

IMPACT REPORT

2023-2024

Welcome

It's been a big year. The Invasive Species Council continues to make huge strides towards protecting Country.

From horses to ants, from the cold Australian Alps to tropical Far North Queensland, we continue to advocate for Country and one of the biggest threats to it – invasive species.

For the past 235 years, Country has endured relentless damage from invasive species, both farmed and feral.

My role as the Indigenous Ambassador is to ensure all current Australians are aware of their responsibility of custodianship. To ensure we all look after our protected areas, rivers, soil, plants and animals and care for Country.

This past year, I've witnessed the persistent determination of communities, campaigners and donors come together to make historic improvements for nature.

It's because of these actions that our Country has a chance to breathe and the native animals and streams will be grateful.

I invite you to celebrate the achievements in this report with us but also to be ready for another year of pushing to protect Country from invasive species.

Our Country is crying out for healing. Let's continue to listen and ensure the rest of Australia does too.

Richard Swain



The Invasive Species Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians throughout Australia and their connections to land and sea. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Message from our CEO

I'm so proud of the outstanding achievements we have won for nature this year. We've accomplished what others thought impossible: to avert extinctions and defend our protected areas.

We'd been warned that it was too late to stop fire ants but with sound advice from many experts, including Dr Robert Puckett (page 9) and our unshakeable will to defend nature from invasive species, we pushed on. Now, we're finally gaining ground in the fire ant fight thanks to the \$1 billion in funding committed for fire ant eradication. Governments responded to our campaigns, not once, but twice. \$411 million was committed in 2017 and this year a further \$593 million over 4 years was granted.

A historic victory now means we are finally reclaiming Kosciuszko National Park from feral horses, after 6 years of relentless campaigning. The resumption of aerial control of feral horses in NSW national parks after a 23-year hiatus is giving Kosciuszko the chance to recover. I was once told that this was a campaign that we could never win, because of the difficulty with public support. Years on, not only have we won the hearts and minds of the public, but this critical win gives us the tools to seriously reduce horse numbers in Kosciuszko National Park and sets a powerful precedent for future conservation efforts around the country.

We've also saved the Walls of Jerusalem National Park in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area from feral deer (for now). Since the Tasmanian

state election, we're seeing stronger action with staff now employed to manage feral deer in the north and south.

These achievements are living proof that with the right strategic advocacy, supporters and government relationships, we can keep pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

As the only national advocacy organisation dedicated to stopping the invasive species mega threat, we have our work cut out for us. An IPBES Invasive Alien Species report released in August 2023 identifies Australia as a global hotspot for biodiversity loss from invasive species. The IUCN 2020 World Heritage Outlook 3 Report also states that there are significant concerns for many sites, of which invasive species are by far the top threat along with climate change. We estimate that 70 of the next 100 extinctions in the coming decades are expected to be caused by invasive species.

This year has shown that it is within our power to change this.

Thank you to those who helped make the impossible possible. The ambition of the Invasive Species Council, with the backing of caring people, ensures that we keep moving towards a wildlife revival.

Yours for nature,

Andrew Cox, CEO



Note: This annual report covers our activities for the 15-month period July 2023 to September 2024, since our financial year was changed to start on 1 October.



We would like to dedicate this impact report to a very special funder **The Ian Potter Foundation**. Stopping invasive species driven extinctions would not be possible without you.

Our **Impact** Snapshot



An incredible

13,000+

letters to politicians, submissions to government and pledges have been signed



Over

\$600,000,000

secured for nature, including fire ants, horses, deer, nation-wide cats management and bird flu preparation



We've reached

3,000,000+

people on social media with our campaigns and invasive species issues



We've reached Australians

338,000,000+

times with crucial messages about the impact of invasive species via the media



We've secured

2

senate inquiries for feral horses and fire ants



We've had

51%

growth in the number of supporters who believe in protecting nature from invasive species

The elections that keep on giving

New South Wales

In 2023, we achieved landmark commitments from the new NSW Labor Government¹ that are now delivering great outcomes for nature.

These include:

- \$8 million spent on feral horse control to reduce feral horse numbers in Kosciuszko National Park
- the establishment of a 5-person dedicated cat control team
- 100 new National Parks and Wildlife Service pest and weed officers
- Barrington Tops National Park saved from feral horses
- the release of the Natural Resource Commission's Review into Invasive Species management.

Tasmania

The March 2024 snap election brings new opportunities, with a hung parliament and increased influence from minority parties and independents. 2 dedicated feral deer officers – the first in the state – has had strong results, with nearly all feral deer eradicated from The Walls of Jerusalem.

Federal government's second year

The federal government announced \$268 million towards fire ant eradication and responded strongly to the 2 senate inquiries we secured for feral horses and fire ants.

Landmark win for NSW

In September 2024, the Natural Resources Commission released a landmark report on the devastating impact of invasive species in NSW.

The preliminary NSW Invasive Species Management Review made 71 strong recommendations to overhaul the system. If adopted, this will be the light at the end of the tunnel for NSW's environment, which has long been under threat from invasive species, worsened by years of underfunding.

These include establishing a 5-year Invasive Species Investment Program, creating a NSW Invasive Species Management Committee with decision-making authority and empowering local governments to enforce pet cat containment. We must ensure the NSW government uses this report as a blueprint to implement real change.

What's next?

The upcoming Queensland election in October 2024 and a looming federal election offer two big opportunities to secure more wins for wildlife.

THANK YOU

A very special thank you to **David Rickards** (Carrara Foundation) who raised funds to launch this program from: **The Madden Sainsbury Foundation, Phillip Cornwell, Equity Trustees, Danny Mathews, Curlew Foundation and Running Waters Fund.**

Shaping the narrative to shift public opinion



Jack Gough presenting to government staff on how to build public support for invasive species management.

This year we have dominated the media conversation, shaped the political narrative and shifted public opinion. National emergencies like fire ants, the looming bird flu disaster and the ongoing cat-astrophe are making invasive species, and their threat to nature a dinner table conversation. In total, we've featured in **16,859** media stories, reaching Australians over **338 million** times – an impact worth nearly **\$10 million** in advertising. This includes 7 front page splashes and coverage in all major outlets, including hundreds of features in the Murdoch press, reaching into new audiences beyond the usual suspects. In addition we have elevated the voices of allies, Indigenous voices and experts in hundreds of stories where we were not featured. This is an outstanding result and speaks to our unique ability to speak to all parts of society and politics.

This is a critical stage in our strategy to put invasive species in the centre of the extinction crisis and raise the profile of the Invasive Species Council and our influence, so that we can amplify our impact and save nature. To ensure invasive species is no longer a mega threat, we must shift public opinion from uncomfortable to comfortable on challenging topics like aerial culling and baiting which are essential tools to defend the fragile alps from feral horses, eradicate fire ants and manage feral cats and foxes. A key part of our role is to show governments that 1) Australian's love our native species and will choose them over invasive species once they know what's at stake and 2) when the reason for culling or baiting is explained in the right way, public support for it increases dramatically¹. This gives decision makers the confidence to take bold, rapid action to reverse the devastating impact of invasive species.

We've reshaped the conversation around invasive species, leveraging insights from our commissioned social research by Essential Media Communications (EMC). From the media and our website, through

¹ We embarked on a significant social research project in 2022 to understand how many Australians are aware of the invasive species threat and their attitudes and behaviour towards the methods used to protect the environment, and how we could persuade them to support those methods if they didn't at first.

to key speaking events and direct engagement with governments and other environmental organisations, we're helping others ensure a safe and effective conversation around saving nature from invasive species too. We've delivered many presentations on how to shift the narrative and win hearts and minds including keynote addresses at:

- Australian Biosecurity Symposium
- Australasian Vertebrate Pest Conference
- Australian Pest Animal and Weed Symposium
- NSW Vertebrate Pest Conference
- National Aerial Shooting Workshop.

We also worked closely with federal, NSW, Vic, SA, and Tas departmental staff to share insights and improve their public messaging.

What's next?

Next year, we'll re-poll Australians to measure the shift in public awareness and understanding. We'll also present the EMC research on communications to many more government staff and industry conferences. We will continue to ensure there is regular, high profile and impactful media coverage of the need for effective action on invasive species.

Jack Gough's informative and engaging presentations at a number of national forums were the most talked about by attendees in the days and weeks following these events, particularly relating to how to better engage their communities and build social licence for management of invasive species. Jack's presentations continue to be in demand.



Dr Annelise Wiebkin,
National Deer Management Coordinator

Message from our President

Over the past 2 years I have learnt much about invasive species. Not so much about the species themselves, but of course the real issue is us – Homo sapiens. How we think, our behaviour, our processes, modes of living and governance are at the heart of the invasive species issue.

The Invasive Species Council thus has to change how society and governments think and act. We have to raise the alarm about lurking threats while they still appear innocuous – which is not easy. So hats off to Andrew and his fearless team for what they have achieved over the past year in making this happen.

I want to give special thanks to **The Ian Potter Foundation for the multi-year grant, and for the significant support provided by the Purves Environmental Fund, John T Reid Charitable Trusts, Curlew Fund, Beetle Bones Fund and Illawong Avenue.** Their leading support has enabled our growth and success, including a significant increase in media coverage that has put the invasive species issue in the national spotlight and hold governments to account.

In our third year of growth, a stronger team continues to deliver results. We have seen our supporter base increase by 54% this year, and our income reached \$3,621,785 for the extended 15 month financial year. Well done all.

None of this is possible without our supporters, volunteers, partners, members of the board and the science and conservation committee, contractors and staff.

Thank you for your continued passion and generosity.

David Rickards, President



THANK YOU

We are immensely grateful for the donors who choose annual pledged giving. Your ongoing support provides secure capacity from which we can build ambitious goals for nature and wildlife.

Thank you for your trust and commitment

- Anne Reeves
- Beetle Bones Fund
- Brennan Family Foundation
- Curlew Fund
- Garry White Foundation
- Jamie Pittock
- Melliodora Fund

- Mullum Trust
- Naylor Stewart Foundation
- Paddy Pallin Foundation
- Purves Environment Fund
- Water Dragon Fund

We are also grateful for the support of many anonymous donors.

Extinctions. Why?

Tim Low, Invasive Species Council co-founder, ecologist and author



Last year was good for lizards. 2 species feared extinct were rediscovered – the Victorian grassland earless dragon and Lyon's grassland striped skink of north Queensland. Their return is revealing about Australia. They were the only animals lost since 1960 whose demise had been blamed on habitat loss or degradation.

In our 2023 report, *Gone: Australian animals extinct since the 1960s*, we reported that invasive species (including pathogens) had been the main cause of 68% of modern extinctions. The rediscovered lizards push that percentage higher.

So does a taxonomic paper in 2023 finding that the Australian Outback once had 6 species of small marsupial carnivores called mulgaras, rather than 2 as was thought. 4 of the 6 are seemingly extinct from cats and foxes. The little mulgara and northern mulgara lasted past 1960. The thinking had long been that habitat loss was the main cause of extinctions. When I wrote my book *Feral Future* in 1999 I assumed like everyone else that habitat loss was causing most extinctions. A 2019 paper with John Woinarski as lead author was a turning point, showing that invasive species have caused more animal extinctions than anything else. Land clearing has mainly caused plant extinctions.

Why should invasive species be this bad? The naivety of Australian animals towards foreign predators and pathogens is a huge issue. Also, invasive species are more pervasive than people. Habitats survive in national parks and elsewhere, and while bulldozers aren't allowed into national parks, foxes, cats and pathogens enter them with ease, including the chytrid fungus that eliminated 6 frogs, and the myrtle rust now pushing some rainforest trees close to extinction.

The past is the best guide we have to the future and it is telling us – in no uncertain terms – that invasive species will continue as the main cause of extinction, at least until global temperatures rise much higher. Everyone who cares about wildlife should be mightily concerned about invasive species.

We wish to honour our co-founder Tim Low, who was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2024 for his 'significant service to conservation, and to environmental education and awareness'. Tim's 1999 book *Feral Future* was the inspiration for our founding. He was our first employee and remains involved as a technical advisor.

Winning the fire ant fight: Australia's last chance

Australia is gaining ground in the fight against one of the world's most destructive pests – fire ants. Last year, we secured a historic \$593 million to supercharge the eradication effort until 2027.

This new funding enabled rapid responses to fire ants in northern New South Wales and the Murray Darling Basin. Today, over 300,000 hectares – one-third of the infestation zone – are under active treatment. That's double the output of the previous year due to the increase in funding.

Completed eradications in Gladstone, Port Botany and Fremantle showcase the success of these strategies, as do interceptions of fire ants in Melbourne, Hobart and the Northern Territory.

Through high-profile media coverage, strategic campaigning and actions taken by our supporters, the fire ant eradication program is back on track after 24 years of underfunding. But funding to 2027 is only half of what is needed to free Australia from a life sentence with these tiny killers, as eradication will take 10 years.

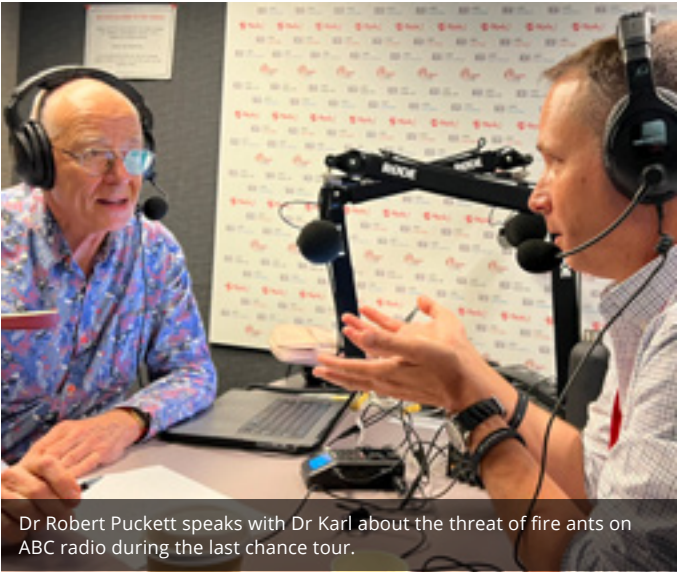
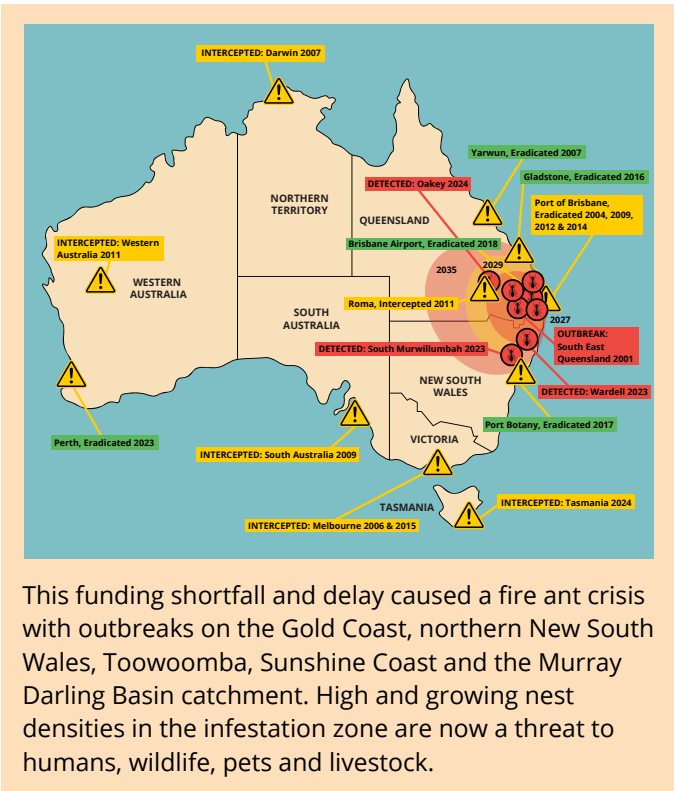
Shocking new fire ant research

Our early intel on fire ants was based on overseas examples or decades-old Australian modelling. This year we commissioned research with the University of Melbourne and The Australia Institute and the results were alarming.

Melbourne University found fire ants would cause 650,000 medical appointments annually, with triple the anaphylactic reactions of bees, which caused 12 Australian deaths in 2021. The Australia Institute's review estimated the economic impacts of fire ants at over \$2 billion annually – far higher than official

figures. That's more than cats, foxes, camels, cane toads and rabbits combined.

The fire ant federal senate inquiry, driven by our advocacy, warned of threats to species like koalas, echidnas, and platypuses. This became reality in July when fire ants were found near Brisbane's Daisy Hill Koala Sanctuary. Predictions show fire ants could reduce 45% of bird, 38% of mammal, 69% of reptile, and 95% of frog populations in southeast Queensland. The vulnerable Wallum sedge frog habitat at Nirimba is now at risk of early extinction if fire ants aren't eradicated.



Dr Robert Puckett speaks with Dr Karl about the threat of fire ants on ABC radio during the last chance tour.

A warning from America's front line

The United States lost its fight against fire ants generations ago. Now, managing them with chemicals in backyards and deadly attacks on humans, wildlife, pets and livestock are commonplace.

Dr. Robert Puckett of Texas A&M University visited Australia to share insights from Texas's frontlines, holding public talks, media interviews and meetings with federal MPs and Queensland leaders. His visit emphasised the urgency of Australia's efforts to avoid repeating the U.S.'s costly mistakes.

What's next?

The current fire ant eradication program is underfunded and expires in 2027. Our campaign will intensify leading up to the October Queensland and 2025 federal elections and beyond to secure the necessary long-term funding that is required for full eradication. We have also developed clear priorities for the new Qld government's first 100 days.



Australia is on a razor's edge with regard to its chance of eradication of fire ants. Eradication is possible but only if the government and citizens within the fire ant range stay focused and committed to their containment and removal. I have worked closely with the Invasive Species Council to help raise awareness of the threat of fire ants and I have been incredibly impressed with their resolve, effectiveness and commitment to science. Good luck!

Dr Robert Puckett, Texas A&M University



The eradication of fire ants is such an important issue that we cannot afford to lose. I witnessed the power of the personal stories told by Texan fire ant expert Dr Robert Puckett tour who recently was brought to Australia by the Invasive Species Council. Politicians and key decision-makers received first hand information in a way that resonated. He explained the costs, the injuries and the deaths from fire ants in the US.

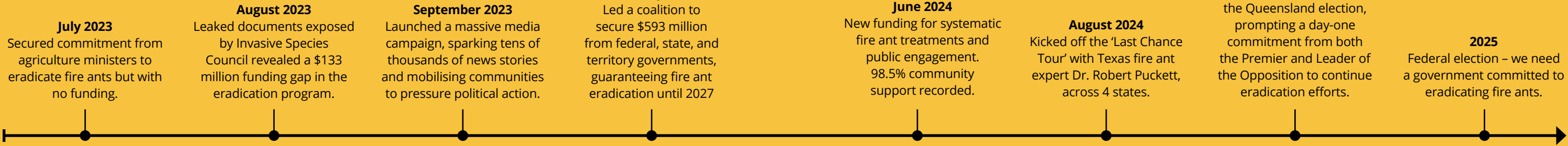
We know that 95% of Australia will be invaded by fire ants. Then we will have to spend \$2 billion a year – forever! Why don't we just spend \$2 billion a year for a few years and eliminate them? We need to get politicians to see that.

Ray Ison, donor

THANK YOU

We are extremely grateful for the generosity of Ray and Pam Ison who fund our fire ant work.

Crashing through delay and inaction



Municipal workers collect dead pelicans on Santa Maria beach in Lima, Peru. Photo: Guadalupe Pardo.



THANK YOU

General donations allow us to tackle the big threats like cats and pivot to emerging emergencies like fire ants and bird flu. A huge thank you for your generosity: **Chris and Gina Grubb, Gras Foundation, Green Eyes Foundation, Horizon Foundation, Illawong Ave, Lyndal Sullivan, Mark Harris and Vivienne Skinner.**

The looming catastrophe of H5N1 bird flu

Late last year, beaches in Patagonia normally noisy with rambunctious breeding colonies of elephant seals were deathly quiet. A destructive strain of avian influenza known as H5N1 had arrived and claimed some 97% of that year's young born on the South American mainland.

Since arriving in South America in late 2022, H5N1 bird flu has also killed at least 35,000 sea lions and 650,000 wild birds, including 40% of Peru's pelicans.

In Australia, as millions of shorebirds and seabirds fly in from affected countries to the north, we wait on tenterhooks to see whether the potential for similar devastation here is realised over the next few months.

Scenes of mass wildlife deaths have become common as H5N1 has swept around the world over the past 20 or so years, particularly since the 2021 emergence of the highly lethal 2.3.4.4b clade.

When the virus reached Antarctica early this year, Australia became the last unaffected continent but remained woefully unprepared to prevent wildlife losses.

Advocacy by the Invasive Species Council

The Invasive Species Council has been the primary advocate pushing Australia's governments from complacency to action to prepare for H5N1 outbreaks in wildlife.

When we first raised the alarm some 18 months ago about Australia's lack of preparedness, the Agriculture Minister rejected 'any suggestion we are not prepared'.

But since then, our work – briefing ministers, advisors and bureaucrats, creating alliances with other NGOs,

generating extensive media coverage – has persuaded the Australian Government to:

- commission the preparation of toolboxes for the preparation of response plans for priority sites and wildlife populations
- coordinate with state and territory governments to encourage planning
- conduct preparedness exercises
- investigate options for vaccinating some highly threatened species.

But despite this work and the extensive forewarning, Australia is still far from prepared.

A big part of the problem is there is no precedent for national coordination of responses to new invaders in Australia that cannot be eradicated. This is something that the Invasive Species Council says must change.

Australia's fragile future

A risk assessment commissioned by the Australian Government in 2023 rated the risk to Australian wildlife as high with the potential for 'catastrophic' impacts on birds. Since then, the risk to mammals has also increased. In South America, there is worrying evidence of transmission between mammals.

Australia's Threatened Species Commissioner has said a bird flu outbreak could be the nation's biggest single ecological disaster, potentially worse than the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires.

Globally, some 500 bird species and 60 mammal species have been affected so far. Almost any bird species is considered susceptible, particularly seabirds, shorebirds, waterbirds and predators, and mammals that scavenge or prey on birds. Iconic Australian species like black swans, pelicans, sea lions and Tasmanian devils face significant peril.

Australia's distance from other continents has kept us safe so far but means our wildlife is likely to be highly susceptible when H5N1 does arrive.

Following relentless media, meetings with ministers and over 1,000 letters from our supporters to the Prime Minister, the federal government, at the time of writing this report, announced nearly \$100 million for H5N1 preparedness. Of this, \$35.9 million has been specifically allocated to protect vulnerable wildlife and biodiversity!



Our Advocacy Director, Jack Gough joined ABC journalists to snorkel with seals at Montague Island, highlighting the H5N1 bird flu threat to sea mammals. The story ignited nationwide media attention.

Tasmanian devil. Photo: Chris Fithall.





A historic victory for Kosciuszko and endangered species

Overtuning decades of inaction to protect Kosciuszko

In 2023/24 we made history in our work to protect Kosciuszko National Park and save critically endangered species. In a landmark breakthrough, we led the charge in securing the unprecedented decision to overturn a 2-decade-long ban on aerial shooting in NSW. Our efforts have ensured over \$8 million has been spent on removing over 7000 feral horses from the park since the 2023 state election.

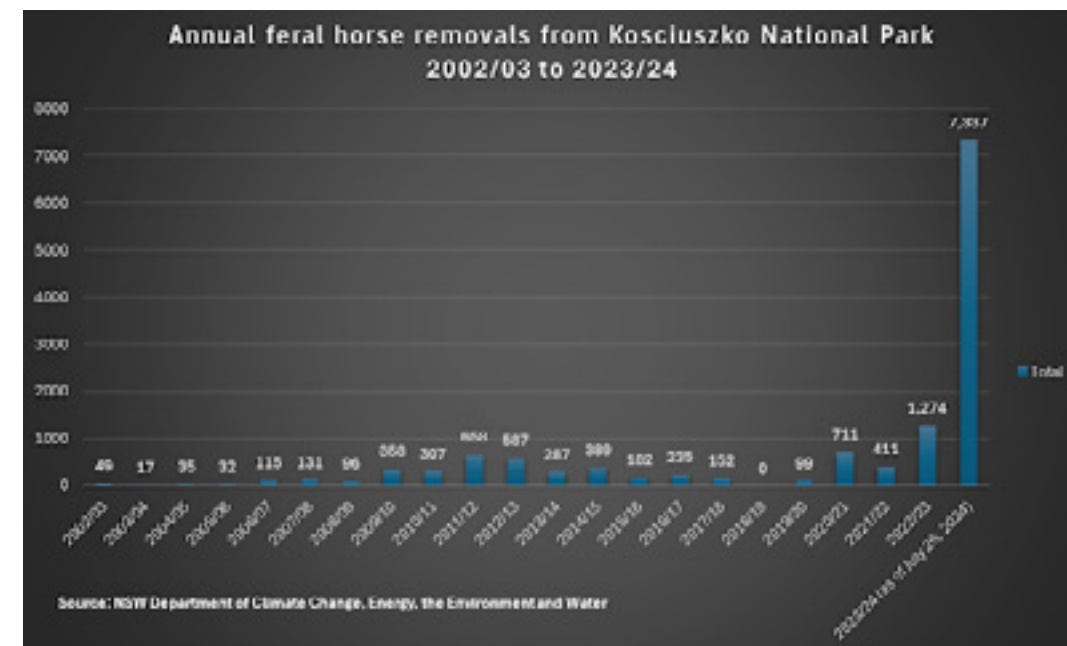
This was a major victory for native species, such as the southern corroboree frog, whose fragile alpine environment is now starting to recover.

This transformational win has reshaped how the government tackles the feral horse crisis in Kosciuszko National Park, setting a powerful precedent for future conservation efforts around the country and delivering real, lasting protection for the park's fragile environment.

This was no small feat and is a testament to the work of all of the strong champions involved in our Reclaim Kosci campaign, founded and led by our Indigenous Ambassador, Richard Swain.

Through strategic media coverage, policy development and tireless advocacy, we mobilised over 9,000 people to submit responses in favour of aerial control. We also successfully pushed for a federal senate inquiry which recommended overturning the ban. This decisive public momentum, on top of our work to amplify the voices of scientists and Indigenous advocates, led to the NSW Government's historic reversal of the ban in October 2023.

The results have been nothing short of remarkable. For the first time in over 20 years, the removal rate of feral horses exceeded the population growth rate. In total, over 7,300 feral horses were removed from Kosciuszko National Park in 2023/24, with aerial shooting playing a critical role. This number



surpasses the combined total of the previous 21 years (6,125), showcasing the transformational power of aerial control.

To wrap up a successful year, in September 2024 Barrington Tops National Park, which surrounds World Heritage Gondwana Rainforests, saw its feral horse population reduced by over 50% as a result of a new aerial control program, made possible by our advocacy.

The next 12 months are crucial. Sustained pressure and strategic action is essential to ensuring the permanent protection of Australia's sensitive alpine areas and treasured parks and landscapes.

The conflict continues

Despite these wins, challenges remain. The law still protects feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park. One Nation, the Shooters and Fishers, some National Party MPs and the Animal Justice Party are working closely to spread disinformation and undermine the professional work of our national park's rangers in feral horse control. Twice this year we had to mobilise our supporters swiftly to ensure the Liberals, Greens and Labor defeated motions in parliament to try to halt aerial control of feral horses. Seven court challenges from opposition groups have now been overturned.

We've also created a positive shift in the accuracy and fairness of reporting on this issue in the media. We made a formal complaint to the ABC Ombudsman which was upheld on the basis of inaccuracy and bias and ABC was forced to issue an apology and correct the record.

What's next?

We'll build on this momentum by pushing to repeal the ridiculous Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act that protects feral horses in a national park. We'll work to see world heritage and other iconic national parks in NSW, Vic and Qld protected from feral horses and other feral animals.

During my long career as a professional botanist, I have been distressed to see the increase in the weediness of our native vegetation. I have also seen places like Kosciuszko National Park gradually overrun by a tidal wave of invasive animals like feral horses, cats, foxes, deer and rabbits.

The urgency and importance of this problem is why I support the Invasive Species Council. They have the expertise, the influential connections and the media savvy to influence policy and effect change across Australia.



Isobel Crawford, donor

THANK YOU

Our work to Reclaim Kosci wouldn't be where it is today without our dedicated funders, volunteers and supporters who make it possible. A very special thank you to volunteer Linda Groom whose commitment to Reclaim Kosci has been instrumental. And a big thank you to donors including **Linda Groom, Diversicon Foundation, Isobel Crawford Purves Environmental Fund, CAGES Foundation (Family Funding Stream), Esther Gallant, Ross Knowles Foundation, Paddy Pallin Foundation, Madden Sainsbury Foundation, Phillip Cornwell and Natalie M.**



Saving wildlife from feral and pet cats

Cats are the leading driver of extinction in Australia. From feral cats decimating wildlife in protected places, to free-roaming domestic cats in urban neighbourhoods, their impact on native species is undeniable, driving at least 25 to extinction.

Through our work and the support of our incredible allies, we are seeing a growing wave of momentum. Governments are finally paying attention, the media is engaged and public sentiment is shifting.

Feral cats

Feral cats kill 1.5 billion native mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs each year. Thankfully 2023 was a crucial turning point in our efforts to control their numbers. After galvanising more than 6,000 supporters urging the government to act, in September 2023 Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek declared a 'war on feral cats', releasing a renewed federal Threat Abatement Plan for Feral Cats. This was signed on to by all state and territory governments – the first time ever there has been a national agreement to a Threat Abatement Plan. This plan is a direct result of our collective pressure and provides a blueprint for critical strategies like island eradication programs and supporting Indigenous rangers. The government has committed \$60 million and we are seeking further long-term commitments.

In NSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) launched a recruitment campaign for its first-ever dedicated feral cat control team. An important government review of the ban on felixers in Victoria on French Island has commenced following our advocacy and we continue to push to overturn the ban on baiting state-wide.

Pet cats

Domestic cats also play a devastating role, killing an estimated 300 million native animals every year.

This year we've seen an exciting shift in attitudes towards cat containment. Research by the Biodiversity Council released in May showed that 66% of Australians now support policies requiring domestic cats to be kept on their owners' properties. Nearly 50% of Victorian councils have introduced containment rules, and the ACT has implemented 24/7 containment laws. This momentum is growing, but more states need to follow. Outdated laws in NSW and WA still hinder effective containment and there is a lack of funding for owner education.

In response to our advocacy, in September 2023 the NSW state government announced an inquiry into domestic and feral cats which will occur in late 2024. This is a major opportunity to pass new laws, like 24/7 containment, which would save native wildlife.

What's next?

We'll use the 2025 federal election to help secure an additional \$60 million to protect wildlife from feral cats. We'll deliver a strong submission to the NSW parliamentary inquiry on cat management and apply pressure through strategic meetings, supporter activation and media. We'll also continue to build support in SA and Victoria to overturn restrictions on feral cat management and in Tasmania we are seeking stronger pet cat containment rules.

A National Island Eradication and Recovery Program

Australia's over 8,000 islands are home to some of our most unique and threatened wildlife, and we're taking bold action to protect them. Their isolation makes islands ideal for eradicating invasive species and restoring wildlife.

Through strategic advocacy and partnerships, we're building momentum and securing the political will needed to ensure these remarkable places and their wildlife can thrive.

This year, we successfully secured several wins in our fight to protect Australia's islands. On French Island, we advocated for a review of the use of felixers and 1080 to help control feral cats, as the eradication program has stalled due to a ban in Victoria. Thanks to our engagement with the Victorian government, a review is now underway, and we've built media momentum, including high profile coverage in The Age to increase public awareness.

In Tasmania, we supported the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's call for \$1.9 million to fund feral cat eradication on Lungtalanana (Clarke Island) and we've secured a commitment from the federal Opposition. Our efforts with the Tasmanian government have also led to the scaling up of feral pig eradication on Flinders Island and the appointment of a dedicated deer eradication officer on Bruny Island.

We continue to push for long-term solutions at the federal level. This year, through lobbying, high profile media and detailed budget submissions we have been building support for a dedicated National Island Eradication and Recovery Program. Island eradications have been Australia's most successful conservation initiatives in recent times and a dedicated program would provide the long-term funding needed to secure community support and complete the full eradication cycle – planning, eradication, verification and prevention of re-invasion.

Our joint advocacy with Norfolk Island Regional Council and TierraMar contributed to positive outcomes on Norfolk Island, where a rodent control expansion has led to a significant reduction in rat numbers and a rebound in native bird populations, including species not seen for years.



On Lord Howe Island, we're advocating for funding from both the NSW and federal governments to continue the island's weed eradication program, building on the success of the previous rat eradication efforts. Our national bird flu campaign has also put island protection at the forefront to ensure these precious places and unique birds and mammals are prepared.

What's next?

As the federal election approaches, we're calling for a dedicated federal funding stream for island eradication projects. We are also advocating for the development of a plan to eradicate feral cats from all of Kangaroo Island, growing our Tasmanian focus and securing additional measures to protect our island's wildlife from the looming threat of bird flu.



THANK YOU

Thank you to **the Garry White Foundation** for funding the urgent work in Victoria. Protecting Tasmania's world heritage wilderness has been made possible thanks to the **Purrybury Trust**. A special thanks to **Henry Rischbieth** who donated seed funding and rallied others so that we could launch a campaign in South Australia. Thank you to **Rose Gilder** and the **FWH Foundation** for responding to his call.

Walls of Jerusalem National Park in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Ending Australia's deer plague

After more than a decade of persistent work, the National Feral Deer Action Plan was officially adopted in August 2023. Finally we have a national plan with ambitious targets to stop feral deer taking over the whole Australian continent!

With around 2 million already on the loose, feral deer have rightly been described as the 'next rabbit plague'. They are trashing and trampling world heritage areas, eroding streams and preventing the regeneration of bushland. Decades of inaction and fragmented efforts have allowed their numbers to skyrocket.

This plan marks the first national, coordinated effort to control feral deer but more funding for delivery is needed.

We are also driving state-level action. In South Australia, we're working to ensure the state government follows through on its commitment to eradicate all feral deer in 10 years, which would set an important precedent for other states.

In Victoria, we continue to lobby for deer protection status removal and lead the Victorian Deer Community Control Network. In NSW, we're gaining significant momentum alongside local land services

and the National Parks Wildlife Service in developing a Blue Mountains Greater World Heritage deer eradication plan. In Queensland, we're advocating for a south east Queensland regional feral deer plan ahead of the Queensland election in October 2024.

Despite hunting lobby resistance, public support for protecting nature from feral deer is growing, boosted by our media campaigns and events.

Our giving is focused towards environmental philanthropy so we work with many ENGO's. Whether goals are species protection/re-introduction, revegetation, or more general, all require protection and restoration of habitat against pressures from invasive species. Eradication of some of these invasive species remains a viable option in South Australia and is supported by state government initiatives. The Invasive Species Council plays a vital role in maintaining the government's focus.

Henry Rischbieth, Letcombe Foundation



Unlike land clearing, mining or other development, damage to our world from invasive species is not immediately obvious. Having observed the insidious destruction that can result, I feel compelled to take action locally using bush regeneration approaches. But there is also a need for broad strategic long term action by government and community, and this is where the work of the Invasive Species Council can bring that about.



As humans, we are mostly responsible for introducing species to this part of the world for our own benefit, so we need to fix it.

Lyndal Sullivan, donor

Tasmania

Together, we've saved the Walls of Jerusalem National Park in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area from feral deer. The aerial shooting program we championed has successfully removed nearly all feral deer from the area.

We are now a well-respected voice in Tasmania and have built a powerful alliance of groups working to remove the legal protection of feral deer and eradicate them from priority areas such as the Tasman Peninsula. We swiftly mobilised in response to the March snap-election, developing a comprehensive policy platform that has provided a roadmap for the new Tasmanian government.

A hung parliament now holds the balance of power, with minority parties and independents gaining significant ground. We've already seen strong signals of support from the crossbench on some of our issues, particularly deer and cat management.

In response to our advocacy, the government has appointed professional roles dedicated to managing feral deer in Tasmania's north and south, leading to control efforts ramping up in key areas, like Bruny Island.

Up to 150 feral pigs are devastating northwest Tasmania and without immediate action, this population could explode to 30,000 in just a decade. We are mobilising supporters, MPs and working with local councils to address this urgently.



Our policy road map for the new Tasmanian government



News story feature in The Age

What's next?

We're keen to expand our work in Tasmania, including the eradication of cats on Lungtalanana (Clarke Island), feral pigs on Flinders Island, mandatory pet cat containment and increasing the state weed fund.





Gazania (African daisy) shown growing in garden (left) and having spread to the natural environment on the same street (right).

Getting serious about invasive garden plants

It finally happened. In June 2024 Australia's environment ministers agreed to develop a national Threat Abatement Plan for escaped garden plants. It came 14 years after the threat was first listed under Australia's national environmental law and after previous environment ministers twice refused to develop a plan.

This monumental win reflects the impact of our Threats to Nature program – to boost Australia's capacity and ambition to systematically tackle major threats – and our long-term advocacy for action on weeds.

Two-thirds of all introduced plant species now established in the Australian environment are escaped garden plants and they remain the main source of new weeds in Australia.

They choke out native plants, transform fire regimes, destroy the habitats of native wildlife and have already contributed to at least 4 plant extinctions.

This is a major opportunity for Australia to finally get serious about tackling one of our most destructive threats.

To keep the momentum going, in July we launched a powerful media campaign that went viral, putting the spotlight on the devastating impacts of garden escapees and increasing pressure on the industry and government to take action.



ABC news article featuring the Invasive Species Council.

What's next?

We'll aim for all governments to commit to developing and implementing a robust Threat Abatement Plan with strong laws to stop the sale of invasive plants, eradicate early-stage invaders and enhance long-term weed management. We'll seek increased funding for community programs to help gardeners remove high-risk plants while holding businesses accountable.

Your Good Will for Nature can create a wildlife revival

This year we launched our Good Will for Nature bequest program.

As a smaller, impactful organisation with a mandate to grow our impact to match the scale of the invasive species mega threat, the Invasive Species Council increasingly depends on people's Good Will for Nature to finance our critical work to future-proof our environment.

This growing community of people share our vision to lead a wildlife revival by stopping the invasive species mega threat.

If you also want to join the Good Will for Nature community or would like more information please visit invasives.org.au/legacy

THANK YOU

We are honoured by those who have decided to leave a Good Will for Nature to the Invasive Species Council. Thank you. Also, a huge thank you to the generosity of our wildlife revival partners who donate monthly.



Kosciuszko National Park.



Rob and Nancy Pallin.

A message from our Good Will for Nature patrons

As patrons of the Good Will for Nature bequest program, Rob and Nancy Pallin would like to express their passionate commitment to conservation and the critical importance of addressing invasive species through their legacy to the Invasive Species Council.

The Australian bush holds a special place in our hearts.

One of the most important issues for conservation in Australia is the threat of alien invasive species. We've witnessed first-hand the devastating impact of invasive species, from the destruction of alpine herb fields to the loss of vital vegetation along creeks. It's a heartbreaking reality that threatens the survival of countless species.

Unless we solve that issue, we won't have wildlife for our grandkids.

We have been impressed by the level of engagement that the Invasive Species Council has had with governments and other key stakeholders. We're thankful for their work in protecting the environment — our wildlife and ecosystems.

It's important to support organisations that have a direct impact and we've been very inspired by the work of the Invasive Species Council. As a result, a proportion of our estate will be gifted to the Invasive Species Council.

Through our bequest we hope to inspire others to join us in supporting the Invasive Species Council and ensuring a healthier, more resilient future for Australia's natural environment.

We want to thank everyone who has also left a gift in their Will to the Invasive Species Council.

Rob and Nancy Pallin



Froggatt Award winners lead the charge against invasive species

The Invasive Species Council was proud to celebrate the outstanding contributions of 2 remarkable winners of the 2024 Froggatt Awards in August 2024, recognising their pivotal roles in protecting Australia's environment, native species and communities from invasive species threats.

This prestigious award is named after the Australian entomologist Walter Froggatt who famously opposed the release of cane toads in the 1930s, standing as a lone voice of reason – a legacy that continues through these awards.

The 2024 winners included:

For control and eradication: NSW Minister for the Environment the Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service for their work to protect Kosciuszko National Park by rapidly reducing the highly damaging feral horse population, for the first time in over 20 years.

For community advocacy: Arid Lands Environment Centre and the members of the Indigenous Desert Alliance for successfully convincing the Northern Territory Government to declare buffel grass as a weed in the Northern Territory.

A blueprint for future action

The efforts of this year's Froggatt Award winners demonstrate both vision and leadership and serve as a blueprint for how we should be tackling invasive species in the future.

Through the Froggatt Awards, the Invasive Species Council continues to highlight the critical work being done across the country to safeguard Australia's unique environment, honouring those who lead the way in invasive species management.



Voice of Country

The Voice of Country campaign has gained significant momentum this year. We now have a growing, national alliance of influential organisations calling for a Commissioner of Country federally.

We're in the ears of decision-makers who know they can't ignore this growing chorus of voices who want to protect Country.

In NSW, we've gained significant pace. In September, the NSW Natural Resources Commission's review into invasive species management recommended the appointment of a First Nations Land and Sea Country Commissioner – something we've been strongly advocating for.

I am grateful to all our supporters for these achievements. We are getting closer, but there is work to do. Our mission to protect Country from invasive species must spread across all of Australia.

Feral cats continue to prey on totemic species like bilbies and rare species like night parrots. Buffel and gamba grass threaten cultural sites and feral deer are damaging the cultural landscape in Tasmania.

This upcoming federal election gives us a crucial opportunity and platform to gain national support for a federal Commissioner for Country.

Richard Swain

The work that Richard Swain and the Voice of Country campaign are doing to ensure Indigenous voices are at the table when it comes to protecting Country is vital. The Commissioner for Country will be a monumental step forward in this regard and I am grateful that the Invasive Species Council are doing such a great job in championing this important cause.



Daryl Wells,
Open Spaces Manager at Muru Mittigar



THANK YOU

A very special thank you to **David Rickards** and **Carrara Foundation** who raised funds to launch this program from: **The Madden Sainsbury Foundation, Phillip Cornwell, Equity Trustees, Danny Mathews, Curlew Fund, Running Waters Fund, Rendre Trust, Oranges and Sardines Foundation** and the **Eldon and Anne Foote Trust** administered by **Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation**.

Emus. Photo: Heidi Fin.

Stopping new invaders

As global trade and travel continue to grow, stopping new invaders becomes ever more challenging. Thanks to our work over the years, Australia now has a list of high-risk potential environmental invaders and a plan to reduce the risk of their arrival. It is too early for it to have made much of a difference yet, but some progress is being made to analyse the pathways by which new invaders are likely to arrive and prepare to detect and eradicate them. A priority focus for us is to increase the resources for this program.

A steady stream of new invaders continues to arrive and establish in Australia. Recently detected species that are now here forever include the freshwater gold clam (transforms river systems), Suminoe oyster (can displace native oysters), Nile tilapia and carpet sea squirt (a.k.a sea snot). Even worse are some of the invaders that could arrive in the near future

– eucalypt-killing strains of myrtle rust, rock snot (a river-smothering algae), wolf snails and crayfish plague, to name a few.

Australia needs to substantially increase the funding to stop new invaders. We’ve been a prominent voice for making risk creators (importers) pay for this. The Australian Government has responded by imposing some fees, and we’ve been appointed as the only environmental NGO to a federal advisory committee on sustainable funding options.

What’s next?

We’ll use the 2025 federal election to seek commitments from all political parties to strengthen Australia’s defences against new invaders.



Myrtle rust on scrub myrtle. Photo: Tim Low.



Fire ant close up.



Fox.



Many Australians are aware of introduced pests in their backyards, parks and perhaps other rural pests such as cane toads, rabbits, pigs, foxes, cats etc. They cause billions of dollars in damage and most of these will always be with us to kill or outcompete native species and erode fragile country.

It is multiple times less costly for the government and the community to prevent new arrivals and manage those already here before they become overwhelming. In this context the Invasive Species Council has proven most successful in cost effectively leveraging donor funds in science based programmes to address these threats and protect Australian flora, fauna and habitat from further damage.

Chris Grubb, treasurer and donor

What’s next?

The Biosecurity Collective will reconvene in 2025 to conduct a mid-decade review of our biosecurity system, to determine if it is ready for the challenges of 2030 and beyond.

Biosecurity symposium

The 3rd Australian Biosecurity Symposium was held in August 2024 at the iconic SeaWorld Resort on the Queensland Gold Coast. With the theme of ‘Innovation. Inclusivity. Immersion,’ over 430 of Australia’s brightest minds and trailblazers came together to hear 128 speakers tackle one of the most critical issues we face: strengthening Australia’s biosecurity.

The keynote speakers focused on messaging and how to raise awareness about the importance of biosecurity.

This symposium included the inaugural Biosecurity Youth Summit with 40 high school students from around Queensland learning about the importance of a strong biosecurity system.

The two-day event was co-hosted by the Biosecurity Collective – Animal Health Australia, Invasive Species Council, Centre for Invasive Species Solutions and Plant Health Australia.

The symposium coincided with the inaugural National Biosecurity Week, which promotes the critical role of biosecurity in protecting our environment, agriculture, communities and economy.

- Key initiatives to be progressed by the Biosecurity Collective following the Symposium include:
- advancing the Parliamentary Friends of Biosecurity
 - expanding National Biosecurity Week
 - enhancing youth engagement
 - doubling investment in biosecurity for sustained transformation
 - defining a powerful national biosecurity brand.

The symposium was an idea originally conceived by the Invasive Species Council and brought to reality through a partnership with Animal Health Australia, who were responsible for event management for the first two events. The next symposium will be held in 2026.

THANK YOU

Thank you to Decade of Biosecurity coordinator, **Emily Mellor**, who left the role in May 2024. The Decade of Biosecurity initiative is made possible via its founders – the Invasive Species Council, Animal Health Australia, Plant Health Australia and Centre for Invasive Species Solutions. Funding was provided by:

- | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|
| • SA govt | • NSW govt | • Vic govt |
| • Qld govt | • Tas govt | • WA govt |

In-kind support was provided by **National Farmers’ Federation, Freight and Trade Alliance, Landcare Australia, National Landcare Network** and **NRM Regions Australia**.



A dead lizard being dragged away by Yellow Crazy Ants.

World heritage rainforest restored as yellow crazy ant eradication efforts surge

2024 marked a significant turning point in the struggle to eradicate yellow crazy ants from north Queensland's iconic world heritage rainforest.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority has successfully cleared nearly 500 hectares of yellow crazy ants, a highly aggressive, acid-spitting invader. An additional 1,000 hectares remain under 'clearance surveillance', making this one of the world's most successful invasive ant eradication efforts.

This comes as a result of a \$24.8 million funding commitment for both the Cairns and Townsville yellow crazy ant eradication programs that we helped to secure back in 2022.

The restoration of rainforest bird and insect life is already visible, with strong community engagement and a shared determination to finish the job.

The Queensland LNP has committed to extending the program for 2 more years from 2026, but matching federal funds are essential to ensure its success.

Local council yellow crazy ant eradications are also underway in Townsville, Whitsundays and Brisbane.



What's next?

Current federal and Queensland funding runs out in 2026. The 2024 Queensland election and 2025 federal election will be used to campaign for \$30 million in government co-funding for the next phase of the yellow crazy ant eradication program.



Invasive Species Council Citizen Science Coordinator Jess Ward-Jones describes Bug Hunt to federal MP Susan Templeman 26 Mar 2024.

Biosecurity Bug Hunt: Inspiring the next generation of citizen scientists

This year we partnered with the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Landcare NSW and Qld Water and Landcarers to launch an exciting project to harness citizen science in enhancing biosecurity reporting. Using the iNaturalist app, families, bushwalkers and land carers transformed their outdoor adventures into opportunities to snap insect photos for our Australia-wide Biosecurity Bug Hunt project.

This was a pilot project funded through the federal government's Environmental Biosecurity Project Fund, to test how citizen science could best be used to produce valuable data for invasive insect early detection and management, with all data sent to the Atlas of Living Australia.

The project was very successful, with in person outreach to over 6,000 Australians through festivals, community events, schools, parliamentary events and conferences, and over 350,000 people engaged through social media. Almost 1 million insect observations by nearly 30,000 people were aggregated through the project.

Headline findings for future projects included:

- A mission to find nothing does not spark excitement or motivate ongoing effort – A 'snap them all' approach with biosecurity as a side benefit

rather than a focus is the best way to engage and retain participants.

- High levels of community participation is possible with relatively little funding.
- School aged children were the most easily engaged and influenced parent participation.
- Ease of use is the most important platform criteria.

Invasive insects are among Australia's top environmental threats. Their often cryptic nature presents unique challenges for surveillance but this pilot showed how technology has the ability to transform citizen engagement into a tool for rapid detection and response. By encouraging more citizen scientists to observe insects in their environment, we can enhance responses to time-sensitive biosecurity incursions and deepen public understanding of environmental biosecurity.

What's next?

Scope is being sought to expand the project to foster long-term engagement and interest of citizen scientists across Australia through in person events and at schools, as well as collaborating with other organisations for a nationwide backyard blitz. Stay tuned!

Our Board

The Invasive Species Council's Volunteer Board has brought invaluable experience and dedication to our governance this year. We thank them for their passion, commitment and countless hours of service, which keep the Council a formidable force to be reckoned with!

For more information on our board visit our website invasives.org.au/about-us/our-people/board

THANK YOU

David Rickards (President),
Fiona Sutton (Vice President),
Bernadette Schmidt (Secretary),
Chris Grubb (Treasurer), **Sara Phillips** and **Sandy Lolicato**.

Our Conservation and Science Committe

The Conservation and Science Committee, established in 2022, ensures the Invasive Species Council's work is guided by top experts in biosecurity, biodiversity, social science, and invasive species management. Chaired by Ian Thompson, the committee includes Drs April Reside, Chris Dickman, Sarah Legge, Mark Lonsdale, Lynette McLeod, and Sue McIntyre, who joined last November. We thank Samantha Setterfield, who recently departed, for her valuable contributions.

This year, the committee has provided valuable advice on:

- Principles for effective management of feral animals.
- Invasive species management in NSW for a review by the Natural Resources Commission.
- Australia's program for preventing priority new environmental invaders.
- The Invasive Species Council's state of environmental biosecurity report.

THANK YOU

We thank each committee member for their expert advice and commitment to protecting Australia's unique wildlife from the growing threat of invasive species.



Pygmy Possum. Photo: Ashlee Benc of Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife.



As an ecologist dedicated to finding conservation solutions, I am pleased to be a member of the Conservation and Science Committee of the Invasive Species Council. I greatly respect the organisation's commitment to evidence-based advocacy and admire their capacity to influence government policies and programs. Their work is much needed.

Dr April Reside, University of Queensland



Black kite. Photo: Miguel Yamin.

A message from our ambassador

I am a strong advocate for the Invasive Species Council because it is the key national organisation and the most effective in protecting our rich biodiversity and ecosystems from alien invasive species.

In 2022, in response to the global biodiversity crisis and the rapid rise in extinctions, Australia signed the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This agreement commits to curb invasive species' impact by managing introduction pathways, preventing priority species establishment, reducing introduction rates by at least 50% by 2030 and prioritising control on key eradication sites, like islands.

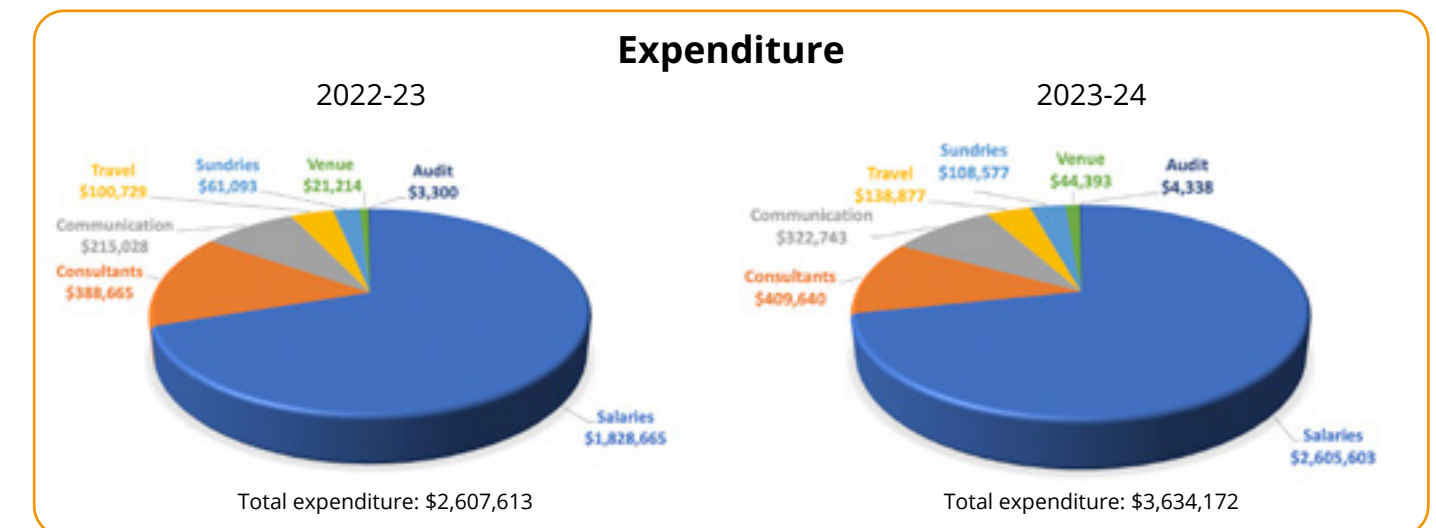
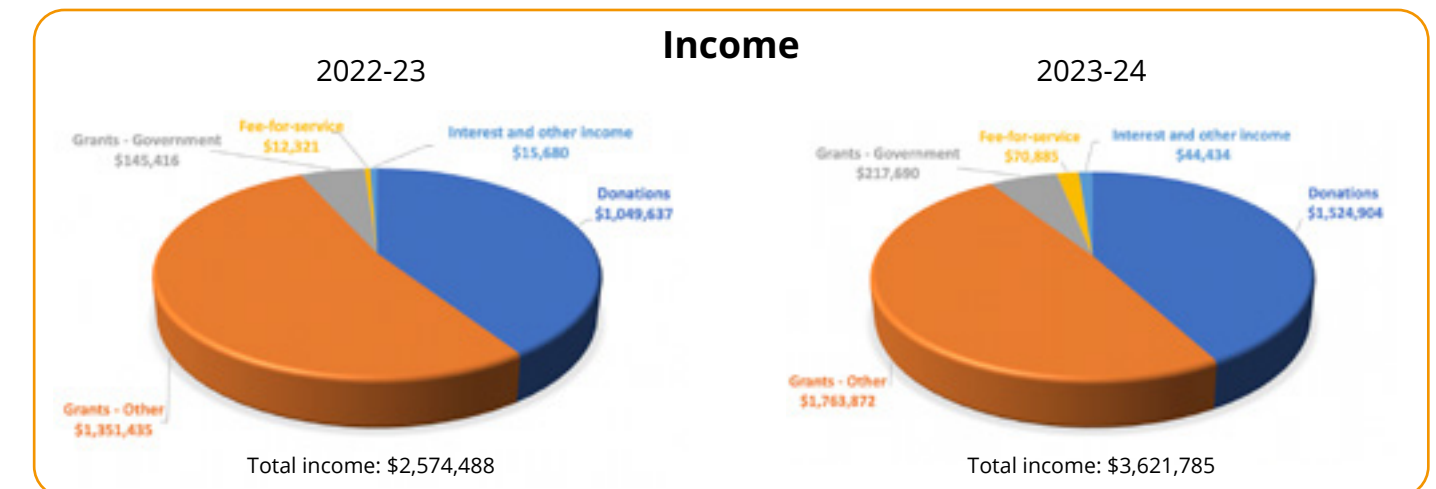
But how are we going to achieve this in Australia within 6 years? What federal budget is required to seriously develop and implement an action plan that addresses biodiversity and ecosystem services, not just agriculture?

Without the commitment, policy expertise and public pressure from the Invasive Species Council, this target will likely be forgotten – leading to more extinctions. I am not prepared to stand by and let that happen.

Christine Milne AO



Yearly income and expenditure



- Notes:**
1. 2023-24 reporting period is 15 months due to changing the financial year to start on 1 October.
 2. 2023-24 figures are subject to audit and AGM approval.
 3. 2023-24 'Grants - Other' includes carried forward income from the prior year of \$189,622.
 4. 2023-24 'Grants - Government' includes carried forward income from the prior year of \$102,590.



Our 2050 vision is for an Australia where wildlife and ecosystems are safe from invasive species which are no longer a major driver of extinction or environmental degradation.

We catalyse strong, collaborative biosecurity to protect and restore what makes Australia extraordinary – our unique animals, plants and landscapes. As the only national advocacy organisation dedicated to the growing threat of invasive species, we must leap into the future with a bold plan that is powerful enough to alter the dire trajectory for nature and save our species. This is only possible with the funding from you. Investments today will scale our impact to keep nature safe from invasive species.

Please donate what you can today.
invasives.org.au/donate

Thank you.



Biosecurity is everyone's business, everyday. Our island home is constantly facing the threat posed by invasive plants, animals, diseases and pathogens. From myrtle rust, varroa mites, fire ants and yellow crazy ants, to bird flu, brown marmorated stink bugs and chytrid fungus in our frogs, there is always something knocking at our door and shore.

Biosecurity has never been more important. That's why we need everyone across Australia to keep an eye out and put biosecurity front and centre of all we do. The Invasive Species Council continues to step up, inform, educate and amplify the need for individual awareness and involvement. They are doing critical work and have my support as Biosecurity Ambassador.

Costa Georgiadis, Decade of Biosecurity Ambassador