



A billion dollar boost to biodiversity

Submission to the Select Committee on Productivity in Australia

Invasive Species Council

July 2026

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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Introduction

*an obligation to future generations to deliver a better standard of living
productivity matters, ... budget sustainability matters, ... resilience ... matters
Reform which is progressive and patriotic ... and practical and pragmatic
methodical reform, which is considered and collaborative and ambitious*

Treasurer Jim Chalmers, National Press Club, June 2025

Australia is overrun by invasive species that hunt, trample, disease and outcompete native wildlife. They **degrade** ecosystems, **erode** Indigenous culture, **cost** farmers many billions of dollars a year, **sabotage** climate goals by fueling intense fires, **endanger** public health, and **damage** the environmental values underpinning our nature tourism industry. The annual measurable cost of invasive species already exceeds **\$24.5 billion** (a CSIRO compilation of published costs).

The policy and program proposals in this submission would deliver benefits that prevent or mitigate the impacts of invasive species - a primary driver of habitat destruction and biodiversity decline.

They will drive a new **methodical, collaborative, ambitious** approach on a key threat to nature – while delivering enormous benefits for people. They will ensure a **better standard of living** for current and future generations.

Some threats, like fire ants, would mean painful, sometimes deadly, encounters with stinging swarms; dead pets; billions in annual costs. Eradicating them should therefore be a **standard-of-living, sustainability and productivity** imperative for multiple government agencies. The same is true for rabbits, which will ravage landscapes and farm incomes unless we re-invest in biocontrol efficacy.

Nothing could be more **progressive and patriotic** than saving Australian wildlife from extinction and protecting precious places such as national parks and islands from exotic invaders. To improve our capacity to do all this, we need to invest in Australians' talent for solving difficult problems by supporting **collaborative and ambitious** innovation from lab to landscape.

This submission responds to the **Senate Select Committee on Productivity in Australia's** invitation for:

*Evidence on how strategic productivity growth and other policy measures can drive productivity in the environment sector and related industries such as agriculture, forestry and fishing, and mining...
[including] identifying avenues to reduce red and green tape and encourage private investment with respect to environmental policy and projects, including environmental sustainability.*

The committee discussion paper rightly canvasses difficulties in measuring productivity particularly for the 'non-market sector'. However it does not consider environmental productivity measures - a common yet fundamental gap in ensuring sustainable productivity over the long term.

Some proposals build on existing programs of proven effectiveness – long term funding for the flagship **Saving Native Species program**, enhancing and restoring the **Supporting Communities Manage Pest Animals and Weeds Program**. Others propose new programs, recognising that environmental spending, including on invasive species, has been far too low for far too long.

This submission is guided by 5 principles for effective environmental investments, focused on ensuring that public money is invested wisely to achieve the most beneficial long-term outcomes.

Principles for effective environmental investments

1. **Prioritise prevention and eradication:** Biosecurity prevention should be treated as a productivity investment with a high benefit-cost ratio. Eradications, such as that of red fire ants, must be treated as national emergencies that do not require funding offsets.
2. **Avoid funding cliffs:** Early, decisive decisions on major programs – such as Saving Native Species, National Environmental Science Program, and fire ant eradication – are essential to prevent costly program disruption and loss of skilled personnel.
3. **Invest in identified strategic priorities:** Environmental expenditure should be concentrated on strategic, planned priorities rather than fragmented competitive grants.
4. **Invest in workforce capacity:** Workforce planning is required to ensure a skilled capacity for conservation management, especially for invasive species and fire management in protected areas and on public land.
5. **Build responsive capacity into programs:** Recognising the biological nature of invasions, programs must have inbuilt agility and funds to seize opportunities (e.g. droughts) and react swiftly to emerging threats.

Key issues summary

Invasive species are Australia's leading extinction driver, costing the economy billions in lost productivity and precipitating catastrophic wildlife decline. Invasive species costs already exceed \$24.5 billion (according to a CSIRO compilation of published costs). They degrade ecosystems, erode First Nations culture, cost farmers billions of dollars a year, and sabotage climate goals by fuelling intense fires. Effectively managing these threats is not merely an environmental obligation; it is a foundational economic and productivity imperative for Australia.

Protecting our natural capital requires acknowledging that effective invasive species control is not achieved by the stroke of a pen. It demands practical, sustained, long-term on-ground work that restores and protects nature from this primary driver of extinction and habitat loss.

Beyond the stroke of a pen

Legislative reform is a critical component of environmental protection, but it is not a panacea. Recent reforms to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) represent only a small slice of the broader picture. While protected areas and stronger environmental laws can mitigate habitat clearing and regulate land use, they are not a barrier to biological invasions. Ultimately, EPBC reforms will count for little unless they are backed by rigorous, well-funded efforts to save highly threatened species and tackle critical extinction drivers directly on the ground.

Good policy must result in *boots on the ground*, backed by investment in new technology and innovative solutions to address impacts. Stopping biological invasions requires sustained support, not ad-hoc or short-term funding cycles. We cannot regulate a feral cat out of existence. Effective invasive animal control relies heavily on consistently exceeding species replacement rates—requiring an annual removal rate of over 60% for feral cats and 70% for feral pigs just to keep populations stable. Failing to fund programs that achieve this level of ongoing, practical intervention allows invasive species to recover, reinvade or continue to degrade the environmental values that underpin nature, tourism industry and agricultural output. To secure productivity gains, the federal government must pivot from piecemeal short term interventions towards landscape-scale programs with measurable sustained success.

Investment in invasive species management is an economic imperative

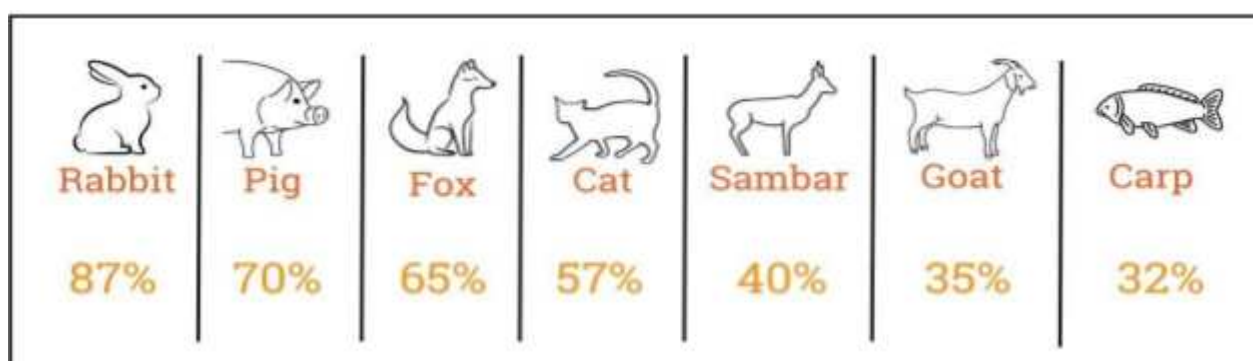
Invasive species management cannot be treated as a marginal environmental issue; it is a core economic challenge. Invasive plants and animals directly cost Australian agriculture \$5.3 billion annually in management and lost production. They choke our waterways, increase the ferocity of bushfires, and threaten the \$40 billion-a-year nature tourism industry. Ensuring we are prepared for future invasive species challenges can help avoid some of these future costs, as can targeted timely interventions on key threats right now.

A productivity-focused Australia must transition from a reactive, piecemeal approach to a forward facing culture of practical conservation problem-solving. By investing in tangible, landscape-scale, on-ground work—from island eradications to unblocking chemical controls and backing professional aerial operations—we can restore our natural capital. Protecting Australia from the insidious threat of invasive species is fundamentally an obligation to future generations and a prerequisite to delivering a resilient, highly productive nation.

Best practice control at a landscape scale

Managing established invasive species is often a highly contested space. Regional communities struggling with invasive species are right to demand action. However, a lack of resources has led some jurisdictions and local authorities to pursue measures such as bounty schemes.

Bounties do not pass the test of co-ordinated landscape scale management. They often lead to small scale removal of the weakest and most naive of a species, leaving stronger, faster, and cannier individuals to survive and reproduce. The survivors become alert and elusive, rendering the schemes less effective over time. These factors combined make the invasive problem worse. To protect nature and agricultural assets effectively, control must be highly coordinated, strategic and focused on protecting the highest value assets.



Estimated proportion that needs to be killed annually to reduce populations

Achieving this requires prioritising early investment in programs and a commitment to best-practice methodologies, which often necessitates navigating complex social and political conflicts. A vocal hunting lobby seeks to prioritise access to invasive species as a game resource. Viewing invasives as a resource undermines professional control measures and preserves destructive species like feral deer. Similarly fringe voices and minority groups routinely push misinformation to derail aerial control of feral horse and deer populations and use of targeted chemical treatments for invasive plants, insects and diseases.

To overcome these barriers and preserve essential tools for landscape-scale action, the federal and state governments must strongly back evidence-based, professional control methods. This includes:

- **Professional aerial shooting:** Highly skilled, humane aerial culling is a proven, indispensable tool for reducing large feral herbivore populations rapidly across inaccessible landscapes. The reinstatement of aerial culling in Kosciuszko National Park has led to a dramatic decline in feral horses, sparking visible ecological recovery in the fragile alpine environment and giving critically endangered species a fighting chance at survival. Defending and expanding the social licence for professional aerial control is non-negotiable for large-scale population control.
- **Best practice chemical treatments:** Effective responses to biosecurity incursions and established invasive species often rely on the timely availability of chemical controls. Currently, the regulatory process for minor or emergency use permits can act as a severe bottleneck, increasing costs and undermining operational success. Dedicated resources within the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) are required to streamline this process without compromising the regulatory function. Resources are needed to support priority biosecurity responses and ensure the correct and effective deployment of treatments.

Sanctuaries of hope

For established invasive species, continental-scale eradication is exceptionally difficult. Australia's islands have a geographic advantage that can be leveraged for significant conservation and productivity wins. Historically, Australia's islands have been epicentres of extinction, harbouring a disproportionate number of threatened species. However, they now offer unrivalled opportunities to recover these species because, unlike on the mainland, invasive predators can be totally and permanently eliminated.

Australia should urgently scale up one of its most demonstrably effective conservation interventions: the creation of wildlife havens – by eliminating invasive species from islands, peninsulas and fenced reserves. Recent outstanding successes on World Heritage islands – such as Macquarie, Dirk Hartog and Lord Howe – demonstrate how rapidly threatened native species rebound when invasive predators are removed. A dedicated **National Islands Eradication and Recovery Fund** would yield enormous, permanent benefits for endemic island wildlife, island-breeding seabirds, and at-risk mainland species.

Investing in fenced havens and peninsulas also allows for the rewilding of native species that have been decimated by feral cats and foxes. For example, bold initiatives on Kangaroo Island aim to create Australia's largest island haven, pushing towards the total eradication of feral cats. With strong biosecurity and more than 50 offshore islands, Tasmania has a natural advantage and could become a global model for island revival. By systematically creating feral-free zones, we establish resilient biodiversity banks that protect Australia's unique natural heritage for future generations.

The escalating threat of feral deer and the need to reverse budget cuts

Feral deer are one of Australia's fastest-growing invasive threats—trashing landscapes, polluting waterways, and driving wildlife decline. Without urgent action, feral deer populations could top 1 million in Tasmania alone by 2055, currently costing the state up to \$100 million each year in agricultural and environmental damage. On the mainland, the crisis is equally dire, growing pockets of feral deer in almost every state and a severe lack of resources feed this spiralling threat.

Despite this, federal funding for crucial management programs has gone backward. The May federal budget entirely cut the *Supporting Communities Manage Established Pest and Weeds* program and reduced the *Saving Native Species* fund by 27%. These budget cuts actively undermine targeted, multi-year local programs that have achieved measurable results despite historically scarce funding.

Effective management requires the full funding and implementation of the **National Feral Deer Action Plan**. National action coordinators for feral deer, pigs, and cats have successfully galvanised collaboration and co-investment to meet the environmental and agricultural threats posed by these species. Halting the inexorable western expansion of feral deer requires empowering large-scale ungulate control and securing long-term funding for on-ground community networks. We must restore funding to these vital community-led management programs to protect regional productivity.

Strengthening prevention

One of the most productive investments the Australian Government can make is to ensure a regulatory framework that prevents the arrival of new invasive species. The enormous costs of responding to invasions by the likes of the red imported fire ant and the polyphagous shot-hole borer model the benefits of prevention.

Foundational to effective environmental biosecurity is ensuring appropriate interpretation and application of **Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP)** – defined as 'as 'providing a high level of sanitary and phytosanitary protection aimed at reducing risk to a very low level, but not to zero.' The Australian Government has said that the ALOP is ultimately based on a *societal value judgment*, reflecting the community's attitude to risk-taking as expressed in government policy. However, there is little public guidance on how the ALOP is interpreted for environmental risks.

The current interpretation of the ALOP does not provide confidence that environmental values are being appropriately considered. Current risk analyses lack recognition of the irreversibility of many environmental invasions and the immense costs and difficulty of recovering native species and ecological communities from the impacts of invasive species, whereas economic impacts on businesses are routinely considered. Furthermore, the impacts of new invasive species on First Nations cultural heritage are largely neglected.

Uncertainty is pervasive in environmental biosecurity due to the lack of research on environmental risks and the uniqueness of Australian biodiversity. Precaution is rarely exercised by decision-makers despite the potential in article 5.7 of the The WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement, for doing so.

The Australian Government has the opportunity to build on the work undertaken by the **Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis (CEBRA)** to implement a **biosecurity insurance scheme**. This scheme would provide a framework for risk creators to contribute to mitigation and immediate response efforts. It could underpin a system that more efficiently evaluates biosecurity risks.

Allowing potentially catastrophic environmental invaders into Australia due to a failure to exercise precaution is a productivity risk. Many of the recommendations in this submission address prevention failures or mitigate established invasive species threats. These are important environmental measures but must be coupled with a prevention and early intervention regulatory approach.

Productivity and the natural environment

The Australian Government's current productivity agenda – focused on reversing a decade of stagnation to drive growth in wages, household incomes, and national living standards – is mostly market-centric and targeted to conventional economic indicators.

But the notion of productivity extends beyond economics. Whenever there is production – whether by human activity or in nature – there is also productivity. Primary productivity, for example, is the conversion of solar energy to plant matter via photosynthesis – a form of productivity highly relevant to rabbits, which can consume all or much of annual plant production in certain ecosystems.

Productivity in nature makes a huge contribution to the human economy and wellbeing – a recognition encapsulated in the ecosystem services concept. The loss of primary productivity to rabbits is one impact that can be partly measured in economic terms – including where rabbits compete with livestock for native pastures. In this and other ways, rabbits contribute substantially to land degradation, which has been costed for Australia in terms of lost ecosystem services at \$224 billion/year, about 7% of one estimated value of total terrestrial ecosystem services.

The contribution of ecosystem services to Australian productivity has been mostly neglected by governments. Although the Productivity Commission has an environment and water work stream, and invasive species are Australia's most expensive land management problem, it has not undertaken any relevant inquiries.

Even more neglected is the relevance of productivity to non-human life, which cannot be measured in economic terms, except in human-centred ways such as the 'willingness to pay' for conservation.

Case study: Productivity benefits of effective rabbit control

Economic productivity	Ecosystem productivity	Biodiversity and conservation productivity
Reduced costs of rabbit control	Recovery of vegetation and fewer weeds	Increased native plant diversity and abundance
Increased farming and forestry production and profits	Improved soil stability and health	Increased native animal diversity and abundance
Reduced costs of remediating damage	Increased carbon sequestration	Recovery of threatened species

Key national invasive species program recommendations

Proposal section	Investment item	Term (years)	Total cost (\$m)	2026–27 budget (\$m)	2027-31 (\$m)	Beyond (\$m)	Biodiversity Boost
CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL PRIORITIES							
Fire ants (page 7)	National Fire Ant Eradication Program (unfunded after 2027)	5	547.85	82.05	370.74	95.06	
Science (page 10)	National environmental solutions accelerator fund	4	160.0	–	60.0	20.0	80.0
Subtotal		–	707.85	82.05	430.74	115.06	80.00
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY (DAFF)							
Project fund (page 7)	Environmental Biosecurity Project Fund	4	10.0	0.825	7.5	2.5	10.0
Rabbits (page 8)	Rabbit Biocontrol Pipeline Strategy	5	15.0	1.2	9.0	6.0	15.0
Mega-threats (page 9)	National invasive species action coordinators (7 FTE)	4	11.2	-	8.4	2.8	11.2
APVMA (page 8)	Environmental Biosecurity permit coordinator	3	1.5	-	1.0	0.5	1.5
	Environmental Biosecurity permit processes and treatments	3	0.9	-	0.6	0.3	0.9
Co-investment (page 11)	Enhanced invasive plants and animals fund	6		-	60.0	30.0	90.0
DAFF subtotal		–	38.6	2.025	86.5	42.1	128.6
DEPARTMENT OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER (DCCEEW)							
Nature fund (page 7)	Saving Native Species fund	4	98.8	98.8	225.0	75.0	300.0
Mega-threats (page 9)	Nature resilience and threat abatement fund	4	-	-	48.0	-	48.0
	H5 bird flu species resilience program	2	11.2	11.2	200.0	-	200.0
Precious places (page 10)	Protected areas invasives action fund	4	-	-	120.0	40.0	160.0
	National islands eradication and recovery fund	10	200.0	-	80.0	120.0	200.0
Voice of Country (page 9)	Commissioner for Country	4	8.0	-	4.0	-	4.0
Science (page 6)	National Environmental Science Program	6	300.0	0.0	200.0	100.0	300.0
DCCEEW subtotal		–	618.00	110.00	877.00	335.00	1,212.00
TOTAL INVESTMENT		–	\$1,364.45	\$194.08	\$1,394.24	\$555.16	\$1,420.60

1. Eradicate fire ants

Eradicating fire ants now, while it is still technically feasible, is one of the most socially, environmentally and financially responsible decisions the government can make. Failure to act decisively will burden Australia with costs estimated to exceed \$22 billion by the 2040s, impoverish ecosystems, and leave large parts of the continent dangerous for humans and domestic animals.

Because a nationwide infestation will be an economy-wide impost – with costs to health, agriculture, infrastructure, tourism, sport, local government, education and the environment – this funding should not be subject to a requirement for offsetting against other funding in the DAFF budget. Eradication funding should be treated as a whole-of-government priority and be additional to other departmental expenditures.

While recent eradication efforts are reversing the spread, current funding levels are insufficient to achieve total eradication. To secure the success of the National Fire Ant Eradication Program, the government must ensure continuity of funding and an immediate suppression boost in high-density areas.

\$465.8 million over 5 years (from 2027–28 to 2031–2032) to secure the eradication trajectory. This number is subject to verification in the Eradication Response Plan 2027–2032.

2. Rescue the Saving Native Species fund

No new extinctions, the Australian Government pledged in 2022. Meeting this pledge will require reversing a dire trajectory: Australia has already suffered the extinction of 7 unique animal species this century, and more than 100 plants and animals have been assessed by the National Environmental Science Program as more likely than not to be extinct by 2040.

Yet funding for the main national program focused on staving off extinctions has been cut by 27% and been provided only a two year funding extension. It seems unthinkable that the Australian Government would allow the expiry of the Saving Native Species program – a primary source of funding, strategy and energy for reversing the nature crisis. EPBC reforms will count for little unless they are backed by efforts to save highly threatened species and tackle critical extinction drivers, including invasive species. At a minimum, the program should be maintained with a modest funding indexation from \$224.5 million over 3.5 years to \$300 million over 4 years.

Examples of projects funded in this program:

- Yellow crazy ant eradications to protect the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and Townsville coastal habitat
- Gamba grass eradications to prevent catastrophic invasion of Kakadu National Park and west Arnhem Land
- Kangaroo Island feral cat eradication to create Australia's largest island haven
- Tasmanian feral deer and cat control on Bruny Island and the Midlands biodiversity hotspots.

\$300 million over 4 years to maintain and expand the Saving Native Species program – to protect some of our most vulnerable species and precious places, and tackle critical extinction drivers.

3. Boost the Environmental Biosecurity Project Fund

Despite escalating threats and the acknowledged need to strengthen environmental biosecurity, the budget for Australia's only dedicated environmental biosecurity fund has been frozen since its 2018 inception, preventing many worthy high-impact projects from even being considered.

Environmental biosecurity presents big challenges that differ fundamentally from those of agricultural biosecurity and warrant an increase to dedicated funding focus to:

- investigate environment-specific invasion risks and pathways
- improve surveillance for invaders with primarily ecological impacts
- support the development of promising innovations for managing environmental invaders
- better engaging communities as the eyes and ears of our biosecurity system.

The proposed modest annual increase, for \$0.8 million to \$2.5 million would enable more ambitious multi-year projects and back in the elevated status of the Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer to allow them to build government, community and industry capacity to prepare for, respond to and reduce environmental risks.

\$10 million over 4 years for the Environmental Biosecurity Project Fund to enable support for high-impact, multi-year environmental biosecurity projects.

4. Prevent a looming rabbit plague

Denuded landscapes, eroded soils, ravaged crops and vanishing wildlife – rabbits are Australia's most costly vertebrate invader (\$200 million/year cost to farmers) and a threat to more than 300 nationally listed species.

Australia has had great success suppressing rabbit populations with biocontrols, but the research pipeline has dried up since the last biocontrol release in 2017. Rabbits build immunity to biocontrol, and a new release is needed every decade or so to prevent population explosions and escalating damage to nature, agriculture and the economy. **The Rabbit Biocontrol Pipeline Strategy is endorsed by national experts and all governments, but currently lacks federal investment.**

\$15 million over 5 years to fund the nationally endorsed Rabbit Biocontrol Pipeline Strategy. This investment is critical to fast-track the next rabbit biocontrol virus before existing controls fail.

5. Unblock biosecurity response tools

Effective responses to biosecurity incursions often rely on the timely availability of chemical controls. **Currently, the regulatory process for minor or emergency use permits can be a bottleneck, undermining the potential for success or increasing the costs.** Dedicated resources within the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) are required to streamline this process. The solution to this bottleneck will involve a combination of direct support with applications and a project to ensure that jurisdictions leading biosecurity responses are able to collect and submit relevant data to deploy the correct treatments in their applications.

\$1.5 million over 3 years to fund a biosecurity permit coordinator within the APVMA with the following functions:

- Engage with state/territory jurisdictions and biosecurity management groups to ensure timely processing of minor or emergency use permits.
- Promote engagement with end users to ensure correct and effective use of chemicals under permits.
- Support jurisdictions leading biosecurity responses with explanatory language for use in the communication of permits and their functions where high public interest exists.

\$900,000 over 3 years for work to align biosecurity needs, permit processes and available treatments and create improved predictability on permit application data package requirements.

6. Establish a Commissioner for Country

Caring for Country is deeply embedded in First Nations peoples' culture. Despite increasing acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledge, Australia sorely lacks First Nations voices in environmental decision-making. **A statutory Commissioner for Country would elevate Indigenous leadership and ensure culturally appropriate governance in environmental law.** The Commissioner would work to:

- support First Nations people to care for Country
- advocate for biodiversity and culturally significant species
- provide advice to government on decisions under the EPBC Act that impact Indigenous people
- progress Indigenous-led solutions to environmental problems and inform policy design.

\$4 million over 2 years to establish a Commonwealth Commissioner for Country in DCCEEW

7. Systematically mitigate mega-threats

7A. Reverse decline through threat abatement

With more than 2,000 native species and ecological communities listed as nationally threatened, it is not feasible to save them all – species-by-species, community-by-community – while their major threats remain potent. **To stop new extinctions, reverse declines and restore ecosystems, Australia must systematically mitigate the mega-threats driving declines.**

For more than 30 years, Australia has had a system for listing and abating key threatening processes – essential for addressing threats like feral cats unconstrained by regulations or protected area boundaries. The proposed Nature Resilience and Threat Abatement Fund would provide guaranteed baseline funding (\$2 million a year) for coordinating abatement of 12 big threats to nature.

The Australian Government recognised the value of threat mitigation in its 2024 H5 bird flu response, acknowledging that reducing existing pressures is the most effective way to help wildlife survive an unavoidable outbreak of bird flu. We recommend maintaining the resilience funding at a similar level to achieve the dual benefits of boosting the resilience of native wildlife and achieving enduring threat mitigation. Unspent funds from any part of the current bird flu package should be rolled over.

\$48 million over 4 years to establish a Nature Resilience and Threat Abatement Fund to support national collaboration on priority threats.

\$200 million over 2 years to boost the resilience of species and locations susceptible to H5 bird flu. Ensure that unspent funds are rolled over to strengthen long-term preparedness.

7B. Expand DAFF's successful national action coordinators network

National action coordinators for feral deer, pigs and cats have galvanised collaboration and co-investment, reducing the environmental and agricultural threat of some of Australia's most harmful invasive species.

We propose the expansion of the national network of action coordinators by 7 new roles (\$400,000/year per coordinator). Priorities for coordination include (1) invasive grasses in northern Australia, (2) community surveillance, (3) invasive insects, (4) freshwater invasive species, (5) invasive cacti, (6) escaped garden plants and (7) myrtle rust and other exotic plant diseases.

\$11.2 million over 4 years for 7 new national invasive species action coordinators.

8. Secure a feral-free future for precious places

8A. Create island wildlife havens

Australia's islands have been epicentres of extinction and continue to harbour a disproportionate number of threatened species. But they also offer unrivalled opportunities to recover threatened species because invasive species can be totally eliminated – a feat rarely achievable on the mainland for well-established invaders.

Australia should scale up one of its most demonstrably effective conservation interventions: island eradications to create wildlife havens. Recent outstanding successes on World Heritage islands – Macquarie, Dirk Hartog, Lord Howe – show how rapidly threatened species rebound when invasive predators are removed.

A National Islands Eradication and Recovery Fund would yield enormous benefits for endemic island wildlife, island-breeding seabirds, and at-risk mainland species. Examples of eradications that could be supported include feral cats on Kangaroo Island, weeds on Lord Howe Island, deer on Bruny Island, Argentine ants on Norfolk Island, gamba grass on Tiwi Islands and Groote Eylandt and yellow crazy ants on Hamilton Island.

\$200 million over 10 years to establish a National Islands Eradication and Recovery Fund to provide the long-term funding needed to complete the full cycle of planning, eradication, verification and prevention of re-invasion.

8B. Stave off ecosystem collapses and extinctions in protected areas

While protected areas mostly stop land clearing and mining, they are not a barrier to biological invasions. Many of Australia's premier national parks are suffering devastating declines or are at grave risk:

- Six animal extinctions since 2000 have been of species with most of their habitat in national parks.
- In some premier national parks around the nation – world-heritage-listed Kakadu (NT) and Purnululu (WA), as well as Booderee (NSW) and Great Otway (Vic) – populations of several mammal species have collapsed.
- Invasions of highly flammable grasses are threatening the future of several parks – buffel grass in Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Tjoritja/West MacDonnell Ranges and gamba grass in Litchfield and Kakadu.

The precipitous decline of some of Australia's most valuable protected areas warrants federal investment to avert permanent loss. A Protected Areas Invasives Action Fund would enable state and territory governments to manage catastrophic threats that exceed routine management capacities.

\$160 million over 4 years to establish a Protected Areas Invasives Action Fund to manage invasive threats in public and private protected areas at risk of ecosystem collapse or major biodiversity loss.

9. Innovate for a wildlife revival

9A. Accelerate research into practical invasive species solutions

Australia has a history of overcoming immense environmental challenges through research and innovation – epitomised by the Cactoblastis moth that beat back prickly pear and the viruses that keep rabbits from eating the land bare. Investment in research is essential for developing the cost-effective, landscape-scale solutions required to tackle invasive species.

The National Environmental Science Program delivers applied science to strengthen nature conservation. It has been instrumental in advancing our understanding of biodiversity trends, improving threatened species recovery and threat management, and supporting Indigenous land management. **But the scale of the invasive species**

crisis requires a more dedicated focus. The current NESP phase spans 2020-21 to 2026-27, with a \$149 million investment. With funding for the current program expiring in mid-2027, now is the time to commit to a renewed program with a priority focus on strengthening Australians' capacity to more effectively avert and suppress extinction-driving invasions.

\$300 million over 6 years for the National Environmental Science Program, including for a dedicated invasive species hub to drive research for practical, scalable solutions for mitigating invasive threats.

9B. Support mission-driven innovation from lab to landscape

Australia's failure to overcome invasive threats is not due to a lack of scientific talent. Rather, promising solutions often fail to transition from the lab to the field because of the 'valley of death' – the gap between proof-of-concept and on-ground deployment. Australia currently lacks the innovation ecosystem needed to incentivise and scale these breakthroughs.

We've seen the power of focused collaborative efforts in ambitious global projects, such as the rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines and New Zealand's Predator-Free 2050 program. **By unifying effort around high-impact challenges, Australia can transition from a reactive, piecemeal approach to a 'can-do' culture of conservation problem-solving.** New and emerging technologies – e.g. drones, AI, smart traps, eDNA monitors, thermal imaging cameras – combined with a deeper understanding of invader attributes are opening the door to addressing previously intractable problems.

One inspiring challenge would be to create the conditions – effective suppression of fox populations – to enable eastern quolls to once again thrive on the mainland (outside fenced reserves). Another worthy challenge would be to halt the inexorable western expansion of feral deer by enabling large-scale ungulate control.

\$80 million over 4 years to establish a National Environmental Solutions Accelerator Fund dedicated to motivating, driving and supporting the development of innovative solutions to Australia's most harmful invasions.

10. Reinstate and enhance the *Supporting Communities Manage Established Pest and Weeds Fund*

The May federal budget made no provision to continue funding for the *Supporting Communities Manage Established Pest and Weeds Fund*. This abrupt cessation of support actively undermines targeted programs that have been achieving measurable results over years.

To secure long-term productivity and environmental restoration, the federal government must reinstate an enhanced version of this fund. This new iteration should be explicitly guided by the principles advocated earlier in this document. Its goal must be to maximise existing funding and develop sustainable, contemporary national cost-sharing arrangements for established and emerging invasive species threats. Rather than viewing federal spending in isolation, this enhanced fund must explore alternative mechanisms and options across the system as a whole, at all levels of government.

Effective management of widespread, established invasive species relies heavily on Commonwealth investment to motivate co-invest. An enhanced fund should be designed specifically as a catalyst for this co-investment. By committing \$15 million per year over a sustained six-year period, the federal government can provide the

long-term certainty needed to unlock and leverage substantial matching funds from state and local governments, as well as corporate and philanthropic partners.

This leveraged approach will move Australia away from piecemeal interventions in favour of programs that demonstrate sustained measurable success. It will ensure that regional communities, Landcare networks and Natural Resource Management groups have the reliable, sustained support necessary to effectively tackle targeted invasive plants and animals on the ground

\$90 million over 6 years (\$15 million annually) to reinstate and enhance local capacity for targeted invasive species management, structurally designed to unlock and leverage state, local, corporate, and philanthropic co-investment.