

ACF position paper

Energy that is good for nature
and people 



**AUSTRALIAN
CONSERVATION
FOUNDATION**

**Nature
needs us,
now**

FEBRUARY 2023

ACF supports a renewable powered Australia.

This means powering everything we can – our homes, transport, cities, farms, industries and exports – with renewables.

This is essential to do our fair share to slash climate pollution and reduce global warming.

Replacing coal and gas with renewables will require a rapid and large-scale build of renewable energy, energy transmission infrastructure and critical mineral mining.

This build must not harm nature and should deliver benefits for nature and people and have free, prior and informed consent from Traditional Custodians.



The Challenge

The single biggest actions Australia can take to solve the climate crisis is to:

1. power Australia with renewables and replace our coal, gas and nuclear exports with exports like renewable powered energy, hydrogen, aluminium and steel as well as green technologies and minerals critical to green technology like batteries;
2. protect and regenerate nature because nature absorbs carbon and maintains our climate.

To achieve a net zero Australia and exports, Australia will require many times the electricity than is generated today¹, all of which must be renewable or zero emissions. A rapid and large-scale build of renewable energy, energy transmission infrastructure, critical mineral mining and industry development is required.

A tension exists between the need for rapid deployment of renewables and ensuring that renewable projects protect critically important ecosystems; deliver benefits for nature and people and have free, prior and informed consent from Traditional Custodians and community support.

The following principles should be applied to help navigate these tensions and rapidly build renewables that are good for nature and people.

¹ [Net Zero Australia: Interim findings from a groundbreaking study \(unimelb.edu.au\)](https://www.unimelb.edu.au/net-zero-australia)



The Principles

Build only renewables and net zero energy infrastructure

1. Urgently replace coal and gas with renewables and zero emissions energy infrastructure to help solve the climate crisis.

Australia must not build any new coal or gas projects and replace existing fossil fuels with renewables and zero emissions energy infrastructure, which includes sustainably managed solar, wind, batteries and some hydro-electricity and excludes carbon-intensive and polluting fuels like coal, oil, gas, wood and charcoal and dangerous fuels like nuclear.

To fix the climate crisis, we must protect and regenerate nature

2. No project should harm Australia's high-value ecosystems and habitats.

Habitat destruction is the biggest threat to biodiversity in Australia. Responding to the climate crisis should not make this problem worse.

Federal and State laws should protect important areas and irreplaceable habitat from development impacts. Areas protected from development should include critical habitat for threatened species and ecological communities, national parks, marine parks, World Heritage sites and internationally important wetlands. Buffers to ensure that the values of these areas are not compromised must also be protected.

All projects should be assessed through rigorous and independent environmental impact assessment processes,

including assessing cumulative impacts across projects and regions and adoption of the precautionary principle, with independent and accountable assessment and decision making.

Regional Planning and investment in identifying and mapping environmental values should be used to guide the development of renewable energy infrastructure, and funding and reforms needed to deliver this should be prioritised.

3. All projects should avoid harmful impacts to nature, and where impacts are unavoidable, deliver sustainable and durable gains for nature.

The mitigation hierarchy should be strictly observed, demonstrated, and enforced with avoidance of harmful impacts afforded the highest priority. 'Offsets' should be a last resort and deliver credible environmental gains for nature.

Exemptions from assessment or approval requirements or lower standards for environmental protection should not be used to facilitate renewable energy development as this undermines community trust and confidence in the regulatory system.

These principles should apply now and, where reforms are necessary to improve and strengthen current laws such as the EPBC Act, these reforms should be prioritised.





Plan the energy transition

4. Renewable energy infrastructure should support the regeneration of nature, and co-existence with nature and existing land-uses, should be prioritised.

Minimising damage to nature should be achieved by national energy planning and careful siting of regional energy zones so that, as much as possible, energy infrastructure is located in areas where ecosystems are already disturbed. This will minimise the need to develop undisturbed natural areas and high-value agricultural land. National planning and regional energy zones will avoid piecemeal planning and impacts and ensure cumulative impacts on nature and communities can be assessed and minimised. Planning will also help avoid placing infrastructure in areas at risk of climate damage through for example sea-level rise, flooding or fire.

5. Maximise energy productivity to minimise energy generation and transmission needs.

Energy efficiency – in buildings, industry and transport – is under planned in Australia yet provides enormous opportunity to save money, resources and impacts on nature by using energy productively. Ambitious energy efficiency targets and actions should be set for Australia.

Make sure people benefit so that social licence for renewables is maintained

6. Free, prior and informed consent of Traditional Custodians should be attained, and First Nations Peoples should benefit from developments on their Country.

Consent should be attained (or denied) and First Nations People should benefit from energy projects on their Country. ACF supports the principles outlined in the *Best Practice Principles for Clean Energy Projects*² by the First Nations Clean Energy Network as well as the rights to Free, Prior and Informed consent as outlined in the *UN declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*³.

7. Communities, particularly local communities or affected communities should benefit.

The highest standards of community participation and engagement should apply across the development, construction, operation and decommissioning of energy projects. Where possible, projects should support local communities, services and jobs and provide benefits such as reliable, affordable energy, and fair compensation should be paid to affected communities.

² [Best Practice Principles for Clean Energy Projects](#)

³ [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\) \(unesco.org\)](#)



The Expectations

Industry

ACF expects developers of energy, transmission, mining and related projects to set the highest standards for project development including:

- taking every effort to avoid and minimise environmental impacts, social impacts including visual, noise, radio and television interference and local transport impacts;
- showing leadership by delivering climate, clean energy and environmental, as well as social and economic benefits to affected and local communities and First Nations Peoples;
- seeking Free, Prior and Informed consent from Traditional Custodians.

Government

ACF expects state and federal governments to collaborate to enable the rapid build of renewable energy and infrastructure across Australia in a planned and purposeful way that implements the principles in this document.

While ACF supports processes such as national planning and renewable energy zones to expedite renewables build, this must not circumvent the protection of nature, culture and community values in Australia.



We love **our beautiful planet**

Australian Conservation Foundation

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