



Green Corridors Plan

Julia Gillard and Labor
Let's move Australia forward



GREEN CORRIDORS PLAN

A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will invest \$10 million to build the resilience of our environment to climate change.

Federal Labor will work with the 56 regional natural resource management groups to develop a National Green Corridors Plan to prepare our native plants and animals, as well as our agricultural landscapes for climate change.

Why we are doing this – the evidence

Outside Australia's cities, both in rural areas and in more remote natural areas, our landscapes are already facing a range of challenges. The twin scourge of weeds and feral animals is the most pressing. Feral pigs are the obvious example, as they move between natural areas and farmland they can foul wetlands, spread disease and ruin crops.

Adding to all these pressures is the growing challenge of climate change. In south-eastern Australia it means hotter, drier summers and longer droughts, with less water in our wetlands and on our farms, and an increased risk of bushfire. In the north it means changed rainfall patterns, with a real impact on flooding and storms. And all around the coastline, rising sea levels are likely to damage our coastal lakes and wetlands.

Together these impacts are putting increasing pressure on the survival of our native plants and animals. For farmers, a changing climate can undermine the long-term sustainability of the natural resource base that farming depends on.

Land managers, whether they are managing farm land, conservation reserves or Indigenous lands, need to be preparing now for these new and changing climatic conditions. Together we need to be thinking on a continental scale, because that is the scale of the challenges being faced. We need to coordinate our investment and our efforts at the national scale to build resilience into our landscapes so they can survive the rigours of the future.

What Federal Labor will do

Federal Labor will convene a National Green Corridors advisory group to prepare a draft National Green Corridors Plan. The advisory group will have broad expertise, including scientists, farmers, Indigenous groups and regional natural resource management groups. It will consider climate change impacts and adaptation, identifying critical linkages in the landscape to allow the migration of species. The National Green Corridors Plan will also aim to protect natural stores of carbon in native ecosystems to minimise our greenhouse gas emissions.

Landcare groups, State and local government, Indigenous organisations, natural resource management groups, as well as farming, conservation and tourism organisations will have the opportunity to contribute to the National Green Corridors Plan.

As the National Green Corridors Plan is being finalised, funding will be provided to pilot this approach in at least one region to test its effectiveness. The Federal Government will also provide funding support to regional natural resource management groups to assist them in revising their regional plans to help implement these climate change corridors at the regional, state and national scale.

In its first term, Federal Labor has established Caring for our Country as an ongoing program designed to make real environmental improvements to the landscape. By emphasising the importance of climate change adaptation, this announcement represents the next stage in this reform program, and it will guide future investments under Caring for our Country in an era of a changing climate.

The key to its success will be in building strong partnerships between the regions, the States and the Commonwealth to coordinate implementation of the National Green Corridors Plan at each level.

To ensure this alignment occurs, a re-elected Gillard Labor Government will review the relationship between national targets and state and regional targets for all natural resource management programs. There will be a renewed recognition of regional and state natural resource management plans and support for them being aligned to, and informing, national targets and priorities.

Once finalised, the National Green Corridors Plan will be implemented through regional natural resource management plans, state plans and the Caring for our Country program.

Who will benefit and what will change

This package will provide farmers, Indigenous land managers, natural resource managers, Landcare, and other community groups with a better coordinated plan for making their landscapes resilient against climate change and other threats to sustainability.

The National Green Corridors Plan will involve a balanced mix of landscape-scale measures, from conservation reserves and stewardship areas through to sustainable on-farm practices that have biodiversity and production benefits, such as no-till farming, native pasture management and strategic grazing programs. This will make farming more sustainable and efficient while recognising and rewarding the good work that farmers are doing to manage their landscapes and adapt to a changing climate.

Who will be eligible

Funding will be available to natural resource management groups to assist them in reviewing and updating their regional natural resource management plans. Funding to implement the plan will also be available to landholders and community groups in the pilot region.

THE COALITION'S RECORD

The Coalition failed to use the Natural Heritage Trust to prepare Australia's environment and landscape for climate change, and failed to make real improvements in the landscape at the national scale. A series of damning reports by the Australian National Audit Office found that the Natural Heritage Trust's results were at best patchy, and at worst non-existent. The most recent of Audit Office report found that:

"There is little evidence as yet that the programs are adequately achieving the anticipated national outcomes or giving sufficient attention to the 'radically altered and degraded Australian landscape' highlighted in the 1996 Australia: State of the Environment Report."

The NHT was manipulated to achieve political ends. Coalition Ministers treated it as a giant slush-fund, which they would dip into at will. There were examples of just about every kind of maladministration, including poor financial management and late payment. Access to funding was restricted by a confusing web of program silos with no public or transparent method of allocating those funds.

Follow-up visits to sites where work was supposed to be done sometimes revealed an empty space. For example, \$6 million was invested in rainforest revegetation in the Wet Tropics between 1997 and 2002. A recent study found that only half the area reported as revegetated was actually replanted, and about half of the surveyed sites are now in poor or very poor condition.

The transition between NHT1 and NHT 2 was chaotic. A large number of grants programs were terminated summarily and it took some regional bodies up to nine months to get established again.

While there were some local successes under the NHT, they are testament to the focus, drive and concern of local communities wanting to see improvements in their environment. Those communities were swimming against a tide of rorting, political manipulation and mismanagement.

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