

# **Extinction** **wrapped** **2023**



**AUSTRALIAN  
CONSERVATION  
FOUNDATION**

**Nature  
needs us,  
now**

**We acknowledge the  
Traditional Owners of  
Country** and their continuing  
connection to land, waters and  
community. **We pay respect to  
their Elders past and present  
and to the pivotal role that  
First Nations Peoples continue  
to play in caring for Country  
across Australia.**



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# Introduction

**This document is a snapshot of the nature destruction that was facilitated by Australia's failing nature laws in 2023.**

It tallies up the number of species that were added to the threatened species list, the number of hectares of habitat destruction that was approved and the coal and gas projects that were given the green light in the 12 month period.

Pressure on Australia's nature is mounting. Bulldozing of bush and forest, invasive species and fires, floods and drought fuelled by climate change are destroying nature and driving wildlife to extinction. Australia has one of the worst extinction rates on Earth, and it's getting worse.

The laws that are meant to be protecting Australia's nature are failing. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) is barely monitored, rarely enforced and full of loopholes that allow businesses to destroy nature.

The year ahead must be pivotal in turning the tide of extinction in Australia. 2024 is the year the Albanese government must deliver on its commitment to re-write Australia's nature laws in line with the government's promise of zero new extinctions. Landmark decisions will be made on some controversial project proposals, such as Walker Group's plan to construct a marina and high rise apartment complex on the internationally significant Toondah Harbour wetlands, and Australia will host the global conversation on nature conservation at the Global Nature Positive Summit.

We have the solutions to create a better Australia, for people and nature. Together we can protect the nature and wildlife that still flourish in our big backyard, and work together to restore the places and ecosystems that have been damaged.





# Key findings - by the numbers

In 2023:

- **144** species and ecological communities were added to Australia's threatened species list, with a total of 2212 Australian plants, animals and ecosystems now threatened with extinction.
- **11** species were 'uplisted' - in other words, assigned to a category closer to extinction.
- **2** species were downlisted, but even then the news was not good, as they were both downlisted on technicalities, not because of genuine recovery of the species.
- **10,426** hectares of habitat destruction was approved under our national nature laws across 44 projects. That is equivalent to clearing the size of the Melbourne Cricket Ground 5000 times over.
- **4** new gas projects were approved and 4 new coal projects were approved under our national nature laws, along with dozens of variations to existing fossil fuel projects.
- Our national nature laws only stopped **one** project from being approved - a Central Queensland thermal and coking coal project.

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## Changes to Australia's national threatened species list

**2023 was the busiest year for species being added to Australia's national threatened species list since it was established.**

There were five times as many species added as the average year, and twice as many as in the previous record year.

This record number of additions is a symptom of the worsening extinction crisis. The fact that they are being listed as threatened is not the problem. Many of these species were nominated for listing years ago, and this high number shows the Minister and the Department are clearing the backlog and trying to make the threatened species list reflect reality. However, the growing number of threatened species does indicate that the situation for Australian nature is getting worse over time, underlining the urgent need for government action.

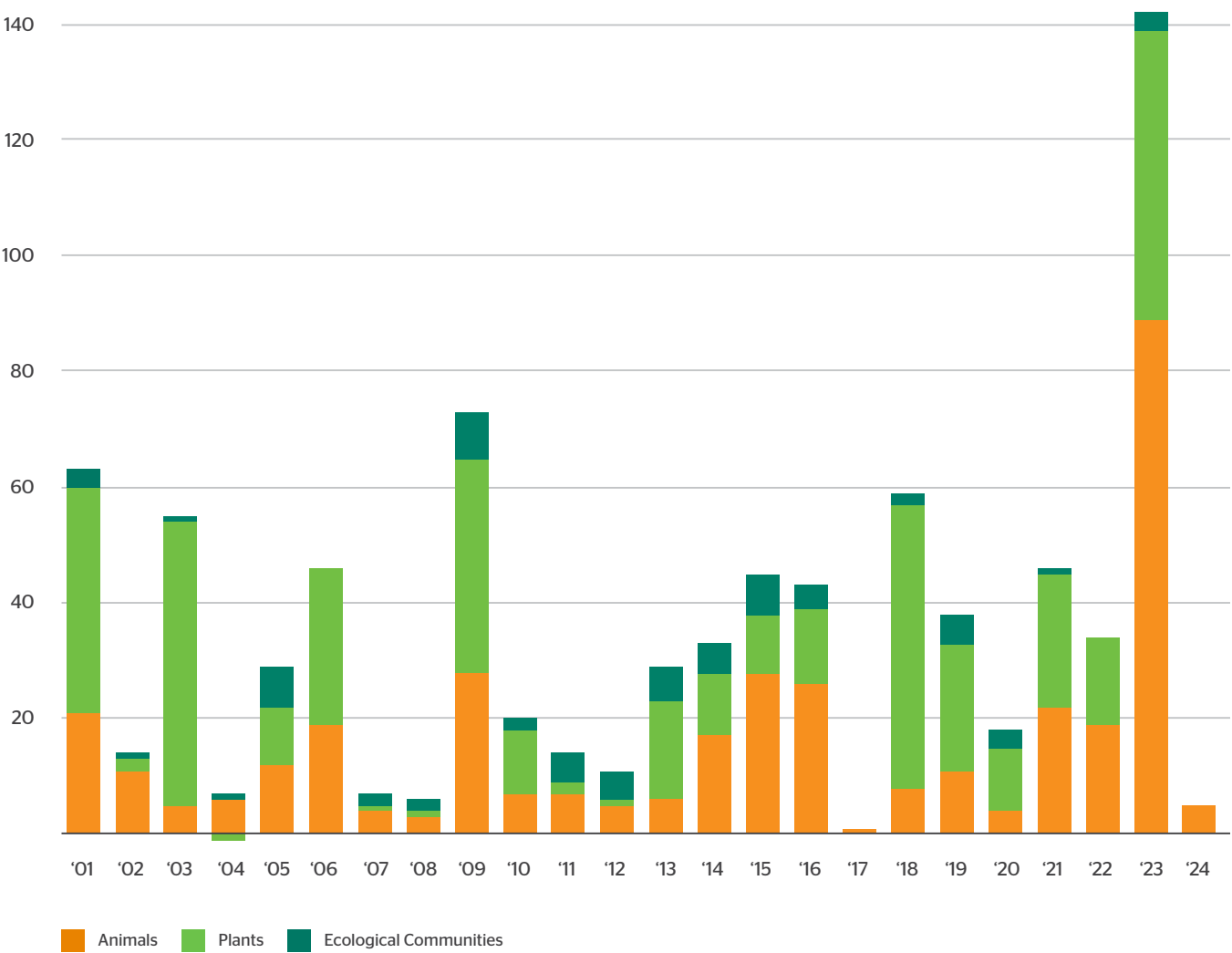


*Left.* Queensland land clearing  
*Photo.* Dean Sewell

*Above.* Pink cockatoo perched on a dead tree  
*Photo.* Rixipix / iStock

Threatened species

This chart shows Australian Government data of additions and uplistings to the EPBC Threatened Species and Ecological Communities lists, minus deletions and downlistings, for each year after the list was established.



Source: ACF. Created with Datawrapper

144 total newly-listed threatened species and ecological communities.

|             | Animals |
|-------------|---------|
| Reptiles    | 24      |
| Crustaceans | 24      |
| Fish        | 19      |
| Birds       | 13*     |
| Frogs       | 6       |
| Insects     | 3       |
| Earthworm   | 1       |
| Total       | 90      |

*\* Some of these birds were already recognised under the migratory bird provision, but are newly added under the threatened species provision (and therefore now better protected).*

|            | Plants |
|------------|--------|
| Eucalypts  | 9      |
| Wattles    | 4      |
| Grevilleas | 2      |
| Orchids    | 2      |
| Banksia    | 1      |
| Hakea      | 1      |
| Tea tree   | 1      |
| Total      | 51     |

| Ecological communities  |   |
|---|---|
| Empodisma peatlands of southwestern Australia                                 |   |
| Kurri sand swamp woodland of the Sydney Basin bioregion                       |   |
| Honeymyrtle shrubland on limestone ridges of the Swan Coastal Plain Bioregion |   |
| Total   | 3 |

Uplistings and downlistings on Australia’s national threatened species list

| Uplistings |          |   |
|------------|----------|---|
| Animals    | 11       |   |
|            | Fish     | 3 |
|            | Mammals  | 3 |
|            | Reptiles | 3 |
|            | Birds    | 2 |
| Plants     | 10       |   |
| Total      | 21       |   |

One animal and one plant were downlisted. Unfortunately, neither of these are as a result of successful recovery efforts. A taxonomic review reclassified a plant in far north Queensland from ‘extinct’ to ‘critically endangered’. A separate scientific revision showed the Round Island Petrel in fact never had a breeding colony anywhere within Australia’s jurisdiction, making it ineligible to appear on Australia’s threatened species list.

Total numbers on the EPBC threatened species list

As of 17 January 2024 there are:

|                        |      |
|------------------------|------|
| Fauna                  | 654  |
| Flora                  | 1452 |
| Ecological Communities | 106  |
| Total                  | 2212 |

# Habitat approved for clearing under Australia’s national environment laws

In 2023, a cumulative total of 10,436 hectares of habitat destruction was approved across 44 projects. This is less than half the average of the previous ten years. (24,036 hectares was the average across 2012-2021).<sup>1</sup>

Whilst it is positive that the rate of approved habitat destruction has slowed, this is still an unsustainable amount of deforestation. It likely only represents a fraction of the total habitat cleared as [land clearing in Australia is frequently undertaken without assessment under national environment laws](#). Clearing on agricultural land, predominantly for beef production, represents the vast majority (over 90%) of this unregulated, unapproved clearing.

The 10 animals most impacted (ranked by total area of habitat approved to be destroyed) are outlined below. The animal impacted by the most approvals was the koala, which was affected by 10 projects with approval to clear a total of 1071 hectares of its habitat. The animal that stands to lose the most habitat is the northern quoll. Two projects pose an outsized threat to the quoll, with approval granted to clear a total of 1408.8 hectares of northern quoll habitat.

| The 10 threatened species worst impacted by federally-approved habitat destruction in 2023 |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| Rank   | Species  | Number of approvals and NCA-PMs for which we were able to find a hectare figure | hectares approved to be destroyed <sup>2</sup> |
| 1  | Northern quoll                                 | 2   | 1408.8   |
| 2  | Grey falcon                                    | 3   | 1314   |
| 3  | Olive python (Pilbara subspecies)              | 2   | 1078   |
| 4  | Koala  | 10  | 1071   |
| 5  | Ghost bat                                      | 2   | 1037.6   |
| 6  | Grey-headed flying-fox                         | 8   | 444  |
| 7  | Southern squatter pigeon                       | 6   | 346.9  |
| 8  | Night parrot                                   | 2   | 309.1  |
| 9  | Pilbara leaf-nosed bat                         | 2   | 304.2  |
| 10   | Five-clawed worm-skink, long-legged worm-skink | 1   | 268.1  |

Only one project, a coal mine proposed for central Queensland, was denied approval under our national environment laws in 2023.

<sup>1</sup> Note: This figure is an abstract figure, not the actual, real-world hectares of vegetation approved to be destroyed. For example, an approval might say that a proponent is allowed to clear 10 hectares each of northern quoll, olive python and grey falcon territory. In reality the footprint of cleared habitat is likely 10 hectares total, but we have described this as 30 hectares of habitat approved to be destroyed. This methodology was chosen because the actual total habitat removed is rarely published in approval documents. As an experiment, we assumed that the total amount of habitat approved to be destroyed for each project was the highest area of habitat approved to be destroyed for any one species as part of that project, no larger. This method yields an estimate of 2,920 hectares. However, this is certainly an underestimate because not all projects with multiple habitat hectares listed impact hectares that overlap 100%.

<sup>2</sup> Note: This is not an abstract figure. It is the actual area of habitat approved to be destroyed.



# New fossil fuel projects and national inventory of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

Four new gas projects were approved and four new coal projects were approved under our national nature laws in 2023, as well as dozens of variations to existing fossil fuel projects.

National CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for the 2023 calendar year are not yet published. However, the financial year ending on 30 June 2023 indicates a concerning upward trend in Australia's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:

“Australia's greenhouse gas emissions were **467 million tonnes** in the financial year ending June 2023, an **increase of four million tonnes** on the previous year [i.e. our emissions rose by about 0.85%]. To achieve a 43% reduction in emissions by 2030 compared with 2005 levels, and net zero emissions by 2050, Australia will need to decarbonise at an average annual rate of 17 million tonnes.”

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.climatechangeauthority.gov.au/annual-progress-advice-0>



Smokestacks and cooling towers of coal fired power plants  
Photo: Tenedos / iStock

# We love **our beautiful planet**

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