



Nature Conservation Council

The voice for nature in New South Wales

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, MP

Premier

52 Martin Place

SYDNEY NSW 2000

2 April 2019

RE: Request to improve environmental outcomes

Dear Premier Berejiklian,

The Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales (**NCC**) is the state's peak environment organisation. We represent over 150 environment groups, and thousands of supporters, across NSW. Together we are dedicated to protecting and conserving the wildlife, landscapes and natural resources of NSW.

I am writing today to encourage you and your Government to turn over a new leaf and embrace the protection of the environment and to act on climate change which is in the long-term interests of our state and communities. This letter outlines the public demand for action on environment and climate issues, the top priority policy asks we seek your support for, and also key changes to the way Government functions that would significantly improve outcomes for people and nature.

Public demand for action

In critical parts of the state polling and exit polling has demonstrated that environment and climate change were key issues for voters in the election, this public demand for action provides you with a strong mandate to act. Below is a summary of key polling:

- **Exit polling from the electorate of Coogee**¹ conducted as voters were leaving polling booths found that 'Climate change and the environment' influenced the highest number of voters (30%) above the economy (25%), health (12%), and education (10%).
- The **exit polling in Coogee** also found the 'climate change and the environment' was the most common issue that influenced the vote of people who voted Liberal in 2015 but not in 2019, at 58%, ahead of 'health' at 40%. Climate change was the number one reason historic Liberal voters did not support your party.

¹ Lonergan conducted exit polling of 1,588 voters in 16 booths in the Coogee electorate on March 23rd. We are happy to present the full results to you or your office upon request.

- The Sydney Morning Herald² reported on polling that demonstrated that 57.5% of voters said that 'climate change and environmental protection' would influence their vote, higher than hospitals, schools and public transport.
- ReachTEL/UComms polling in **Lismore**³ which we commissioned on March 28, demonstrated that 'climate change and the environment' was the number one issue for 38% of voters, compared to the economy (20%), cost of living (16%) and health (15%).
- ReachTEL/UComms polling in the **North Shore electorate**³ demonstrated that 'climate change and the environment' was the second most important issue for Liberal voters (15%), and that people who voted for an Independent believed that your Government is not doing enough to act on climate change (68%) compared to those who thought you were doing enough (24%).

We are only too happy to meet with you or your office to present these polling results in full.

Top priority policy asks

In August 2018 we launched *A Cleaner, Greener NSW: Policies for the 2019 state election and beyond*⁴. It contains 45 policies that are urgently required to protect nature and act on climate change. I would like to draw your attention to five critical areas which I implore you to act on swiftly.

1. End deforestation to save the koala

Between 1990 and 2010, koala numbers in NSW plunged by 33%. NSW needs a comprehensive, whole-of-government plan to conserve and manage koalas. The strategy must address all current threats to koala populations, including native forest logging and land clearing, and must provide comprehensive protection for all koala habitat including the establishment of the Great Koala National Park, which would add 175,000ha of publicly owned state forests to existing protected areas to form a 315,000ha reserve in the Coffs Harbour hinterland.

2. Rescue our rivers and wetlands

The rivers and wetlands of NSW are under extreme stress after decades of catchment degradation, water-course diversion, unsustainable water extraction, and climate change. Water-sharing plans must include enforceable rules and allocations of environmental water. This must be a priority for water sharing plans under the Murray Darling Basin Plan, and a key trigger for a comprehensive review of water-sharing plans on the NSW coast. New dams do not create water, they redistribute it, withholding it from downstream users. Recent dam proposals from your government appear to be for the benefit of private industry not the public interest and should be halted. Plans to raise Warragamba Dam must also be halted, as the raised dam

² <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/climate-change-top-of-voters-minds-in-nsw-election-20190311-p513bb.html>

³ Polls were conducted on the evening of March 28. We are happy to present the full results to you or your office upon request.

⁴ [4] Full document available at: <https://www.nature.org.au/media/324115/final-election-platform-2019-single-pagescompressed.pdf>

would permanently damage many kilometres of wild rivers and streams within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

3. End native forest logging

Two million hectares of NSW's State native forests continue to be exploited for commercial logging, with extremely detrimental impacts on native habitat and wildlife, soils, water, and carbon stores. NSW has an historic opportunity to shift the use of our native forests from logging to sustainable management, including through the use of skills and knowledge of the Traditional Owners, for the benefit of the people. We must end native forest logging.

4. Boost clean energy

Despite a series of small clean energy trials and programs, your Government needs to significantly lift its level of ambition to drive the transition to clean energy at scale. Under your leadership NSW is now the most coal dependent state in Australia and we can no longer wait for the federal Government to solve our energy and climate problems for us. A credible policy would ensure that at least 4000 MW of renewable energy generation and storage is built in NSW in this term of government. This will push down wholesale prices and climate pollution while creating jobs in NSW.

5. Develop a credible plan to reach target of net zero emissions by 2040

We welcome your 'firm commitment' to reaching net zero emissions by 2050, however we advocate that date be brought forward to 2040 to do our fair share of keeping warming to under 1.5 degrees. NSW must legislate for net zero-emissions by 2040 so all government decisions consider the impact of policies on reaching this goal. The goal must include clear milestones, including clear five-yearly targets.

We are only too happy to meet with you or your office to discuss these policy outcomes in more detail.

Key changes to Government functions

Outcomes for nature can be improved by changing the way Government operates. Below are five key changes to the way Government operates that could have significant benefits for nature.

1. Elevate environment to a stand-alone department

You have identified environment and climate change as key priorities for your Government. Environment should be its own cluster, distinct from Planning, Industry and Energy to ensure the issue receives the dedicated attention it deserves. Under a previous Coalition Government, the Environment was downgraded to an office and has suffered ever since, with the lack of status flowing down into the operations and responsibility of the bureaucrats. The move to cluster the Office of Environment and Heritage with Planning and Industry is deeply concerning. To send the necessary signal to the public and environment groups that this Government is serious when it comes to the environment and climate change you should elevate OEH to a Department.

2. Resource the National Parks and Wildlife Service appropriately

Given the environmental, social and economic responsibilities that NPWS shoulders, it should be a stand-alone agency, so its interests are better represented to Cabinet. We request that you establish a Head of NPWS who reports either directly to the Environment Minister or, at a minimum, to the incoming Secretary for the Department of Environment. This arrangement would provide confidence that NSW remains true to the vision of the Hon Tom Lewis, the Liberal Minister who created the NPWS—to create, maintain and promote to the world NSW's extraordinary national parks and reserves. NPWS also requires a funding boost of at least \$150 million by 2022 to ensure we are resourcing our parks as they deserve.

3. Separate the role of Chair and CEO of the EPA

Having the same person act as Chair and also be the Chief Executive Officer provides no real check and oversight on the functions of the organisation, makes it difficult for the Board to be an independent source of oversight and advice, and would not be acceptable for a public company with the same level of responsibility as the EPA. The Upper House Inquiry into the EPA in 2014 recommended that the positions of Board Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer not be occupied by the same person. We urge you to implement the recommendation and delineate these two roles.

4. Manage environment issues for conservation

Marine parks, land management, crown lands, water and forestry currently fall within the Industry cluster. Historically most of these were managed under the environment portfolio. It is unacceptable that these fall within the Industry cluster as they are environments to be managed, rather than industries to exploit. Marine Parks and Coastal management should also be managed under the environment portfolio and by the Minister for Environment.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to learn of your priorities on environment and climate change.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 9516 1488 or ncc@nature.org.au to arrange a suitable meeting time.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Smolski
CEO
Nature Conservation Council of NSW