

From words to action: Protecting Australia's wildlife, forests and the Great Barrier Reef from the bulldozers

In 2025, the Albanese Government reformed Australia's broken nature protection law, including restricting the loopholes that allowed rogue bulldozing of forests and woodlands. Now, to give Australia's forests, wildlife and the Great Barrier Reef a fighting chance, it must turn these changes on paper into reality.

Australia's problem with bulldozing forests for food

- Australia has one of the worst rates of deforestation in the world.¹
- An area of forest the size of a football field is being bulldozed every two minutes.²
- Each year, hundreds of thousands of hectares of bushland are bulldozed, mostly to expand pasture for beef and sheep grazing.³
- The problem is getting worse - the latest data from NSW shows the bulldozing of forests and woodland in that state increased more than 50% on the previous year.⁴
- UNESCO identifies deforestation as a major threat to the Great Barrier Reef, with the latest Queensland data showing 44% of bulldozing in that state occurred in the reef's catchment zone.⁵
- Destroying forests contributes on average 55 million tonnes of CO₂-e per year.⁶ That's more than the entire carbon footprint of Sri Lanka.
- Businesses like banks and supermarkets and their investors are recognising that deforestation is a significant risk to the economy. Last year, ANZ faced a world-record shareholder vote in favour of disclosing their deforestation-linked lending.

How Australia's updated nature laws can protect the bush

Support landholders to comply – Education must be afforded to landholders so they can understand their updated obligations under the changed law. This includes ensuring state governments are providing accurate information to landholders.

Enforce the law to protect wildlife from the bulldozers – The Department must be given a mandate to take enforcement action. Cracking down on those who break the law sends the clear message that compliance by the agriculture sector is expected just like it is from every other industry.

Set up the National Environment Protection Agency to enforce the law –

For better compliance and enforcement of the national nature law, the NEPA needs substantial and ongoing funding. This must be accompanied by a strong culture of enforcement and new powers like the ability to issue 'stop work' orders and hand down tougher penalties.

Create National Standards with strong rules to protect wildlife and bushlands –

These rules must make it clear what's in and what's out. The Standards must outline upfront how threatened plants, animals and ecosystems need to be protected under the national law.

For more information: brendan.sydes@acf.org.au



References

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- 4 NSW Government – [2023 NSW Vegetation Clearing Report](#).
- 5 Queensland Government [SLATS Report 2022-2023](#).
- 6 Keith H., Macintosh A., Butler D., Mackey B. (2025). [“How claims of a net increase in forest cover mask the truth about the environmental impact of land clearing in Australia”](#). Griffith Climate Action Beacon Science Informing Briefing Note 1/25.” Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia.