Australian Land Conservation Alliance

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IGR & Wellbeing Frameworks Unit
Budget Policy Division
The Treasury
PARKES ACT 2600
By email: leo.soames@treasury.gov.au; cc chai.tee@treasury.gov.au

31 August 2022

Dear IGR & Wellbeing Frameworks Unit,

RE: Submission on environmental indicators and the wellbeing budget

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to The Treasury on environmental aspects of its forthcoming inaugural wellbeing budget, including prospective indicators for wellbeing and the environment.

Please note that ALCA is happy for this submission to be published in full.

About the Australian Land Conservation Alliance

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia. Our eleven members are:

- Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Biodiversity Conservation Trust NSW
- Bush Heritage Australia
- Greening Australia
- Landcare Australia
- Nature Foundation
- Queensland Trust for Nature
- South Endeavour Trust
- Tasmanian Land Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy Australia
- Trust for Nature (Victoria)

ALCA land conservation efforts stretch across over 3 million square kilometres with more than 3,000 landholders. We have over 50,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds $200 million. Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance and funding and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

Through their active land management, ALCA member organisations are deeply embedded in rural communities and economies, providing jobs, securing significant regional investment, and safeguarding remaining native habitat, with its many positive spillover effects for community, wellbeing, and food security. We seek to demonstrate the role and value of private land conservation as a cornerstone of the Australian economy.

Some ALCA members are statutory entities; the views expressed in this submission do not necessarily represent the views of the Government administering those statutory entities.

Summary

The Federal Government's 'wellbeing budget' is a key opportunity to recognise and integrate the importance of protecting, restoring, and managing our environment to safeguard and improve Australia's food security, health, and economic outcomes.

Appropriate environmental wellbeing indicators can help to reorient the strategic direction of Government budget measures and allocations to account for the importance of nature to all Australians.

Whilst the escalating impacts of the climate crisis have taken hold within the Australian public consciousness, the parallel crisis facing our natural world is less widely known. And yet, the World Economic Forum has already declared nature loss "*a planetary emergency*"[1] with four of the top eight most severe risks on a global scale over the next ten years identified as environmental risks[2]:

> "*Humanity has already wiped out 83% of wild mammals and half of all plants and severely altered three-quarters of ice-free land and two-thirds of marine environments. One million species are at risk of extinction in the coming decades – a rate tens to hundreds of times higher than the average over the past 10 million years….*
>
> ***Human societies and economies rely on biodiversity in fundamental ways. …over half the world's total GDP – is moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services.***"[3]

The United Nations System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) details which sectors' supply chains are most critically dependent upon nature. They include[4]:

- Cropping
- Grazing
- Forestry
- Wild fisheries
- Water supply
- Global climate regulation services (e.g. carbon sequestration)
- Local climate regulation services (e.g. urban cooling and agricultural cooling effects)
- Air filtration
- Soil and sediment retention services
- Solid waste remediation
- Water purification services
- Water flow regulation services
- Coastal protection services
- River flood mitigation services
- Pollination services
- Nursery population and habitat services
- Recreation-related services (including tourism)
- Visual amenity services
- Education, scientific and research services
- Mental health services[5]

[1] See: World Economic Forum, January 2020; https://www.weforum.org/reports/nature-risk-rising-why-the-crisis-engulfing-nature-matters-for-business-and-the-economy

[2] See: World Economic Forum, *Global Risks Report 2022*; https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2022.pdf; the risks are climate action failure (1st); extreme weather (2nd); biodiversity loss (3rd); human environmental damage (7th); natural resource crises (8th).

[3] See: World Economic Forum, *Nature Risk Rising: Why the Crisis Engulfing Nature Matters for Business and the Economy*, January 2020; https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-risks-report-2020

[4] Largely reproduced from: p154-157 (Annex 6.1), United Nations, SEEA, *Ecosystem Accounting*; https://seea.un.org/sites/seea.un.org/files/documents/EA/seea_ea_white_cover_final.pdf

[5] This last item has been well-dcoumented during the COVID-19 pandemic; for example: S.M. Labib et. al., *Nature's contributions in coping with a pandemic in the 21st century: A narrative review of evidence during COVID-19*, Science of the Total Environment (Journal), 10 August 2022; https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8983608/; and University of Western Australia research: J.N. Sneddon et. al, *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on environmental values*, May 2022, Sustainability Science (Journal); https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-022-01151-w

The scale and devastation that the unfolding nature crisis will have upon our collective wellbeing will dwarf all but the very biggest issues facing our nation – and will rival them in importance.

As per the British Government's Dasgupta Review:

> "*We are facing a global crisis. We are totally dependent upon the natural world. It supplies us with every oxygen-laden breath we take and every mouthful of food we eat. But we are currently damaging it so profoundly that many of its natural systems are now on the verge of breakdown.*"[6]

Indeed, in 2021, Australian scientists confirmed evidence that already 19 of Australia's ecosystems have either collapsed or are collapsing[7].

Australia's inaugural wellbeing budget presents an opportunity to ensure that, at the most strategic level, the nation's budget begins to reflect the fundamental importance of protecting and restoring nature to our supply chains, food security, our health, and overall wellbeing.

It is on this basis that ALCA recommends three headline indicators (and four biodiversity sub-indicators) for environmental wellbeing, namely, indicators for **terrestrial biodiversity**, **marine biodiversity** and **action on climate change**.

Recommendations

That the Treasury adopt the following environmental indicators for the wellbeing budget:

1. **Biodiversity:**

   As a proxy indicator for (change in) the proportion of terrestrial (including freshwater) and marine biodiversity covered by protected areas [modelled on SDG indicator 15.1.2[8]], **the (change in) proportion of Australia's protected land areas [terrestrial biodiversity]** and **the (change in) proportion of Australia's protected sea areas [marine biodiversity]**.

   a. These indicators clearly align with Australia's domestic commitment to protect 30% of Australia's land and 30% of Australia's sea by 2030[9].

   b. Note, protected areas would be defined by the IUCN[10] protected area definition (as utilised by the Commonwealth Government in its Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database[11], 'CAPAD').

[6] See: p1, Dasgupta, P. *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review*, HM Treasury, Government of the United Kingdom; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review

[7] See: Bergstrom et. al, 'Combating ecosystem collapse from the tropics to the Antarctic', Global Change Biology, 2021; https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.15539

[8] See: Goal 15, Sustainable Development Goals, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations; https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal15

[9] "*Our Government will set a national goal of protecting thirty percent of our land and thirty percent of our oceans by 2030.*"; Minister the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, National Press Club, 19 July 2022, https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/plibersek/speeches-and-transcripts/national-press-club-address-minister-environment-and-water-tanya-plibersek

[10] International Union for Conservation of Nature; the Commonwealth is a member of the Union (via its relevant Departments); see: https://www.iucn.org/our-union/members/iucn-members

[11] See: DCCEEW, https://www.dcceew.gov.au/agriculture-land/land/nrs/science/capad/2020

Biodiversity sub-indicators:

i. **The (change in) proportion of Australia's protected land areas, by IBRA bioregion**[12].

ii. **The (change in) proportion of Australia's protected sea areas, by marine bioregion**[13].

iii. **The (change in) Australia's IUCN Red List Index**[14] [SDG indicator, 15.5.1[15]], which "*shows trends in overall extinction risk for species, and is used by governments to track their progress towards targets for reducing biodiversity loss*".

iv. **The (change in) the extent of remnant native vegetation in Australia**[16].

2. **Action on climate change:**

The (change in) total CO2-equivalent (greenhouse gas) emissions per year [SDG indicator 13.2.2[17] and Commonwealth's Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing[18]], as per Australia's National Greenhouse Accounts[19].

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Treasury's thinking on environmental indicators for wellbeing for the inaugural wellbeing budget.

ALCA looks forward to ongoing engagement with The Treasury as environmental indicators and the environmental framing for budget measures continues to develop across future budgets.

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[12] Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia; see: DCCEEW, https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/nrs/science/ibra
[13] See: DCCEEW, https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/marine/marine-bioregional-plans
[14] See: International Union for Conservation of Nature; https://www.iucnredlist.org/assessment/red-list-index
[15] See: Goal 15, Sustainable Development Goals, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations; https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal15
[16] National Vegetation Information System (NVIS); see: DCCEEW
[17] See: Goal 13, Sustainable Development Goals, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations; https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13
[18] See: AIHW, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/indicators/australias-welfare-indicators/environment/environment
[19] See: DCCEEW; https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/emissions-reporting/tracking-reporting-emissions