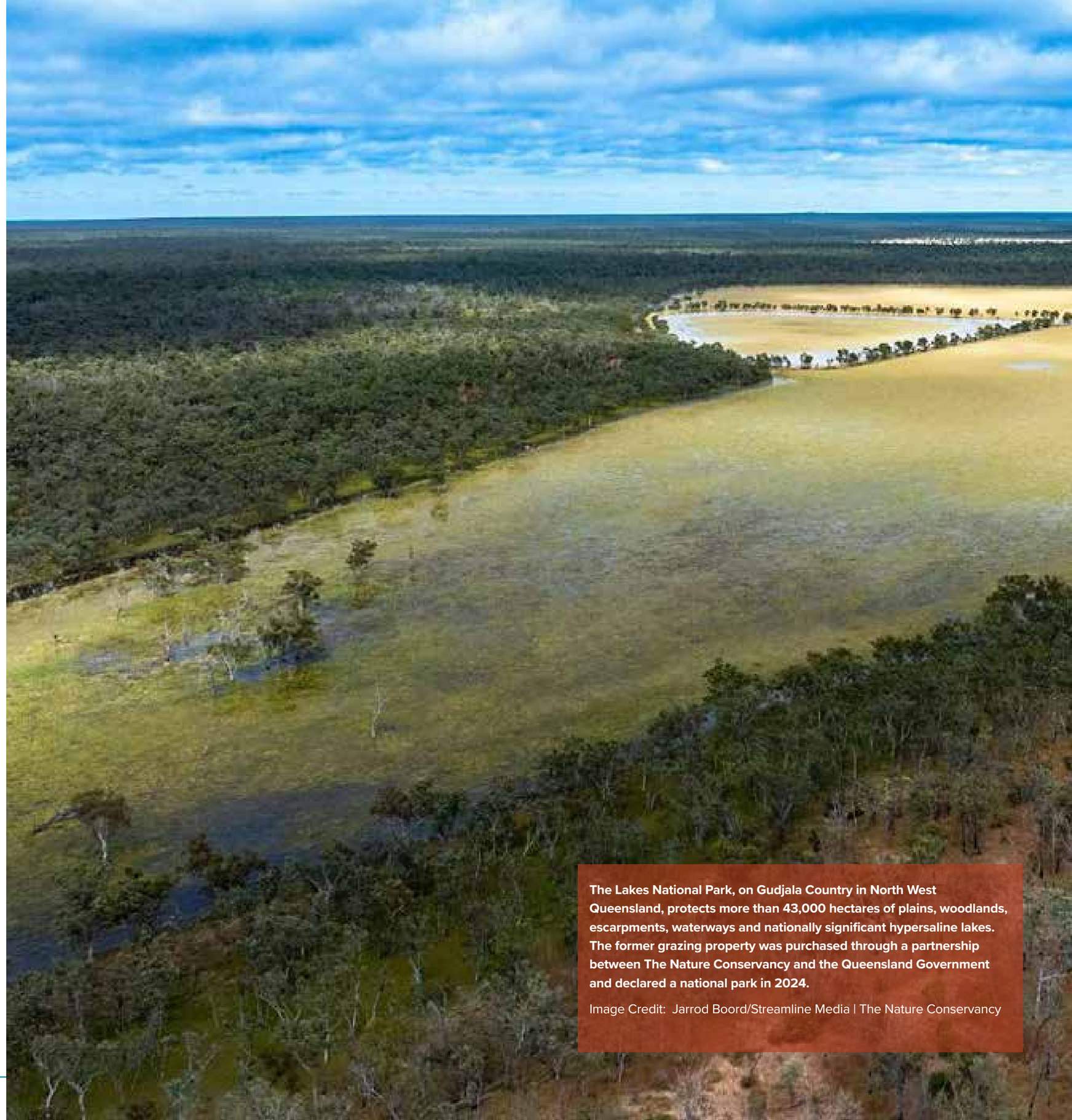
At the halfway point, as Australia reports on progress towards that commitment through the Convention on Biological Diversity, including at COP17 in Armenia in October 2026, this review finds that **important progress has been made but that delivery is not yet on track to meet the full requirements of the target.**

Meeting the 2030 commitment will require a significant increase in the pace and scale of investment, including support for protected areas on private land and targeted protection in regions where ecosystems and threatened species habitat remain poorly represented.

Australia has an opportunity to build a protected area system by 2030 that safeguards the continent's species, ecosystems and landscapes, while supporting First Nations leadership, regional communities and enduring cultural and economic benefits. Proven conservation mechanisms, growing public and private investment and recent protection across Indigenous, public and private land provide a strong foundation for further progress.

> **Delivering the 30x30 commitment will, however, require faster and more strategically targeted action. The challenge includes securing protection for at least an additional 34.3 million hectares of healthy, biodiverse land by 2030, while addressing major gaps in the protection of ecosystems and threatened species habitat.**

Many threatened species, bioregions, subregions and ecosystems remain poorly protected, and the protected area system still has significant gaps in ecological representation. Current funding, policy settings and delivery arrangements are not yet sufficient to close these gaps. Success will depend on greater investment, stronger coordination across governments and land tenures, secure long-term management funding, and protection directed to places of greatest biodiversity importance.



The Lakes National Park, on Gudjala Country in North West Queensland, protects more than 43,000 hectares of plains, woodlands, escarpments, waterways and nationally significant hypersaline lakes. The former grazing property was purchased through a partnership between The Nature Conservancy and the Queensland Government and declared a national park in 2024.

Image Credit: Jarrod Boord/Streamline Media | The Nature Conservancy

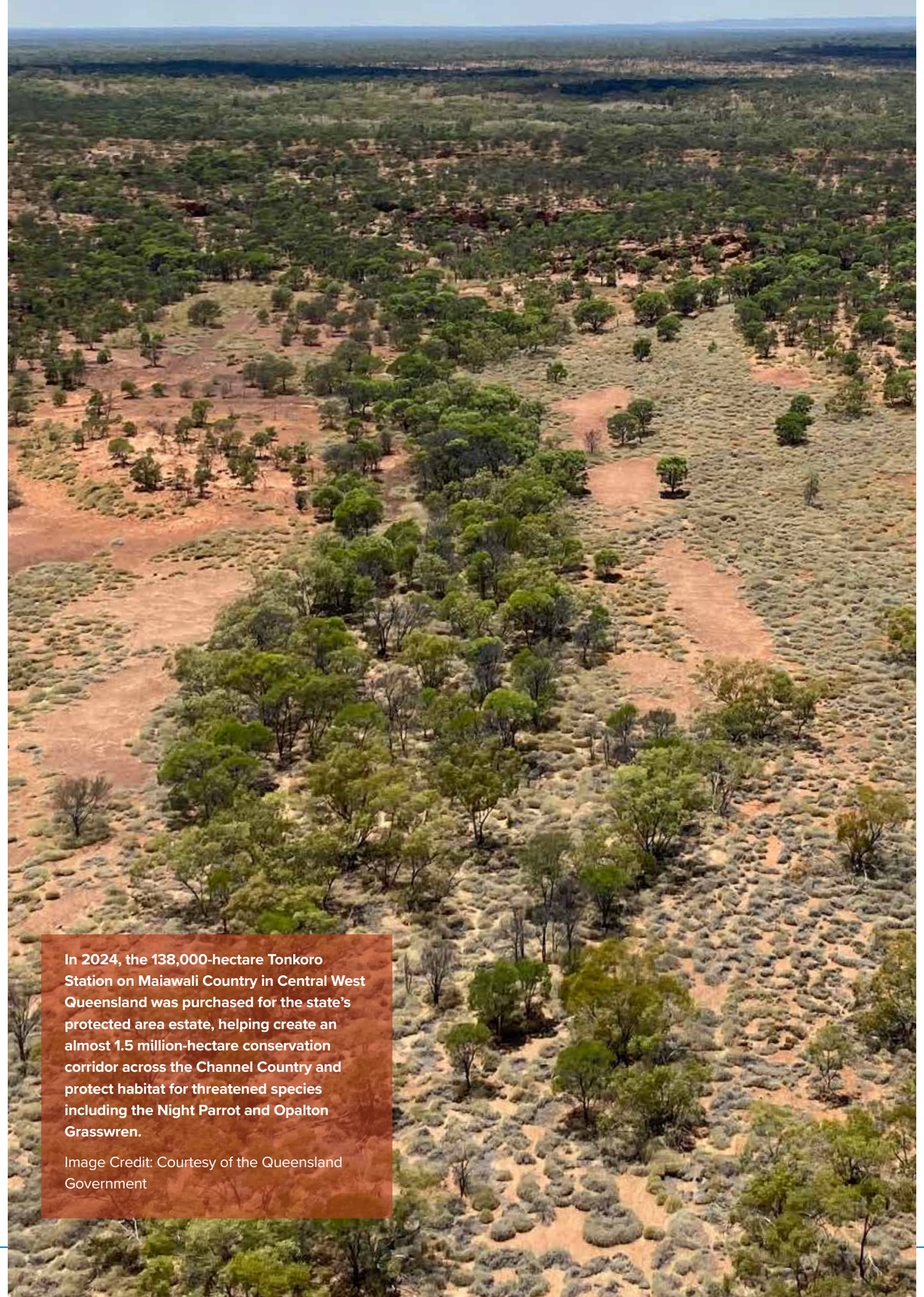
Using the 2024 Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD), supplemented by subsequent additions to the protected area estate, approximately 25 per cent of the Australian continent is protected at the time of publication. Progress since adoption of the GBF includes major new and additions to Indigenous Protected Areas, land acquisitions for new public and private protected areas, state-based initiatives, development of Australia's Roadmap for 30x30 on land and a national framework for other effective area-based conservation measures, and funding announcements under the Australian Bushland Program. These advances provide a strong platform for the next phase of delivery.

Closing the remaining area gap is only part of the task. The national percentage does not show whether Australia is protecting the full diversity of its species and ecosystems. Target 3 requires protected and conserved areas to be important for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecologically representative, well connected and effectively managed, with First Nations rights recognised and respected.

> **The analysis shows that many bioregions, subregions and ecosystems remain poorly protected and that substantial gaps persist, particularly at finer ecological scales.**

These shortfalls also leave many threatened species and habitats exposed. Recent research shows that some threatened species have little or none of their known range within protected areas, while substantial habitat for highly imperilled, restricted-range species remains outside the network. Australia could therefore achieve 30 per cent protection by area without adequately safeguarding many of the species, habitats and landscapes most in need of protection.

Australia's policy response has advanced some elements of the four pathways identified in the *2023 Protecting Australia's Nature: Pathways to protecting 30 per cent of land by 2030* report. The Australian Bushland Program supports partnerships with states and territories, Indigenous Protected Areas, Nature Repair Market projects, and strategic property purchases. However, the available funding remains significantly below the level required, and current co-investment settings for land purchases will be less effective at leveraging state, philanthropic and private investment than those used under the former National Reserve System Program. Greater investment will also need to be matched by secure long-term management funding so that new protected areas deliver enduring ecological and cultural outcomes.



In 2024, the 138,000-hectare Tonkoro Station on Maiawali Country in Central West Queensland was purchased for the state's protected area estate, helping create an almost 1.5 million-hectare conservation corridor across the Channel Country and protect habitat for threatened species including the Night Parrot and Opalton Grasswren.

Image Credit: Courtesy of the Queensland Government

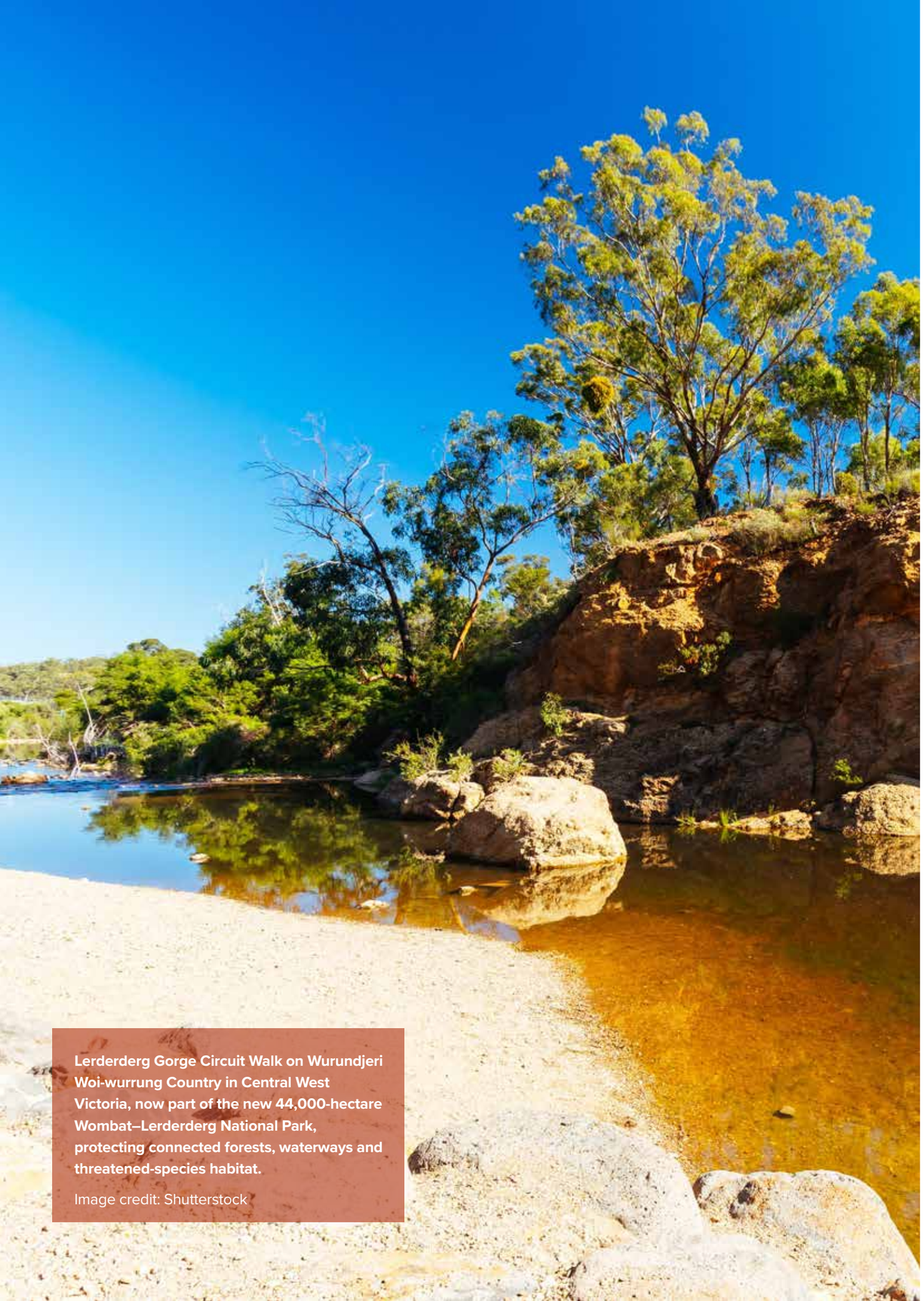
Australia has the mechanisms needed to achieve 30x30, but delivery will require coordinated national leadership, substantially greater investment and deliberate targeting of under-represented ecosystems and threatened species habitat. The identified pathways are:

- **Establish a $5 billion dedicated land purchase fund** to enable strategic purchases of high-biodiversity land for new public, private and Indigenous protected areas.
- **Expand and securely fund Indigenous Protected Areas**, rebuild delivery capacity, and support Traditional Owner-led protection and management.
- **Strengthen permanent private-land conservation** through federal support for covenant programs, enhanced protection mechanisms, and reform of tax and financial barriers.
- **Systematically review public land** to identify high-value opportunities for protection.

This report acknowledges the Australian Government's establishment of the Australian Bushland Program and its commitment to invest $250 million over five years to support conservation and progress towards 30x30. Substantially more funding is required however, if Australia is to meet its 2030 commitment. The 2027 federal budget is now a key milestone to significantly increase funding for nature to ensure delivery occurs on the ground before the 2030 deadline.

Australia has demonstrated that rapid growth of the protected area system is possible when governments, Traditional Owners, conservation organisations, landholders and philanthropy work together.

> **The years to 2030 must convert commitments and early investment into protection at the scale required – not simply to reach 30 per cent of the continent, but to build a comprehensive, adequate, representative, and well-managed National Reserve System that safeguards Australia's biodiversity for the long term.**



Lerderderg Gorge Circuit Walk on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country in Central West Victoria, now part of the new 44,000-hectare Wombat–Lerderderg National Park, protecting connected forests, waterways and threatened-species habitat.

Image credit: Shutterstock

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INTRODUCTION

In 2025, the new 10,560-hectare Wuthathi (Captain Billy Landing) National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) (CYPAL) was established on Wuthathi Country in Cape York, jointly managed by the Wuthathi People and the Queensland Government.

Image credit: Richard Windeyer

Australia was one of 196 parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to commit to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) in 2022. Target 3 of the GBF commits parties to protect and conserve at least 30% of the world's terrestrial and inland water areas and coastal and marine areas by 2030, but doing so to ensure ecological representation, connectivity, protection of areas of particularly importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services. This target is often called the 30x30 Target.

As part of the commitment under the Convention to update National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans to reflect country commitments to the GBF, the Australian Government produced *Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024–2030* (Australian Government 2024a). A headline target of that Strategy is to "Protect and conserve 30% of Australia's landmass, and 30% of Australia's marine areas, by 2030". In full, this target commits Australia to:

> **"Protect and conserve at least 30% of Australia's terrestrial and inland water areas, and marine and coastal areas by 2030, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ensuring protected and conserved areas are ecologically representative, well connected and effectively managed, recognising and respecting the rights of First Nations peoples."**

Beyond fulfilling Australia's global commitments, protecting at least 30% of Australia's lands and waters by 2030 also has strong public support. Australian residents broadly support the 30x30 goal (Fitzsimons et al. 2025), and some 72% supporting a policy to "Establish new national parks to protect natural and cultural values" and 95% believing that more of the federal budget should be dedicated to nature protection (Biodiversity Council 2025).

Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

In 2023, conservation science and policy experts from The Nature Conservancy, Pew Charitable Trusts, WWF-Australia and the Australian Land Conservation Alliance published *Protecting Australia's Nature: Pathways to protecting 30 per cent of land by 2030* (Fitzsimons et al. 2023). Known as the 'Pathways to 30x30' report, it outlined four effective pathways, and associated recommendations, to meet Target 3 of the GBF, based on the effectiveness of previous and existing models of substantive protected area growth in Australia.

Victoria's Riverina supports a rich mosaic of floodplains, wetlands, woodlands and native grasslands across the state's north, providing vital habitat for threatened species.

Image credit: Ian Mckenzie

These pathways remain crucial to achieving the 30x30 target:

1. Establish a new dedicated AU$5 billion fund for the purchase of land of high biodiversity importance to create new public, private or Indigenous protected areas;
2. Continue to support the creation of new Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) to meet Traditional Owner demand and establish secure long-term funding for IPA management;
3. Increase support for the uptake of permanent conservation covenants on private and leasehold land through federal government support for covenant programs, particularly for under-represented bioregions and ecosystems, develop enhanced protection conservation covenants and review federal and state tax and financial incentives and barriers to private land conservation; and
4. Systematically review public land to identify areas of high conservation significance and subsequent protected area opportunities.

The Australian Government's establishment of the Australian Bushland Program - a commitment of $250 million over five years - is a welcome step towards 30x30.

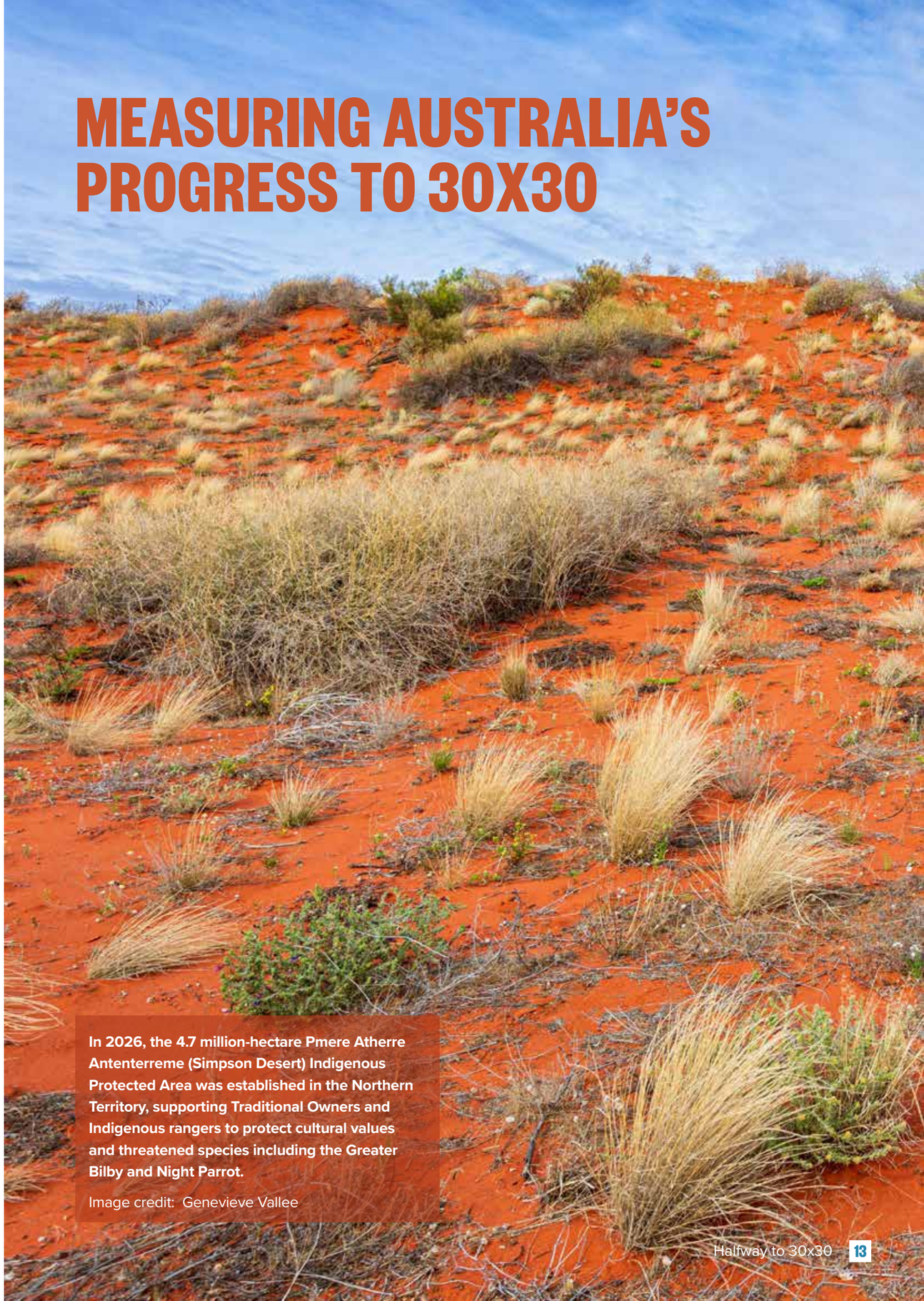
However, investment remains well short of the scale required: the program should be capitalised to $5 billion by 2030, with the 2027–28 Federal Budget providing a critical opportunity for a substantial increase in funding.

A review on progress of the GBF is a key topic of discussion at the Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17) in Yerevan, Armenia, 19–30 October 2026.

> This report reviews Australia's progress towards Target 3 of the GBF and the 30x30 target under *Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030*, as well as its commitments under *Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030*.

In this review we consider both ecological representation and threatened species coverage. Ecological representation is a key part of Australia's science-based policy approach for developing the National Reserve System for the past 30 years. Ecological representation is also a key part of Target 3 of the GBF, as it was in the previous targets of the Convention of Biological Diversity.

MEASURING AUSTRALIA'S PROGRESS TO 30X30



In 2026, the 4.7 million-hectare Pmere Atherre Antenterreme (Simpson Desert) Indigenous Protected Area was established in the Northern Territory, supporting Traditional Owners and Indigenous rangers to protect cultural values and threatened species including the Greater Bilby and Night Parrot.

Image credit: Genevieve Vallee

Some 22% of Australia's land occurred in protected areas when Australia signed the GBF in 2022. In 2024, data from the Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database put this figure at 22.57%. Recent protected area announcements have increased protection to 25% of Australia's land mass (Watt et al. 2026) (Figure 1).

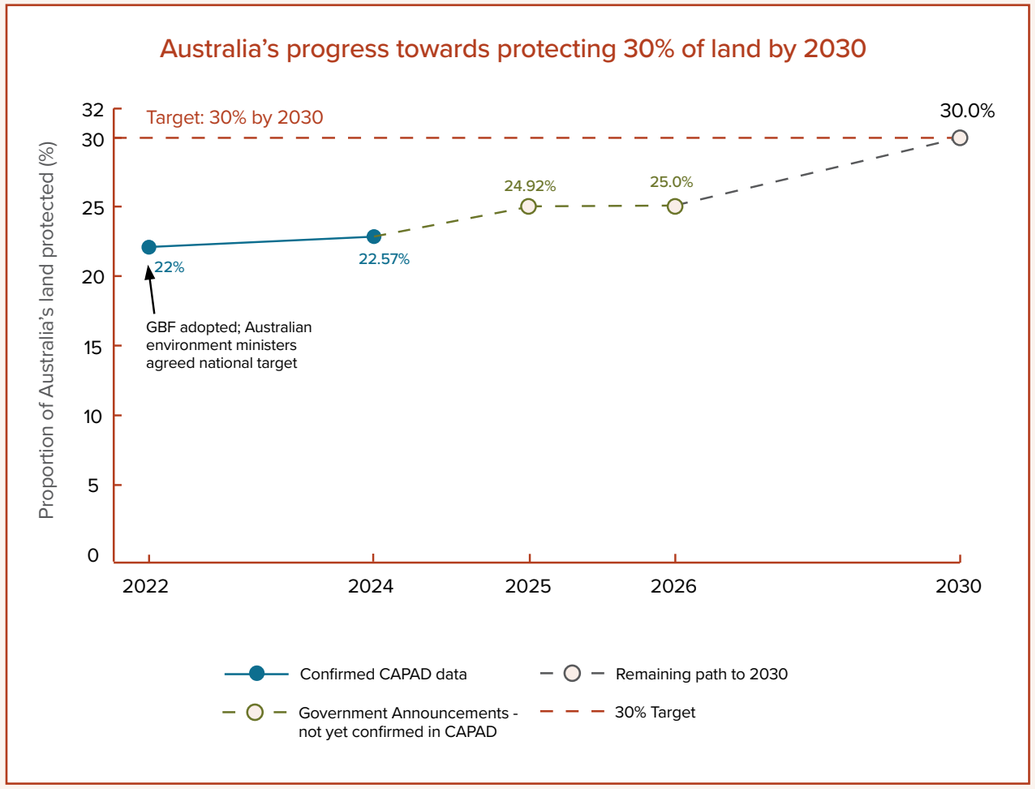


Figure 1

Percent protection levels for Australia's land: progress and need.
Sources: DCCEEW Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database 2024; Australian Government announcements.

METHODOLOGY

This report assessed Australia's progress towards protecting and conserving 30% of its land by 2030 using the most recent nationally consistent protected area dataset available at the time of analysis – the 2024 Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD).

CAPAD provided the baseline for calculating the proportion of Australia's landmass within protected areas and for assessing protection across Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) bioregions and subregions. The CAPAD spatial layer was also analysed alongside National Vegetation Information System Major Vegetation Subgroups to assess progress against the comprehensiveness and representativeness benchmarks in *Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030.*

To assess progress against targets for comprehensiveness and representativeness, we analysed the latest available national protected area data layer and the inclusion of National Vegetation Information System (NVIS) Major Vegetation Subgroups (MVS) within the protected area estate (NVIS Technical Working Group 2017).

MEASURING PROGRESS AGAINST BIOREGIONS AND SUBREGIONS

With 25% of land on the Australian continent protected, the increase in area needed to achieve 30% protection by 2030 will be around 34.3 million hectares. However, simply focusing on a coarse target of 30% of the continent alone will not achieve Australia's commitments under Target 3 of the GBF, nor meet criteria built into Australia's existing policy framework.

There are still large regions of Australia with very little land protected. Based on 2024 CAPAD figures, 27 of Australia's 89 bioregions and 203 of Australia's 419 subregions are still very poorly represented, with less than 10% of their area in any form of protected area (Figures 2 and 3). Of those 27 bioregions, 14 have between 5 and 10% of their area protected, whilst 13 have less than 5% protected.

MEASURING PROGRESS AGAINST COMPREHENSIVENESS AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

Ensuring the development of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas has been a core, science-based principle for the development of the National Reserve System for the past 30 years. Ensuring the protected and conserved area system is 'ecologically representative' is also a core part of Target 3 of the GBF and Australia's 30x30 commitment under Australia's Strategy for Nature and National 30x30 Roadmap.

Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030 sets explicit national targets for a comprehensive, adequate and representative National Reserve System. These targets include:

PROGRESSING COMPREHENSIVENESS

Measure: Include examples of at least 80 per cent of the number of regional ecosystems in each IBRA region. Priority will be given to under-represented IBRA bioregions with less than 10 per cent protected in the National Reserve System.

Reporting frequency: All jurisdictions by 2015 with reports on progress every two years.

PROGRESSING REPRESENTATIVENESS

Measure: Include examples of at least 80 per cent of the number of regional ecosystems in each IBRA subregion.

Reporting frequency: All jurisdictions by 2025 with reports on progress every two years.

Of Australia's 86 bioregions with NVIS vegetation mapping, 62 (72.1%) have some level of protection for at least 80% of their Major Vegetation Subgroups (MVSs), while 24 (27.9%) have protection for less than 80% as at 2024 (Figure 4).

Of Australia's 412 subregions with NVIS vegetation mapping, 188 subregions (45.6%) have 80% or more of individual MVSs with some level of protection and 224 (54.4%) have less than 80% as at 2024 (Figure 5).

Figure 2

Protection levels of Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) bioregions as at 2024

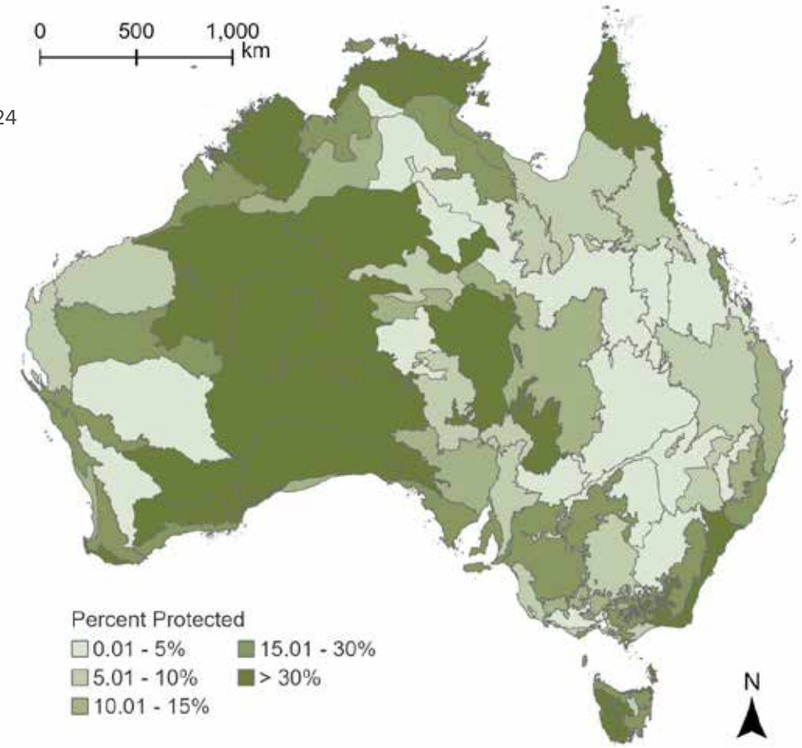
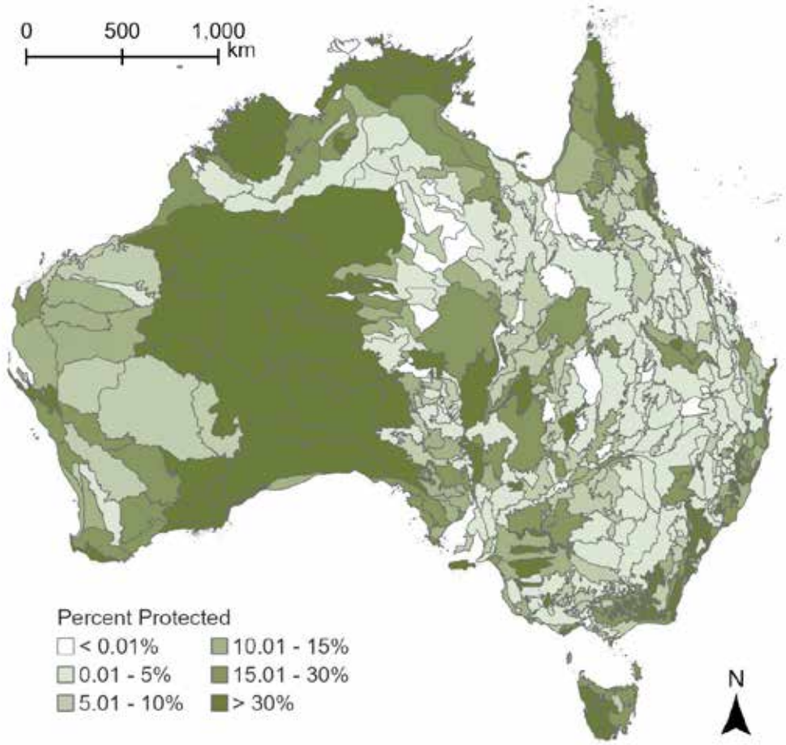


Figure 3

Protection levels of IBRA subregions as at 2024



This means that ecosystems in nearly 30% of Australia's bioregions are not considered to be 'comprehensively' protected and ecosystems in more than half of Australia's subregions are not considered to be 'representatively' protected, as defined by Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System.

In 2026, Australia's Seventh National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity suggested: "Since June 2020, Australia has protected an additional 39.68 million hectares or 5.16% of landmass, increasing the ecological representativeness of our protected area network and safeguarding a diverse range of habitats and ecosystems across Australia" (DCCEEW 2026). However, no data was provided to demonstrate the extent to which ecological representativeness has been increased. Despite commitments to produce reports on progress every two years for comprehensiveness and representativeness under Australia's National Reserve System Strategy, no such reports have been made public, if they have been produced.

MEASURING PROGRESS AGAINST SPECIES COVERAGE

Target 3 of the GBF requires more than progress against comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness benchmarks. It also requires protected and conserved areas to secure places of particular importance for biodiversity, ecosystem functions and services, and connectivity. Australia has long-standing policy settings and datasets for assessing comprehensiveness and representativeness, but nationally consistent approaches for measuring these additional attributes are less developed. This is despite *Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030* having two targets for 'adequacy' by which all Australian jurisdictions were to report on progress every two years:

PROTECTING THREATENED SPECIES & ECOSYSTEMS

Include critical habitats and core areas important for the long-term survival of rare, migratory, threatened or other priority species and ecological communities, including those listed under Commonwealth, state or territory legislation in each IBRA bioregion.

PROTECTING CRITICAL SITES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE

Include critical areas to ensure the viability, resilience and integrity of ecosystem function in response to a changing climate, such as large and small refuges, critical habitats, broad landscape-scale corridors, places of species and ecosystem richness, sites of endemism and sites that support threatened species and/or ecological communities, and places important for the stages in the life cycle of migratory or nomadic species, to act as core lands of a broader whole of landscape approach to biodiversity conservation.

Threatened species and ecological community data therefore provide an important test of whether expansion of the protected area system is protecting the biodiversity most at risk.

Recent research provides indicators for assessing these dimensions of Target 3 and identifying priorities for protected area expansion. Watson et al. (2026) examine how well the National Reserve System represents threatened species and ecological communities, while Ward et al. (2025) identify protection gaps for highly imperilled narrow-range species. Together, these studies show that growth in the protected area estate has not consistently secured the species, ecosystems and ecological processes most at risk.

> **The headline results show both progress and persistent gaps.**

Since 2010, the median proportion of a threatened species' range protected within the National Reserve System (NRS) has risen from 20.5% to 23.3%. Yet in 2022, 160 threatened species (11%) still had less than 1% of their range within the NRS (Watson et al. 2026). For 305 Critically Endangered restricted-range species, about 85,000 km^2 of habitat – roughly 1% of Australia – remains outside the protected area network, including the entire known range of 39 species (Ward et al. 2025). These findings contrast with the protection of 67.5% of highly intact land within the NRS in 2022, demonstrating that expansion has been more successful at securing large intact landscapes than at closing some of the most acute species-level gaps (Watson et al. 2026).

Protected area targets are commonly expressed as hectares or percentages because they allow progress to be tracked and compared. However, reaching an area target alone will not deliver the biodiversity outcomes that protected area systems are intended to achieve.

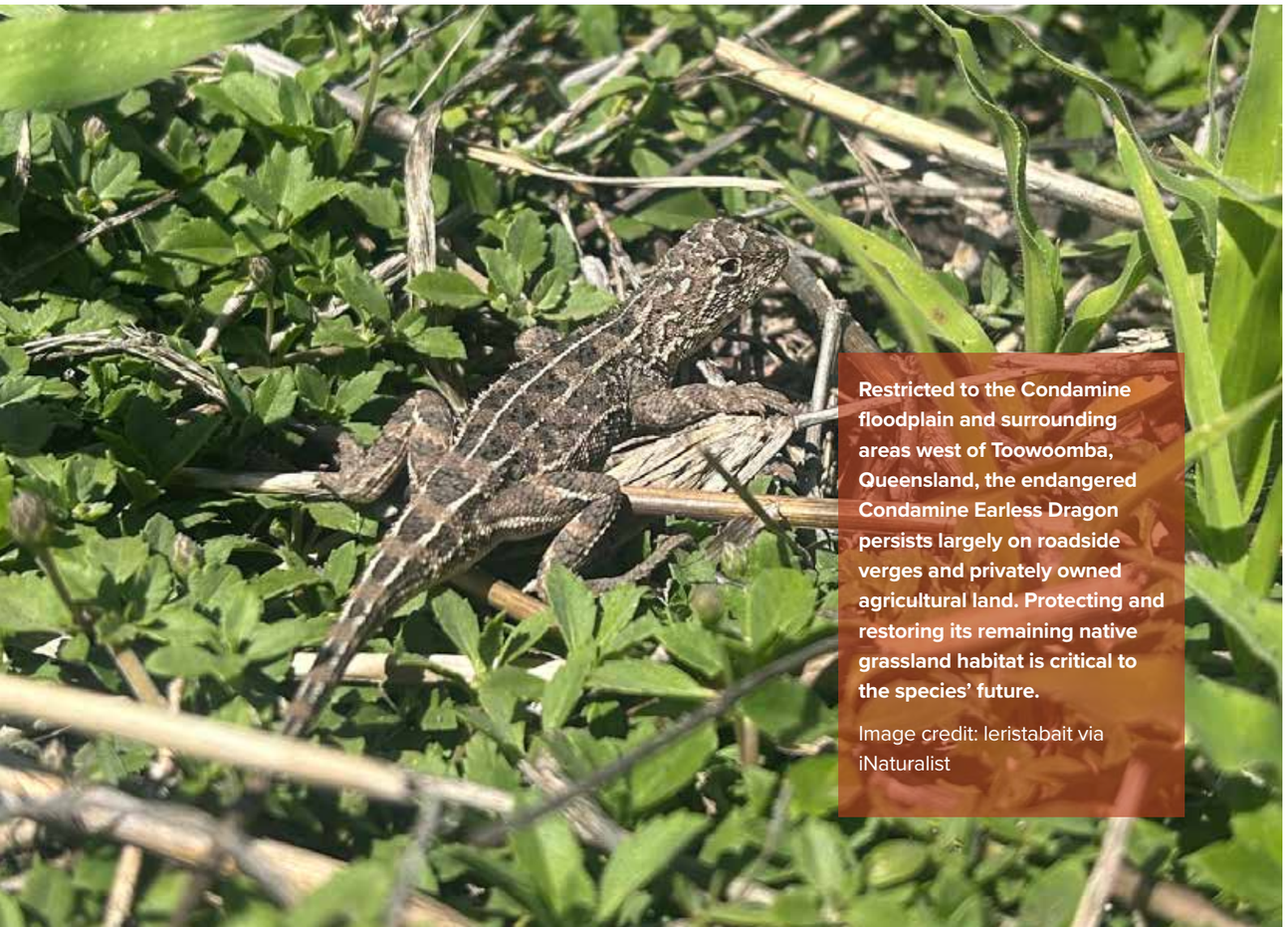
The purpose of 30x30 is not simply to expand the NRS, but to secure Australia's ecosystems, species and habitats, including those most at risk.

> **Recent research shows that, despite substantial expansion of the NRS, major gaps remain for threatened species and ecological communities.**

These gaps represent populations, habitat patches and ecological processes that remain exposed to clearing, inappropriate fire regimes, invasive species, disease, altered water regimes and climate change (Watson et al. 2026; Ward et al. 2025). Watson et al. (2026) assessed NRS coverage for 1,434 terrestrial species listed as Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* between 2010 and 2022. By 2022, 1,274 species had at least some mapped range in the NRS, but only 291 species (20.3%) met the study's species-specific target for adequate representation.

A further 160 species had less than 1% of their mapped range protected. The gap was greatest for Critically Endangered species: 40 had less than 1% of their range in the NRS and only 14% met the adequate representation target. Plants, which comprised three-quarters of the species assessed, had the lowest proportion meeting representation targets, followed by invertebrates. Many of these species have narrow distributions and can be lost through the degradation or destruction of only a small number of sites.

The national findings become clearer when considered at species level – for example McDowall's Galaxias and the Grey Range Thick-billed Grasswren have little or no representation in the NRS, but each illustrates a different dimension of the protection gap. McDowall's Galaxias depends on occupied freshwater reaches and the condition and hydrology of the surrounding system. The Grey Range Thick-billed Grasswren relies on arid-zone habitat where vegetation configuration, grazing pressure and fire management influence habitat suitability.



Restricted to the Condamine floodplain and surrounding areas west of Toowoomba, Queensland, the endangered Condamine Earless Dragon persists largely on roadside verges and privately owned agricultural land. Protecting and restoring its remaining native grassland habitat is critical to the species' future.

Image credit: leristabait via iNaturalist

Figure 4

Precent of NVIS Major Vegetation Subgroups with some level of protection in bioregions as at 2024.

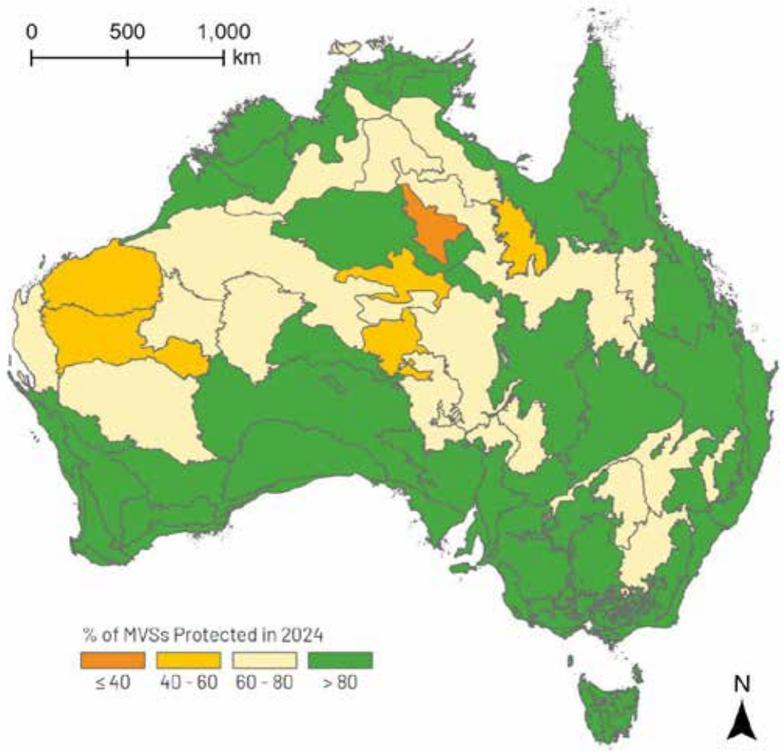
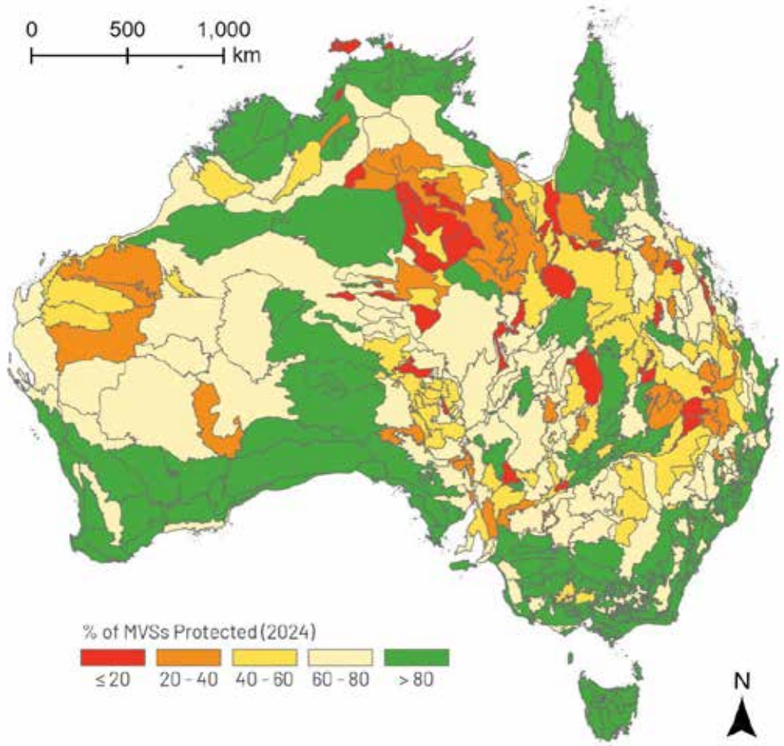


Figure 5

Percent of NVIS Major Vegetation Subgroups with some level of protection in subregions as at 2024.



The Mongarlowe Mallee is one of Australia's rarest eucalypts, known from only a tiny number of plants in south-eastern New South Wales.

Image credit: Australian Network for Plant Conservation

The shortfall for threatened species is particularly stark for narrow-range species. Ward et al. (2025) identified 305 Critically Endangered species with ranges smaller than 20,000 km². About 85,000 km² of their habitat—approximately 1% of mainland Australia—lies outside the protected area network, including the entire known range of 39 species.

> **Protecting or conserving this area would not, by itself, recover every Critically Endangered species, but it would address some of the most serious omissions in the NRS and provide a secure platform for active management.**

This is consistent with Target 3's direction to prioritise areas of particular importance for biodiversity and to ensure that protected area systems are ecologically representative.

There are similar shortfalls for threatened ecological communities. Watson et al. (2026) assessed 98 nationally listed communities and found that median NRS coverage increased only from 12.1% to 13.2% between 2010 and 2022, while the number meeting a 17% representation benchmark set by that study rose from 42 to 45. In 2022, only 12 of 44 Critically Endangered ecological communities met that benchmark. These results extend the species-level findings: many of Australia's most imperilled ecosystems remain predominantly outside protected areas, often in fragmented and modified landscapes where remaining patches are small, isolated and subject to continuing pressures.

An analysis by Ward et al. (2025) reinforces this ecosystem-scale requirement. Among 99 nationally prioritised terrestrial and freshwater species, habitat restoration was the most commonly required action, applying to 59 species, followed by ecological fire management for 25 species and mapping and protection of climate refugia for 18 species. Actions to reduce extinction risk were needed across freehold land, pastoral leases, other Crown land and existing conservation land; only 8% of the area prioritised for downlisting species was already on nature conservation land. Many of the places needed to prevent extinction and support recovery therefore lie outside the existing NRS and across multiple land tenures.

> **New public, Indigenous and private protected areas – including permanent conservation covenants – will be needed alongside other mechanisms for managing threatened species across the landscape. Species and ecosystems with small or fragmented distributions must not be deprioritised simply because protecting them would make only a small percent contribution to the national protected area target.**

Expansion of the NRS under 30x30 should therefore be assessed against an integrated set of outcomes. Proposed additions should be evaluated for the threatened species ranges and ecological communities they secure, their contribution to the comprehensiveness and representativeness of poorly protected bioregions subregions and regional ecosystems, and their value for connectivity and climate resilience. The purpose of 30x30 is not simply to increase the area protected, but to build an ecologically representative and connected system that protects places of particular importance for biodiversity, including Australia's most vulnerable species and ecosystems.

At Brindingabba in western NSW, Great Artesian Basin springs create rare desert oases that support distinctive plants and wildlife. Listed as Critically Endangered in NSW, these ecological communities depend on protecting the springs, surrounding habitat and the groundwater that keeps them flowing.

Image credit: Joshua J Smith | The Nature Conservancy

POLICY AND DELIVERY

Western Australia's Wheatbelt biodiversity hotspot supports many species found nowhere else on Earth, including distinctive Verticordia wildflowers around Wongan Hills and Reynoldson Reserve.

Image credit: Hans Wismeijer

Since signing the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Australian Government and some state governments have made several policy, program and funding advances.

PROGRESS ON POLICY

In 2024, the *National Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures Framework* (Australian Government 2024b) was released, making Australia one of the few countries with detailed guidance for recognising other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs; also known as conserved areas). This was followed by the report *Achieving 30x30 on Land: National Roadmap for Protecting and Conserving 30% of Australia's Land by 2030* (DCCEEW 2024), which sought to:

1. explain the role of both protected and conserved areas in achieving the 30x30 land target;
2. describe principles to guide efforts towards 30x30;
3. raise awareness of programs that support 30x30; and
4. identify indicators for tracking progress.

The roadmap was framed as complementing *Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024–2030*, *Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030*, the *National Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures Framework*, and relevant policies in each state and territory; however, it does not detail how the 30x30 target will be reached.

The National Roadmap describes two criteria for identifying areas with higher biodiversity values and lower protection for the purposes of 30x30:

1. Areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services; and
2. Areas that enhance ecological comprehensiveness and representativeness.

A Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) framework was used to develop three datasets to address these criteria, which were released in early 2026 (Environmental Information Australia (EIA) 2026).

In 2023, legislation to establish a national, regulated Nature Repair Market was passed (Brugler et al. 2025), and; in late 2025 consultation on a 'Protect and Conserve' method under the Nature Repair Market commenced. According to this public consultation, the objective of the method is "to support projects that contribute to the 30x30 target, noting projects under the method will support long-term protection and conservation of nature beyond the 2030 timeframe" (DCCEEW 2025a).

In 2024, more than 325,000 hectares of Nanda Country around Kalbarri gained stronger protection through the creation of new national parks and nature reserves, jointly managed by Nanda Traditional Owners and the Western Australian Government.

Image credit: Nick Dunn

PROGRESS ON DELIVERY

In October 2023, the Australian Government announced $25 million to "supercharge efforts" to meet its 30x30 target (Plibersek 2023).

In March 2025, the Australian Government announced that a new "Saving Australia's Bushland Program will invest $250 million over the next five years to boost conservation" and to "protect 30 per cent of land and 30 per cent of seas by 2030" (Plibersek 2025).

The Australian Bushland Program (as it is now known) has 4 components:

1. partnering with state and territory governments to expand, and better manage, protected and conserved areas;
2. growing the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) Program to support First Nations-led protection;
3. investing in Nature Repair Market projects that protect and conserve biodiversity; and
4. contributing funding to help buy and protect key properties with high biodiversity value.

In March 2026, the federal minister approved a total of $99.43 million in Australian Bushland Program (ABP) funding for New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania to deliver 12 projects advancing 30x30 outcomes through a mix of land purchases, conservation covenant programs and exploration of OECMs (Australian Government 2026) – see appendix for full details.

In June 2026, the Australian Government announced a Request for Expression of Interest for strategic land purchases. This component of the Australian Bushland Program funds approved organisations to buy and protect land with high biodiversity value.

In contrast to the 2:1 ratio for funding land purchase under the successful National Reserve System Program where the Australian government contributed up to two-thirds of the purchase price, the funding model proposed for land purchase under the Australian Bushland Program is just 1:2 (DCCEEW 2025b). This constrains the effectiveness of the program, making it more challenging for the land purchase proponent to raise two-thirds of the purchase price in dynamic real estate markets, and thus likely dampen philanthropic co-investment (Fitzsimons 2025).

In January 2026, the Australian Government announced it was investing up to $13 million to establish at least eight new Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), from the Australian Bushland Program (Watt 2026).

Some state governments have developed state-based frameworks to contribute to 30x30 outcomes, including South Australia (DEW 2025), Queensland (DETSI 2025) and New South Wales (NSW NPWS 2026a).

However, some states have also backflipped on commitments for protected area expansion, such as in Victoria where a previous commitment to establish an expanded reserve system in state forests following the cessation of native forest timber harvesting has not been acted upon (Fitzsimons and Wescott 2025).

PROGRESS ON PROTECTION

Alongside policy and program development, governments, Traditional Owners and conservation organisations have delivered a range of new protection outcomes across public, private and Indigenous land. The examples here are selected highlights of 30x30 progress rather than a comprehensive state-by-state update.

INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS

In 2025, the Australian Government delivered six new Indigenous Protected Areas and expanded two more, adding almost 16 million hectares and 2 percentage points towards the national 30x30 land target.

QUEENSLAND

Vergemont Station

In 2024, the Queensland Government purchased the 352,589-hectare Vergemont Station. The former cattle-grazing property has significant riverine and biodiversity values, provides habitat for the endangered Night Parrot and highly restricted Opalton Grasswren, and connects with nearby protected areas to help conserve almost 1.5 million hectares of the Channel Country bioregion. The purchase included a $21 million philanthropic contribution brokered by The Nature Conservancy – the largest such donation for a land purchase in Australia – and will enable creation of a new national park of about 300,000 hectares (Fitzsimons 2025; Powell 2025).

Tonkoro and Melrose stations

In 2024, the Queensland Government purchased the 138,000-hectare Tonkoro Station and 65,000 hectares of Melrose Station in western Queensland. The properties provide habitat for the endangered Night Parrot and the highly restricted Opalton Grasswren and contain regional ecosystems that are poorly represented – or not represented – in the existing protected area estate (Queensland Government 2026).

The Lakes National Park

In 2024, the new 43,000-hectare The Lakes National Park was declared north of Hughenden. The park spans the Einasleigh Uplands and Gulf Plains bioregions, protecting plains, woodlands, escarpments, creeks, a nationally significant high-altitude hypersaline lake and the headwaters of the South Gregory River, which flows into the Great Barrier Reef catchment (Queensland Government 2026).

Conserved Areas (OECMs)

Queensland has also recognised Australia's first two designated OECMs, known locally as Conserved Areas: Weranga Scarps on the Western Downs, covering 48 hectares, and McCoys Creek Wetland in East Coomera,covering 146 hectares.

New protected areas are strengthening conservation across Queensland's Gulf Plains, Channel Country and Einasleigh Uplands.

Image credit: Steve Waters

NEW SOUTH WALES

Thurloo Downs

The NSW Government is acquiring the 437,394-hectare Thurloo Downs property between Bourke and Tibooburra for addition to the national parks estate. It is the largest acquisition of private land for national parks in NSW history. The property fills important gaps in the reserve system, protects landscapes and ecosystems not found in any other national park, and provides habitat for threatened species including the Black Falcon, Flock Bronzewing, Australian Bustard, Stripe-faced Dunnart and Woma Python. It also contains extensive Aboriginal cultural heritage, including hearth remains, flakes and grinding plates. (NSW Government 2026)

Tasman and Corinya stations

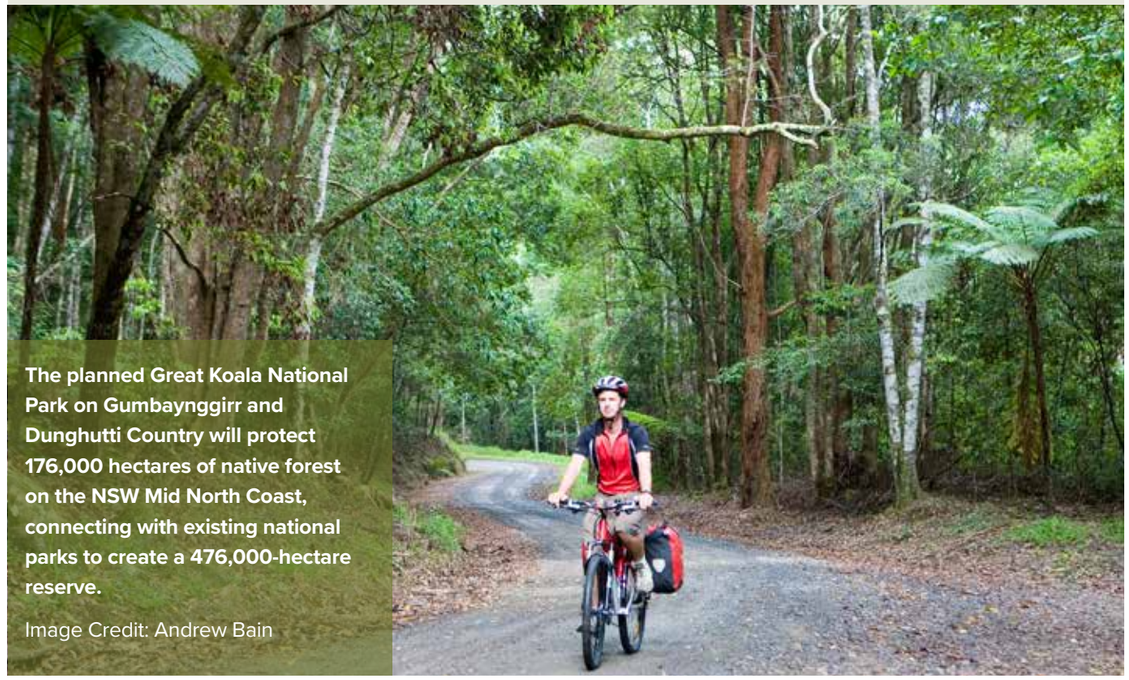
In 2025, the NSW Government acquired 71,866 hectares across Tasman and Corinya stations in partnership with The Nature Conservancy for addition to the national park estate. Located about 140 kilometres south-west of Cobar, the acquisition protects parts of two of the state's least reserved bioregions – the Cobar Peneplain and Murray Darling Depression – and brings the Neckarbo Range, Barnato Lakes and six other under-represented landscapes into the reserve system. At least 13 threatened species occur on the properties, including the South-eastern Hooded Robin and Pink Cockatoo (The Nature Conservancy 2025).

Cuttaburra National Park

The NSW Government's 2023 purchase of Comeroo Station added 37,423 hectares of high-conservation-value land to form Cuttaburra National Park. About 150 kilometres north-west of Bourke, the park protects diverse wetlands in the Cuttaburra Creek system, including more than a quarter of the nationally important Yantabulla Swamp. It also strengthens connectivity with Brindingabba National Park and private protected areas, creating a conservation corridor of more than 90,000 hectares. The purchase was supported by The Nature Conservancy, with contributions from the Wyss Foundation and Holdfast Collective (The Nature Conservancy 2024).

Proposed Great Koala National Park

The proposed Great Koala National Park on the NSW Mid North Coast would reserve more than 176,000 hectares of state forest and connect it with existing national parks and reserves to create a 476,000-hectare conservation area - one of the largest in the state (NSW NPWS 2026b).



The planned Great Koala National Park on Gumbaynggirr and Dunghutti Country will protect 176,000 hectares of native forest on the NSW Mid North Coast, connecting with existing national parks to create a 476,000-hectare reserve.

Image Credit: Andrew Bain

In 2023, Lake Carnegie Nature Reserve was established on Martu Country in Western Australia's remote Goldfields, protecting a nationally important wetland and habitat for the critically endangered Night Parrot.

Image Credit: LWM/NASA/LANDSAT

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Wanarra

Bush Heritage Australia has secured Wanarra, a 107,000-hectare property in Western Australia's Mid West. Adjoining the existing Charles Darwin Reserve, Wanarra reconnects more than one million hectares of public and private protected land to create one of the region's largest continuous conservation landscapes. The property provides habitat for the vulnerable Malleefowl and endangered Western Spiny-tailed Skink. During rare wet periods, the culturally significant Mongers Lake complex, which extends for more than 100 kilometres, also supports thousands of migratory waterbirds (Bush Heritage Australia 2026).

Plan for Our Parks

Launched in 2019, the Western Australian Government's Plan for Our Parks initiative created more than 6.5 million hectares of new national parks, marine parks and other conservation reserves (Western Australian Government 2025). Key achievements since 2023 include:

- May 2023: Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara National Park and Lake Carnegie Nature Reserve add more than 800,000 hectares.
- July 2023: The expansion of Kennedy Range National Park and creation of Pimbee National Park add 270,000 hectares.
- July 2024: Burringurrah (Mount Augustus), Muggon and Dalgaranga National Parks and Lakeside Conservation Park add 816,000 hectares.
- April 2026: 145,000 hectares are added to Helena and Aurora Ranges National Park.

VICTORIA

Patho Plains grasslands — conservation covenants

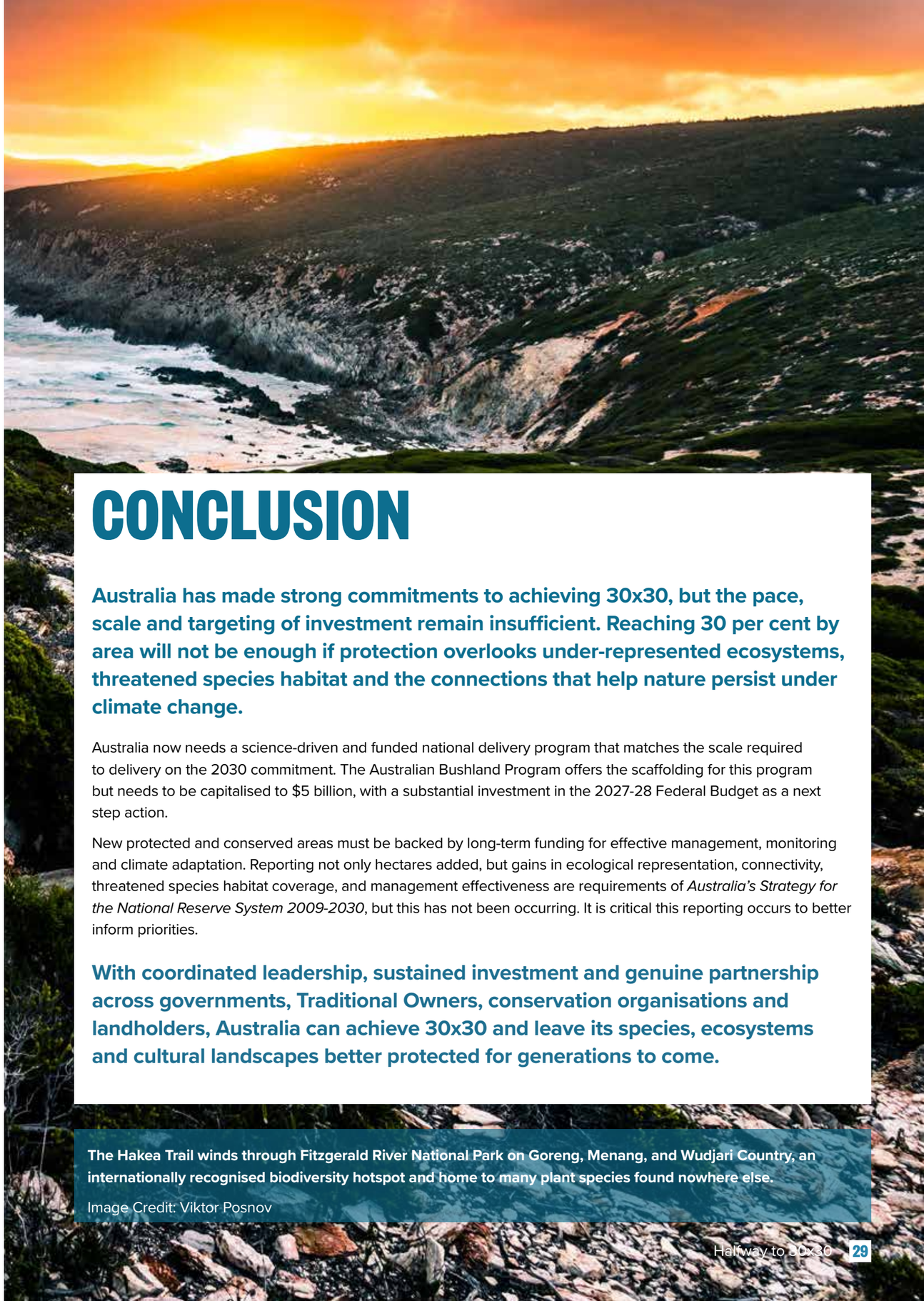
A collaborative project led by Trust for Nature, with financial contributions from The Nature Conservancy and others, established conservation covenants over four properties totalling 649 hectares of native grassland on the Murray Valley Plains. The project protects habitat for the critically endangered Plains-wanderer in a landscape where less than 5% of the original native grasslands remain. The Victorian Riverina remains a priority for improving ecological representation (The Nature Conservancy 2026).

Central West parks

In 2021, the Victorian Government announced that it would create three national parks, two conservation parks and seven new or expanded regional parks in the state's central west, consistent with its response to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's Central West Investigation Final Report. Legislation to create the first six parks passed in 2025. These comprise the Wombat–Lerderderg, Pyrenees and Mount Buangor national parks, the Cobaw and Hepburn conservation parks, and an addition to Bendigo Regional Park (Victorian Government 2026).

On Yorta Yorta Country in Victoria's Patho Plains, conservation covenants with local landholders are permanently protecting native grasslands and critical habitat for the critically endangered Plains-wanderer.

Image Credit: Trust for Nature



CONCLUSION

Australia has made strong commitments to achieving 30x30, but the pace, scale and targeting of investment remain insufficient. Reaching 30 per cent by area will not be enough if protection overlooks under-represented ecosystems, threatened species habitat and the connections that help nature persist under climate change.

Australia now needs a science-driven and funded national delivery program that matches the scale required to delivery on the 2030 commitment. The Australian Bushland Program offers the scaffolding for this program but needs to be capitalised to $5 billion, with a substantial investment in the 2027-28 Federal Budget as a next step action.

New protected and conserved areas must be backed by long-term funding for effective management, monitoring and climate adaptation. Reporting not only hectares added, but gains in ecological representation, connectivity, threatened species habitat coverage, and management effectiveness are requirements of *Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030*, but this has not been occurring. It is critical this reporting occurs to better inform priorities.

With coordinated leadership, sustained investment and genuine partnership across governments, Traditional Owners, conservation organisations and landholders, Australia can achieve 30x30 and leave its species, ecosystems and cultural landscapes better protected for generations to come.

The Hakea Trail winds through Fitzgerald River National Park on Goreng, Menang, and Wudjari Country, an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot and home to many plant species found nowhere else.

Image Credit: Viktor Posnov

APPENDIX

Allocation of funding to-date for states to advance 30x30 under the 'state and territory partnerships' component of the Australian Bushland Program (Parliament of Australia 2026).

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER PORTFOLIO

TABLE 1: RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1: IN TABULAR FORM, LIST THE FUNDING PROVIDED TO DATE UNDER COMPONENT 1 – STATE AND TERRITORY PARTNERSHIPS, SHOWING FOR EACH FUNDING AGREEMENT.

Date Minister approved funding	Funding Recipient	Description of the project/s	Date funding agreement executed	Funding amount awarded by ABP *Note: this in addition to contributions from states*	Date funds were paid	Expected completion date	Estimated contribution to the land 30 by 30 target (hectares)*
16 March 2026	New South Wales (NSW) Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT)	1. Expand the NSW BCT's Conservation Co-investment Offer private land covenanting program with co-funding from the NSW Government. 2. Expand the NSW BCT's Fixed Price Offer private land covenanting program withco-funding from the NSW Government.	27 May 2026	$15,000,000	23 June 2026	30 June 2030	1. 10,000 2. 15,000
16 March 2026	NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	1. Provide funding to supplement the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service land acquisition program.	2 June 2026	$25,000,000	9 June 2026	30 June 2030	1. 150,000
16 March 2026	South Australian (SA) Department for Environment and Water	1. Assess public and private lands, including pastoral lease and sanctuary land to identify sites suitable for voluntary conserved area recognition. 2. Assess SA's Crown land estate to identify sites suitable for designation as public protected areas. 3. Create a dedicated fund for purchasing and protecting land.	28 May 2026	$9,776,084	$5,700,000 on 18 June 2026 Remaining fundstobe paid over 26/27 – 29/30FY.	30 June 2030	1. 100,000 2. 50,000 3. 150,000
16 March 2026	Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania	1. Expand the existing Private Land Conservation Program and undertake conserved area recognition.	Currently under negotiation	$5,500,500	Payment not yet made	30 June 2030	To be confirmed through ongoing agreement negotiations.
16 March 2026	Victorian Department for Energy, Environment and Climate Action	1. Expand the existing Trust for Nature private land covenanting program. 2. Pilot the recognition of conserved areas onprivate land in Victoriain partnership with Trust for Nature.	Currently under negotiation	$13,300,000	Payment not yet made	30 June 2030	To be confirmed through ongoing agreement negotiations.
16 March 2026	Queensland Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation	1. Expand the existing NatureAssist private land covenanting program. 2. Assess state-owned land for protected area designation or conserved area recognition. 3. Support the purchase of regionally significant land.	Currently under negotiation	$30,855,406	Payment not yet made	30 June 2030	To be confirmed through ongoing agreement negotiations.

**Some approved projects include activities with strong potential for additional protected and conserved areas beyond these initial estimates. Such projects include desktop reviews of Crown Land, and implementation of the National Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) Framework.*

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Ferntree Falls on Eastern Maar Country in Victoria's newly established Mount Buangor National Park. Created in 2026, the 5,300-hectare park brings together the former state park and surrounding forest under national park protection.

Image Credit: David Humphreys