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Gaining ground in preserving our wildlife

Threatened species are getting a federal helping hand, writes **Josh Frydenberg**.

Australia has one of the richest and most complex ecosystems in the world. With more than 150,000 different species, we are considered one of only 17 megadiverse nations on the planet. Remarkably, 40 per cent of our birds, 80 per cent of our flora and 90 per cent of our reptiles can be found nowhere else.

Our diversity faces many challenges putting this unique endowment under threat. Climate change, feral predators and population growth in urban areas all take their toll. This is why the Turnbull government has rolled out a comprehensive strategy to protect our threatened species, the results from which show it is working.

Today, 99.7 per cent of about 2000 of the threatened species and ecological communities listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act have a recovery plan or conservation advice, with our aim of achieving 100 per cent shortly. We have appointed Australia's first threatened species

commissioner, Gregory Andrews, whose successor Dr Sally Box is taking the lead implementing our Threatened Species Strategy with its targeted focus on 20 mammals, 20 birds and 30 plants.

We have mobilised more than \$255 million for over 1200 different projects that seek to improve the habitat and remove threats to threatened species, including projects that form part of our Landcare, 20 Million Trees, Green Army, National Environmental Science and Threatened Species Recovery Fund programs.

In every case, where appropriate, we seek to galvanise the expertise and efforts of Indigenous rangers, native title holders, state

governments and not-for-profit organisations. For example, under the Recovery Fund, we are supporting the Dambimangari and Uunguu IPA Ranges to protect the brush-tailed rabbit rat and the golden bandicoot by managing fire and feral cats. As a government, we have also increased ranger funding

by more than 30 per cent and we are expanding the size of the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs).

We're also seeking to increasingly leverage the goodwill of the private sector with the launch last year of Australia's first Threatened Species Prospectus, which has already mobilised more than \$6 million to fund 19 projects, ranging from a \$500,000 commitment to support the platypus and a range of

threatened and freshwater fish species to an \$86,000 crowd-sourced initiative to establish a new island haven for the Norfolk Island green parrot.

As the most recent progress report illustrates, there have been some further timely and tangible improvements to the prospects of a number of our threatened species. Last year, in Victoria, 100 critically endangered regent honeyeaters were released in the Chiltern-Mount Pilot National Park and 90 eastern

barred bandicoots were released in Phillip Island. In NSW, 240 critically endangered southern corroboree frogs were placed into disease-free enclosures in Kosciuszko National Park and the number of threatened magenta lilly-pilly is increasing by over 30 per cent in the coastal rainforest areas.

Significantly, what the progress report also finds is that we are mitigating the damage caused by feral cats, which kill 1 million birds a

day. We have been able to at the national level cull thousands of them, while eradicating their presence on Christmas, Bruny, Kangaroo, French and Dirk Hartog islands.

Protecting our threatened species is a huge task and no one is underestimating the challenge. But, the release of the most recent progress report does give us cause for optimism and with continued engagement across the different levels of government and the private and not-for-profit sectors, we can ensure future generations get to enjoy and appreciate Australia's unique natural inheritance.

Josh Frydenberg is the federal Minister for the Environment and Energy.

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