



Nature Conservation Council

The voice for nature in NSW

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2025

Saturday

18 October 2025

Held at the Greenhouse Climate Tech Hub

Level 3, 180 George Street Sydney

Online observers:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6785081132>

BUSINESS PAPERS

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EXECUTIVE 2024 - 2025

Chairperson: Carolyn Loton

Vice-Chairperson and Public Officer: Julie Taylor Mills

Secretary: Julie Barnes

Treasurer: Luke Austin

Executive Members:

Justine Bucknell

Winsome Hall

Terry Korn

Peter Coughlan

Jo Davey

Lynette Ryan

David Marquard

Sally Townley

All positions are Honorary

2025 Annual Conference Agenda



8.15 – 8.45	Registration, Tea and Coffee, Meet and Mingle
8.45 – 9.00	Welcome to Country with Craig Madden
9.00 – 9.15	Conference Open
9.15 – 9.30	Chair's Address
9.30 – 9.45	Treasurer's Report and Launch of Impact Report
9.45 – 10.15	Council Affairs Motions

10.15 – 10.45am | Morning Tea

10.45 – 11.45	Member Group Motions
11.45 – 12.00	The Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC
12.00 – 12.10	Q&A
12.10 – 12.20	CEO Update
12.20 – 12.30	Ms Sue Higginson MLC
12.30 – 12.40	Mr James Griffin MP

12.40 – 1.25pm | Lunch

1.25 – 1.35	70 Years of NCC Documentary Trailer
1.35 – 2.50	Keynote panel

2.50 – 3.20pm | Afternoon Tea

3.20 – 4.20	Workshops
4.20 – 4.50	Member group updates
4.50 – 5.00	Conference Close and Wrap-up

5.00 – 6.15pm | Networking Drinks and NCC 70th Birthday Celebrations

6.30pm – close | Optional Conference Casual Dinner

[Subject to change]

List of Annual Conference Motions

A Council Affairs		
	Submitted by	Subject
1	NCC Board	Admission of New Member Societies
2	NCC Board	2024 Annual Conference Minutes
B Member Group Motions		
1	Wilderness Australia	Gardens of Stone: tourism lease
2	Wilderness Australia	Gardens of Stone: inappropriate development
3	Blue Mountains Conservation Society	Gardens of Stone: endorse the Rise Against Coal resolution
4	Blue Mountains Conservation Society	Gardens of Stone: call on the Ministers to take actions
5	Lane Cove Bushland and Conservation Society	Data centres: governing regulations

Annual Conference Motions 2025

A. Council Affairs

MOTION 2025/A1 - Admission of New Member Societies

Submitted by the NCC Board

THAT the Conference confirms the admission to membership of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, the organisations listed below, whose membership applications were accepted and approved or recommended for approval by the Board from November 2024 to 18th October 2025.

- The Better Cities Initiative
- Yamba CAN Inc.
- Our Future Shoalhaven
- The Colony Bees
- Transition Towns Australia
- Birdlife Southern NSW
- Fingal Bay Community Association
- Gloucester Transitions Inc
- COAST Rescue
- Canopy Keepers
- Link Road Forest Campaign Inc

MOTION 2025/A2 – 2024 Annual Conference Minutes

Submitted by the Board

THAT the Nature Conservation Council NSW accepts the minutes of the AGM held on 16 November 2024, linked [here](#).

B. Member Group Motions

MOTION 2025/B1 – Gardens of Stone: tourism lease

Submitted by Wilderness Australia

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW request that the Minister for the Environment reject the tourist industry push for a lease over the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area for three luxury glamping resorts set amongst internationally significant pagoda landscapes.

Background information: At the 2024 Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) AGM on 16 November 2024, member groups unanimously passed a motion to write to the Minister for the Environment, Penny Sharpe MLC, to advise that the proposed lease to Wild Bush Luxury Experience for private, luxury accommodation at three sites in the recently protected Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area should not be granted.

Twelve months later, no decision has been made and the threat to the internationally significant pagoda landscape, threatened species and water resources remains.

The proposed project has not been subjected to public consultation and the NPWS claimed that the three glamping resort proposals are of low-impact without an environmental impact assessment having been undertaken.

Developers use private luxury accommodation associated with public Great Walks, such as the Gardens of Stone Pagoda Walk, to secure a valuable title over national parks land with high amenity, and with taxpayer-funded infrastructure and marketing. Leases can subsequently be sold for profit.

PROPOSED ACTION: That NCC write a letter to the Minister for the Environment.

MOTION 2025/B2 – Gardens of Stone: inappropriate development

Submitted by Wilderness Australia

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW request that the Minister for the Environment:

1. Require proposed developments and visitor facilities in national parks and state conservation areas that cause greater than negligible harm to Aboriginal heritage, other cultural heritage, threatened species and communities, as well as significant geodiversity, to be placed on public exhibition for comment and review; and
2. Restrict developments in national parks and ensure they do not impact threatened species or ecological communities.

Background information: A Lost City Walk in the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area that was completed in 2024 caused environmental impacts due to the removal of over 100 individual threatened plants and by the establishment of a walking easement through a nationally threatened Newnes Plateau Shrub Swamp. This level of impact was insufficient to trigger exhibition of the proposed track, despite the affected plant having a highly restricted distribution.

A Lost City Walk in the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area that was completed in 2024 caused environmental impacts due to the removal of over 100 individual threatened plants and by the establishment of a walking easement through a nationally threatened Newnes Plateau Shrub Swamp. This level of impact was insufficient to trigger public exhibition of the proposed track, despite the affected plant species having a highly restricted distribution.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service will only exhibit environmental assessments if a threatened species population is to be 'placed at risk of extinction by the proposed works'. This test is too high a bar for proposals. In comparison, Centennial Coal Springvale swamp offset agreement requires \$2 million to be paid if mining causes greater than negligible damage to a shrub swamp.

There is an urgent need to have a trigger to reject proposals for visitor facilities that cause unacceptable impacts to park values. Not causing extinctions is an obvious first step.

In September 2021, the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) announced a Threatened Species Framework for zero extinctions for species within the NSW national park estate. This framework should require the NPWS to ensure its proposed works and visitor facilities will not cause 'greater than negligible' harm to threatened species and communities.

PROPOSED ACTION: That NCC write a letter to the Minister for the Environment per the motion.

MOTION 2025/B3 – Gardens of Stone: endorse the Rise Against Coal resolution

Submitted by Blue Mountains Conservation Society

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW Conference endorse the Rise Against Coal event resolution and call for the NSW government to deliver:

1. An immediate halt to water pollution and nature and heritage destruction;
2. A NSW Parliamentary Inquiry to correct regulatory failures and prevent further damage caused to this sensitive region by the coal industry;
3. Protection of Sydney's drinking water catchment through Labor's promised river health laws;
4. A coal phase-out and rehabilitation plan that secures the health of rivers, nature and the community.

Background information: The Gardens of Stone region north of Lithgow contains huge biodiversity with more than 1000 plant species, 33 vegetation communities and fauna diversity with many being threatened status. It also contains the Western coalfields with five mines currently operating. The region's streams, rare and threatened plants and animals, towering cliffs, spectacular pagoda landscape and nationally listed swamps are being damaged by coal mining.

Dozens of rare swamps have been destroyed and Sydney's drinking water supply polluted by vast volumes of mine wastewater. Mine water required to be contained in Thompsons Creek Reservoir is instead being discharged without consent into the Coxs River.

Western Sydney Uni Assoc. Prof. and water pollution expert Dr Ian Wright said, 'high levels of pollution leaking from the primary waste dump at Mt Piper Power Station and mixed with coal mine drainage are flowing into a Coxs River tributary.' 'This is the worst water pollution site in Sydney's drinking water catchment that I've seen in 30 years in my science', said Dr Wright.

Mine owners, Centennial Coal, Energy Australia or the NSW government have no long-term plan to treat and limit the vast amounts of mine waste that will flood out of the mines under Newnes Plateau once these mines start closing from next year. A parliamentary inquiry is needed to get to the bottom of this unfolding disaster, protect the Gardens of Stone and safeguard Sydney's drinking water supply.

Gardens of Stone Alliance works to protect the Gardens of Stone region north of Lithgow. Alliance members are Blue Mountains Conservation Society, Lithgow Environment Group, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Wilderness Australia, 4nature, National Parks Association of NSW and Bushwalking NSW.

On Saturday 9th August, more than 120 people attending the Gardens of Stone Alliance co-hosted Rise Against Coal community meeting passed the unanimous resolution as

described in the proposed motion for this Conference.

Proposed action: endorse the Rise Against Coal motion (no changes may be made to the wording of the motion).

MOTION 2025/B4 – Gardens of Stone: call on the Ministers to take actions

Submitted by Blue Mountains Conservation Society

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW writes to the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Penny Sharpe, the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, the Hon Paul Scully and the Minister for Water, the Hon Rose Jackson calling for NSW Government to take the actions in the resolution unanimously passed at the 9 August Rise Against Coal public meeting that seek to protect the Gardens of Stone region, the health of the Cocks River and Sydney's drinking water.

Background information: As per motion 2025/B3

Proposed action: Write letters to the relevant Ministers as outlined in the motion.

MOTION 2025/B5 – Data centres: governing regulations

Submitted by Lane Cove Bushland and Conservation Society

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW write to the Premier, Treasurer, Planning Minister and Environment, Energy and Climate Change Minister to express concern at changes to the law which would make it easier for all kinds of infrastructure and development to evade proper assessment, and in particular:

- Object to the loss of Council oversight of resource intensive developments,
- Advocate the return approval powers to local councils, and for mandatory expert and community consultation, and
- Advocate a consistent set of regulations governing the location, construction and operation of all data centres, including the associated infrastructure,
 - Adequate physical setbacks to adjacent uses in urban areas and where adjacent to environmentally sensitive zones,
 - Standards for power and water use relative to needs of the local area and other uses in the supply catchments
 - Standards for mitigation of local environmental impacts with thresholds set for unacceptable levels of impact (on people, wildlife and environment) – including tree loss, overshadowing, light, heat and noise generation and intrusion, view impacts, construction impacts and potential pollution from diesel fuel spills
 - Capture of stormwater both onsite and, where appropriate from adjacent areas, to supplement water supply for data centre use and relieve stormwater disposal pressures in adjacent areas

Background information:

In September 2025, the NSW Government introduced a Bill to Parliament that could significantly overhaul the state’s planning system. While the Bill aims to streamline development approvals and address housing shortages, it proposes the creation of a “single front door” authority to provide advice on development applications on behalf of all government agencies. This change would reduce the role of local councils, communities, and specialised environmental agencies in the planning process, with the goal of speeding up approvals.

A key concern is that the Bill would remove requirements for input from these specialised agencies or Ministers under the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act* (1979), including in decisions affecting threatened species and biodiversity.

Currently, the rapid spread of data centres in urban areas and near sensitive environments such as remnant bushland, poses a growing but poorly quantified threat. Data centres consume vast amounts of energy and water to power and cool their servers. In Sydney alone, there are 88 existing or planned data centres, with 15 more across other parts of NSW. Many of these facilities risk impacting local water and electricity supplies, as well as adjacent lands.

We argue that the government should be moving in the opposite direction and taking a more considered and precautionary approach to industry developments, particularly in light of the biodiversity crisis and the rapid growth of the data storage industry and its significant

impacts on water resources, climate emissions, and biodiversity.

Proposed action: That NCC write to the Premier, Treasurer, Planning Minister and Environment, Energy and Climate Change Minister urgently, as per the motion.