

Employment Taskforce  
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Dear Employment Taskforce,

**RE: Submission to the Employment White Paper**

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Federal Government's consultation on its Employment White Paper.

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.

- 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 member land conservation efforts have influenced over 3 million square kilometres with more than 4,000 landholders. We have over 70,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$260 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 spill-over 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.

## The accelerating nature crisis

**The accelerating nature crisis facing our nation must be urgently addressed if we are to prevent a sharp decline in Australia's productivity growth.**

Whilst the nature crisis is less well-known than the parallel, albeit interconnected, climate crisis, it is just as serious for our society and economy. A recent report has confirmed Australia's trajectory towards the collapse of ecosystems<sup>1</sup> and we have seen the largest documented decline of biodiversity than any other continent in the world<sup>2</sup>.

More broadly, according to the World Economic Forum:

*"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."*<sup>3</sup>

Using the same methodology, **approximately half of Australia's GDP has also been demonstrated as having a moderate to very high dependence on nature**<sup>4</sup>.

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."*<sup>5</sup>

The key findings of the Federal Government's 2021 State of Environment Report highlight the seriousness of the nature crisis as specific to Australia:

*"Overall, **the state and trend of the environment of Australia are poor and deteriorating** as a result of increasing pressures from climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and resource extraction. Changing environmental conditions mean that many species and ecosystems are increasingly threatened. Multiple pressures create cumulative impacts that amplify threats to our environment, and abrupt changes in ecological systems have been recorded in the past 5 years.*

*...Our inability to adequately manage pressures will continue to result in species extinctions and deteriorating ecosystem condition, which are reducing the environmental capital on which current and future economies depend. **Social, environmental and economic impacts are already apparent.**"*<sup>6</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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>

<sup>2</sup> See: DCCEEW; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/conservation>

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> See: Australian Conservation Foundation, *The nature-based economy: How Australia's prosperity depends on nature*, September 2022; <https://www.acf.org.au/how-australias-prosperity-depends-on-nature>

<sup>5</sup> 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>

<sup>6</sup> See: Government of Australia, 2021 State of Environment Report; <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/overview/key-findings>

<sup>7</sup> As above, n1

However, environmental decline is not just a threat that needs to be managed – **investment in the green economy is an opportunity to grow our sustainable economic output and productivity**, and is especially relevant to regional, rural and remote economies. Harnessing nature and natural processes – for example, agricultural pest management, pollination, and soil quality improvement, to name but a few – are the earliest form of applied biotechnology.

Green economy investments will also be driven by the arrival of the **Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)** risk management and corporate disclosure framework, as the companion piece to its predecessor, the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). The TNFD seeks to provide a framework for businesses to disclose their nature-related risks and how they are managing and mitigating those risks; we have seen how the TCFD has driven disclosure and, subsequently, investment in emissions mitigation and abatement. For example, of the “*over 60% of the companies reviewed [by the TCFD] disclosed their climate-related risks or opportunities in 2021 fiscal year reports – up from 27% in 2017 fiscal year reports*”. As per ASIC guidance, the TCFD framework has been recommended for climate change related disclosures since 2019 and we can expect that a similar path and status will be achieved by the TNFD.

**Nature-based solutions** to climate change also present an opportunity to help manage Australia's climate transition. In 2017, research led by The Nature Conservancy and 15 other institutions demonstrated that nature-based solutions can provide up to one-third of the emission reductions needed by 2030 to keep global temperature increases under 2°C – 30 per cent more than previously estimated<sup>8</sup>.

A 2021 University of Melbourne collaboration, *Nature as a climate solution*<sup>9</sup>, details how nature-based solutions can be implemented to maximise the benefits to community and Indigenous Australians.

**The nature sector also needs to operate in an environment that does not actively discriminate against it** – this means removing existing discriminatory measures against conservation from our tax, employment benefits, and skills and training policy settings.

ALCA's three key messages to the Employment Taskforce and the Australian Government are therefore:

- **We must prevent environmental collapse if we wish to safeguard our productivity and avoid social and economic regression.** Against the backdrop of prolonged structural deficits in our Federal, State and Territory environment budgets, this means a serious investment in protecting, managing and restoring our natural environment, such as delivering on Australia's 30 x 30 commitment (protecting 30% of Australia's lands and 30% of Australia's seas by 2030) as well as addressing the key threats to our environment including invasive species, habitat loss, and climate change.
- **Investment in the green economy – including nature-based solutions to climate change – is an opportunity to grow our sustainable economic output and productivity**, and is especially relevant to regional, rural, and remote economies where at-scale environmental conservation and recovery is more achievable.
- **Ensure that the operating environment facing nature sector employers is, at the very least, agnostic rather than discriminatory.** This means extending the benefits of Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status to environmental charities, extending tax relief measures currently afforded to agricultural land-use to conservation land-use, and reversing the university funding penalties upon environmental studies implemented under the Job Ready Graduates package.

<sup>8</sup> See: B.W. Griscom et. al., 'Natural climate solutions', *Earth, Atmosphere and Planetary Sciences*, 114 (44) 11645-11650, October 2017; <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1710465114>

<sup>9</sup> See: R.A. Morgain et. al., *Nature as a Climate Solution*, University of Melbourne, 2021; <https://www.conservationfutures.org.au/publications>

## Economic stimulus through conservation

During the height of the pandemic, the 2020 Ernst & Young report, *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*<sup>10</sup> outlined how the conservation sector provides an opportunity to generate significant social and economic returns on investment – as well as a targeted programmatic dividend for the environment. Focusing on managing environmental threats; habitat restoration; and infrastructure, building and maintenance, it found that:

*“...government investment of \$4 billion in a national conservation and land management program could raise economic output by about \$5.7 billion, reduce welfare costs by \$620 million and generate 53,000 jobs over the next four years.”*

Further:

*“The evidence of long-term economic and environmental benefits from these investments is encouraging. Research indicates that they can deliver meaningful gains in agricultural productivity, including by reducing costs and lifting the capacity of the land, improve water quality and natural disaster resilience, and preserve the country’s natural heritage.”*

Even with the worst of the pandemic hopefully behind us, the conclusions of the report remain highly relevant to government – namely, the potential of the proposed program of stimulus through conservation to jump-start economic activity and boost labour market outcomes, and the ability of a well-designed employment program targeted on outcomes to deliver long term economic benefits from governments’ conservation and land management investments.

Full details of the costing scenarios, their returns and the methodologies can be found in the full report.

## ALCA’s learning and leadership programs

ALCA is developing two learning and leadership programs which seek to provide early and advanced learning and training opportunities for two streams of conservation professionals, namely:

- Early career professionals entering the on-ground conservation sector for the first time; and
- Emerging and existing leaders within the conservation and land management sector who can benefit from cross-sectoral knowledge and skills, especially those required for sustained collaboration with the corporate sector and those working across cross-cultural boundaries.

The aim of the Programs is to articulate clear development pathways in conservation, as well as widen participants’ diversity of skills and knowledge to help propel the entire sector forwards.

The Programs also seek to offer long term support for participants to help build higher retention rates, which is particularly important in the conservation sector as it struggles to compete on salaries, particularly with a growing sustainability focus from business.

Government input into the Program – including perspectives from government on conservation leadership and policy – will be important to round out the experience of participants as well as prepare them for engaging effectively on conservation issues with government.

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<sup>10</sup> See: <https://workingwithnature.org.au/>; also hosted on ALCA’s website at: <https://alca.org.au/delivering-economic-stimulus-through-the-conservation-and-land-management-sector/>

## Recommendations

1. Commit to serious Federal investment that overcomes Australia's chronic, structural environment budget deficit, with a focus on delivering Australia's '30 x 30' commitment and nature-based climate solutions, combating invasives species and preventing habitat loss.
2. Undertake Treasury modelling of the extent of the Australia's social and economic reliance upon nature and forecast our predicted social and economic trajectory under various scenarios.
3. Extend the benefits of Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status to organisations that are registered on the register of environmental organisations (REO) and are registered charities with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), noting the benefits to talent attraction this would provide to employers in the nature sector working in the public interest (and levelling the playing field for environmental charities with PBIs).
4. In alignment with the formal communique of the 2022 (Australian) Environment Ministers' Meeting<sup>11</sup>, identify incentives to increase private land conservation that address barriers to private and public investment in the private land conservation sector, including:
  - a. Commit to a formal review of conservation taxes by Treasury or the Productivity Commission, in alignment with Recommendation 28d of the *Report of the Independent Review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the 'Samuel Review')<sup>12</sup>.
  - b. Work with the remaining State Governments yet to extend their exemptions to land tax for agricultural land to land for conservation (i.e. Victoria, Queensland, and the ACT).
5. Reverse the approximate 34% drop in government funding for the delivery of environmental studies courses that was implemented under the Job Ready Graduates (JRG) package legislated in 2020<sup>13</sup>.
6. Conclusions of the 2020 Ernst & Young report, *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector* still remain highly relevant and should be drawn upon as a resource for government.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Government's consultation on its Employment White Paper.

ALCA looks forward to ongoing engagement with the Government to ensure that its strategy for Australian productivity and employment accounts for the fundamental importance of nature to our collective prosperity.

### Australian Land Conservation Alliance

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<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/emm-communique-21-oct-2022.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> See: <https://epbcactreview.environment.gov.au/resources/final-report/recommendations>

<sup>13</sup> *Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020*; see:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_LEGislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bld=r6584](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_LEGislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r6584)