



Responses to Boobook Declaration questionnaire

Biodiversity Strategies and Funding

1. Will you sign the Boobook Declaration? Please outline the reasons behind your decision.

Federal Labor acknowledges the threats faced by biodiversity, and supports the intent of improving Australia's response to this challenge. That is why we have introduced a range of policies and programs that give biodiversity the attention it deserves. These include:

- The \$2 billion investment in Caring for our Country.
- The \$180 million investment in the National Reserve System program.
- The \$20 million per annum in the National Environment Research Program which will focus exclusively on biodiversity research.
- The revision of the National Biodiversity Strategy.
- The recently announced National Green Corridors Plan.

Federal Labor considers these appropriate responses to this issue. Consequently, Labor does not support the specific funding arrangements in the Boobook Declaration, nor the specific institutional arrangements it proposes.

2. Given that a poll conducted by WWF and ACF showed 3 out of 4 people support increasing the share of the nation's budget currently spent on nature conservation, what plans does your party have to expand programs such as Caring for Our Country, and what percentage of the Federal budget do you think needs to be committed to biodiversity conservation?

Caring for our Country has a budget of more than \$2 billion over five years to 2013. Labor has ensured that this is an ongoing program which will continue beyond this period, unlike the Coalition's Natural Heritage Trust program which was a terminating program funded only in limited multi-year blocks. Funding for Caring for our Country is reviewed through the annual budget process with future years' funding identified in the forward estimates.

3. How would your party ensure that the responsibility for biodiversity is clearly defined between the three levels of government, that the management of the biodiversity crisis is well coordinated, and that performance against objectives are clearly defined and monitored over the long term?

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And how would your government recognise and support the contribution of the community, including environmental organisations, in advocacy for better protection of biodiversity through reform of laws, policies and programs

Federal Labor will ensure that appropriate coordination, management and monitoring of biodiversity responsibilities occurs through the implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy. Federal Labor has been driving the development of a revised National Biodiversity Strategy through the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council and is seeking to that this Strategy includes the measurable targets necessary to monitor progress in implementing the Strategy. This Strategy will be released once the Ministerial Council processes are complete.

Federal Labor values the role of community organisations in advocacy for better biodiversity protection. Labor provides support to community organisations for their basic costs through a program of Grants for Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations. Labor has significantly increased total funding under this program and has removed the Coalition's policy of excluding advocacy activities from this program.

Effective National Environment Legislation

4. Is your party committed to acting on the reforms recommended by Dr Alan Hawke's review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, including improvements to crucial elements of public interest participation, better protection for critical habitats and strong fisheries assessment processes?

Will your party commit to establishing "Ecosystems of National Significance" as a new protected matter under the EPBC, and also ensure vulnerable ecological communities trigger the Act? Will you commit appropriate investment to fast track the establishment of accurate National Environmental Accounts?

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act is one of the most powerful and fundamental tools for biodiversity protection available to the Federal Government. Late last year, Federal Labor received the final report of Dr Allan Hawke's review of the EPBC Act. Amongst other things, this report recommends linking bioregional planning and strategic assessment to broader environment policy objectives, using environmental markets and offsets arrangements to achieve the desired level of conservation of our precious biodiversity.

The Gillard Labor Government will consider the recommendations of the Hawke review carefully, including those regarding Ecosystems of National Significance, to ensure that our national environmental laws are supporting efficient and effective environment protection and to facilitate sustainable development, while at the same time cutting red tape and increasing certainty for business. We will introduce new legislation into Parliament during our second term to implement any reforms identified to better achieve these objectives.

Federal Labor is investing \$18 million over four years to establish a National Plan for Environmental Information to help protect our precious environmental assets into the future. The National Plan for Environmental Information is the first

step towards long term reform of Australia's environmental information base, and sets us on the path for a system of credible national environmental accounts. Ongoing funding of \$4.4 million per annum will be used to progressively expand activities and maintain this new record of environmental information. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts will implement the reform, and the Bureau of Meteorology will be the central authority for environmental information.

5. Can your party ensure more effective assessments of the impacts of all major, natural resource-based projects on biodiversity? For example, how would you ensure a comprehensive assessment is undertaken for a project burning woodchips for energy production at both Eden and Orbst?

The Australian Government's responsibilities for environmental protection are defined in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act), which constitutes our national environment law. Under the EPBC Act, the Australian Government's role is confined to the protection of certain defined matters of 'national environmental significance'. These matters include world and national heritage properties, wetlands of international importance (listed under the Ramsar Convention), nationally threatened species and ecological communities, migratory species listed under the EPBC Act, nuclear actions and Commonwealth marine areas.

Only proposals that are likely to have a significant impact on one or more matters of national environmental significance must be referred to the federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWAH) for assessment. A project involving the burning of woodchips for energy production would only fall within the jurisdiction of the Australian Government if it would have, or was likely to have, a significant impact on one or more matters protected by the EPBC Act. All other environmental matters are the responsibility of the relevant State or Territory government.

As Federal Labor's record demonstrates, all proposals that fall within federal jurisdiction are rigorously assessed under the terms of national environmental law. If a detailed environmental assessment is required, once completed it is then rigorously reviewed by the federal DEWAH and specific advice, including all public comments, is provided to the Minister. The Minister will only make a decision on whether or not a proposal can proceed if he or she has all relevant information before him to make a properly informed and legally robust decision under our national environmental law. In making decisions of this kind and setting conditions on those proposals that are approved, the Minister always carefully considers the various reports, public comments, departmental and independent advice provided to him on relevant environmental, social and economic matters, while also paying regard to the overriding objects of the EPBC Act, including the precautionary principle and the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

6. Evidence has shown that state regulations and laws are often inadequate for protecting of biodiversity, for example in the case of Victoria's Brown Mountain.

How will you ensure the states protect our endangered species and will you intervene in cases where there is likely to be long-term environmental damage as a result of state mismanagement?

Federal Labor will ensure that it always administers Commonwealth laws and responsibilities with diligence and rigour. In cases where impacts on endangered species are required to be considered under Commonwealth law, Federal Labor will maintain a high standard of regulatory protection, as it has to date.

Supporting Biodiversity in a Changing Climate

7. There are a plethora of international reports including the World Bank Report “Convenient solutions to an Inconvenient Truth” substantiating the critical role of large intact natural systems in climate change mitigation AND adaptation. Substantial reports exist on the sequestration capabilities of Australia’s forests and outback. To date this issue has been completely absent from climate responses, will your party take up the issue of how nature conservation can positively contribute to Australia’s carbon reduction as well as assist in building ecosystem and species resilience? What plans does your party have to provide pathways for climate adaptation for Australia's threatened species, and how much funding will your party commit to providing avenues for climate adaptation?

8. Connectivity Conservation or landscape scale conservation is an internationally endorsed approach to address habitat fragmentation and provide species the best chance of adaptation. It is also an inclusive approach to conservation, which can cross many land tenures and involve all components of Australian society. Will your party promote the concept and provide adequate funding for the major community effort required to realise large scale biodiversity ‘corridors’?

In response to 7 and 8:

Federal Labor has announced that green corridors will be established across the Australian landscape to provide habitats for native plants and animals threatened by climate change. A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will invest \$10 million in a National Green Corridors plan, to build the resilience of our environment to a changing climate.

Labor will work with the 56 regional natural resource management groups to develop a National Green Corridors plan to prepare our native plants and animals, as well as our agricultural landscapes for climate change. Green Corridors will link up national parks and reserves with well managed private land. Farmers will be encouraged to participate on a voluntary basis through incentives such as stewardship payments, capital grants or support from volunteer conservation organisations.

A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will work in consultation with the community, through regional natural resource management groups, to develop the climate change adaptation plan on a continental scale. A National Green Corridors Plan will be developed by an advisory group including broad expertise, with both scientists and regional natural resource management groups represented. It will consider climate change impacts and identify critical linkages in the landscape to allow the migration of species.

The National Green Corridors Plan will also aim to protect natural stores of carbon in native ecosystems to minimise our greenhouse gas emissions. As the National Green Corridors Plan is being finalised, the Federal Government will support regional natural resource management groups to revise their regional plans to help implement these climate change

corridors at the regional, State and national scale. This approach will be piloted in at least one region to test its effectiveness.

Threatened Species Recovery

9. Do you support fully funding recovery plans for all legally recognised threatened species and ecosystems? If not, how would you ensure recovery of threatened species? Do you support threat abatement plans for all legally recognised threatened species and ecosystems? If not, how would you manage threats such as land clearing, invasive plants and animals and long-line fishing?

Recovery plans are prepared for listed threatened species on the advice of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC), a body comprised of Australia's leading biodiversity experts. In some cases the TSSC recommends the preparation of conservation advices rather than recovery plans, and these decisions are always made on the basis of the individual circumstances of the threatened species in question. The Gillard Labor Government remains committed to the development and implementation of recovery plans as recommended by the TSSC, and has been working actively with State, Territory and local governments, and with local community organisations and other stakeholders to put these plans into effect.

Threat abatement plans are developed to respond to specific identified threats, and are prepared on the independent advice of the TSSC. The Gillard Labor Government continues to work to implement threat abatement plans and to proactively work to identify and respond to key threats to our precious biodiversity.

10. Will your party commit to improve the status threatened species through adequate funding of on-ground community action, research and monitoring?

Federal Labor provides funding for action to protect threatened species and their habitat through Caring for our Country. This is an ongoing program and the adequacy of funding for it is reviewed annually through the Budget process.

Regarding research, biodiversity research has become the focus of the newly established National Environment Research Program, which is funded to approximately \$20 million per annum.

11. Do you accept that continuing land clearing and logging of Australian native forests makes a substantial contribution to our greenhouse gas emissions? Given that a halt of these activities could reduce our greenhouse emissions by about 16% , will you move to control these activities in the next term of the Australian Government?

12. Will you commit to finalising the transition of the logging industry out of publicly owned native forests and into the plantation estate before the end of 2011?

In response to 11 and 12:

Federal Labor recognises both the environmental and economic importance of our native forest resources. We believe in a balanced and sustainable approach to native forest management. This includes ensuring the conservation and sustainable management of Australia's forest resources, as well as maintaining support for forest industries and jobs into the future.

Major native forest areas in NSW, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania are managed under the 20-year Regional Forest Agreements (RFA) between the Commonwealth and the States. That framework provides for the sustainable management of these forests and recognises their importance in protecting biodiversity and supporting regional jobs, tourism and recreation industries.

The RFAs also protect significant reserves containing old growth forests, areas of high biodiversity and wilderness. The Bureau of Rural Sciences publication *Australia's Forests at a Glance 2010* notes that 73 per cent, of Australia's old growth forests are in formal or informal reserves.

The Gillard Labor Government remains highly supportive of Regional Forest Agreements and will continue to strongly support them, to ensure a balanced and sustainable approach to forest management.

Will you revise the decision to allow the burning of native forests to be classed as renewable energy and thereby gaining RECs and competing with sustainable renewable energy sources?

The Renewable Energy Target (RET) includes specific eligibility criteria in relation to the use of native forest wood waste to ensure that the scheme does not provide an incentive to clear native vegetation.

Treatment of wood-fired generation under the enhanced RET is unchanged from the previous Mandatory Renewable Energy Target – wood waste and energy crops (which includes plantation biomass) are eligible renewable energy sources under the enhanced RET scheme.

The RET explicitly excludes biomass from a native forest being eligible as a purpose-grown energy crop. It also includes specific eligibility criteria in relation to the use of wood waste from native forests, including the use of a 'high-value test', to ensure that only genuine wastes from sustainable forestry operations are eligible.

Action on Key Environmental Issues

13. Australia is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity and has signed on to the target of all nations to the establishment and maintenance by 2010 for terrestrial and by 2012 for marine areas of comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas. How do you plan to honour this global undertaking? The National Reserve System is our principal mechanism to ensure adequate sanctuaries for nature conservation and at the same time support other values such as water catchments, tourism and recreation. Will your party continue to support this vital program, and given its centrality, at what level of funding?

Through the National Reserve System program, Federal Labor has quadrupled investment in acquiring new areas as national parks and reserves – critical reservoirs of biodiversity. Since coming to Government we have added 3.4 million hectares to Australia's conservation estate, including the two million hectare Warddeken and Djelk Indigenous Protected Areas in Arnhem Land. The National Reserve System program is targeted to under-represented bioregions with the objective of developing a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system. The program has \$180 million committed to it over five years to 2013.

Federal Labor is committed to establishing a representative system of marine protected areas in Commonwealth waters by 2012. We will continue a thorough and balanced consultation process with stakeholders and the wider community to establish a shared vision for ocean health, ocean use and ocean protection, and the identification of new economic opportunities.

We will use a scientifically driven process that determines the location and size of marine parks. The highest level of conservation protection will be provided for the most sensitive and special areas. We will continue to allow sustainable fishing in other areas that will benefit from the healthy fish stocks that the marine park network supports.

A re-elected Gillard Labor will release a draft plan for the South West Marine Bioregion, and finalise the remainder of the marine bioregional plans - North, Northwest and East - by December 2011.

14. If elected, what will you do to stop state governments driving development and population growth into acknowledged environmentally sensitive areas, especially urban fringe areas such as Macedon Ranges in Victoria and the Swan Coastal Plain around Perth? Where development in these areas compromises high biodiversity and conservation values, or increases the risks associated with development of fire-prone areas, what will you do to provide protection for such areas at Federal level?

Since coming to office, the Federal Labor Government has been actively promoting a shift from a traditional project-by-project approval regime, which is essentially reactive, to a more strategic approach to biodiversity conservation. Strategic assessments of this kind enable biodiversity protection to be planned for at a landscape scale. Such assessments include consideration of a very broad range of factors including all federally protected environmental matters likely to be significantly impacted by the proposal and, where relevant, factors such as fire risk.

Strategic assessments have been initiated to respond to urban growth pressures in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra, and discussions are now underway with other States and Territories for further strategic assessments. Strategic assessments were never used by the Coalition when in government.

15. With (i) invasive species a major and growing threat to biodiversity, (ii) the recognition by the Beale review of Australian quarantine that environmental biosecurity capacity lags well behind that of business-focused biosecurity and (iii) the finding by the Hawke review of the EPBC Act that there are major gaps in laws regulating invasive species, what would your government do in terms of law reform and program funding to reduce the invasive species threat to biodiversity?

The Government is continuing to work to address the threats posed by invasive species. The Gillard Labor Government is currently preparing a detailed response to the recommendations of the Hawke Review, and if re-elected we will ensure that any reforms to the EPBC Act to strengthen biosecurity are consistent with the recommendations of the Beale Review. The Government will respond to the recommendations of the Hawke Review this year.

Funding for reducing the ecological impact of invasive species is available under Caring for our Country. The largest single investment under this program has been a \$19 million contribution to reducing the ecological impact of feral camels in Central Australia.

16. Empirical evidence has shown that indigenous involvement, including real jobs, in land and sea management not only has major environmental benefits in Australia but has very significant social and health benefits such as less substance abuse, domestic violence, crime and higher school attendance and general health and well being. It is a landscape of hope and a genuine good news story. Will your government continue support of this important program and at what level?

Supporting Indigenous Australians to undertake land and sea management is a priority for Federal Labor. Just over \$160 million (8 per cent) of the \$2 billion Caring for our Country Business Program funds the following Indigenous specific programs over five years:

- Working on Country - \$90 million.
- Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) - \$50 million.
- Indigenous Emissions Trading (IET) – \$10 million.
- Traditional Marine Resource Uses in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) - \$10 million.

These programs will continue under a re-elected Labor Government. We draw your attention to the following specific achievements:

- Since Labor came to power 14 Indigenous Protected Areas covering 3,021,089 ha have been added to the National Reserve System. A further 38 IPA consultation projects are under way through community negotiations and planning. These proposed IPAs have the potential to add millions of hectares of Indigenous owned land and sea country to the National Reserve System. By providing funding for the next four years for declared IPAs we are showing the confidence we have in these Indigenous communities and their ability to deliver environmental outcomes.
- Currently, there are 66 Working on Country projects approved across Australia. The total number of approved Indigenous ranger positions being approximately 630. This is more than double Labor's 2007 election commitment.
- The Indigenous Emissions Trading program provides \$10 million over five years to facilitate participation of Indigenous land managers in carbon markets. The commitment is delivered in two project streams. The primary stream is the Indigenous Fire Management in Northern Australia project which aims to generate carbon market opportunities through traditional fire management and involves emissions research across four regions from the Kimberley to Cape York. The second stream, Indigenous Carbon Market Participation, supports Indigenous people with an interest in reforestation opportunities under emerging carbon markets on Indigenous land across Australia.
- Regional NRM bodies received \$138 million in base-level funding, of which nearly \$13 million (9 per cent) was identified as having a clear Indigenous component. \$83 million funded successful competitive and land care grants, of which \$9 million (11 per cent) was approved for projects with a clear Indigenous focus.