

NSW Environmental Trust Strategic Plan 2024 to 2029

Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water

Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges 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This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.





Aboriginal statement

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) acknowledges the Aboriginal peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters of New South Wales.

We respect and recognise the endurance of the Aboriginal peoples' cultural heritage, beliefs and their relationship to the land, water, sky, flora and fauna. We acknowledge the continuing importance of this relationship to Aboriginal peoples today, despite the devastating impacts of European invasion.

The Trust understands its role and responsibilities in working with Aboriginal peoples to promote history, cultural heritage and caring for Country. This is reflected in this new strategy, which acknowledges the importance of restoring healthy Country, recognising and integrating the values of the Aboriginal peoples, their traditional lore and their unique connection to Country.

The strategy acknowledges this is not just a priority; it is a guiding principle that provides an opportunity for ongoing learning across our work but also with our engagement with the broader community of New South Wales.

The Trust has a long history and association with the Aboriginal peoples of New South Wales and values their diversity. We support working in partnership with the Aboriginal peoples of New South Wales, ensuring the process is based on respect, trust and the spirit of openness. We aim to make positive and long-lasting changes to strengthen and enrich our environment.

We are committed to embedding the values and perspectives of the Aboriginal peoples of New South Wales in our work to ensure we continue to learn and forge a positive future through connecting to place. Through this strategy, the Trust will continue to engage and work with Aboriginal peoples to take care and restore sites of significance on Country. We will achieve this through ongoing consultation, collaboration and funding initiatives that foster connection to Country for all peoples in New South Wales.

The Trust understands that by encouraging greater connections and relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the broader community of New South Wales, it is the responsibility of everyone to walk together in the spirit of reconciliation to heal and create a healthy Country and peoples.

Foreword



As Chair of the NSW Environmental Trust, I am pleased to release the next 5-year strategic plan.

New South Wales faces a range of serious environmental challenges. Biodiversity is in crisis across the state and the country. During the next 5 years, it is crucial that steps are taken to address biodiversity loss, promote conservation, develop climate change resilience and target invasive species, among others.

The Trust is a dedicated fund for actions that focus on nature conservation, restoration and repair. The Trust administers grants across a diverse range of programs to restore and rehabilitate the lands and waters of New South Wales.

The members of the Trust include representatives from the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; local government; the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and NSW Treasury. This year, a dedicated Aboriginal representative will also be appointed to the Trust for the first time.

Since its establishment over 25 years ago, the Trust has invested around \$1.34 billion to tackle environmental issues in our state. Over the past 4 years, the focus has been on strengthening the NSW natural environment, supporting native species and their habitats, and reducing human-induced impacts on the environment.

Over the next 5 years, the Trust will focus on prioritising healthy Country and recognising and valuing Aboriginal culture, rehabilitating and strengthening the resilience of degraded ecosystems, and enhancing environmental management practices. Climate change sits across all priorities and will be considered in every action the Trust invests in.

The Trust recognises the importance of transitioning to nature positive and is committed to contributing towards the national targets for reversing biodiversity loss, protecting our land and seas, and restoring degraded ecosystems by 2030.

The Trust is uniquely positioned to make a significant and lasting positive difference.

This strategy will guide Trust investment over the next 5 years and ensure our efforts are focused where they are most needed. We thank everyone who provided input into the process, and we look forward to working together to restore and protect our beautiful environment.

The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC

Minister for Climate Change,
Minister for Energy,
Minister for the Environment,
Minister for Heritage



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NSW Environmental Trust strategic priorities 2024 to 2029

Our mission

Ensure that current and future generations can enjoy a thriving natural environment in New South Wales.

1 Prioritise healthy Country and recognise and value Aboriginal peoples, their traditional knowledge and practices, and connection to Country



Recognise and demonstrate the value of Aboriginal traditional knowledge and practices and the important role they play in creating healthy Country and supporting wellbeing.

Provide support, resources and opportunities to empower Aboriginal people to connect to and manage Country and enhance community wellbeing.

Create opportunities for Aboriginal people to effectively manage waterways, wetlands and groundwater on Country.

Recognise the value of culturally significant species and the role of Aboriginal peoples in their conservation.

2 Restore ecosystems and biodiversity



Support native species adaptation, genetic diversity, and resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Mitigate the impacts of urbanisation on waterways and wetlands.

Improve the resilience of ecosystems to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Support restoration of natural flow to improve ecological functions and riparian condition.

3 Strengthen environmental management

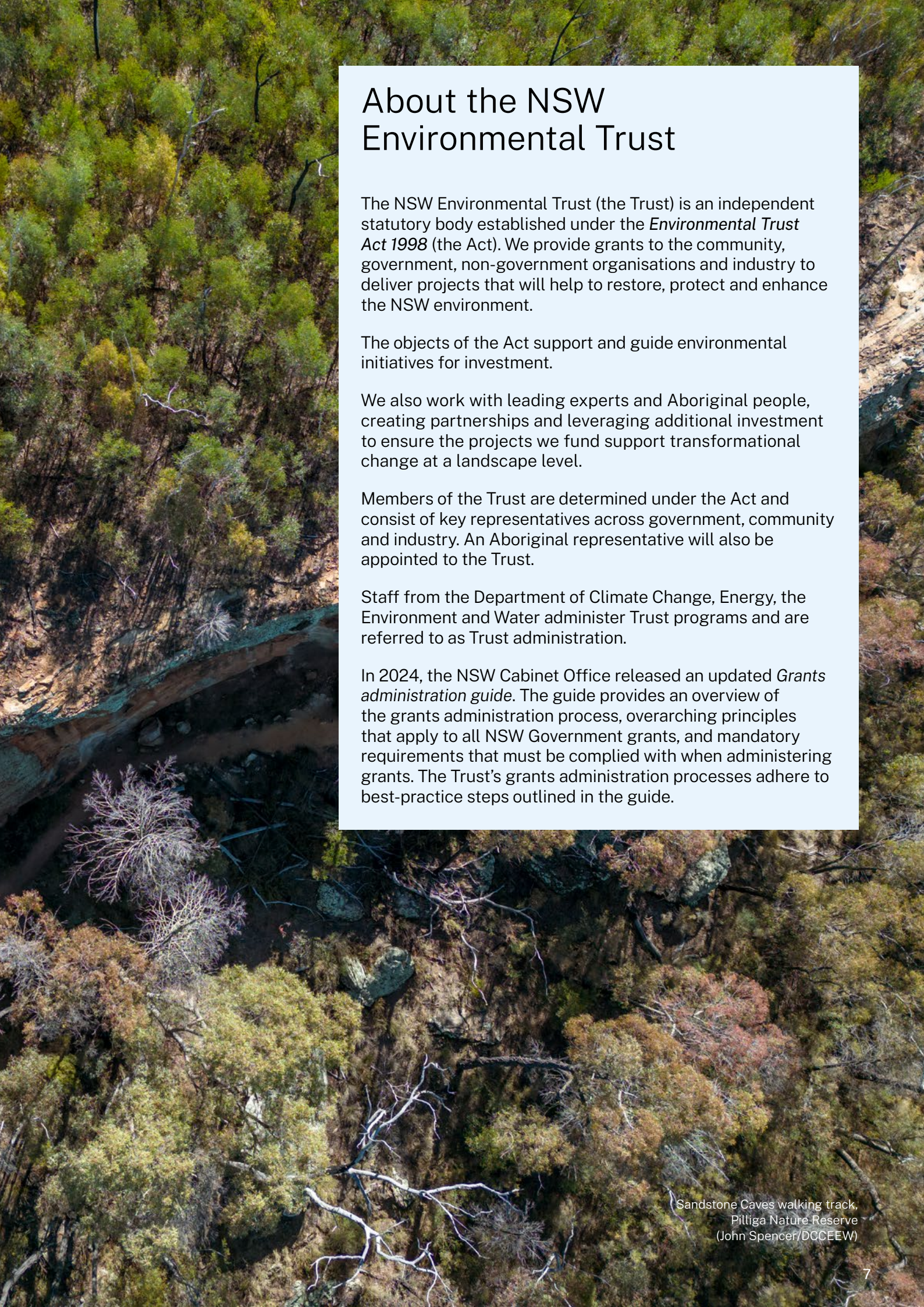


Improve monitoring practices and data management for better environmental outcomes.

Improve cross-tenure connectivity to support holistic ecosystem restoration.

Increase land managers' capacity to improve environmental outcomes and natural resource management practices.

Improve knowledge and understanding of plant and animal diseases to inform management actions.

An aerial photograph of a natural landscape. The scene is dominated by dense, green and brownish vegetation, likely a woodland or forest. A prominent feature is a rocky stream bed or gully that winds through the center-left of the image. The rocks are light-colored and appear to be sandstone. The overall lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. A large white rectangular text box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the main text of the document.

About the NSW Environmental Trust

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) is an independent statutory body established under the *Environmental Trust Act 1998* (the Act). We provide grants to the community, government, non-government organisations and industry to deliver projects that will help to restore, protect and enhance the NSW environment.

The objects of the Act support and guide environmental initiatives for investment.

We also work with leading experts and Aboriginal people, creating partnerships and leveraging additional investment to ensure the projects we fund support transformational change at a landscape level.

Members of the Trust are determined under the Act and consist of key representatives across government, community and industry. An Aboriginal representative will also be appointed to the Trust.

Staff from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water administer Trust programs and are referred to as Trust administration.

In 2024, the NSW Cabinet Office released an updated *Grants administration guide*. The guide provides an overview of the grants administration process, overarching principles that apply to all NSW Government grants, and mandatory requirements that must be complied with when administering grants. The Trust's grants administration processes adhere to best-practice steps outlined in the guide.

Considerations shaping the strategy

The Trust strives to identify and respond to emerging environmental issues and challenges facing our communities using an informed, innovative and connected approach.

Informed

We listen, learn and engage with communities, industry, government and Aboriginal peoples to understand the most critical environmental issues impacting them, and how this should inform Trust investment.



Citizen science and community engagement (Peter Robey/DCCEEW)

Innovative

We support innovative solutions to existing and emerging environmental issues. This includes investing in new research, technologies and approaches that will create positive environmental outcomes for future generations.



3D printed habitat tiles (SIMS)

Connected

We support the creation of strategic partnerships and connections to support knowledge-sharing and achieve shared goals.



People on a Discovery tour, Muogamarra Nature Reserve (John Spencer/DCCEEW)



Following the conclusion of the Trust's previous strategic plan, it's now time to establish a new direction and ensure we are focusing on the most critical environmental issues.

Extensive research and stakeholder consultation form the foundations of this strategic plan. The Trust worked with 50 stakeholders including Aboriginal peoples, communities, government, industry and academia to identify the most significant environmental issues impacting New South Wales. Over 130 separate issues were provided, which were then analysed and refined into 3 strategic priorities and 12 opportunities. Figure 1 provides an overview of the development process from initial research through to priority setting.

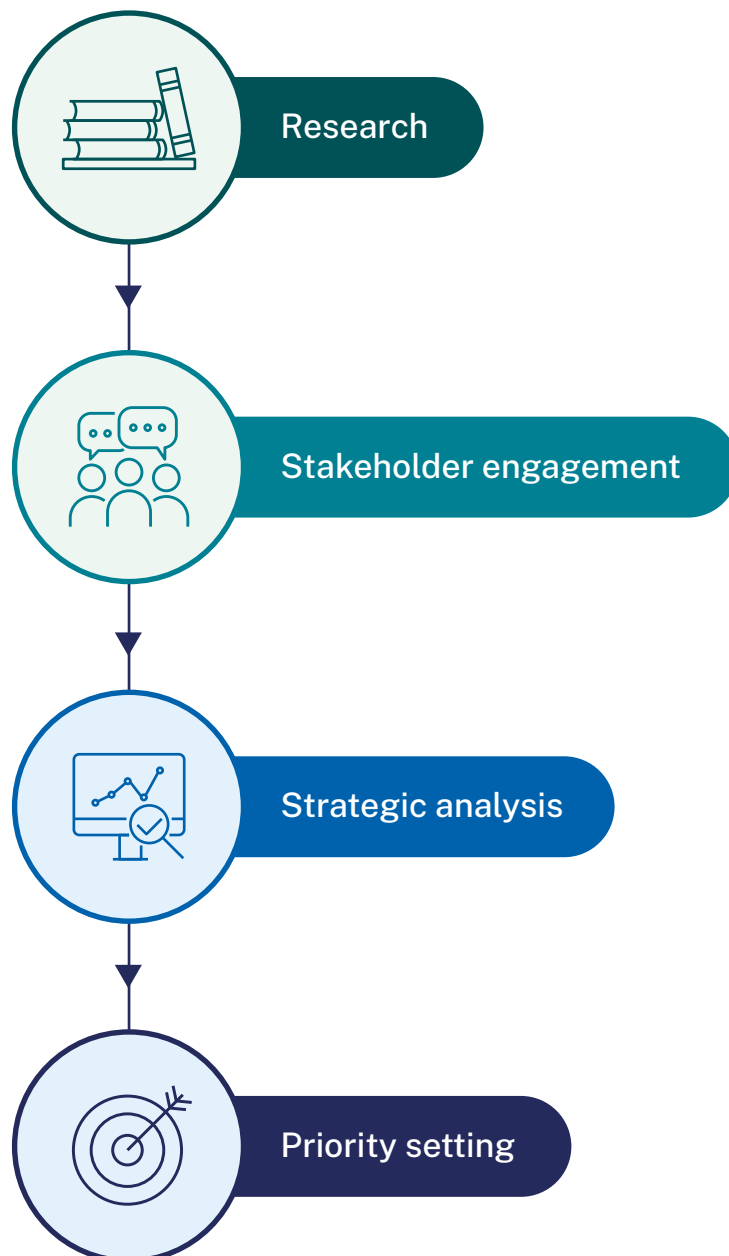


Figure 1 Development process

Strategic priority 1



Prioritise healthy Country and recognise and value Aboriginal peoples, their traditional knowledge and practices, and connection to Country

Opportunities

- 1.1 Recognise and demonstrate the value of Aboriginal traditional knowledge and practices and the important role they play in creating healthy Country and supporting wellbeing.
- 1.2 Provide support, resources and opportunities to empower Aboriginal people to connect to and manage Country and enhance community wellbeing.
- 1.3 Create opportunities for Aboriginal peoples to effectively manage waterways, wetlands and groundwater on Country.
- 1.4 Recognise the value of culturally significant species and the role of Aboriginal peoples in their conservation.

Aboriginal peoples have cared for Country across generations for tens of thousands of years and continue to do so. They possess the traditional knowledge and practices to create and restore healthy Country, and in doing so, support and enhance community wellbeing. Aboriginal peoples' role in caring for Country is more than environmental management – it is a responsibility and part of their culture.

Recognition of the importance and value of traditional knowledge and practices is critical to restoring healthy Country and managing the pressures and threats facing the environment. Recognition must also be underpinned by support, resources and opportunities to lead solutions that incorporate traditional knowledge and practices in environmental management, in line with the principles of caring for Country (Cresswell et al. 2021).

Investment under this priority will focus on restoring healthy Country and demonstrating the importance of traditional knowledge and practices in managing ongoing threats to the environment.

Mothers Ancestral Guardians Indigenous Corporation (MAGIC), a grantee under the Trust's Protecting our Places program, undertake a cool cultural burn in Rick Farley Reserve in far-west NSW. (Dieuwer Reynders)



Strategic priority 2



Restore ecosystems and biodiversity

Opportunities

- 2.1 Support native species adaptation, genetic diversity and resilience to the impacts of climate change.
- 2.2 Mitigate the impacts of urbanisation on waterways and wetlands.
- 2.3 Improve the resilience of ecosystems to adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- 2.4 Support restoration of natural flow to improve ecological functions and riparian condition.

New South Wales is home to a wide variety of ecosystems and rich biodiversity, including many threatened species – both flora and fauna. High numbers of species and ecosystems continue to experience significant declines and degradation. This is caused by a range of threats and impacts caused by humans, urbanisation, disease, invasive species and climate change.

Increases in extreme climate events such as floods, drought and bushfires have significant negative impacts on biodiversity, with aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity recognised as being particularly vulnerable.

Further extinctions of Australian species can be expected over the next 2 decades unless current management effort and investment are substantially increased and are effective (Cresswell et al. 2021).

By restoring and safeguarding our terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, we can help plants and animals to strengthen their climate resilience.

Investment under this priority will improve the status of threatened ecological communities and species, and contribute to restoring healthy ecosystem functions through restoration and rehabilitation.

Silver-tails (*Ptilotus obovatus*) on
Langidooon-Metford
(John Spencer/DCCEEW)



Strategic priority 3



Strengthen environmental management

Opportunities

- 3.1 Improve monitoring practices and data management for better environmental outcomes.
- 3.2 Improve cross-tenure connectivity to support holistic ecosystem restoration.
- 3.3 Increase land managers' capacity to improve environmental outcomes and natural resource management practices.
- 3.4 Improve knowledge and understanding of plant and animal diseases to inform management actions.

Management of the NSW environment involves many stakeholders, including landholders, Aboriginal communities, non-government organisations, research institutes, industry organisations and volunteers. Better informed, connected and integrated environmental management practices can result in positive social and ecological outcomes.

While our understanding of the general state and trends of biodiversity has increased over the past 5 years, there are still large knowledge and data gaps for many species (Cresswell et al. 2021). This impacts the ability to implement informed environmental management practices.

Better monitoring and data management, as well as improved connectivity and capacity building, will improve management responses.

Investment under this priority will help to improve the way in which the NSW environment is managed and ultimately support better environmental outcomes.

Sturt National Park, the site of the Trust's Beyond Fencing project delivered by the University of New South Wales (Tom Hunt/DCCEEW)



Measuring success

Being able to measure and monitor outcomes is the key to success. As a standard practice, the Trust measures environmental outcomes using project-level monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) frameworks.

Project and program-level performance indicators are identified during the design phase and then monitored and reported on annually across the life of the grant. This information allows the Trust to assess progress towards project outcomes, in addition to progress towards broader strategic and NSW Government environmental goals. The Trust also commissions independent evaluations of major projects to assess their appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and net benefits.

Risk management is another key element of the delivery of this strategy. A consistent and integrated approach to risk management ensures the Trust can effectively identify, manage and mitigate significant risks.

Over the next 5 years, all future Trust-funded projects and programs will align with one or more of the strategic priorities and related opportunities. The data captured at the project level through annual reports and evaluations will allow the Trust to track progress against the strategic priorities, manage key risks, assess the effectiveness of the strategy, and demonstrate return on investment.

Grants provided under the new priorities will complement existing government programs and initiatives. They will fund activities that fill gaps, extend or innovate in these spaces. Funding will not duplicate or replace efforts already committed to under other government programs.



References

Cresswell ID, Janke T and Johnston EL (2021) *Australia state of the environment 2021*, independent report to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment, Commonwealth of Australia.

The Cabinet Office (2024) *Grants administration guide*, NSW Government, Sydney.

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Photos:

Cover photo: Mt Yulludinida, Mt Kaputar National Park (Bob McDonald/DCCEEW); Page 3: Mutawintji Cultural Festival 2023 (Otis Filley/DCCEEW); Page 4: The Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC (Cassandra Hannagan); Page 5: Volunteer locating hawkweed plants, Kosciuszko National Park (Rebecca Mooy/DCCEEW); Page 9: Red-tailed phascogale (Laurence Berry/AWC); Page 13: Tiara walking track, Oxley Wild Rivers National Park (Gerhard Koertner/DCCEEW); Page 14: Billy Bung lagoon (Gabriel Anderson/DCCEEW).

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