



ALGA

Australian Local
Government Association

Implementing Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030

Submission to the Department of Climate
Change, Energy, Environment and Water

15 October 2025



Introduction

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is the voice of local government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the nation.

ALGA is a federation of all state and territory local government associations. ALGA was established in 1947 and throughout its history has been actively involved in issues of national significance affecting local government and local communities.

ALGA advocates for the roles, resourcing, and capacity needs of local governments in respect to national environmental protection and restoration matters. These include, for example, matters prescribed under the *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), threatened species protection, threatening processes such as weeds, pests, and biosecurity, and water.

ALGA welcomes the opportunity to discuss practical opportunities for partnership to protect our natural heritage.

Local government's national contribution to protecting our environment

Being based in their community and by acting on the ground, local governments are ideally positioned to provide practical, application-based perspectives on how we can achieve national environmental outcomes.

Local governments play an important role in protecting and taking care of the places, flora and fauna, we care about. For example, councils often undertake:

- Surveillance and response to biosecurity emergencies,
- Protecting ecosystems from threatening processes such as pests and weeds,
- Encouraging residents to engage in their own environmental behaviours through education programs, bush care and waterway care programs,
- Maintaining parklands, reserves, protected areas, and crown lands in many jurisdictions,
- Setting out and defending restrictions in land use planning to protect important ecosystems and heritage,
- Using nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation and protecting local environmental values as the climate warms, and,
- Being the backbone of Australia's waste management system; investing and engaging in investment, community education and implementation of practices to improve resource recovery and mitigate pollution.

Councils are also critical collaborators and enablers for other place- and community-based organisations and institutions such as Indigenous rangers and Traditional Owner groups, natural resource management and community groups, farmers and the agricultural sector.

Despite these critical roles, local governments are often overlooked as nationally relevant land managers, biodiversity stewards, stakeholder convenors, and sources of expertise and experience.

The Discussion Paper set out by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment, and Water (DCCEEW) did not reference local government and *Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030* largely misses the opportunity to identify local government as a key delivery partner.

Nevertheless, local governments implement local activities to protect and restore the natural environment and our shared natural heritage via the means available to them. Councils can support delivery of national environmental priorities – when resourced appropriately to do so.

Funding landscape for local government environment roles

Local government spends more money on environmental protection than any other level of government.

As discussed in [ALGA's submission](#) to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Local Government Sustainability, councils spent \$6.75 billion in FY2021/22 on biodiversity, biosecurity, water management, and waste management. For context, states and territories spent \$6.62 billion, and the Commonwealth \$6.7 billion over this period.

ALGA's [2022 Local Government Workforce Skills and Capability Survey](#) found, based on analysis of Census data, that environmental protection is one of local government's top expenditure items, accounting for 14.9% of national local government expenditure in FY2020/21.

This is despite being the level of government which receives the lowest proportion of national taxation revenue, just 0.5% in FY2024-25.

Cost-shifting for environmental protection is adding to the financial stress of councils. Financial stress directly impacts on councils' ability to provide environmental protection and services into the long term.

In 2025, [Local Government NSW found](#) that local governments are shouldering the cost of environmental protection operations from the state government of approximately \$27.1 million, noxious weed management for \$16.1 million, contained land management for \$8.6 million.

In 2022, the [Local Government Association of Queensland found](#) that councils were covering \$42.8 million for state government environmental health services, \$19.7 million for biosecurity services, and \$3 million for maintenance of the travelling stock route network.

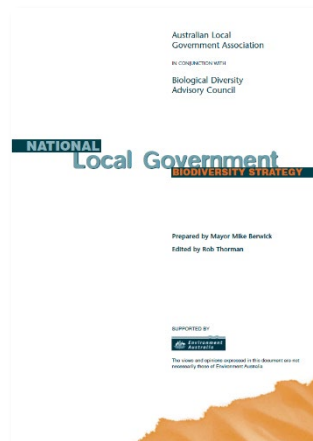
A strategic, place-based funding approach is required

The scale of work required to create a step change in restoration of national environmental outcomes requires significant new funding and finance. It also requires reforms to prevent systematic and cumulative damage to our ecosystems.

ALGA acknowledges the work undertaken by DCCEEW to address resourcing shortages, for example, to establish a Nature Repair Market to support private finance into environmental conservation. ALGA also acknowledges the Australian Government's commitment to reforming the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Local government is strongly supportive of environmental law reform to make the laws both more effective and easier to use and navigate.

In addition to increasing the amount of resourcing in the system for environmental works, we require a strategic, place-based and cumulative approach which prioritises effort, incentivises efficiencies through collaboration, and identifies where funding can be used for the best return on investment.

The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, in its [Blueprint to Repair Australia's Landscapes](#) (2024), made a similar case in respect to a bioregional approach, the need to establish realistic targets for regeneration, and to identify key areas for investment.





ALGA has consistently made the case for prioritisation of collective effort on a bioregional basis, accompanied by commensurate funding, capacity support and knowledge sharing. ALGA's [National Local Government Biodiversity Strategy](#) (pictured, page 2), drafted in collaboration with the Biological Diversity Ministerial Advisory Council in 1999, remains as relevant today as ever.

Capacity, skills and workforce to meet environmental stewardship needs

In addition to a place-based funding approach, dedicated attention to cross-cutting implementation enablers such as data and information systems, training and skills, and workforce planning is required.

While there are efforts being made on these themes in different parts of the system that contribute to environmental outcomes, the Australia Government should spearhead a cross-policy and cross-portfolio audit to develop a holistic perspective and implement greater support where there are critical gaps.

ALGA is currently executing the 2026 iteration of its Local Government Workforce Skills and Capability Survey, delivered with Public Skills Australia. The 2022 Report found that:

- As of 30 June 2021, the local government sector employs 190,800 workers in almost 400 occupations. The sector's workforce is spatially distributed across rural (55%), urban and urban fringe (25%) and urban regional (20%) areas.
- Almost all respondent local governments (over 91%) reported that they had experienced skills shortages in 2021-22.
- Environmental health officers (30%), town and urban planners (40%) and engineers (46%) are among the most difficult skills gaps to fill in local government; with all having important roles to play for environmental protection in waste, health, land use planning and infrastructure functions.
- Skills gaps are worsening. The proportion of local governments expecting shortages in these areas increased from 20-35% in 2018 to 37-53% in 2022.

Public Skills Australia's [2024 Government Workforce Plan](#) found that capabilities and skills to grapple with climate change is increasingly being sought by local governments, with increasing demand in the sector for engineers and 'resilience officer' personnel.

ALGA is calling for the Federal Government's [National Skills Plan](#) to acknowledge the vital role of local governments as employers in training and skills development, including for environmental protection, emissions reduction and adapting to a changing climate.

ALGA is also seeking funding opportunities for council employees to access training for identified skills shortage areas, especially in regional and remote communities.

Environmental protection

ALGA is requesting that the Commonwealth fund councils to support the delivery of national environmental outcomes. Funding should be long-term to enable efficiencies from fulsome programs, and non-competitive to support collaboration across councils and other stakeholders.

New funding should cover outcomes stipulated in:

- International environmental and heritage protection conventions to which Australia is a signatory
- Threatened Species Action Plans
- Matters of National Environmental Significance and State Environmental Significance

- Biosecurity threats to ecosystems and communities
- Any new obligations under EPBC Act reforms
- Increasing resilience of local ecosystems to climate change.

ALGA acknowledges the Australia Government's Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECM) Framework as a means of supporting Australia to meet its 30x30 conservation target; and to connect existing conservation to financing through the newly established Nature Repair Market.

The OECM Framework could be a useful mechanism for recognising council stewardship of biodiverse areas. However, the administrative load associated with the assessment process could limit uptake among councils without a clear pathway to return on investment.

Uptake of the Framework could be encouraged with a clear and streamlined pathway and tools for assessment, and recognition with enabling funding for their conservation and land management functions. A streamlined assessment tool could be integrated with Nature Repair Market method criteria and facilitate connections to funding opportunities.



SA coastal councils asked children in their communities to draw their feelings and thoughts on the Southern algal bloom, exemplifying councils' critical work in understanding and representing their communities' environmental priorities through planning, programs, investment and representation to other levels of government.

Southern Reef Algal Bloom Response, South Australian coastal councils (SA)

To manage and mitigate the impacts of the 2025 algal bloom crisis, local governments have supported the SA Government in sharing public health advice, facilitating local information sessions to keep their communities informed, liaising with and supporting impacted businesses, and installing beach signage to alert residents to potential health risks. They are also contributing to the Harmful Algal Bloom Taskforce to advise on recovery priorities, communications and to advice on scientific monitoring needs. A delegation of SA coastal councils has engaged in federal advocacy to raise awareness for the need for support for tourism and businesses, mental health supports, and coordinated, large scale nature-based infrastructural solutions to build marine ecosystem resilience.

Integrated and community natural resource management (NRM), Derwent Valley Council (TAS)

Derwent Valley Council, in partnership with the Derwent Catchment Project and Central Highlands Council, delivers a comprehensive NRM program aligned with its "Our Valley 2030" strategic plan. Key initiatives include sustainable land use planning, weed eradication through best-practice management, willow control, and support for sustainable agriculture. The Council also promotes community education and collaborates to connect remnant vegetation. Programs address fire and flood recovery, river and estuary restoration, and conservation planning. The Derwent Valley Weed Management Strategy guides local efforts to reduce environmental and agricultural impacts. Derwent Valley Council's suite of NRM works is representative of the integrative, community-based environmental protection undertaken by councils across Australia.

Environmental biosecurity

Local governments play an extensive part in managing weeds and pests which threaten our natural environmental values, agriculture, community health, and disaster hazard risk. With a changing climate increasing biosecurity risk, local government contributions to surveillance, community education, waste disposal, land management and human health will be even more important.

Despite their roles and contributions, local governments are not reliably compensated for their work in managing pests and weeds. National funding agreements do not stipulate how federal funding should flow to local governments that are tasked with implementing parts of biosecurity plans and measures.

The National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA), section 4.1.2. states: “That greater clarity is needed on the specific roles and responsibilities of local government and that this should be handled, where appropriate, in subsidiary agreements and arrangements within jurisdictions.” This need is outstanding.

ALGA is a member of the National Implementation Committee of the National Biosecurity Strategy. In this forum, ALGA’s major areas of concern include:

- A fit for purpose governance model which appropriately maps, recognises and incorporates the roles of local government into biosecurity responses.
- A sustainable funding model which appropriately funds local governments for their roles.
- A workforce, skills and capacity strategy which identifies present and projected implementation gaps at local level and sets out actions and investments to remedy them.
- Facilitating biosecurity data access to local governments to enable them to support threat mitigation (in jurisdictions where local governments are required or expected to do so).

Proactive Management of Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer (PSHB), City of Perth (WA)

PSHB was first detected in Western Australia in the inner-city suburb of East Fremantle in August 2021, triggering a \$41.29 million nationally coordinated eradication program. The City of Perth is home to over 16,000 trees, valued at over \$100 million, with 60% of the tree asset at risk. The City took proactive measures to achieve early detection and targeted intervention, including implementing a city-wide program of ground and aerial inspections, coupled with extensive trapping, chemical trials, pruning and tree health treatments. The approach significantly reduced PSHB impact, with only 25 trees removed, compared with over 4,700 trees removed across the Perth quarantine area during the eradication phase. The City has shared its knowledge with land managers across WA and other states and territories, helping build capacity. The transition to long-term management of PSHB will require an ongoing commitment from Government, a strong governance framework and increased and sustained funding for

Bribbaree Velvety Tree Pear Biocontrol Program, Hilltops Council (NSW)

The Bribbaree biocontrol program was initiated following the end of the 2018 drought to address a severe infestation of invasive velvety tree pear. Due to the impracticality of chemical spraying in the area, natural biocontrol was identified as a more sustainable and environmentally sound solution. Through persistent effort, Hilltops Council staff transformed a modest facility into a large-scale greenhouse capable of supporting multiple annual releases of the biocontrol agent *Cochineal (Dactylopius opuntia)*. The new greenhouse setup enables rapid cultivation during warmer months, significantly increasing release frequency. Even mature cactus specimens, some exceeding six metres in height and over a decade old, are now showing signs of decline due to the insect's impact. Meanwhile, younger plants are struggling to establish, and the cochineal

land managers to stop the spread of PSHB beyond the quarantine area.

continues to spread effectively throughout the infestation.

Climate adaptation



As stipulated in the Australian Government's National Adaptation Plan and National Climate Risk Assessment (NCRA), local government has fundamental roles in helping Australian communities adapt to a changing climate.

ALGA's [Adapting Together report](#) (2025) found that conservative estimates of local government adaptation actions delivered benefits of between at least \$0.8 and \$3.1 per \$1 of investment. One area of quantifiable benefits associated with these estimates was associated with protecting ecosystem services.

When modelled at the national scale, continued local government spending on adaptation at these levels would equate to at least \$400 million per year, or \$2 billion invested in the 5 years to 2030. This \$2 billion investment is estimated to benefit local communities by between \$2.2 and \$4.7 billion.

Of all systems of national importance prioritised in the NCRA, councils play particularly critical roles in protecting our natural environment system:

What are the main local government responsibilities in this system?	How does local government build climate resilience in this system?
Management, maintenance and protection of natural environment, including: • Parks and open spaces • Trees • Roadside weed and pest control • Water catchments, including creeks and riverbanks • Coastal and foreshore management • Driving innovation through trials of highly localised approaches to environmental protection in a changing climate, such as pilots for resilient tree species and reefs.	• Reducing the urban heat island effect by providing natural cooling areas, protecting the public during heatwaves. • Supporting the maintenance and/or enhancement of biodiversity to build ecological resilience to climate stressors. • Reducing impacts from heavy rainfall events by providing naturally absorbent surfaces to limit flash flooding.
Regulation of the natural environment to ensure conservation and/or protection, including through: • Urban planning and future growth planning • Preparing and administering planning schemes • Issuing planning and building permits	Can reduce community exposure to a range of climate-related risks and build adaptive capacity to cope with the impacts of extreme weather by: • Preventing development in areas of environmental significance or importance, or where there is likely contamination which could risk public safety. • Implementing protection zones/buffers to ensure properties are set back from coastal areas to protect from erosion and sea level rise. • Enforcing sustainable land management practices that protect ecosystem services.

What are the main local government responsibilities in this system?	How does local government build climate resilience in this system?
Engaging with Traditional Owners to enhance community and council approaches to caring for Country.	Supporting First Nations peoples and living Traditional Knowledge as a strength for local adaptation.

ALGA is calling for a fit-for-purpose adaptation governance model and a new \$400 million per year climate adaptation fund, to be distributed across all councils to provide local, place-based solutions to Australia's changing climate.

Secure, ongoing funding for councils will generate the best national return on investment for adaptation expenditure.

Blue Heart Initiative, Sunshine Coast Council (QLD)

The Blue Heart is a 5,000-hectare floodplain in the Maroochy River catchment, transformed through a partnership between Sunshine Coast Council, Unitywater, and the Queensland Government. Designed to adapt to climate change and rising sea levels, the project restores wetlands, enhances biodiversity, and protects flood storage capacity. It integrates blue carbon farming, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities, while supporting Traditional Owner priorities. As sea levels rise, the area will transition to estuarine wetlands, offering new land use and income options. This nature-based initiative exemplifies proactive climate resilience and sustainable land management for coastal communities

Dell Eco Reef, City of Greater Geelong (VIC)

To mitigate the impacts of coastal erosion from sea level rise and extreme storm events, the City of Greater Geelong has invested in concrete wave break modules to reduce the impact from unfettered waves. The modules are placed in the shoreline and serve as an artificial reef, breaking up the intensity of the wave. The modules have also enabled growth and additional habitat for marine organisms. This has provided additional recreational benefits for beachgoers allowing them to snorkel and observe wildlife at high tide.

Resource recovery

Local governments are the backbone of Australia's waste management system.

Councils manage resources, educate communities, and trial innovative models and methods in waste and recycling. Particularly in regional areas with thin markets, councils can invest themselves in waste and recycling infrastructure to ensure ongoing services to their communities.

However, local governments do not have control over the volume and types of waste entering the system, nor the different approaches to waste taken in different states and territories. Many regional, rural and remote communities which cannot benefit from the same waste and recycling services available in metropolitan regions.

With waste generation up 12% in the last decade and recycling rates lagging other OECD countries, local governments need more support.

Local government believes that those creating waste should be responsible for bearing the cost and that national regulations are the most efficient and effective way for industry to meet these responsibilities.

To help take the pressure off local government landfills and deliver genuine scaling up of resource recovery, ALGA is asking the Australian Government to:

- Take a strategic approach by prioritising national policy attention to waste streams with the highest potential to improve environmental outcomes, reduce costs to local government, and create economic opportunities.
- Establish a mandatory product stewardship approach for waste materials and ensure product stewardship schemes include, and are effective, in regional and remote areas.
- Ban the importation and manufacturing of products containing identified contaminants.
- Introduce a 'local government impact assessment' into national waste policy and reform processes to ensure council interests are systematically incorporated into policy design.

Scrap metal recovery, West Arnhem Regional Council and East Arnhem Regional Council (NT)

With large distances and limited market coverage of resource recovery services in regional, rural and remote communities, growing numbers of discarded car bodies represent an environmental and human health hazard. West and East Arnhem Regional Councils have stepped up to address growing numbers of disposed car bodies and white goods in their communities. East Arnhem's Scrap Metal Recovery Project has now recycled 3717 tonnes of scrap metal, including 1500 vehicles. West Arnhem has recently removed more than 293 tonnes from its landfill, with scrap metal sent to Darwin to be recycled and remade into new parts. While successful, councils have limited ability to stem the broader lack of recovery system for car bodies and other recoverable materials. Greater support from other levels of government is required to ensure regional, rural and remote communities have equitable access to resource recovery services.

Fabricating Behaviour Change for Textile Waste Reduction, Penrith City Council (NSW)

Fast fashion has led to a global textile waste crisis, with each Australian buying 56 garments annually. In Penrith, charity clothing bins were removed in 2021 due to safety and dumping issues, leaving residents with limited recycling options. Penrith City Council implemented multiple initiatives to enhance textile recycling and shift perceptions of textiles as waste to valuable resources. Textiles became a collectable item in late 2022, supported by a public awareness campaign. Initiatives included a clothing bin trial in a residential flat building, a successful drop-off event in June 2023, and branded uniform recycling. Between January 2023 and June 2024, Penrith City Council made significant progress, contributing to the goal of an 80% recovery rate by 2030 and promoting a circular economy. Key outcomes included a 14% decrease in textiles across household bins, 9,580kg of textiles diverted from landfill, and 3,211kg of clothing donated, with unsuitable textiles shredded and repurposed.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input on the implementation of Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030. Please contact Eleanor Robson (Policy Director – Environment) for any further information you may require.

Sincerely,



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