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Reversing the damage done: the State of the Environment report calls on us to protect and restore our natural world. Here's how.

National environmental not-for-profit Bush Heritage Australia welcomes the release of the Australia State of the Environment 2021 report as a call to the Australian public to protect our natural places. Bush Heritage recognises that while the report is confronting, the information is not surprising and highlights the dire environmental challenges that conservationists are already working to address.

The report, released on Tuesday by Minister for the Environment and Water Tanya Plibersek, outlines the increased pressures of known threats such as climate change, habitat destruction and invasive species that are driving species decline and ecosystems collapse.

There are now over 1900 species and communities listed as threatened – a figure which was exacerbated by the 2019-2020 Black Summer fires that killed or displaced between one and three billion animals – and 19 ecosystems facing collapse as a result of human impacts.

According to Dr Rebecca Spindler, Bush Heritage's Executive Manager for Science and Conservation, "This report is confronting but it is not surprising to us. We know that Australia has the highest rate of mammal extinction in the world, that our species are in rapid decline, and the consequences of this on life as we know it will be severe. We are already seeing the impacts of climate change across our reserves, as are the partners we work with."

"What the report reinforces is the importance of Private Protected Areas, of upscaling and bringing innovation to our national conservation efforts, and walking together with Traditional Owners, ensuring Traditional Knowledge is recognised, respected and protected."

The report also comes with a government commitment to protect 30 percent of land and sea country by 2030 and recognises that Country will only heal by centring Traditional Owners' voices and knowledge of the land.

Bush Heritage is already working hard to address these urgent environmental challenges every day, in partnership with Traditional Owners, researchers and other land holders and is enthusiastic to see the alignment between Bush Heritage's strategies and the Minister's priorities.

As part of its [2030 Strategy](#), released last year, Bush Heritage will deepen its work aiming to double its network of reserves from 1.2 million to 2.4 million hectares, strengthen its Aboriginal partnership program, and grow its emerging focus on agricultural partnerships, all with a view of working across 30 million hectares of land to improve conservation values. The strategy is underpinned by three decades of land management and based on a right-way approach to science and conservation to ensure we can protect plants, animals and people through the challenges that lay ahead.

"We have seen the impact we can make when we show up for the environment and get our boots dirty and our hands in the ground, but we have to do it strategically, from a foundation of good

data and we have to do it together. We can boost biodiversity through land-based biodiversity focused carbon projects, agricultural partnerships and ecological restoration to benefit the whole of the landscape and reverse the damage done,” says Dr Spindler.



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Images

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How Bush Heritage is working to build resilience in our natural landscapes:

- **Working to face climate change:** Climate change projections indicate that the geographic range of some invasive species and disease-carrying vectors will increase, fire impacts will be more intense and less predictable, surface temperatures will increase, and water patterns will change significantly across much of Australia. Bush Heritage has been working with scientists from CSIRO to develop climate ready strategies and test new ways of working across [its Priority Landscapes](#). This work is already honing the strategies and actions on ground to ensure it works where and how it can have the greatest impact for conservation. Some of these methods may seem a challenging departure from traditional conservation but will be needed across some landscapes to ensure our habitats are functional into the future.
- **A Right-Way Approach:** As an organisation focused on achieving positive conservation impacts for Australian landscapes and people, Bush Heritage recognises that this work cannot be done without recognising, respecting and protecting traditional knowledge and working alongside Traditional Owners. Bush Heritage’s goal is to plan collaboratively across all reserves and to work in partnership with Aboriginal people to achieve their conservation goals on Country.
- **A Strong Foundation of Data:** Bush Heritage is working collaboratively with land managers and decision makers across sectors to develop a biodiversity focused, robust and transparent environmental data portal. A key example is the [Conservation Futures](#) (In collaboration with University of Melbourne and others) project that will bring together First Nations people, natural resource managers, private landholders, industry, government, research and conservation groups to develop culturally relevant, cross sectoral information to assist integrated planning and monitoring systems.
- **Rethinking Regional Planning:** A key mechanism to meeting our environmental goals may lie in Collaborative Regional Land Management. Both ecosystem restoration and productive outputs can be maximised by consensus building and deliberately planning landscapes to weave well managed productive landscapes and habitats at critical intervals to maintain species viability, habitat connectivity and services to productive systems. Integrated regional collaboration and planning with a strong voice for Traditional Owners, representation by all sectors and a future focus with good data on likely projections will be critical to success.
- **Keeping biodiversity in focus:** With more than 50% of Australia made up of agricultural land, Bush Heritage is working with research partners to support farmers to boost biodiversity on their properties through natural capital accounts.