

Media release: 16 December 2020

\$1.2 million investment to combat extinction through conservation collaboration

The University of Melbourne and Bush Heritage Australia have been awarded a significant grant of \$1.2 million by The Ian Potter Foundation to build an open-source Conservation Knowledge System. This online platform will combine First Nations knowledge and Western science for the benefit of governments, environmental groups, conservation agencies, the agriculture and resources sectors, and the general public to guide land management and conservation policies and actions, and to strengthen biodiversity and environmental protection.

Australia is suffering higher biodiversity loss than any other developed nation, having already lost 110 species since European settlement, and a Threatened Species list that grows unabated. Australia's *Strategy for Nature and Threatened Species* has ambitious conservation goals, yet the information resources needed to design diverse, effective and efficient action to reach them is not currently readily available, nor does it draw on traditional Aboriginal knowledge in protecting conservation and cultural values in the landscape.

Brendan Wintle, Professor in Conservation Ecology at the University of Melbourne, said this funding will have huge benefits across both the business and environmental sectors.

“This project brings together knowledge systems, aspirations, data and predictions to support decision and policy makers, land managers and communities to make future-focused strategies that build resilience. No individual project has to date attempted to map conservation, cultural and investment opportunities with threats and refugia at this scale and resolution, and we thank the Ian Potter Foundation for their vision and generous support,” Professor Wintle said.

Dr. Rebecca Spindler, Bush Heritage's Head of Science and Conservation, said embedding First Nations knowledge in this framework was a key point of difference.

“There is an urgent need for a consistent and coordinated Traditional, Western and local knowledge system that will help prioritise and drive biodiversity conservation outcomes. We need a new way of thinking and working together to realise landholder and Traditional Owner aspirations, and promote development options that are good for people and nature,” said Dr. Spindler.

“It is particularly exciting to have so many Government, industry and non-government partners on the project – all working towards common goals. Commerce and conservation can, and should, work together; better information will facilitate better outcomes for the economy and the environment.”



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Mr Charles Goode, Chair of The Ian Potter Foundation, said, “This ambitious initiative represents a proactive approach to planning for the conservation of Australia’s unique environments and species, and integrating planning for climate change with management strategies. The project’s emphasis on collaboration – across research bodies, government agencies, conservation groups and traditional owners – will ensure that all the pieces of distinct knowledge can be brought to bear to address the extinction crisis and improve conservation outcomes.”

The project commences in early 2021, with the knowledge system implemented with key stakeholders from mid-2023 onwards.

Other partners on this national collaborative project are: University of Melbourne, Bush Heritage Australia, University of Queensland, ILSC, Curtin University, CSIRO, NRM Regions Australia, TNC Australia, ACF, Greater Eastern Ranges, BirdLife Australia, Restore Australia, WWF, Odonata, NAB, AC-IUCN, SA DEW, NSW OEH, VIC DELWP.

About Bush Heritage Australia

The Australian bush is a place of outback wonders and rugged beauty. Founded by Dr Bob Brown in 1991, Bush Heritage is an independent not-for-profit that buys and manages land, and partners with Aboriginal people, to protect our irreplaceable landscapes and magnificent native species. Together with our partners, we protect 8.86 million hectares – that’s more than all of Tasmania.

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