



# FEDERAL ELECTION 2019

## Protecting our Reef and Oceans

### How do the party policies compare?

*An independent assessment of parties' policies by the Australian Marine Conservation Society*

#### **About us**

The Australian Marine Conservation Society is a national environmental organisation representing more than a quarter of a million people across the country. We are a voice for reefs, people, marine wildlife and healthy oceans.

We are proudly independent, non-partisan and funded by donations from the community. Our purpose is to advance the protection of our marine environment. We do not promote or oppose political parties or direct people how to vote, but offer independent policy assessments of where the parties stand on the big issues facing our Reef and our oceans.

#### **Why have we assessed the policies of the main parties?**

Australia is home to more marine species than any other nation on earth. We are caretakers of the world's most important marine places; including Ningaloo and Shark Bay, the Kimberley, the Great Australian Bight and our beloved Great Barrier Reef. The Reef is the planet's largest living structure, a World Heritage treasure, and supports a \$6 billion tourism industry.

But Australia's oceans are threatened by climate change, pollution and industrial development. Some of our fisheries still catch vulnerable species and fragile parts of our seas are unprotected, with critical shortfalls remaining in our network of marine parks.

Urgent and immediate action is required to tackle the crisis facing our Great Barrier Reef. Almost half of its shallow water corals have died in the past two years.

The single biggest threat is rising ocean temperatures from climate change, driven mainly by the burning of fossil fuels such as coal and gas. Decisive action is needed to cut carbon pollution by switching to

renewable energy. Efforts to improve water quality, protect marine wildlife and coastal habitats, tackle plastic pollution and reduce fishing pressure must also be accelerated.

With so much to lose, the federal election presents a critical opportunity for political leaders to act decisively and ensure that marine protection is a priority. The future of our oceans is in the hands of the next Australian government.

## **How have we assessed the policies of the main parties?**

AMCS has written to the main parties to let them know what's needed to protect our reefs and oceans in the next term of government.

We have independently assessed each party's position and commitments based on their responses, published policies, statements and election announcements. We have rated each party on how their policies meet the following key tests:

1. Protect our Reef and oceans from climate change by ensuring a rapid transition to renewable energy
2. Rule out new thermal coal mines across Australia, including stopping Adani's proposed mine
3. Clean up water pollution of the Great Barrier Reef and improve Reef governance
4. Restore Australia's marine sanctuaries
5. Protect endangered wildlife from fishing impacts and improve fisheries sustainability
6. Tackle plastic pollution of our oceans at the source

To inform our assessments we wrote to the parties seeking specific policy commitments against each of the above key tests. Where a party has not made any relevant commitments, or the party's policies did not adequately meet our requested policy commitments, a 'not met' (red cross) rating is given. Where a party's policies adequately meet some aspects of our requested commitments, a 'partly met' (amber) rating has been given. Where a party's policies largely or fully meet our requested commitments, a 'met' (green tick) rating has been given.

An assessment of the parties' policies as of 8 May 2019 is provided below. AMCS has assessed the policies of the Liberal-Nationals Coalition, the Australian Labor Party and the Greens, for the scorecard.

More information about the 2019 Federal Election, including lists of all candidates by electorate can be found [here](#).

*Note: As the future of our Great Barrier Reef is a significant issue in the 2019 election, AMCS has also assessed the Reef related policies of other parties that are fielding a candidate or candidates in the Reef tourism hub of Cairns, namely Pauline Hanson's One Nation, Katter's Australian Party, the United Australia Party, Fraser Anning's Conservative National Party and independents.*

The assessment of those parties can be found here: [marineconservation.org.au/cairnsvotes](http://marineconservation.org.au/cairnsvotes)

# Assessment of the Reef and oceans policies of the main parties

## 1. Protect our Reef and oceans from climate change by ensuring a rapid transition to renewable energy

Climate change, driven mainly by burning coal and other fossil fuels, is warming our oceans and causing marine heat waves that are a major threat to the planet's ocean ecosystems. It is the biggest threat to our Great Barrier Reef. To do our fair share of limiting global average temperature rise to 1.5C based on 2005 levels, Australia should have a national Emissions Reduction Target of 65 – 85% by 2030.

To achieve the Paris goal and to have a sustainable Great Barrier Reef, the next Australian government must commit to:

- a just and orderly transition out of coal-fired power stations by 2030
- a Renewable Electricity Target of 100% by 2030.

### Liberal-Nationals Coalition

- The Coalition has an emissions reduction target of 26–28% by 2030, based on 2005 levels. This target, if matched by all other countries, would see global average temperature rise to 3–4 degrees, a level that scientists say would risk human civilization.
- The Coalition has not made any commitment to a just and orderly transition out of coal-fired power stations.
- The Coalition will not extend the Renewable Energy Target beyond 2020. Their approach to the electricity sector is to focus on lowering power prices and ensuring reliability, not reducing carbon emissions.
- The Coalition is relying on their Climate Solutions Fund of \$2 billion to reduce emissions, the Snowy Mountains Scheme (Snowy 2.0), a second interconnector between Tasmania and Queensland (the Battery of the Nation project), and a \$50 million Energy Efficient Communities Program.
- Read the Liberals' Climate Solutions Package [here](#).
- Read the Liberals' Lower Power Prices plan [here](#).
- Read the Liberals' Protecting our Environment plan [here](#).

**Assessment:** Not met

### Labor

- Labor has an emissions reduction target of 45% by 2030, based on 2005 levels and a zero net emissions target by 2050. The Climate Change Authority recommended Australia set a target of 45 – 65% emissions reduction by 2030 to achieve an orderly pathway to zero net emissions by 2050. Labor has chosen the lower end of the 2030 range.
- Labor is committed to establishing a Just Transitions Authority to plan and coordinate the structural adjustment response to future power station closures, however it has not committed to closing all coal-fired power stations by 2030.
- Labor is committed to ensuring that 50% of the nation's electricity is sourced from renewable energy by 2030.

- Labor has announced a Renewable Energy Zone for Far North Queensland, the first REZ in Queensland to stimulate greater renewable energy investment in Cairns and the region.
- Labor's renewable electricity target is a significant improvement on the Coalition's position, but a [report](#) has found Australia's current rate of wind and solar energy development puts the nation on track for 78% renewable energy market share by 2030 - a business as usual result that is higher than Labor's target.
- Read Labor's Climate Change Action Plan [here](#).

**Assessment:** Partly met

## Greens

- The Greens have an emissions reduction target of 63 - 82% by 2030 based on 2005 levels, and a zero net emissions target by 2040. This will ensure Australia does its fair share to limit global average temperature rise to no more than 1.5C and minimise the loss of coral reefs.
- The Greens are committed to an orderly retirement of coal-fired power stations by 2030. Their Renew Australia 2030 plan includes a state by state breakdown of fossil fuel phase out.
- The Greens are committed to achieving 100% renewable electricity by 2030.
- Read the Greens Renew Australia 2030 plan [here](#).

**Assessment:** Met

## 2. Rule out new thermal coal mines across Australia including stopping Adani's

To ensure the world still has coral reefs, which 500 million people depend on for their food security and livelihoods. Australia must transition out of thermal coal exports. The next Australian Government must rule out all new thermal coal mine developments including Adani's Carmichael mine.

### Liberal-Nationals Coalition

- The Coalition has not committed to ruling out new thermal coal mines.
- Many Liberal and National Party MPs and Senators have actively pushed for more thermal coal mines and a new coal-fired power station in north Queensland.
- The Environment Minister Melissa Price MP approved Adani's groundwater plan on the eve of the Prime Minister calling the federal election.
- Read the Liberals' Lower Power Prices plan [here](#).
- Read the Liberals' Protecting our Environment plan [here](#).

**Assessment:** Not met

### Labor

- Labor has not committed to ruling out new thermal coal mines.
- Labor has committed to net zero emissions by 2050, but this does not include coal exports.
- The Labor leader Bill Shorten has indicated he has no plans to review approvals for the Adani mine and rail project if he wins the election. Labor has said the project must stack up environmentally and commercially, that it won't receive any taxpayer funding under a Labor government, that Labor won't create sovereign risk by cancelling contracts, and that Labor will adhere to the science and law in decision making.
- Labor has announced \$1.5 bn of taxpayer money to develop gas fields in the Galilee Basin, Bowen Basin and the Northern Territory. The money is from a revised Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility called the Northern Australia Development Fund.
- Read Labor's Climate Change Action Plan [here](#).

**Assessment:** Not met

### Greens

- The Greens' plan will phase out thermal coal by setting a yearly limit on coal exports from 2020 reducing each year until a full phase out in 2030. The Greens are committed to replacing coal with clean energy exports.
- The Greens are opposed to the Adani coal mine going ahead.
- Read the Greens Renew Australia 2030 plan [here](#).
- Read our media release responding to their Healthy Oceans Policy [here](#).

**Assessment:** Met

### 3. Clean up water pollution of the Great Barrier Reef and improve Reef governance

Sediment and fertiliser runoff from agricultural activities is a major threat to inshore coral reefs and seagrass meadows of our Great Barrier Reef. The next Australian Government must:

- Establish and properly fund a large-scale, transformational Great Barrier Reef catchment repair program
- Restore public confidence in Reef funding by requiring the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to hand back all unspent funds and ensure non-research funds are managed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.
- Introduce a land clearing trigger under federal environmental law to apply to Reef catchments
- Introduce regulations under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act that set water quality targets for all 35 Reef catchments.

#### Liberal-Nationals Coalition

- The Coalition government has finalised a joint Reef Water Quality Improvement Plan with the Queensland government which includes ecologically relevant targets for all 35 river basins in the GBR catchment.
- The Turnbull-Morrison government committed \$201 million (through the GBR Foundation) to improve Reef water quality. This amount, spread over six years, increases funds available to fix water quality but it is still insufficient to achieve the water quality targets promised to the World Heritage Committee.
- The Coalition is committed to maintaining the grant agreement with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation which involves \$443.3 million given to a private charity rather than directing the funding through public agencies to ensure transparency and accountability. The Coalition has made no commitment to introduce a land clearing trigger to the EPBC Act to reduce vegetation clearing in the Reef catchment.
- The Coalition has made no commitment to introduce regulations under the GBR Marine Park Act that set targets for improving water quality.
- Read the Liberals' Protecting our Environment plan [here](#).

**Assessment:** Partly met

#### Labor

- Labor has committed to terminating the grant agreement with the GBR Foundation and returning unspent funds to public agencies and ensuring every dollar is spent on conserving the Reef.
- Labor has pledged to honour the same amount of funding for the Reef as the Coalition government.
- Labor has committed to investing in real time monitoring of water quality that will enable precise information to ensure on-ground actions achieve the biggest and most cost-effective pollution cuts.

- Labor has committed to investing in clean water laws, working with the Queensland Government and stakeholders to ensure pollution load limits to be met by the State, industries and other developments.
- Labor has committed to ensure the federal government can intervene to put in protections to stop broad-scale land clearing. Labor will not apply the 'vegetation clearing trigger' to Reef catchments as Labor's policy states that where states properly regulate land clearing, "such as Queensland, Labor will take no action". Where existing Federal law may not have been applied in the Reef catchment, Labor has committed to looking carefully into these matters to ensure Reef water quality is maintained.
- Labor has committed to ensuring the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is a strong, independent champion for the Reef.
- Read Labor's Rescue the Reef plan [here](#).
- Read Labor's statement on GBRMPA [here](#).
- Read Labor's policy on land clearing in its Climate Change Action Plan [here](#).

**Assessment:** Partly met

## Greens

- The Greens have committed to improve Reef water quality with a \$2 billion grant fund over ten years for scientists, governments and farmers to improve agricultural practices and repair reef catchments.
- The Greens have committed to recover the unspent money granted to the GBR Foundation for projects to protect and preserve the reef over the next five years. They have committed to appoint the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) as the responsible authority for managing grants for the Reef, including establishing a special account for funds recovered from the GBR Foundation.
- The Greens have committed to establish land clearing triggers within environmental laws.
- The Greens have committed to set legally enforceable caps on water pollution by catchment.
- Read the Greens policy Protecting our Oceans, Forests, Rivers and Reefs [here](#).

**Assessment:** Met

#### 4. Restore Australia's marine sanctuaries

Marine parks are like an insurance policy for our oceans, providing our best option for ensuring good management and ecosystem protection for the long term. In 2012, Australia created the world's largest nationwide network of marine parks. The Coalition revised management plans in 2018 and removed half the high level sanctuary zone protections, exposing them to threats of destructive commercial fishing and oil and gas development.

The next Australian Government must:

- Restore high level protection within Australia's marine parks and make further improvements
- Provide \$100m for management and fisheries adjustment.

#### Liberal-Nationals Coalition

- The Coalition has not committed to restoring high level protections in marine parks nor to make any improvements to existing marine parks.
- The Coalition has existing budget commitments for marine park management: \$56.1 million over four years to 2019–2020 with additional ongoing funding of \$5.3 million a year from 2020–21.

**Assessment:** Not met

#### Labor

- Labor has committed to restoring Australia's marine sanctuaries and retaining any improvements to zoning.
- Labor has committed \$42.2 million in addition to the budgeted \$56 million for management of marine parks, and will deliver fisheries adjustment for commercial fishers, although have not specified an amount.
- Read: [Media Release: Labor will bring back the Commonwealth marine parks](#)

**Assessment:** Met

#### Greens

- The Greens have committed to restoring Australia's marine sanctuaries and undertaking a review to advise on creating new or expanded marine parks that account for the latest scientific recommendations.
- The Greens have committed \$247million over four years for fisheries adjustment.
- Read the Greens' Healthy Oceans policy [here](#).

**Assessment:** Met



## 5. Protect endangered wildlife from the impacts of fishing and improve fisheries sustainability

Australia's fisheries operate in the richest, most biodiverse waters on our planet. Fishing is the most immediate threat to many endangered and protected marine species, including many species of sharks that are unique to our waters. Certain types of fishing, including gillnets and industrial-scale factory freezer trawlers ('supertrawlers') pose a significant risk to marine life and fish stocks. An overhaul of Australia's outdated and inadequate environmental legislation and institutions is needed to protect our endangered ocean wildlife from fishing and other impacts.

The next Australian Government must:

- Protect endangered ocean wildlife from impacts of fishing, including ensuring hammerhead sharks are not fished in our Great Barrier Reef, for the benefit of Reef resilience in the face of climate change
- Permanently ban supertrawlers from Australia's waters
- Ensure existing environment laws are used to drive fisheries sustainability and commit to creating a new generation of strong national environmental laws
- Ensure threatened species recovery plans are properly funded and resourced for the conservation and recovery of endangered ocean wildlife.

### Liberal-Nationals Coalition

- The Coalition has committed to '[More fishing opportunities for all Australians](#)', including investing in a National Fisheries Plan. The plan has no references to fisheries sustainability or protecting endangered wildlife from fishing.
- The Coalition Government support the continuation of fishing for endangered scalloped hammerhead sharks in the Great Barrier Reef, and [amended](#) the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act in 2018 to ensure fishing for the species could continue.
- The Coalition announced a [\\$100 million Environment Restoration Fund](#) invested over 4 years under the National Landcare Program. This would fund a range of programs, including on-ground projects to protect endangered wildlife, but lacks a commitment to funding recovery plans for endangered wildlife.
- The Coalition has banned supertrawlers greater than 130m in length, but this does not exclude the majority of large freezer factory trawlers, such as the *Geelong Star*.
- The Coalition has committed to an independent statutory review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act but not committed to creating new national environmental laws or a national environmental agency.

**Assessment:** Not met

### Labor

- Labor will permanently ban supertrawlers in the Small Pelagic Fishery.
- Labor has [committed](#) to work towards ending fishing for endangered scalloped hammerhead sharks in the Great Barrier Reef.
- Labor has announced an initial \$100 million commitment to tackle extinction and invasive species issues and develop, resource and implement recovery plans for threatened species through a [Native Species Protection Fund](#).

- Labor has committed to introduce a new Australian Environment Act within its first term of government if elected, with a \$50 million allocation for environmental law reform and a new federal Environment Protection Agency to ensure compliance with environmental laws.
- See the ALP's National Platform [here](#).

**Assessment:** Met

## **Greens**

- The Greens have committed to ending shark fishing in the Great Barrier Reef and protect Reef wildlife from fishing.
- The Greens have committed to a new \$2 billion/year Nature Fund that would significantly increase funding to protect Australia's wildlife. This includes a commitment to fund new recovery plans where they are lacking and update old ones, as well as a commitment to fund the implementation of the recovery plans.
- The Greens have committed to introduce new, stronger laws to protect nature and our environment. They have committed to establish a federal Environment Protection Agency as watchdog to enforce environmental laws.
- The Greens have committed to banning all supertrawlers from Commonwealth waters
- Read the Greens' "Nature Fund" plan [here](#) and the Greens' Healthy Oceans policy [here](#).

**Assessment:** Met

## 6. Tackle plastic pollution of our oceans

Plastic pollution is devastating to our coasts and seas, inflicting a huge toll on our marine wildlife. So much plastic is entering our oceans, it is estimated that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the seas than fish.

The next Australian Government must:

- Introduce a national ban on single-use plastics by 2023
- Introduce a mandatory national 70% reduction target for plastic pollution entering our waterways and reaching our oceans.

### Liberal-Nationals Coalition

- The Coalition has not committed to a national single-use plastics ban.
- The Coalition will continue to support the national phase out of microbeads, however they have not committed to a ban on microbeads.
- The Coalition has committed \$167 million to tackle waste and litter through their Australian recycling investment plan including a \$100 million Australian Recycling Investment Fund, \$20 million for a new Product Stewardship Investment Fund, and \$16 million to the Pacific Ocean Litter Project. However they have not committed to a mandatory national 70% plastic reduction target to stop plastic pollution at the source.
- Read: Media Release: [A Cleaner Environment for all Australians](#).

**Assessment:** Not met

### Labor

- Labor has committed to a national ban on plastic microbeads and single-use plastic bags from 2021, however they have not committed to a broader national single-use plastics ban.
- Labor has committed to introducing a voluntary national container deposit scheme.
- Labor has not committed to a mandatory national 70% plastic reduction target to further cut plastic pollution at source.
- Labor has committed \$290 million to cut waste, tackle plastic pollution and boost recycling, including \$60 million to the National Recycling Fund, \$15 million to establish a National Waste Commissioner and \$15 million to assist our neighbours clean up the Pacific Ocean.
- Read Labor's Media Release: [Labor's plan to create a cleaner Australia](#).

**Assessment:** Partly met

### Greens

- The Greens have committed to banning proscribed single-use plastics from sale by 2025, and banning microbeads and light-weight single-use plastic bags by 2021.
- The Greens have committed to introduce a mandatory national container deposit scheme by 2021.

- The Greens have not committed to a mandatory national 70% plastic reduction target, however they have committed to rebooting Australia's recycling industry with \$500 million for infrastructure and programs. They have also committed to introducing a mandatory product stewardship scheme setting recycling targets for all plastic packaging, wherein by 2025 100% of all packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable, and 70% of all plastic packaging will be recycled or composted.
- The Greens' Healthy Oceans policy can be found [here](#).

**Assessment:** Met