

A living legacy

Invasive species actions for South Australia

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Document details

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About the Invasive Species Council

The Invasive Species Council was formed in 2002 to advocate for stronger laws, policies and programs to keep Australian biodiversity safe from weeds, feral animals, exotic pathogens and other invaders. It is a not-for-profit charitable organisation, funded predominantly by donations from supporters and philanthropic organisations.

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Cover Photo: Dudley Peninsula, looking over to the Mainland. Credit: Quentin Chester

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South Australia needs a better plan for invasive species

According to the *South Australia State of the Environment Report 2023*, invasive species remain a primary driver of biodiversity decline. Since the 1960s, they have cost the national economy more than \$390 billion in management and impacts. The report highlights critical threats on Kangaroo Island, in regional and pastoral areas, and on Country. It also found there had been little progress on reducing the abundance or distribution of most key invasive species. And the number of new reported incursions had increased.

In South Australia and across Australia, invasive species have been the major driver of animal extinctions. Since 1788, Australia has averaged more than 1 extinction every 3 years. Invasive species have been a primary driver (>30% contribution) in about two-thirds of these, including for more than 80% of vertebrate animal losses (*Figure 1*).

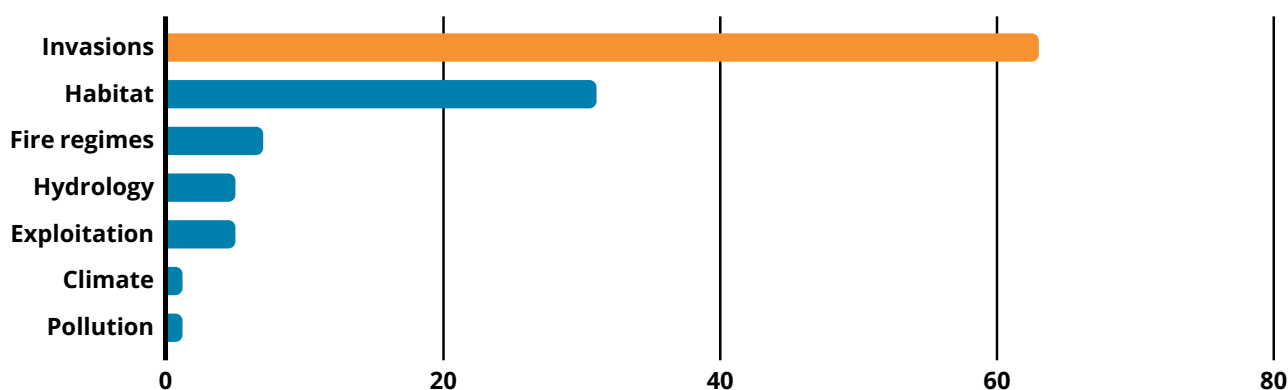


Figure 1: Primary drivers of species extinctions or probable extinctions since colonisation. A 'primary driver' is estimated to have contributed at least 30% to an extinction.

This document outlines the Invasive Species Council's priorities for the next South Australian government. With even a modest funding increase, the next government can strategically tackle the state's most difficult invasive species challenges and lead the nation in addressing the primary cause of extinctions.

Key priorities include:

- **A legacy for Kangaroo Island:** an ambitious opportunity for island conservation to establish and maintain a Wildlife haven.
- **Priority invasive species:** urgent action to prevent species from becoming unmanageable or to eradicate populations while it is still possible.
- **Care for Country:** support for Indigenous-led and community efforts to protect land and wildlife from feral animals and weeds. This leverages traditional knowledge and modern science to ensure healthier ecosystems and cultural continuity.
- **Invest and innovate:** implementing regulatory and funding reforms to improve how we tackle invasive species.
- **Protected areas:** our state parks require adequate resourcing to manage invasive species and maintain ecosystem health.
- **Landscape reforms:** ensuring strong landscape boards across the state.

Invasive species actions for South Australia

A legacy for Kangaroo Island

1. Commit to an island-wide wildlife haven for Kangaroo Island with an implementation plan to achieve this goal by 2050.
2. Fund the eradication of cats on Kangaroo Island's Dudley Peninsula.
3. Commit to the removal of escaped Tasmanian blue gums on Kangaroo Island.

Priority species

4. Commit to the eradication of feral deer in South Australia.
5. Commit to enhanced management of feral pigs in South Australia.
6. Develop a management plan in pastoral areas to address feral goats.
7. Commit to a statewide cat management strategy.

Caring for Country

8. Appoint a South Australian Indigenous Commissioner for Country to advise on the management of invasive species and their impact on Indigenous culture and country.
9. Commit to a government-wide business case to contain and reduce the impact of buffel grass in South Australia.

Invest and innovate

10. Champion the development of a strong federal threat abatement plan for escaped garden plants and aquatic weeds.
11. Commit to recommendations from the National Fire Ant Eradication Program review when they are released.

Protected areas

12. Commit to the continuation of an effective Heritage Agreement program.
13. Deliver ambitious policy reforms and programs for our national parks and protected areas

Landscape reforms

14. Provide a formal government response to the Landscape Act reforms.
15. Provide a clear framework for Landscape boards to access their retained earnings for projects.

A legacy for Kangaroo Island



1. Commit to an island-wide wildlife haven for Kangaroo Island by 2050.

Current situation

Kangaroo Island is a biodiversity treasure – home to dozens of species and ecological communities found nowhere else, including some that are critically endangered.

Invasive species are the primary threat to these ecosystems. Strict biosecurity measures have kept Kangaroo Island free from foxes and rabbits, unlike the South Australian mainland. But the island still faces pressure from feral cats and many harmful weed species.

Opportunities

Kangaroo Island offers the South Australian government an opportunity for a flagship project of national significance – the creation of an island-wide wildlife haven. This would be Australia's largest safe haven – and leave a permanent legacy for island and biodiversity conservation.

Kangaroo Island has a proven track record of eradications – with successes in eliminating feral pigs, goats and deer and effective programs to tackle invasive weeds such as bridal creeper and yellow burrweed. Strong community support and established biosecurity measures to minimise incursions from the mainland make this commitment achievable.

With the eradication of cats on the Dudley Peninsula making good progress, now is the time to identify and prioritise the remaining opportunities to eliminate invaders and optimise conditions for island wildlife to thrive.

Actions needed

Commit to an island-wide wildlife haven for Kangaroo Island with an implementation plan to achieve this goal by 2050

2. Fund the eradication of feral cats on Kangaroo Island's Dudley Peninsula.

Current situation

Feral cats are formidable predators that imperil many threatened species on the island. Cat population densities currently are 10 times higher on the island than on the adjacent mainland.

The feral cat eradication program on the Dudley Peninsula is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere and is already achieving conservation successes. The program is distinguished by its leadership in adopting cutting-edge technology, involving highly skilled practitioners, cultivating strong community support, and actively engaging with First Nations practitioners.

Opportunities

The Australian Government funded the first year of this project but has not committed to ongoing funding beyond this financial year. It is essential that this funding, currently delivered under the Saving Native Species (SNS) program, is continued.

A funding pledge by the South Australian government – reflecting the significance of this project – would demonstrate commitment and provide a buffer for program continuity.

Actions needed

- Provide \$800,000 to enable ongoing eradication of cats on Kangaroo Island's Dudley Peninsula (20% of the total project cost).
- Engage with the Australian Government to secure joint funding of \$2.1 million required to complete the eradication of cats on Kangaroo Island's Dudley Peninsula.

3. Commit to the removal of escaped Tasmanian blue gums on Kangaroo Island.

Current situation

The spread of Tasmanian blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) wildlings on Kangaroo Island has reached a critical stage following the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires. While these trees were originally planted for timber, they are now a major invasive threat to the island's unique biodiversity. About 3,500 hectares of remnant native vegetation, conservation land and roadside areas are significantly impacted. This species exacerbates the risk of bushfires, which, in a self-perpetuating invasion-fire cycle, would increase the spread of this destructive weed.

Opportunities

Tasmanian blue gum is a declared species under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. While the government and organisations have made a concerted effort to remove wildlings, a coordinated island-wide strategy is required. This strategy should couple large-scale, on-ground eradication efforts with regulatory enforcement to ensure landholders take action.

A prioritisation and funding package is needed to tackle blue gum wildling infestations on the island and avoid an ecological disaster.

Actions needed

Commit to an island-wide management strategy and provide adequate funding to tackle escaped blue gums on Kangaroo Island.

Priority invasive species



4. Commit to the eradication of feral deer in South Australia.

Current situation

South Australia's feral deer eradication plan is nation-leading – it would be the first significant mainland eradication of a well-established invasive vertebrate. This program is already delivering significant results and demonstrates what is possible with a proactive government, effective legislation and improved control tools. The elimination of feral deer would be an important legacy for the next South Australian Government and can be achieved within the next four years.

Opportunities

Landscape boards have undertaken an extensive compliance program to ensure deer farmers comply with legislation to prevent escapes that supplement feral populations. Feral deer culling programs have gained strong support from landholders who recognise the benefits. It is vital to maintain this momentum and support.

The removal of more than 28,400 feral deer since the plan began is a significant achievement. The tools, techniques and community support are now in place to achieve removal levels of at least 65% per year. The primary impediment to success is the lack of ongoing funding required to complete the project.

Actions needed

Commit to the eradication of feral deer in South Australia:

- Provide \$2 million per year over four years to the program.
- Seek matching federal funding commitments.
- Maintain social licence by delivering education and proactive public engagement programs to ensure continued community support for culling and eradication efforts.

5. Commit to enhanced management of feral pigs in South Australia.

Current situation

Record flooding in the northern parts of the state has caused feral pig populations to migrate from Queensland and New South Wales. This increase in food sources has resulted in a population explosion.

The South Australian Government has responded to this disaster by activating the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) to address the impacts of flooding. But resourcing to manage the scale of the feral pig population has not been adequate.

Opportunities

For the sake of the environment and farmers, the South Australia government should urgently tackle this emerging feral pig problem.. It is vital to direct funds from the DRFA to address this issue before these populations become well established. Developing a grant program to address this biosecurity concern would enable landholders to apply for funding to manage the threat on their properties.

Actions needed

Commit to the effective management of feral pigs in South Australia:

- Allocate \$3 million from disaster relief funding to the state's north-east to manage growing populations and support environmental recovery.
- Appoint a regional pig coordinator as a cross-tenure role to lead control efforts and coordinate activities between stakeholders.

6. Develop a management plan in pastoral areas to address feral goats.

Current situation

There are currently over 400,000 feral goats in South Australia, with the majority in the rangelands. Feral goats are an environmental and agricultural threat – degrading and damaging soil and native vegetation, spreading weeds, competing with livestock and able to spread diseases like foot and mouth. Feral goat populations can increase by 60-75% a year in good conditions and in the absence of dingoes.

The current approach to management of feral goats in SA is not working, with numbers mainly fluctuating in response to ad-hoc harvesting in response to the market price for goat meat. This is because:

- Effective enforcement by landscape boards of the requirement to control feral goats is prevented by the vague definition of 'control' in the Landscape SA Act, as outlined in the SA Policy on Feral Goats, and the heavy burden of proof required.
- Reinfestation from poorly managed domestic goat herds and re-release by pastoralists continues and there are no prescribed minimum fencing standards other than that they must be 'goat-proof'.
- Some pastoral leaseholders are essentially farming goats, whilst also stocking their properties with their full allocation of sheep and cattle.
- Funding for, and leaseholder participation in, a targeted and ongoing feral goat control program is insufficient to significantly reduce the population.

Opportunities

To mitigate the major ecological threat of feral goats in pastoral areas, the government should develop a comprehensive management plan to significantly reduce feral goat populations. Central to this strategy is the introduction of a formal destruction requirement for landholders, paired with strict minimum fencing standards to prevent further spread. This commitment must be backed by an ambitious, well-funded reduction plan that integrates increased mustering, rigorous enforcement of landholder responsibilities, and direct government intervention, such as aerial shooting, in areas where low densities render other methods ineffective.

To ensure long-term success, the plan should explore alternative management strategies that optimise 'win-win' outcomes for stakeholders while prioritising the protection of ecological values and supporting the national feral goat threat abatement plan. This initiative should begin with a targeted consultation process co-led by the Department for Environment and Water (DEW), Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA), and the Arid Lands Landscape Board. To maintain transparency and inclusivity, this consultation should include representatives from the Conservation Council SA, private land conservancies managing pastoral leases, and the Invasive Species Council, all working toward the clear objective of reducing goat numbers through improved and enforceable standards.

Actions needed

Develop a management plan in pastoral areas to manage feral goats:

- Introduce a destruction requirement for landholders and strict minimum fencing requirements.
- Commit to an ambitious, funded feral goat reduction plan which includes increased mustering of feral goats, enforcement of stricter landholder requirements and government control where very few goats remain (i.e. where aerial shooting is the only effective strategy).
- Explore alternative strategies to goat management in pastoral areas which optimise win-win outcomes while maintaining ecological and conservation values.
- Commence targeted consultation, co-led by DEW, PIRSA and the Arid Lands Landscape Board, with a clear aim to reduce feral goat numbers through improved, enforceable standards. At a minimum this consultation should include representatives chosen by Conservation Council SA, 2 representatives of private land conservancies who manage SA pastoral leases, and the Invasive Species Council.
- Support the national feral goat threat abatement plan.



7. Commit to a statewide cat management strategy.

Current situation

Cat management in South Australia is hindered by a massive overpopulation of about 137,000 unowned or semi-owned cats in urban areas and an estimated 265,000 feral cats in rural regions. Feral cats are a 'key threatening process' linked to the extinction of more than 25 mammal species and the daily predation of millions of native birds, reptiles and mammals.

Additionally, cat-dependent diseases such as toxoplasmosis cost the Australian livestock industry roughly \$12 million annually by impacting meat quality and lambing success. These risks are higher in South Australia's cooler, wetter climates.

Currently, cat management is administered by local government. This has resulted in a patchwork of regulations that is confusing for the community and difficult to enforce. While the South Australian government has commenced a statewide strategy for cat management, it is yet to be released.

Opportunities

To address these challenges, South Australia must move towards a consistent statewide framework. The *Dog and Cat Management (Cat Management) Amendment Bill 2024* and the *Dog and Cat Management (Breeder Reforms) Amendment Act 2025* provide a pathway for this reform.

This legislation would empower councils with standardised seizure and detention powers. It also clarifies the authority for landscape boards and national park managers to control feral cats in ecologically sensitive areas. The state strategy should transition from local bylaws to mandatory statewide standards, including universal registration and a breeder licensing scheme to curb uncontrolled breeding.

Actions needed

Commit to a statewide cat management strategy that transitions from a patchwork of local bylaws to a consistent, enforceable statewide framework.

Care for Country



Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands' Buffel Grass.
Credit: Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board.

8. Appoint a South Australia Indigenous Commissioner for Country to advise on the management of invasive species and their impact on indigenous culture and country.

Current situation

The impact of invasive species on Australia's environment is a direct threat to First Nations' cultural heritage and connection to Country. Weeds and feral animals destroy sacred sites and imperil native wildlife and culturally significant species. They reduce the availability of native food sources, prevent the regeneration of degraded landscapes and alter the characteristics of local ecosystems.

Invasive species have deep and long-lasting impacts on the ability of Elders to share knowledge with younger generations. Continuing to allow the destruction of culture through the degradation of Country and further extinctions is a significant policy failure.

Opportunities

First Nations people hold deep knowledge of Country and have a strong desire to be more involved in conservation. Centring First Nations knowledge and culture is vital to address our conservation challenges. Providing opportunities for leadership, employment and knowledge sharing is essential to tackle the threat of invasive species.

Establishing a South Australian Indigenous Commissioner for Country would be a positive step to increase First Nations leadership in invasive species management. This model has precedence in New South Wales through the appointment of an Aboriginal Assistant Commissioner (Healthy Country) within the Natural Resources Commission. An equivalent role in South Australia should be adequately resourced and empowered to provide independent advice to the government and parliament on natural resource issues, including invasive species.

Actions needed

- Appoint a South Australian Indigenous Commissioner for Country: establish and maintain an independent position with an annual budget of \$750,000 to advise on invasive species management and their impact on Indigenous culture and Country.
- Set First Nations employment targets: allocate dedicated positions or set a minimum proportion target for First Nations employment when recruiting and contracting for invasive species management.

9. Commit to a government-wide business case to reduce the threat of buffel grass in South Australia.

Current situation

For Traditional Owners, buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) – known as *tjanpi kura* (bad grass) and *mamu tjampi* (devil grass) in Pitjantjatjara – is rapidly transforming desert plant communities into dangerous grass monocultures. Buffel burns hotter, faster and more frequently than native grasses. It is aggressively spreading through songlines and sacred sites, choking waterways and leaving dust where there was once diverse native life.

In Central Australia, buffel grass now covers hundreds of kilometres of Country. It continues to spread, threatening native ecosystems as far south as Port Pirie. Road and rail corridors act as ‘super spreaders’, exposing infrastructure to catastrophic impacts when buffel grass burns, closing roads and warping rail lines.

Opportunities

This invasive weed has spread largely unchecked across South Australia. Halting and reversing its spread requires a whole-of-government approach. In late 2024, the South Australian Government conducted a cross-government roundtable and developed a business case to address this issue, but this has not been released. Since then, little action has been taken. Mitigating the buffel threat should be a priority in the next term of government.

Actions needed

- Commit to a whole-of-government business case: provide \$2 million per year for seven years to manage buffel grass in South Australia.
- Appoint a statewide coordinator: establish a role to coordinate actions across government departments and agencies.
- Empower landscape boards: provide boards with the resources and authority for compliance and enforcement activities.
- Invest in research: fund new treatments and strategies to tackle buffel grass.
- Advocate for national action: support the listing of buffel grass as a Weed of National Significance and the creation of a federal threat abatement plan with dedicated funding for research and priority actions.
- Drive behavioural change: create educational materials and policies to prevent the spread of buffel grass.



Invest and innovate



Fire ant close up.

10. Strengthen the SA biosecurity system.

Current Situation

In South Australia, environmental biosecurity is primarily governed by the Landscapes South Australia Act 2019. This Act is administered by the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) and a network of nine Landscape Boards, as well as the Department of Environment and Water (DEW) in protected areas.

Opportunities

South Australia has a unique chance to lead the nation by appointing a Statutory, Independent Environmental Biosecurity Commissioner specifically designed to capitalise on the strengths of PIRSA, DEW and the Landscape Boards.

A statutory, independent Biosecurity Commissioner, supported by an expert and representative advisory committee, would elevate the significance of biosecurity and invasive species management within government and the community, while ensuring agency accountability to their biosecurity responsibilities.

Actions needed

- Create a new statutory, independent Environmental Biosecurity Commissioner and associated State Biosecurity Advisory Committee.
- Strengthen interdepartmental biosecurity agreements between PIRSA, DEW and the nine Landscape Boards to ensure a strong focus on protecting and restoring environmental priorities and effective cooperation between agencies.

11. Champion the development of a strong federal threat abatement plan for escaped garden plants and aquatic weeds.

Current situation

The number of naturalised plants and new weeds is growing, increasing the risks of major new invasions to add to the likes of blackberries and olives and exacerbating the degradation of native habitats. Only a small proportion of potentially invasive garden plants are currently regulated, and there is minimal cross-jurisdictional coordination to address these threats.

Weeds are already the most expensive land management problem in Australia, having cost the economy almost \$200 billion over the last 60 years. Under current trends, this already dire problem will worsen significantly.

Opportunities

A federal threat abatement plan offers the opportunity to develop a nationally coordinated, prevention-focused approach to regulating the sale of garden plants. While the South Australian government has committed to the joint development of a TAP, we call on the next government to become a champion for meaningful reforms. Stronger national leadership is required to prevent the next generation of escaped garden plants from becoming environmental disasters.

Actions needed

- Commit to championing and enacting a strong federal threat abatement plan to address escaped garden plants and aquatic weeds.
- Advocate for national reform: use the state's position to influence federal policy, ensuring the TAP includes robust regulations on the sale and movement of high-risk ornamental plants.

12. Commit to adopt recommendations from the National Fire Ant Eradication Program review when they are released.

Current situation

Proactive engagement and early national commitment to tackling red imported fire ants are critical to the program's success. South Australia should be a leader in this space due to the severe risks the species poses to the state. South Australia's climate is highly suitable for fire ants to establish and thrive, putting our agriculture, environment and outdoor way of life at risk.

By committing to the national response, South Australia would help ensure the program has the scale and resources required to eradicate every nest before the ants can spread interstate via freight, soil or turf.

Opportunities

While South Australia's \$17.1 million funding commitment in 2024 was a vital step, the next priority is to negotiate and secure a long-term funding package for the period beyond 2027. The current National Fire Ant Eradication Program response plan only covers activities until June 2027, but the national goal is to achieve eradication by 2032.

An independent review of the program was conducted in late 2025 and is due for release in early 2026. This review will determine if current funding levels are sufficient to achieve the 2032 eradication target. South Australia should be prepared to scale up its contribution if the review identifies a funding shortfall or recommends a revised strategic approach.

Actions needed

- Commit to the recommendations of the 2025–26 national fire ant review once they are released.
- Negotiate a long-term funding agreement: work with the Australian Government and other jurisdictions to secure the resources needed to sustain eradication efforts through to 2032.

Protected areas



Pelicans. Meningie, South Australia. Credit: Miguel Yamin.

13. Commit to the continuation of an effective Heritage Agreement program.

Current situation

Since 1980, Heritage Agreements have transformed the South Australian landscape, protecting more than 1.8 million hectares of native vegetation across about 2,800 sites. They have created vital wildlife corridors, buffers around national parks and private sanctuaries essential for conserving biodiversity.

South Australia has an effective Heritage Agreement grant model that, over the last four years, has helped private landholders manage invasive species on their properties. This successful program should be continued to protect these high-value ecosystems.

Opportunities

The efficacy of the program is evident in the strong uptake by landholders, with more than 200 grants already delivered. By empowering private landholders to prioritise the management of invasive species, the program directly contributes to a robust future for our threatened ecosystems.

Given its proven success and the persistent threat posed by invasive species, the continuation and expansion of the Heritage Agreement grant model is essential. Sustaining this initiative will help protect South Australia's unique natural heritage and safeguard the significant environmental investment already made by both the government and private landholders.

Actions needed

- Commit to the continuation of the Heritage Agreement grant program: provide \$7 million in funding over four years.
- Expand the program's reach: ensure the model remains accessible to a broad range of landholders to maximise biodiversity outcomes on private land.

14. Deliver ambitious policy reforms and programs for our national parks and protected areas

Current situation

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* is the primary legislation for establishing and managing South Australia's vast network of protected areas. These reserves ensure that ecosystems of national or scientific significance are preserved for public benefit and conservation. While the *Biodiversity Act 2025* now governs the protection of native wildlife, the 1972 Act remains the legal foundation for land management within parks, including the control of invasive species.

Opportunities

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* is due for review. Given the age of the legislation, this review is an opportunity to align it with modern science and best practices for invasive species management. Updating the Act will support targeted and strategic conservation outcomes across state-managed lands.

The review also presents an opportunity for the South Australian government to strengthen the state's capacity for effective protected area management by matching numbers of National Parks and Wildlife Service frontline staff with needs and ensuring they are supported with funding, equipment, training and accreditation to effectively address the threat of invasive species.

Actions needed

- Complement reforms of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972 with policies to apply best practice management of invasive species in protected areas.
- Provide necessary resourcing and training for the department to manage these areas effectively, ensuring there are enough staff and that they have the tools and expertise required for modern biosecurity challenges.

Bunker Hill, South Australia. Credit: P. Jennings.



Lashmar Lagoon, South Australia. Credit: Quentin Chester.

Landscape reforms



15. Adopt reforms to the Landscape Act to strengthen invasive species management.

Current situation

The Landscape South Australia Act 2019 provides the legislative framework for managing the state's natural resources and tackling invasive species. An independent review was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of these reforms and identify areas for improvement.

The report of the independent review was published in February 2024 and tabled in Parliament in April 2024. Almost 2 years later, the government has not yet released a formal response to the report's 66 recommendations to strengthen the system. This creates uncertainty and neglects opportunities to rectify problems.

Opportunities

The South Australian government should act decisively and adopt the independent review's key recommendations that strengthen invasive species funding and enforcement provisions.

A formal government response to the review will provide clarity along with legal and financial certainty to transition from reactive control to proactive eradication.

The review's recommendations – particularly those concerning stronger enforcement powers and addressing funding between regions – will allow landscape boards to address invasive species more effectively across the state.

Actions needed

Adopt recommendations from the independent review of the Landscape Act South Australia that enable equitable levy distribution and strengthen enforcement powers to improve the state's capacity to address invasive species.

16. Provide a clearer framework for landscape boards to access their retained earnings for projects.

Current situation

Landscape boards provide a critical service to communities across South Australia, assisting landholders to manage invasive species on their properties. As statutory authorities, these boards manage their own budgets, which are primarily funded by regional landscape levies and government grants. Their retained earnings – often referred to as ‘equity’ or ‘accumulated surplus’ – represent funds held for future projects, emergency reserves or long-term commitments.

Opportunities

While landscape boards are economically responsible, their accumulated surplus has grown significantly. Under current processes, boards find it difficult to access these funds once they are collected, except for those already allocated to long-term projects. The process to access unallocated retained earnings is often onerous. Establishing a clearer pathway to these funds is essential to support critical, time-sensitive work, such as tackling the state’s growing invasive species challenges.

Actions needed

Provide a clear framework for landscape boards to access retained earnings: simplify the process for boards to use their accumulated surplus for high-priority projects and emerging biosecurity threats.

Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands' Wildflowers before Buffel.
Credit: Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board.



