



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

NSW National Parks Establishment Plan



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.





Contents

Executive summary	6
Introduction	7
Part A: Strategic context	11
1. International context	12
2. National context	14
3. State context	16
Part B: Regional context	25
4. How regions shape National Park and Wildlife Service decisions	26
Part C: Benefits and opportunities of growing the national park estate	45
5. How growing the national park estate strengthens communities	46
6. National Park and Wildlife Service conservation opportunities	52
7. Linking benefits and opportunities to decision-making	54
Part D: Assessment themes and priority actions	55
8. How we assess land for the national park estate	56
9. Theme: Areas of high conservation value	59
10. Theme: Ecological connectivity and resilience	62
11. Theme: Cultural heritage	65
12. Theme: Management effectiveness	67
13. Theme: Restoration and rehabilitation	69
14. Theme: Climate change adaptation and mitigation	71
15. Theme: Visitor experience value	73
Part E: Resourcing the national park estate	75
16. Land expansion methods	76
17. Lifecycle of protected area management	78
18. The NPWS Service Delivery Framework	79

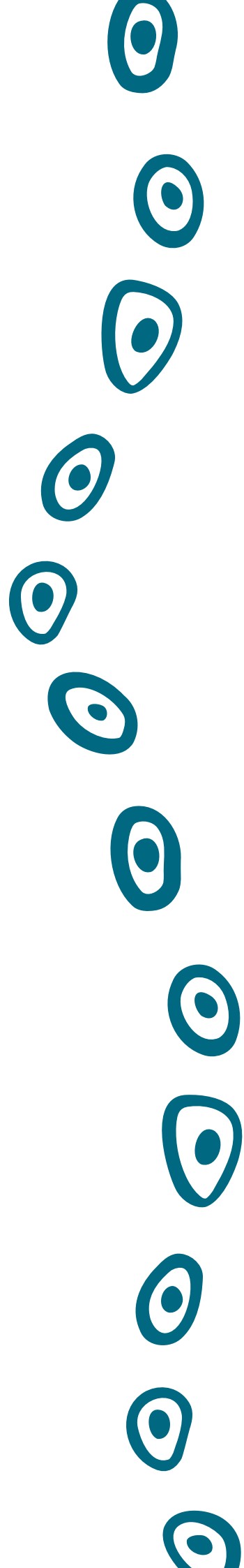


Part F: Evaluation and reporting **86**

About the cultural illustrations and stories	88
Glossary	90
Acronyms and initialisms	93
References	94
Appendix 1: National park estate growth since 2008	97
Appendix 2: Key statistics overview	98
Appendix 3: Ecological modelling	106

List of tables

Table 1. Summary of NPWS economic and employment contribution (2021–22)	49
Table 2. Priority actions for areas of high conservation value	60
Table 3. Priority actions for ecological connectivity and resilience	63
Table 4. Priority actions for cultural heritage across all regions	66
Table 5. Priority actions for management effectiveness across all regions	68
Table 6. Priority actions for restoration and rehabilitation across all regions	70
Table 7. Priority actions for climate change adaptation and mitigation across all regions	72
Table 8. Priority actions for visitor experience value across all regions	74
Table 9. Land acquired and reserved, guided by the National Parks Establishment Plan (2008)	97
Table 10. NPWS reservation statistics for IBRA bioregions across the national park estate conservation planning regions (March 2026)	102
Table 11. NPWS reservation statistics for IBRA subregions across the conservation planning regions (March 2026)	104
Table 12. Data layers that inform National Parks Establishment Plan ecological modelling (March 2026)	106



List of figures

Figure 1	NSW National Park Estate (April 2026)	22
Figure 2	The 5 national park estate conservation planning regions	27
Figure 3	Bioregions of the Far West national park estate conservation planning region	29
Figure 4	Bioregions of the Central Western plains national park estate conservation planning region	32
Figure 5	Bioregions of the Tablelands and Western Slopes national park estate conservation planning region	35
Figure 6	Bioregions of the Coast and Coastal Ranges national park estate conservation planning region	39
Figure 7	Bioregions of the Australian Alps national park estate conservation planning region	42
Figure 8	NPWS conservation opportunity areas across NSW (March 2026)	53
Figure 9	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia bioregion protection in the NSW national park estate (March 2026)	101
Figure 10	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia subregion protection in the NSW national park estate (March 2026)	103



Executive summary

The New South Wales (NSW) National Parks Establishment Plan sets out our long-term strategy to grow and strengthen the national park estate so it can continue to protect the state's most significant natural and living cultural landscapes. As the core of NSW's broader public and private protected area system, the national park estate plays a critical role in safeguarding our biodiversity and cultural heritage. This Plan provides a clear, evidence-informed approach for assessing land to add to the national park estate. It also informs how that land is managed under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act), helping NSW contribute meaningfully to national and international biodiversity commitments.

NSW's system of public and private protected areas is essential to stopping biodiversity decline, supporting healthy ecosystems, protecting cultural heritage, and giving communities and visitors places to connect with Country. But many ecosystems and cultural landscapes remain under-represented or vulnerable to growing pressures such as climate change, land-use change, and fragmentation. Addressing these gaps is essential to delivering a comprehensive, adequate, and representative protected area system.

The 2026 National Parks Establishment Plan updates and expands upon the foundational 2008 Plan by including the latest science, climate projections, cultural knowledge, and ecological, social and economic considerations.

It aligns with NSW's broader policy direction for nature, recognising that protecting nature and culture means looking after whole landscapes across both public and private land.

Central to the Plan is a set of assessment themes used to evaluate land that may be added to the national park estate. These themes ensure investment is well-targeted, transparent, and guided by both ecological and cultural priorities.

The Plan further outlines how the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) will resource, implement, and evaluate the creation and management of new protected areas. To support accountability and ongoing improvement, progress will be monitored and reported each year, with a full review of the Plan every 5 years.

Overall, this Plan provides a clear and practical way to grow, connect and effectively manage the national park estate so nature, culture, and communities can thrive for generations.

Have your say

Community feedback on the draft National Parks Establishment Plan is invited. You can make a submission or complete the online survey via: [Have Your Say](#)



Introduction

Protected areas are recognised internationally as the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation (CBD n.d.). They represent one of our biggest investments in conserving nature. They support human health and wellbeing, keep cultural connections and livelihoods strong, and protect the ecosystems that economies depend on.

Protected areas also reduce physical risks by stabilising catchments, helping buffer extreme heat and fire, and maintaining connected landscapes so that ecosystems cope better with a changing climate.

Beyond the support they provide for the environment, protected areas also make a major contribution to the global economy, particularly through nature-based tourism.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN; Dudley 2008) 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.

The NSW national park estate is the result of 147 years of work by governments, community groups, and individuals. It began in 1879 with the creation of Royal National Park, Australia's oldest national park and the foundation of the state's protected area system.

These protected areas provide important habitat for native plants and animals. About 85% of all threatened species in the state occur within the national park estate, which also contains many of our most intact and threatened ecosystems. The national park estate is also one of NSW's largest carbon stores, storing around 900 megatonnes of forest carbon (NPWS 2021).

NSW's protected areas are popular visitor destinations, attracting 65.6 million domestic visits in 2024–25. Broader estimates from 2021–22 indicate these areas contribute around \$19.5 billion in economic activity and support more than 62,000 jobs across the economy (see Part C).

Protected areas also provide important health and wellbeing benefits. The annual health services value of Australia's protected areas has been estimated at \$145 billion (Rosengreen 2019).

Aboriginal cultural heritage spans more than 65,000 years of connection to Country. With over 24,000 Aboriginal sites recorded and 51 Aboriginal places declared, NPWS and Aboriginal communities work in partnership to manage and protect Country. Recognising that the national park estate is part of a broader Aboriginal cultural landscape.

The national park estate also protects historic buildings and sites, geological heritage, public open space for nature-based visitor experiences, and resources for scientific study and education.



The National Parks and Wildlife Service

Established in 1967, NPWS is one of the world's oldest and most respected protected area management agencies. It was created by bringing together the Fauna Protection Panel and the Parks and Reserves Branch of the NSW Lands Department. By the end of 1967, NPWS managed around 70 reserves under the NPW Act, most of which came from these earlier agencies. This early estate included core parts of several well-known protected areas, such as Blue Mountains National Park, Kosciuszko National Park, Morton National Park and Royal National Park.

Today, the national park estate covers 8.45 million hectares under the NPW Act. It includes more than 897 national parks and reserves, 4 World Heritage-listed sites and 17 Ramsar wetlands.

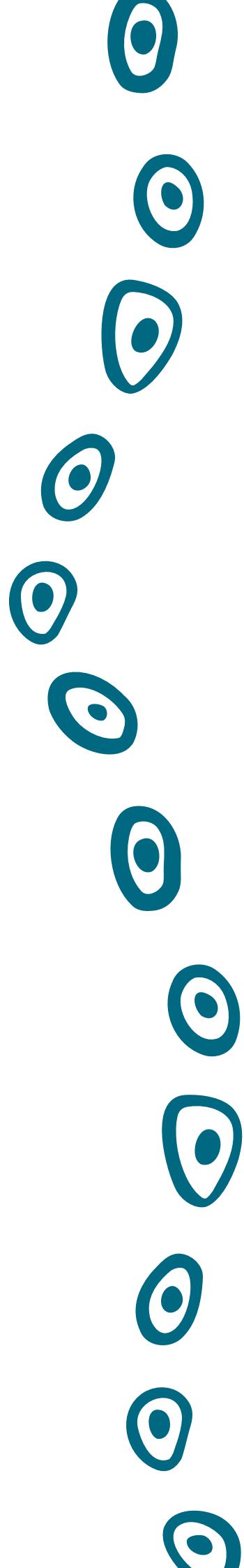
NPWS manages the national park estate through work such as:

- conserving native plants and animals
- caring for cultural heritage
- undertaking feral animal, weed and fire management
- supporting sustainable tourism and visitation
- conducting research and education
- coordinating volunteer programs.

The strength of NPWS management has been recognised internationally. Three protected areas managed by NPWS are on the IUCN Green List – the global standard for well-managed protected and conserved areas: Cape Byron State Conservation Area, Arakwal National Park, and Baranguba Montague Island Nature Reserve.

The effective management of the national park estate is underpinned by strong partnerships with other land managers, Aboriginal traditional owners, communities, and businesses.

NPWS recognises Aboriginal people as the original custodians of the lands and waters, animals and plants, and diverse landscapes of NSW. Each Aboriginal community has its own culture, traditions, and laws linked to the land. NPWS also recognises the deep and ongoing relationship Aboriginal people have with Country, a connection between culture, land, and everyday life.



The National Parks Establishment Plan

The NSW National Parks Establishment Plan (the Plan) sets out a strategic roadmap for the next 25 years and will guide how the conservation landscape evolves across our state.

The Plan builds upon the *NSW National Parks Establishment Plan 2008* by updating NPWS' priorities for future investment and responding to current opportunities and challenges. The Plan also aligns closely with the NPW Act, and the goals and purposes set out in the Act.

Goal

To build an ecologically representative and well-connected national park estate to effectively conserve biodiversity in NSW and form the core of a broader system of protected areas across both public and private lands, as well as other conservation measures. Together these systems will help to:

- conserve and manage biodiversity
- maintain ecosystem functions and services
- protect socially and culturally important landscapes, places, and sites
- respect the rights of Aboriginal peoples and local communities.

These outcomes must be delivered in line with the principles of ecologically sustainable development and the broader public interest.

The Plan will play a key role in supporting the NSW plan for nature (NSW Government 2024), the NSW Nature Strategy (in draft), and NSW's ambition to restore nature. It will do this by expanding and improving an ecologically representative and well-connected network of protected areas across public and private land.

The Plan is divided into 6 parts:

- **Part A: Strategic context** – describes the policy framework in which the national park estate operates.
- **Part B: Regional context** – describes the regional context in which the national park estate operates including the key ecological, social, economic and cultural characteristics that define the 5 national park estate conservation planning regions.
- **Part C: Benefits and opportunities of growing the national park estate** – outlines the various environmental, social, cultural, economic and other benefits of growing the national park estate and NPWS's conservation opportunities.
- **Part D: Assessment themes and priority actions** – describes the 7 themes that guide the assessment of land to add to the national park estate and sets out priority actions for future investment.

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- **Part E: Resourcing the national park estate** – sets out resourcing considerations needed to implement the Plan.
 - **Part F: Evaluation and reporting** – explains how the Plan will be evaluated and reported on over time.

How this Plan will be used

The NSW Government will use the Plan to guide strategic decision making.

The Plan brings together multiple layers of information to guide decision-making about the growth of the national park estate. It will inform decisions about land assessment, purchases, transfer, reservation, and other aspects of managing the national park estate.

Part A: Strategic context





1. International context

The Australian Government is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a global treaty that requires countries to promote and develop strategies to conserve and use biodiversity sustainably.

In 2010, United Nations CBD Parties agreed to Aichi Target 11 which called for 17% of land and 10% of marine areas to be protected by 2020.

As countries met Target 11's land coverage goal, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was developed.

In 2020 the GBF introduced Target 3 (the 30 by 30 target), where signatories will:

- conserve **30% of land** and **30% of marine areas** by **2030** through creating networks of protected and conserved areas
- recognise and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities over their traditional lands and waters.

The GBF also sets a target to restore 30% of all degraded ecosystems by 2030, Target 2. Under Target 2, countries will improve biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity, and connectivity.

The GBF points out that stopping the decline of biodiversity globally requires action across all types of land tenure. Public and private protected areas alone will not be enough. High-value conservation areas outside of public and private protected areas can also play a role, and the GBF recognises this through promoting or incentivising biodiversity conservation alongside other land uses.

Under the GBF, the responsibility for halting and reversing biodiversity loss is shared across governments and private sectors, land managers, researchers, Aboriginal people, consumers, and all members of the community.

Protected areas also contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, set out in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UN 2020).

1.1 Protected area categories and levels of protection

The IUCN provides a global framework for classifying protected areas based on their management goals. The system includes categories that range from areas set aside for strict conservation (category Ia) to areas that allow sustainable use of natural resources (category VI).

In NSW, land is reserved under the NPW Act as a particular protected area category. These categories define the main purpose of the land, what uses are allowed, and the level of protection it is given.

The NPWS protected area categories include:

- national parks
- nature reserves
- regional parks
- state conservation areas
- Aboriginal areas
- historic sites
- karst conservation reserves.

Each NPWS protected area category is matched with the most relevant IUCN category. This provides an international reference point for understanding the intended level of protection, how the area should be managed, and the types of uses that are allowed. It also supports consistency with global conservation standards.

How NPWS determines protected area categories

When land is added to the national park estate, NPWS determines the most appropriate protected area category, often in collaboration with Traditional Owners. This decision is based on the land's biodiversity, cultural values, and management needs.

The selected category aligns with the land's values and sets out how it should be protected and used. Different categories exist because some places need very high levels of protection, while others can support a wider range of uses.

For further information visit: [Different parks, different purposes](#)



2. National context

The National Reserve System is Australia's network of formal protected areas. Its goal is to develop a comprehensive, adequate, and representative (CAR) system of protected areas that secures long-term protection for Australia's land-based biodiversity.

The National Reserve System applies CAR principles to guide how protected areas are added across Australia.

- 'Comprehensive' 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.
- 'Adequate' 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.
- 'Representative' 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).

These principles provide the scientific basis for creating a balanced and resilient network of protected areas.

The National Reserve System also provides general guidance for establishing protected areas:

- boundaries should be set with strong ecological integrity (for example, by including the headwaters of catchments)
- larger protected areas are preferable, although a range of sizes may be needed to adequately sample conservation values
- boundaries should be simple/practical and avoid long narrow shapes, unless they protect rivers and ecological corridors
- each protected area should meet as many conservation criteria as possible
- impacts from processes that threaten biodiversity should be minimised (particularly from adjoining areas)
- protected areas should be integrated with broader landscape-scale conservation efforts.

The CAR principles underpin how land is assessed in this Plan and guide NPWS in building a CAR protected area system for NSW.

In October 2022, Environment Ministers from all Australian states and territories agreed to work together to protect and conserve 30% of Australia's land and 30% of its marine areas by 2030. A national roadmap now guides collaborative action toward the land-based part of this 30 by 30 target (Commonwealth of Australia 2024). Each state or territory can decide how it will contribute based on its own circumstances.



The roadmap focuses on:

- protecting areas that are particularly important for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services
- increasing protection in IBRA bioregions and subregions that do not have full representation of ecosystems
- improving connection between existing protected areas by establishing new protected or conserved areas.

As of June 2024, 22.6% of Australia's landmass, or 173.4 million hectares, was protected in the National Reserve System. To meet the 30% target, another 57 million hectares is to be protected or conserved. The challenge is not just the scale of land required but ensuring that new protected areas are rich in biodiversity and not vulnerable to future human and climate impacts. Meeting this ambitious national 30% target will require substantial additions to Australia's National Reserve System.

In consultation with Australian states and territories, the Australian Government has mapped biodiversity values and how well different ecosystems are represented to support the enhancement of Australia's protected areas (DCCEEW 2026b). These maps will help inform future decision making. NSW is working with the Australian Government and neighbouring states and territories to support conservation outcomes.



3. State context

NSW has exceptional biodiversity, with around 11.3% of the State's land area under permanent protection across public and private tenures (CAPAD 2024). This includes the national park estate, Indigenous Protected Areas and private land conservation agreements.

While comparisons between states and territories have limitations due to differences in landscapes, settlement histories, land tenure, and socio-economic factors, the overall level of permanent protection in NSW remains relatively low compared to many other Australian jurisdictions. Strengthening and expanding the protected area system is essential to improving ecological representation, building resilience to climate change, and safeguarding natural and cultural heritage across NSW.

In NSW, the national park estate is a key component of the land-based National Reserve System. It is established through the reservation of land under the NPW Act, and may have local, state, national, or international significance.

Protected areas that make up the national park estate contribute to biodiversity conservation, ecological connectivity, cultural heritage protection, climate resilience, and a range of social and economic benefits, including nature-based tourism and visitor experiences.

NPWS will continue to add and reserve land to expand protected areas. Additions to the national park estate will focus on:

- areas of high conservation value, such as threatened species habitat, threatened ecological communities, wetlands, river systems, groundwater-dependent ecosystems and areas with important geodiversity and subterranean values
- areas that support ecological connectivity and resilience
- areas that support restoration and rehabilitation
- places with important cultural heritage values (Aboriginal, historic, and shared)
- areas that improve the effectiveness and efficiency of protected area management
- areas important for climate change adaptation and that reduce climate impacts
- areas that support ecologically sustainable visitor experience value.

The ongoing strategic expansion and refinement of the national park estate will make a significant contribution to building a CAR protected area system for NSW and to supporting national and international commitments.



Public and private land conservation working together

The NSW protected area system relies on both public and private land conservation working together at a landscape scale. The national park estate managed by NPWS and permanent private land conservation agreement areas, administered by the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) are complementary components of the National Reserve System. While they operate under different legislation and use different conservation mechanisms, both contribute to protecting biodiversity, cultural values, ecological connectivity and climate resilience across NSW.

The most effective conservation outcomes are achieved when these approaches work together. Over the 6 years to 2024 the National Reserve System grew by about 880,000 hectares in NSW. Around 60% of this growth occurred within the national park estate, with the remaining 40% occurring in permanent private protected areas. Private land conservation can expand the range of natural values that are protected and provide buffers and connectivity to enhance the national park estate.

Together these complementary approaches help build a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system across NSW.

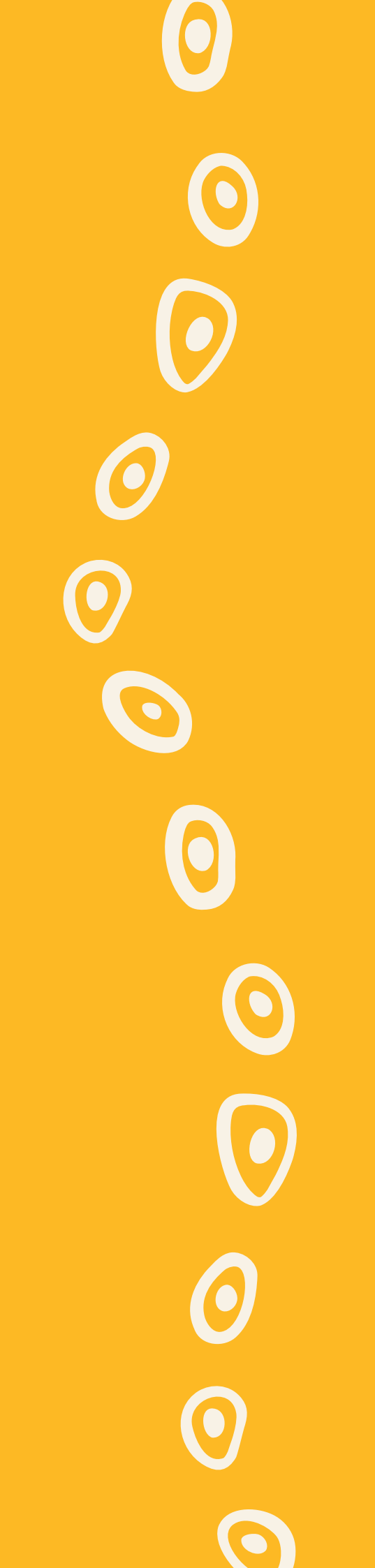
Choosing the most appropriate conservation mechanism

The NSW Government uses a range of conservation approaches to protect nature across public and private land. Decisions about the most appropriate conservation mechanism depend on the values of the land, the conservation outcomes sought, long-term management requirements, and landholder interests.

The national park estate provides permanent public protection, dedicated conservation management, landscape-scale threat management, protection of cultural heritage and opportunities for public access and visitor experiences.

National park estate reservation may be best suited where:

- large, intact or strategically important landscapes require permanent public ownership and management
- significant biodiversity, cultural heritage, climate resilience or visitor experience values would benefit from long-term public investment and protection
- landscape-scale management of fire, feral animal and weeds, cultural heritage and visitation is required
- additions would improve the comprehensiveness, adequacy, representativeness, connectivity or management effectiveness of the protected area system

- 
- protection or restoration of important ecosystems, threatened species habitat, cultural landscapes or climate refugia can be achieved.

Private land conservation enables biodiversity outcomes to be achieved while retaining private ownership and stewardship, protecting important habitats across working landscapes and strengthening connectivity across land tenures.

Private land conservation may be best suited where:

- important biodiversity values occur on private land that the landholder wants to retain
- the high-value biodiversity occurs on only a portion of a property; the remainder can remain productive agricultural land
- ecological connectivity can be strengthened between existing protected areas (public and private)
- specific ecological assets such as wetlands or threatened species (even if small in area) are identified on private land and can be protected through a conservation agreement
- private landholders are motivated by conservation on their property (and/or can be incentivised with management funding from BCT) and can secure important biodiversity conservation outcomes.

The Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy (2018) under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, guides investment priorities for private land conservation in NSW. In the years since the establishment of the BCT in 2017, priority investment areas for private land conservation have been largely across the sheep-wheat belt of NSW where the unique ecosystems are under-represented in the protected area system.

Together, these complementary approaches enable landscape-scale conservation outcomes to be achieved across whole landscapes and help NSW contribute to national and international biodiversity targets.



3.1 The NSW Nature Strategy

The NSW Nature Strategy is being developed in response to the NSW plan for nature (2024). The NSW Nature Strategy will be a legal requirement under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, and it will guide public and private investment and action to protect, connect and restore ecosystems and landscapes across tenures (NSW Government 2024).

The Strategy will set statewide goals and targets for conservation and restoration, and guide State's contribution to national and international targets. The National Parks Establishment Plan has been developed in anticipation of, and alignment with, this intended framework.

The national park estate is expected to play a key role in contributing to these goals and targets through continued growth, strategic land acquisition, improved ecological representation and connectivity, and ongoing management actions.

As part of preparing the NSW Nature Strategy, the national park estate's contribution to the targets will be determined.

3.2 Aboriginal connection to Country

The concept of Country is central to Aboriginal culture. Country is not just the physical environment, it includes language, knowledge, cultural practices, and responsibilities. Aboriginal people see Country as kin, and the wellbeing of Country is deeply connected to the wellbeing of its people.

Aboriginal heritage is understood holistically. It brings together both tangible and intangible cultural elements (Janke et al. 2021). This includes knowledge, lore, practices, people, and the objects and places that connect people to identity and Country.

Tangible heritage includes rock shelters, scarred trees, shell middens, bora grounds, and stone artefacts. Intangible heritage includes songlines, Dreaming stories, oral traditions, ceremonies, arts, practices, and rituals passed down through generations. Aboriginal culture is vibrant and continually evolving, helping maintain cultural identity, practices, and wellbeing for future generations.

Living cultural landscapes hold deep cultural, spiritual, and historic importance for Aboriginal people. They show how Aboriginal people engage with the world and care for Country. These landscapes are defined as 'the dynamic interactions between people and Country... [encompassing] the natural environment, the spiritual and traditional knowledge of that environment, and the cultural practices and activities applied there' (Janke et al. 2021).

The NSW national park estate provides an essential connection to Country, supporting Aboriginal wellbeing, protecting cultural assets and landscapes, and sustaining the world's oldest living culture.

3.3 NSW marine protected areas

Marine protected areas play a crucial role in conserving marine biodiversity and supporting marine science, recreation, and education. The NSW system of marine protected areas comprises:

- Marine parks – 6 multiple use marine parks that cover around one third, or about 345,000 hectares, of the NSW marine estate.
- Aquatic reserves – 12 aquatic reserves that cover about 2,000 hectares of the NSW marine estate.
- Protected areas with marine components – many terrestrial protected areas extend into the sea, including estuaries, beaches, and rocky shores. In total, 62 land-based protected areas in NSW include marine areas.

Although marine protected areas connect with the land-based national park estate, they are managed separately. Day-to-day management of marine parks and aquatic reserves is carried out by the Department of Primary Industries, guided by the *Marine Estate Management Act 2014*.

3.4 National park estate growth and ecological gaps

Understanding how the national park estate has grown since 2008 provides important context for identifying remaining gaps and setting future priorities under this Plan.

The first National Parks Establishment Plan (DECC 2008) set out a long-term program to expand the national park estate, recognising that creating a representative system would take about 50 years. Since 2008, the estate has grown from 6.7 million hectares to more than 8.57 million hectares (as of December 2025). Appendix 1 shows the annual and cumulative changes between 2008 and 2025.

Growth has varied from year to year, with substantial progress in 2020, 2021, 2023 and 2025. These years included 3 of the largest private land purchases in NPWS history, adding areas that contain many NSW (Mitchell) Landscapes (Mitchell 2008) previously unrepresented in the estate.

Lands added to the estate have come from:

- Crown land and state forest transferred from other government agencies after consultation
- land held by government agencies or private landholders and donated to NPWS
- Commonwealth land that was purchased or transferred to NSW at no cost
- freehold and leasehold Crown land purchased directly by NPWS.

Even with significant expansion of the national park estate since 2008, important ecological and geographic gaps remain (Appendix 2). Many ecosystems, IBRA bioregions and NSW (Mitchell) Landscapes (Mitchell 2008) are still poorly protected or under-represented. Also, the distribution of protected areas is uneven across the state with most concentrated in coastal and alpine regions, whereas inland and western regions have far fewer. As a result, many ecosystems, species, and living cultural landscapes are vulnerable to pressures including land clearing, habitat fragmentation, and climate change.

To address these gaps, we need to build a CAR protected area system. This includes both the national park estate and the broader network of public and private protected areas. The National Parks Establishment Plan contributes to this landscape-scale approach by guiding where growth of the national park estate can most effectively complement private protected areas and other conservation mechanisms and strengthen the overall protected area system. Figure 1 shows the NSW national park estate.



Cultural illustration of Growing Land Protection.

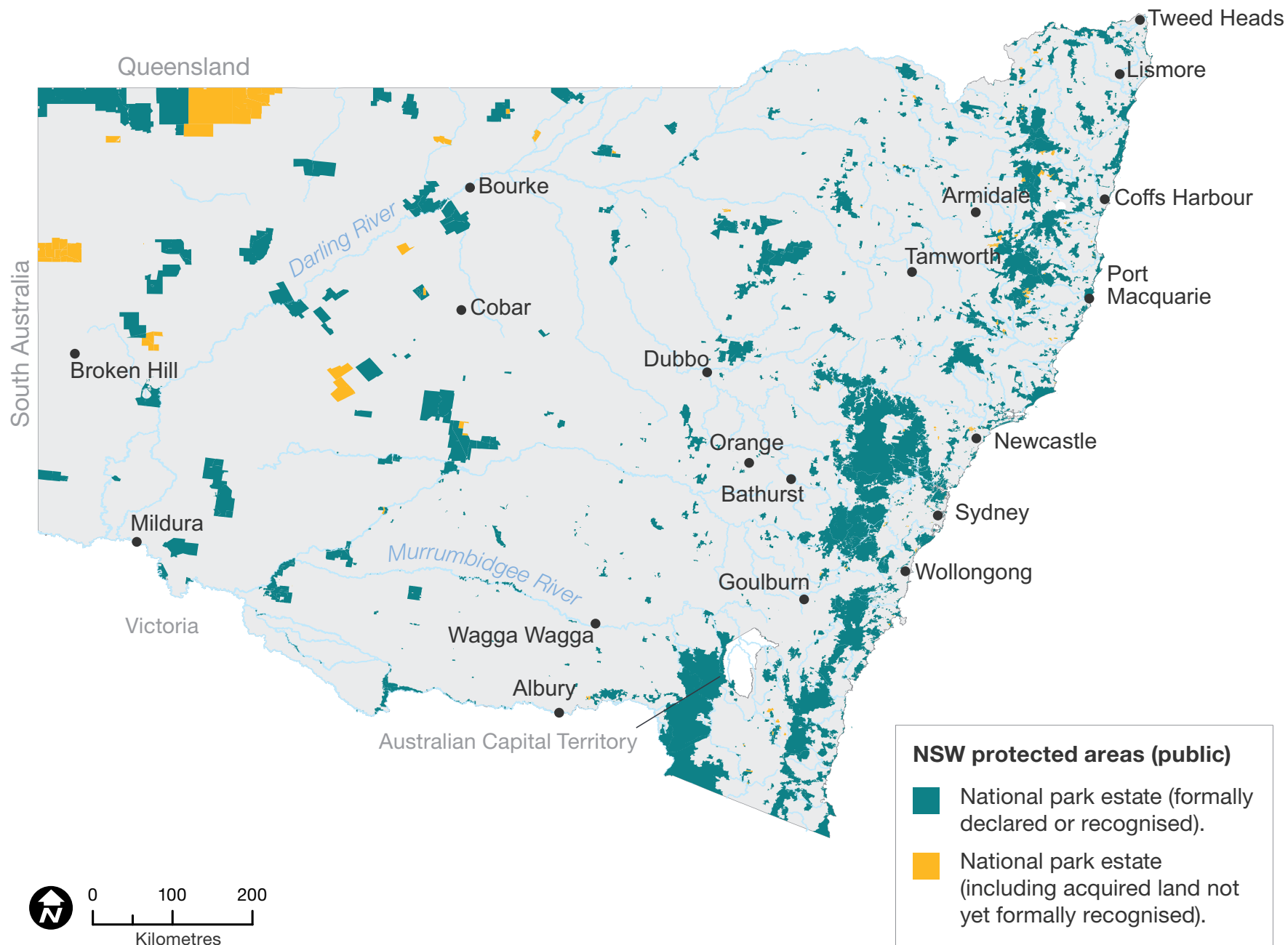


Figure 1 NSW National Park Estate (April 2026)
Acquired land = land held under Part 11 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* but not yet reserved under the Act.

3.5 Other protected areas and conservation approaches

The NSW Government is working across public and private land to protect biodiversity and support healthy, resilient ecosystems.

NPWS is continuing efforts to expand the national park estate. These protected areas are part of a broader network of protected areas and conservation efforts that contribute to building a CAR protected area system and play an important role in helping to reach Australia's targets under the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Flora reserves

Dedicated under the *NSW Forestry Act 2012*, flora reserves are NSW State forest lands permanently reserved to conserve native plants, forest ecosystems and threatened species and habitats. They may also protect Aboriginal cultural and archaeological values (NPWS 2026). There are 88 flora reserves in NSW, covering about 66,000 hectares of the protected area system (CAPAD 2024). NPWS manages 18 of these reserves, with the remainder managed by the Forestry Corporation of NSW.

Private land conservation

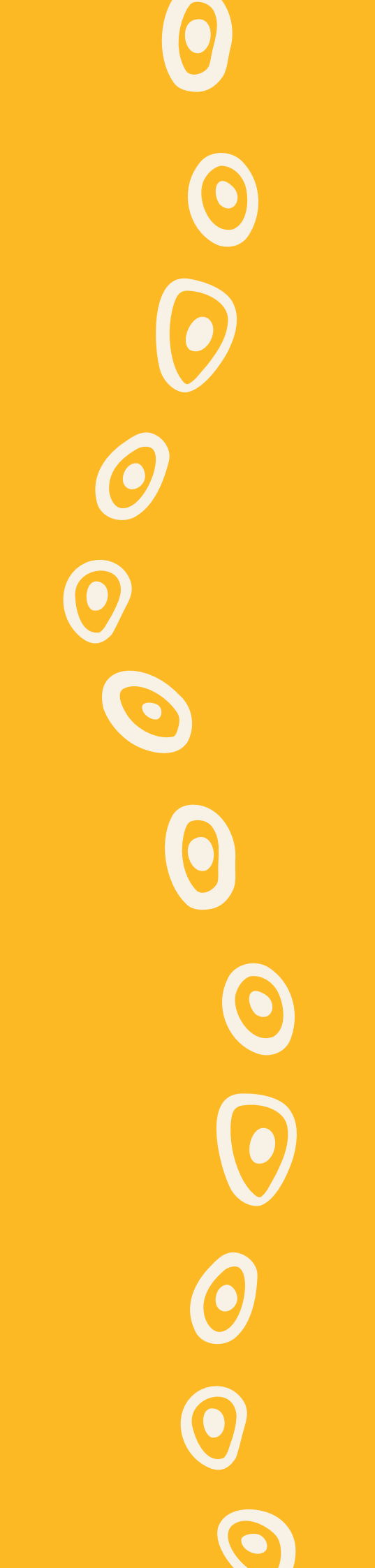
Private land conservation makes up around 620,104 hectares of the NSW protected area system (NSW Government 2026). Under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, private landholders can enter long-term conservation agreements to protect biodiversity on their properties. NPWS works closely with the BCT to build a coordinated and complementary network of public and private protected areas across NSW.

Indigenous Protected Areas

Indigenous Protected Areas are areas that Traditional Owners manage to protect Country, culture, and biodiversity (DCCEEW 2024). In NSW, there are 11 Indigenous Protected Areas recognised as part of the National Reserve System, with another 4 areas currently going through consultation (DCCEEW 2026a). Indigenous Protected Areas make up around 38,000 hectares of the protected area system (CAPAD 2024).

Other publicly managed protected areas

These include local council-managed reserves, dedicated Crown land, and Travelling Stock Reserves. Although they are not protected under the NPW Act, these lands play a significant role in the broader protected area system by helping maintain biodiversity and landscape connectivity. They complement the national park estate by protecting additional ecological and cultural values and providing important corridors in highly modified landscapes.



Conserved areas

Conserved areas, also known as Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), are areas outside formal protected areas that still deliver long-term biodiversity conservation. They secure additional ecological and cultural values across public and private land, which aligns with the national OECM Framework adopted in 2024.

NSW does not yet have any recognised conserved areas, but other states such as Queensland have begun to apply conserved areas to support statewide nature outcomes. The NSW Government has committed to establishing a conserved areas framework as part of the NSW Plan for Nature and NSW Nature Strategy.

Part B: Regional context





4. How regions shape National Park and Wildlife Service decisions

The National Parks Establishment Plan applies a regional approach to guide how land is assessed and prioritised across NSW.

The regional context presented provides the geographic, ecological, cultural and socio-economic foundation for implementing the Plan.

While the assessment of land for inclusion in the national park estate is guided by the statewide assessment themes in Part D, these decisions are applied within a regional context. Each conservation planning region reflects different:

- levels of ecosystem representation
- degrees of connectivity and fragmentation
- cultural landscapes and partnerships
- social and economic conditions and land-use pressures.

Understanding these regional differences is essential for implementing the Plan in a targeted and effective way. In practice, the regional context is used to:

- identify where the most significant gaps in the protected area system occur
- guide the appropriate stage of protected area development
- inform consideration of opportunities to expand or improve the national park estate.

4.1 NPWS conservation planning regions

NPWS has identified 5 conservation planning regions across NSW: Far West, Central Western Plains, Tablelands and Western Slopes, Australian Alps, and Coast and Coastal Ranges (Figure 2). Each conservation planning region covers one or more IBRA bioregion.

There are 18 mainland NSW bioregions. These are broad landscape-scale areas that group together the many ecosystems found in that part of the state. Each bioregion can be further broken down into sub-regions (Appendix 2).

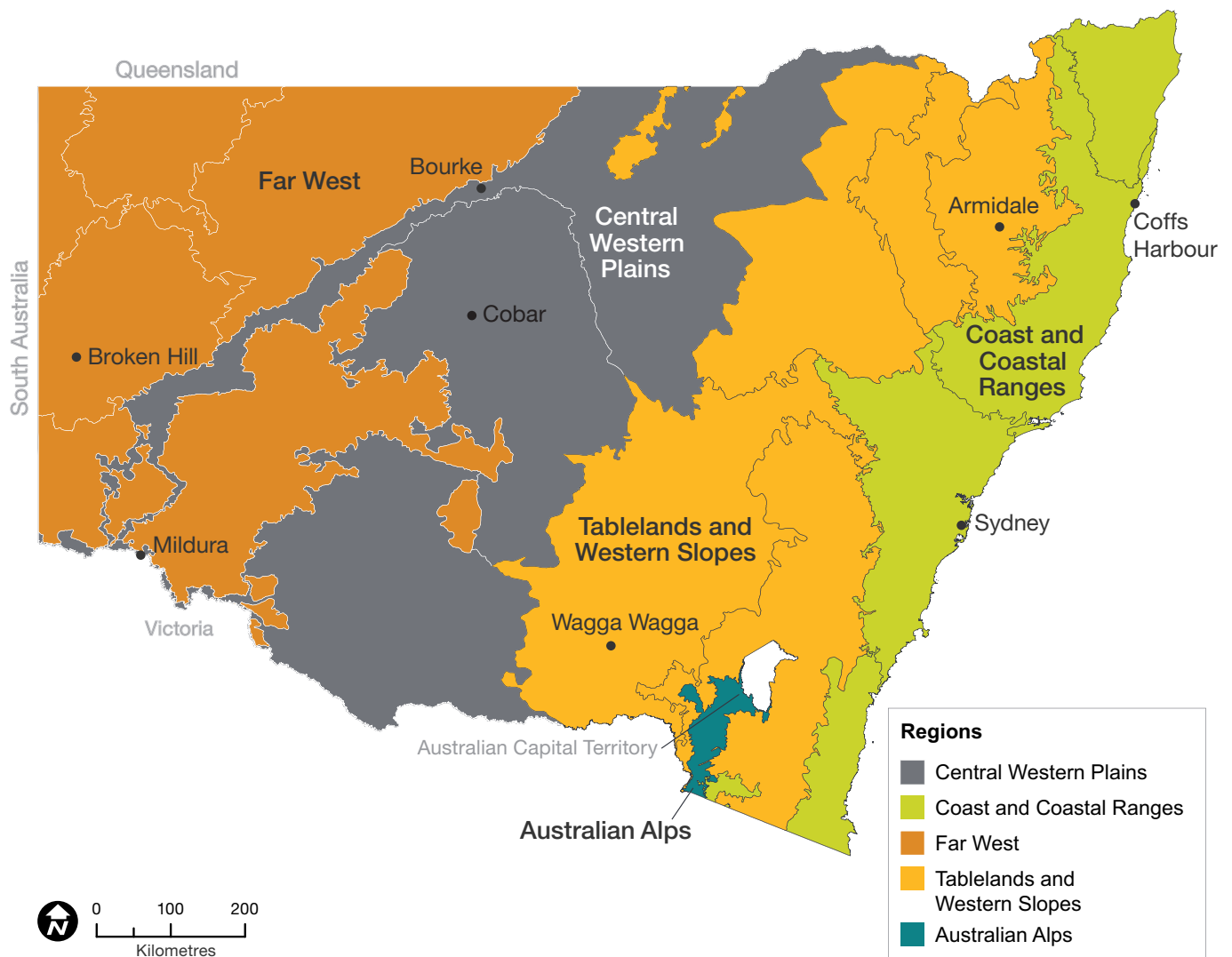


Figure 2 The 5 national park estate conservation planning regions

The 5 conservation planning regions enable us to group together bioregions that are at similar stages of planning and management. This helps focus efforts on building a protected area system that meets the CAR principles.

The work progresses in 3 stages:

Stage 1: Creating new nodes. This stage is about setting up protected areas in places where none or few exist yet. NPWS does this by acquiring available land to create new ‘nodes’. These nodes form the first parts of a future protected area. Over time more land can be added around them to develop a more connected network of protected areas.



Stage 2: Building up protected areas. This stage involves building or enhancing nodes that are already in place. This means adding land or protecting key natural or cultural features that were not fully covered before, as well as linking existing protected areas so they form larger and more connected areas. This improves biodiversity outcomes by supporting more species and creating resilient ecosystems.

Stage 3: Refining boundaries. This final stage focuses on acquiring small parcels of land inside or next to existing protected areas. These additions help create more practical boundaries making the protected area easier and more efficient to manage.

4.2 Conservation planning region profiles

The following NPWS conservation planning region profiles summarise key ecological, social, economic and cultural characteristics and explain how the national park estate contributes to different parts of NSW.

To prepare these summaries, NSW Functional Economic Regions (FERs) were allocated to each NPWS conservation planning region (Far West, Central Western Plains, Tablelands and Western Slopes, Coast and Coastal Ranges, Australian Alps). The FERs and NPWS conservation planning regions are based on different frameworks (economic activity and ecological systems). In applying this analysis, FERs have been allocated to NPWS conservation planning regions based on the majority of land area within each FER. As a result, some towns and local areas may sit within a different NPWS conservation planning region than the FER they have been allocated to for the purposes of this analysis.

This approach avoids overlap and provides an indicative picture of local conditions within and across the conservation planning regions and helps explain how the national park estate's growth and ongoing management interact with local geographies, economies and communities.

Far West conservation planning region

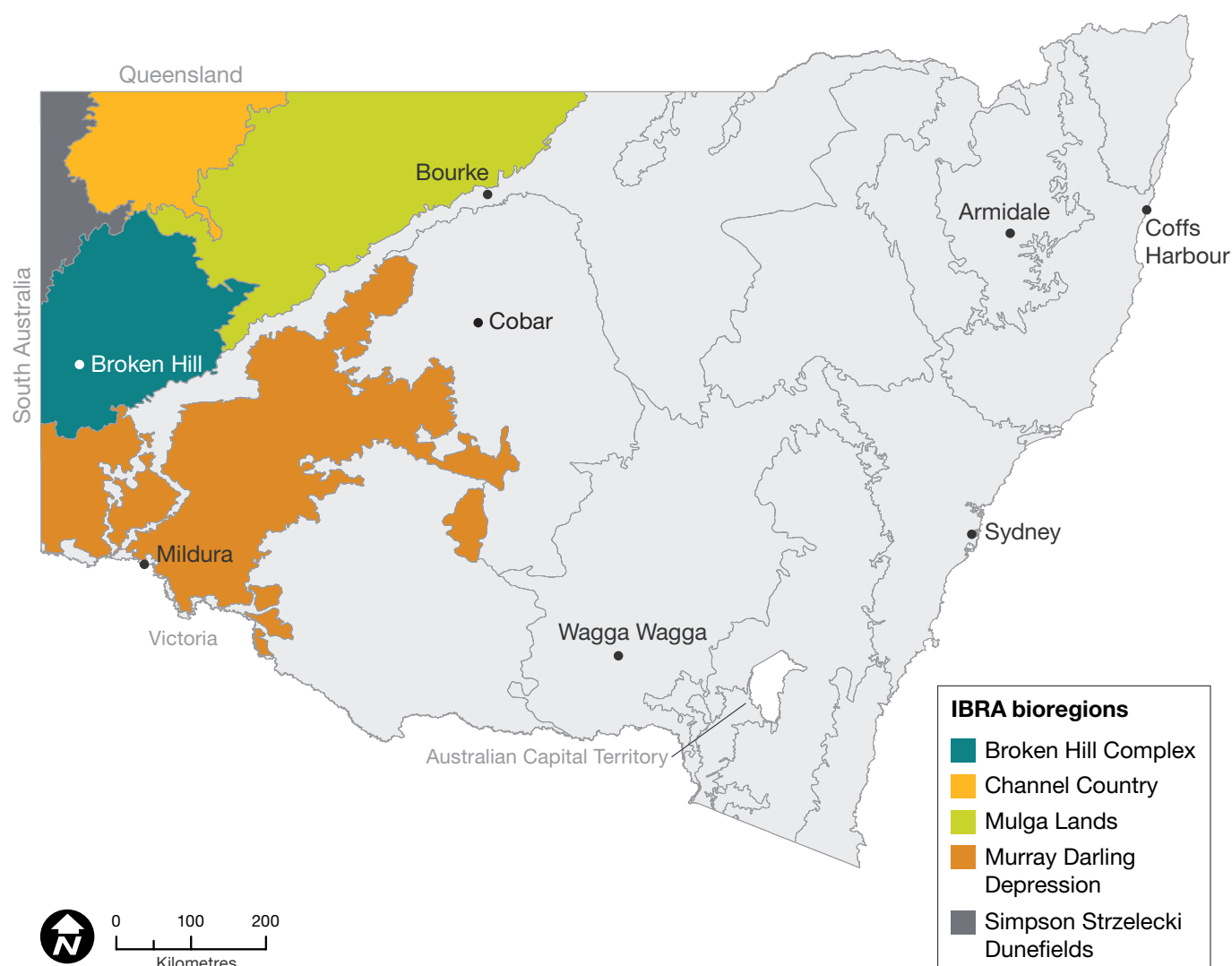


Figure 3 Bioregions of the Far West national park estate conservation planning region
IBRA = Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia

Regional overview

- This region covers the NSW Functional Economic Region known as the Far West.
- Located in western NSW extending to the South Australian and Queensland borders, the Far West region covers over 21,726,941 hectares (Figure 3).
- It encompasses multiple arid and semi-arid bioregions – Broken Hill Complex, Channel Country, Mulga Lands, Murray–Darling Depression, Simpson Strzelecki Dunefields and supports unique arid-zone biodiversity and nationally significant river systems.

- Land tenure is dominated by large pastoral leases and freehold grazing properties, with Crown land held as perpetual pastoral leases known as Western NSW Land Leases.
- Irrigated agriculture is concentrated along the Murray and lower Darling river systems.
- The region has a low population density, with small, widely dispersed towns such as Broken Hill, Wentworth, Ivanhoe, Menindee, Tibooburra, Wilcannia and White Cliffs.
- Important service centres nearby, such as Bourke in the adjoining Central Western Plains region, reflect strong functional and community connections across western NSW.
- The region's remoteness impacts residents' access to services, infrastructure, and employment opportunities.
- The population is generally declining and ageing, with a growing proportion of residents aged over 55 (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- Labour markets show moderate unemployment alongside rising job vacancies (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- Major industries include mining, agriculture, healthcare, energy and water supply, construction, and tourism.
- The region's economy is highly exposed to remoteness, climate variability, and a limited industry base. Together, these factors affect agricultural output, labour productivity, employment, and population levels (Marsden Jacob Associates 2026).
- Regional economic strategies identify diversification as a priority, including expanding local tourism, making better use of natural and cultural assets, and supporting Aboriginal participation (Department of Regional NSW 2023).

Cultural connections

- There are strong cultural connections to Country for Aboriginal communities, which is recognised through joint management arrangements in protected areas such as the Mutawintji protected area complex and Mungo and Kinchega national parks.
- NPWS also works in partnership with Aboriginal people outside of formal joint management arrangements to protect culture and living cultural landscapes for current and future generations.
- Cultural connections and management arrangements often extend across planning region boundaries.
- Native title determinations and claims exist within this region providing rights to Aboriginal people under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) and associated Indigenous Land Use Agreements.

Conservation in the national park estate

- protected areas – 27 formally recognised protected areas are wholly or partly within the Far West conservation planning region, with about 682,000 hectares acquired not yet reserved as protected areas.
- national park estate – 10.4% of this region
- representation – 3 bioregions have between 5 and 10%, one bioregion between 15 and 20% and one bioregion has just over 30%, of their extent reserved
- significant gaps in representation – of the 23 subregions, 2 subregions have no reservation, a further 4 have less than 5%, 9 subregions have between 5 and 10%, and 3 have between 10 to 15% of their extent reserved (Appendix 2).

Conservation in other public and private protected areas (part of the National Reserve System)

- within Far West there is about 264,400 hectares in private protection (this includes Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreements), with no other known publicly protected lands.

Threatened entities

- 9 endangered, 2 critically endangered, ecological communities
- 2 threatened populations
- 133 threatened plant species
- 248 threatened animal species (NSW BioNet 2026)
- 31 threatened species are currently considered to have no protection within the national park estate (NPWS 2026) (Appendix 2).

Key environmental pressures

- land-use change – fragmentation and loss of connectivity
- climate change
- altered natural water flows
- invasive plant and feral animal species.

Restoration and rehabilitation

Restoration will be critical, with a focus on:

- restoring landscape function to reduce loss of valuable nutrients and water
- feral animal and invasive weed management
- reintroduction of locally extinct fauna.

Focus for building a CAR protected area system

- Stage 1: creating new nodes
- Stage 2: building upon existing protected areas
- Other priority actions for future investment are outlined in Part D of the Plan.

Central Western Plains conservation planning region

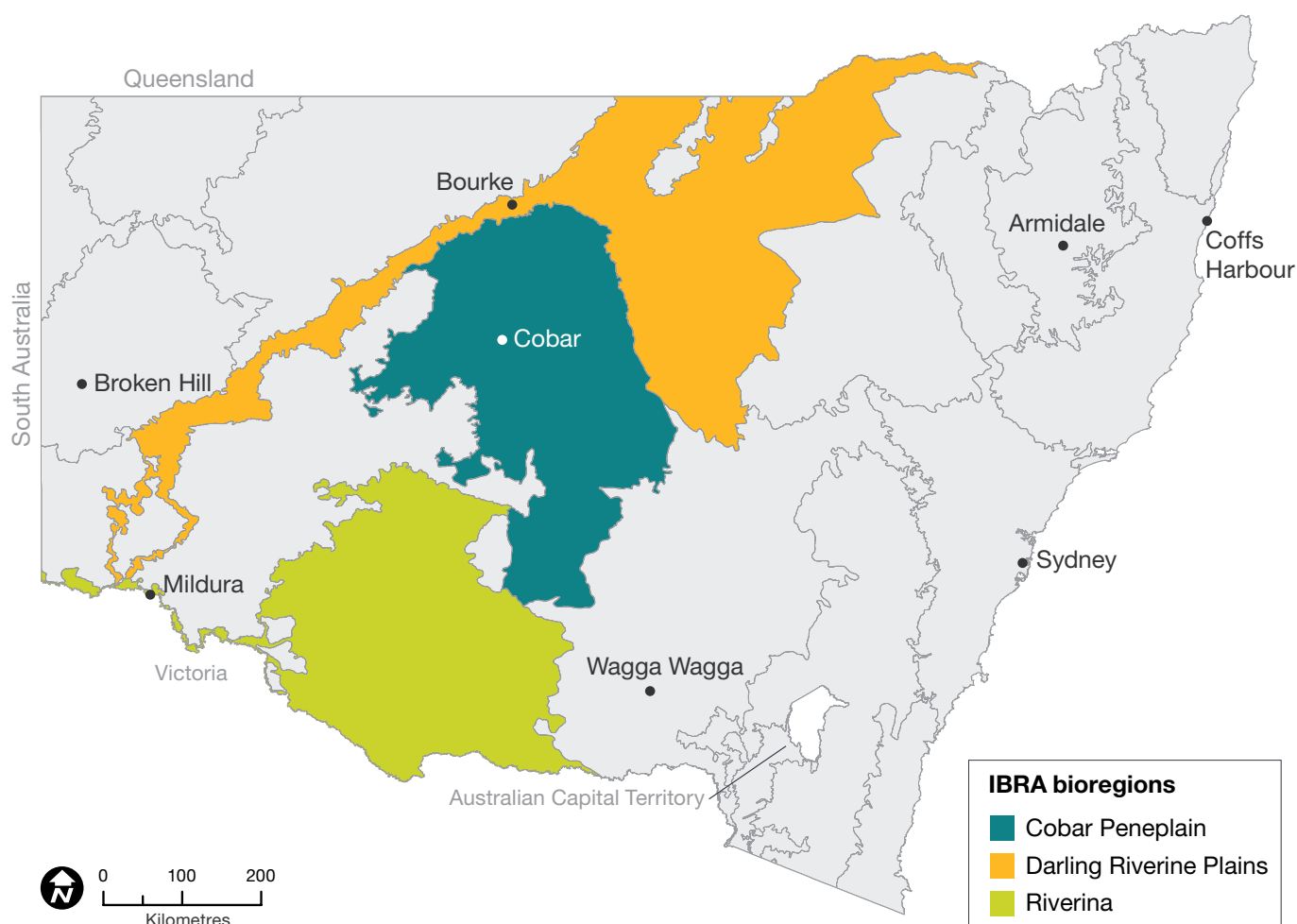


Figure 4 Bioregions of the Central Western plains national park estate conservation planning region
IBRA = Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia

Regional overview

- The Central Western Plains conservation planning region includes the NSW Functional Economic Regions known as the Murray, Western Murray, Western Plains, and Western Riverina.
- It extends from the Queensland border to the Victorian border, spanning over 23,819,171 hectares.

- This region is characterised by the riverine plains and floodplain systems, the Darling Riverine Plains and Riverina bioregions, separated by the undulating plains of the Cobar Peneplain bioregion, which is interspersed with low rocky ranges, semi-arid woodlands, and grasslands.
- Active land use includes grazing and cropping often accompanied by water extraction for irrigation.
- There is an opportunity to support an integrated land management approach to protect riparian corridors and wetlands along the Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and Darling river systems.
- Land parcels are typically smaller and more expensive per hectare than in the Far West conservation planning region.
- There is a mix of regional service centres such as Griffith, Moree, Narrandera, Cobar, and Walgett that support large agricultural properties.
- It includes the Central West Orana and South West Renewable Energy Zones (Energy Co 2026).
- Population trends vary across the region. There is growth or stability in southern and eastern areas, whereas more remote western areas are in decline (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- Housing markets are constrained, with very low vacancy rates and rising prices in most subregions, although some western areas remain more affordable (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- The population is ageing. Labour markets are tight, with many vacancies, but some areas are experiencing rising unemployment alongside these vacancies (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- The region has a diverse economy centred on agriculture, including irrigated farming, alongside mining, energy production, manufacturing, construction, tourism, and healthcare.
- Regional economic strategies emphasise diversification and resilience, particularly through expanding the local nature-, cultural- and events-based tourism. This includes making better use of natural and water resources and improving infrastructure and transport to support accessibility (Department of Regional NSW 2023).

Cultural connections

- There are strong cultural connections to Country for Aboriginal communities recognised through joint management arrangements in protected areas such as Mount Grenfell State Conservation Area and National Park, and Gundabooka National Park and State Conservation Area.
- NPWS also works in partnership with Aboriginal people outside of formal joint management arrangements to protect culture and living cultural landscapes for current and future generations.

- Cultural connections and management arrangements often extend across planning region boundaries.
- Native title determinations and claims exist within this region providing rights to Aboriginal people under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) and associated Indigenous Land Use Agreements.

Conservation in the national park estate

- protected areas – 55 formally recognised protected areas are wholly or partly in the Central Western Plains conservation planning region, with approximately 45,000 hectares acquired not yet reserved as protected areas
- national park estate – 3.3% of this region
- representation – all 3 bioregions have less than 5% of their extent reserved
- significant representation gaps – of the 19 subregions, 2 subregions have no reservation, with another 11 having less than 5% of their extent reserved, 2 have 5 to 10%, and 3 have 10 to 15%, of their extent reserved (Appendix 2).

Conservation in other public and private protected areas (part of the National Reserve System)

- within Central Western Plains there is about 148,700 hectares in private protection (this includes Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreements), with about 800 hectares in other publicly protected lands.

Threatened entities

- 11 endangered and 3 critically endangered ecological communities
- 2 threatened populations
- 93 threatened plant species
- 166 threatened animal species (NSW BioNet 2026)
- 27 threatened species are currently considered to have no protection within the national park estate (NPWS 2026) (Appendix 2).

Key environmental pressures

- land-use change – clearing, fragmentation and connectivity loss
- altered natural water flows
- climate change
- invasive plant and feral animal species.

Restoration and rehabilitation

Restoration will be important, with a focus on:

- those areas which have not gone beyond the ecological restoration threshold

- reversing encroachment of invasive native scrub through careful land management regimes
- feral animal and invasive weed management
- reintroduction of locally extinct fauna.

Focus for building a CAR protected area system

- Stage 1: creating new nodes
- Stage 2: building upon existing protected areas
- Other priority actions for future investment are outlined in Part D of the Plan.

Tablelands and Western Slopes conservation planning region

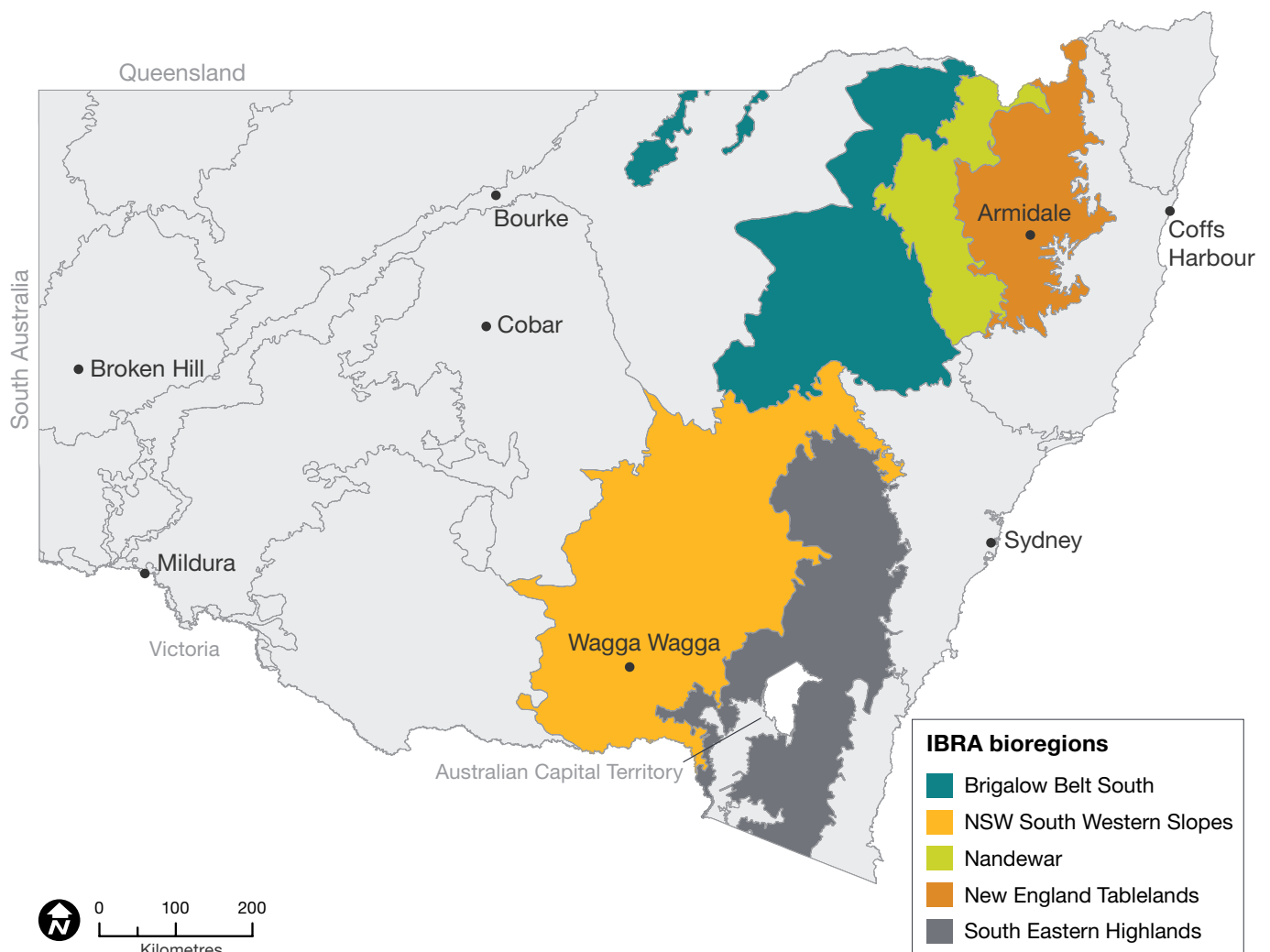


Figure 5 Bioregions of the Tablelands and Western Slopes national park estate conservation planning region
IBRA = Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia

Regional overview

- The Tablelands and Western Slopes conservation planning region covers the NSW Functional Economic Regions of Cowra, South West Slopes, Southern Tablelands, Queanbeyan–Palerang, Lithgow, Upper North West, Lower North West, Northern New England High Country, Southern New England High Country, Abercrombie, Albury–Wodonga, Castlereagh, Central Orana, Eastern Riverina, Mid-Lachlan, Mid-Western, and Orange, Blayney, and Cabonne.
- The region is 23,652,315 hectares in size, the eastern areas are mainly undulating highlands of the New England Tableland, South Eastern Highlands, and the Liverpool Range, while western regions are a mix of flat, undulating and rugged landscapes.
- The region creates a catchment divide between the eastern and western flowing river systems of NSW.
- The region encompasses the eastern part of the NSW sheep-wheat belt where land is extensively cleared of native vegetation.
- It includes the Central West Orana and New England Renewable Energy Zones (REZ). The New England REZ is expected to be NSW's largest REZ by capacity and scale (Energy Co 2026).
- There is an opportunity to support an integrated land management approach with the Biodiversity Conservation trust and other public land managers to protect remnant native vegetation corridors, such as Travelling Stock Reserves, road reserves, and land along stream banks, that support important ecosystems and habitats and provide essential links.
- Key regional centres include Orange, Armidale, Wagga Wagga, Albury–Wodonga and Tamworth.
- Population trends vary across the region. Most areas are experiencing modest growth, but some sub-regions continue to decline (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- House prices are rising and vacancy rates remain low, indicating housing supply pressures (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- The population is ageing across much of the region, although some areas have younger or more stable age profiles (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- Labour markets are tight, with low unemployment and high job vacancies, although some northern and inland areas continue to experience higher unemployment despite strong demand for workers (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- The region has a broad economic base, including agriculture, mining, energy generation, manufacturing, construction, forestry, fishing, education and training, healthcare, and a growing tourism industry.

- Regional strategies emphasise expanding tourism to diversify and strengthen local economies. This includes developing agritourism and food and wine experiences, nature-, cultural- and adventure-based tourism, and improving infrastructure and transport to support accessibility (Department of Regional NSW 2023).

Cultural connections

- There are strong cultural connections to Country for Aboriginal communities, recognised through joint management arrangements in protected areas, including Narran Lake Nature Reserve, Boonalla and Bulagaranda (Mount Yarrowyck) Aboriginal areas.
- NPWS also works in partnership with Aboriginal people outside of formal joint management arrangements to protect culture and living cultural landscapes for current and future generations.
- Cultural connections and management arrangements often extend across planning region boundaries.
- Native title determinations and claims exist within this region providing rights to Aboriginal people under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) and associated Indigenous Land Use Agreements.

Conservation in the national park estate

- protected areas – 296 formally recognised protected areas are wholly or partly in this conservation planning region, with approximately 20,000 hectares acquired not yet reserved as protected areas
- national park estate – 7.6% of this region
- representation – of the 5 bioregions, 2 bioregions have less than 5%, 2 bioregions have from 5 to 10% and one bioregion has from 10 to 15% of their extent reserved
- significant representation gaps – of the 47 subregions, 1 subregion has no reservation, another 22 subregions have less than 5%, 8 subregions had between 5 to 10%, and 3 have between 10 to 15% of their extent reserved (Appendix 2).

Conservation in other public and private protected areas (part of the National Reserve System)

- within Tablelands and Western Slopes there is about 187,000 hectares in private protection (this includes Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreements), with about 10,500 hectares in other publicly protected lands.

Threatened entities

- 21 endangered and 5 critically endangered ecological communities
- 11 threatened populations
- 339 threatened plant species
- 269 threatened animal species (NSW BioNet 2026)
- 55 threatened species are currently considered to have no protection within the national park estate (NPWS 2026) (Appendix 2)
- biodiversity hotspots:
 - the northern Brigalow Belt South is part of the ‘Brigalow’ national biodiversity hotspot.
 - the Nandewar and New England Tablelands bioregions form part of the ‘Forests of East Australia’ global biodiversity hotspot.

Key environmental pressures

- land-use change – clearing, fragmentation and connectivity loss
- altered natural water flows and climate change
- invasive plant and feral animal species.

Restoration and rehabilitation

Restoration will be critical, with a focus on:

- restoring habitat to improve the likelihood of species persistence
- feral animal and invasive weed management
- reintroduction of locally extinct fauna.

Focus for building a CAR protected area system

- Stage 2: building upon existing protected areas
- Stage 1: creating new nodes
- Other priority actions for future investment are outlined in Part D of the Plan.

Coast and Coastal Ranges conservation planning region

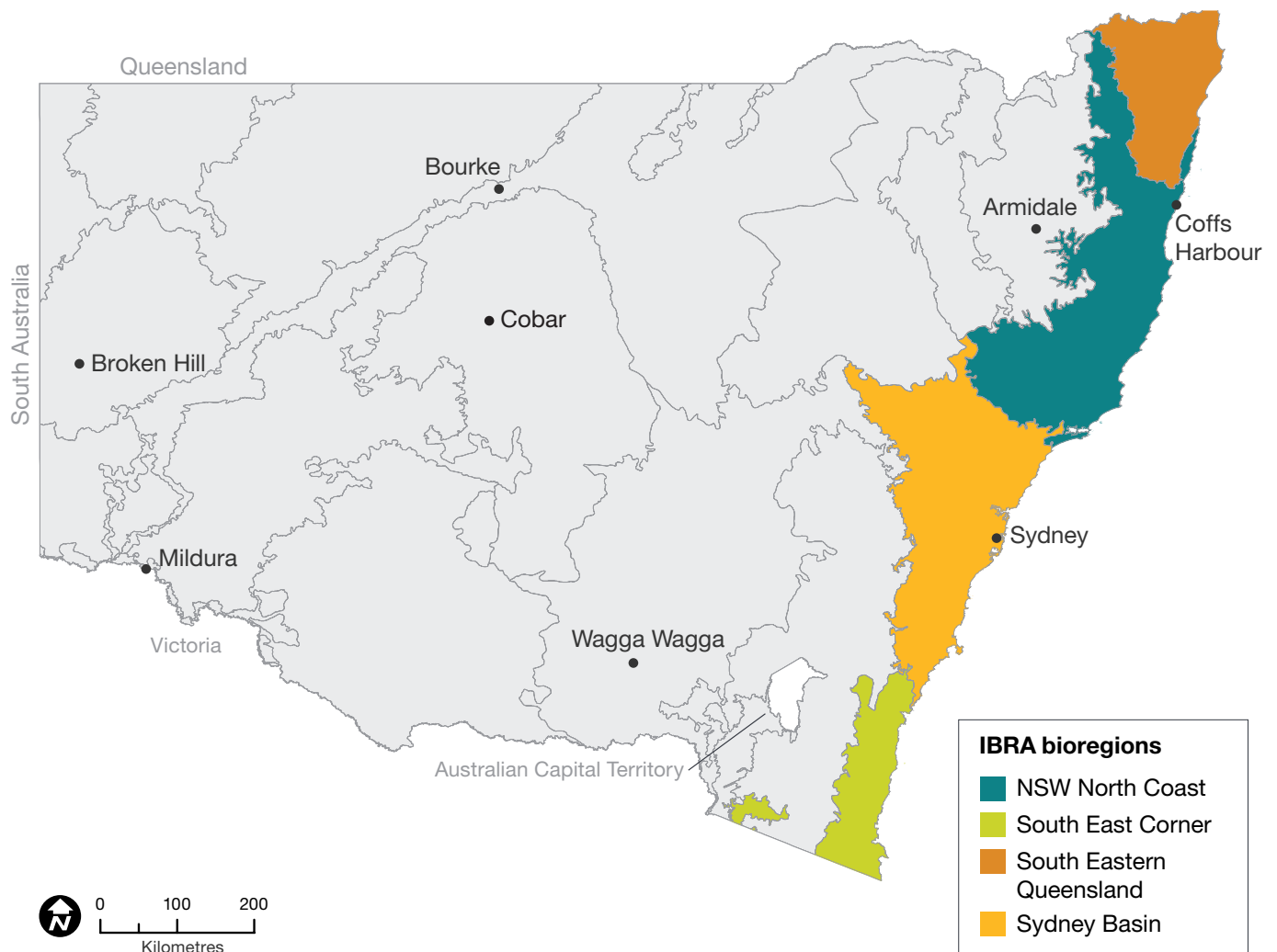


Figure 6 Bioregions of the Coast and Coastal Ranges national park estate conservation planning region
IBRA = Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia

Regional overview

- The Coast and Coastal Ranges region covers the NSW Functional Economic Regions known as Northern Rivers, Tweed, Clarence Valley, Coffs Coast, Nambucca, Hastings Macleay, Hunter, Central Coast and Lake Macquarie, Mid-Coast, Kiama, Shellharbour, Shoalhaven, Far South Coast, Wingecarribee, and Metropolitan (including Newcastle).
- Located on the eastern fall of the Great Dividing Range, this region covers 10,336,733 hectares.
- This region has relatively high annual rainfall compared with inland NSW, and it has rugged ranges, coastal valleys, floodplains, dune systems, estuaries, forests, and coastal heathlands and wetlands.

- Compared with other conservation planning regions, it has lower levels of clearing and higher reservation in the national park estate, with large areas of native vegetation retained.
- Coastal valleys, floodplains, lowlands, and other fertile soils have been extensively cleared, leaving their ecosystems poorly protected and highly threatened.
- This planning region has high concentrations of biodiversity and is a stronghold for several threatened species, some inadequately conserved or prioritised such as the koala. Priority areas for addition to the national park estate remain along the east coast despite already high levels of reservation.
- The region has a highly fragmented mix of land uses and complex tenure patterns, with land parcels varying widely in size and ownership.
- It includes the Hunter-Central Coast and Illawarra Renewable Energy Zones (Energy Co 2026).
- There is intense development pressure along coast and in major urban centres.
- High population growth has increased demand for housing, infrastructure, and services, particularly in the Sydney metropolitan region and coastal centres such as the Central Coast, Newcastle/Hunter, Coffs Harbour, Tweed, Wollongong, and Shoalhaven. Housing affordability is a major and persistent issue, with low vacancy rates and rising house prices across many coastal areas (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- The population is ageing, particularly in coastal lifestyle and retirement destinations.
- Labour markets are tight, with low or stable unemployment and many job vacancies across much of the region, although some areas continue to experience higher unemployment (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- The region has a diverse, service-based economy supported by tourism, arts and recreation services, retail trade, education and training, healthcare, construction, agriculture, forestry, fishing, manufacturing, public administration, and in some areas mining and defence (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- Economic strategies prioritise sustainable growth of local nature-based, coastal, and marine tourism and Aboriginal-led cultural experiences. These strategies aim to increase visitor spending and year-round visitation, supported by investment in infrastructure and improved accessibility (Department of Regional NSW 2023).

Cultural connections

- There are strong cultural connections to Country for Aboriginal communities, recognised through joint management arrangements in protected areas such as Biamanga, Gulaga and Arakwal national parks and Cape Byron State Conservation Area.

- NPWS also works in partnership with Aboriginal people outside of formal joint management arrangements to protect culture and living cultural landscapes for current and future generations.
- Cultural connections and management arrangements often extend across planning region boundaries.
- Native title determinations and claims exist within this region providing rights to Aboriginal people under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) and associated Indigenous Land Use Agreements.

Conservation in the national park estate

- protected areas – 515 formally recognised protected areas are wholly or partly in the Coast and Coastal Ranges conservation planning region, with approximately 36,000 hectares acquired not yet reserved as protected areas
- national park estate – 31.4% of this region
- representation – of the 4 bioregions, one has from 10 to 15% reservation, and the 3 other bioregions have more than 15% of their extent reserved
- significant representation gaps – of the 41 subregions, 4 have less than 5%, 5 subregions have between 5 to 10%, and 3 have between 10 to 15% of their extent reserved (Appendix 2).

Conservation in other public and private protected areas (part of the National Reserve System)

- within Coast and Coastal Ranges there is about 104,100 hectares in private protection (this includes Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreements), with about 52,000 hectares in other publicly protected lands.

Threatened entities

- 57 endangered, 15 critically endangered, and 4 vulnerable ecological communities
- 43 threatened populations
- 528 threatened plant species
- 281 threatened animal species (NSW BioNet 2026)
- 594 threatened species are currently considered to have no protection within the national park estate (NPWS 2026) (Appendix 2).

Key environmental pressures

- land-use change – clearing, fragmentation and connectivity loss, including development and major arterial clearing associated with transportation and utility corridors
- invasive plant and feral animal species
- climate change.

Restoration and rehabilitation

Restoration will be important, with a focus on:

- feral animal and invasive weed management
- enhancing ecological connectivity and resilience.

Focus for building a CAR protected area system

- Stage 3: refining existing reserves.
- Stage 2: building upon existing protected areas
- Other priority actions for future investment are outlined in Part D of the Plan.

Australian Alps conservation planning region



Figure 7 Bioregions of the Australian Alps national park estate conservation planning region
IBRA = Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia

Regional overview

- The Australian Alps conservation planning region covers the NSW Functional Economic Regions of Snowy Monaro and Snowy Valleys.

- This region has a unique climate and biodiversity, with one bioregion that straddles the NSW–Victorian border and supports alpine forests, woodlands, shrublands, grasslands and wetlands. This planning region covers 464,298 hectares.
- The population is small and spread out, with centres including Tumbarumba, Tumut, Batlow, Cooma, and Jindabyne. Access to services is limited outside these towns.
- The region has experienced modest population growth, alongside rising house prices, and constrained housing supply, with low vacancy rates across much of the region (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- The population is ageing overall, but with younger seasonal or working populations in key centres (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- Labour markets are tight, with low unemployment and high job vacancies, alongside workforce shortages, particularly in tourism and seasonal industries (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- The region has an economy shaped by tourism, hydro-electricity generation, agriculture, forestry, professional services and manufacturing (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- Tourism is highly seasonal, driven by winter snow activities and summer outdoor recreation, and the region is increasingly affected by climate change (Department of Regional NSW 2023).
- Economic priorities focus on strengthening a year-round nature-based tourism sector through adventure and agritourism, supported by improved accessibility and continued investment in recreation and tourism infrastructure (Department of Regional NSW 2023).

Cultural connections

- There are strong cultural connections to Country for Aboriginal communities recognised through joint management arrangements in protected areas such as Kosciuszko National Park, and Kuma and Kybeyan nature reserves.
- NPWS also works in partnership with Aboriginal people outside of formal joint management arrangements to protect culture and living cultural landscapes for current and future generations.
- Cultural connections and management arrangements often extend across planning region boundaries.

Conservation in the national park estate

- protected areas – 4 formally recognised protected areas wholly or partly in the Australian Alps conservation planning region
- representation – 81.3% of the Australian Alps bioregion is part of the national park estate, primarily within Kosciuszko National Park (Appendix 2).

Conservation in other public and private protected areas (part of the National Reserve System)

- within Australian Alps there is about 700 hectares in private protection (this includes Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreements), with about 100 hectares in other publicly protected lands.

Threatened entities

- 1 endangered and 3 critically endangered ecological communities
- 1 threatened population
- 29 threatened plant species
- 59 threatened animal species (NSW BioNet 2026)
- 4 threatened species are currently considered to have no protection within the national park estate (NPWS 2026) (Appendix 2).

Key environmental pressures

- climate change
- visitation
- invasive plant and feral animal species.

Restoration and rehabilitation

Restoration will be important, with a focus on:

- feral animal and invasive weed management
- enhancing ecological connectivity and resilience.

Focus for building a CAR protected area system

- Stage 3: refining boundaries
- Stage 2: building upon existing protected areas
- Other priority actions for future investment are outlined in Part D of the Plan.



Cultural illustration of Preserving Ecosystems.

Part C: Benefits and opportunities of growing the national park estate





5. How growing the national park estate strengthens communities

Growing the national park estate delivers a wide range of benefits to the community. The scale and type of benefits vary across regions, depending on ecological and cultural characteristics, local economic structures, population characteristics and levels of access and visitation.

5.1 Land management and stewardship

The national park estate enables coordinated management of extensive areas of public land across NSW.

NPWS actively manages protected areas to protect natural and cultural heritage values, reduce environmental risks, and maintain public access for visitors and communities. This includes ongoing, targeted programs to manage feral animals and invasive weeds, restore ecosystems, manage fire, and protect threatened species and habitats.

Managing feral animals, weeds and environmental threats across large and often remote landscapes is complex. The outcomes of land management are influenced by factors such as climate variability, terrain, and cross-tenure land use. As a result, effective land management is best understood through coordinated, long-term effort at landscape scales, rather than isolated actions.

Because of its scale and geographic reach, in many parts of NSW, the national park estate plays a critical role in supporting landscape-scale biosecurity and ecosystem protection. NPWS works across tenure boundaries in partnership with neighbours, local councils, volunteers, community groups, and other land managers and state government organisations including the Rural Fire Service and Local Land Services, to deliver coordinated responses to shared environmental challenges.

This approach reflects NPWS' role as a major conservation land manager with the capability to deliver strategic, long-term programs that contribute to broader biodiversity and biosecurity outcomes across NSW.

In addition, the national park estate plays an important role in storing and sequestering carbon. NPWS manages over 40% of forest carbon in NSW (about 900 megatonnes), underscoring its contribution to climate change mitigation (NPWS 2021). Land management activities protect these carbon stores while supporting restoration and long-term ecosystem resilience.

The NSW Government's Biosecurity Action Plan 2025 reinforces the need for coordinated, cross-tenure approaches to feral animal and weed management. NPWS is actively involved in its implementation, including development of the State Biosecurity Strategy 2026–2036.

For further information on NPWS' feral animal and weed management strategies visit: [Feral animal and weed management strategies](#)

5.2 Cultural heritage protection

The national park estate plays an important role in protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage and places of historic and shared value across NSW.

Protecting these areas supports:

- conservation of living cultural landscapes and culturally significant sites
- ongoing access to Country and the maintenance of cultural connection
- recognition, understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal, shared, and historic heritage values.

NPWS manages many culturally significant landscapes, sites and places through targeted conservation programs, site management, and appropriate access provisions. This helps preserve cultural values for current and future generations and strengthens community understanding of the state's cultural heritage.

NPWS also works in partnership with Aboriginal communities, including through joint management arrangements across the state.

For further information on cultural heritage protection visit: [Conservation and heritage](#)

5.3 Fire management

NPWS uses a strategic approach to fire management across the national park estate and adjoining landscapes, working with communities and other agencies.

With a workforce of trained firefighters, a dedicated aircraft and helicopter fleet, and specialised equipment and crews, NPWS plays a critical role in bushfire preparedness and response.

NPWS fire management activities include:

- research, planning and community engagement
- hazard reduction
- fire trail maintenance
- coordinated bushfire preparedness, management, and rapid response.

These activities help protect life and property, conserve environmental and cultural values, and support landscape resilience across NSW.

For further information on fire management visit: [Draft NSW National Parks System Directions Statement](#) and [Managing fire in parks](#)



5.4 Economic and employment contributions

The national park estate contributes \$19.5 billion a year to the NSW economy and supports 62,500 direct and indirect jobs (2021–22). This contribution is through direct spending, infrastructure investment, land management activities, employment and business opportunities including tourism. NPWS is currently updating this economic modelling to reflect 2024–25 data. A summary of NPWS' statewide economic and employment contribution is provided in Table 1.

Economic and social outcomes across NSW regions are influenced by long-term structural factors, including changes in industry structure, demographics, and climate. In some areas, particularly more remote parts of NSW, expansion of the national park estate is sometimes associated with community concerns about impacts on agricultural land use, employment, local services, and regional economies. These perspectives form part of the broader regional setting within which decisions are made.

NPWS responds by taking a regionally tailored approach. This includes considering how land additions and ongoing management investment align with local conditions, engaging with communities and Traditional Owners, and tailoring management and visitor strategies to regional opportunities. Through this approach, NPWS aims to protect natural and cultural values while supporting community resilience, regional economies, and connection to Country and culture.

Table 1. Summary of NPWS economic and employment contribution (2021–22¹)

Contribution measure	Value
Total recreational use value (2021–22) ²	\$4.42 billion
Total expenditure (2021–22)	\$19.5 billion
Direct recreation expenditure ³	\$10.55 billion
Indirect recreation expenditure ³	\$8.07 billion
Direct NPWS expenditure	\$492 million
Indirect NPWS expenditure	\$390 million
Total jobs (2021–22)	62,500
NPWS direct jobs	2,226
NPWS indirect jobs	933
Direct tourism jobs	45,269
Indirect tourism jobs	14,075

Notes 1 = The NPWS data is from 2021–22 (NPWS 2022). NPWS is currently updating its economic modelling to reflect 2024–25 data. 2 = Refer to the glossary for the definition of ‘Recreational use value’. 3 = Refer to the glossary for the definition of ‘Recreation direct expenditure’ and ‘Indirect recreation expenditure’.

5.5 Tourism and visitor experiences

Nature-based tourism is a key benefit of the national park estate. There were 65.6 million domestic visits in 2024–25, a 24% increase since 2022 and a 9% increase since 2018. Additionally, there were 4.6 million international visits to the national park estate in 2024–25 (Roy Morgan, 2026).

Visitation across the state varies, with higher numbers in coastal and more accessible regions, and lower but growing visitation in more remote areas (Marsden Jacob Associates 2026). The most visited protected area in 2024–25 was Blue Mountains National Park receiving over 7.8 million visits, this was followed by Royal National Park with over 4.9 million visits (Roy Morgan, 2026).

In western NSW for example, recent statistics show that while day trips are less common, visitors are more likely to stay overnight and travel in the region. This increases the economic contribution to towns through accommodation, fuel, food, and local services (Marsden Jacob Associates 2026).



Three in 5 visitors said their most recent visit to the national park estate was the only or main reason for their trip (Roy Morgan, 2026). Walking is the most common activity in the national park estate, other frequent activities include touring and sightseeing, picnicking and dining, rest and relaxation, water-based recreation, nature-based appreciation and camping and accommodation (Roy Morgan, 2026). This shows the important role that the national park estate plays as a driver of tourism in NSW.

To view the NPWS Park Visitation Survey (2024–25), visit the Parks visitor survey webpage at: [Park Visitor survey](#)

5.6 Visitor infrastructure and public access

Visitor infrastructure within the national park estate enables access to places and experiences that support community wellbeing, social cohesion, and connection to Country.

This infrastructure must be safe, resilient, and accessible to:

- support increasing visitation
- protect natural and cultural values
- sustain the economic contribution of the national park estate.

NPWS oversees more than \$2.6 billion in visitor infrastructure, supporting nature-based tourism, local jobs and recreation and cultural benefits. This includes a large network of visitor facilities across the state, such as:

- 3,172 km of walking and multi-use tracks, including 457.5 km of Great Walks, supported by around 850 pedestrian bridges
- day-use and recreation facilities, including 937 picnic areas, over 365 campgrounds, 706 lookouts and 3,055 barbecues
- visitor buildings, including 325 visitor accommodation buildings, 693 visitor facilities buildings (such as historic huts, visitor centres, and kiosks/cafes) and 1,059 visitor amenities buildings.

NPWS also provides public access to protected areas through a range of experiences and infrastructure, including:

- 1.9 million overnight stays each year, supported by campgrounds and accommodation
- visitor precincts and recreation areas, such as lookouts and picnic facilities
- over 10,000 km of public roads and trails
- more than 3,000 km of walking tracks.

5.7 Community health and wellbeing

Access to protected areas has a significant positive impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing (Rosengreen 2019).

Protected areas provide important spaces for people to:

- be active through walking, cycling, and outdoor recreation
- spend time in nature, supporting mental health and wellbeing
- connect with family, community, and Culture.

Contact with the natural environment is known to reduce stress, support emotional wellbeing, and provide opportunities for learning, creativity, and social interaction. Globally, the mental health benefits of visiting protected areas are estimated to deliver substantial economic value (US\$6 trillion each year), highlighting their importance to human wellbeing (Buckley et al. 2019).

Protected areas also support community wellbeing by maintaining healthy environments, such as clean air and water, and improving resilience to environmental pressures. These benefits are underpinned by ecosystem services, the natural processes that support life and are recognised globally as having substantial economic value (up to US\$145 trillion each year; Costanza et al. 2014; Meyers et al. 2020).

Together, these benefits help create healthier, more connected communities across NSW.



Cultural illustration of Healthy Country, Healthy People.



6. National Park and Wildlife Service conservation opportunities

To support evidence-informed decision making, NPWS uses spatial ecological modelling to identify conservation opportunities across NSW (see Figure 8 and Appendix 3). This approach provides a statewide (desktop) perspective that complements more detailed regional analysis, and highlights where additions to the national park estate are likely to deliver the greatest conservation benefit, as outlined in the priority actions in Part D.

The map in Figure 8 is derived from the combination of 3 spatial models. The individual spatial models identify:

- areas of high environmental value for NPWS (values are defined in line with the NPW Act), including core areas of remnant vegetation
- areas that improve ecological connectivity, including potential wildlife corridors that connect core areas of remnant vegetation, supporting plant and animal populations to interact rather than become isolated and at greater risk of extinction
- the least protected ecosystems and areas that would help build a more comprehensive, adequate, and representative protected area system, including adequate samples of ecosystems within and across each IBRA bioregion and subregion.

In Figure 8, areas of high conservation opportunity for NPWS are shown in yellow, indicating locations where multiple important values from the spatial models converge. For example, an area may support a threatened ecological community in good condition (high value in the 'areas of high environmental value' model), be located adjacent to an existing protected area (high value in the 'ecological connectivity' model), and be underrepresented within the current national park estate (high value in the 'least protected ecosystems' model).

Areas shown in blue, may still hold conservation importance, but, achieving desired outcomes may require greater investment of resources. For instance, an area may be important for threatened species (high value in the 'areas of high environmental value' model), but consist of small, fragmented pockets of suitable remnant native vegetation of moderate condition surrounded by cleared land (low values in the 'ecological connectivity' model). In such cases, conservation could be enhanced through actions such as complementing privately protected areas, feral animal and weed management, and targeted land restoration and rehabilitation.

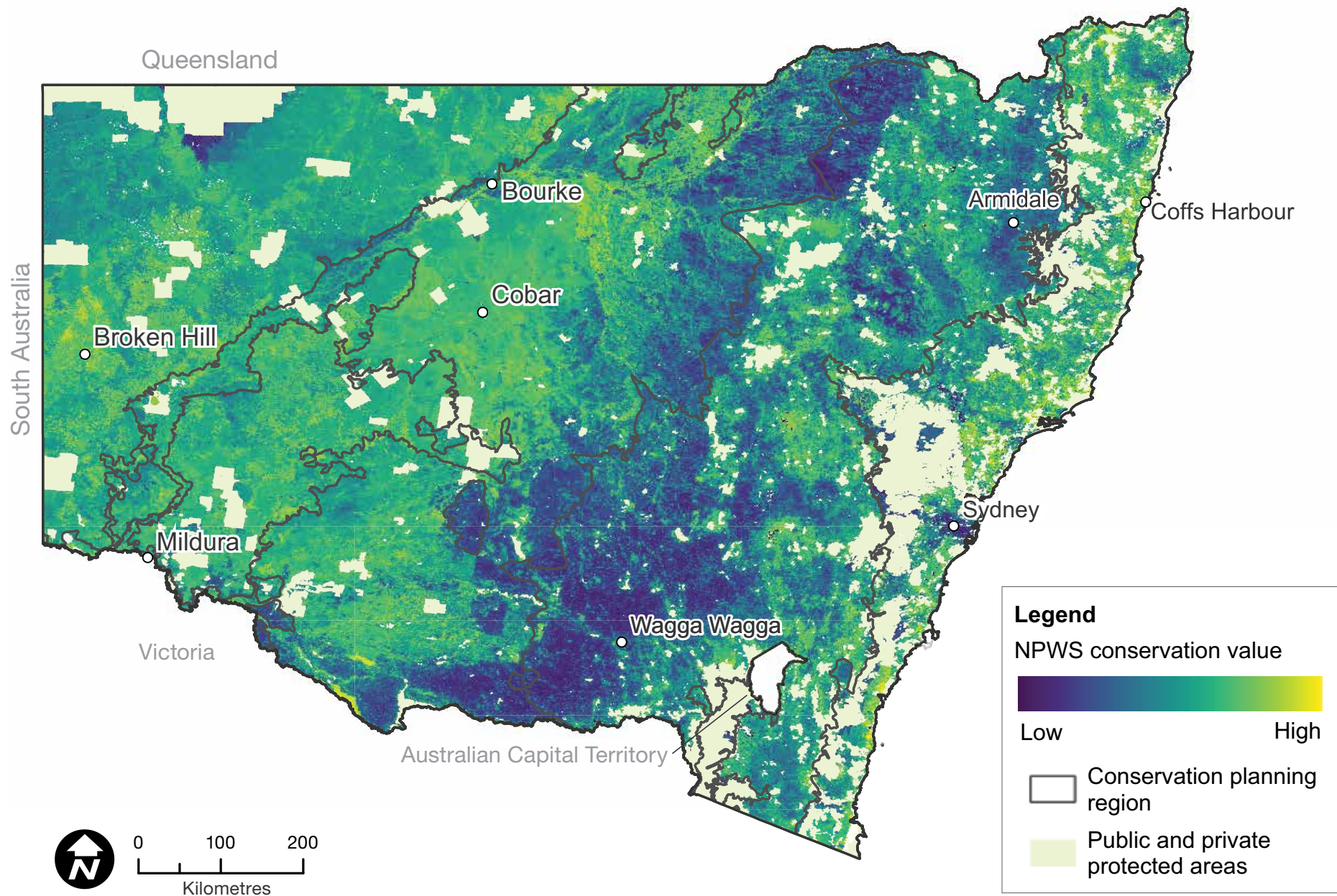


Figure 8 NPWS conservation opportunity areas across NSW (March 2026)



7. Linking benefits and opportunities to decision-making

The benefits and opportunities of adding to the national park estate demonstrate its broad value and provide important context for the Plan. These are not stand-alone drivers of land acquisition. Instead, they are considered alongside the assessment themes outlined in Part D.

Part D sets out the framework for how decisions are made in the Plan. It translates these broader considerations into a structured and consistent approach for assessing land and prioritising future investment through defined priority actions.

Part D: Assessment themes and priority actions





8. How we assess land for the national park estate

NPWS acquires land to expand and improve the national park estate. The aim is to include and represent a wide variety of ecosystems, environments, plants, animals, and places important to people. This helps to protect the State's natural and cultural heritage, including Aboriginal, shared, and historic heritage.

Under the National Parks Establishment Plan, 7 assessment themes form the framework used to evaluate and prioritise land for inclusion in the national park estate. Consistent with the CAR principles described in Part A, the first step in creating a new protected area, or adding land to an existing one, is to assess the land's conservation value.

The 7 themes that guide this assessment are:

- Areas of high conservation value
- Ecological connectivity and resilience
- Cultural heritage (Aboriginal cultural heritage, shared and historic heritage)
- Management effectiveness
- Restoration and rehabilitation
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Visitor experience value.

These assessment themes are interconnected and often overlap. NPWS will also apply additional filters that refine decision making across the themes. These include:

- threat urgency
- social and economic considerations
- cost-effectiveness
- long-term management capacity and resourcing needs.

Together, these factors will help ensure that new additions deliver conservation and cultural outcomes and can be managed sustainably over time.

Each theme is supported by priority actions that aim to:

- expand and refine protected areas in line with the NPW Act
- direct investment to areas of highest conservation value
- ensure the national park estate represents and protects NSW's natural and cultural heritage while supporting public enjoyment of these lands.



Priority actions have been informed by ecological modelling (see Figure 8 and Appendix 3), consultation with subject matter experts from across NPWS and the Department, and key stakeholders. Priority actions may also span multiple themes.

The priority actions under each theme do not single out individual parcels of land. Specific land is only considered after detailed on-site assessment of biodiversity, cultural heritage, and other required assessments.

The 7 themes that guide this assessment are:



Areas of high conservation value



Ecological connectivity and resilience



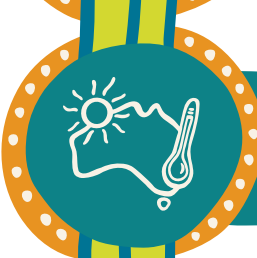
Cultural heritage (Aboriginal cultural heritage, shared and historic heritage)



Management effectiveness



Restoration and rehabilitation



Climate change adaptation and mitigation



Visitor experience value



9. Theme: Areas of high conservation value

The national park estate protects areas of high conservation value. Under this theme, strategies to continue this work include:

- Acquiring land that supports biodiversity conservation, prioritising areas with a high proportion of threatened entities, such as species, ecological communities or populations, listed under NSW or Commonwealth laws; other priority entities; species found only in that area (endemic); important wetlands, rivers, and other groundwater-dependent ecosystems and associated hydrological support networks; healthy, resilient ecosystems that provide essential habitat; significant natural landscapes such as wilderness areas and wild rivers; and recognised areas of international, national, or state significance.
- Expanding the national park estate to include areas with important cultural heritage, including cultural-use values and types of geodiversity not yet represented or under-represented in the national park estate.

Areas of high conservation value are locations that are important because of their ecological, biological, geological, or cultural significance. This includes areas with already existing conservation values, as well as areas that will play an important role in protecting nature in the future.

Under this Plan, areas of high conservation value are defined using the following criteria:

- **Species diversity** – areas with a wide range and concentration of biodiversity, including species found only in those locations, rare or threatened species, threatened species not currently represented in the national park estate, along with other priority species that need special attention.
- **Ecosystems and habitats** – areas that support essential natural processes, such as wetlands and the hydrological support networks that keep them healthy.
- **Ecosystem services** – areas that support essential natural processes, such as wetlands and the hydrological support networks that keep them healthy.
- **Geodiversity value** – geological landforms and underground features that are important because they are rare, scientifically valuable, culturally, and socially important, or vulnerable to damage. This also includes consideration of pseudo-karst systems.

- **Cultural heritage values** – sites, resources, habitats, and landscapes of Aboriginal, shared, or historic cultural significance and use (UNEP WCMC 2016).
- **Climate resilience** – areas that help species survive by providing climate refuges, support long-term ecological resilience, maintain gradual changes in environmental conditions across a landscape that enable species to adapt or move, or protect ecosystem functions likely to remain resilient under future climate scenarios.

This theme also ensures alignment with areas already recognised as high conservation value under other laws and regulations, such as environmental planning instruments or rules.

NPWS has planned priority actions that will guide its investment for areas of high conservation value across all planning regions (Table 2).

Table 2. Priority actions for areas of high conservation value

Priority action: Establish and expand protected areas to secure high conservation value areas for biodiversity conservation and cultural heritage protection

Focus – all regions

- areas that support threatened entities (see Appendix 2), including areas with habitat for threatened entities not currently recorded in the protected area system, places with high endemism and other priority conservation features
- critical water-dependent ecosystems and associated water systems, including river systems, wetlands, groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and floodplains
- significant geodiversity and geological features, and associated ecosystems where they are robust, contain unique or special attributes and are of an appropriate size
- lands identified for priority reservation under state and regional conservation frameworks (such as regional forest agreements, regional conservation plans, Renewable Energy Zone conservation investment strategies, other strategic conservation initiatives).

Focus – Far West

- intact ecosystems that support their full range of native species with a focus on plants that are endemic perennials
- areas resilient to climate change, including those highlighted through Greenspot (mesic resilience) analysis and climate-change modelling, which help support and maintain arid-zone landscape function.

Focus – Central Western Plains

- intact ecosystems that support their full range of native species, with a focus on plants that are endemic perennials
- areas resilient to climate change, including those highlighted through Greenspot (mesic resilience) analysis and climate-change modelling, which help support and maintain arid-zone landscape function
- connected habitat along major rivers and waterway systems, including links with private protected areas
- by agreement, private land zoned C1 where it contributes to conservation and supports reservation outcomes.

Priority action: Establish and expand protected areas to secure high conservation value areas for biodiversity conservation and cultural heritage protection

Focus – Tablelands and Western Slopes

- priority habitats for threatened entities
- forested areas that offer large areas of consolidated habitat
- Crown land of high conservation value that adjoins existing protected areas
- by agreement, private land zoned C1 where it contributes to conservation and supports reservation outcomes.

Focus – Coast and Coastal Ranges

- high-priority coastal and estuarine areas, such as estuaries and lakebeds that adjoin existing coastal and estuarine protected areas
- important habitats for threatened entities, including koala habitat and large, connected conservation areas in coastal forests, especially those with key habitat features and old growth vegetation
- connected water networks that support healthy wild river outcomes
- lands identified for priority reservation under the Cumberland Plains Conservation Plan and other strategic conservation initiatives
- catchments and coastal systems, including:
 - lands in drinking water catchments
 - coastal lakes and estuaries
 - wetlands and coastal transition zones
- Crown land of high conservation value that adjoins existing protected areas
- by agreement, private land zoned C1 where it contributes to conservation and supports reservation outcomes.

Focus – Australian Alps

- climate-sensitive ecosystems and areas that provide climate refuges
- Crown land of high conservation value that adjoins existing protected areas
- by agreement, private land zoned C1 where it contributes to conservation and supports reservation outcomes.



10. Theme: Ecological connectivity and resilience

NPWS strategies to protect land for ecological connectivity and resilience include:

- Securing areas that strengthen ecological connectivity and increase remnant patch size to ensure long-term viability. This is essential for building resilience to climate change, ensuring that habitat is sufficient to have viable populations of plants and animals, and supporting native plants and animals, including insects, pollen, seeds, invertebrates, and migratory and nomadic species that move through the landscape
- Acquiring land that contributes to a comprehensive, adequate, and representative protected area system, ensuring ecosystems are well-connected and viable.

Ecological connectivity is defined as ‘the unimpeded movement of species and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth’ (CMS 2020). Loss or disruption of connectivity happens when an ecosystem, habitat, or land-use type is broken up into smaller isolated pieces, a process known as fragmentation. Remnants of vegetation (‘patches’) can then be too small to sustain viable populations of plants and animals, leading to localised extinction.

Well-connected ecosystems, with remnant patches sufficient to sustain local populations, give biodiversity the best chance to survive, adapt and build resilience to climate change. They support ecological functions such as pollination, seed dispersal, hydrology (or water systems), nutrient cycling, migration, and resilience to climate impacts and disease (Oppler et al. 2020). Connectivity also improves genetic diversity, which strengthens species viability, and creates pathways that link places of cultural and social value.

The national park estate, together with the broader public and private protected area system, plays a vital role in preventing biodiversity loss, restoring, and maintaining resilient ecosystems, and improving ecological connectivity – even in landscapes where vegetation has been cleared or is regenerating.

Action is needed to maintain, enhance, and restore ecological connectivity between and among individual protected areas, and where applicable, conserved areas. Together, these areas form ecological networks that help conserve biodiversity in fragmented landscapes.

Under this theme, NPWS will consider the proximity of land under assessment to other public and private protected areas and the level of fragmentation in the surrounding landscape.



There is a strong link between ecological connectivity, resilience, and the national goal of a CAR protected area system. For example, ‘adequacy’ refers to how much of each ecosystem needs to be protected to ensure its long-term viability at a bioregional scale, as well as the shape and layout of those protected areas (Commonwealth of Australia 2009).

Major threats to biodiversity, such as land-use change, habitat modification, altered natural water flows, and climate change, will also be considered under this theme. Areas facing the greatest risk will be prioritised for improved protection within the national park estate, where the land is available to acquire.

NPWS has planned priority actions for ecological connectivity and resilience to guide investment across all planning regions (Table 3).

Table 3. Priority actions for ecological connectivity and resilience

Priority action: Establish and expand protected areas to improve ecological comprehensiveness, representativeness, and adequacy

Focus – all regions

- least protected ecosystems, particularly those with little or no representation in the national park estate (0 to 15%) (see Appendix 2)
- landscapes under increasing pressure from:
 - land use change and habitat loss or modification
 - climate variability and climate change
 - altered water flows, including regulation of natural water systems.

Priority action: Expand the national park estate to strengthen ecological connectivity, reduce fragmentation, and support climate resilience

Focus – all regions

- strategic ‘stepping stone’ sites that:
 - strengthen broader habitat connectivity networks
 - link existing protected areas or naturally vegetated areas
 - support the long-term evolution of the protected area system
 - maintain habitat for migratory and nomadic species and help sustain genetic diversity and species viability
- forested areas that offer some inherent ecological resilience to intense wildfire
- areas that facilitate species movement and support natural ecological processes such as pollination, seed dispersal, and healthy water flows, especially under climate change
- opportunities that strengthen connectivity between public protected areas, private conservation lands, and other conserved areas
- fragmented, cleared, or regenerating landscapes where habitat connectivity can be restored or enhanced
- key linkages include:
 - connections between protected areas in the Tablelands and Western Slopes
 - coastal-range corridors in eastern NSW
 - connections across alpine systems and adjoining bioregions.

A statewide analysis of opportunities to strengthen landscape-scale connectivity across these priority areas is provided in Figure 8 and Appendix 3.

Focus – Central Western Region

- areas that connect habitats along waterway systems across public and private lands
- areas that increase the size or improve the shape of remnant vegetation patches
- areas that expand the central mallee protected area node.

Focus – Tablelands and Western Plains

- areas that protect climate corridors that lead to higher altitude areas, including corridors along waterways across public and private lands
- areas that increase the size or improve the shape of remnant vegetation patches.

Focus – Coast and Coastal Ranges

- coastal areas and land–sea transition zones that support ecological connectivity.



11. Theme: Cultural heritage

Under this theme, NPWS will use cultural landscape assessments during the land assessment processes to ensure Aboriginal cultural values and knowledge inform decisions.

The aim of this theme is to strengthen recognition that Aboriginal cultural heritage is inseparable from the natural environment and must inform decision-making across all assessment themes.

NPWS strategies to protect lands with cultural heritage values include:

- adding land to the national park estate where landscapes, places and resources hold cultural, social, scientific, aesthetic, heritage, or shared heritage values, so these values are protected for future generations
- adding landscapes and places of importance to people consistent with the purposes of the NPW Act, which call for the conservation of objects, places, and features of cultural value within the landscape. This includes:
 - places, objects, and features of significance to Aboriginal people
 - places with social value to the people of NSW
 - places of historic, architectural, or scientific significance.

11.1 Aboriginal cultural heritage

Aboriginal people have an enduring connection to Country, and the national park estate plays a critical role in supporting these connections and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage. Cultural heritage includes the places, traditions, customs, values, and objects that represent the living history and identity of Aboriginal communities.

All land added to the national park estate, whether it is for biodiversity conservation or other values, contains Aboriginal cultural values. Ongoing access to these lands is essential for Aboriginal people to maintain and practice culture.

To support this, NPWS will expand its cultural assets and landscapes knowledge base and ensure that Aboriginal people's perspectives and cultural knowledge shape land assessment processes. This will be achieved through targeted consultation at the regional level.

11.2 Historic and shared heritage

Alongside Aboriginal cultural heritage, NPWS also has responsibilities for historic and shared heritage. Heritage includes the places, objects, and stories passed down through generations and protected for the future (DCCEEW 2024).

In NSW, this spans tens-of-thousands of years of Aboriginal culture and landscapes, as well as historic buildings, monuments, gardens, archaeological sites, shipwrecks, bridges, industrial structures, streetscapes, conservation precincts, and intangible heritage (DCCEEW 2024).

Shared heritage reflects the experiences and interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in NSW. Recognising this shared history is central to understanding the cultural evolution of the state.

NPWS has identified 6 key NSW heritage stories that are strongly represented in the national park estate and that NPWS is well placed to tell:

- creating and experiencing national parks
- Aboriginal Country, shared history
- arriving and settling
- pastoral lives
- defending and protecting NSW
- making a living from Nature (OEH 2016).

Under this Plan, land assessed against this theme will be considered for its potential to enhance NPWS' ability to tell these stories.

NPWS has planned priority actions for cultural heritage that will guide investment across all planning regions (Table 4).

Table 4. Priority actions for cultural heritage across all regions

Priority actions

Recognise and safeguard Aboriginal people's ongoing connection to Country, and protect tangible and intangible Aboriginal cultural values, places, and heritage.

Preserve and strengthen landscapes, places, and species of cultural importance, including those valued for their heritage, shared history, beauty, scientific significance, social or cultural identity in the broader cultural landscape.



12. Theme: Management effectiveness

Management effectiveness refers to how well protected areas are managed and how successfully they protect values and meet goals and objectives.

The NPWS strategy to acquire land that improves management effectiveness is:

- securing areas that enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of managing the national park estate.

Growth of the national park estate and successful conservation need strong management. Without effective management, simply adding more land will not achieve desired outcomes for the long-term protection of biodiversity and cultural heritage or enable Aboriginal communities to care for Country and access culturally important places.

Management effectiveness reflects 4 main considerations:

- **Design improvements** – fixing design issues in existing protected areas, such as acquiring inholdings (areas of private or Crown land embedded within an existing protected area) and other areas that help improve the shape or design of a protected area.
- **Access** – acquiring land that provides or improves legal and practical access for management or public use of existing protected areas, especially where access is currently limited or absent/non-existent.
- **Boundary refinement** – adding strategic parcels of land to existing protected areas to improve or refine boundaries, mainly along the coast, ranges, tablelands, and western slopes.
- **Delivery of conservation and other objectives** – acquiring high conservation-value lands that adjoin existing protected areas, land that buffers existing protected areas from adjoining land uses, areas that help address local impacts of climate change and areas that enable the application of management regimes at feasible scales (for example, for fire or feral animal management). This also includes acquisitions that strengthen partnerships with adjoining conservation areas on private and public lands such as Indigenous Protected Areas.



When assessing land for acquisition, NPWS will also consider risks and liabilities that may impede management, increase costs, or compromise the long-term viability of a protected area. These risks include:

- existing lease or licence uses that are incompatible with protected area management
- land condition issues, such as feral animals or weed infestations
- built assets and infrastructure condition
- bushfire risk, especially where the land borders towns
- flood risk where visitor facilities or other infrastructure could be impacted
- social and economic impacts on local communities
- legacy issues arising from previous land uses
- neighbouring land uses
- future compulsory addition such as land intended for major developments, for example freeways.

To guide decision-making, NPWS will carry out a state-wide analysis to locate potential land additions that would most improve the management effectiveness of existing protected areas.

NPWS has planned priority actions for management effectiveness that will guide investment across all planning regions (Table 5).

Table 5. Priority actions for management effectiveness across all regions

Priority actions
Secure access to protected areas to improve management effectiveness.
Secure lands or water bodies that adjoin, or inholdings within, protected areas to improve boundaries and support the effective delivery of management programs.
Secure lands to buffer protected areas from adjoining land uses that may undermine their long-term health and viability.



13. Theme: Restoration and rehabilitation

NPWS actively restores and rehabilitates land to support biodiversity and improve degraded sites. While NPWS's focus is on acquiring land with intact, healthy ecosystems, in some situations, it will also acquire disturbed or degraded areas when restoration or rehabilitation can deliver significant ecological, cultural or landscape benefits.

NPWS may acquire land for restoration and rehabilitation to:

- support delivery of the Objects of the NPW Act
- protect endangered ecological communities and threatened species habitat that are currently under-represented in the national park estate
- secure ecological connectivity by adding cleared or modified areas that provide important habitat linkages
- enable the reintroduction or recovery of species once restoration has improved habitat
- restore or improve ecosystem services, such as soil health, seed banks, and natural water flows
- strengthen cultural values and connections, including opportunities for Aboriginal communities to care for Country
- enhance ecologically sustainable visitor experiences through restored or rehabilitated landscapes.

Ecological restoration is defined as 'the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed' (SER 2004). Rehabilitation, by contrast, refers to 'the process of repairing ecosystem functions and services in a degraded environment, often without fully restoring the original ecosystem' (Klaus and Kiehl 2021).

In basic terms, restoration aims to return an ecosystem as closely as possible to its original state. Rehabilitation focuses on rebuilding key ecological functions and services, even if the original mix of species and ecosystem structure cannot be fully recovered.

Restoration and rehabilitation can also help with climate change adaptation and reduce climate impacts by improving ecosystem resilience, supporting essential ecosystem services, and increasing the amount of carbon captured by ecosystems. Restoring culturally significant pathways, such as songlines, can further strengthen both cultural and ecological connectivity (Bradby et al. 2023).



These actions must be considered within the broader context of managing individual protected areas, the national park estate, and surrounding landscapes and cultural values.

Achieving the right balance between need and feasibility is critical:

- need arises when restoration or rehabilitation would help recover important ecosystems, habitats, cultural assets, or species of state or national significance, or when it would deliver community benefits and climate co-benefits
- feasibility depends on factors such as likelihood of success, stakeholder support, competing land uses, and availability of funding, resources, and capacity.

NPWS will balance the restoration and rehabilitation of modified land with the preservation of intact areas. To support consistent decision making, a restoration and rehabilitation position statement and a prioritisation framework that aligns with the emerging restoration objectives and targets in the draft NSW Nature Strategy will be developed.

NPWS has planned priority actions for restoration and rehabilitation that will guide investment across all planning regions (Table 6).

Table 6. Priority actions for restoration and rehabilitation across all regions

Priority actions
Secure cleared or disturbed landscapes that offer the best opportunities to enhance ecological connectivity, reintroduce, or recover individual species in their former habitats, or improve various ecosystem services and ecological processes for future ecological resilience.



14. Theme: Climate change adaptation and mitigation

NPWS strategies to acquire land that supports climate change adaptation and mitigation include:

- protecting and strengthening ecological connectivity through land addition
- protecting healthy and well-connected ecosystems so they remain resilient
- restoring or maintaining ecosystem functions and natural processes to support adaptation and contribute to reducing climate change impacts
- securing areas that will provide future habitat and climate refuges, protect cultural heritage and assets, support cultural use, and reduce pressures that worsen climate impacts.

Climate change threatens people's lives and livelihoods, the health of ecosystems, and the survival of species. NSW is experiencing these impacts, including an unprecedented cycle of extreme heat, drought, bushfires, storms, and floods (DCCEEW 2024a).

Protected areas play an essential role in our response to climate change. They support ecosystems by enhancing their resilience to change (adaptation) and help reduce climate impacts by protecting and increasing natural carbon stores (mitigation).

When land is assessed under this theme, NPWS will consider its potential to:

- **Reduce pressures that intensify climate impacts** – The impacts of climate change can worsen when it interacts with other problems such as invasive species and habitat fragmentation. Ecosystems and species are more likely to adapt to a changing climate when these stressors are reduced or removed.
- **Restore or maintain ecosystem functions and natural processes** – Ecological processes such as plant growth, decomposition, wetland filtration and nutrient cycling support ecosystem health and resilience, even when the structure of an ecosystem or the composition of a species changes.
- **Preserve and enhance ecological connectivity** – As the climate changes, many species and ecosystems adapt by moving into new areas with more suitable habitat conditions. Connected landscapes give them the ability to relocate and survive.

- **Protect areas that provide potential future habitat for displaced species** – Species can be displaced by climate change, land-use change, sea-level rise, or other pressures. Protecting areas for future habitat will help species adapt. This can sometimes involve trade-offs with other priorities, and these will be considered to ensure balanced and effective responses to climate change. Land assessment will also consider climate risks, including exposure to natural hazards, to support long-term resilience and alignment with NSW policies.
- **Conserve climate refuges** – Areas that remain sheltered from climate change allows biodiversity to survive, persist and potentially expand over time. These areas may also contain Aboriginal cultural heritage values.

NPWS has planned priority actions for climate change adaptation and mitigation will guide investment across all planning regions (Table 7).

Table 7. Priority actions for climate change adaptation and mitigation across all regions

Priority actions

Establish and expand protected areas to improve climate-change resilience across the national park estate, and biodiversity and cultural values, with a focus on areas that:

- provide climate refuges
- have significant genetic value
- help species adapt to climate change, including potential future habitat for displaced species
- maintain or restore ecological functions and processes under changing climate conditions
- create opportunities to reduce the stressors such as habitat fragmentation or degraded waterways, which intensify climate impacts
- are carbon-rich or have high-sequestration potential, including areas identified by the *NSW Blue Carbon Strategy* (DPE 2022).



15. Theme: Visitor experience value

The NPWS strategy to acquire land for its visitor experience value is:

- areas that already offer, or have the potential to offer, ecologically sustainable recreation that is complimentary to the other values of land being assessed for acquisition.

One of the objectives of the NSW national park estate, as set out in the NPW Act, is to support public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage. People visit protected areas for many reasons and often seek a range of experiences in different settings.

Research shows that simply knowing an area is protected generates a strong interest in visiting. This is partly because people expect to encounter unique or significant natural values that justify the area's protection over other natural settings (Heagney et al. 2015).

The purpose of acquiring land under this theme is to create new or improved opportunities for visitors to experience and connect with nature, while encouraging public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of natural and cultural heritage and its conservation.

Under the National Parks Establishment Plan, land assessed for its visitor experience value will be considered for its:

- accessibility, including whether people can legally and practically reach the site
- existing infrastructure, services and facilities and their condition, as these influence the potential for ecologically sustainable recreation
- social and economic benefits that recreation on the land could provide.

This theme needs to be considered in the broader context of managing the individual protected area, the national park estate, and the nature-based recreation opportunities already available in the surrounding landscape. This includes considering land close to population centres.

There is also an interplay between visitor experience value and cultural heritage, including Aboriginal cultural heritage and historic or shared heritage, both tangible and intangible. Heritage buildings or places on land being assessed for potential acquisition may provide visitor experiences, but careful consideration needs to be given to their long-term conservation and sustainable use, including the resources to maintain and interpret them.

To support decision making, NPWS will develop a framework to assess available resources or the potential to generate more capacity through adaptive reuse of existing built infrastructure.

NPWS has planned priority actions for visitor experience value that will guide investment across all planning regions (Table 8).

Table 8. Priority actions for visitor experience value across all regions

Priority actions
Priority will be given to lands that offer new and/or improved visitor experiences, particularly where they complement other thematic values, existing protected areas, are accessible and support sustainable nature-based visitor experiences.



Cultural illustration of 7 Themes.

Part E: Resourcing the national park estate





16. Land expansion methods

The effective management of protected areas in NSW depends on expanding the national park estate in a planned way, as well as the continued investment in establishing and managing these areas over time. As the national park estate grows, the services needed to manage it also grow in scale and complexity.

To ensure protected areas are well-managed, investment needs to be aligned with ecological needs, cultural values, and visitor needs.

NPWS can add freehold or leasehold Crown land to the national park estate through several approaches:

- direct offers from landholders
- purchases on the open market
- transfer of public land
- land donations, which still undergo a formal assessment to ensure they provide strategic value to the national park estate
- compulsory processes (used only in very limited circumstances).

Each year, NPWS assesses many properties, but only a small number meet the criteria to be added to the national park estate. Strong prioritisation processes ensure that only the most suitable and strategically important lands are included, in line with the National Parks Establishment Plan.

How NPWS grows the national park estate

NPWS can add land to the national park estate under the NPW Act through a 4-step process: assessment, prioritisation, consultation, and approval.

Step 1: Assessment

Information is gathered about each proposal, guided by the assessment themes and priority actions in this Plan. Proposals must also align with current government directions.

Step 2: Priority setting

Lands under consideration are ranked against the priorities outlined in this plan.

Where possible, land is assessed objectively, although informed judgement is also used. This approach enables NPWS to compare a wide range of proposals, including those with values that cannot easily be quantified.

Step 3: Consultation

Proposals are discussed with other government land-use agencies to identify competing interests and other important land uses.



Step 4: Approval

Recommendations are referred to the Minister for the Environment, or an authorised delegate, for approval to proceed.

NPWS has a finite budget for land acquisition, and all purchases are informed by independent valuations and a rigorous assessment of environmental, cultural and visitor experience values. Decisions about purchasing or transferring land need to balance competing interests and land uses so that a range of goals can be met. This includes supporting a diverse economy, protecting a healthy environment, and maintaining cultural connectedness.

Making a new addition is the first step in managing it as part of the national park estate. Once NPWS takes ownership, a series of coordinated actions begin to establish and manage the land as part of the national park estate.



17. Lifecycle of protected area management

The full lifecycle of managing protected areas has 3 interlinked phases. Each phase is a critical step in how protected areas are created, cared for and maintained over time.

17.1 Phase 1: Buying or receiving land

This phase involves checking whether land is suitable for inclusion in the national park estate. Costs can include the purchase or transfer of the land, ecological and cultural heritage surveys, legal fees, valuations, other assessments, and staff-related expenses.

17.2 Phase 2: Setting up the protected area

Once the land has been acquired, NPWS begins the works needed to establish it as a protected area under the NPW Act. This can involve building essential infrastructure (such as depots, fire trails, and visitor facilities), starting feral animal, weed and fire management, and deploying staff to the area.

17.3 Phase 3: Ongoing care and management

NPWS manages protected areas in perpetuity under the NPW Act. This involves activities such as feral animal, weed and fire management, ecological monitoring, caring for cultural heritage, ensuring visitor safety, and maintaining infrastructure. The resources needed varies significantly depending on the type of protected area, its location, ecological and cultural heritage needs, and how many people visit the area. As the estate grows, NPWS will need more staff to deliver these tasks effectively.



18. The NPWS Service Delivery Framework

Each phase of the protected area management lifecycle needs different resources. NPWS uses a service delivery framework to describe clearly and consistently what it is doing, understand the costs of its work, and report how well it is performing. This enables NPWS to meaningfully compare services between different areas, understand the full cost of delivering them, and plan future service delivery. It also enables NPWS to explain the impact of funding changes with confidence.

The framework includes 21 programs; each linked to the goals of the NPW Act and the NPWS budget. These programs are designed to deliver specific outcomes for the environment and the community. Activity categories within each program guide how services are delivered and how funding is allocated.

18.1 Budget and service delivery alignment

NPWS plans its budget so that public resources are directly linked to specific, measurable outcomes. This approach allows the community to understand how funds are used and what outcomes are achieved.

The annual budget and service delivery cycle helps NPWS deliver:

- departmental priorities
- NSW Government election commitments
- targets for the 21 NPWS service delivery framework programs
- corporate services such as IT, procurement, and legal support for staff.

Budget and service delivery is run in a continuous annual cycle of planning, delivering, monitoring, adjusting, and reporting. This process enables NPWS to prepare for the year ahead while maintaining flexibility to redirect funding when needed. For example, during natural disasters or bushfire seasons, NPWS can move resources between programs to respond to or meet emerging priorities.

18.2 Service delivery levels

Each program in the NPWS service delivery framework includes specific commitments and targets. These commitments provide data that enable NPWS to monitor current performance, support future funding proposals, and show that public money is being used well.

As the national park estate grows, the framework is reviewed to reflect the increased responsibilities that come with managing more land. Growing and refining the national park estate in line with the National Parks Establishment Plan will require additional resources to meet NPWS service delivery commitments across both existing and newly added areas.



Without ongoing investment, there is a risk that service quality and conservation outcomes may decline as the estate becomes larger and more complex.

Managing a protected area involves a range of work tasks. These include:

- feral animal, weed, and fire management
- disaster response
- ecological monitoring and reporting
- threatened species and other biodiversity conservation programs
- cultural heritage conservation and interpretation
- Aboriginal joint management
- visitor safety programs
- infrastructure development and maintenance
- community and stakeholder engagement
- education programs.

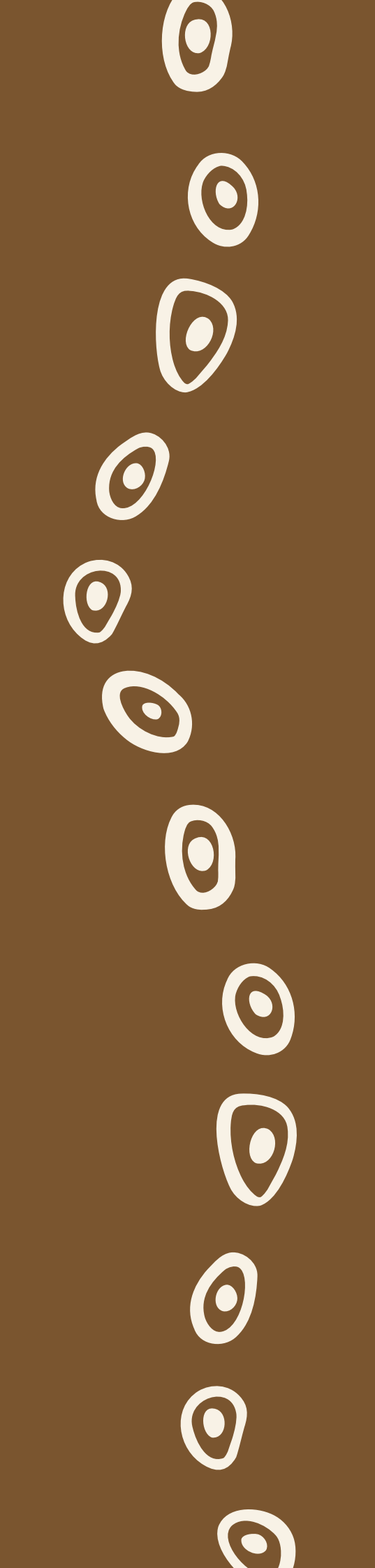
Funding also supports staff and volunteer training, equipment, and technology systems that help NPWS run its operations effectively across diverse landscapes.

Service levels differ widely across the national park estate. These levels are influenced by factors such as the type of protected area (such as national park, nature reserve, or regional park), its size and location, the condition of existing infrastructure, ecological and cultural heritage management needs, and how many people visit.

For example:

- A high-visitation coastal national park may need extensive infrastructure, such as campgrounds, car parks, day-use facilities, and a staffed visitor centre, as well as feral animal, weed, and fire management programs.
- A remote nature reserve may have minimal built infrastructure and low visitation, enabling resources to focus on ecological monitoring, and feral animal, weed, and fire management rather than visitor facilities.
- A historic site requires specialist heritage conservation and interpretation.

This variability means areas with higher service needs generally require more funding. As the national park estate continues to grow, NPWS will review its Service Delivery Framework to maintain service quality and meet commitments across all programs.



18.3 Funding the national park estate

Establishing and managing protected areas needs substantial and sustained investment. The NSW Government is the main source of funding for the national park estate, but additional support comes from philanthropy, self-generated revenue, limited commercial operations, and other sources.

A range of conservation finance mechanisms can also help meet the long-term resourcing needs of the estate, including:

- the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust
- strategic collaborations and partnerships
- natural capital markets such as Green Bonds under the NSW Sustainability Bond Programme, and the Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme.

The National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust

The National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust is emerging as the statutory not-for-profit partner of NPWS. The Trust was established under Part 7 of the NPW Act and endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient in 2024.

The NPW Act provides that funds must go towards:

- the acquisition of lands
- scientific research and monitoring
- threatened species conservation, including restoration
- projects that support the involvement of Aboriginal people in park management, including joint management
- other non-routine activities that support the conservation of nature and cultural values and foster public appreciation and enjoyment.

The Trust is intended to be overseen by an independent Board with members appointed by the NSW Environment Minister.

For further information, visit: [Donate to NSW National Parks](#)

Strategic collaborations and partnerships

NPWS works with a diverse network of partners to support the full lifecycle of protected area management across NSW. These partners include Aboriginal communities, non-government organisations, volunteers, government bodies, private landholders, philanthropists, and the private sector. These collaborations enable people and organisations to share knowledge, expertise, and new ideas. In many cases, the pooling of resources to deliver shared outcomes align with the objects of the NPW Act (O'Flynn, Schweinsberg and Wearing 2022).

Strategic partnerships play an essential role in enhancing conservation outcomes across the national park estate.

Examples of existing successful partnerships include joint management, land additions supported by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and feral predator-free areas.



Cultural illustration of Working in Partnership.

Joint management with local Aboriginal communities

NPWS jointly manages 159 protected areas with local Aboriginal communities. This involves sharing responsibility for governance, planning, and day-to-day management. These partnerships recognise Aboriginal people's cultural authority and ongoing connection to Country, and strengthen the cultural, ecological, and social values of jointly managed protected areas.

For examples of joint management partnerships, visit: [Aboriginal joint management of parks](#).



Land additions supported by The Nature Conservancy

NPWS and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) have a long-standing partnership focused on acquiring areas of high conservation value for addition to the national park estate. In 2025, TNC contributed \$4.41 million towards the purchase of the 71,000-hectare Tasman and Corinya properties south of Cobar in western NSW.

This addition helped safeguard 2 of NSW's least reserved bioregions, the Cobar Peneplain and the Murray Darling Depression. It also helped protect the Neckarbo Range and Barnato Lakes Landscapes, along with 6 other under-represented landscapes. TNC's support was made possible through its partnership with the Wyss Foundation.

Feral predator-free areas

NPWS partners with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and the University of New South Wales (Wild Deserts), to establish and manage predator-free areas within the national park estate. These projects have enabled the reintroduction of species such as the numbat, greater bilby, and golden bandicoot – many of which had been absent from NSW for more than a century. These feral predator-free areas now support thriving populations and contribute to threatened-species recovery.

For more information, visit: [Feral predator free project](#).

Sponsorship policy

NPWS operates under a Sponsorship policy that provides a clear and consistent framework for evaluating opportunities that may contribute funding and resources to the national park estate. The policy outlines NPWS-specific requirements and aligns with the NSW Government Sponsorship Policy (2024), which provides principles-based guidance and includes mandatory requirements for agencies involved in sponsorship arrangements.

For more information, visit: [Sponsorship policy](#).



The NSW Sustainability Bond Programme

The NSW Government introduced the NSW Sustainability Bond Framework in 2018. Under this framework, TCorp can issue Green, Social, and Sustainability bonds. Money raised from these bonds is used to fund or refund projects and assets that deliver positive environmental and social benefits and contribute towards meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as well as support the NSW Government's environmental and social priorities.

With the framework in place, the government introduced the NSW Sustainability Bond Programme, through which a 10-year, AU\$1.8 billion Green Bond was issued – the largest in Australia at the time. The programme was created to support a broad range of environmental and social initiatives across the state.

Funds raised through the programme can only be used for projects that meet the eligibility criteria set out in the NSW Sustainability Bond Framework.

In 2020, the Improving Access to National Parks program was added as an 'eligible asset'. Up to \$150 million from the programme was allocated to improve accessibility to national parks through capital works, improving visitor facilities and infrastructure, and supporting tourism. Funding also supported the development of digital tools to improve mobile connectivity across the national park estate and expand safety programs.

In the future, new programs may be added to the NSW Sustainability Bond Programme's asset pool, creating the opportunity to access additional funding to support the National Parks Establishment Plan and the 3 phases in the protected area management lifecycle.

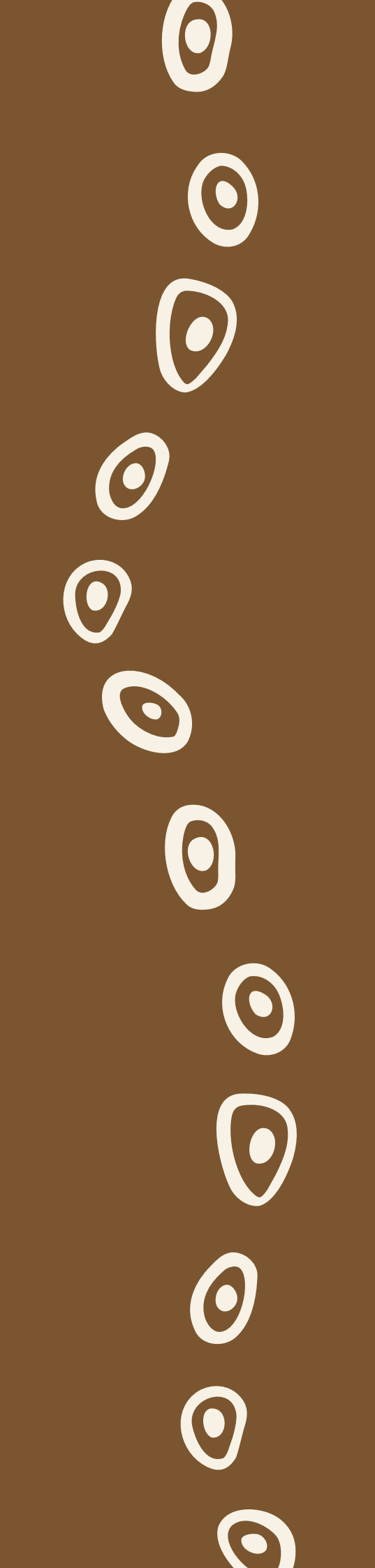
For further information, visit: [Sustainability bond programme](#)

Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme

The Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) Scheme is Australia's national scheme for creating carbon credits, set up under the *Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming) Act 2011* and the Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Rule 2015.

The NPW Act was amended in 2021 to include Part 5A, which enabled the NSW Environment Minister to create and manage carbon sequestration rights to protect and enhance carbon sinks.

A project can generate credits during a dedicated 'crediting period,' which ranges between 7 to 25 years depending on the project type. All NPWS carbon projects currently have a 25-year crediting period, which means each project can generate ACCUs for 25 years from the date they were registered.



Each project also has a permanence period. All NPWS carbon projects registered to date have a 100-year permanence, meaning the carbon stored must be maintained for 100 years. This obligation is non-negotiable.

ACCUs generated by NPWS carbon projects can be used to offset emissions that cannot be eliminated or avoided in other ways. For example, under the ACCU Scheme's Improved Native Forest Management (INFM) method, state governments may earn ACCUs by voluntarily ceasing planned harvesting in defined areas of multiple-use public native forests that would otherwise be used for commercial forestry (DCCEEW 2026d).

The sale of ACCUs may generate revenue that could help recover some of the costs of managing protected areas, including the delivery of carbon projects. NPWS is developing a policy to guide how ACCUs generated from carbon projects will be sold on the Australian Carbon Exchange.

For more information, visit: [Australian Carbon Credit Unit \(ACCU\) Scheme](#)

Part F: Evaluation and reporting





Regular monitoring and evaluation of the National Parks Establishment Plan, in line with NSW Treasury's Program Evaluation Guidelines, is important for tracking progress and keeping the public informed.

An initial evaluation of the Plan will be undertaken at the end of 2031, with subsequent evaluations every 5 years after that.

Reporting on National Parks Establishment Plan outcomes will include:

- annual reporting on how the national park estate is contributing to the proposed targets in the draft NSW Nature Strategy
- annual public updates on achievements.

The priority actions in Part D of this plan may be updated based on the findings from the annual reporting and 5-year evaluations.

Evaluation will also align, where appropriate, with the emerging monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and improvement framework being developed for the draft NSW Nature Strategy. This may include integration with the Biodiversity Indicators Program, State of the Environment reporting, and public dashboards to support transparency once the NSW Nature Strategy is finalised.

About the cultural illustrations and stories

We valued the collaborative process to design this document alongside the team at Yirra Miya, a First Nations Creative Agency. The cultural illustrations were developed by Founder and Creative Director Leticia Forbes of Yirra Miya and a proud Wiradjuri artist. We have shared the stories to support the understanding and recognition of their significance throughout this document.

Growing land protection



This illustration represents growing land protection across Australia and caring for Country from now and into the future. It acknowledges the strength of engaging with First Nations people in land protection and working collectively with all protectors of land. The illustration represents three circles of growth with the knowledge sticks representing sharing of knowledge and planting seeds for future impact.

Preserving ecosystems



This illustration represents preserving ecosystems across Australia and the intricate layering of our natural elements.

This illustration shows layers of ecosystems from the sun and mountains, through to the kangaroo tracks to represent animals, cross-hatching to represent land, seeds to represent plants, circles and waves to represent the rivers and the ocean. They are contained by a circular journey line to represent continuation and continuous movement of change and growth.

Healthy Country, healthy people



This illustration represents the significance of maintaining a healthy Country and how this interconnects with the wellbeing of all people living and growing on Country. This reflects the importance of sitting and listening to each community to understand the localised approach needed to care for the land.

This illustration shows components of Country from our skies, land, and waters. The row of people represents that we are in togetherness. The community circle in the lower centre represents caring for community, the seeds for creating change and outcomes for future impact.



7 themes

This illustration represents the 7 themes within the National Parks Establishment Plan that form the framework used to evaluate and prioritise land for inclusion in the national park estate. Within this element the 7 themes are displayed, starting from the top centre icon and continue in a circle clockwise. The 7 themes are displayed with the following icons:

- Platypus icon - Areas of high conservation value
- Ecosystem in cycle - Ecological connectivity and resilience
- Gathering circle - Cultural heritage (Aboriginal cultural heritage, shared, and historic heritage)
- Hands in partnership over map - Management effectiveness
- Planting of seeds and growth - Restoration and rehabilitation
- Australia with temperature change - Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Tent - Visitor experience value.

The icons are layered on a circular journey path with a connected community circle in the centre to represent the connection to Country and caring through a holistic approach with all the icons being equally important and interconnected.



Working in partnership

This illustration represents the importance of working in partnership. It honours the knowledge people bring to achieve better outcomes for biodiversity and cultural heritage through the growth of the national park estate. The illustration shows two connected people gathering to share and work side-by-side. The interconnected circles represent the significance of sharing knowledge with the extension of the knowledge sticks showing where they join. The seeds represent planting seeds for future impact.



Seeds

This panel represents a journey line of seeds for creating change and outcomes for future impact.

Glossary

Term	Meaning/description
Acquired lands	Acquired lands are held under Part 11 of the <i>National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974</i> but not yet reserved under the act.
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 (NRMMC 2009).
Biodiversity	The variety of all life forms: the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form.
Comprehensiveness	Refers to the aim of including samples of the full range of regional ecosystems recognisable at an appropriate scale within and across each IBRA bioregion as defined by the Australian Government (NRMMC 2009).
Conservation	The protection, maintenance, management, sustainable use, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment.
Conserved area	Also referred to as other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), conserved areas are areas outside formal protected areas that still deliver long-term biodiversity conservation.
Cultural heritage	Aboriginal cultural heritage and non-Aboriginal heritage show how different cultures see, use and care for the land. These world views have shaped how the land has been managed over time. Heritage comprises places, objects, and stories we have inherited from the past and want to protect for future generations. In NSW, this includes tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal culture and landscapes, as well as historic buildings, monuments, gardens, archaeological sites, shipwrecks, bridges, industrial structures, streetscapes, conservation areas, and cultural traditions. Aboriginal people have a deep connection to all of NSW, and the entire national park estate holds cultural value. For Aboriginal communities, cultural heritage includes the places, traditions, customs, values, and objects that represent the ongoing history of their people. This includes tangible objects and places such as rock shelters, scarred trees, shell middens, bora grounds, and stone artefacts, and intangible values, such as songlines, Dreaming stories and ceremonies passed down through generations.
Gazetted	Formal or legal recognition, through an official notice in the NSW Government Gazette, that land has been added to the national park estate and that maps, boundaries and public access rights have been officially updated.
Geodiversity	The natural diversity of rocks, minerals, landforms, fossils, sediments and soils, and the processes that have shaped these features over time.
Groundwater-dependent ecosystems	Ecosystems that need access to groundwater to meet all or some of their water requirements to maintain their communities of plants and animals, ecological processes, and ecosystem services. They include a range of environments that can be highly specialised, possessing unique characteristics that separate them from other ecosystems. Their dependence on groundwater varies from seasonal to episodic, to continual. They can range in size from a few metres to many square kilometres.
Ecological connectivity	The unimpeded movement of species and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth (CMS 2020).

Term	Meaning/description
Endemism	The condition of being <i>endemic</i> or restricted in geographical distribution to an area or region. Endemism is an ecological classification in that it describes the range or distribution of a species, or group of species.
Entity	A term used in conservation planning that defines a unit of biodiversity, such as a species, subspecies, population, habitat type, or ecological community that is recognised as needing protection.
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 (DCCEEW 2024). NSW supports 18 land-based bioregions, as well as 5 marine bioregions in its coastal waters.
Landscapes	For national reporting purposes, regional ecosystems in NSW are defined by a dataset called NSW Landscapes (OEH 2017). These 571 landscape types are considered the best available surrogate for this purpose, at this time. New and more detailed vegetation information is available for NSW and can inform the development of an up-to-date alternative for NSW landscapes.
National park estate	For the purposes of this document, the national park estate includes national parks, nature reserves, state conservation areas, Aboriginal areas, historic sites, regional parks, and karst conservation reserves established under the NPW Act, NPWS acquired but not yet reserved lands, as well as certain Crown reserves and flora reserves managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.
Priority entity	An entity that for various reasons, needs special attention.
Protected area	For the purposes of this document, the national park estate includes national parks, nature reserves, state conservation areas, Aboriginal areas, historic sites, regional parks, and karst conservation reserves established under the NPW Act, NPWS acquired but not yet reserved lands, and certain Crown reserves, as well as certain Crown reserves and flora reserves managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.
Public land	Commonwealth lands, public conservation reserves, state forests, Crown lands, or freehold land held and managed by a state or federal authority.
Protect	To safeguard identified natural, cultural, recreational, and other values by managing activities and threats to ensure their long-term conservation and resilience. This usage aligns with the IUCN principle that protection involves legally or effectively managing an area to achieve the enduring conservation of nature and associated values (IUCN 2008).
Recreational use value	The value that tourism and recreation in the national park estate contribute to the wellbeing of the NSW community. This value is measured as 'consumer surplus' and 'producer surplus.' Consumer surplus is the extra benefit an individual gets when they would have paid more than the actual market price for goods and services, but they did not have to. This difference between what the individual paid and what they were willing to pay is known as the consumer surplus. Producer surplus is when a producer is willing to supply goods or services for less than the market price, but they receive the market price. The difference between the minimum price they would accept, and the market price represents the extra gain or economic benefit the producer receives, referred to as producer surplus (or profit).
Representativeness	Is comprehensiveness considered at a finer scale (IBRA subregion) and recognises that the regional variability within ecosystems is sampled within the National Reserve System (NRMMC 2009).

Term	Meaning/description
Restoration	The ongoing process of regaining ecological functionality and enhancing human well-being across deforested or degraded landscapes. It seeks to re-establish ecosystems that are structurally and functionally self-sustaining, resilient to normal environmental stressors, and connected to surrounding landscapes. Restoration aims to meet present and future needs while delivering multiple ecological, cultural, and social benefits over time.
Subregion	Smaller mapped biogeographic units lying within larger bioregions. NSW has 131 subregions.
Sub-landscape	Sub-landscapes represent an intersection and nesting of NSW Landscapes within IBRA regions and sub-regions. They were developed for the purpose of assessing progress towards a CAR reserve system. NSW has 1,221 sub-landscapes.
Total economic value	Total economic value comprises both use and non-use values. The NPWS estimate of total economic value includes recreational use value, as well as non-use values associated with NSW residents' willingness to pay to maintain and manage the current extent of the NSW national park estate. Protected areas have many other values that NPWS are yet to quantify for example carbon sequestration, water and air filtration, and heritage values.
Tourism (recreation) expenditure	Direct tourism expenditure Economic activity analysis is based on recorded market transactions. Tourism expenditure and NPWS management activities generate economic activity in the local economies that surround the national park estate. This direct expenditure also leads to the generation of direct jobs in regional economies. Tourism or recreation direct expenditure is a measure of visitor expenditure made during trips where visiting the protected area was a key reason for the trip generation. Because we have accounted for the role of the national park estate in trip generation, we can assume that the reported jobs and expenditures would not have occurred in the absence of the national park estate. Indirect tourism expenditure The subsequent purchases by business receiving the initial (direct) expenditure generate further economic activity in the region, referred to as indirect expenditure or flow-on effects. Similarly, employers spending a portion of the income earned in the initial round of expenditure generate further "indirect" economic activity. Accounting for indirect as well as direct effects (total effects) provide a more comprehensive assessment of the economic impacts of the national park estate in a region.
Viability	The capacity of a reserve or reserve system to affect the long-term survival of the native species and ecosystems contained within it. Also referred to as reserve 'adequacy'.
Wetland	A wetland is an area of land that stays wet, either from surface water, groundwater, or both, for long enough that the plants and animals living there depend on moist conditions for at least part of their lifecycle. They can be covered by water permanently, seasonally, or only at certain times, and the water may be fresh, brackish, or salty. The water is usually still or slow moving, except in places such as tidal creeks where flows can be stronger. Examples of wetland types include lakes, lagoons, estuaries, rivers, floodplains, swamps, bogs, billabongs, marshes, coral reefs, and seagrass beds.

Acronyms and initialisms

Acronym	Meaning
ACCU	Australian carbon credit unit
CAPAD	Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
IBRA	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia
IPA	Indigenous Protected Area
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OECM	Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures

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Appendix 1: National park estate growth since 2008

Table 9. Land acquired and reserved, guided by the National Parks Establishment Plan (2008)

Calendar year	Acquisitions		Reservations	
	Annual change	Cumulative total	Annual change	Cumulative total
2008	155,781.96	155,781.96	38,596.22	38,596.22
2009	31,557.99	187,339.94	45,366.20	83,962.42
2010	75,520.11	262,860.05	228,039.81	312,002.23
2011	16,882.32	279,742.37	107,404.70	419,406.93
2012	25,409.74	305,152.11	2,176.02	421,582.95
2013	10,711.31	315,863.42	13,539.55	435,122.50
2014	4,603.32	320,466.73	6,732.53	441,855.02
2015	67,053.43	387,520.16	11,869.79	453,724.82
2016	6,353.48	393,873.64	26,859.03	480,583.84
2017	6,739.21	400,612.85	–	480,583.84
2018	4,122.85	404,735.70	4,853.02	485,436.86
2019	8,592.04	413,327.74	73,631.31	559,068.18
2020	195,120.50	608,448.24	226,052.91	785,121.09
2021	233,600.35	842,048.59	17,483.14	902,604.23
2022	71,516.64	913,565.22	66,500.04	969,104.27
2023	484,696.03	1,398,261.25	3,184.62	972,288.88
2024	37,429.60	1,435,690.85	37,791.05	1,010,079.93
2025	116,659.08	1,552,349.93	3,340.75	1,013,420.68

There may be several reasons affecting the length of time between acquisition and reservation. In some cases it may be years before reservation can proceed, whereas, when appropriate, Lands of the Crown may be reserved without first being recorded as an acquisition.

The data in Table 9 may also reflect losses due to occasional disposal of land.

Appendix 2: Key statistics overview

Threatened entity statistics

Part D of this Plan explains the importance of threatened ecological communities, species, and populations when creating or expanding protected areas. Below lists the threatened ecological communities and populations found in each national park estate conservation planning region, which are reflected in the priority actions outlined in Part D. A complete list of threatened species is available on NSW BioNet.

Threatened entity patterns vary across regions because each region differs in size and ecological complexity and this may reflect previous survey efforts or areas of focus. Inland regions, such as the Far West and Central Western Plains, appear to have fewer listed threatened entities overall, however, these are important and often distinctive threatened communities, including woodland and shrubland systems.

The Tablelands and Western Slopes region contain a high number and wide variety of threatened communities, populations, and species. The Coast and Coastal Ranges region appears to have the greatest number of threatened entities overall, reflecting both its ecological richness and survey effort.

Although the Australian Alps region covers a smaller area, it contains a distinct set of specialised threatened communities and a smaller but significant suite of threatened species.

In each NPWS conservation planning region (see Part B) reference is made to the number of threatened species that are currently considered to have no protection within the national park estate. This is defined as threatened species recorded in the NPWS Threatened Species Inventory (unpublished), that are unlikely (low confidence), or that have no record (very low confidence), of being found on the national park estate. The inventory has been developed based on threatened species sightings extracted from BioNet, expert knowledge and species distribution models. It includes only animal and plant species listed in Schedule 1 of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*; and excludes marine mammals, invertebrates, endangered populations and species that are extinct (NPWS 2026).

Far West

- **Critically endangered ecological communities (2 listed):** Porcupine grass-red mallee-gum coolabah hummock grassland/low sparse woodland, Artesian springs ecological community.
- **Endangered ecological communities (9 listed):** *Acacia loderi* shrublands; porcupine grass-red mallee-gum coolabah hummock grassland/low sparse woodland, brigalow-gidgee woodland/shrubland, coolibah-black box woodland, *Acacia melvillei* shrubland, *Allocasuarina luehmannii* woodland, myall woodland, sandhill pine woodland, *Tecticornia lylei* (wiry glasswort) low open-shrubland.
- **Threatened populations (2 listed):** *Liopholis whitii* (White's skink), *Climacteris affinis* (white-browed treecreeper).

Central Western Plains

- **Critically endangered ecological communities (3 listed):** Artesian springs ecological community, marsh club-rush sedgeland, white box - yellow box - Blakely's red gum grassy woodland and derived native grassland.
- **Endangered ecological communities (11 listed):** *Acacia loderi* shrublands, coolibah-black box woodland, inland grey box woodland, myall woodland, brigalow, brigalow-gidgee woodland/shrubland, carbeen open forest community, fuzzy box woodland, *Acacia melvillei* shrubland, *Allocasuarina luehmannii* woodland, sandhill pine woodland.
- **Threatened populations (2 listed):** *Climacteris affinis* (white-browed treecreeper), one population in Cobar Peneplain bioregion, and the other in Riverina bioregion.

Tablelands and Western Slopes

- **Critically endangered ecological communities (5 listed):** Artesian springs ecological community, white box - yellow box - Blakely's red gum grassy woodland and derived native grassland, New England peppermint (*Eucalyptus nova-anglica*) woodland, Monaro tableland cool temperate grassy woodland, Werriwa tablelands cool temperate grassy woodland.
- **Endangered ecological communities (21 listed):** Brigalow, *Cadellia pentastylis* (Ooline) community, carbeen open forest community, *Carex* sedgeland, coolibah-black box woodland, fuzzy box woodland, inland grey box woodland, Mount Kaputar high elevation and dry rainforest land snail and slug community, myall woodland, native vegetation on cracking clay soils of the Liverpool Plains, Pilliga outwash ephemeral wetlands, semi-evergreen vine thicket, Howell shrublands, Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve sphagnum moss cool temperate rainforest, McKies stringybark/blackbutt open forest, montane peatlands and swamps, ribbon gum-mountain gum - snow gum grassy forest/woodland, upland wetlands of the drainage divide, Genowlan Point *Allocasuarina nana* heathland; Mt Canobolas *Xanthoparmelia* lichen community; tableland basalt forest.
- **Threatened populations (11 listed):** *Acacia pendula*, *Adelotus brevis* (tusked frog), *Alectura lathamii* (Australian brush-turkey), *Climacteris affinis* (white-browed treecreeper), *Cymbidium canaliculatum*, *Eucalyptus aggregata*, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, *Petaurus norfolcensis* (squirrel glider), *Petaurus australis* (yellow-bellied glider).

Coast and Coastal Ranges

- **Critically endangered ecological communities (15 listed):** Hunter Valley weeping myall woodland, white box - yellow box - Blakely's red gum grassy woodland and derived native grassland, Werriwa tablelands cool temperate grassy woodland, Agnes Banks woodland, blue gum high forest, Cumberland Plain woodland, eastern suburbs banksia scrub, Elderslie banksia scrub forest, *Hygrocybeae* community, Kincumber scribbly gum forest, *Melaleuca armillaris* tall shrubland, Robertson basalt tall open forest, shale sandstone transition forest, Sun Valley cabbage gum forest, Sydney turpentine-ironbark forest.
- **Endangered ecological communities (57 listed):** Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve sphagnum moss cool temperate rainforest; *Carex* sedgeland, Central Hunter grey box - ironbark woodland, Central Hunter ironbark - spotted gum - grey box forest, coastal cypress pine forest, coastal saltmarsh, freshwater wetlands on coastal floodplains, grey box - grey gum wet sclerophyll forest, Hunter floodplain red gum woodland, Hunter lowland redgum forest, Hunter valley vine thicket, littoral rainforest, Lower Hunter spotted gum ironbark forest, lowland rainforest, lowland rainforest on floodplain, montane peatlands and swamps, river-flat *Eucalypt* forest on coastal floodplains, subtropical coastal floodplain forest, swamp oak floodplain forest, swamp sclerophyll forest, *Themeda* grassland on seacliffs and coastal headlands, white gum moist forest, Araluen Scarp grassy forest, Bangalay sand forest, Brogo wet vine forest, dry rainforest of the South East Forests, lowland grassy woodland, Byron Bay dwarf graminoid clay heath community, Blue Mountains basalt forest, Blue Mountains shale cap forest, Castlereagh swamp woodland community, coastal upland swamp, Cooks River/Castlereagh ironbark forest, Duffys forest ecological community, Illawarra lowlands grassy woodland, Illawarra subtropical rainforest, Kurnell dune forest, Kurri sand swamp woodland, Norah Head low woodland with heathland on indurated sand, Maroota sands swamp forest, Milton Ulladulla subtropical rainforest, moist shale woodland, Mount Gibraltar forest, Newnes Plateau shrub swamp, O'Hares Creek shale forest; Pittwater and Wagstaffe spotted gum forest, Quorrobolong scribbly gum woodland, Robertson rainforest, shale gravel transition forest, Southern Highlands shale woodlands, Southern Sydney sheltered forest on transitional sandstone soils, Sydney freshwater wetlands, tableland basalt forest, the shorebird community occurring on the relict tidal delta sands at Taren Point, Umina coastal sandplain, Sydney basin woodland, Warkworth sands woodland, Western Sydney dry rainforest.

- **Vulnerable ecological communities (4 listed):** Lower Hunter Valley dry rainforest, Blue Mountains swamps, Castlereagh scribbly gum woodland, Slaty gum woodland.

Australian Alps

- **Critically endangered ecological communities (3 listed):** Snowpatch feldmark, snowpatch herbfield, windswept feldmark.
- **Endangered ecological communities (1 listed):** Montane peatlands and swamps.
- **Threatened population (1 listed):** *Petaurus australis* (yellow-bellied glider).

NSW IBRA bioregion statistics

The Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEW) tracks progress in building the protected area system, which is reflected in CAPAD (Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database) 2024.

CAPAD reporting includes gazetted lands in the national park estate and is based on Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) bioregions and subregions. While the CAPAD database is updated every 2 years, NPWS maintains statistics to the subregion and sub-landscape level on an ongoing basis.

IBRA is a national, science-based framework that groups landscapes into bioregions and subregions based on shared features such as climate, geology, landforms, vegetation, and species. Each unit represents a landscape with relatively uniform natural features and distinct ecological communities. This makes the IBRA framework a useful tool for biodiversity assessment, conservation planning, and monitoring, and has been used as the primary unit throughout this plan.

NSW contains 18 mainland IBRA bioregions (excluding Lord Howe Island). For planning purposes, NPWS has grouped these bioregions into 5 conservation planning regions reflecting similar stages in developing a comprehensive, adequate, and representative protected area system.

IBRA bioregion protection across the state is not evenly distributed (Figure 9), there are no bioregions with 0% representation.

Table 10 shows what percentage of each bioregion is included in the national park estate (gazetted and acquired lands) within each conservation planning region, using recently updated NPWS statistics (March 2026).

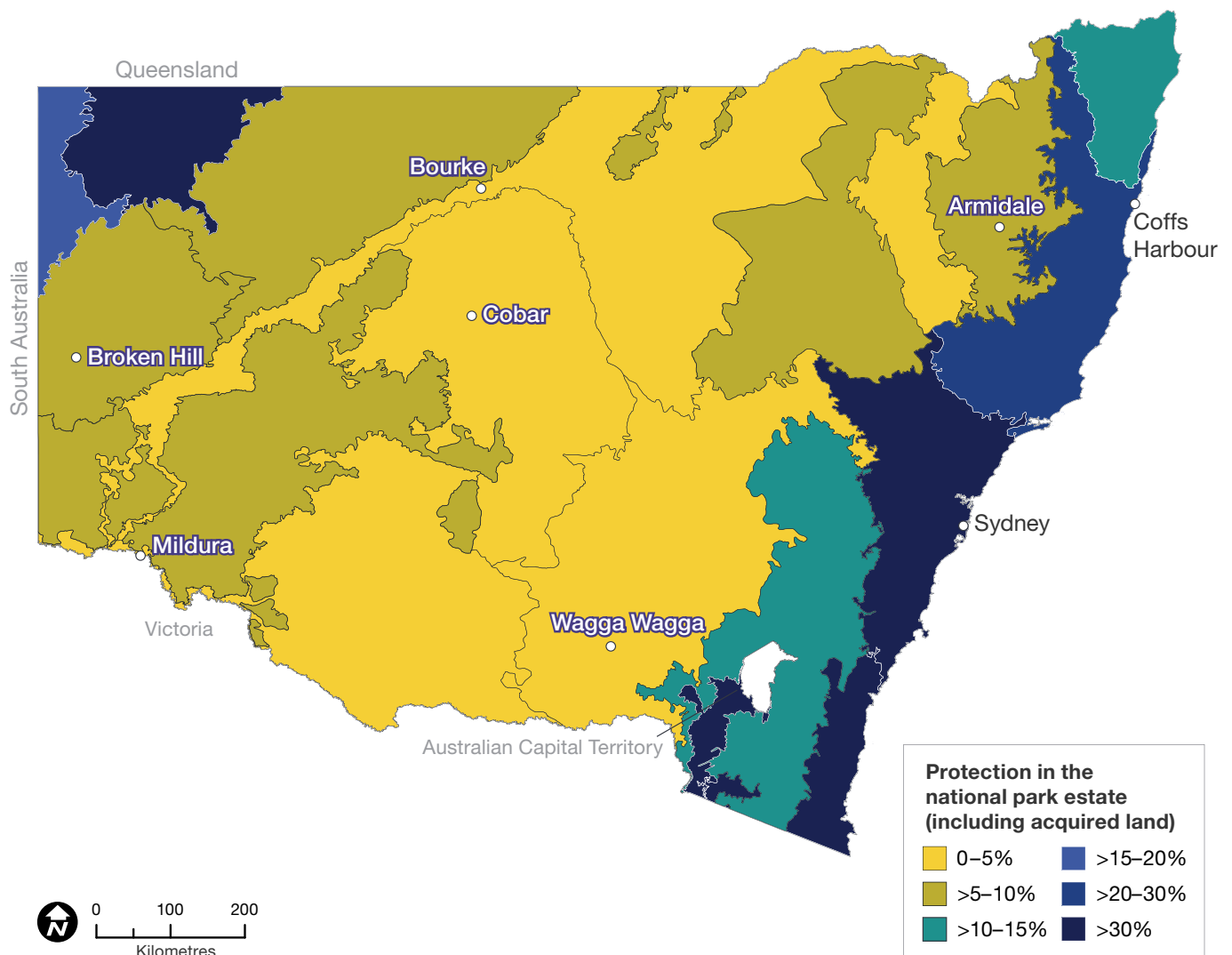


Figure 9 Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia bioregion protection in the NSW national park estate (March 2026)
 Acquired land = land held under Part 11 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 but not yet reserved under the Act.

Table 10. NPWS reservation statistics for IBRA bioregions across the national park estate conservation planning regions (March 2026)

Bioregion percentage reserved in national park estate (including acquired lands)	Bioregions by conservation planning region
–	Far West (5)
Greater than 5 to 10% (high priority)	Broken Hill Complex; Murray Darling Depression; Mulga Lands (3)
Greater than 15 to 20%	Simpson Strzelecki Dunefields (1)
Greater than 30%	Channel Country (1)
–	Central Western Plains (3)
Greater than 0 to 5% (critical gap)	Darling Riverine Plains; Cobar Peneplain; Riverina (3)
	Tablelands and Western Slopes (5)
Greater than 0 to 5% (critical gap)	NSW South Western Slopes; Nandewar (2)
Greater than 5 to 10% (high priority)	Brigalow Belt South; New England Tablelands (2)
Greater than 10 to 15%	South Eastern Highlands (1)
–	Coast and Coastal Ranges (4)
Greater than 10 to 15%	South Eastern Queensland (1)
Greater than 20 to 30%	NSW North Coast (1)
Greater than 30%	Sydney Basin; South East Corner (2)
–	Australian Alps (1)
Greater than 30%	Australian Alps (1)

Notes IBRA = Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia

Review of NPWS IBRA bioregion statistics (Table 10) shows that the largest reservation gaps (0–15%) are concentrated in inland regions, with all bioregions of the Central Western Plains (3 bioregions) and Tablelands and Western Slopes (5 bioregions), also 3 of 5 bioregions in Far West. In Coast and Coastal Ranges one bioregion has less than 15% representation.

In contrast, coastal and alpine regions show stronger representation, with isolated gaps in representation.

The NPWS IBRA bioregion and subregion statistics, informs the focus for building a CAR protected area system for each of the conservation planning regions. These statistics do not reflect the availability of suitable remnant native vegetation for conservation across the planning regions.

IBRA subregion statistics

IBRA bioregions are subdivided into finer-scale subregions (131 in mainland NSW), which provide additional ecological detail (Figure 10).

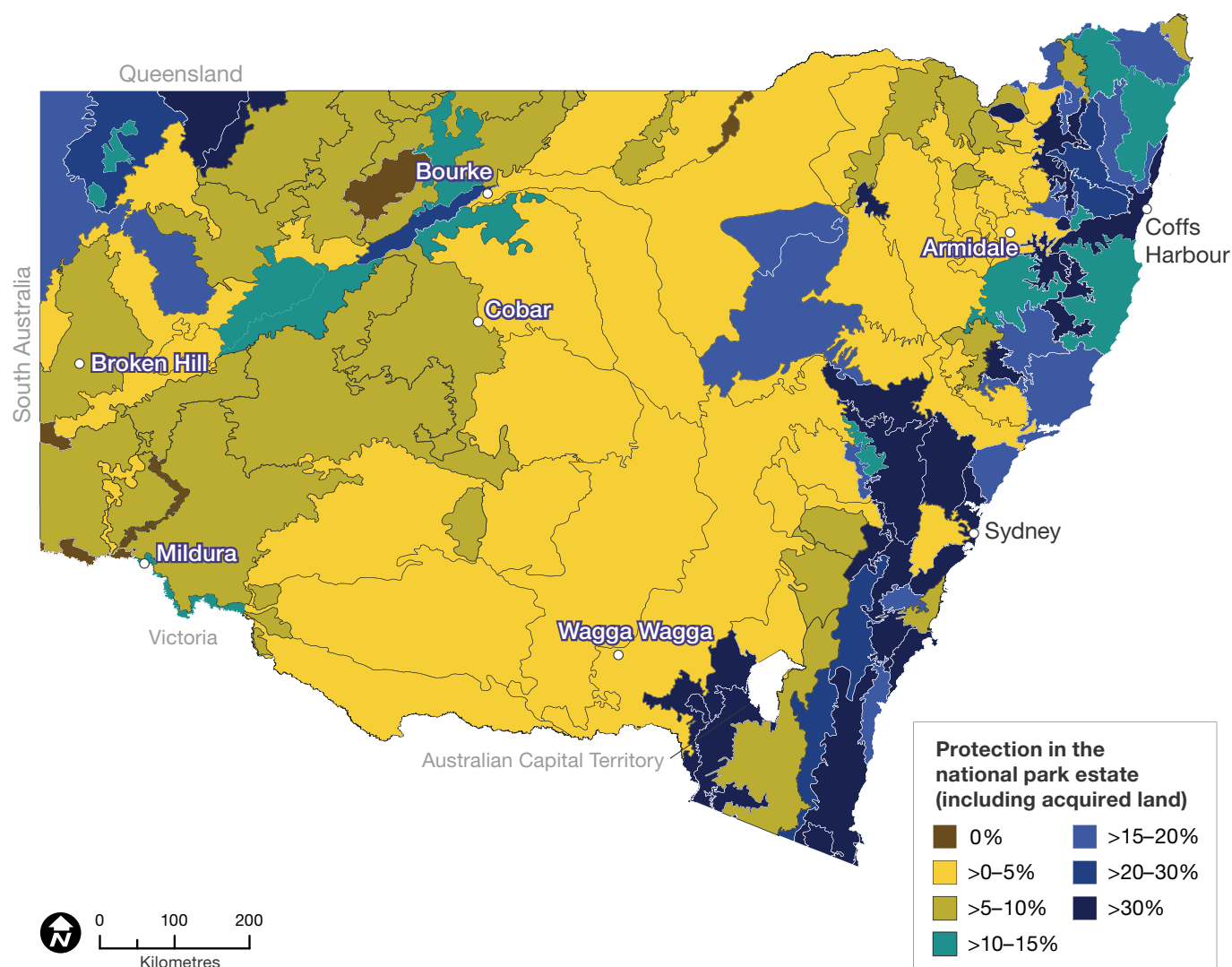


Figure 10 Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia subregion protection in the NSW national park estate (March 2026)

Acquired land = land held under Part 11 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 but not yet reserved under the Act.

The NPWS IBRA subregion statistics show that reservation gaps are widespread at the subregion scale, particularly across inland regions, and in isolated pockets along the coast (Table 11).

The Tablelands and Western Slopes conservation planning region has the highest number of under-protected (<15% reservation of) subregions at 34, followed by the Central Western Plains at 18 and Far West with 18 subregions each, confirming that these 3 conservation planning regions are important for improving protection, especially where there is availability of suitable land for conservation. Coastal regions show a mixed pattern. Some subregions remain poorly protected, with 4 in the 0–5% range and 5 in the 5–10% range, and 3 in the 10–15% range, but many are much better represented, with 19 subregions above 30% protection.

Table 11. NPWS reservation statistics for IBRA subregions across the conservation planning regions (March 2026)

Subregion percentage reserved in national park estate (including acquired lands)	Subregions by conservation planning region
–	Far West (23)
0	Braemer; Kerribree Basin (2)
Greater than 0 to 5% (critical gap)	Central Depression; Barrier Range Outwash; Scopes Range; Paroo Overflow (4)
Greater than 5 to 10% (high priority)	South Olary Plain; Barrier Range; Darling Depression; Urisino Sandplains; White Cliffs Plateau; Nebine Plains; Warrego Plains; Cuttaburra-Paroo; West Warrego (9)
Greater than 10 to 15%	Warrego Sands; Paroo-Darling Sands; Core Ranges (3)
Greater than 15 to 20%	Strzelecki Desert; Mootwingee Downs (2)
Greater than 20 to 30%	Sturt Stony Desert (1)
Greater than 30%	Bulloo Dunefields; Bulloo (2)
–	Central Western Plains (19)
0	Pooncarie-Darling; Murray Scroll Belt (2)
Greater than 0 to 5% (critical gap)	Castlereagh-Barwon; Lachlan Plains; Bogan-Macquarie; Nymagee; Great Darling Anabranch; Canbelego Downs; Warrambool-Moonie; Murray Fans; Lachlan; Culgoa-Bokhara; Murrumbidgee (11)
Greater than 5 to 10% (high priority)	Barnato Downs; Menindee (2)
Greater than 10 to 15%	Boorindal Plains; Wilcannia Plains; Robinvale Plains (3)
Greater than 15 to 20%	None
Greater than 20 to 30%	Louth Plains (1)
Greater than 30%	None
–	Tablelands and Western Slopes (47)
0	Moonie-Barwon Interfluve (1)
Greater than 0 to 5% (critical gap)	Northern Outwash; Liverpool Plains; Talbragar Valley; Liverpool Range; Beardy River Hills; Deepwater Downs; Glenn Innes-Guyra Basalts; Yarrowyck-Kentucky Downs; Lower Slopes; Inverell Basalts; Murrumbateman; Bundarra Downs; Peel; Orange; Bathurst; Tenterfield Plateau; Nightcap; Armidale Plateau; Moredun Volcanics; Inland Slopes; Eastern Nandewars; Hill End (22)
Greater than 5 to 10% (high priority)	Narrandool; Northern Basalts; Nandewar Northern Complex; Tingha Plateau; Crookwell; Monaro; Oberon; Severn River Volcanics (8)
Greater than 10 to 15%	Ebor Basalts; Walcha Plateau; Capertee Valley (3)
Greater than 15 to 20%	Pilliga Outwash; Pilliga; Capertee Uplands; Stanthorpe Plateau; Wongwibinda Plateau (5)
Greater than 20 to 30%	Bungonia; Kybeyan-Gourock (2)

Subregion percentage reserved in national park estate (including acquired lands)	Subregions by conservation planning region
Greater than 30%	Northeast Forest Lands; Bondo; Binghi Plateau; Kaputar; Round Mountain; Kanangra (6)
–	Coast and Coastal Ranges (41)
Greater than 0 to 5% (critical gap)	Upper Hunter; Ellerston; Cumberland; Hunter (4)
Greater than 5 to 10% (high priority))	Tomalla; Burringbar-Conondale Ranges; Cataract; Sunshine Coast-Gold Coast Lowlands; Illawarra (5)
Greater than 10 to 15%	Clarence Lowlands; Woodenbong; Macleay Hastings (3)
Greater than 15 to 20%	Rocky River Gorge; Karuah Manning; Clarence Sandstones; Bateman; Moss Vale; Wyong; Scenic Rim; Mummel Escarpment (8)
Greater than 20 to 30%	Dalmorton; Chaelundi (2)
Greater than 30%	East Gippsland Lowlands; Pittwater; Sydney Cataract; Jervis; Coffs Coast and Escarpment; Kerrabee; Comboyne Plateau; South East Coastal Ranges; Burragorang; Yengo; Barrington; Yuraygir; Guy Fawkes; Carrai Plateau; Wollemi; Upper Manning; Washpool; Ettrema; Macleay Gorges (19)
–	Australian Alps (1)
Greater than 30%	Snowy Mountains (1)

Notes IBRA = Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia

Appendix 3: Ecological modelling

NPWS has developed ecological modelling to help inform the priorities for future investment. The modelling, which uses Multi Criteria Analysis Shells (MCAS) to assess spatial information, was developed in collaboration with the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's (DCCEEW) Science and Insights Unit, NPWS Park Systems and Operations Unit, the Biodiversity Conservation Trust, and the DCCEEW Renewable Energy Zone project team.

To identify NPWS areas of conservation opportunity across NSW for potential future investment, 3 ecological models were integrated into a single spatial output (Figure 8, Part C). These models identify:

- areas of high environmental value for NPWS, including core areas of remnant vegetation and good examples of ecosystems that are currently the least protected
- areas that improve ecological connectivity, including potential wildlife corridors that connect core areas of remnant vegetation, supporting plant and animal populations to interact rather than become isolated and at greater risk of extinction
- the least protected ecosystems and areas that would help build a more comprehensive, adequate, and representative protected area system, including adequate samples of ecosystems within and across each IBRA bioregion and subregion.

The combined output brings together data aligned with the objects of the NPW Act, along with other key assessment factors such as habitat corridors, restoration opportunities, and protection of ecosystems. Table 12 identifies the data layers used in the ecological modelling.

Table 12. Data layers that inform National Parks Establishment Plan ecological modelling (March 2026)

Data layers
Ecological model: Areas of high environmental value, including core areas of remnant vegetation and good examples of ecosystems that are currently the least protected.
• Biodiversity Values Map: Mapping for special lands in part 7 of the Biodiversity Conservation Regulation 2017 (NSW). • Native Vegetation Management Benefits (NVMB) 2 Manage: The NVMB identifies relative benefit to NSW biodiversity by protecting and managing existing vegetation. • Draft NSW Threatened Ecological Community Indicative Footprint v0.2 (Internal): A spatial dataset that identifies potential TEC occurrence of all TECs throughout NSW. • Aboriginal sites decision support tool – All combined features (likelihood) (Internal): To predict feature likelihood in the current landscape. • Significance Assessment of Cavernous Karst Areas (non-reserved) in NSW: This layer maps value areas identified in the (Internal) Significance Assessment of Cavernous Karst Areas (non-reserved) in NSW, September 2011. • Assets of Intergenerational Significance: Asset of Intergenerational Significance (AIS) is land declared under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1975. AIS represent important habitat for entities listed as threatened under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.

Data layers

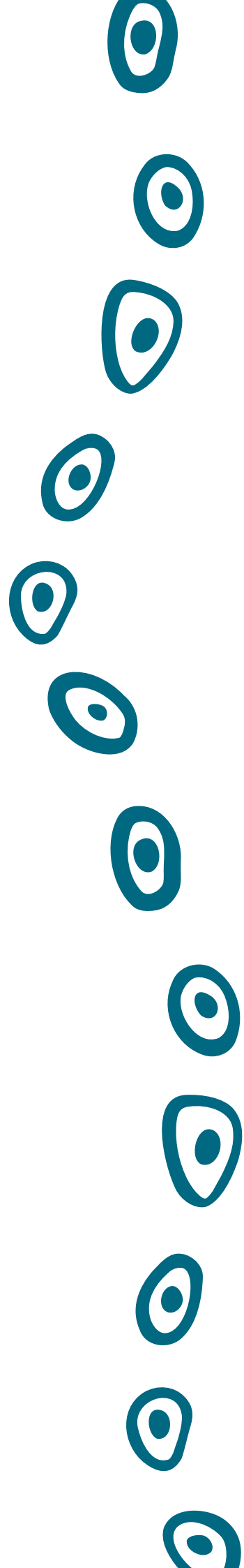
Ecological model: Areas that improve ecological connectivity, including potential wildlife corridors that connect core areas of remnant vegetation, supporting plant and animal populations to interact rather than become isolated and at greater risk of extinction.

- NSW Habitat Link Value (HLV) Index: The NSW Habitat Link Value Index has been used to map ecological connectivity and provides a visualisation of a region's connectivity network. (Modelling weight of 2.)
- Native Vegetation Management Benefits 2 Manage: Manage - highlights remaining examples of highly cleared vegetation types and assigns a higher benefit to sites that are in better condition. (Modelling weight of 1.)
- Native Vegetation Management Benefits 2 Delta Improve: Delta Improve layer gives the additional benefit to NSW biodiversity from improving condition of each pixel from its current, baseline state, over 15 years. (Modelling weight of 0.5.)
- Native Vegetation Management Benefits 2 Delta Restore: Delta Restore layer is the additional benefit to NSW biodiversity from each pixel from fully restoring it from its current, baseline state. (Modelling weight of 0.2.)

Ecological model: The least protected ecosystems and areas that would help build a more comprehensive, adequate, and representative protected area system, including adequate samples of ecosystems within and across each IBRA bioregion and subregion. See Appendix 2 for IBRA bioregion and subregion statistics.

- NPWS CAR (inverted): Data includes area (ha) reserved for each NSW Landscape within each IBRA subregion (i.e. for each sub-landscape). The layer was created to assist in the assessment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system in NSW and is only one component of Adequacy. Reserved lands include all securely and permanently protected lands for the purpose of nature conservation. For public lands, all NPWS reserves and all Flora Reserves are included and for private lands all lands assessed as permanently and securely protected.
- NSW Neighbourhood Habitat Intactness (NHI) Index: The NSW Neighbourhood Habitat Intactness (NHI) Index measures the amount and quality of terrestrial habitat connected to each location in NSW weighted by how well connected it is to that location. For a given location, a high NHI value indicates that there is high availability of connected habitat (both quantity and quality) across a range of ecological scales. Such areas are expected to provide resources that support native species to a greater degree than areas with low NHI. The NHI Index is estimated for all locations across New South Wales and can be averaged across a region to provide an estimate of the habitat integrity for that region. The NSW NHI Index is a multi-scale application of the neighbourhood habitat area (Ni).

This ecological modelling aligns with the approach used in the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy (BCIS) and by the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW 2026). The models have been designed to be updated as new data becomes available and as progress is made to grow the national park estate and the broader protected area system.



Aboriginal cultural illustrations:

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Photos:

Front Cover: Mungo National Park, Mungo Lookout, Willandra Lakes World Heritage Region. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 3:** Barrington Tops waterfalls. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 6:** *Telopea speciosissima* (Waratah), Muogamarra Nature Reserve. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 7:** Gulaga and the coastal banksia. David Rogers/DCCEEW; **Page 11:** Mungo lunette, Mungo National Park. Hao Li/DCCEEW; **Page 12:** Reflections of Audley, Royal National Park. Kieran Saunders/DCCEEW; **Page 14:** Dorrigo Rainforest Centre, Dorrigo National Park. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 16:** The Three Sisters Waking Up. Anton Galitch/DCCEEW; **Page 25:** Brush-tailed rock-wallaby, *Petrogale penicillata*. Rosie Nicolai/DCCEEW; **Page 26:** The shortest canopy in the tallest forests. Bridget Campbell/DCCEEW; **Page 45:** Penrose Gorge, Glow Worm Tunnel walking track, Wollemi National Park. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 46:** Silver tails, *Ptilotus obovatus*, also known as smoke or cotton bush. Western Ridge walking track, Mutawintji National Park. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 52:** *Brachyscome mittagongensis* – flowering. Russell Moule/DCCEEW; **Page 54:** Behind the river. Ted Dimitropoulos/DCCEEW; **Page 55:** Sunrise after the storm. Kevin De Costa/DCCEEW; **Page 56:** *Monochoria cyanea*, Pilliga Outwash Ephemeral Wetlands Endangered Ecological Community, Pilliga West State Conservation Area. Nicola Brookhouse/DCCEEW; **Page 59:** Male superb parrots, *Polytelis swainsonii*. Helen Fallow/DCCEEW; **Page 62:** Natural landscapes, Bellenbar Station. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 65:** Cape Byron Lighthouse, Walgun Cape Byron State Conservation Area. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 67:** Fire regrowth, Crowdy Bay National Park. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 67:** Volunteers tree planting at Glenrock State Conservation Area. John Spencer/DCCEEW; **Page 71:** Satellite tracking. Bobby Jo Vial/DCCEEW; **Page 73:** Darling River campground (Yapara Paaka Thuru), Toorale National Park. Joshua Smith/DCCEEW; **Page 75:** Caryapundy Swamp, Narriearra Station. Joshua Smith/DCCEEW; **Page 76:** An emu under the shade of a mulga. Joshua Smith/DCCEEW; **Page 78:** Yarrangobilly Ribbon Gum burnt bark March 2020. Adam Klumper/DCCEEW; **Page 79:** Rock textures near Putty Beach. Barry Collier/DCCEEW; **Page 86:** Cuttaburra scenic drives. Paula Kennedy/DCCEEW. **Page 109:** Valley views from Point lookout at sunrise, New England National Park. Byron Smith/DCCEEW.

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