

RENEWABLES NATION: FAST, BEST, JUST

Overview

WWF-Australia has a vision that, by 2026, Australia is an active leader in the region and globally for the transition to a thriving and resilient net-zero world. A cornerstone of this vision is that, by the end of 2026, COP31 engages millions to deliver a regenerative and inclusive approach for global climate action.¹

As part of the international WWF Network, WWF-Australia works at speed and scale to reduce emissions, build resilience for people and nature, and ensure that the clean energy transition is fast, best, and just. We work with a range of stakeholders from Indigenous and Local Communities within Australia and our near region to a range of corporates, to decision-makers at all levels of government, to academics across many fields, and with relevant global processes such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Changing 'business-as-usual' planning and systemic structures is essential to address the fundamental existential crisis of a climatic system in peril, which threatens biodiversity conservation and reliable food production. WWF's *Living Planet Report 2022*² highlighted the 69% decline in average population sizes of wildlife across the globe over the past 50 years. This loss of biodiversity, and of the natural carbon uptake and storage enabled by healthy ecosystems, exacerbates the climate crisis. The World Economic Forum estimated that half the world's GDP is dependent upon healthy nature³.

The latest and best science confirms that Australia has from 2023 to 2038 to decarbonise our greenhouse gas emissions. A pathway for Australia to do its fair share to help stabilise warming to 1.5°C requires at least a 75% reduction relative to 2005 levels by 2030, 90% below 2005 levels by

¹ <https://www.wwf.org.au/blogs/australians-should-rally-behind-bid-to-host-cop31/>

² *Living Planet Report 2022* WWF-Australia

³ *Nature Risk Rising- Why the Crisis Engulfing Nature Matters for Business and the Economy*, World Economic Forum 2020

2025, and net zero by 2038⁴. The transition is a global race and Australia needs to keep its promises to the global community, while delivering just, inclusive, and equitable outcomes.

While the world is increasingly embracing clean energy solutions and decarbonising the means of production in innovative ways, how this transition occurs will be critical to impactful climate action. The speed and scale necessary to become a renewable energy fuelled export economy will place pressure on ecosystems, and the location and connectivity of clean energy infrastructure must be beneficial to communities. The clean energy revolution needs to be fast, best, and just if we are to rapidly reduce the effects of a changing climate. Undertaking a 'just transition' of systemic change at scale "depends on environmental and social policies being mutually reinforcing, not contradictory"⁵.

WWF-Australia's Renewables Nation program has delivered significant impact since 2019 and following the election of the new Federal government the momentum on climate ambition has shifted. For Australia to realise its *renewable energy superpower* potential, it will need to ensure that the intersection between the speed and scale of the rollout, and its impact on biodiversity and local communities and particularly for First Nations communities, is managed effectively. These issues are not unique to Australia. Internationally, WWF has been working with major renewables developers and other conservation and Indigenous organisations to bring these issues to attention and seek urgent resolution.

LAUNCH OF CLEANaction COALITION

In May WWF-International alongside Iberdrola, Ørsted, the Alliance for Rural Electrification (ARE), Birdlife International, ICLEI-Cities Biodiversity Center, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Nordic Energy Research, the PanAfrican Climate Justice Alliance and Spoor launched a global report called CLEANaction.⁶

Key Findings

- Jointly solving the **energy crisis, the nature crisis, and the climate crisis** is critical to a healthy planet and our future prosperity. The much-needed transition to 100% renewable energy offers opportunities to provide access to clean, efficient, reliable, and affordable energy while also protecting biodiversity.
- **Decisive action is needed this decade to hold global warming below 1.5°C** and avert the most catastrophic impacts of climate change. To meet this target, renewable energy will need to account for more than 90 per cent of electricity generation by 2050.
- Fossil fuels are at the centre of the climate emergency and the current crisis of energy security and cost. In comparison, even when considering the full range of environmental impacts, renewables cause **significantly less disruption and damage to nature than fossil fuels**.
- **Wind and solar photovoltaics (PV) have the lowest impacts on nature and should be prioritised for the energy transition**, although other renewables can be the most appropriate

⁴ [20230612 WWF-Aus-Targets \(climate-resource.com\)](https://www.wwf.org.au/what-we-do/energy/2023/06/12/wwf-aus-targets-climate-resource-com).

⁵ *The Transition Away from Oil & Gas: A WWF Network Policy Position*, May 2021

https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_policy_position_the_transition_away_from_oil_gas.pdf
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⁶ [Shift to renewable energy must protect nature, says clean energy coalition | WWF \(panda.org\)](https://www.wwf.org.au/what-we-do/energy/2023/06/12/wwf-aus-targets-climate-resource-com)

solution depending upon the local circumstances and sustainability principles applied. Renewables can build resilience, create energy access, alleviate energy poverty, and provide greater energy security than fossil fuels.

- There are **enough sites available for wind and solar that also have a low impact on nature** to allow us to achieve International Energy Agency projections for a power system that can limit temperature rise to 1.5°C - a crucial threshold to avoid the worst impacts for people and nature.
- We must develop the **right types of renewables in the right places in the right way**. Early planning is key to ensure that the most appropriate technologies are used to minimise risks and avoid impacts on local communities and nature.
- We need to **change how materials are traced and sourced** and move towards a more energy efficient and circular economic model.

Recommendations

The CLEANaction Coalition is calling on governments to:

- **Undertake strategic-level energy planning at national or regional scales** to identify potential energy savings, suitable renewable energy sources, and sites for energy expansion in areas of low biodiversity sensitivity.
- **Consider the impact on nature at the earliest stage** of integrated clean energy planning, taking account of the full value chain (from sourcing material to disposal).
- **Develop national regulatory schemes** that require energy developers to contribute to national conservation targets.
- **Invest in timely nature-sensitivity mapping** to help direct technology siting through proper data, and require industry to avoid protected areas, Key Biodiversity Areas, and other areas of sensitivity and value.
- **Apply stringent environmental impact assessment processes** and required standards to all new developments according to best practice.
- **Adopt a circular economy approach with optimised energy efficiency**, to maximise reuse of energy materials, and minimise demand for natural resources.

The CLEANaction Coalition is calling on renewable energy investors and developers to:

- **Integrate biodiversity, social and environmental risks** early into renewable energy planning and investment decisions.
- **Apply effective biodiversity safeguards** and environmental impact assessment procedures to avoid and minimise impacts and offset any residual impacts to achieve net-positive outcomes.
- **Ensure there is traceability of raw materials** and account for supply chain impacts within corporate commitments to nature.
- **Apply a circular approach** to minimise the use of primary materials and maximise the reuse and recycling of materials.
- **Strengthen corporate disclosure and reporting** on biodiversity, environmental and social impacts.

All stakeholders should promote research, knowledge sharing and diffusion of best practice to encourage greater awareness and motivation towards the expansion of renewable energy with least negative disruption to nature.

Next Steps – Australian Action Needed

There are several actions that WWF is engaging with, namely:

- a. Engagement on regional planning review and mapping process: The Federal Government has committed to 3 pilots where bioregions will be mapped/zoned for RE development (green, amber, red) with some state governments (most likely WA, Qld, and NSW) to partner on this work. WWF can utilise our considerable mapping/GIS experience (e.g., with species and habitats) to positively shape this process and ensure the substantially planned increase in renewable energy is developed under appropriate conditions and expectations.
- b. An RE development principles & PPA (Power Purchase agreement)/procurement toolkit developed in collaboration with the [Business Renewables Centre-Australia](#) for corporate buyers. Too many renewable energy projects are proposed in places that have good sun or wind resource but are poorly situated in terms of nature and community impacts. WWF can help energy buyers '*raise the bar*' – to ensure the best projects move quickly (and poor projects are held back).
- c. Continued engagement with key government and industry stakeholders such as Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC), Federal and State energy and industry departments, Infrastructure Sustainability Council, major infrastructure head contractors (AECOM, CPB, etc.), Clean Energy Council and their members, Smart Energy Council, etc. to understand concerns and collaborate to ensure every project delivered highest standard outcomes.
- d. Support First Nations communities through organisations such as [First Nations Clean Energy Network](#)⁷ and [Original Power](#) to support best practice principles and ensure projects provide economic and social benefits, mutual respect, clear communication, cultural and environmental considerations, landcare, business employment opportunities and free, prior and informed consent.
- e. Develop an Australian chapter of the CLEANaction Coalition to focus on how best practice renewables, green metals and green minerals development can intersect with minimising impacts on biodiversity through showcasing great examples, and putting in place effective assessment systems that do not derail the overall objective of ensuring we move quickly towards a clean energy future.

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⁷ https://www.firstnationscleanenergy.org.au/network_guides