Achieving 30 by 30 on land

National Roadmap for protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land by 2030

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their Cultures and to their Elders both past and present. We are committed to working respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and give particular acknowledgement to their use, knowledge and custodianship of Australia's native plants and animals over countless generations. We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their aspirations to maintain, protect and manage their Culture, language, land and sea Country and heritage.

Executive summary

Photo: Menindee, New South Wales.

Australian governments have agreed to work collectively to achieve a national target to protect and conserve 30% of Australia's land (including inland waters) and 30% of marine areas by 2030 (the 30 by 30 target).

It is an ambitious goal that requires the Australian, state and territory governments, First Nations Peoples, environmental organisations, the private sector and individual landholders to work collaboratively to expand and enhance Australia's protected and conserved areas.

Through the collective efforts of governments, First Nations Peoples, landholders and environmental organisations, Australia has grown its terrestrial protected areas over the last 3 decades, from covering 8% of our land and inland waters in 1997 to now covering over 22%. Conserved areas, also known as 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs), are different to protected areas. Conserved areas deliver conservation of biodiversity, even if management for conservation is not the primary objective, whereas protected areas must have a primary management objective to conserve biodiversity. The National OECM Framework will guide recognition of land-based conserved areas in Australia. While protection of 22% of Australia's landmass is a significant achievement, an additional 60 million hectares of land needs to be protected or conserved to meet the 30 by 30 land target.

Australia has one of the world's largest representative systems of marine protected areas. As at the end of September 2024, this system protected 48% of Australian marine waters, with about 22% in highly protected 'no-take' areas. Opportunities for strengthening marine protection, consistent with the 30 by 30 target, are being explored through the Sustainable Ocean Plan and the 10-yearly reviews of Australian Marine Park Management Plans. This roadmap outlines a pathway for achieving the 30% land target.

Biodiversity supports all aspects of human life and is essential to a functioning economy given its role in maintaining a range of ecosystem services such as clean air and water, pollination and carbon sequestration. The state and trend of Australia's

environment is poor and deteriorating, with pressures to biodiversity from land, water and sea use changes; invasive species; climate change; pollution; and unsustainable use of natural resources. This has led to Australia having one of the highest rates of extinction in the modern world. The latest science tells us that protecting or conserving 30% of land 'optimally located for conservation' may be sufficient to improve the conservation status of over 80% of plant and vertebrate species on Earth.

The importance of protecting and conserving areas with high biodiversity is recognised internationally. In December 2022 the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a new global strategy and targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss – the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The GBF has 4 long-term goals for 2050, which are underpinned by 23 targets to guide action over the years to 2030. Target 3 is the 30 by 30 target.

This roadmap sets out the pathway for national efforts towards the 30 by 30 target on land. Consistent with Target 3 of the GBF, the national 'land' target encompasses both terrestrial and inland water ecosystems, and both protected areas and conserved areas can contribute to the target.

The roadmap is an overarching framework that complements Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030, the National OECM Framework, and relevant policies in each state and territory. The contribution of the Australian, state and territory governments towards achieving the 30 by 30 target will be guided by these documents and will reflect each government's individual circumstances, priorities and resources.

The roadmap recognises that protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land will not single-handedly prevent further biodiversity loss. Rather, expanding and enhancing Australia's protected and conserved areas is part of a suite of broader actions that together aim to counteract the drivers of environmental decline and create conditions in which nature thrives.

The overarching objective of GBF Target 3 is to ensure that at least 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas, and 30% of marine areas, are effectively conserved by 2030. Consistent with this, Australia's approach to achieving 30 by 30 on land requires the expansion and enhancement of protected and conserved areas. To comprehensively achieve this objective, Australia commits to the target and 2 core principles.

Figure A: Australia's response to 30 by 30: the national target and 2 core principles

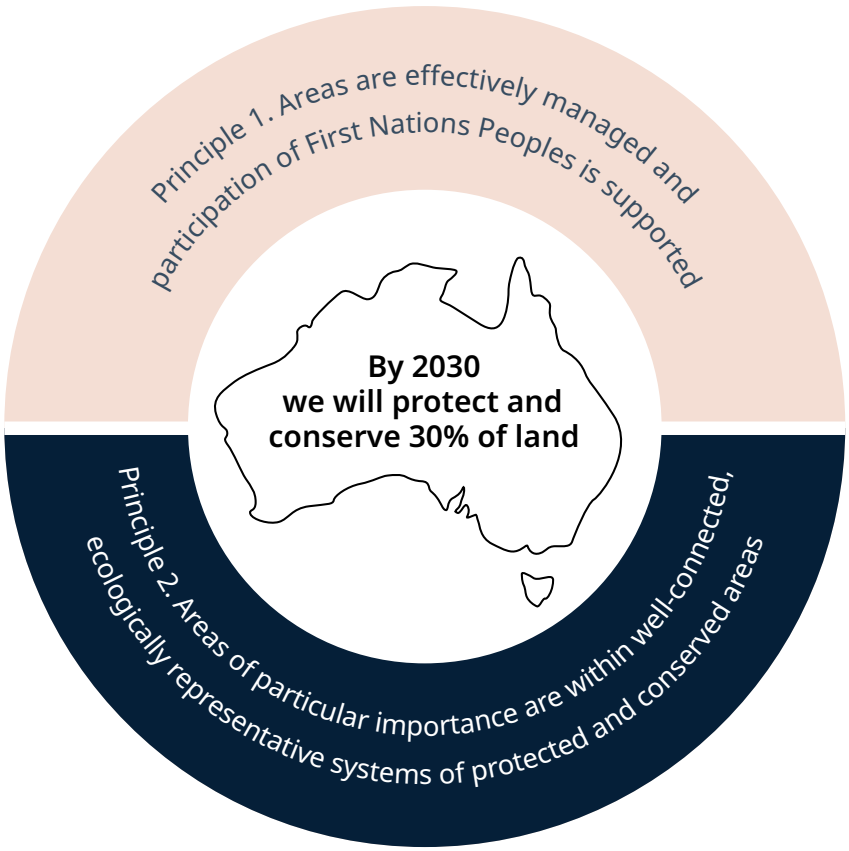


Photo: Tamborine National Park, Queensland.

Identifying areas of particular importance and low levels of protection or conservation can focus national efforts. This roadmap describes criteria that can be used to identify areas for the purposes of 30 by 30 at national, regional and local scales.

Australia's approach to achieving 30 by 30 requires the Australian, state and territory governments, environmental organisations, First Nations groups, and the philanthropic and private sectors to work collaboratively to expand and enhance protected and conserved areas and to support First Nations Peoples to care for Country. All governments in Australia have policies, programs and initiatives in place that support the establishment of new or expansion of existing public protected areas. Examples are protecting public land previously available for timber harvesting, assessing Crown land for protection, and buying land with significant biodiversity value.

With over 60% of Australia's land privately owned or managed, but with private protected areas contributing approximately 6% to the National Reserve System by area, there is an opportunity for motivated landholders to voluntarily protect biodiversity on their properties. This could have a significant impact because 70% to 90% of poorly protected or unprotected biodiversity is on private land. The Nature Repair Market will enable the protection of biodiversity on private land, and a permanent protection method is being developed for this purpose. There are also mechanisms in all states and territories, such as conservation covenanting programs, revolving funds, and stewardship schemes.

Recognition of conserved areas allows for greater recognition of areas that are important for biodiversity but where formal protected area designation is not possible, appropriate or supported.

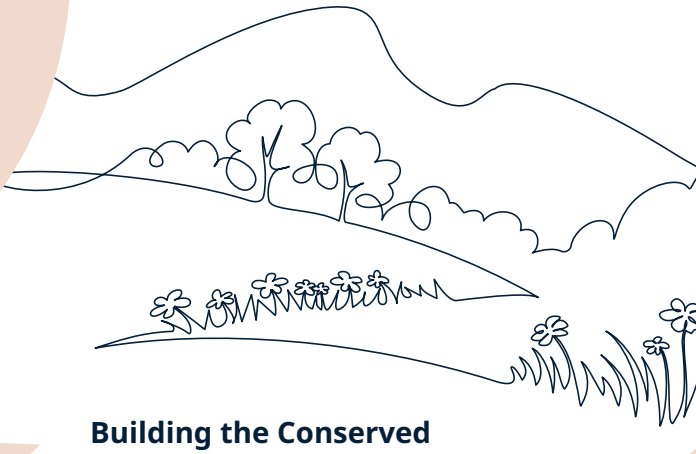
Australia's progress towards 30 by 30 will be tracked against a headline indicator (percentage of land protected or conserved) and 3 sub-indicators that reflect elements of the 2 core principles set out in the roadmap.

Halting and reversing biodiversity loss will require efforts from multiple sectors and groups, including governments, environmental organisations, the private sector, landholders, research organisations, First Nations Peoples, and each of us as members of the public. We can all contribute to this goal and to achieving the protection or conservation of Australia's precious biodiversity.

Figure B: How we will achieve 30 by 30

Expanding public protected areas

State and territory government strategies and policies



Building the Conserved Area Network

Implement the OECM Framework

Identify, assess and recognise conserved areas

Principle 1. Areas are effectively managed and participation of First Nations Peoples is supported

By 2030 we will protect and conserve 30% of land

Principle 2. Areas of particular importance are within well-connected, ecologically representative systems of protected and conserved areas

Increasing private protected areas

Nature Repair Market

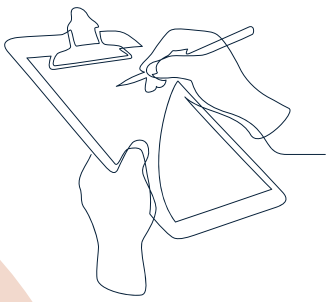
Revolving funds

Tax concessions

Conservation covenanting programs

Improving monitoring and reporting

Review Australia's monitoring and reporting requirements



Supporting First Nations Peoples to care for Country

Expand and improve the Indigenous Protected Areas program

Double the number of Indigenous Rangers

Indigenous Land Use Agreements

Covenants that recognise Cultural values

Joint management of protected areas

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Photo: Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, Victoria.

1. Introduction

Photo: Corrigin grevillea (Grevillea scapigera).

Australia has committed to protect and conserve 30% of its land and 30% of its marine areas by 2030 (the 30 by 30 target). This roadmap outlines a pathway for achieving the 30% land target.

Over 22% of Australia's land is protected. An additional 60 million hectares needs to be protected or conserved to meet the 30 by 30 target. We will achieve the 30 by 30 land target by growing Australia's protected area network – the National Reserve System (NRS) – and establishing a new network of conserved areas. To ensure positive outcomes for biodiversity, networks of protected and conserved areas need to include areas of particular importance, contribute to ecological representativeness, be well connected, and be effectively and equitably managed.

The 30 by 30 target is an ambitious goal. It requires the Australian, state and territory governments, non-government stakeholders and the private sector to work collaboratively to expand and enhance Australia's protected and conserved areas. Landholders who are motivated to voluntarily protect or conserve the biodiversity on their land can also make an important contribution.

Throughout this roadmap:

- 'areas of particular importance' means areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services
- 'land' encompasses both terrestrial and inland water ecosystems.

1.1 The importance of protecting and conserving biodiversity

Australia's biodiversity is essential to our way of life. It is fundamental to the health of our environment, economy and community, and underpins our quality of life and cultural and spiritual fulfilment. Australia is one of only 17 megadiverse nations, and many of Australia's species are found nowhere else on earth. We have a special responsibility to protect and conserve our biodiversity.

For over 65,000 years, Australia's First Nations Peoples have cared for Country, including its plants, animals, land, rivers and seas. Support for First Nations Peoples to access, connect with and care for Country is central to improving the health of Country and people.

The *Australia State of the Environment 2021* report tells an alarming story. The state and trend of the environment is poor and deteriorating. This is due to pressures on nature including land and sea use change, invasive species, climate change, pollution, and unsustainable use of natural resources. Australia has one of the highest rates of extinction in the modern world. For example, more than 10% of Australia's land mammals have become extinct over the past 200 years, and another 21% are threatened and declining (Woinarski et al. 2015, Woinarski et al. 2019). Our native species and ecological communities face significant challenges from accumulated and compounding threats.

Climate change is having widespread impacts on Australia's biodiversity. It increases the frequency and intensity of biome-altering events such as flood, fire and drought, and alters human uses of land and water (Dunlop et al. 2012). Ecological change is already occurring, with biodiversity being affected in many ways. Biodiversity loss undermines nature's ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions and protect against extreme weather events, and can further accelerate climate change. Remote First Nations communities are exposed to significant and increasing risks associated with climate change and are highly vulnerable to its impacts.

Inland aquatic ecosystems – including rivers, lakes, floodplains, wetlands and subterranean waters – are critical to sustaining life on land. These ecosystems support high levels of biodiversity and provide important refuges for wildlife and habitat for many endemic species (Pollino & Couch 2014). In a changing climate, longer periods of drought will reduce and degrade inland aquatic ecosystems. This will reduce habitats for flora and fauna, which will affect breeding and populations as well as potentially reducing species refuges (Cresswell et al. 2021).

Coastal environments, including mangroves, saltmarshes, beaches and dunes, provide important habitat and ecosystem services such as maintaining the stability of shorelines and providing protection from erosion and storm damage (Cresswell et al. 2021). While this roadmap focuses on the land component of the 30 by 30 target, it recognises the importance of protecting and conserving land adjacent to important marine and coastal ecosystems, due to their interaction and connectivity. For example, protecting coastal areas can reduce land use impacts that cause sedimentation and water pollution, thereby improving outcomes for connected marine environments.

Globally, managing 30% of land 'optimally located for conservation' may be sufficient to improve the conservation status of over 80% of plant and vertebrate species on Earth (Jung et al. 2021). In situ protection and conservation of biodiversity supports maintenance and recovery of species in their natural surroundings. Well-managed protected areas and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) (referred to as conserved areas in Australia – see Section 4.2) address the causes of biodiversity loss, such as habitat degradation, overexploitation, invasive alien species and climate change (Mazaris et al. 2013, Nila et al. 2019, Schulze et al. 2018).

Australia has one of the world's largest representative systems of marine protected areas. As at the end of September 2024, this system protected 48% of Australian marine waters, with about 22% of marine waters in highly protected 'no-take' areas. Since 2022 the Australian Government has added over 1 million km^2 to the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas through additional protection of Commonwealth waters. Opportunities to strengthen marine protection are being explored through the Sustainable Ocean Plan and the 10-yearly reviews of Australian Marine Park Management Plans.

Protected areas are at the core of efforts towards conserving nature and the services it provides us – food, clean water supply, medicines and protection from the impacts of natural disasters (IUCN 2023).

1.2 Outcomes beyond improved biodiversity

Protected and conserved areas deliver a broad range of outcomes. They play a central role in protecting species and critical habitats and preventing extinctions. They also help to mitigate the impacts of climate change and build resilient land, inland water, coastal and marine ecosystems. Protected and conserved areas can also contribute to broader outcomes including social, economic, health and cultural outcomes.

In 2023 the Australian Government released the first Measuring What Matters Statement – Australia's national wellbeing framework. This framework helps us to better measure and manage what matters most to Australians: building a healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous Australia for everyone. The Measuring What Matters Statement recognises that protecting, repairing and managing a healthy and sustainable natural environment is essential for a strong economy, thriving industries, a healthy population, and quality of life. It identifies protected areas as an indicator under the 'Sustainable' theme.

Outcomes for health and wellbeing

Healthy ecosystems have a strong link to human health. Ecosystem services – including clean air, clean water and healthy soils – are essential for healthy communities. Time spent in nature has measurable benefits for physical and mental health and wellbeing. For example, the 2015 *Valuing Victoria's Parks* report estimated that undertaking physical activity regularly in parks could lead to avoided healthcare costs and productivity gains worth up to $200 million per annum.

Benefits to the economy

All business sectors depend on biodiversity and ecosystem services, either directly or through their supply chains, and more than half of the world's total GDP either moderately or highly depends on natural capital (World Economic Forum 2020). As an important contributor to maintaining and improving biodiversity, protected and conserved areas provide benefits to the economy across a range of key industries such as the production of food, fibre and fuel.

Protected areas make an important contribution to Australia's economy through nature-based tourism. The *State of Australia's Regions 2024* report notes that national parks play a critical role in attracting tourism to Australia's regions. Queensland's national parks generate over $2.6 billion per year for the Queensland economy and support over 17,000 jobs across various industries in regions surrounding national parks (Driml et al. 2020). Similarly, in New South Wales nature-based tourism contributes up to $7 billion to the state's economy each year (Pelletier et al. 2021). Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory supports over 1,180 jobs and contributes $136 million to the Australian economy each year (Deloitte 2020).

Private protected areas can provide landholders with broader benefits such as income diversification and increased farm productivity due to healthier natural assets. Conserved areas may also generate income associated with a site's primary management objective, where this is not biodiversity conservation.

Outcomes for First Nations Peoples

Protected and conserved areas can support First Nations Peoples to connect and reconnect with Country and protect the cultural values of Country for future generations. Sustainable, customary use of resources can occur in protected and conserved areas. Recognition of the rights and interests of First Nations Peoples through rights-based approaches to conservation should support First Nations Peoples' self-determination and deliver outcomes for education, health, employment and language (Chapple et al. 2023).

There is strong evidence that both the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) program and the Indigenous Rangers program provide multiple positive outcomes for First Nations Peoples. Both the IPA and Indigenous Rangers programs directly contribute to Closing the Gap Targets 15 and 16 by supporting connection to Country, Culture and languages (See Box 1) (NIAA 2024). Previous evaluations of the IPA program found that IPAs deliver significant health, social, economic and other wellbeing outcomes. This includes higher levels of employment, safer communities, and stronger connections to Country, language and Culture (SVA Consulting 2016). See Section 5.1 and Section 7.3 for more information on the IPA and Indigenous Rangers programs.

Photo: Smoking ceremony.

Box 1: National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The objective of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.

Target 15a:	By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's legal rights or interests.
Target 16:	By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.

Outcomes for cultural heritage protection

Protected and conserved areas play an important role in protecting cultural heritage through programs that recognise the cultural heritage values of places, objects and collections associated with Country (Indigenous cultural heritage, collections of significance and intangible heritage) and with First Nations communities and other cultural groups and communities with connections to protected and conserved areas.

The landscape and seascape contexts of protected and conserved areas help to safeguard stories, histories, places and cultural materials in ways that other forms of heritage protection cannot offer. Protected areas play an important role for Australia in meeting our obligations for heritage protection, including under the World Heritage Convention.

1.3 Broader approaches to addressing biodiversity loss

Protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land will not in itself prevent further biodiversity loss. Expanding and enhancing Australia's protected and conserved areas is part of a suite of broader actions that together aim to counteract the drivers of environmental decline and create conditions in which nature thrives.

Responsibility for halting and reversing biodiversity loss sits across multiple sectors and groups, including government, environmental organisations, the private sector, landholders, academia, First Nations Peoples and each of us as members of the public.

All levels of government – national, state, territory and local – implement a wide range of policies and programs to address major threats to biodiversity. At the national level, the Australian Government uses leadership, regulation, direct investment, and the provision of data and information to support the achievement of biodiversity conservation objectives. Mechanisms to protect and improve biodiversity include national environmental legislation; targeted investments through the Natural Heritage Trust; national strategies and plans such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, Australia's Strategy for Nature, and the Threatened Species Action Plan 2022–2032, which includes a 10-year objective that at least 30% of Australia's landmass is protected and conserved; threat abatement plans; and designation of World Heritage properties in recognition of their outstanding natural and cultural heritage values.

These are complemented by the national legislation to establish the new Nature Repair Market and regional planning under national environmental legislation. In addition, the Australian Government is developing a National Adaptation Plan to better position Australia to prepare for and manage increasing risks arising from climate change, including building the resilience of our natural environment, natural assets and vital ecosystems.

Protecting and conserving inland aquatic ecosystems will also help us achieve the 30 by 30 target. Australia currently has 67 Ramsar wetlands – these are wetlands that are representative, rare or unique, or important for conserving biodiversity. Another important mechanism to protect and improve the health of inland waters is the *Restoring Our Rivers Act 2023* (Cth) to support full delivery of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan. The Australian Government has committed $20 million over 3 years to support First Nations Peoples in the Murray–Darling Basin to prepare Cultural flow plans which could assist with owning and managing water entitlements. Under the National Water Initiative, all states and territories have committed to prepare water plans with provisions for the environment and achieve sustainable water use in over-allocated or stressed water systems.

All state, territory and local governments are implementing policies and programs, beyond protected and conserved areas, that support positive outcomes for nature. On-ground management of biodiversity is undertaken across Australia by landholders, First Nations Peoples and organisations, environmental organisations, natural resource management groups, government agencies, industry, farmers and volunteers. These actions together aim to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and the planet.

1.4 Balancing biodiversity outcomes with other land use

Australia State of the Environment 2021 notes that biodiversity conservation embraces landscape-scale conservation planning, which aims to support biodiversity alongside agricultural and other human land uses.

Efforts to increase levels of biodiversity protection and conservation need to consider broader landscape-scale planning and account for existing land uses. This requires considering potential trade-offs between biodiversity conservation and productive land uses at the landscape-scale, and factoring in activities such as agriculture, mining, forestry, renewable energy infrastructure, and urban expansion. In some instances, designation as a protected area or recognition as a conserved area may not be appropriate for a site due to other priorities, existing land uses, or the condition of biodiversity.

Photo: A multi-use landscape in Australia.

Box 2: Regional planning

The Australian Government is working with the states and territories on regional planning to manage environmental impacts of development at a landscape and/or seascape scale.

Regional planning will channel conservation efforts and investment into what matters most for the environment, while facilitating important development in the right places. Planning will be collaborative and focus on regions where there are both development priorities and areas with high environment and/or heritage sensitivity. Regional planning will improve environmental outcomes and guide development to less environmentally sensitive areas, assisting proponents to reduce their impacts.

Regional planning will support the roll-out of nationally significant infrastructure and help deliver nature positive outcomes by:

- providing better information to enable informed planning and decision-making
- helping proponents to reduce their impacts, while also reducing regulatory overlap and duplication
- indicating to proponents where an early 'no' for a proposed development is appropriate, helping to protect areas of high conservation priority
- enabling better management of cumulative impacts and threats to nature
- informing targeted government and private investment in environmental restoration and management.

Better environmental information can help inform decisions about where to declare protected or conserved areas in the region. In some cases, regional planning could also support the creation, expansion or enhancement of protected or conserved areas, contributing directly to 30 by 30.

2. International context

Photo: Short-necked turtle (Emydura macquarii).

The importance of protecting and conserving areas with high biodiversity is recognised internationally. In December 2022 the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted a new global strategy and targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss – the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The GBF is guiding international and national biodiversity action and investment until 2030 with a vision for nature through to 2050.

The CBD Parties agreed to take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 to set nature on a path to recovery so that 'by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people'. The GBF has 4 long-term goals for 2050, which are underpinned by 23 targets to guide action over the years to 2030.

Australia's domestic contribution to this international vision is outlined in Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030 (see Box 3).

Photo: Cape Spencer, South Australia.

Box 3: Australia's Strategy for Nature

Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030 sets out Australia's framework to strengthen our national response to biodiversity decline and our commitments under the GBF. The Strategy identifies 6 priority national targets that all Australian governments and sectors can work towards. This includes a target to protect and conserve 30% of Australia's landmass and 30% of Australia's marine areas by 2030, which aligns with the GBF Target 3.

Target 3 of the GBF aims to ensure at least 30% of the world's land and 30% of the world's ocean is protected or conserved by 2030. Target 3 provides for both protected areas and conserved areas to contribute to global efforts towards 30 by 30.

GBF Target 3:
Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities including over their traditional territories.

GBF Target 3 relates to and supports other GBF targets as shown in Figure 1. Efforts towards GBF Targets 1, 2, 12, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23 will also help to achieve Target 3. For example, restoration actions under Target 2 may result in restored areas with biodiversity values being protected or conserved. Efforts towards Target 3 will help to achieve Targets 4, 9 and 11

Figure 1: Relationship between Target 3 and other Global Biodiversity Framework targets

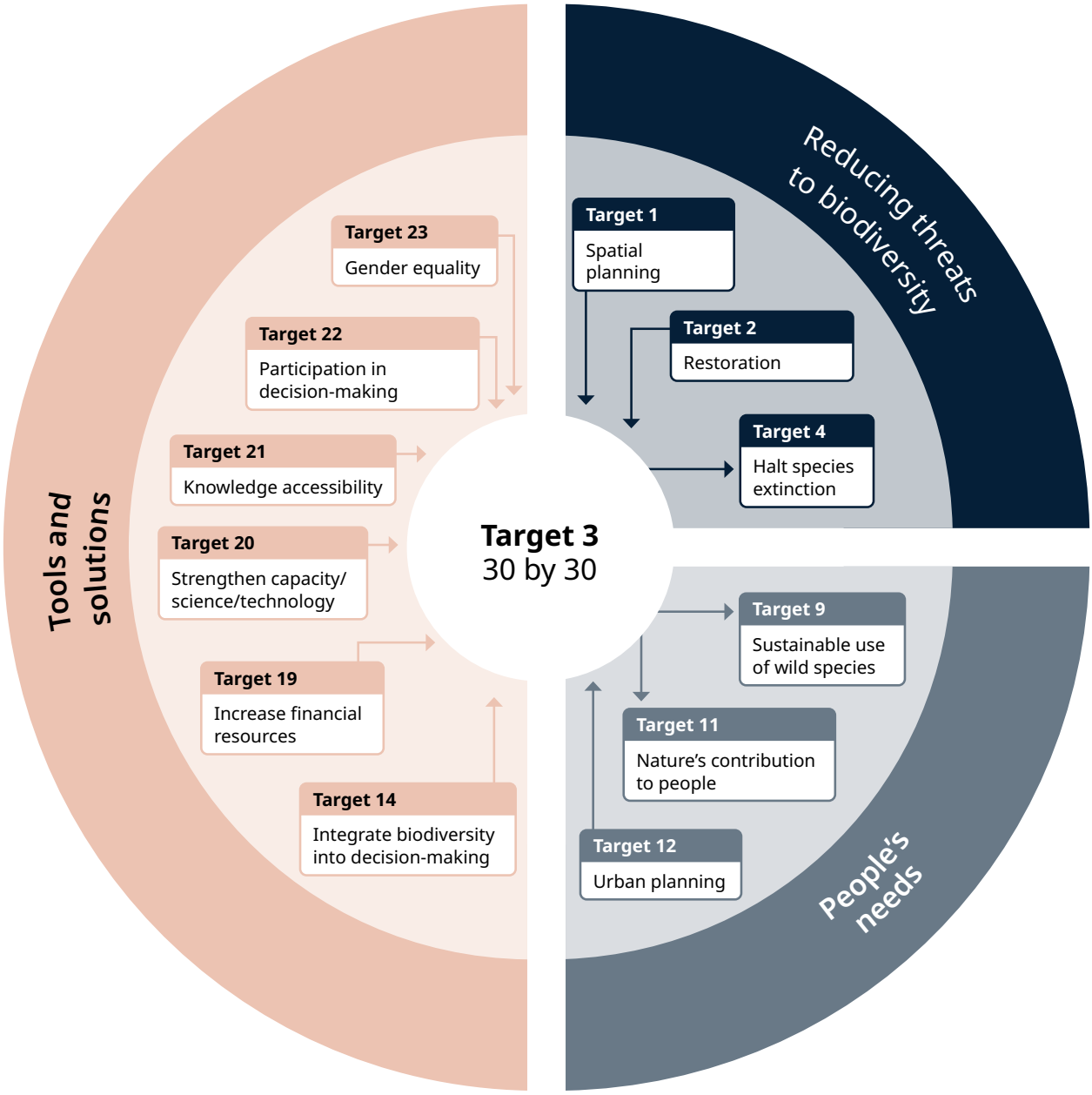


Photo: Snow gum (Eucalyptus pauciflora).

3. National 30 by 30 policy context

Photo: Bracted grevillea (Grevillea bracteosa).

This roadmap is an overarching policy framework that complements Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030 (NRS Strategy), the National Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures Framework (OECM Framework) and policies in each state and territory (see Box 4). The roadmap does not supersede or replace the NRS Strategy or OECM Framework.

The NRS Strategy provides national guidance on issues such as protected area design, selection, management and monitoring, to improve cross-jurisdictional coordination and collaborative action by protected area managers and key stakeholders to enhance the NRS. The OECM Framework provides principles and minimum requirements to guide recognition of land-based conserved areas in Australia.

The contribution of the Australian, state and territory governments towards achieving the 30 by 30 target will be guided by these documents, in addition to their individual circumstances, priorities and resources.

National Reserve System

The goal of the NRS is to develop and effectively manage a comprehensive, adequate and representative national system of protected areas, as the primary means for securing long-term protection for Australia's terrestrial biodiversity. The NRS requires adaptive management to ensure biodiversity values are maintained and biodiversity conservation outcomes are delivered.

Conserved Area Network

Conserved areas are an opportunity to recognise conservation of areas that are important for biodiversity but where formal protected area designation is not appropriate or supported. It allows recognition of voluntary conservation efforts in areas where land is managed for other purposes, such as productive landscapes. It may also enhance the ability of private landholders to protect biodiversity on their land, including through mechanisms such as the Nature Repair Market. Recognised conserved areas will be part of Australia's Conserved Area Network, not the NRS.

Figure 2: Relationship between the roadmap and other national policies

Photo: Great desert skink (Liopholis kintorei).

Box 4: Examples of state and territory policies that complement and contribute to the 30 by 30 target

Australian Capital Territory Nature Conservation Strategy 2013–2023 (under review)

New South Wales Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy 2018

New South Wales Coastal Lands Protection Scheme

New South Wales National Parks Establishment Plan

Northern Territory Parks Masterplan 2023–53

Queensland's Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030

Conserving Nature 2012–2020: A strategy for establishing a system of protected areas in South Australia (under review)

Natural Heritage Strategy for Tasmania (2013–2030)

Nature Conservation Strategy for Parks and Reserves managed by Parks Victoria 2021–2031

Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037

Western Australia's Plan for Our Parks 2019

4. The role of protected and conserved areas in achieving 30 by 30

Photo: Woolshed Falls, Victoria.

Australia's protected and conserved areas will contribute to achieving the national 30% land target. While our progress towards 30 by 30 to date has been in protected areas, over time recognition of conserved areas may make an important contribution to achieving the target.

4.1 Protected areas

As at June 2022, over 22% of Australia's land (172.4 million hectares) was formally protected and included in the NRS (CAPAD 2022).[1] The NRS has been established by Australian, state, territory and local governments, First Nations Peoples, private landholders and environmental organisations, working together to protect and manage large areas of intact biodiversity. **Appendix A** provides a breakdown of each state's and territory's coverage of protected areas.

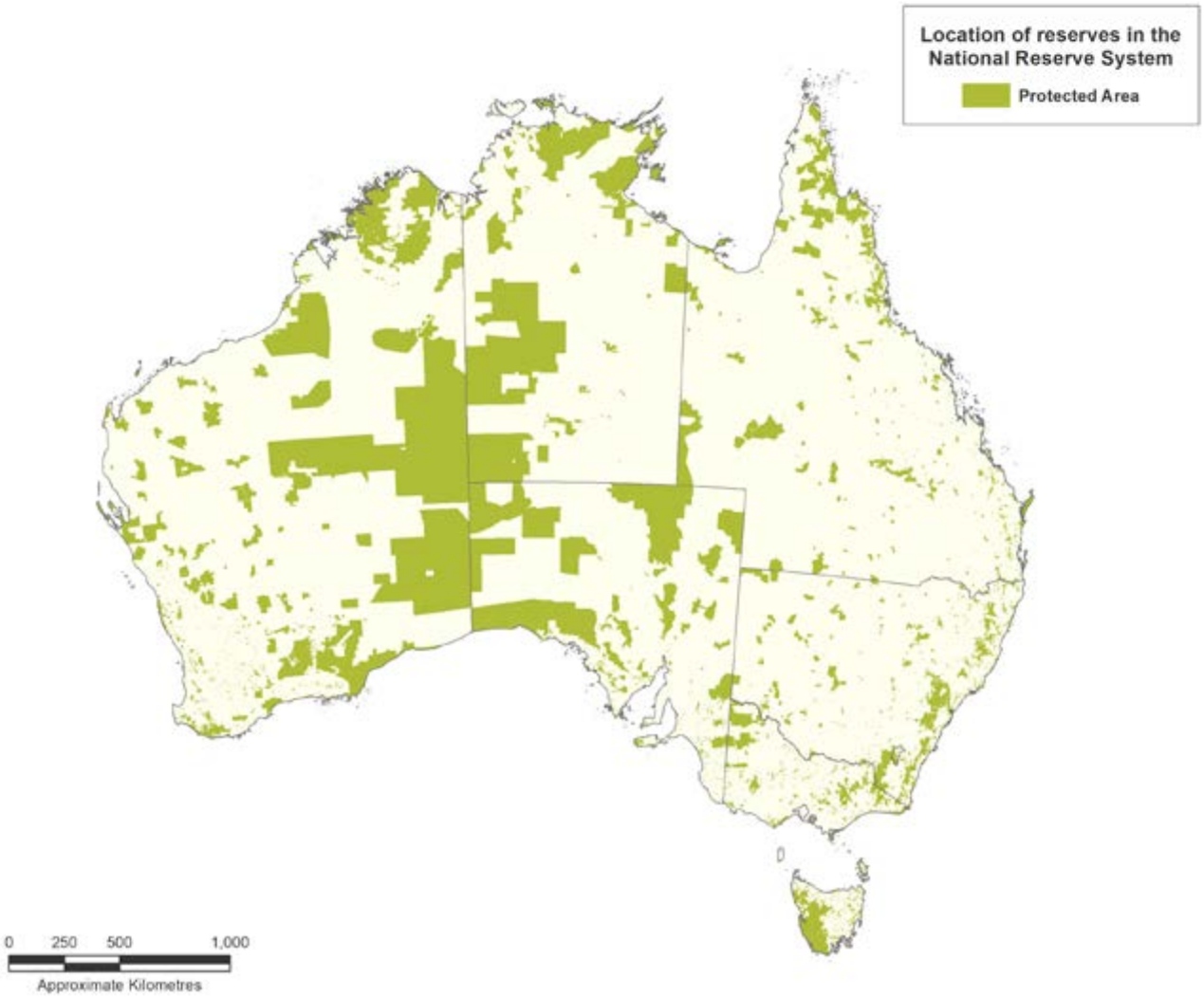
1 Land managers report on a protected area's location, size, IUCN management category and plan of management every 2 years through the Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database. The most recent version is CAPAD 2022, which includes data as at 30 June 2022. The next version of CAPAD will be CAPAD 2024.

What is a protected area?
According to the NRS Strategy, only areas that meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition of 'protected area' can form part of the NRS. The IUCN defines a protected area as a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

In Australia, protected areas can occur on public or private land (including inland waters), and land owned by First Nations Peoples. Depending on the tenure, a protected area may be solely or jointly managed by government, First Nations Peoples or organisations, or landholders.

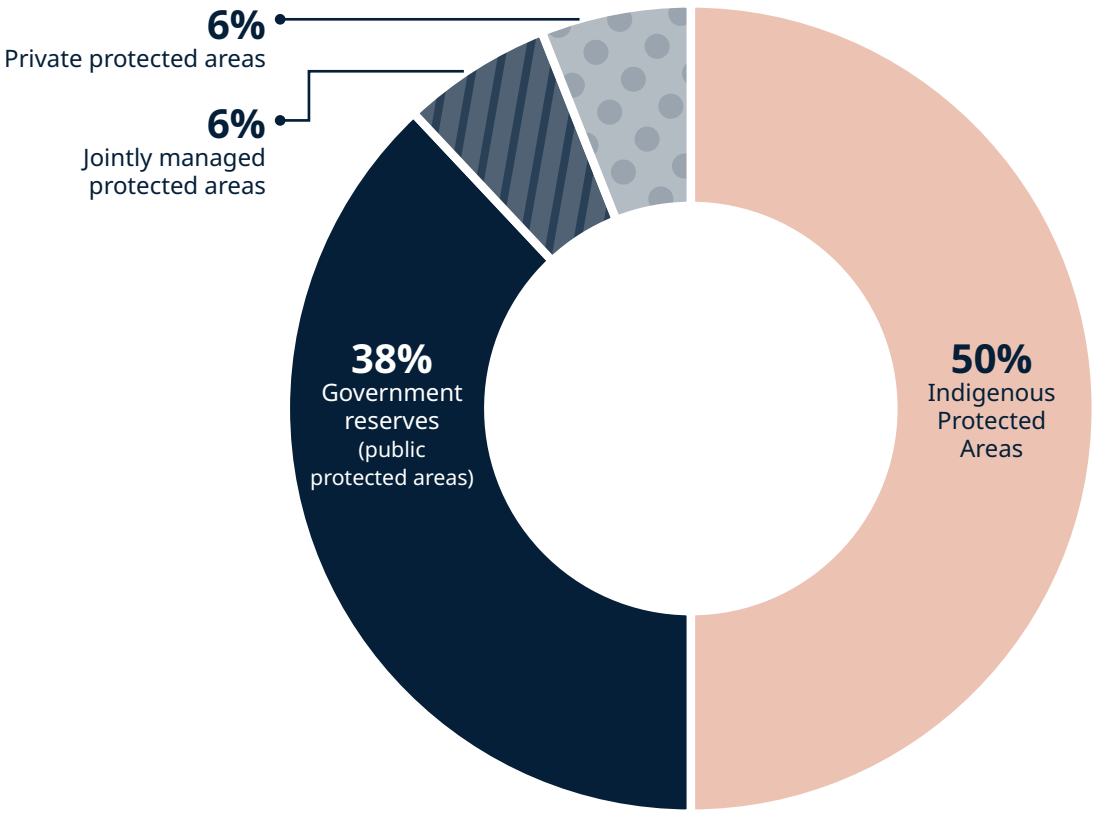
States and territories have established processes for determining whether environmental offset sites can contribute to the NRS, or whether protected areas are suitable locations for environmental offset activities.

Figure 3: Map of Australia's National Reserve System as at June 2022[2]



2 Further information, including a detailed map can be found at www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/nrs/science/maps-and-data

Figure 4: National Reserve System breakdown by governance type as at June 2022



Indigenous Protected Areas

Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) are areas of land and sea that Traditional Owners have agreed to manage for biodiversity conservation and the protection of cultural values. As at the end of August 2024, there are 87 IPAs in Australia, covering more than 50% of the NRS by area. Most IPAs are established on areas where native title rights have been determined, or on land granted under land rights legislation. However, other areas of land may be included in an IPA with consent from the relevant landowners.

IPAs are managed in line with IUCN protected area management categories. The majority are managed consistent with categories V (protected landscape or seascape) and VI (protected area with sustainable use of natural resources) (see Table 1). These categories promote balance between conservation, culture, and traditional management approaches or sustainable use of natural resources.

Government reserves (public protected areas)

Government reserves or public protected areas are areas where decision-making authority, responsibility and accountability rests with national, state or local governments (CAPAD 2022). Australia's first government reserve, the Royal National Park south of Sydney, was created in 1879. There are now over 7,295 government reserves in Australia.

Photo: Simpson Desert, South Australia. Credit: R Galvin.

Box 5: Munga-Thirri – Simpson Desert National Park

Located in the Simpson Desert, South Australia, Munga-Thirri – Simpson Desert National Park is Australia's largest national park, at 3.6 million hectares. It features a diversity of desert wildlife protected in a landscape of varied dune systems, extensive playa lakes, spinifex grasslands and acacia woodlands. It supports more than 50 ecosystems, including coolibah woodlands, sand plains and vast dunefields – all adapted to a climate of infrequent rain and a parching evaporation rate.

Jointly managed protected areas

In jointly managed protected areas, different governance bodies share decision-making authority, responsibility and accountability. Joint management arrangements are recognised by a management board, agreement or other formal arrangement. There are over 255 jointly managed protected areas in Australia (CAPAD 2022). Most of these are jointly managed by government and First Nations Peoples.

Photo: Cradle Mountain, Tasmania.

Photo: Kakadu National Park. Credit: Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water/Ian Oswald-Jacobs.

Box 6: Commonwealth jointly managed protected areas

At the Commonwealth level, the Director of National Parks jointly manages 3 terrestrial national parks with the Traditional Owners of those lands:

- **Kakadu** is one of the largest national parks in Australia and is the land of the Bininj and Mungguy Peoples. It is also a Ramsar wetland, World Heritage property and National Heritage place, listed for its outstanding natural and cultural values, including for its protection of significant rock art sites which document the world's longest artistic tradition.
- Located in the spiritual heart of Australia's Red Centre, **Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa** was declared a national park in the 1950s. The park has traditional associations with Pitjantjatjara, Yunkunyjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra speaking Peoples, collectively known as Aṉangu. Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa National Park is also a World Heritage property and National Heritage place listed for its outstanding natural and cultural heritage, including as a cultural landscape.
- **Booderee** National Park is a significant place of the Bhewerre Peoples, including Australia's only First Nations owned and managed botanic gardens.

While the joint management approach across these parks continues to evolve, it provides a framework for Traditional Owners to work with Parks Australia to manage the parks, including solving problems, sharing decision-making and exchanging knowledge, skills and information.

Joint management is embedded in Commonwealth legislation and underpinned by boards of management with majority Traditional Owner membership, lease agreements and plans of management. These elements work together to maintain Traditional Owner Cultures and heritage, conserve the integrity of ecological systems and provide for sustainable use and enjoyment of parks.

The implementation of this model and the relationship between the Director of National Parks and Traditional Owners at Kakadu, Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa and Booderee is an area of focus of the Australian Government's Nature Positive Agenda. In 2023 the Australian Government committed $262 million over 4 years plus ongoing funding of $68 million a year to protect Commonwealth national parks and sustain core business including conservation, research, improving management practices and environmental and cultural heritage management outcomes.

Private protected areas

Private protected areas are protected areas where land and resource owners hold decision-making authority, responsibility and accountability. Australia has over 6,000 private protected areas, covering more than 10 million hectares. Organisations such as the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, Bush Heritage Australia, South Endeavour Trust, Tasmanian Land Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy Australia, and Trust for Nature (Victoria) manage large areas of land for biodiversity conservation.

Photo: Blue-winged parrot (Neophema chrysostoma) visits Witchelina's grasslands and woodlands.

Box 7: Witchelina Nature Reserve, South Australia

Witchelina Nature Reserve is a private protected area in South Australia that is owned and managed by the Nature Foundation. The former pastoral property covers 421,000 hectares across 3 different Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) bioregions. It provides habitat for several nationally listed threatened species, including the vulnerable thick-billed grasswren and plains mouse. After rainfall events, the reserve's creeks and ephemeral wetlands provide arid zone refuges for waterbirds. The Nature Foundation works closely with the Traditional Owners, the Kuyani-Adnyamathanha Peoples Nation and the Arabana Peoples Nation, to manage the reserve's biodiversity and culturally significant sites.

Protected area management categories

The IUCN protected area management categories provide an internationally recognised categorisation of protected area management types according to their management objectives. The IUCN states that the categories are not to be viewed as a hierarchy in terms of quality, importance or naturalness, as all are important in their contribution to the system of protected areas.

Table 1: International Union for Conservation of Nature protected area management categories

Category		Definition
I	Ia	**Strict Nature Reserve**: strictly protected areas set aside to protect biodiversity and also possibly geological/geomorphological features, where human visitation, use and impacts are strictly controlled and limited to ensure protection of conservation values. Such protected areas can serve as indispensable reference areas for scientific research and monitoring.
	Ib	**Wilderness Area**: usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition.
II		**National Park**: large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystem characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities.
III		**Natural Monument or Feature**: areas set aside to protect a specific natural monument, which can be a landform, seamount, submarine cavern, geological feature such as a cave, or even living feature such as an ancient grove. They are generally quite small protected areas and often have high visitor value.
IV		**Habitat/Species Management Area**: areas where the priority is to protect particular species or habitats, and management reflects this priority. Many category IV protected areas will need regular, active interventions to address the requirements of particular species or to maintain habitats, but this is not a requirement of the category.
V		**Protected Landscape/Seascape**: places where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.
VI		**Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources**: areas that conserve ecosystems and habitats, together with associated cultural values and traditional natural resource management systems. They are generally large, with most of the area in a natural condition but a proportion under sustainable natural resource management. Low-level non-industrial use of natural resources compatible with nature conservation is seen as one of the main aims of the area.

4.2 Conserved areas

The OECM Framework guides recognition of conserved areas in Australia. These areas will form Australia's Conserved Area Network.

What is a conserved area?
The definition of 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs or, in Australia, conserved areas) was adopted by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2018. OECMs are geographically defined areas, other than protected areas, which are governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values.

Conserved areas deliver effective in situ conservation of biodiversity, even if management for conservation is not the primary management objective. This is distinct from protected areas, which must have a primary conservation objective. Recognition of conserved areas provides an opportunity to recognise conservation actions occurring in areas that are important for biodiversity but where formal protected area designation is not possible, appropriate or supported. The management of biodiversity values in a way that achieves their long-term maintenance (or improvement) is the fundamental basis for conserved areas.

Examples of sites that – depending on site-specific values – may be recognised as conserved areas are some areas of Defence land, water catchments, travelling stock routes, urban parks managed for recreation that are large enough and sufficiently natural to also achieve conservation of biodiversity, and natural areas managed by universities for biological research.

To recognise a site as a conserved area, a detailed assessment of its biodiversity values and management arrangements must be undertaken. The OECM Framework provides a tool that may be used for this assessment. Consent from the site's governance authority is required for assessment and for recognition of a site as a conserved area. For sites governed by First Nations Peoples, free, prior and informed consent needs to be demonstrated ahead of assessment and recognition. Only sites that are assessed as eligible for recognition can be included in Australia's Conserved Area Network.

The role of environmental offsets in relation to conserved areas will be at the discretion of the relevant Australian, state or territory government agency, as is the case with protected areas. The site must meet all relevant requirements for conserved area recognition, including that it delivers demonstrable biodiversity outcomes.

Photo: Numbat (Myrmecobius fasciatus).

5. Australia's commitment to Target 3

Photo: Southern cassowary (Casuarius casuarius) in Daintree National Park, Queensland.

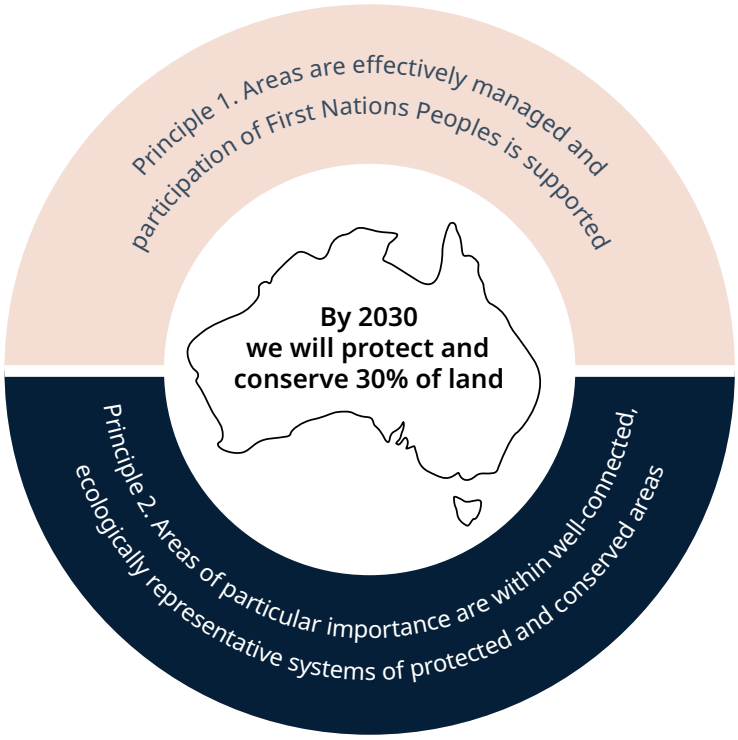
GBF Target 3 calls for the expansion and enhancement of protected and conserved areas (CBD 2024). To achieve this, Australia commits to the target of protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land.

This commitment is underpinned by 2 core principles that inform where and how Australia's network of protected and conserved areas will be expanded and enhanced:

1. Areas are effectively managed and participation of First Nations peoples is supported.
2. Areas of particular importance are within well-connected, ecologically representative systems of protected and conserved areas.

Expanding the NRS and establishing a Conserved Area Network will include protecting and conserving areas of public, private and First Nations land. We will achieve the intent of the 30 by 30 target by prioritising the protection and conservation of areas that have particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, regardless of ownership, and ensuring they are within well-connected, ecologically representative systems of protected and conserved areas.

Figure 5: Australia's response to 30 by 30: national target and 2 core principles



5.1 Areas are effectively managed and participation of First Nations Peoples is supported

Target 3 of the GBF recognises that systems of protected and conserved areas must be managed in a way that achieves positive outcomes for biodiversity and allows for all relevant stakeholders and rights-holders to be involved in their establishment and management. For effective conservation and management, protected and conserved areas must also have appropriate management objectives and processes, be appropriately resourced, and have consistent monitoring. It is also important that areas beyond the borders of protected and conserved areas are managed to maintain intact biodiversity and manage threats. Australia's approach to effective management for protected and conserved areas is described in this section.

Importance of management arrangements

Management arrangements ensure protected and conserved area values are maintained and safeguarded against intrusive activities (Dudley 2008). Arrangements need to be secure, robust and adaptable to changing circumstances. For inclusion in the NRS, a site must be well managed (NRMMC 2009). The NRS Strategy states that a well-managed site must:

- be managed in accordance with 1 or more IUCN protected area management categories (see Section 4.1)
- be adaptively managed to minimise loss of biodiversity. Adaptive management enables managers to respond to changing circumstances and emerging risks to prevent decline in biodiversity values
- have the effectiveness of its management monitored and evaluated. Evaluating the effectiveness of management tracks achievement of conservation goals and supports adaptive management where changes in management are needed.

Land managers report on a protected area's location, size, IUCN management category and plan of management every 2 years through the Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD) (CAPAD 2022). Monitoring data is collected by managers and is considered when plans of management are reviewed and revised. Jurisdictions implement management effectiveness frameworks based on nationally agreed principles (as outlined in the NRS Strategy, Table 6) and individual circumstances.

Management arrangements for conserved areas may differ from those for protected areas. Conserved areas are managed with biodiversity conservation as either a primary or secondary management objective, or as the ancillary result of other management activities. If biodiversity conservation is the primary or secondary objective, the conserved area must have documented management arrangements in place that identify conservation objectives for a site, biodiversity values for which a site is important, threats to those values, management actions, and the approach to monitoring to ensure the biodiversity values for the site are maintained. Conserved areas where biodiversity conservation is a coincidental result of long-term management activities (i.e. ancillary conserved areas) do not require documented biodiversity conservation management arrangements.

The United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre, the IUCN, and the Secretariat of the CBD are developing indicators for internationally consistent reporting on the effectiveness of protected and conserved areas that better align with Target 3 elements (CBD 2022). Once these are finalised, there will be an opportunity for Australia to align monitoring and reporting requirements with these new international indicators.

Photo: Western grasswren (Amytornis textilis textilis) occur within Hamelin Station Reserve.

Box 8: Management of Hamelin Station Reserve

Owned and managed by Bush Heritage Australia, Hamelin Station Reserve is a 202,000 hectare conservation reserve in Western Australia. A former sheep station, the property was purchased in 2015 and is now managed as an IUCN Category II (National Park) protected area. It abuts the shore of Hamelin Pool and the Shark Bay World Heritage property and is of exceptional conservation importance.

In partnership with the Malgana people, Bush Heritage Australia has:

- installed motion cameras to actively monitor and record biodiversity
- erected an 84 km stock-proof fence, to help reduce the number of goats and sheep migrating onto the property to minimise impact on vegetation and soil recovery
- decommissioned man-made water points, removed internal fences, and closed degraded tracks to help stop erosion.

Management is adapted in response to the information gained through the active monitoring program. The monitoring program has so far identified 4 species of dunnarts, 2 species of native mice, and 57 species of reptiles across the station. Targeted pest control programs are undertaken as required in response to feral pests identified through surveillance.

The station also acts as a research base with accommodation for researchers, volunteers, supporters and Malgana community members, who are working together to understand and restore the environment.

Implications of climate change for management of protected and conserved areas

The widespread impacts of climate change on Australia's biodiversity have implications for the management of protected and conserved areas. Management approaches that are based on assumptions that ecosystems are inherently stable are no longer appropriate in response to high levels of environmental and ecological change. The RAD (resist–accept–direct) framework, developed by the United States National Parks Service, supports management decisions for changing ecosystems. The RAD framework provides 3 options for managers:

1. Resist change by seeking to keep ecosystems in a current state, or slowing the rate of transformation.
2. Accept change, i.e. let changes occur with minimal intervention.
3. Seek to direct change by steering ecosystem transformations toward desired and away from undesired outcomes (Williams 2021).

Importance of supporting and enabling participation of First Nations Peoples

Effective participation in decision-making by First Nations Peoples who could be affected by the establishment and management of protected and conserved areas is necessary in recognition of their rights and interests. The effective integration of First Nations Peoples' ecological knowledge, practices and innovations supports the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

IUCN OECM guidance states that, as with protected areas, the governance of conserved areas should be equitable and reflect human rights principles recognised in international and regional human rights instruments and in national legislation, including for First Nations Peoples (IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs 2019).

The IPA program recognises First Nations Peoples' expertise and responsibilities in caring for Country and supports First Nations communities to voluntarily dedicate and manage their land as protected areas (see Box 9).

Photo: Wet season ground burning in Kakadu National Park. Credit: Parks Australia.

Photo: Central Western Desert consultation IPA in the Northern Territory. Copyright: Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and Allan Fox.

Box 9: Indigenous Protected Areas program

The IPA program was established in 1997 to support Indigenous land management, increase the size of the NRS and improve its comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness.

IPAs combine traditional and contemporary knowledge in a framework where Traditional Owners collaboratively manage their land and sea Country, leverage partnerships with conservation and commercial organisations, and provide employment, education and training opportunities for First Nations Peoples.

Key enablers for achievement of IPA program objectives are:

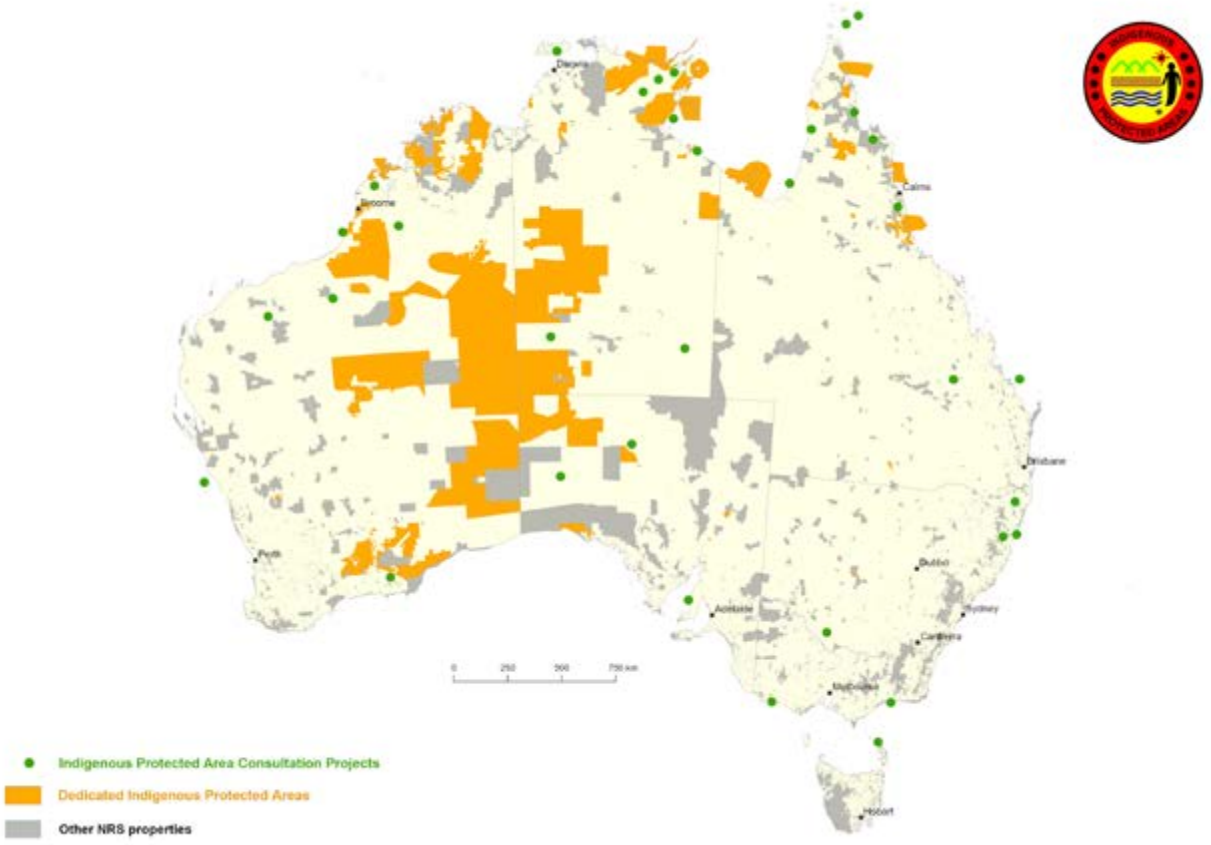
- Indigenous Culture and connection to Country
- cultural leadership and authority and the role of Elders in ensuring good governance and appropriate decision-making
- community support, partnerships and collaborations
- resources and authority to support management of and connection to Country
- recognition and support for both cultural and biodiversity outcomes
- strong organisational and administrative capacity, as well as experience gained over time.

In addition to environmental resilience and cultural heritage protection, IPA program participants report benefits of empowerment, cultural connection and wellbeing, as well as broader socio-economic benefits for Indigenous communities (SVA Consulting 2016).

IPAs also provide opportunities to diversify sources of income. For example, cultural burning and fire management projects in savannah regions may be eligible for the Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme. Opportunities for enterprise development, such as farming, harvesting and selling bush foods, are also being explored.

Analysis of 2009–10 to 2014–15 financial years found that an investment of $35.2 million towards IPAs generated an adjusted value of $96.5 million in social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes. It also found that being on Country increased Indigenous rangers' confidence, pride, sense of self and physical health (SVA Consulting 2016).

Figure 6: Indigenous Protected Areas as at August 2024[3]



Other protected area types and management approaches can also facilitate equitable governance. Agreements between governments and Traditional Owners to jointly manage and protect national parks and conservation reserves create opportunities for sharing of knowledge and responsibility for management (see Box 6 and Box 23).

More recently, governments and environmental organisations have been exploring how covenants could be used as a mechanism to recognise First Nations Peoples' cultural values, where they are in line with conservation outcomes. These covenants may allow for lands managed by First Nations Peoples to contribute to the 30 by 30 target (see Section 7.3).

First Nations Peoples' ongoing care for Country can be recognised and supported beyond the NRS. Conserved areas could support First Nations Peoples who do not want to formally protect an area of Country as an IPA but are interested in gaining recognition for their work where it delivers long-term biodiversity conservation outcomes, including through cultural management of Country.

Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) provide an opportunity for land under native title to be included in the NRS or Conserved Area Network. ILUAs are agreements entered into under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). They can be made over areas where native title has been determined to exist, where a native title claim has been made, or where no native title claim has been made. Areas under an ILUA may be subject to conditions on land use that may make them eligible for inclusion in the NRS or Conserved Area Network.

3 Further information, including a detailed map with the names of each IPA can be found at www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/indigenous-protected-areas

Photo: Brush-tailed Mulgara (Dasycercus blythi).

Box 10: Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara National Park

In 2011 the Western Australian Government created a legislative framework enabling the inclusion of First Nations Peoples in formal joint management. Since then, many joint management partnerships with First Nations Peoples have been established for parks and reserves across Western Australia.

For example, in October 2022 Western Australia established a new 800,000 hectare national park at Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara through an ILUA.

The national park is home to more than 480 plant species and its nature reserve includes a wetland believed to be habitat for the critically endangered night parrot. The national park and nature reserve are jointly managed and jointly vested (i.e. tenure is shared) with the Tarlka Matuwa Piarku Aboriginal Corporation and the Western Australian Government. This was the largest exclusive possession native title agreement in Australia. The Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara National Park is also a dedicated IPA.

5.2 Areas of particular importance are within well-connected, ecologically representative systems of protected and conserved areas

The intent of 30 by 30 will only be achieved if areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services are within well-connected, ecologically representative systems of protected and conserved areas.

Target 3 of the GBF describes the types of areas that should be protected or conserved to prevent further biodiversity loss. Areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services (referred to in the roadmap as areas of particular importance) are those high in species richness, diversity or threatened species, areas with particularly important habitats, and areas that are important for the continued provision of ecosystem functions and services (for example, areas important for water supply or erosion control, and sacred sites). These areas should be prioritised for protection or conservation. Table 2 provides information on identifying areas of particular importance (see Section 6).

The NRS seeks to protect the full range of regional ecosystems and other important environmental values across Australia. Identification of areas for inclusion in the NRS is underpinned by a scientific framework to ensure that Australia progressively extends protection to examples of all our ecosystems. The objective of the scientific framework is to develop a 'comprehensive, adequate and representative' (CAR) system of protected areas (see Box 11). This scientific framework can equally apply to development of the Conserved Area Network.

Box 11: The CAR criteria

Comprehensiveness refers to the aim of including samples of the full range of regional ecosystems recognisable at an appropriate scale within and across each Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) bioregion.

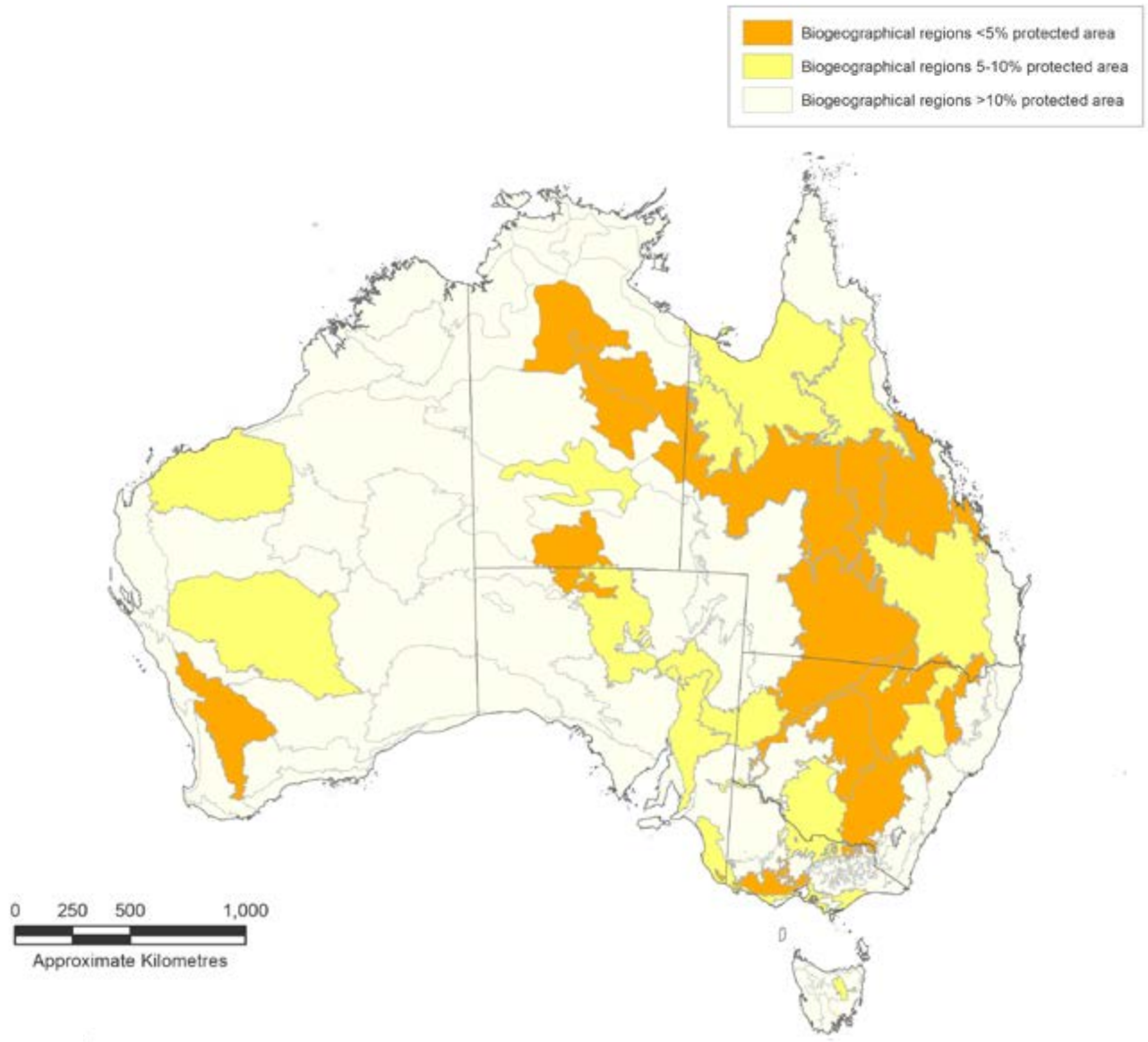
Adequacy refers to how much of each ecosystem should be sampled to provide ecological viability and integrity of populations, species and ecological communities at a bioregional scale. The concept of adequacy incorporates the ecological viability and resilience of ecosystems for individual protected areas and for the protected area system as a whole.

Representativeness is comprehensiveness considered at a finer scale (IBRA subregion) and recognises that the regional variability within ecosystems is sampled within the reserve system (NRMMC 2009, p. 10).

The CAR scientific framework is based on Australia's bioregional framework, the IBRA. Bioregions are large, geographically distinct areas of land with common characteristics such as geology, landform patterns, climate, ecological features, and plant and animal communities. The IBRA framework divides Australia into 89 bioregions and 419 subregions. Subregions are more homogenous geomorphological units in each bioregion. The IBRA regions make up 'a broad framework for identifying deficiencies in the existing system of protected areas, and for setting priorities for action in establishing the NRS in Australia' (Thackway & Cresswell 1995).

The comprehensiveness and representativeness criteria are implemented by protecting and conserving ecosystems across IBRA regions or subregions. The level of existing protection across Australia's 89 IBRA bioregions varies. There are many reasons for these differences, including land use history, ownership, and the extent of native vegetation remaining. There are 27 terrestrial IBRA bioregions that have less than 10% of their land protected (CAPAD 2022).

Figure 7: Map of Australia's IBRA bioregions by percentage protected as at June 2022[4].



4 Further information, including a detailed map with the names of the regions can be found at www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/nrs/science/maps-and-data

While it is unrealistic for each IBRA bioregion to have the same level of protection or conservation, it is important to increase the level of protection and conservation in IBRA bioregions with low levels of protection, to ensure the NRS and Conserved Area Network are representative of Australia's vegetation communities and ecosystems.

In general, the CAR adequacy criterion is addressed through focusing on protecting and conserving larger areas and more populations of species. This may also include focusing on vulnerable biodiversity components and ecological processes and significant refuge areas of more diverse habitat, regardless of existing levels of protection and conservation, in each IBRA region. Addressing the adequacy criterion is more challenging due to the impact of climate change on species populations. IBRA regions with more significant refuges are likely to need more protection and conservation. Refuge areas are likely to change as species and communities respond to the changing climate. Ongoing monitoring of the impact of climate change is needed to ensure we continue to protect and conserve adequate areas.

Enhanced ecological connectivity is critical in supporting areas to become robust and adapt to climate change (Crooks & Sanjayan 2006). Connectivity reduces fragmentation; maintains ecological processes and services for ecosystems that occur at scales larger than individual protected and conserved areas; and supports species' resilience (ability to withstand stresses and disturbances), including by enabling migration (Saura et al. 2018, Watson et al. 2023).

Protected and conserved areas can improve ecological connectivity. Where land between existing protected or conserved areas is managed for biodiversity conservation but formal protected area designation is not possible, appropriate or supported, conserved areas can play a role in improving connectivity. Areas restored under Target 2 (Restore 30% of all degraded ecosystems) may also include land corridors and buffers to high-quality sites, which would complement 30 by 30 expansion and enhancement efforts.

Australia's efforts to expand and enhance protected and conserved areas will:

- prioritise protection and conservation of areas of particular importance
- increase protection and conservation in bioregions and subregions with low levels of protection and where ecosystems are not fully represented
- improve connectivity between existing protected areas by establishing new protected or conserved areas.

Photo: A pair of Gang-gang Cockatoos (Callocephalon fimbriatum).

6. Identifying priority areas for 30 by 30

Photo: Fitzroy Waterfalls, New South Wales.

Identifying areas of particular importance which also have low levels of protection or conservation, can help to focus efforts towards achieving 30 by 30. Criteria to inform the identification of priority areas can be applied at different scales – national, regional or local – in our work towards the 30 by 30 target consistent with identified principles (see Section 5.2).

The following 2 criteria are relevant to identifying priority areas for the purposes of 30 by 30 at the national, regional and local scales:

- The area has particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services.
- The area's protection will enhance ecological comprehensiveness and representativeness.

Table 2: Criteria to identify priority areas for 30 by 30

Criteria	Description
Areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services	Priority should be given to areas that: • are high in species diversity • contain species that are highly endemic to an area • provide habitat for nationally listed threatened species and ecological communities, and migratory species • contain, or provide habitat for, species and/or ecological communities under severe and imminent threat, that are irreplaceable, and/or at risk of extinction • are important for the continued provision of ecosystem functions and services • have ecological integrity and intactness • contribute to ecological connectivity.
Areas that enhance ecological comprehensiveness and representativeness	Alignment with the CAR scientific framework (see Box 11). Priority should be given to including adequate samples of ecosystems within and across each IBRA bioregion and subregion.

The identification of priority areas for the purposes of 30 by 30 will improve over time as more data and information become available and methods for identifying these areas are refined. These improvements may lead to changes to the descriptions of the above criteria. Governments will continue to work with research and environmental organisations to identify and focus efforts on areas to be protected and conserved.

State and territory governments and many private land conservation organisations use sophisticated methods and tools to inform where they direct their biodiversity conservation efforts and investment. Some systems produce very detailed information relevant at the local or property scale. Boxes 12 and 13 detail the systems used by the Queensland and Northern Territory governments to identify priority areas for protection or conservation.

Photo: Esperance king spider orchid (Caladenia decora).

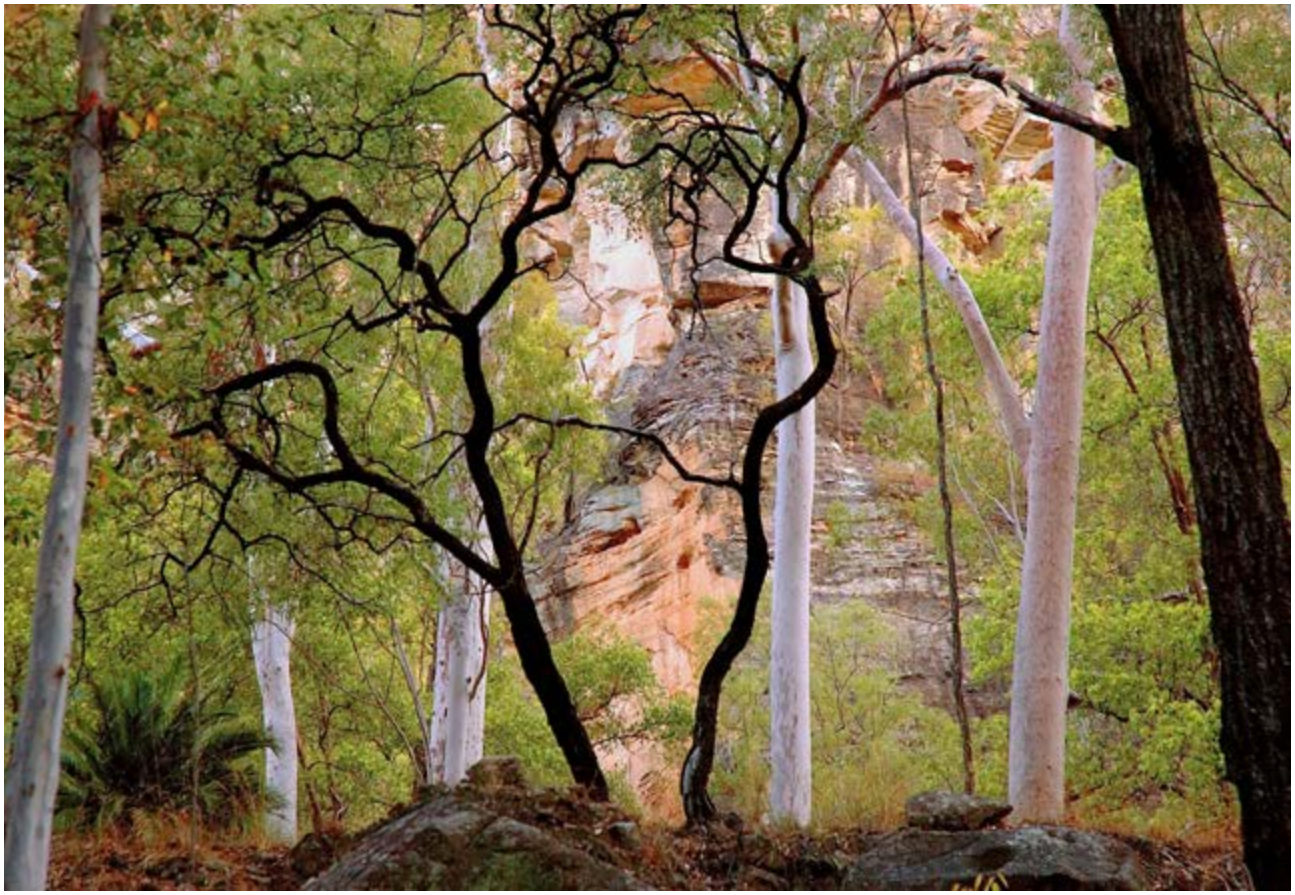


Photo: Carnarvon National Park, Queensland.

Box 12: Queensland's Strategic Conservation Analysis tool

The Queensland Government uses the Strategic Conservation Analysis (SCA) tool to prioritise expansion of its protected areas. The SCA tool identifies properties that would contribute most towards conserving threatened species habitats and under-represented regional ecosystems if added to Queensland's protected area system. It quantifies and assesses:

- relative contribution to Queensland's protected area system in terms of regional ecosystem protection
- irreplaceability and urgency associated with protecting regional ecosystems
- extent to which an area protects threatened species and their habitats
- potential value in restoring cleared or degraded ecosystems.

Photo: Tjoritja/West MacDonnell National Park, Northern Territory.

Box 13: Northern Territory Parks Biodiversity Assessment and Prioritisation Framework

The Northern Territory Government has previously used jurisdiction-scale analyses of landscape attributes to identify (terrestrial) areas with high conservation significance, and to assess the relative value of its parks and reserves in order to inform management priorities. Both approaches used a scoring system against multiple criteria that remain relevant to any future assessment of high-priority areas for protection or conservation.

The Northern Territory Parks Management Effectiveness Framework scored protected areas against 4 criteria:

- Contribution to CAR components. This included assessing the site's contribution to the representation of bioregions and to the adequacy of conservation of vegetation types and vertebrate fauna; the diversity of vegetation types in the site; and its irreplaceability in representing vegetation types
- Intrinsic biodiversity values. Sites were scored according to the presence of important wetlands and wildlife aggregations, representation of endemic and threatened species, and overall species richness
- Resilience. Sites were scored against a number of attributes that may contribute to resilience, including an area/shape index; ruggedness; altitudinal and rainfall variability; and adjacent extent of highly modified land
- Threats. Sites were scored on their level of current threat from fire, feral animals, weeds and other pressures. Where quantitative data were not available, this relied on park managers' perceptions of the level of threat.

The Northern Territory Sites of Conservation Significance assessment used a set of 'intrinsic biodiversity value' attributes similar to those described above, based on available Territory-wide datasets, but did not consider the sites' potential contribution to achieving CAR outcomes.

While tools and methods vary across jurisdictions, they are underpinned by similar criteria. There are additional criteria or considerations that can guide decision-makers when selecting specific sites or properties for protection or conservation. Some of these are detailed below. Consideration should be given to other relevant policies and programs as detailed in Section 1.3.

6.1 Cultural benefits

As rights-holders and knowledge-holders, First Nations Peoples must have their rights and interests recognised and heard to ensure equitable and effective governance, consistent with the national 30 by 30 target. The *Reimagining Conservation* report (Chapple et al. 2023) identifies indicators of success, which include First Nations Peoples being respected in decisions about Country and Culture and having choices about their social, cultural and economic needs.

It is important that First Nations Peoples are supported to understand what other land use scenarios are compatible and incompatible with the proposed protected or conserved area, as well as understanding the long-term aspirations that First Nations landholders have for their community.

Identifying areas for protection or conservation should be undertaken in ways that support and prioritise First Nations Peoples' rights and interests, to facilitate:

- self-determination and self-governance
- integration of First Nations Peoples' knowledge, perspectives and practices into conservation efforts
- connections and reconnections to Country
- care of culturally significant places and/or species
- data sovereignty and data governance.

Approaches that can facilitate these outcomes are discussed in Section 7.3.

6.2 Connectivity

CBD guidance on Target 3 (2022) states that protected and conserved areas should be connected through corridors and integrated into wider landscapes to better withstand stresses and disturbances. Prioritising the protection and conservation of habitats and areas that connect important biodiversity areas across wider landscapes:

- facilitates the mobility of threatened species across their whole potential range
- improves the resilience of threatened ecological communities against stresses and disturbances
- provides an adequate buffer to mitigate the impacts of edge effects on important biodiversity areas.

6.3 Climate change resilience and adaptation

Climate change is an important consideration in delivering long-term outcomes for biodiversity conservation and providing ecosystem services. To improve climate change resilience in Australian landscapes, priority should be given to protecting and conserving habitats and areas that:

- are projected to become important biodiversity areas under future climate change scenarios
- contribute to species and ecological community resilience and adaptation to increasingly severe climatic events, including rising average temperatures, flooding, heatwaves, drought and fire
- contribute to the resilience and adaptation of ecosystem functions and services in the context of a changing climate, including maintaining and improving air quality, soil formation and stability, erosion, coastal protection from sea level rise, pollination, stability of local climate, nutrient cycling, and water filtration
- contribute to mitigating and adapting to climate change
- protect communities and assets by providing a natural buffer against the impacts of extreme weather events – for example, mangroves where they act as a buffer to coastal systems
- contribute to carbon sequestration and storage.

In practice, trade-offs are likely to be required when prioritising areas that have these attributes.

Photo: Critically endangered Regent Honeyeater (Anthochaera phrygia).

7. How we will achieve 30 by 30

Photo: Blue-banded bee (Amegilla cingulata) on a grass lily flower (Murdannia graminea).

Australia's approach to achieving 30 by 30 requires Australian, state and territory governments, non-government stakeholders, First Nations groups, and the philanthropic and private sectors to work collaboratively to expand protected and conserved areas and support First Nations Peoples to care for Country.

Future expansion and enhancement of protected areas and recognition of conserved areas should focus on areas of particular importance that have low levels of protection or conservation. Once potential sites are identified, they should be assessed to determine if they are appropriate for protected area designation or conserved area recognition. A site's suitability for protected area designation should be considered first. Conserved area recognition should be considered where protected area designation is not possible, appropriate or supported.

This section describes policies and programs that will allow Australia to protect or conserve at least 30% of its land. These are effective initiatives that have already secured the protection of 22% of Australia's land. However, if we are to achieve the 30 by 30 target, they will need to be scaled up. Through the Protecting Important Biodiversity Areas Program, the Australian Government is working with states and territories to test new mechanisms or expand existing successful ones that we can use to achieve 30 by 30.

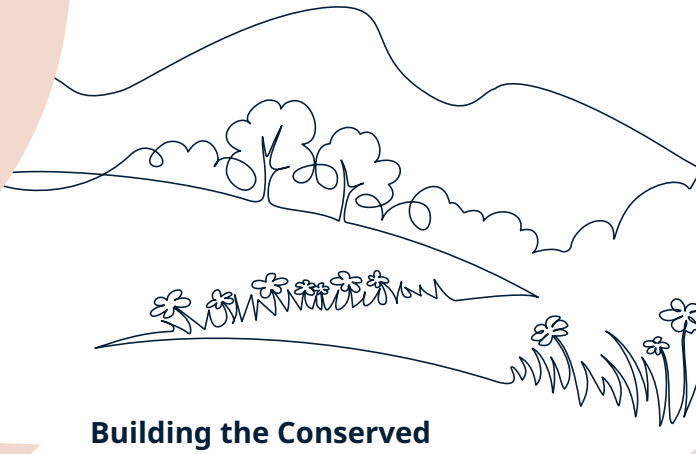
The Australian Government, in partnership with state and territory governments, will continue to investigate barriers to and incentives for achieving the 30 by 30 target. This includes investigating:

- ways to increase protection and conservation of biodiversity on private land, including through market mechanisms such as the Nature Repair Market
- possible research opportunities to support designation of protected areas and recognition of conserved areas, including ongoing work to identify priority areas.

Figure 8: How we will achieve 30 by 30

Expanding public protected areas

State and territory government strategies and policies



Building the Conserved Area Network

Implement the OECM Framework

Identify, assess and recognise conserved areas

Principle 1. Areas are effectively managed and participation of First Nations Peoples is supported

By 2030 we will protect and conserve 30% of land

Principle 2. Areas of particular importance are within well-connected, ecologically representative systems of protected and conserved areas

Increasing private protected areas

Nature Repair Market

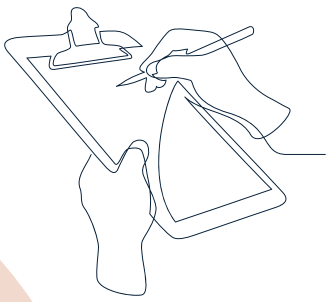
Revolving funds

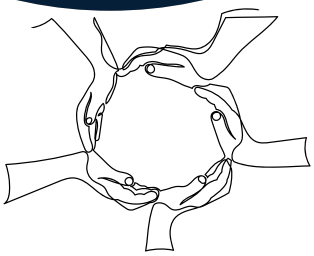
Tax concessions

Conservation covenanting programs

Improving monitoring and reporting

Review Australia's monitoring and reporting requirements





Supporting First Nations Peoples to care for Country

Expand and improve the Indigenous Protected Areas program

Double the number of Indigenous Rangers

Indigenous Land Use Agreements

Covenants that recognise Cultural values

Joint management of protected areas

7.1 Support to expand public and private protected areas

All governments in Australia have programs and initiatives in place that support the establishment or expansion of public and private protected areas.

Public protected areas

Terrestrial protected areas managed by Australian governments cover over 65 million hectares. Governments are exploring ways to contribute to the 30 by 30 target by expanding public protected areas. Efforts vary across Australia but include protecting public land previously available for timber harvesting, assessing Crown land for addition to the NRS, or buying land with significant biodiversity value. See Boxes 14 to 17 for information on approaches being taken by Australian governments. These efforts are guided by relevant policies (see Box 4).

Photo: Namadgi National Park, Australian Capital Territory.

Photo: Stripe-faced dunnart (Sminthopsis macroura).

Box 14: Establishing new national parks in New South Wales

Thurloo Downs in the far north-west of New South Wales has been acquired by the New South Wales Government for addition to the national parks estate. At 437,394 hectares – almost twice the size of the Australian Capital Territory – it is the largest acquisition of private land for national parks in New South Wales history.

The property contains exceptional biodiversity values and fills important gaps in the national parks estate. It includes 2 of the highest priority subregions for addition to the national parks system and 4 landscapes not protected anywhere else in the state. Around 50 threatened species are expected to be found on the property, including flock bronzewing, grey grasswren, black falcon, and white-fronted chat, as well as stripe-faced dunnart, little pied bat, sandy inland mouse, crowned gecko, and several threatened plants.

It includes a complex network of rivers, salt lakes and floodplains, fringed with coolibah and decorated with billabongs and waterholes. Long parallel sand dunes overlook a mosaic of woodlands, transitioning into sandplains and gibber country. With neighbouring Narriearra-Caryapundy Swamp National Park, it protects 90% of the Bulloo Overflow in New South Wales and a near-contiguous area of almost 1 million hectares stretching for 240 km to the South Australian border.

The property lies in the traditional country of the Karenggapa and Parundji Peoples and has extensive Aboriginal cultural heritage. There is evidence of artefacts, including hearth remains, flakes, grinding plates and other items of significance across the property. The New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service will work with the Aboriginal community to protect these important cultural sites.

Thurloo will transition to a national park as the pastoral operation winds down. During this period, the National Parks and Wildlife Service will deliver targeted feral animal and weed control, undertake ecological and cultural heritage surveys, and plan visitor infrastructure. The area boasts spectacular scenery and will become a must-see destination in a network of national parks in far western New South Wales.

Photo: Finke Gorge National Park, Northern Territory.

Box 15: Northern Territory Parks Masterplan 2023–53

In 2023 the Northern Territory Government released its masterplan for Northern Territory parks and reserves. The plan outlines the strategic objectives for park management to 2053. It highlights a vision of a resilient and secure system of parks conserving the diversity of the Territory's unique natural, recreational and cultural values, managed together with First Nations Peoples, creating prosperity for joint management partners and ensuring a lasting legacy for future generations to experience, understand and enjoy. The plan outlines the Northern Territory Government's intent to seek landscape-scale partnerships to address threats and ecosystem connectivity, recognising that these issues cannot be addressed at a site level alone and that a whole-of-landscape lens needs to be used to help species and ecosystems build resilience as climatic patterns shift.

The Northern Territory differs from most Australian jurisdictions, as approximately half of its land is Aboriginal freehold tenure. Of the 85 parks and reserves managed by the Northern Territory Government, 33 are jointly managed with Traditional Owners. The masterplan includes goals to strengthen Traditional Owner decision-making within jointly managed parks. It commits to greater Traditional Owner input into region-wide decisions and developing indicators for measuring joint management effectiveness. Accordingly, the masterplan emphasises the essential role Traditional Owners have in sustaining natural biodiversity values within the parks estate and the need to establish a 'two way' approach to conservation management, integrating First Nations and Western knowledge. The masterplan sets targets and recognises that discussion with joint management partners is paramount to understand Traditional Owner aspirations for long-term park management arrangements, which could include sole management aiming to achieve self-sufficiency and increased self-determination.

Photo: Field surveys on Vergemont Station, Queensland. Credit: Ian Wilkinson/Queensland Government.

Box 16: Strategic expansions of protected area corridors in Queensland

The Queensland Government is acquiring large properties for protection. In 2024 it acquired Tonkoro and Vergemont Stations and part of Melrose Station in western Queensland. The purchase of the 352,000 hectare Vergemont Station was facilitated by the single largest donation for land protection in Australia: a $21 million anonymous donation, secured with the support of The Nature Conservancy. Once dedicated, these acquisitions will add over 500,000 hectares to the NRS.

The properties are located in under-represented IBRA bioregions and contain suitable habitat for listed species including the night parrot and the Opalton grasswren. The addition of these properties to the NRS will help create a protected area corridor of almost 1.5 million hectares between existing national parks in Queensland.

Dedication of these properties will also help protect the headwaters of the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin, which is one of the last remaining free-flowing arid river systems in the world and one of Australia's most important inland catchments.

Photo: Mountain ash (Eucalyptus regnans) forest, Victoria.

Box 17: Ending native timber harvesting in Victoria

Native timber harvesting in Victoria's state forests ended on 1 January 2024. The Victorian Government has established a Great Outdoors Taskforce to make recommendations on the future management of approximately 1.8 million hectares of state forests that were previously available for timber harvesting, including areas that qualify for protection as national parks, areas that would be suitable for recreation opportunities, and areas where there are opportunities for management of public land by Traditional Owners.

Private protected areas

Many private landholders are willing to protect the biodiversity on their properties, especially with the removal of barriers and/or the right support and incentives. Biodiversity conservation plays a role in protecting waterways, reducing erosion, improving soil health, providing shade and cooling, and improving drought resilience. Landholders are likely to be most supportive of biodiversity protection where it complements other objectives, such as primary production where this is the main source of income. Efforts to increase protection on private land need to account for landholders' multiple objectives and interests.

Activities associated with managing land for conservation, such as feral animal and weed control, fire risk management, and species monitoring, can be costly. Biodiversity conservation may also result in loss of income, because conserved land may no longer generate income. High property values can prevent those with an interest in conserving biodiversity, but without the financial resources to do so, from purchasing properties.

Over 60% of Australia's land is privately owned or managed, yet private protected areas contribute only 6% of the NRS by area. Further, 70% to 90% of unprotected or poorly protected biodiversity exists largely on private land (Ivanova & Cook 2020). There is considerable scope for private landholders, where appropriate, in partnership with governments and the philanthropic and private sectors, to voluntarily contribute to the 30 by 30 target.

All jurisdictions have legislation, policies and programs that support and encourage protection of biodiversity on private land. These include initiatives such as conservation covenanting programs, revolving funds, stewardship payments, and land management advice.

Government initiatives that support private protected areas include the following:

- Nature Repair Market: The Australian Government is implementing the Nature Repair Market to mobilise private finance to repair and protect our unique natural environment. Its aim is to make nature-related investment easier and drive nature repair across Australia. Activities that contribute to 30 by 30 may be eligible for biodiversity certificates under the Nature Repair Market. These will provide a further incentive for business to undertake eligible activities and provide support to private landholders to manage and enhance biodiversity on their land. A permanent protection method is being developed to enable the protection and conservation of biodiversity on private land through the Nature Repair Market.
- Conservation covenants: These are voluntary agreements between landholders and authorised covenant scheme providers that aim to protect and enhance the natural, cultural and/or scientific values of land. Conservation covenants or agreements dictate the activities that can or cannot occur on the land once an agreement is in place. All states have covenanting programs (see Box 20). Enhanced conservation covenants are those that exclude extractive activities incompatible with biodiversity conservation, such as mining (see Box 22).
- Revolving funds: These are funds set aside for the purpose of purchasing properties with natural or cultural values, placing a conservation covenant on the title, and reselling the land to conservation-minded people. The proceeds from the sale of properties are used again to buy more properties and sell them with a conservation covenant in place. These programs are operating in Queensland through Queensland Trust for Nature, in Tasmania through the Tasmanian Land Conservancy, and in Victoria through Trust for Nature (Victoria).
- Programs that provide funding to assist with on-ground management activities:
  - The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust has annual funding of $70 million to provide landholders who enter conservation agreements with payments to manage their land for conservation.
  - Since 2007, Queensland's Private Protected Area Program has committed $18.2 million to private landholders through the NatureAssist program to support projects that protect and enhance significant natural and cultural values on private protected areas.
  - The South Australian Heritage Agreement Scheme has $6 million between 2022 and 2026 to support new conservation covenants and annual conservation management payments.
  - In Victoria the $77 million BushBank program will restore natural environments across the state. BushBank also provides economic opportunities for Traditional Owners and supports the participation of Traditional Owners in restoration and carbon markets.

Tax concessions that provide incentives for conservation on private land:

- At the national level, landowners entering covenants under approved conservation covenanting programs may be eligible for tax concessions under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* (Cth).
- Some state and territory governments and local councils offer tax concessions for conservation on private land. For example, in New South Wales, areas with conservation agreements are exempt from council rates and land tax. In Victoria, land with a conservation covenant registered on title is exempt from land tax.

Navigating the various tax concessions within and between jurisdictions, including local government rates and rebates, can be challenging. Raising awareness of the various tax concessions and making the different approaches more consistent may lead to greater uptake.

Photo: Sloping Main Reserve, Tasmania. Credit: Rob Blakers. Supplied by Tasmanian Land Conservancy.

Box 18: Role of private land conservation organisations

In Australia, private land conservancies are making a significant contribution to the 30 by 30 target. Over the last 30 to 40 years, through partnerships with governments and philanthropic organisations, private land conservation organisations have helped develop Australia's privately protected areas network. It is now one of the largest in the world.

Examples of organisations supporting biodiversity conservation on private land are:

- Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC), which manages and/or owns more than 31 properties spanning 6.8 million hectares. AWC has the biggest network of feral cat and fox free land in Australia
- Bush Heritage Australia, which manages 45 reserves covering over 1.4 million hectares. It focuses on buying and managing land of high conservation value containing nationally significant ecosystems, and works in collaboration with traditional custodians wherever possible
- The Nature Conservancy, a global not-for-profit, non-government organisation which since 2022 has provided $29 million to support Australian state governments to protect over 500,000 hectares
- Nature Foundation, which manages 9 reserves in South Australia, covering 515,000 hectares, for biodiversity conservation and protection of threatened species
- Tasmanian Land Conservancy, which works on nature conservation projects covering more than 90,000 hectares (see Box 19)

Photo: Tasmanian devil, Tasmania. Credit Heath Holden. Supplied by Tasmanian Land Conservancy.

Box 19: Tasmanian Land Conservancy

The Tasmanian Land Conservancy (TLC) is a not-for-profit organisation that protects nature on private land in Tasmania. TLC has a network of private protected areas that protect important habitats and support threatened species such as swift parrots, forty-spotted pardalotes, wedge-tailed eagles, masked owls, Tasmanian devils and quolls. They also protect threatened vegetation communities and threatened plants, including cider gums and grassland paper daisies.

TLC uses a range of mechanisms to protect nature. Donors can contribute both to the purchase of properties to be added to TLC's reserve network and to the TLC Foundation, which generates a reliable source of income to fund the long-term management and monitoring of TLC's reserves in perpetuity. TLC also helps conservation-minded landholders establish their own nature reserves, permanently protected with conservation covenants, in partnership with the Tasmanian Government and natural resource management bodies – conserving over 38,000 hectares in this way. TLC's Revolving Fund purchases properties with high biodiversity values, protects them through conservation covenants, then sells them to new owners who are keen to support conservation. Following the sale of the land, the funds are reinvested to secure more land of high conservation value.

Photo: Short-beaked echidna (Tachyglossus aculeatus).

Box 20: State conservation covenanting programs

- New South Wales Conservation Management Program, Conservation Partners Program and Biodiversity Offsets Program
- Queensland Private Protected Area Program
- South Australian Heritage Agreement Scheme
- Tasmanian Private Land Conservation Program
- Victorian Trust for Nature Conservation Covenant Program
- Victorian BushTender
- National Trust of Western Australia Conservation Covenant and Stewardship Program
- Western Australian Nature Conservation Covenant Program

Photo: New South Wales waratah (Telopea speciosissima).

Box 21: NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) is a statutory, not-for-profit New South Wales Government organisation that partners with landholders to protect and enhance biodiversity through private land conservation. The BCT signs permanent or long-term agreements with willing landholders to protect moderate- to high-condition vegetation/ecosystems on part or all of their property. As at June 2024, the BCT's permanent agreements cover around 536,000 hectares or 0.6% of New South Wales.

The BCT's priorities and investment are guided by the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy, which includes priority area maps, principles, criteria and targets. The investment strategy embeds the principles of a CAR protected area system.

The New South Wales Government provides around $70 million per year to the BCT. The bulk of these funds are used to:

- invest in a government-backed long-term endowment fund. The investment returns from this fund pay for annual management payments to voluntary agreement holders for the life of the agreement in return for implementing agreed conservation management actions to maintain and improve biodiversity values
- deliver ongoing support to agreement holders (whether or not they receive guaranteed annual payments). This includes regional BCT staff site visits, technical guidance, site-specific advice, targeted online training courses, networking events and field days. For agreement holders who do not receive guaranteed annual payments, the BCT provides small-grant funding for specific conservation works.

The BCT measures biodiversity outcomes through an extensive science-based ecological monitoring module. This evaluates management effectiveness and assesses changes in ecological condition over time. The methods in this module have been accredited by Accounting for Nature.

Photo: Pullen Pullen Reserve, Maiawall Country. Credit: Lachlan Gardiner. Supplied by Bush Heritage Australia.

Box 22: Enhanced conservation covenants

Enhanced conservation covenants exclude activities incompatible with biodiversity conservation, including extractive activities such as mining, and provide greater certainty that conservation outcomes will be achieved. Queensland is the first jurisdiction in Australia to adopt this approach, with the creation of a category of private protected area referred to as special wildlife reserves. These reserves have the same level of protection as national parks and exclude incompatible land uses.

Bush Heritage Australia's property Pullen Pullen a 56,000 hectare reserve that is home to the elusive (once thought extinct) night parrot was the first special wildlife reserve to be declared in 2020. In 2024 a second Bush Heritage property, Edgbaston Reserve, was declared a special wildlife reserve. Edgbaston Reserve contains more than 100 artesian springs and 23 animal species found nowhere else in the world.

7.2 Building Australia's Conserved Area Network

Recognition of conserved areas in Australia will make an important contribution to achieving 30 by 30. This approach allows for greater recognition of areas that are important for biodiversity but where formal protected area designation is not possible, appropriate or supported – for example, where biodiversity conservation is compatible with other objectives, such as primary production, but protection is not possible due to legal or land tenure restrictions or other constraints.

The OECM Framework provides guidance, including minimum requirements, to underpin a nationally consistent approach to the recognition of land-based conserved areas in Australia.

The framework sets out a new approach to the conservation of biodiversity in Australia. Implementation arrangements will be developed incrementally, commencing with a limited number of pilot projects. Lessons from the pilot projects will inform any updates to the framework ahead of broader implementation. A database to record conserved areas is in development.

7.3 Support for First Nations Peoples to care for Country

For First Nations Peoples, Country refers to both water and lands and is understood as interconnected and living ecosystems. For over 65,000 years, First Nations Peoples have cared for and protected Country during dynamic climatic conditions, using scientific and cultural knowledge.

First Nations Peoples will continue to make important contributions to the 30 by 30 target, building on and expanding existing approaches to caring for Country. The Australian Government has funded the IPA Program since 1997, with the most recent commitment, $231.5 million over 5 years from 2023–24, to expand and improve the program. IPAs now comprise more than 50% of the area of the NRS (see Box 9). As of September 2024, there are 34 IPA consultation projects underway. Dedication of all 34 projects is estimated to contribute 25 million hectares of land to the NRS. This is equivalent to 3.25% towards the 30 by 30 target.

The Australian Government Indigenous Rangers program, supported by $1.3 billion from 2021 to 2028, will increase the number of Indigenous rangers from 1,900 to 3,800 by 2030 and increase the number of women rangers. There are complementary Indigenous ranger programs in states such as Queensland and Western Australia.

Covenants that recognise cultural values and ILUAs are also opportunities to increase support for First Nations Peoples' management of protected and conserved areas. In New South Wales the Cultural Biodiversity Conservation pilot offers financial support to eligible Aboriginal landholding organisations who choose to enter into ongoing protected area agreements with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust. This funding aims to support Aboriginal landholding organisations to implement an agreed conservation management plan.

There are also moves across Australia towards increasing joint management of public protected areas with First Nations Peoples (see Box 23).

Photo: Garig and Iwaidja Arrarrkbi performing traditional dance, song and ceremony to mark 50 years since Cobourg Peninsula became the world's first Ramsar site, within the jointly managed Garig Gunak Barlu National Park, Northern Territory. Credit: Northern Territory Government, Parks and Wildlife.

Box 23: Joint management of public protected areas with First Nations Peoples

Over 2 million hectares, or 30%, of the **New South Wales** national parks estate is jointly managed between the government and First Nations Peoples. Joint management arrangements vary across parks. They may include policy, planning and direction-setting and/or day-to-day park management.

In consultation with First Nations Peoples, including native title holders, the New South Wales Government is developing a new joint management model.

In **Victoria**, joint management is established under the terms of the *Traditional Owners Settlement Act 2010* (Vic). This Act establishes a framework for the Victorian Government to recognise Traditional Owners and certain rights in Crown land, including joint management.

This can include the provision for parks and reserves to be returned to Traditional Owners under a form of land title called Aboriginal Title. Land under Aboriginal Title will continue to be managed as national parks or other forms of public parks. Traditional Owner land management boards develop joint management plans which provide a basis for ongoing management of these areas (DEECA 2019).

Photo: Kangaroo grass (Themeda triandra).

In addition to joint management, there are other emerging approaches to shared management with First Nations Peoples. One of these is the 'right-way' approach – where traditional knowledge, Western science and shared values come together for better conservation outcomes (see Box 24).

Box 24: Right-way management of Bush Heritage Australia reserves

A 'right-way' approach to shared management of privately owned reserves is being implemented in central Victoria by Bush Heritage Australia and the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (trading as DJAARA). Bush Heritage has been working in partnership with DJAARA since the early 2000s. DJAARA is the Traditional Owner group entity for **djandak** (Dja Dja Wurrung Country).

The partnership, known as Wurreka Galkangu, spans several reserves owned by Bush Heritage on **djandak**, covering over 2,500 hectares of grassy woodland and heathy forest. It is about coming together to build genuine and enduring relationships and to listen, learn, share knowledge and walk together in **dhelkunya dja** (healing Country).

Wurreka Galkangu is supported by formal agreements and a shared governance structure. It uses 'healthy Country planning' principles to inform strategic priorities and planning at a landscape scale. This strategic landscape planning then cascades down to inform shared decision-making and implementation of management activities on each of the reserves.

'Our partnership is a demonstration of restorative justice that recognises the past and enables Dja Dja Wurrung self-determination towards mutually beneficial social, cultural and conservation outcomes.'

Photo: Kosciuszko National Park, New South Wales.

8. Monitoring progress towards 30 by 30

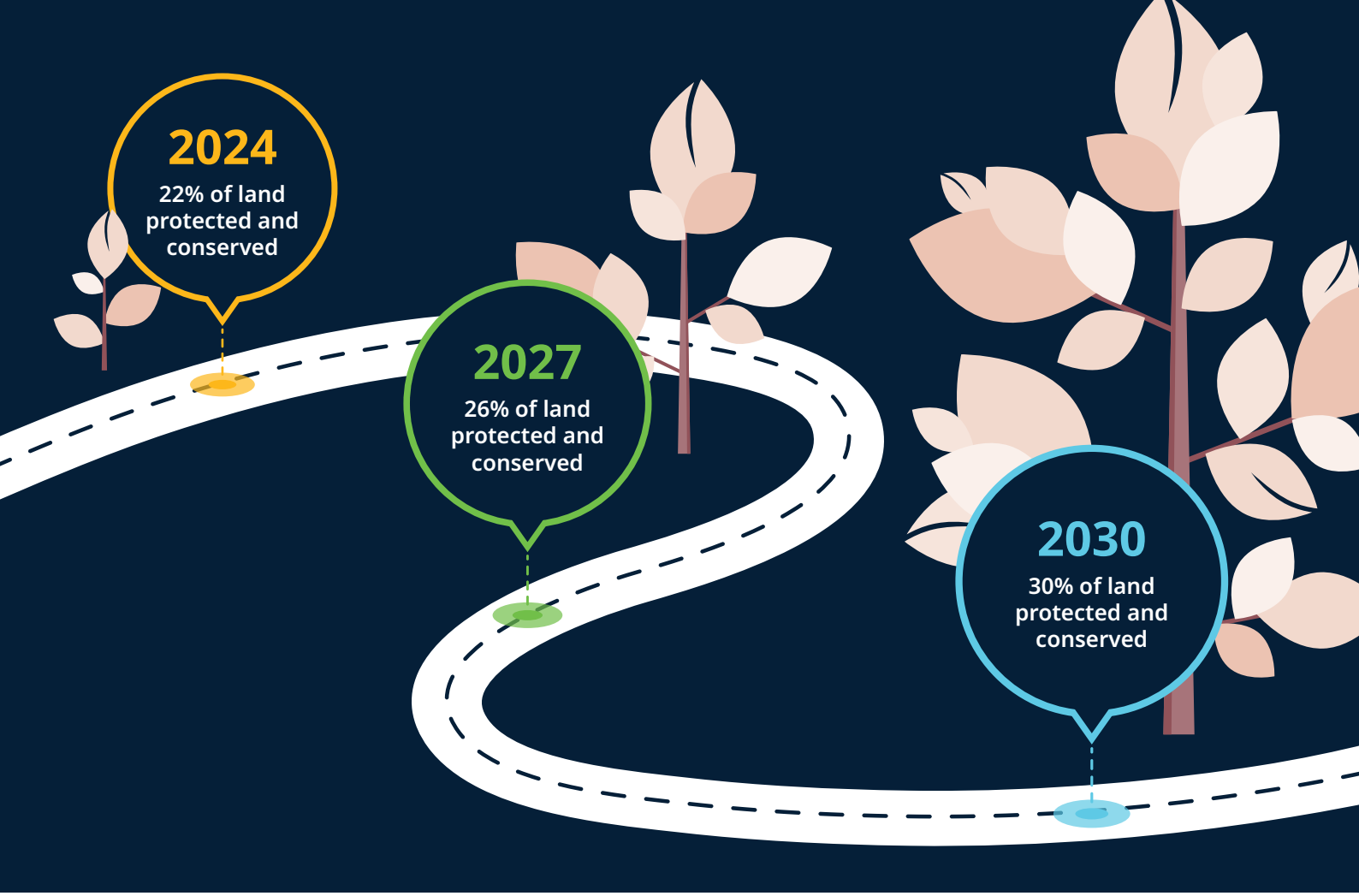
Photo: Citizen scientist observing a waterway.

Having measurable indicators is important for providing clear direction and enabling us to track progress.

In December 2022 the Conference of the Parties to the CBD adopted a monitoring framework for the GBF (CBD 2022). In the monitoring framework, the headline indicator for Target 3 is *Coverage of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures*. Australia's progress towards the 30 by 30 target will be tracked against this headline indicator.

Table 3: Australia's headline indicator

Headline indicator	2024	2027	2030
Percentage land protected or conserved	22%	26%	30%



The CBD Parties also agreed to optional component indicators for specific elements of Target 3 – for example, protected area coverage of key biodiversity areas, Protected Areas Management Effectiveness, IUCN Red List of Ecosystems, and Species Protection Index. Further optional complementary indicators were identified to support in-depth analysis.

Initially Australia will report progress towards 30 by 30 against the following sub-indicators:

- Percentage of the extent of protected and conserved areas managed or jointly managed by First Nations Peoples
- Increase in ecological comprehensiveness and representativeness
- Increase in protection or conservation of private land.

The sub-indicators reflect the core principles set out in this roadmap.

Reporting progress towards the 30 by 30 target

The Australian Government will track and report on national progress towards achieving the 30 by 30 target, drawing on information from state and territory governments. Our progress reporting will address the headline indicator and each sub-indicator, and will profile initiatives such as those identified in Figure 8.

This reporting will be embedded in processes established for the purposes of Australia's Strategy for Nature and our national reporting obligations under the CBD.

Data for this reporting will come from CAPAD – the system for capturing data on protected areas in Australia. CAPAD relies on information provided by the Australian Government, states and territories and other conservation partners.

CAPAD is updated and published every 2 years and provides information at the national level and the state and territory level. It includes information about each protected area, including its IUCN management category, location, size, governance type and gazettal date (the year an area was declared a protected area).

A database for capturing data on conserved areas is in development. It will rely on information provided by the Australian Government, states and territories and other conservation partners.

The Australian Government has committed to establish Environment Information Australia – an agency with independent, legislated obligations to report on progress towards national environmental goals such as 30 by 30.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
CAPAD	Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
IBRA	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia
ILUA	Indigenous Land Use Agreement
IPA	Indigenous Protected Area
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
NRS	National Reserve System
OECM	other effective area-based conservation measure

Glossary

Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030 (NRS Strategy)	Agreed by all Australian governments in 2009, sets priority actions and targets for a nationally coordinated approach to establishing and managing the NRS.
Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD)	The national database with information on Australia's protected areas. CAPAD is published every 2 years. CAPAD is compiled using data from state and territory governments and non-government organisations.
Conserved areas	Australian terminology for other effective area-based conservation measures.
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	An international and legally binding treaty. Australia has been a Party to the CBD since 1993.
Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs)	Voluntary agreements between native title parties and other people or bodies about the use and management of areas of land and/or waters.
Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA)	Australia's bioregions – IBRA classifies Australia's landscapes into large geographically distinct bioregions based on common climate, geology, landform, native vegetation and species information.
Indigenous Protected Area(s) (IPA)	Areas of land and sea that Traditional Owners have agreed to manage for biodiversity conservation and the protection of cultural values. Most IPAs are established on areas where native title rights have been determined or on land granted under land rights legislation. However, other areas of land may be included in an IPA following consent from the relevant landowners. All IPAs are recognised as protected areas in Australia.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	An international body comprising both government and civil society organisations. Its membership includes 197 states and government agencies, 1,097 national and international non-government organisations, 19 Indigenous organisations and 42 affiliate organisations.
Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)	An international agreement under the CBD. The GBF sets out 4 global goals to 2050 and 23 global targets to 2030, including Target 3. In adopting the GBF, all Parties (including Australia) have committed to setting national targets to implement it.
National Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures Framework (OECM Framework)	The framework that guides how conserved areas are recognised in Australia. It identifies principles to guide conserved area recognition, outlines how implementation arrangements could work in practice and includes a site assessment tool.
National Reserve System (NRS)	A system of formally recognised parks, reserves and protected areas on public, private and Indigenous land dedicated to the long-term protection of Australia's biodiversity. It comprises national parks and nature reserves, Indigenous Protected Areas, private protected areas and shared management areas.
Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)	'A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.' CBD Decision 14/8
Protected areas	Australian protected areas eligible to be included in the National Reserve System. Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030 defines a protected area as 'A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values'.
Target 3	The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework target to ensure at least 30% of the world's land and 30% of the world's ocean is protected or conserved by 2030.

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Appendix A

During 2022 Commonwealth, state and territory nature conservation agencies, Indigenous Protected Area managers and private protected area managers provided information on their terrestrial protected areas. This information was compiled into CAPAD 2022.

The 30 by 30 target is a national target. Australian, state and territory governments will contribute to achieving the target according to their circumstances, priorities and resources.

Table A provides a snapshot of information for each state and territory up to 30 June 2022. New protected areas have been gazetted across Australia since 30 June 2022.

Table A: Terrestrial protected areas by jurisdiction as at June 2022 (CAPAD 2022)

Jurisdiction	Number of protected areas	Protected area (ha)	% of jurisdiction protected
ACT	51	131,904	55.94
NSW	2,350	8,169,918	10.20
NT	85	33,536,325	24.88
QLD	1,222	15,275,846	8.83
SA	2,014	29,721,867	30.20
TAS	1,676	2,893,895	42.31
VIC	4,627	4,012,888	17.64
WA	1,857	76,142,710	30.13
Total	**13,903**	**169,941,262**	**22.10**

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