

# **Feature Article on Protection of Native Species: Overview of Legislation and wants around protecting vulnerable to threatened species**

*Written by Shweta Karthik - HOPE researcher Qld*

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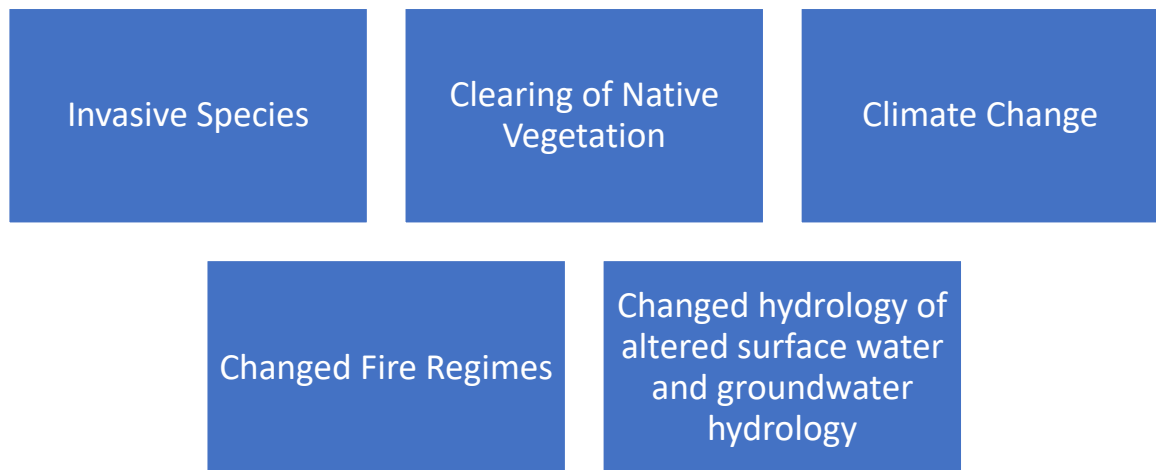
## **1.Introduction**

Protecting our threatened species against introduced invasive species has become an urgent priority over the years. The National Biosecurity Strategy, released on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024, mentions that \$390 Billion worth of damage has been caused by invasive species over the past two years. In recent times, this and other legislations have gained criticism from non-profit organisations, citing a disconnect (Bennet, E. 2025) from community expectations and governmental deliverables, including documentation of measurable impact. A key target is to ensure that at least 1% of the Australian Government Budget is spent on preserving wildlife (Ritchie, E., Woinarski, J., & Maron, M., 2025). Hence, this report examines the current state of legislation on dealing with threatened species and invasive species, with a focus on the impact on invasive species and growth in wildlife carer groups.

The economic value of saving native species can be highlighted by the fishery industry and aquaculture production, which is estimated at \$3.5 Billion (\$AUD). The damage caused by unpredictable weather is estimated at \$4.5 billion annually (Biodiversity Council Australia, 2025).

Currently, 13 animals and plants have been added to Australia's list of threatened species (classified as critically endangered), such as the Dalhousie catfish, Pugh's sphagnum frog and the Coffs Harbour Fontainea (a rainforest tree). Other threatened species include freshwater fish, lizards, flowering shrubs, a daisy and an orchid species. Only 0.43% of threatened species have improved threat status.

As per the Threatened Species Strategy from 2021 to 2031, the 5 key threats to these species are (The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment & Environment, 2022):



## 2. Glossary

**Invasive species:** an organism that can become a pest to other organisms and the environment.

**Threatened species:** a plant or animal that has been assessed as being at risk of extinction.

**Wildlife carer groups:** Groups or organisations that care for sick, injured or orphaned wildlife until they can be rehabilitated and released back into the wild.

**Protected Areas:** Term mentioned in the CBD (Convention of Biological Diversity). Relating to protection plans, these areas are dedicated towards long-term conservation of nature.

**OECM:** Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures: Areas that are not geographically defined as a protected area, but are governed and managed in ways that support conservation of biodiversity.

**Ecological Communities:** Groups of native species that live together and interact.

## 3. Overview of legislation

The current legislation, referred to as the National Biosecurity Strategy (Australian Government, 2022), was released on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024. It embodies a risk-based system. It mainly targets stronger partnerships, shared biosecurity culture, national awareness and education programs. It calls for sustainable investment and funding practices.

The biodiversity strategy runs on the principles of conserving at least 30% of Australia's terrestrial and inland water areas. Overall, the policies also demand that the introduction of invasive species is minimised by 2030.

The National Biosecurity Strategy (2024) states that invasive species have caused \$390 B AUD worth of damage over the past 6 decades. Moreover, above land clearing and climate change, invasive species are the number one driver of native animal extinctions in Australia). Australia is dealing with projected costs of \$2 billion per year against invasive species like fire ants (Invasive Species Council, 2025).

With improvements in legislation, 1,502 threatened species have more than an 80% probability of not going extinct.

### **Evolution of wildlife conservation**

One of the earliest legislative attempts towards wildlife conservation was the International Union for Conservation (1948). The US Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Weber, C, 2025) was one of the strongest wildlife protection laws. In recent times, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), has helped establish global standards.

Global partnerships between organisations have helped strengthen legislation around wildlife trafficking. In the December 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference, 188 governments (including Australia) agreed to halt human-induced extinction of known threatened species by 2050 (UNEP, 2022). The conference was chaired by China and hosted by Canada. Here, the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (DCCEEW, 2025) was adopted. This framework replaced the CBD's 2011-2020 Strategic Plan.

In Australia, there have been co-management agreements between government agencies and indigenous communities which have allowed them to access protected areas.

### **Growth in wildlife carer groups**

In Australia, there has also been growth in wildlife carer groups, particularly with "Friends of" citizen science groups and Regional Natural Resource Management Organisations. Other wildlife carer organisations include Australian Native Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation Association (ANARRA), Brisbane Area Rescue Network and more. Many of these groups have 24-hour hotlines to rescue injured native wildlife (Wildlife rescue and care, 2025). They were a key part in supporting care for seabirds and other native species impacted by Cyclone Alfred in March 2025 (Lottie Twyford and Jessica Ross, 2025).

## **Examples of legislation of the protection of species**

1. **The National Biosecurity Strategy (2024):** It is a risk-based system underpinned by science and the intergovernmental agreement on biosecurity. It was released on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024. It calls for these key strategies:
  - Stronger Partnerships: Via stronger international partnerships and strengthening the understanding of antimicrobial and pesticide resistance and zoonotic pathways
  - Have a shared biosecurity culture: through national awareness and education programs
  - Coordinated preparedness and response
  - Sustainable investment and funding practices: through determining funding needs and priorities, advance funding and investment strategies with stakeholders

- Having a national biosecurity strategy implementation working group
2. **Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999(EPBC Act):** (DCCEEW, 2025). This is Australia's main environmental law. It covers heritage areas, threatened species, migratory species, marine areas and more. It protects threatened species by identifying them, including ecological communities. It is illegal to bring harm in any way to threatened species in Commonwealth areas.
  3. **Threatened Species Strategy from 2021 to 2031:** The primary goal is to reduce the number of species in need of protection. Protecting these species is important as they are a key part of Australia's national identity and many threats accelerate the decline of these species. These strategies target terrestrial, marine and freshwater environments. Many Australian species are endemic to the Australian continent. The new strategy will target legacy threats (The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment & Environment, 2022).
  4. **Grant Support for Wildlife Carers:** Wildlife Carer organisations like the Aussie Native Rescue, Wildlife SEQ Incorporated, and Bat Rescue, are some of the 180 wildlife carer organisations that will have access to a pool of \$1.5 million grant funding for expenses like equipment, shelters, etc (Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Innovation, 2024).

## Concerns raised by Environmental NGOs and Other Agencies

- **5.1 Disconnect from community expectations:** There should be a balance between the protection of important diversity and lowering red tape barriers for reasonable commercial developments. Implementation timeframes have been an ongoing issue. A 2022 Guardian report found that only 2% of the species recovery plans were completed within the stipulated timeframe since 2013 (Cox, L., Environment, L. C., & correspondent, climate. (2025).
- *The Wilderness Society (one of Australia's largest conservation organisations) has called for legal action against federal environment ministers for failure to meet their recovery plans. There are eleven endangered species, such as the greater glider, ghost bat and Baudin's cockatoo, to name a few. The claim highlighted that there is a backlog for unfinished and undeveloped plans for species. An example of this is an unfinished recovery plan for the greater glider, which has been left since 2016.*
- **5.2 Spending on wildlife conservation should be at least 1% of the budget** for effective conservation of biodiversity and restoration efforts. A minimum of 1% of the federal budget should be environmental spending. Currently, only one-thousandth of the federal budget is being spent on conservation action.
- **5.3 Climate Change Impacts and Protection:** NGOs suggest that poor protection of native species impacts environmental law, and causes a climate trigger (whereby a significant amount of greenhouse gas is produced). Based on the Insurance Council of Australia, the cost of damage by climate-induced events has reached \$4.5 billion annually. The Human Rights Law Centre has also urged the Albanese Government to lessen the existential impacts of the crisis. The WWF Australia estimate that more than 3 billion animals were impacted during the 2019-2020 Bushfires, which destroyed 12 million hectares of land. The Labor Government has allocated \$96.6 million (de Kruijff, P. 2025) over the next four years to quicken environmental approvals.

- **5.4 Non- Binding Protection Plans:** Protection Plans are non-binding, so they can lapse at any time. The Australian Government has set aside 30 years to achieve the target of protecting 30% of biodiversity.
- **5.5 10% of Australia's commercially harvested seafood (exported) is listed under the EPBC Act:** There are issues around compliance for commercial fisheries, where 10% of threatened Australian fauna fall under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999). As per the EPBC Act, anyone can nominate a species to be listed under this act (Dominguez-Martinez, R. M., Roberson, L., Gephart, J., Wilcox, C., Sant, G., & Klein, C. (2024).
- **5.6 Request for an independent environment protection authority (EPA):** A review of the EPBC Act requested that there should be an independent environment protection authority (EPA) to monitor major developments and compliance. While this has been a commitment since 2019, an executive in Western Australia mentioned that some states have federal versions of watchdogs, so a unified version across all states is required to combine all these independent bodies.

## Global Examples

The 2015 Threatened Species Strategy has already caused the improvement of the status of many threatened species. It helped improve trajectories for 6 species of birds and 8 mammals. The control of invasive species like feral cats and rats aided in doubling the populations of Norfolk Island green parrots.

Globally, these are other examples of successful policy strategy:

- **United States:** The Bald Eagle Protection Act (IFAW, 2025) helped the Bald Eagle recover from being a threatened species and was reclassified in 2024 as a least concern. Predator Management Strategies in Florida's Cayo Costa and North Captiva Islands improved nesting success in loggerhead turtles, when compared to other islands where no such initiatives were taken (IUCN, 2024).
- **Portugal:** Land management initiatives aided the protection of the Azores Bullfinch under Portuguese law. It helped the species move from endangered to vulnerable classification (IFAW, 2025).
- **Humpback Whale Protection Programs:** Commercial whaling was made illegal, which allowed humpback whale populations to recover (IFAW, 2025). The International Union for Conservation of Nature reclassified this species as "least concern," as numbers rose to 84,000.
- **India:** Research and trial of methods to remove invasive algae worsened its spread, as the physical removal caused the algae to break into many pieces. This research allowed conservationists to refine their methods and implement better strategies to mitigate them (IUCN, 2024).

# Pathway to Progress: Action plan for governments and organisations

To address concerns laid out by stakeholders, the following actions are recommended:

- There should be attempts made to reverse a decline in biodiversity and ensure compensation for biodiversity loss (Rosengreen, C, 2024). This is primarily done through Biodiversity Offset Mechanisms.
- Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek mentions that reform should balance the needs of business and the environment.
- The new strategies place focus on robust ecological knowledge and data.
- Additional research funding should be dedicated towards investigating new tools to control invasive species like feral cats, especially when there is no singular solution to eradicate them.
- Commercially, the use of poisons must be lessened to reduce the killing of non-target animals, which can spread through ecosystems.
- **Better communication and awareness of the severity of the threatened species problem is low:** a 2018 study found that 80% of the Australian public believed that Australian natural environment and wildlife to be in good condition (Ward, M et al, 2024). Community involvement is key as many threatened species are found on privately owned or managed land. The community can also influence sustainable commercial production practices that reduce harm to threatened species.
- **Better system for tracking the funding towards listed species:** This includes a better mapping and monitoring system of tracking critical habitat (Rosengreen, C, 2024). The Australian Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water's Saving Native Species Program, is taking steps towards this. \$224.5 million will be provided to aid recovery of native species, including ecological communities. This relates to Australia's commitment to "zero new extinctions". (DCCEEW, 2025). These include koala, yellow ants (invasive) and gamba grass (invasive). \$8 million of the funding is provided towards supporting data initiatives for tracking and reporting on threatened species. [reword to flow better-includes invasive species in sentence about native species]
- Grant opportunities like Emergency Actions for Threatened Species have been put in place to prevent new extinctions of native species (DCCEEW, 2025).

## Conclusion

The issue of protecting native species has become an important issue in recent times, primarily due to the disconnect in community expectations and policy implementation. They are a key part of Australian National Identity and endemic to this continent. Since only 2% of recovery plans were completed within the stipulated timeframe, environmental groups like the Wilderness Society have called for better transparency in meeting recovery plan targets. The Government has currently allocated \$96.6 million to quicken approvals and is supporting grant funding of wildlife carer groups.

Other concerns and suggestions included the creation of an independent environment protection authority, and reducing the amount of commercial harvested seafood. This is crucial, as 10% of these species fall under the EPBC Act. The 2015 Threatened Species

Strategy has made progress by trajectories for 6 birds and 8 mammals. By having concentrated research efforts in finding novel methods to contain invasive species, more progress can be made towards improving threatened species trajectories.

Overall, to aid protection of native species, there should be a balance between protection of important diversity and lowering red tape barriers for reasonable developments.

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