

Leading a wildlife revival

A bold strategy to keep nature safe from invasive species

FUNDING PROPOSAL MARCH 2023

Leading Australia's wildlife revival

It's a new era of hope. The current federal government is rewriting national environment laws, has set a target for zero extinctions by 2030, is spruiking pet cat containment, and wrangling states and territories for action on feral deer. Sustainable funding options for better biosecurity and biodiversity markets are being investigated. So is the impact of feral horses on Australia's fragile alpine regions. Progressive Australians are standing with our First Nations People who are taking their place as leaders in conservation land management, at all levels.

However, this moment didn't happen by accident. Many of us worked together to create these conditions. Together, we made this moment. And together we must make the next.

It's an exciting time for nature and the progress we are seeing is frankly a welcome relief from a constant barrage of new invasive species threats. Red fire ants have made it to North Stradbroke Island. The role of rats, asian wolf snakes and predatory fish in the extinction crisis has come to light. Myrtle rust has arrived at Lord Howe Island. It's a matter of when, not if, regarding the next disease-borne extinction threats, such as the avian influenza that silently looms. As a country, we are woefully unprepared to protect nature from the continued onslaught.



New Holland Honeyeater.
Photo: Martin Pelanek



Rufous Bettong. Photo: Andreas Ruhz

The impacts of global travel and trade are speeding up the extinction process with about 100 plant and animal species facing a high risk of imminent extinction (within 20 years). Invasive species are a significant threat to almost three-quarters of these predicted extinctions.

The government has made big promises. As the only advocacy-focused environmental NGO committed to stopping invasive species, we need urgent financial support to ensure they deliver, and address the structural problems that drive extinctions and degradation, while we hold the line for our native wildlife.

The conditions are ripe for us to set a powerful path in motion. If we can seize this moment we can catch up on lost time to create safer habitats and restore our biodiverse rich landscapes.

The Ian Potter Foundation wonderfully awarded a major grant of \$2.5 million to the Invasive Species Council in December 2021. We need to build a committed network of funding partners to raise \$750,000 p.a. to match this funding by 2025.

We are ready. We know it's a big, bold goal! But that's what nature desperately needs. We've set the targets that matter, we've done the research and continue to develop impactful strategies to rid invasive species from our islands and bushlands of conservation significance and lead a wildlife revival. This is not an impossible dream, it is a reality that this strategy with your backing can bring to life.

We saw heartening, broadscale cooperation, coordination and investment to stop and slow covid. We can achieve that for nature. It will be hard, but with your help, we know we can do it. Please join me.

Andrew Cox, CEO



Averting extinctions by fixing the system

THREATS TO NATURE PROJECT

most threats have escalated, and hundreds more native species are at risk. Dozens more are on the edge of extinction. Despite their inclusion in the *EPBC Act*, Threat Abatement Plans and other conservation planning instruments have failed to stem the major drivers of ongoing biodiversity loss in Australia, notably invasive species, habitat destruction, inappropriate fire regimes and climate damage.

To revive and protect our unique wildlife from further extinctions, Australia needs an effective threat abatement system. This includes the laws, policies and programs intended to systematically identify and overcome the major threats to nature. Our exciting **Threats to Nature** project outlines solutions to fix this system by addressing major shortcomings that were identified as a key priority for reform in the Samuel Review. In the coming year we'll focus on strengthening

To achieve the ambitious target of zero extinctions by 2030 a radical reform of our national environment laws and institutions must occur. Since Australia's environmental laws (*EPBC Act*) were written in 1999,

the threat abatement system by improving statutory processes to list threats and apply effective threat abatement responses.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. The policy window is open. Now is the time for us to drive change. We must ramp up our efforts for systems change, whilst holding the line for our species.

If we get this right, we can set Australia on the road to recover the diversity and abundance of native wildlife we have lost across the country.

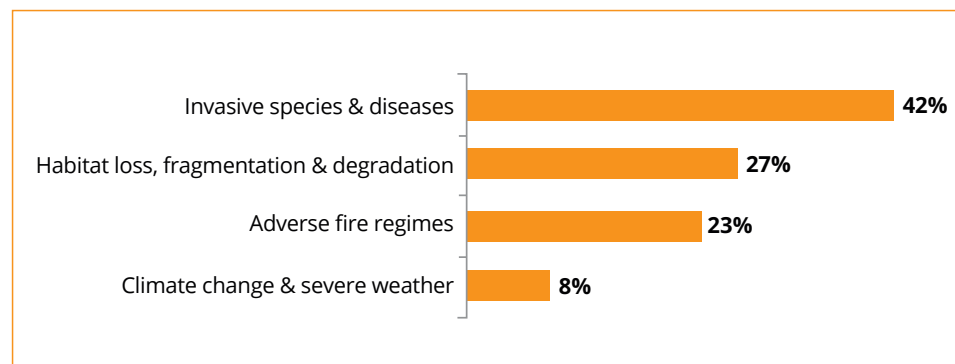
CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Goal: To achieve an ambitious, systematic, well-funded, and nationally coordinated threat abatement system within the new national environment laws in 2024.

Strategy: Actively participate in reform processes in 2023 alongside decision makers and empower political champions who sit across the political spectrum for our reform ideas to ensure invasives are a high-priority consideration in the run-in to the making of new national environmental laws.

Tactics:

- Utilise high-profile issues to make invasive species a major issue in the public discourse on EPBC reform and drive action in federal parliament.
- Strategic cross-organisational supporter mobilisation with stakeholders to build public pressure for environmental law reform.
- Develop legislative solutions that can be implemented through the reform of the *EPBC Act* that will address major drivers of biodiversity destruction and loss.



High-impact and medium-impact threats to nationally listed threatened taxa (expert assessments).

Conserving islands

Eradicating invasive species from offshore islands is a great conservation success with 250 eradications on 150 islands of 18 invasive species, mainly black rats, goats, rabbits, cats, foxes and pigs. There are hundreds more islands with invasive species.

A huge opportunity exists to save endemic island species from extinction and once widespread species that now only remain on islands.

We need to scale up this work and tackle bigger and more complex islands. A new national islands initiative could systematically identifying the best islands for a targeted eradication effort and ensure that biosecurity measures are in place to prevent reintroductions.



Norfolk Island. Photo: Emily Bay



Little penguin. Photo: MLH mlharing

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Goal: By 2025 feral cat eradication is well underway on 5 priority islands (Norfolk, Bruny, Kangaroo, Lord Howe, Christmas) and a national island eradication program commences.

Strategy: Build public popularity of ambitious island eradications to drive government investment.

Tactics:

- Inspire action by showcasing past successes and the opportunity and benefits of island biodiversity.
- Build and demonstrate broad support for action in island communities.
- Mobilise supporter action amongst politically relevant audiences.

Protected areas

Our protected areas are the jewel in the crown of our national conservation efforts. Yet most of Australia's most loved national parks and world heritage areas are under sustained threat from invasive species, as are bushlands of conservation significance. Resources available for managing the major threats to these places are woefully lacking risking our \$23 billion tourism industry.

Removing high impact invasive species from these areas to stop species decline and ecosystem degradation are essential for conservation. This requires additional funding for invasive species management methods.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Goal: By 2025 investment in invasive species management on protected land (indigenous and public) has doubled, and incentives for managing invasive threats on private and indigenous land are driving effective action.

Strategy: Tap into people's love for our national and local parks and reveal their park's vulnerability to invasive species.

Tactics:

- Build a powerful coalition of stakeholders to ramp up pressure for increased funding.
- Increase public awareness through strategic advertising.
- Mobilise Australians to contact their local member of parliament to fix their park.



Sunset from Mt Kosciuszko. Photo: Mike Edmondson

Pathogens

The most serious threat to the survival of frogs is chytrid fungus, a pathogen that has already caused at least 6 extinctions.

Myrtle rust is a major threat impacting one of Australia's largest plant families, the Myrtaceae family. Sixteen rainforest tree species now face imminent extinction and the pathogen has recently made it to the Kimberley and Lord Howe Island.

The next great threat is avian influenza, which is escalating overseas and killing millions of birds and thousands of mammals in Europe, Africa, Asia and America. It could arrive this spring with migratory shorebirds (8 million fly to Australia) and seabirds.

There has been almost no preparation for responding to avian influenza outbreaks in wild birds or mammals. This serious risk to biodiversity warrants urgent action, including 1) establishment of a national taskforce, 2) an expert assessment of the risks for Australian wild birds and mammals, including threatened species, 3) enhanced surveillance, and 4) a national wildlife response plan.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Goal: Minimise impacts of avian influenza on native wildlife if it arrives in Australia; Prioritise emerging threats under the reformed *EPBC Act*.

Strategy: Use the media spotlight to instigate urgent action and promote emerging threats as a priority in *EPBC Act* reform.

Tactics: Write and commission hair raising reports to incite government action via the media; Meet with senior policy makers to discuss solutions to the threat.

Red fire ants

One of the world's worst invasive species, red fire ants swarm in their thousands killing people, small pets, small ground dwelling native animals and livestock. Fire ants have greater ecological impacts than most ants because they reach extremely high densities and can wipe out entire native ecosystems.

An assessment of their likely impact on 123 animals in southeast Queensland predicted population declines in about 45% of birds, 38% of mammals, 69% of reptiles and 95% of frogs.

These killer ants are on the move from Brisbane toward the Murray Darling Basin watershed and the NSW border, and in January 2023 were found on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island).

In 2017, we won \$411 million in government funding for South East Queensland's eradication program. A report from 2021 warns that the program could fail without additional funding and program improvements. This report, that would help raise the alarm and government funding allocations, has not yet been released. Urgent action is needed this year to protect Australia from red fire ants.



CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Goal: All states commit and contribute sufficient funding during 2023 to prevent red fire ant spread and potential extinctions.

Strategy: Force the report out to catalyse public pressure for funding.

Tactics: Mobilise supporters to build pressure; legal tools including freedom of information requests; motions in parliament; lobbying in Canberra and Brisbane.

From Kosciuszko to protecting the Australian Alps

The Australian Alps' national parks and reserves extend from Namadgi National Park in the ACT through Kosciuszko in NSW to Alpine National Park in Victoria. Many of our inland rivers spring from our fragile alpine regions that cover less than 1% of the mainland. Australia's Alps are home to irreplaceable natural and Indigenous heritage values and provide habitat for iconic native animals like the corroboree frog, mountain pygmy possum and alpine she-oak skink.

Despite these places being designated as national parks and listed under national law for natural heritage protection in 2008, they struggle under the weight of 20,000 feral horses, a growing number of other invasive species and climate change. Feral horses erode riverbanks and destroy habitat for wildlife, including 4,000 year old sphagnum wetlands.

Feral horse management is far from uniform. Namadgi National Park in the ACT is proudly feral horse free, with a zero tolerance policy for any incursions. NSW has a plan to reduce horses in Kosciuszko from 18,000 to 3,000 but is burdened by a bill to protect them. Victoria has 5000 feral horses and a reduction plan that needs to be dramatically ramped up.

The Victorian opposition wants to protect feral horses and stop effective control measures, highlighting the lack of effective safeguards against shifting political winds.

We need to build public support for controlling feral horses across our fragile and unique alpine landscapes and apply increasing pressure to governments to significantly reduce numbers.

The Reclaim Kosci campaign is evolving to protect Australia's entire Alpine landscape. We need stronger national safeguards to ensure future state governments protect highly damaging feral horses. Additionally, our campaign efforts will set a precedent for the removal of feral horses from protected areas elsewhere and provide stronger national safeguards for all listed heritage places and nationally listed wetlands, such as Barmah forest.



Mt. Hotham, Alpine National Park

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Goal: Reduce the number of feral horses in the Alps by 30% by 2025.

Strategy: Capitalise on the Federal Government's Nature Positive Plan and environmental law reform opportunities; use ACT's feral horse free jurisdiction to create a race to the top between NSW and Victoria.

Tactics:

- Leverage the Senate Inquiry into the Australian Alps for stronger national safeguards against feral horses and further major invasive threats in other areas of significance.
- Build social licence to increase public pressure on NSW and Victorian governments.
- Work with governments to shape strong federal legislation for Australia's Alps that will also drive stronger action in NSW and Victoria.

Stopping a catastrophe

Protecting our native animals from cats will kick off Australia's wildlife revival. Cats are an environmental disaster for Australian wildlife. They have caused 25 of 33 native mammal extinctions and kill approximately 2 billion animals every year, mostly native.

Management of feral cats is a complex and resource-intensive exercise. With 1.4-5.6 million feral cats and 4.9 million pet cats in Australia, the solutions are challenging and social licence for culling feral cats, in particular for the use of baiting, must be built.

In the short term, removal of barriers to action at the state level is essential. This includes increasing long-term coordination, funding and allowing the use of practical control tools. We also need to advocate for improved culling methods, investment in research, funding for permanent national feral cat and fox coordinators, and the eradication of cats from the 5 priority offshore islands identified by the federal government.

Increasing the uptake of improved culling methods will also be vital in reducing feral cat numbers. Such an example is the recent deployment of Felixer cat traps, that use artificial intelligence to target cats and foxes with a toxic gel bait, outside a fenced conservation reserve. Thanks to funding by a generous foundation, we have been able to deploy a number of these traps to high priority conservation areas to safeguard some of our most endangered species, such as the kowari and night parrot. The first deployment has focussed on creating a safe buffer for kowari's that are small enough to move through the mesh in predator-free enclosures, effectively enabling them to extend their range beyond the enclosure and supporting the establishment of larger free roaming population.

These interim solutions in science and advocacy will alleviate the pressure on our wildlife for the next decade while we build the political will, deliver the quantum of funding needed and advocate to

achieve systemic change and scientific breakthroughs to tackle the millions of feral cats across Australia.

Feral cats are currently on the political agenda. The rewriting of Australia's national environmental laws, development of a new feral cat threat abatement plan and establishment of a new nature repair market coming before parliament provide exciting opportunities to dramatically accelerate action on feral cat control within a few years. We will employ systematic approaches to seize these opportunities.



Honey possum on a banksia. Image: Phototrip

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Goals:

- By 2023 the Federal Government increases funding for innovative, effective cat control methods.
- By 2025 feral cats are being reduced in high priority areas due to broad political support for all effective feral cat control.
- By 2025, 5 local government areas with high biodiversity values are transitioning to effective domestic cat containment.

Strategy: Build decision makers' confidence to take swift action and invest heavily in feral cat and fox management by making wildlife protection the popular choice amongst Australians and a leading solution within the nature repair market.

Tactics:

- Increase public awareness of feral cat impacts on wildlife and investment needed for new tools and techniques.
- Targeted local, state and federal government lobbying.
- Increase pressure by mobilising supporters, land managers and local councils to call for pet cat containment.

Feral cat responding to being fired on by Felixer. Chuditch, burrowing bettong and bilby, all filmed but not targeted by Felixer





Rampant invasive species and thriving Country cannot coexist. It's one or the other. And we can't have a healthy Indigenous culture without healthy Country. Invasive species contribute significantly to the destruction of sacred sites, loss of native wildlife and extinction of Indigenous totem species. This can have deep and long lasting impacts on First Nations communities' culture and connection to Country.

As an Aboriginal nation it is our culture to care for Country and the species that evolved here over millennia. The role of First Nations people is central to solving our conservation challenges. Nearly 60% of Australia's threatened species occur on land managed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.

For the first time the federal government's new Threatened Species Action plan has dedicated targets for integrating First Nation knowledge into conservation and ensuring the recovery of threatened species is led by First Nations people. The Albanese Government also committed to doubling the number of Indigenous rangers by 2030. Now more than ever, Australians are highly receptive to progressing the interests of First Nations peoples. This provides a historic opportunity to protect Country from the wrath of invasive species.

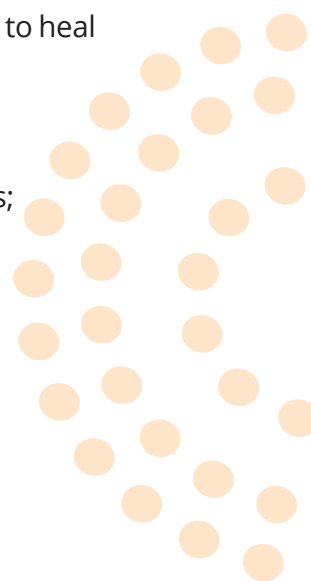
Together, we must create a culture where Australians unite around a living country that allows for our native species to thrive, and reclaim our shared role as custodians of this land. Central to this is improved invasive species management. We believe now is the time to do this.



Richard Swain, A Voice for Country program lead, Ambassador for Invasive Species Council

A Voice for Country aims to bring all Australians together to heal Country through:

- education about the invasive species threat and best-practice responses;
- building the advocacy capacity of First Nations peoples; and
- encouraging all Australians to connect with this problem and the solutions.



This program seeks to inspire and empower future Indigenous rangers and communities to build knowledge and a commitment to managing invasive species, in order to restore the land and care for Country into the future.

Project lead Richard Swain will connect and build a national, Indigenous-led distributed network of caring Indigenous community leaders and communities to unite together to save Country from invasive species. Through direct dialogue and engagement with First Nations communities about the impacts of invasive species on their country, the project will build awareness, ecological knowledge, advocacy skills and practical community capacity for the management of Country. This will increase support amongst communities for First Nations management of invasive species and elevate the First Nations voice for Country amongst key decision makers across federal, state and territory governments, culminating in a joint, united and powerful voice on protecting Country. This voice will be incorporated into political processes, policy negotiations and into public debates.

2030 GOALS

Protection: Protection of national parks, totem species and culturally significant sites from invasive species.

Regeneration: Five species are brought back from the brink in unfenced mainland key protected areas along the Eastern Seaboard.

Awareness: Majority of First Nations communities across Australia understand the ecological and cultural impacts of invasive species.

Training: 100% of Indigenous rangers are trained to actively reintroduce or restore totem and other species impacted by invasive species.

Partnerships: Indigenous and non-Indigenous land managers are working in partnership to address invasive species issues.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Goals: By 2025 achieve the appointment of a new Indigenous Caring for Country Commissioner to ensure a dedicated, permanent voice for the protection of Country regarding decisions of national environment and cultural significance are being made.

Strategy:

- Empower First Nations peoples to be advocates on invasive species on Country.
- Make invasive species management a leading solution to protect Country.

Tactics:

- Neutralise opponents who block solutions, with a forced choice between invasive species or a healthy Country.
- Increase resources and capacity for Indigenous-led caring for Country and invasive species management on their land.



Aboriginal Narjong Ceremony at Long Plain Kosciuszko National Park.
Photo: Justin McManus

Emerging extinction threats

Until the 1970s predatory cats, foxes and black rats were responsible for 90% of the animal extinctions caused by invasive species. Since then, the extinction drivers have diversified – chytrid fungus, wolf snake, trout, giant centipede and weeds have joined the list. Freshwater fishes are the most imperilled with a high risk of extinction within 20 years from predatory fish, the worst being brown and rainbow trout.

Myrtle rust, phytophthora, feral herbivores (rabbits, goats, deer, horses) and weeds – are significant drivers of at least 35 (54%) predicted imminent extinctions of plants.



Fire spreading through gamba grass



Black rat eating a birds nest. Photo: Nga Manu Images

Weeds are destructive, threatening native species ecosystems. Invasive pasture grasses that kill trees by fuelling extremely hot fires can be especially destructive. Despite this, most invasive plants in Australia are not regulated and continue to be sold, planted and introduced to new areas. New laws to create a list of safe plant species that can be sold and moved in each state and territory are urgently needed. The worst offenders are gamba and buffel grass that eliminate woodland trees and dry rainforests in national parks including Kakadu, Uluru and Carnarvon, and drive extreme fires. Buffel grass are still being planted today.

Cacti are another problematic weed occupying harsh and low rainfall areas. Prickly pear covered tens of millions of hectares before a biological control agent brought it under control, but many other cacti from the same sub-family are spreading in Australia, set to harm wildlife and render vast areas of agricultural and conservation land unusable. Already 27 opuntoid cacti are listed as weeds of national significance yet no coordinated national plan exists to prevent another disaster.



A fleet of 7 trucks and 100 men delivered 3 billion cactoblastis larvae eggs. Photo: Queensland Government Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Eliminating feral animals for carbon wins

Researchers at the University of Queensland found that feral pigs which uproot the soil produce as much carbon dioxide globally as 1.1 million cars per annum. Australia and New Zealand account for 60% of those emissions due to our large feral pig populations.

In Australia's Alps, feral horses, deer and pigs are ravaging peatlands, bleeding carbon that was safely stored within.

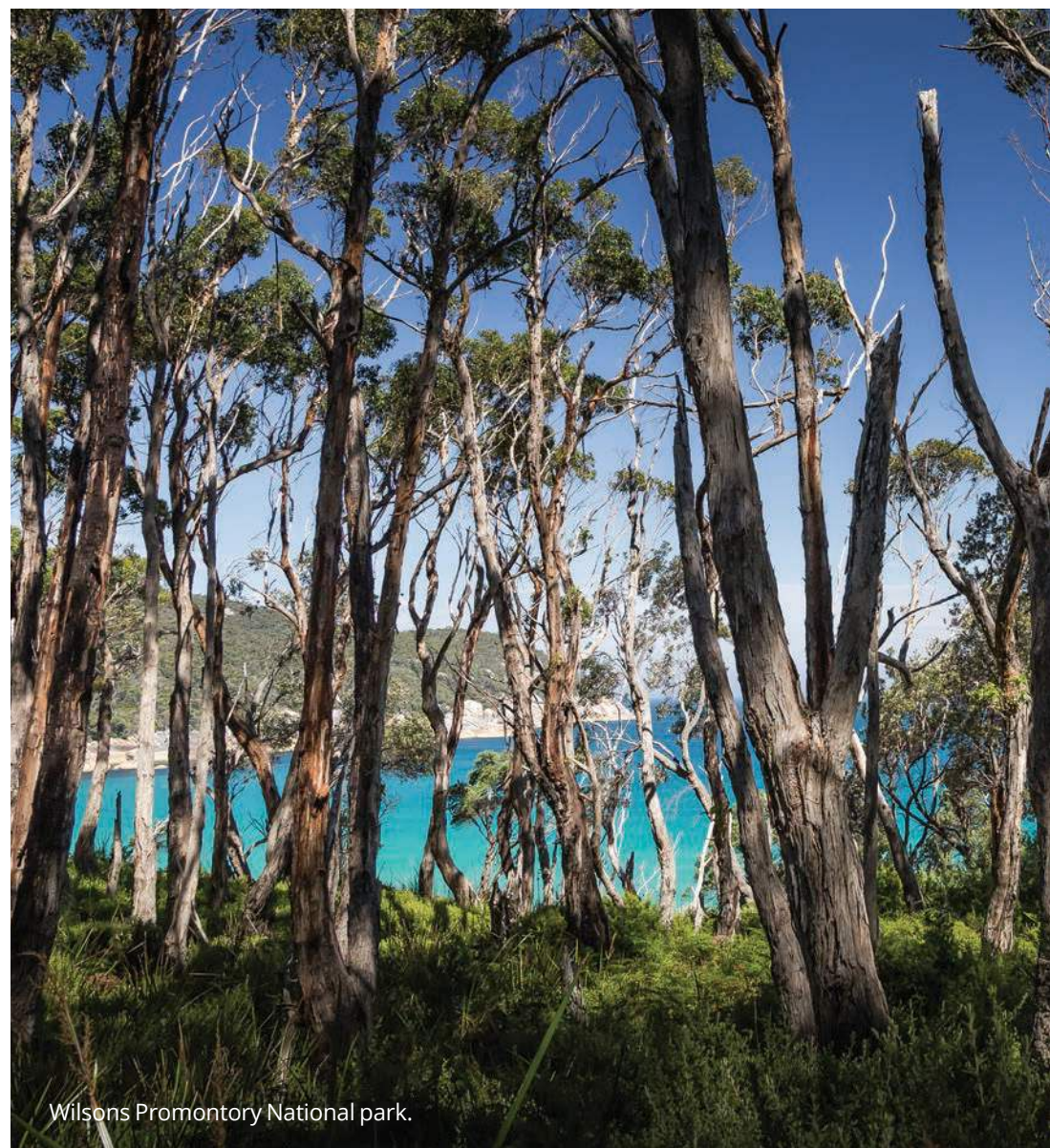
Forest and Bird in New Zealand commissioned a report in 2021 that estimates the equivalent of nearly 15% of New Zealand's 2018 net greenhouse gas emissions per year could be locked into native ecosystem carbon sinks if they controlled feral browsing animals to the lowest possible levels. No such study has been done in Australia...yet.

Capturing hearts and minds

The social research project conducted by the Invasive Species Council in 2022 revealed 3 critical findings: 1) significant support exists for invasive species management; and 2) Australians love our native species and will choose them over invasive species; and 3) when the reason for culling is explained, support for management increases dramatically. We also found that knowledge of invasive species as a leading driver of extinction isn't well known and support for invasive species management was lower amongst younger people.

Developing an education program for primary and secondary students could be a leading strategy to increase awareness and social licence amongst the public and spark a wildlife revival.

The Invasive Species Council is keen to develop these initiatives and prevent further impacts from emerging extinction causes however initiating such programs is outside of our financial ability. Please contact us should you be keen to invest to see this work done.



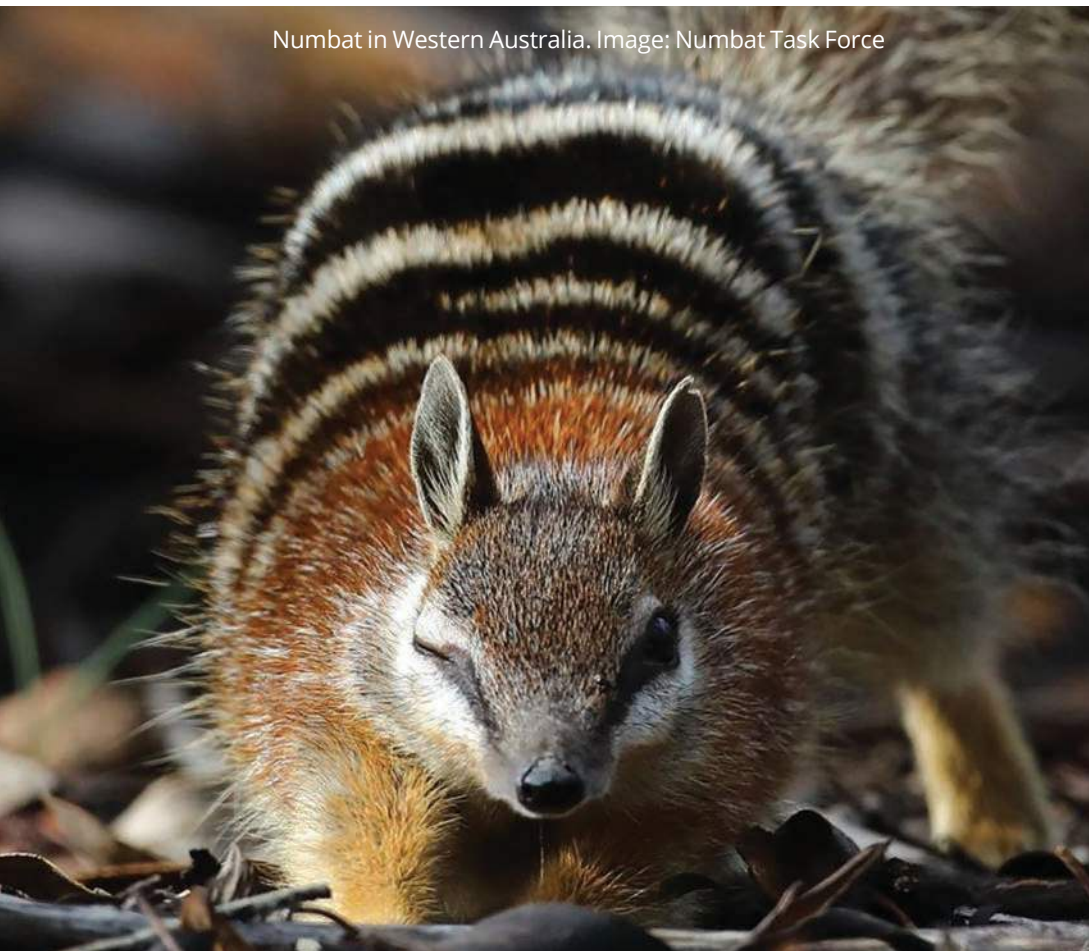
Wilsons Promontory National park.

A crucial investment to help lead the wildlife revival

As the only advocacy-focused environmental NGO committed to stopping invasive species-led extinction and destruction, the Invasive Species Council provides a crucial investment in our future.

Your investment of core funds can help us rapidly grow into a larger, stronger organisation, capable of scaling and accelerating our impact. The simple fact is, money is power. Your investment can also leverage critical government funds. This is how we can successfully ensure zero extinctions and lead a wildlife revival.

Numbat in Western Australia. Image: Numbat Task Force



These are some of our successes since 2002:

- In 2022 won federal commitments of \$24.8M for Queensland's yellow crazy ant eradication programs and \$9.8M to tackle gamba grass and doubling of Indigenous rangers.
- In 2022 protected Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area from feral deer by securing a commitment in the Tasmanian government's deer strategy to keep the WHA deer free.
- From 2016-current, protecting Queensland's Wet Tropics World Heritage Area by securing funding for eradicating yellow crazy ants.
- In 2021 protected Kosciuszko National Park by winning a new NSW plan to actively reduce feral horses from 14,000 to 3,000 by 2026.
- In 2021 won a stronger feral horse plan for Victoria's Alpine National Park.
- In 2020 secured a new Victorian deer management strategy that prioritises the environment including \$18M over 4 years for on-ground feral deer control.
- In 2019 protected NSW from feral deer by removing protected status and official recognition as a priority pest.
- In 2018 secured the appointment of a Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer.
- In 2017 protected SE Queensland and Australia by securing \$411M in a 10-year commitment to eradicate red fire ants.

Funding needed to lead the wildlife revival

We need your help to build a committed network of funding partners to raise \$750,000 p.a. for the next critical three years.

The Ian Potter Foundation awarded a major grant of \$2.5 million to the Invasive Species Council in December 2021.

We need to match this funding by 2025 to deliver our science-based campaign strategy.

Please consider investing in these critical projects to prevent invasive species-led extinctions and supercharge our impact.

Together we can lead Australia's wildlife revival.

Please contact CEO Andrew Cox on 0438 588 040 or email andrewcox@invasives.org.au

Thank you



The Invasive Species Council's mission is bold and aspirational but also achievable because of the quality and commitment of the people in the organisation



Louise Arkles, Senior Program Manager,
Ian Potter Foundation



The Invasive Species Council is a registered charity with DGR 1 status.

Visit www.invasives.org.au/donate

Via EFT: Account: Invasive Species Council Inc.

Bank: Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Limited BSB: 633000 Account: 117645358

Animal family of quokka. Photo: Damian Lugowski



Our vision

By 2050, invasive species are no longer a major driver of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation in Australia.

Our mission

We catalyse strong, collaborative biosecurity to protect and restore Australia's extraordinary wildlife and ecosystems.

We value being



**Advocates
for nature**



**Collaborative
with First
Australians**



**Committed
to science**



**Fearless
and persistent**

Our 2030 goal is for Australia to have a strong environmental biosecurity system, enabling more effective:

Prevention: the establishment of new invasive species in Australia has substantially slowed, and no new very-high-risk species have permanently established.

Eradications: priority invasive species are being systematically eliminated from the Australian mainland and islands.

Containment and control: invasive species have not caused any more extinctions, high priority invasive species are being effectively contained or controlled, and priority biodiversity sites are being protected.

Thank you for your support



invasive
species council