

Australia has lost hundreds of species of plant and animals since European settlement and almost 1,700 are now threatened including the yellow-footed rock wallaby, northern hairy-nosed wombat, grey nurse shark and green turtle.

Habitat loss, introduced species, inefficient use of water and unsustainable farming, fisheries and forestry practices, have been the main causes however climate change will likely have an even greater impact.

An alarming assessment of the vulnerability of biodiversity to climate change* was released in August 2009. It said:

Australia's biodiversity is at risk from even moderate climate change and already under stress, for example from habitat degradation, changed fire regimes and invasive species. Climate change is likely to exacerbate these existing stressors and add additional stresses such as through declining water availability.

Australia ... harbour[s] more than 70% of the Earth's species and are therefore considered extremely biodiverse. About 85% of Australia's terrestrial mammals, 91% of flowering plants, and 90% of reptiles and frogs are found nowhere else in the world. More than 50% of the world's marsupial species occur only in Australia. Rates of extinction of species are likely to increase as the global average temperature rises by just 1 or 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and likely to accelerate sharply as temperature rises beyond 2°C

*www.climatechange.gov.au/publications/biodiversity

Shifts in genetic composition, changed migration patterns of some bird, altered lifecycles of some species and reduced reproduction rates in others are already evident. Some vegetation types are expanding at the expense of others and fire regimes are changing in southern Australia. Higher sea surface temperatures are causing mass coral bleaching.

Some of Australia's most vulnerable natural systems, including reefs, wetlands, mountain forests and alpine areas are likely to suffer significant and irreversible damage unless the world's economies move to very low carbon emissions.

Our Plan

- Take strong action to massively **reduce greenhouse emissions** (see Climate Change Plan)
- Strengthen Commonwealth environmental laws with the objective of **no further species loss**.
- Expand the **National Reserve System** program to ensure a comprehensive, adequate and representative terrestrial and marine protected area system.
- Remove **disincentives to conservation of biodiversity** and encourage private investment in covenanted, high conservation land through the tax system.
- Ensure that government **aid** of any kind is linked to improved biodiversity
- Maximise **Indigenous involvement** in biodiversity conservation and land management
- Expand research, cultivation and **breeding programs** for threatened species
- Ensure Australia meets its environmental obligations to protect and conserve biodiversity under **international trade agreements and foreign aid** programs
- Toughen laws to oblige **Australian companies operating overseas** to adhere to best conservation practices in other countries
- Strengthen wildlife trade laws to **prohibit native species export** unless harvesting levels are proven to be sustainable