



Media release

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Environment is in worse shape after two years of Coalition government

The environment in NSW has suffered significantly in the two years since the Coalition was re-elected in March 2015, a review of the government's performance by leading environmental groups has found.

"Our analysis shows the Coalition has been bad for the environment on several fronts," Nature Conservation Council CEO Kate Smolski said.

"It has weakened land-clearing laws, failed to protect farms and wildlife from coal and gas, subsidised native forest logging, reduced funding for national parks, conservation and research, and undermined the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

"The number of threatened species has grown to more than 1000 and greenhouse gas emissions from power stations spiked 7% in the year to June 2016.

"It is a pretty terrible legacy, however, the new premier and environment minister can turn things around before the election in two years' time.

"The government could quickly earn credits by declaring a Sydney Marine Park and developing a credible plan for meeting their goal of a carbon neutral NSW by 2050."

The government worst environmental failures since 2015 included:

- Gutting down strong land-clearing laws, which will drive species extinctions
- Allowing expansion of coal and gas projects on farmland and in special natural areas, including in Sydney drinking-water catchment
- Subsidising native forest logging, which is driving koalas towards extinction
- Reducing national parks funding, slowing reserve acquisitions to a trickle and reducing conservation work and research
- Undermining the Murray Darling Basin Plan, which will result in less water for river and wetlands health

Waste and pollution was one of the few bright spots on an otherwise bad report card. The groups marked the government up for progressing the Container Deposit Scheme to reduce litter and for expanding recycling infrastructure.

Results in the “Climate and Energy” and the “Planning and Development” categories were a mix of positive and negative decisions and initiatives. (See summary of results below and attached.)

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Pollution and Waste	Good
Climate and Energy	Mixed
Planning and Development	Mixed
National Parks and Wilderness	Bad
Forests, Woodlands, Grasslands and Wildlife	Bad
Marine Conservation	Bad
Coal and Gas	Bad
Rivers and Wetlands	Bad

POLLUTION AND WASTE

Total Environment Centre Director Jeff Angel: “The government deserves full credit for staring down the powerful drinks lobby and committing to introducing a container deposit scheme in NSW. This move will significantly reduce litter and the flow of harmful plastics into the marine environment. Of course, there is more to do and the next step should be a ban on single use lightweight plastic bag.” **Contact:** 0418 273 773.

CLIMATE AND ENERGY

Nature Conservation Council CEO Kate Smolski said: “The government’s commitment to a zero carbon emissions target last year was a great step forward, but it still does not have binding milestones or a plan for the rapid, just closure of the state’s five polluting coal-fired power stations.” **Contact:** 0478 828 864 or 9156 1488.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

North Coast Environment Council spokesperson Jim Morrison: “Despite promises to fix up the NSW planning system, the government has simply tinkered around the edges. The system still favours the big end of town, while the environment and communities continue to take a back seat. Real change is needed to ensure the ongoing pressures of growth are balanced with the need to plan for an ecologically sustainable future.” **Contact:** 6664 2533 or 0488 696 846.

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDERNESS

Colong Foundation for Wilderness Director Keith Muir said: “In the 50th anniversary year of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the government scores a Fail for protected areas by underfunding park management, planning resort development in Kosciuszko National Park, erosion of wilderness protection and inaction on reserve establishment right across NSW.” **Contact:** 0412 791 404.

FORESTS, WOODLANDS AND WILDLIFE

South East Region Conservation Alliance spokesperson Harriett Swift: “The NSW Government has continued to use our taxes to pay for the destruction of our native forests, sacrificing our unique biodiversity, water quality and many of our threatened species. After seven consecutive years of

losses in native forest logging under its hand, it's only response is more of the same – more intensive logging and weaker measures to protect wildlife." **Contact:** 0414 908 997.

MARINE CONSERVATION

NSW National Parks Association CEO Kevin Evans: "The government has still not restored protections for 10 marine sanctuary zones after the ill-thought-out amnesty introduced by Barry O'Farrell in 2013. This is a drop of roughly one third in the area protected in our marine parks and as such is a major backwards step on marine protection. We're also waiting for a Sydney Marine Park to protect the Hawkesbury Shelf bioregion, the only bioregion in NSW to lack formal marine park protection, and to recognise the extraordinary marine diversity that exists in our capital city." **Phone:** 0457 797 977.

RIVERS AND WETLANDS

Central West Environment Council spokesperson Bev Smiles said: "The NSW Government has placed long-term health of our inland rivers and wetlands at risk by reducing environmental water and opposing federal water buybacks in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Coalition has taken every opportunity to obstruct and delay measures to restore the Murray-Darling to health, compromising the recovery of wetlands, water birds and freshwater fish." **Contact:** 0428 817 282.

COAL AND GAS

Blue Mountains Conservation Society Madi Maclean: "The government has comprehensively failed to deliver on its promise to protect critical agricultural and environmental assets, leaving productive farmland, water resources and iconic natural areas at risk. Coal mines, such the Clarence Colliery near Lithgow, continue to pollute the region's waterways and even the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area." **Contact:** 0412 428 202.

HOW THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE WAS ASSESSED

Before the 2015 NSW Government elections, environment groups compiled a report listing the top 25 actions required to conserve nature and protect the environment during the 2015-2019 term of government. The report *Our Environment, Our Future - Policies for the 2015 NSW Election and Beyond* urged all parties and candidates to incorporate those actions in their environmental policy platforms. This Report Card assesses the performance of the Coalition government halfway through its term against those 25 key indicators.

FULL REPORT

Our full analysis, a two-pager and the earlier report, *Our Environment, Our Future*, are available at: www.nature.org.au/reportcard.

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