



NATURE NEEDS MORE

THE NEW WAY OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Media Release: 23 April 2020

For Immediate release

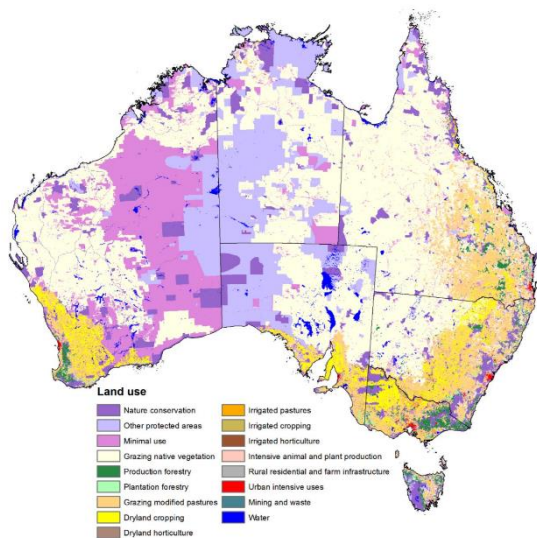
Can a Basic Income Save Australian Native Forests And Wildlife?

Is it time to consider a basic income for farming and forestry communities to aid the transition to a more sustainable economy?

In Australia, it will be impossible to deal with climate change until the country is willing to not only move away from fossil fuels (use and mining) but also rethink land use for farming and forestry. In a September 2019 interview with sustainability expert Michael Mobbs, he remarked on his travels around Australia, driving through days of abandoned and dying county.

Land use in Australia has gone unquestioned for 200 years. The result - 44.87% of Australia's land mass is used for 'Grazing natural vegetation'. By comparison, the land set aside for nature conservation is 7.87%, which is frankly ridiculous in a country the size of Australia, with the population of Australia and the wealth of Australia. And recent bush fires have shown how vulnerable Australian wildlife is to natural disasters, when they are corralled in to such a pitiful amount of land.

National scale land use (based on Land Use of Australia 2010-11, Version 5, ABARES 2016)



Land use 2010-11	Area(sq.km)	Percent (%)
Nature conservation	604,671	7.87%
Other protected areas including Indigenous uses	1,163,676	15.14%
Minimal use	1,172,679	15.26%
Grazing natural vegetation	3,448,896	44.87%
Production forestry	103,494	1.35%
Plantation forestry	25,752	0.34%
Grazing modified pastures	710,265	9.24%
Dryland cropping	275,928	3.59%
Dryland horticulture	743	0.01%
Irrigated pastures	6,048	0.08%
Irrigated cropping	9,765	0.13%
Irrigated horticulture	4,552	0.06%
Intensive animal and plant production	1,414	0.02%
Intensive uses (mainly urban)	13,806	0.18%
Rural residential	17,632	0.23%
Waste and mining	1,860	0.02%
Water	125,542	1.63%
No data	401	0.005%
Total	7,687,124	100.00%

Source: <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/aclump/land-use>

You only have to take a trip in to the NSW hinterland to see abandoned land so degraded over the last two centuries of agricultural production that it has just been left. These areas will never regenerate rapidly enough without some help.

And now we have:

- The additional destruction of more than 18.6 million hectares during the recent bushfire season.
- The NSW Environment Protection Authority has approved logging in forests hard hit by recent bushfires in the state's north without first assessing the toll taken on koalas and other wildlife (<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/epa-approves-logging-without-looking-at-koala-impacts-after-bushfires-20200417-p54kru.html>)
- Regulators missing in action for decades, rule-breakers ignored (Rogues can overstock 440 per cent and report themselves without fear) and bad news covered up*

- 285 family businesses left to manage almost half of WA's land. The average age of pastoralists is 60 and in the main their children want nothing to do with a tough business proposition in a declining landscape: ***Pastoralists therefore have no incentive to keep the land in good condition or mount a decade-long rehabilitation project; "Certainly, their accountants would advise them against it," Pollock writes.****

* <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/sustainability/death-by-a-thousand-cuts-the-industry-doing-more-damage-than-mining-20200123-p53u6b.html>

The level of land degradation has left the Australian continent more vulnerable to the changing climate.

Australia has historically favoured to set aside most of its land mass for grazing animals, currently around 70 million sheep and 15 million cattle. Large tracts of this land are actually ill-suited to grazing, it is too dry and the soil is too fragile for European ungulates, resulting in land degradation, the regional extinction of native flora and fauna and in hardship for farmers trying to make a living from the land.

With advancing global warming this situation is going to get worse, putting more pressure on the land and more pressure on often heavily indebted farmers. Whilst the Australian government regularly provides drought assistance to farmers in the worst affected areas, this does not solve the underlying problem – too many farmers financially lack the ability to walk away from marginal farming areas and many want to stay connected to the land they love anyway. The same is true for communities involving in the logging of native forests.

The solution is to enable farmers to stay on the land and give them the means to forgo grazing or crop growing on marginal land, and not logging any more native forest, for forestry communities.

This can be done via the ongoing provision of an **unconditional basic income, augmented with additional payments to work on land restoration, planting trees, minimising water loss, fostering the growth of native shrubs and grasses and repairing damage done over the last 230 years.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the JobKeeper Allowance, which is effectively a basic income. Not that the Australian government would call it that. Given the government is willing to respond to pre-empt an employment crisis in this way, why not introduce a basic Income to transition communities facing impossible choices between unsustainable production and drowning in debt? Why continue to pump subsidies into industries that are both marginal and environmentally unsustainable, when instead we could pay farmers and loggers directly to restore native landscapes? At the very least it is time for this a basic income linked to rehabilitation, revegetation and rewilding, in an Australian context, to be investigated.

In line with the upcoming post-2020 global biodiversity framework, a country as wealthy as Australia should lead the world and aim to set aside 30% of Australia landmass for nature conservation. This can be done if we pay farmers on marginal land and logging communities to transition away from the current unsustainable activities and become custodians of their land in the process of regeneration and rewilding. We will save money on pointless subsidies propping up obsolete industries and marginal land, and, instead, directly help people transition to a more sustainable future without them having to leave the land or communities they feel connected to.

About Nature Needs More

Nature Needs More Ltd, ABN 85 623 878 428, is a registered charity in Australia with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

Contact person:

Dr. Lynn Johnson, CEO & Founder

Phone: +61 418 124 660 Email: lynn@natureneedsmore.org

Phone: +61 418 124 660

Website: www.natureneedsmore.org