

Environment

# Our Living Heritage

**Our Living Heritage** continues the Coalition's historic effort to protect and rehabilitate Australia's unique natural and cultural heritage. No government has spent as much on the environment as the Howard/Fischer government.

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## **Executive Summary**

### **The Urban Environment**

The Coalition will:

- provide an additional \$50 million for a new Living Cities program which will improve the Commonwealth's leadership in addressing urban environmental problems. The program will provide additional support in areas such as air quality, urban waterway quality, waste and chemical management.

### **The Marine Environment**

The Coalition will:

- provide \$50 million over three years (sourced from additional funds and the Natural Heritage Trust ) to implement the oceans policy. Funds will support:

- a new Marine Regional Planning process to implement ecosystem-based marine management and balance marine resource use with the environment;
  - the development and management of marine parks;
  - the development of national marine and estuarine water quality standards;
  - improved treatment of ballast water to prevent the introduction of marine pests;
  - a national moorings program to protect sensitive marine areas; and
  - acid sulfate soil remediation.
- ban the use of tributyltin (TBT) anti-fouling paints in Australian ports after 2006 and support a global ban on the use of TBT;
- provide \$700,000 over two years from existing programs for a sustainable fisheries network to support by-catch reduction;
- maintain support for the Marine and Coastal Community Network; and
- nominate the Great White Shark for listing under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

## **The Natural Heritage Trust**

The Coalition will:

- provide an additional \$250 million from the sale of the second, 16 per cent, tranche of Telstra, to the Natural Heritage Trust to maintain its funding base during the next Parliament.

## **Forests**

The Coalition will:

- complete Regional Forest Agreements for nine regions by the end of 1999 to protect forests and provide security for jobs in the forest industry; and
- work with the World Bank and the World Wide Fund for Nature forest alliance to protect forests in the Asia-Pacific region.

## **Rivers and Wetlands**

The Coalition will:

- support the protection of Australia's rivers and wetlands, including the Murray-Darling; and
- finalise management plans for all internationally listed wetlands.

## **Biodiversity**

The Coalition will:

- support the National Reserve System program to expand Australia's National Parks;
- support off-reserve biodiversity conservation including the planting of trees and the protection of vegetation through the Bushcare program and work with the States to reduce unsustainable land clearing;
- develop an 'alert list' of introduced plants and animals that pose a risk to our environment if they become established in the wild; and

- amend the Quarantine Act to establish a role for the environment minister in advising on the importation of plants and animals that could have a significant impact on the environment.

## **Ecologically Sustainable Development**

The Coalition will:

- promote the adoption of 'eco-efficiency' by Australian industry; and
- support the development of environment accounting standards in the private sector.

## **Environmental Protection**

The Coalition will:

- seek to enact, as a matter of priority, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998* to reform Commonwealth environment protection legislation to increase protection for the environment and reduce intergovernmental duplication.

## **Places of International and National Importance**

The Coalition will:

- provide an additional \$3.4 million over three years to improve surveillance in the Great Barrier Reef;
- add to the Marine Park further areas in the Great Barrier Reef region which are not yet in the Park;
- conduct a World Heritage assessment for an extension to the existing Riversleigh fossil site listing;
- seek to finalise management and financial agreements with the NSW government in a way that would allow a World Heritage nomination for the Sydney Opera House to proceed; and

- provide \$96 million from the Federation Fund to return to the people of Sydney, five Harbour foreshore defence sites.

## **Plants and Wildlife**

The Coalition will:

- support increased efforts to protect Australia's endangered species;
- continue to pursue an international ban on commercial whaling and the establishment of a global whale sanctuary; and
- establish a new "Bush for Wildlife" program from within the Natural Heritage Trust to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat.

## **Climate Change**

The Coalition will:

- continue to implement the government's *Safeguarding the Future* program to increase the use of renewable energy and control greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Heritage**

The Coalition will:

- complete the National Heritage Places Strategy to improve protection for Australia's cultural and natural heritage; and
- establish a new, \$3 million a year, Cultural Heritage Projects Program to support the conservation and restoration of places of cultural significance.

## **Highlights of the Government's Achievements**

### **Funding**

The Howard/Fischer government has provided record levels of funding for the environment through the \$1.25 billion Natural Heritage Trust - the largest investment ever made in Australia's environment. Funding was made possible by the one-third sale of Telstra.

This new funding base has supported a significant increase in the federal government's efforts to conserve our environment and natural resource base and directly support those communities that are working 'on-the-ground' to protect the environment and promote sustainable agriculture.

## **Vegetation**

The Coalition has established the \$330 million Bushcare program, which is funding a massive program to replant trees and protect native vegetation. Bushcare is the central component of the government's efforts to reverse the decline of native vegetation by mid-2001.

The government has also worked with the States to reduce land clearing and protect endangered ecological communities.

## **The National Park System**

The government has allocated \$80 million to the National Reserve Program which is supporting the purchase of additional land for Australia's National Park system. So far, the government has approved the acquisition of 450,000 hectares of land.

The Coalition has also given new emphasis to the development of marine reserves in Commonwealth waters. The government has declared the World's second largest marine park in the Great Australian Bight and has begun the assessment of five further marine parks.

## **Australia's World Heritage Areas**

The Coalition has significantly increased funding for State-run World Heritage areas. It secured World Heritage listing for Macquarie Island and the Heard and Macdonald Islands in Australia's sub-Antarctic waters. A nomination has been lodged for the Blue Mountains and World Heritage assessments are under way for Australia's major convict sites and Purnululu (the Bungle Bungles) in Western Australia.

## **Endangered Species**

The Coalition has provided increased funding for endangered species programs to protect the 1400 plants and animals that are considered endangered or vulnerable. The government has established the world's first network of

sanctuaries specifically designed to protect dugong. The government has also led world efforts to protect albatross species in the Southern Hemisphere and is currently developing a recovery plan for endangered turtle species.

## **Forests**

Over 500,000 hectares have been added to the conservation reserve system in Tasmania and two Victorian regions as a result of the government's regional forest agreement process. The government has provided \$81 million to ensure that, by the end of next year, 12 regions will have regional forest agreements in place, which will establish a world-class reserve system and provide new security for jobs in the forest sector.

## **The Coastal and Marine Environment**

The Coalition has provided \$125 million to protect our coastal and marine environment. The government has, for the first time, provided national leadership in addressing marine pollution from sewage and stormwater and has increased efforts to improve coastal management, protect marine species, reduce the impact of introduced marine pests and support the thousands of volunteers working to protect our coastline through Coastcare.

The government has also been developing one of the world's first comprehensive oceans policies for Australia's marine jurisdiction.

The government has led world efforts to save whales. The Coalition has pursued a complete ban on commercial whaling and the creation of a global whale sanctuary. As a first step, the government has secured the agreement of South Pacific nations to create a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary.

## **Rivers and Wetlands**

The Coalition has provided \$260 million to improve the water quality and protect the biodiversity of Australia's riverways. This has included \$163 million to support the Murray-Darling initiative which is protecting Australia's largest river system.

The government has also increased support for wetland protection, including Australia's 49 internationally listed wetlands.

## **Air Quality and Waste Management**

The government has provided \$16 million to establish an Air Pollution in Major Cities Program which is improving air quality in urban areas. The government has also led the development of national ambient air quality standards through the National Environment Protection Council.

The Coalition has supported the establishment of a National Pollutant Inventory which will require large companies to publicly report their emission of 90 pollutants.

A Waste Management Awareness program has been established by the Coalition which is educating the public about ways to reduce waste. The government has also worked with the construction industry to reduce waste from construction and demolition sites and developed waste reduction agreements which will result in reduced waste from plastic bottles, newspapers, milk cartons and cans.

## **Climate Change**

The government has provided \$180 million to control greenhouse gas emissions. The comprehensive program is supporting the expansion of renewable energy sources and promoting greater energy efficiency in the automotive, industrial and building sectors. It is also promoting vegetation programs that create 'carbon sinks'.

Internationally, the government has played a constructive role in promoting a responsible and fair global effort to reduce greenhouse emissions. Australia has signed the Kyoto protocol which will require Australia to reduce the growth of its greenhouse emissions to eight per cent over 1990 levels.

## **Cape York**

The government has put in place a plan to protect the conservation and cultural values of Cape York, which is a unique and largely undisturbed part of our environment. Up to \$40 million has been allocated to implement the Plan.

## **Heritage**

The Coalition has provided record levels of funding for cultural heritage, including \$70 million from the Federation Fund cultural heritage program. It has commenced the development of Australia's first national heritage places strategy which will improve protection for our heritage.

## **Environment Laws**

The government has undertaken a comprehensive review of Australia's environment protection laws in order to develop a new regime which will increase protection for our environment, reduce intergovernmental duplication and provide greater certainty for stakeholders. The result is the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998*, which will establish a clear role for the Commonwealth in matters of national environmental

significance.

## **Part 1 Protecting Australia's natural heritage**

### **A. The Living Cities Program – A New Urban Agenda**

The Coalition recognises that Australia's environmental problems are not restricted to regional and rural areas. Urbanisation in Australia and population and economic growth pose challenges that need to be managed by governments and the community if we are to maintain quality of life.

While Australia has avoided many problems faced by cities in other developed nations, we do face a number of specific challenges:

- some Australian cities now face episodes of air pollution which reach levels comparable to cities like New York and Tokyo;
- Australia's waste per head is the highest in the industrialised world - each year we dispose of more than 14 million tonnes of solid domestic, commercial and industrial waste in landfills;
- many of our urban waterways and marine environments suffer from stormwater run-off and sewage pollution;
- commercial and domestic buildings frequently do not meet international best-practice in relation to energy efficiency and waste minimisation; and
- remnant vegetation and bushland in urban centres is threatened.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has started to address many of these problems. Progress has included:

#### **Air Quality**

- an independent air pollution inquiry undertaken by the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering to identify ways to improve air quality, particularly addressing the six major pollutants: carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, ozone, lead, particles and sulfur dioxide;
- implementation of a number of the air pollution inquiry's recommendations

focusing on:

- improved vehicle engine design, fuel quality and alternative fuels;
- reductions in emissions from boilers and furnaces;
- community action through programs like *Smogbusters* and *Breathe the Air* and air quality monitoring, including projects involving school students; and
- improved air quality forecasting models.
- the development of national ambient air quality standards through the National Environment Protection Council.

### **Waste Management**

- providing community education about ways to reduce waste through the "Waste Management Awareness" program;
- working with the construction industry to develop best practice in the level of waste from construction and demolition sites;
- support for Clean-Up Australia's program to reduce supermarket waste, including plastic bags and green waste;
- the development of Industry Waste Reduction Agreements with major industries which will result in:
  - 270 million fewer plastic bottles entering the waste stream;
  - the collection of 200,000 tonnes of newspaper;
  - increasing the level of recycled fibre in paper packaging to 50 per cent; and

- the recycling of more than 40,000 tonnes of steel cans and 500 million milk cartons each year;
- support for the establishment of a Resource Recovery Centre in the Hunter region of NSW; and
- agreement with the States to develop a national packaging covenant and national packaging standards through the National Environment Protection Council.

### **The Living Cities Program**

The Coalition recognises that the federal government must play a leadership role in addressing urban environmental problems.

The next Coalition government will build on the work previously done and provide **\$50 million over three years** to establish a *Living Cities program*.

Through *Living Cities* the Coalition will further address the issues of:

- air quality;
- urban waterways;
- waste management;
- chemical collection;
- urban vegetation; and
- coastal water quality.

#### **(i) Improving Air Quality**

##### **Air Toxics**

As a second stage to our response to the air pollution inquiry, the Coalition will support the development of a national strategy to monitor and manage 'air toxics'. These are pollutants, such as dioxins, benzene and formaldehyde, present at very low concentrations which are suspected to cause long term health effects.

They play an important role in smog formation and, in certain circumstances, also can be a significant air pollution problem. Some air toxics are among the more important indoor air pollutants and are found in materials such as paints, adhesives and sealants in new buildings.

The air toxics strategy will monitor, establish the levels of community exposure to, and manage emissions of selected air toxics. The Coalition also will consider the inclusion of air toxics in a future National Environment Protection Measure.

### Encouraging the Uptake of Compressed Natural Gas

Through the \$180 million *Safeguarding the Future* program, the government has allocated \$3.8 million to facilitate infrastructure for compressed natural gas refuelling networks. The lack of such facilities has been identified as a major problem in encouraging the uptake of compressed natural gas as a cleaner replacement for traditional fuels.

The initial allocation of funds has been directed primarily to providing facilities in western Sydney.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will double financial support for compressed natural gas refuelling facilities to expand the program into other urban areas, including Melbourne.

### **(ii) Urban waterways.**

The Coalition recognises that many waterways in our major cities suffer from a range of environmental problems, including pollution from stormwater and sewage and riverbank vegetation loss.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will provide an additional **\$25 million** to build on existing programs, such as Rivercare and Waterwatch to further improve the health of urban waterways.

Projects supported will reduce pollution and litter and restore and revegetate river banks.

### **(iii) Improving Waste Management**

The Coalition will continue to support programs to reduce the amount of waste

going to landfill. We will:

- maintain the Waste Awareness program;
- build on the successful Wastewise program, working co-operatively with industry, to develop ways to reduce the volume of waste at source;
- support a resource recovery centre program to help establish new regional resource recovery centres modelled on the Hunter centre already supported by the Coalition. These centres will provide expertise and promote the re-use of materials by businesses. The program will provide new employment opportunities in recycling in regional areas; and
- work with the States, local government and industry to finalise a voluntary national packaging covenant supported by an effective kerbside collection schedule and a National Environment Protection Measure.

#### **(iv) 'Chemwatch': Improving the Management of Chemicals**

Industrial, household and agricultural chemical products play an important role in the business sector and every day life. The Coalition recognises that it is important that the use and management of chemicals is such that their impact on human settlement is minimised.

As part of *Living Cities*, the Coalition will establish a 'Chemwatch' program to assist government, industry and the community to make informed decisions about the impact of these chemicals and improve their management.

Key features of 'Chemwatch' will be:

- Commonwealth leadership in the national collection of disused chemical wastes from farms, starting in outer metropolitan areas; and
- the establishment of a national database of 'agvet' chemical use.

#### **(v) Urban Vegetation**

The Natural Heritage Trust was designed to principally focus on the environmental problems facing rural and regional Australia because of the level of biodiversity and vegetation loss and land degradation occurring in

those areas.

The Coalition recognises, however, that many urban green spaces are suffering from a combination of inappropriate development, illegal tree felling, weeds and feral animals. These factors are pushing many remnant native forests in urban areas to breaking points.

For these reasons, the Coalition will ensure that at least 15% of Bushcare is devoted to protecting and rehabilitating urban bushland.

### **(vi) Reducing Coastal Pollution**

Pollution of Australia's beaches and coastline, particularly near urban centres, is of concern to all Australians.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has provided Commonwealth leadership to reduce coastal and marine pollution through the Natural Heritage Trust funded, *Coasts and Clean Seas* program.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will extend support for communities and State and local governments to improve the treatment of sewage and stormwater.

## **B. Protecting our Marine Environment**

Australia has one of the largest ocean territories and longest coastlines in the World. Our marine environment traverses tropical, sub-tropical, temperate and Antarctic zones and contains a rich and unique variety of marine life.

The Coalition has allocated a record level of funding for coast and marine environmental protection - \$125 million over five years through the *Coasts and Clean Seas* program.

### **Australia's Oceans Policy - A New Marine Agenda**

The Howard/Fischer government initiated the development of Australia's - and one of the world's - first national oceans policies.

The Coalition will finalise the national oceans policy as a matter of priority.

Through the oceans policy, the Coalition will commit the federal government to the following goals:

- to exercise and protect Australia's rights and jurisdiction over off-shore areas, including off-shore resources;

- to understand, monitor and conserve Australia's marine biodiversity, the ocean environment and its resources and ensure ocean uses are ecologically sustainable;
- to promote ecologically sustainable economic development and job creation;
- to accommodate community needs and aspirations;
- to improve our expertise and capabilities in ocean-related management, science and technology and engineering;
- to discharge Australia's international obligations under the Law of the Seas Convention and other international conventions;
- to improve and integrate management arrangements; and
- to promote public awareness and understanding;

The Coalition recognises that, while well developed sectoral management bodies exist, we are yet to manage our oceans within an integrated framework.

Principal outcomes of the oceans policy will be:

- a move to integrated ecosystem-based planning and management to ensure that the impact of resource decisions on the environment is properly understood;
- within the framework of the Off-shore Constitutional Settlement, greater coordination between the States and the Commonwealth to ensure that jurisdictional boundaries do not hinder effective management;
- a strong commitment to the principles of multiple use and the precautionary principle; and

- an improved capacity to understand our marine environment through increased scientific effort.

To implement the Howard/Fischer government's plans for the management of our oceans the Coalition will provide **\$50 million over three years** for a range of new measures. \$30 million will be sourced from additional consolidated revenue funds and \$20 million from the Natural Heritage Trust.

### **(i) Regional Marine Planning**

Australia's ocean territories are managed by a range of sectoral agencies. While these agencies work well, the Coalition believes that, in seeking to move towards ecosystem-based management, there is a need to improve linkages between different sectors.

The government will therefore instigate the development of Regional Marine Plans.

These plans will be based on large marine ecosystems and will integrate sectoral commercial interests and conservation requirements. Steering Committees, which will include key stakeholders, will guide the development of the plans.

The goals of Regional Marine Plans will be to:

- determine the conservation requirements of each marine region, including the establishment of marine protected areas;
- put in place a planning regime that prevents potential conflict between different sectors in relation to resource allocation; and
- provide long-term security to marine based industries.

The first Regional Marine Plan will cover the south-east area of Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone and will commence next year.

In developing Regional Marine Plans, the Commonwealth will seek the participation of relevant States and Territories to ensure, as far as possible, the integration of planning across State and Commonwealth waters.

All Commonwealth agencies will be required to operate in accordance with the Plans.

## **(ii) Improving our Understanding of the Marine Environment**

Management of our oceans and the protection of ecosystems and marine biodiversity will succeed only if founded on an improved understanding of the ocean environment and marine resources. The Coalition therefore will:

- undertake baseline surveys of our marine environment and develop sustainability indicators and monitoring; and
- increase the level of assessment of the environmental impacts of commercial and recreational activities.

## **(iii) Marine Protected Areas**

Within the multiple-use framework, the Coalition recognises the importance of establishing a comprehensive and representative system of marine protected areas to conserve marine species and biodiversity.

During the past three years, the Howard/Fischer government has put new emphasis on the commitment by the Commonwealth and States to establish a network of marine reserves:

- in February, 1998, the government established the World's second largest marine park in the Great Australian Bight; and
- the government has also commenced the assessment process for five new marine parks in the waters surrounding Lord Howe Island, Hibernia Reef and Cartier Island, Macquarie Island, Heard and Macdonald Islands and the Tasmanian seamounts.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will increase funding to accelerate the development of **marine protected areas** and improve the Commonwealth's capacity to manage those areas.

## **(iv) Marine and Estuarine Water Quality Standards**

The 1995 State of the Marine Environment Report concluded that the decline in water quality caused by rising levels of nutrients and sediments was the most serious threat to Australia's marine and coastal environments.

The Coalition will therefore support the development of **national standards** for **marine water quality** through the National Environment Protection Council.

## **(v) Improving Ballast Water Management**

Ship ballast water is the worst source of introduced marine pests. Considerable effort has been made domestically and internationally to develop new ways to manage ballast water.

To effectively address ballast water, Australia requires a single national management regime that applies to both State and Commonwealth waters.

The Coalition will support AQIS in developing a single national ballast water management system and improve risk assessment and treatment technologies.

## **(vi) National Moorings Program**

As marine tourism continues to grow, some sensitive coastal environments face increased threats from the effects of anchor drag.

The Coalition will establish a National Moorings Program in sensitive marine areas to address this issue.

## **(vii) Acid Sulfate Soils**

Agricultural, residential and tourism development along the coast have disturbed acid sulfate soils which can seriously damage water quality and inshore habitats.

The Commonwealth has been working with the States to develop a national strategy for acid sulfate soils.

The Coalition will work to conclude the national strategy and commence its implementation, including financial support for major rehabilitation projects to demonstrate the options available to the community and governments in treating existing acid sulfate soil problem areas.

## **(viii) By-catch Reduction**

By-catch from fishing operations poses serious risks to marine wildlife, including endangered species such as turtles.

The Howard/Fischer government has been developing a Commonwealth by-catch reduction plan. The Coalition will finalise and implement the plan which will require the Australian Fisheries Management Agency to develop by-catch action plans for all Commonwealth fisheries within the next Parliament, with priority given to those fisheries in which by-catch poses considerable risk to endangered and vulnerable marine wildlife.

The Coalition also recognises the importance of educating the fishing community about environment issues and the applicability of bycatch reduction

devices. Most fishers recognise their environmental responsibilities and, with the right advice and support, implement environmentally sound fishing practices.

In the next Parliament, the Coalition will therefore:

- provide \$700,000 over two years from the Marine Species Protection Program and the Fisheries Action Program to support a joint Oceanwatch/ Australian Seafood Industry Council/ Australian Marine Conservation Society initiative to establish a network of sustainable fisheries officers to promote environmentally sound fishing practices.

### **(ix) Tributyltin (TBT) Anti-Fouling Paint**

TBT is a highly toxic biocide used in the shipping industry to prevent marine organisms attaching themselves to ship's hulls.

The Coalition supports the phased withdrawal of the use of TBT. The Coalition will therefore:

- ban the use of TBT after the year 2006 on vessels being repainted in Australian docks; and
- support the introduction of a global ban on TBT through the International Maritime Organisation.

### **Cleaning Up our Seas and Protecting our Coastline**

The Howard/Fischer government has invested \$125 million in the *Coasts and Clean Seas* program, which has provided the Commonwealth with new opportunities to lead in coastal and marine issues.

*Coasts and Clean Seas* supports a range of activities, including:

- the Clean Seas program which is providing more than \$50 million to reduce marine pollution from sewage, stormwater and boats;
- Coastcare, which helps thousands of Australians to protect environmentally sensitive sites along the coastline;
- the Marine Species Protection Program; to help conserve Australia's threatened and unique marine wildlife;

- the Coastal and Marine Planning Program, which is reducing ad-hoc coastal planning and improving environmental protection of sensitive areas of the coastline;
- the Introduced Marine Pests program, which is helping control feral marine animals;
- the Coastal Monitoring program, which is increasing Australia's capacity to monitoring the coastal environment; and
- the Marine Protected Area program, which assists the States to declare marine parks in their waters.

The Coalition is committed to the continued implementation of the *Coasts and Clean Seas* program. It will also continue to support community involvement in coastal and marine management by maintaining funding for the Marine and Coastal Community Network.

### **C. The Natural Heritage Trust**

In its next term, the Coalition will build on the hugely successful Natural Heritage Trust.

The Howard/Fischer government established the Natural Heritage Trust in 1997 with funding of \$1.25 billion.

It represents the single largest investment by a federal government in the environmental future of Australia and is directly helping communities deal with their own environmental problems.

The Natural Heritage Trust has funded a wide range of programs designed to remedy Australia's environmental problems. They include:

- Bushcare, which supports the protection of Australia's biodiversity through a national effort to protect existing bushland and revegetate cleared land;
- the National Reserve Program, which provides funds to establish a comprehensive, adequate and representative conservation reserve system;

- the Endangered Species program, which helps to protect Australia's threatened plants and animals;
- the World Heritage program, which assists the States and communities protect Australia's World Heritage areas;
- the Murray-Darling 2001 project which is restoring the health of Australia's largest river system;
- the Rivercare program, which supports the rehabilitation, conservation and management of Australia's rivers outside the Murray-Darling basin;
- the Coasts and Clean Seas program, which supports the protection of Australia's marine environment and coastline;
- the Wetlands program, which supports the protection and rehabilitation of Australia's wetlands;
- the Weed and Feral Animals programs, which is reducing the impact of invasive species on our environment and agricultural industries;
- the Air Pollution in Major Cities program which is improving air quality in urban areas;
- the Waste Awareness program, which is educating the community about waste management;
- the Landcare program, which is mobilising Australia's rural communities to rehabilitate degraded land and supporting sustainable primary production;
- the National Land and Water Audit which will, for the first time, provide reliable information on the status of our natural resource base; and
- the Farm Forestry program, which supports the development of commercial

plantations and farm forestry.

In its short life, the Natural Heritage Trust has made significant progress:

- community groups have been able to access significant funds to help them repair their local environments;
- the Natural Heritage Trust Advisory Committee, chaired by Sir James Hardy, has been established to advise the government on maximising environmental benefits; and
- a 'One Stop Shop' application and approval process has been introduced.

As a result, in 1997-98 more than 3,400 successful projects were funded through the Natural Heritage Trust.

The Coalition recognises the importance of maintaining the momentum established through the operations of the Natural Heritage Trust.

The Coalition will therefore:

- provide an **additional \$250 million** to the Natural Heritage Trust (across both Environment Australia and Primary Industries programs) from the sale of the second (16 per cent) tranche of Telstra to extend current funding through the life of the next Parliament.

## **D biodiversity**

The Australian continent and its surrounding seas and islands include an incredible variety of plants and animals which all contribute towards Australia's rich biodiversity. Australia is the only developed nation which has been described as 'mega-diverse' and our relative isolation means that an unusually large proportion of our wildlife is found no where else on the planet.

An important goal of the government's environment program must be to ensure the conservation of our biodiversity.

The past 200 years have seen considerable biodiversity loss - a problem identified as the nation's greatest environmental challenge by the 1996 State of the Environment Report.

Through the Natural Heritage Trust and associated programs, the Coalition has

been working, in a systematic and comprehensive way, to ensure that biodiversity loss does not continue.

### **(i) Reforming Commonwealth Legislation**

The Coalition recognises that the starting point for biodiversity conservation is a legislative framework that identifies the federal government's responsibilities.

That approach is reflected in Australia's first comprehensive biodiversity legislation, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill, 1998* which has been introduced into the Parliament by the Coalition.

Key features of the bill include:

- enhanced protection for threatened species and communities;
- stronger, up-front protection for World Heritage properties;
- providing, for the first time, national legislative protection for Ramsar wetlands;
- providing for voluntary conservation agreements with landholders for the conservation of biodiversity; and
- providing, for the first time, that regulations may be made to control access to biological resources in Commonwealth areas.

Passage of the Bill will be sought early in the next Parliamentary term.

### **(ii) National Reserve System**

The Coalition has allocated \$80 million from the Natural Heritage Trust to develop a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system.

The government has recognised that the reserve system should include areas representative of Australia's flora and fauna.

The Coalition has:

- approved the purchase of an additional 450,000 hectares of high priority and threatened areas;

- recognised the role of the community and land holders in protecting high conservation areas by allowing organisations, such as Birds Australia and the Australian Bush Heritage Trust, to apply for national reserve funds;
- financially supported the extension of Mt Remarkable National Park in South Australia and established a new National Park in Queensland through the purchase of Cudmore Station; and
- supported innovative conservation mechanisms such as the Grassy Whitebox Woodlands Protected Areas Network in south-western NSW.

These have complemented efforts to create a nationally representative system of marine protected areas in Commonwealth and State waters.

The Coalition remains committed to the development of the national reserve system. During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- continue to fund the development of the national reserve system; and
- increase financial support for community organisations seeking to protect high conservation value areas.

### **(iii) Bushcare**

Overclearing of native vegetation has caused many environmental problems such as the extinction of plants and animals, loss of precious topsoil, the pollution of many of our rivers and rising saline watertables.

Vegetation loss not only has damaged Australia's environment: ultimately it threatens sustainable farming in many areas.

The Howard/Fischer government has established the largest 'off-reserve' native vegetation restoration program in Australia's history, through the Natural Heritage Trust's \$330 million Bushcare program.

The Coalition has set itself the goal of reversing the decline of native vegetation by mid-2001.

Through Bushcare, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- ensured support, through community grants, to on-ground revegetation and protection projects;
- in 1997-98, supported over 650 individual projects;
- established, through Greening Australia, a network of 150 regionally based vegetation experts to help landholders and communities implement revegetation and protection projects; and
- established a Council of Sustainable Vegetation to advise the government on how best to protect Australia's vegetation in accordance with our election commitment.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- support large scale revegetation and bushland conservation projects in co-operation with land holders; and
- provide fencing subsidies of up to \$1200 a kilometre to landholders to place land of high conservation value under voluntary 20 year conservation agreements.

#### **(iv) Biological Diversity Advisory Council**

Expert advice is crucial in protecting our biodiversity.

In 1996, the government established the Biological Diversity Advisory Council to advise the minister and ANZECC on the implementation of the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biodiversity.

Membership includes representatives of the scientific community, industry, conservation organisations, local government and indigenous representatives.

To enhance the role of BDAC, the Council will become a statutory committee under the proposed *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

The Coalition will continue to support the Council and its work.

#### **(v) Australian Biological Resources Study**

The Australian Biological Resources Study was established in 1978 by the

Fraser government and is recognised nationally and internationally as playing a major role in providing fundamental data needed to classify Australia's biodiversity. Its taxonomic research is a stocktake of Australia's organisms and underpins management and conservation of our resources.

The Coalition will continue to support the ABRS and assist it to:

- develop linkages with Natural Heritage Trust programs, and land managers to ensure data supports conservation programs;
- broaden delivery of taxonomic information to communities and landholders by greater use of electronic publications and the internet; and
- develop sophisticated 'bioinformatics' systems - a new way of using computer technology to categorise species information.

### **(vi) Community Biodiversity Network**

The Howard/Fischer government has sought to increase community involvement in and awareness of biodiversity issues and conservation.

One mechanism supported by the government is the Community Biodiversity Network. It is a community-based network designed to link the Commonwealth's biodiversity program with non-government organisations and community groups in promoting biodiversity conservation.

The Coalition will continue to support the Network during the next Parliament.

### **(vii) Land Clearing**

The Coalition recognises that, to be successful, revegetation efforts such as Bushcare must be complemented by substantial reductions in land clearing: currently around 400,000 hectares a year.

Reduction in land clearance is essential if the government is to achieve its target of halting the decline of vegetation loss by 2001.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has used the Natural Heritage Trust Partnership Agreements with the States and Territories to secure support for reducing land clearance.

In particular, States and Territories have committed to better management and protection of native vegetation, including undertakings to:

- put in place effective measures to retain and manage native vegetation, including controls on clearing; and
- avoid or limit any further broad scale clearance of native vegetation, consistent with ecologically sustainable management and bioregional planning, to those areas where regional biological diversity is not compromised.

Importantly, Australia New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council of State and Commonwealth environment ministers (ANZECC) will take the lead in developing and implementing a national framework for the management and monitoring of Australia's native vegetation.

Having supported this two-pronged approach, the Coalition will ensure that commitments made by the States and Territories, which are linked to financial support from the Natural Heritage Trust, are honoured in full.

Funding from the Natural Heritage Trust will assist States and Territories by 2000 to:

- install controls and incentives across all regions and land tenures, to reduce the rate of land clearing in Australia; limit clearing to those instances where regional biodiversity is not compromised; and stop further clearing of endangered ecological communities;
- implement projects to revegetate regions that have been overcleared in the past; and
- provide incentives to better manage grazing, fire, weeds and feral animals to protect the biodiversity values of these ecosystems.

### **(viii) Weeds and Feral Animals**

#### National Weeds Program and National Feral Animals Program

One of the greatest threats to Australia's biodiversity is introduced plant and animal species such as, foxes, marine pests and weeds.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has supported, through the Natural Heritage Trust, the National Weeds Program and the National Feral Animal Control Program.

Support for the national weeds and feral animal program will continue.

The Coalition will also undertake a dual strategy against weeds and feral animals by guarding against expansion of existing pests and stopping the introduction of new ones.

### Preventing the Spread of Exotic Species Already in Australia

The Coalition will support the creation of an 'alert list' of introduced plants and animals present in Australia that are not yet out of control but pose a high risk to our environment.

The list will highlight potential risks associated with each species and be used to ensure these species do not become major problems. It will, for example, identify exotic species newly discovered in Australia and encourage timely and effective action to control or eradicate them. It also will identify 'sleeper' weed and feral animal species that survive in small but dangerous populations.

### Preventing the Introduction of New Weeds and Pests

The Coalition places a high priority on stopping new pests being introduced.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- provided funds, through the Natural Heritage Trust, to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) to develop a new Weed Risk Assessment to avoid the importation of potential weeds;
- proposed amendments to the Quarantine Act to ensure environmental concerns are addressed in AQIS's risk assessment process.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will introduce additional amendments to the Quarantine Act to further strengthen environmental considerations in quarantine decisions.

New provisions will ensure that the Commonwealth environment minister will be formally consulted if a proposed importation of plants, animals or goods is likely to have a significant impact on the environment. The Minister for the Environment will be asked to advise on:

- the risk assessment process;
- whether the importation should occur; and, if so
- what particular conditions should be imposed to prevent significant risk to the environment.

## **E Ecologically Sustainable Development**

Unsustainable, short-term decision making can threaten Australia's biodiversity and our capacity to ensure that future generations benefit from our natural resources.

The Coalition believes that economic development can be consistent with sound environmental policy. This balance is at the centre of the Coalition's approach.

### **(i) Reforming Commonwealth Legislation**

The Howard/Fischer government has given the principles of ESD a legislative basis in the *Natural Heritage Trust of Australia Act 1996*. The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998* also will expressly implement these principles, including the precautionary principle.

### **(ii) Ecologically Sustainable Development and Industry**

The Howard/Fischer government supports partnerships with industry for greater 'eco-efficiency' - a concept that involves companies becoming not just economically efficient but also ecologically efficient.

The Coalition has encouraged industry sectors and enterprises to adopt cleaner production practices to reduce pollution, energy and water consumption and minimise waste. The Coalition is now going beyond cleaner production to maximise economic return at the lowest cost to the natural resource base.

The Howard/Fischer government has:

- supported best practice modules for a range of professional bodies and industry associations, including mining, engineers and local government;
- developed a national strategy for cleaner production; and
- provided assistance to many small business groups including dairies, piggeries and manufacturers to promote cleaner production.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- continue to work with Australian business to provide practical assistance to facilitate the mainstream adoption of 'eco-efficiency'; and

- assist in the development of methodology for assessing resource use for the full life cycle of industrial activity.

### **(iii) Environmental Economics**

The Coalition believes that the long term key to ensuring ecologically sustainable development is integration of environmental values into Australia's economic system.

Traditionally, governments have relied on the 'stick' approach of regulation, or voluntary compliance. While both are necessary, they are not sufficient. The Coalition believes that using economic levers and incentives to drive environmental performance is fundamentally important to achieve widespread improvement in how business deals with the environment.

The Howard/Fischer government has promoted the integration of economic development and environmental protection. It has:

- promoted integration of environmental matters into micro-economic reform;
- pursued outcomes in international negotiations to ensure international economic considerations do not undermine environmental objectives;
- produced an annual environment budget statement which provides, for the first time, information on environmental spending and activities by the Commonwealth across all departments and agencies; and
- promoted use of economic instruments.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to develop economic instruments and incentives. The Coalition will:

- create national incentives for native vegetation (carbon) sinks to help repair land degradation and reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions;
- undertake further work on the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's *Inquiry into Ecologically Sustainable Management* which promotes the 'duty of care' expected of land managers; and

- ensure that microeconomic reforms continue to address environmental concerns and maintain the integration of environmental and economic objectives in Australia's international positions.

#### **(iv) Green Accounting**

An essential part of achieving ecologically sustainable development is to ensure that the use of environmental resources are taken into account in the economic and policy decision making process and their use is publicly reported.

Environmental accounts provide a framework which allows us to examine the impact of human activity on the environment. Both government and the private sector are now more able to monitor 'non-economic' assets. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has continued development of "physical accounts" while environmental reporting by the private sector is increasingly common.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- continue to support the development of national environment accounts by the Australian Bureau of Statistics; and
- support the development and introduction of consistent environment accounting standards in the private sector.

#### **(iv) Promoting Australia's Environment Industries**

To achieve ecologically sustainable development Australian industry must have access to leading environmental technology and management. The Coalition therefore supports Australia's environment technology industries, which offer improved domestic performances and a significant export opportunity.

The Howard/Fischer government has:

- established an Environment Industry Focus Unit to develop opportunities for Australian environment technology and management companies;
- supported the establishment of an Environment Business Forum; and
- provided opportunities for environment management companies through the

International Environment Protection Program.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- continue to promote Australia's environment management and technology industries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region; and
- improve marketing opportunities for environment management companies through an expansion of the environment information network - EnviroNET.

## **F. Environmental Protection**

### **(i) Reforming Commonwealth Legislation**

During the 1996 election the Coalition promised to overhaul the federal government's environment protection laws which had not been reviewed since enactment in the 1970's.

The result of that review is the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998* which was introduced into the Senate in July, 1998.

The Coalition believes that reform is necessary because, under the existing regime, Commonwealth involvement in environmental matters is determined by piecemeal, indirect and environmentally irrelevant triggers such as foreign investment and funding decisions. This limits the Commonwealth's contribution to environmental protection and creates unnecessary delay, uncertainty and duplication for industry.

The Bill will ensure, for the first time, that the Commonwealth instead has direct legislative power in relation to matters of national environmental significance.

A Coalition government, after taking into account the advice of the Senate committee currently considering the Bill, will seek to enact the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998* early in the new Parliament.

Additionally, during the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- introduce legislation to implement the National Heritage Places Strategy due to be completed this year. This will better enable the Commonwealth to protect heritage places of national significance;

- amend the *Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1982* to improve protection for endangered species and Australia's native species;
- within two years, introduce regulations to regulate access to genetic resources in Commonwealth areas; and
- introduce legislation, as necessary, to implement the Commonwealth's obligations under the COAG Agreement in relation to compliance with State environment legislation.

## **(ii) National Environment Protection Council**

The Coalition has ensured the effectiveness of the National Environment Protection Council which allows the States and Commonwealth to develop consistent and mandatory environmental protection measures.

The government, as chair of the Council, has led the work of the National Environment Protection Council which has:

- established a National Pollutant Inventory which requires large Australian businesses to publicly report emissions of 90 pollutants;
- developed ambient air quality standards for the six major atmospheric pollutants; and
- introduced new measures to track the interstate movement of hazardous waste.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to support the National Environment Protection Council and promote measures that address:

- ambient standards for marine and estuarine water quality;
- packaging waste;
- the rehabilitation of contaminated sites; and
- diesel fuel emissions.

## **G. Protecting places of international and National importance**

### **(i) World Heritage Places**

That 13 places in Australia have been included on the World Heritage register is testimony to the richness of Australia's biodiversity and cultural landscapes.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- increased funding support for the management of State run World Heritage places to \$15.7 million in 1998/1999, a 50 per cent increase in funding over spending in Labor's final year in office;
- successfully nominated Macquarie Island and the Heard and Macdonald Islands for World Heritage listing;
- nominated the Blue Mountains in NSW for World Heritage listing;
- finalised a statutory management plan for the Wet Tropics;
- finalised the \$11 .5 million structural adjustment package for Willandra Lakes; and
- improved the management for World Heritage places, including new ministerial councils for Fraser Island and Shark Bay and new community and scientific committees for individual properties.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- maintain funding at near to current record levels for the State managed World Heritage areas;
- in co-operation with the relevant State governments, conclude the assessment of and nominate Purnululu (the Bungle Bungles) and the Australian convict site serial listing;

- seek to conclude a management and financial agreement with the NSW government to allow a nomination for the Sydney Opera House to proceed; and
- assess an extension to the Riversleigh fossil site that includes the Pleistocene terraces, such as those at Terrace Site.

## **(ii) Great Barrier Reef**

The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area, with Kakadu and Uluru, is one of Australia's best known natural wonders.

The Howard/Fischer government has placed a high priority on improving the management and protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

During the past two years, it has:

- increased the size of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park by 350 square kilometres with the addition of Gumoo Woojabuddee area near Shoalwater Bay;
- announced it would extend the prohibition of mining to the entire Great Barrier Reef region through new regulations under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*;
- established the world's first chain of dugong sanctuaries in the southern Great Barrier Reef, the first such sanctuaries in the world; and
- reformed the administrative structure of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to establish four critical issues groups dealing with conservation/World Heritage, tourism and recreation, fisheries and water quality, and coastal development.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to ensure the protection of the Great Barrier Reef. The Coalition will:

- provide an additional \$3.4 million over three years for increased surveillance and enforcement measures in the Great Barrier Reef;

- improve the governance structure of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to establish clearer lines of responsibility, improved engagement with stakeholders and a greater focus on outcomes;
- maintain the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority as a Commonwealth statutory authority based in Townsville;
- ensure that the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council keeps under on-going review the effectiveness of the dugong sanctuary system and, where necessary, considers any additional measures to protect dugong;
- in consultation with the tourism industry, implement a strategy to reduce tourist operators' licence latency;
- within two years, complete a review of existing protective arrangements to ensure appropriate levels of protection for all habitat types within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area;
- ensure the implementation of a policy that requires the use of bycatch reduction devices and turtle excluder devices in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area by 31 March 2000. Turtle excluder devices will be required in critical areas as soon as possible; and
- with the agreement of the Queensland government, add to the Marine Park further areas in the Great Barrier Reef Region which are not yet in the Park.

### **(iii) National Parks and the Reserve System**

The federal government manages a range of well known and important marine and terrestrial National Parks, including Uluru-Kata Tjuta, Kakadu, Booderee (Jervis Bay) and the Australian Botanic National Gardens.

The Coalition has supported the effective management of those Parks.

The Coalition has also provided \$80 million for the National Reserve System program to expand national parks across Australia. To date, just under half a million hectares have been approved for purchase for the National Park system.

The government has also given new emphasis to establishing marine parks in Commonwealth.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- support the purchase of new National Parks through the National Reserve System program and, where possible, help the States restore National Parks that have become degraded;
- support the development of a comprehensive network of marine reserves in Commonwealth waters, and declare five new parks now under assessment; and
- continue to work with indigenous communities to support Aboriginal training and employment in jointly managed parks.

#### **(iv) Indigenous Protected Areas**

Through the National Reserve System program of the Natural Heritage Trust, the Howard/Fischer government has supported the development of indigenous protected areas.

The first Indigenous Protected Area was formally proclaimed in August 1998, over a property called Nantawarrina in the northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia. Five other Indigenous Protected Areas are scheduled for proclamation during the next 12 months.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to work with traditional owners, indigenous communities and land holders to establish indigenous protected areas.

#### **(v) Sydney Harbour Foreshore Defence Sites**

The Australian Defence Forces have or are currently relocating from a number of defence facilities around Sydney Harbour, including North Head, Middle Head, Georges Heights, Cockatoo Island and Woolwich.

The Howard/Fischer government recognises the importance of these sites to the Sydney community for both their natural and cultural values.

The government has therefore decided to:

- establish a Federation Sydney Harbour Trust to manage, protect and rehabilitate North Head, Middle Head/Georges Heights, Woolwich and Cockatoo Island as Defence relocates from those sites; and

- allow public access to parts of Garden Island.

It will provide \$96 million from the Federation Fund for this purpose.

### **(vi) Cape York**

Cape York Peninsula is an area of outstanding natural and cultural importance with an enormous diversity of animal and plant life. The Coalition is committed to the protection of those values.

Up to \$40 million from the Natural Heritage Trust has been provided for the implementation of the *Cape York Natural Heritage Trust Plan*.

Through the *Cape York Natural Heritage Trust Plan*, the Coalition will:

- improve the Cape York reserve system;
- introduce property planning to implement off-reserve conservation measures;
- protect conservation values on indigenous land;
- reduce the impact of weeds and feral animals; and
- protect endangered and vulnerable plants and animals

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to implement the *Cape York Natural Heritage Trust Plan*. Priority will be given to the expansion of the Cape York reserve system and the completion of the property planning process.

## **H. Protecting Australia's Unique Plants and Wildlife**

### **(i) Saving Australia's Endangered Species**

The Coalition is committed to the protection of Australia's native plants and wildlife especially our endangered species.

1429 species are listed as endangered or vulnerable to extinction. On average, 42 species are being added to the list each year.

The Coalition intends to reverse this trend.

Endangered species programs have tended to operate in isolation from other conservation programs. The Howard/Fischer government has sought to change this by integrating the needs of threatened species into other programs, such as those funded by the Natural Heritage Trust.

In addition, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- significantly increased funding for endangered species which has provided assistance for work on recovery plans for one-third of listed species;
- prepared Action Plans for urgent conservation works; and
- for the first time, enabled endangered ecological communities to be listed and listed the first one – the Cumberland Woodland, in the Sydney basin.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- continue support for the Endangered Species program and the preparation of recovery plans and threat abatement plans;
- increase resources to help landholders and local community groups develop ‘site recovery plans’ to control feral animals and weeds threatening endangered species;
- increase the priority given to endangered species in other Natural Heritage Trust programs, particularly those relating to habitat restoration; and
- provide information about endangered species to regional and catchment community groups so it can be incorporated into regional catchment management strategies.

## **(ii) Commonwealth Legislation Reform**

The Howard/Fischer government has recognised the importance of providing a strong legislative framework for the protection of endangered species.

Using the results of the review of existing legislation the government proposes significant improvements to existing Commonwealth legislation to:

- include the protection of nationally threatened species and ecological communities as a matter of national environmental significance, ensuring actions that threaten them will trigger Commonwealth assessment and approval requirements;
- recognise in legislation, for the first time, ‘conservation dependent’ species and vulnerable ecological communities; and
- require the development of recovery plans for all threatened species and communities, even if they do not occur on Commonwealth areas.

### **(iii) Protecting Australia’s Birds**

The Coalition recognises that Australia’s bird species are a highly visible indicator of our country’s biodiversity.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- provided more than \$2.6 million for the conservation of Australia’s bird species; and
- provided \$1.2 million to Birds Australia, the nation’s leading ornithological organisation, to help more than 10,000 bird watchers unite to produce a new and comprehensive Atlas of Australian Birds

In the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to use the Natural Heritage Trust to protect bird habitat.

### **(iv) Albatross**

Albatross are among the world’s largest and longest living birds. Interaction with humans, however, has led to many albatross species becoming critically endangered.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- adopted a threat abatement plan to reduce the impact of fishing on albatross;

- and successfully listed all Southern Hemisphere albatross species under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (the Bonn Convention).

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- implement the threat abatement plan; and
- complete a regional plan to implement the Bonn Convention decision, which Australia is taking the lead in developing in partnership with New Zealand, South Africa, Chile and Argentina.

### **(v) Marine Species**

During the past two years, the Coalition has strengthened the protection of Australia's marine wildlife - many of which are only found in Australian waters.

The Howard/Fischer government has:

- established an \$8 million Marine Species Protection Program to support projects that increase our capacity to protect marine plants and animals;
- introduced export controls for sea horses, sea dragons and pipefish;
- begun the development of a recovery plan for Australia's threatened marine turtles; and
- provided \$1 million to improve our capacity to protect marine species and habitats from the effects of oil spills.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- review the current exemption of marine species from wildlife export controls to ensure exemptions are available only for marine species harvested in accordance with sustainable and ecologically-based management arrangements; and

- complete a turtle recovery plan.

### **(vi) Whales and Dolphins**

The Coalition is proud of the role of the Fraser government in ending whaling in Australian waters. That commitment to protecting whales has been pursued vigorously by the Howard/Fischer government.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- announced its intention to pursue the declaration of a global whale sanctuary and an end to all commercial whaling;
- successfully gained the commitment of South Pacific nations for the establishment of a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary as an interim step; and
- provided \$1.6 million for whale conservation projects over four years.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- continue to pursue the creation of a global whale sanctuary;
- work with other nations to establish the South Pacific Whale Sanctuary;
- strengthen protection for whales by legislating to create the Australian Whale Sanctuary and banning capture for live display;
- review the conservation status of all dolphins and porpoises found in Australian waters (including our Antarctic waters) to update their status in the lists of threatened species under Commonwealth legislation; and
- nominate for listing under the Bonn Convention all dolphin and porpoise species inhabiting Australian waters which satisfy the prerequisites for listing and develop regional plans for those species successfully listed.

### **(vii) Bush for Wildlife**

The Howard/Fischer government, through Natural Heritage Trust programs such as Bushcare, Rivercare, National Reserves, Endangered Species and Wetlands, has supported landholders and community groups working to conserve Australia's wildlife and its habitats.

The government supported a national network of volunteers to conserve threatened plants and animals with a grant of \$350,000 a year to the World Wide Fund for Nature - now increased to \$500,000 a year.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will increase resources for this growth in volunteer support for wildlife conservation through the development of a *Bush for Wildlife* program. The package will be funded from and integrated with Natural Heritage Trust programs. It will:

- protect wildlife and wildlife habitat on land managed by private landholders, corporations and local governments;
- involve community groups in protecting wildlife and habitats;
- encourage State, Territory and local governments to develop or increase the level of habitat protection on private land; and
- enhance the value of wildlife to the community by increasing appreciation of wildlife needs.

The Program will include:

- a continuation of the annual tax deductibility scheme to encourage landholders to undertake Landcare and conservation works;
- co-ordination and support for the existing State-based 'Land for Wildlife' program;
- adjusted Bushcare grant guidelines to encourage wildlife habitat conservation, giving priority to conservation of the habitat of threatened species and ecosystems;
- increased assistance for community groups and landholders to control weeds, feral animals and other processes threatening populations of endangered

species and ecosystems; and

- co-ordination and support for a national revolving fund modelled on the successful Victorian 'Trust for Nature' project, to purchase, fence, covenant and sell properties with native vegetation of national significance.

## **I. Climate Change and protecting the ozone layer**

The Coalition is committed to international measures to avoid the potentially damaging impacts of the greenhouse effect and to control ozone destroying and greenhouse causing gases.

### **(i) Supporting International Efforts**

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has been active in international climate change negotiations.

In December, 1997, Australia was one of 160 countries that agreed to legally binding greenhouse gas emission targets for developed nations. Australia signed the Kyoto protocol in April 1998.

Through the Kyoto protocol, the international community has endorsed a collective reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by the developed world to more than 5 per cent below 1990 levels by 2008 to 2012.

In recognition of Australia's unique economic structure and trade profile, the Kyoto conference agreed that Australia should limit the growth of its greenhouse emissions to 8 per cent above 1990 levels. This is a significant reduction in the rate of emission growth expected over the coming decade.

### **(ii) Australia's Domestic Response**

The Howard/Fischer government has recognised its responsibility to translate international efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into domestic policy.

In November 1997, the government announced a four-year \$180 million program to meet Australia's greenhouse obligations. That program - *Safeguarding our Future* - will also improve our environmental performance in a number of other areas such as air quality.

Principal measures in the program are:

- support for the adoption of energy from renewable sources such as solar, wind and tidal;

- strategies to reduce emissions from cars, industry, and commercial and domestic building;
- support for local government to develop plans to reduce greenhouse emissions;
- tree planting and revegetation through the Plantations - 2020 Vision program and the Bush for Greenhouse program; and
- establishment of the Australian Greenhouse Office to provide national leadership on greenhouse matters and implement the government's agenda.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to implement the Howard/Fischer government's domestic greenhouse response program and the National Greenhouse Strategy.

### **(iii) Protecting the Ozone Layer**

The Coalition supports the international community's efforts to halt damage to the earth's protective ozone layer. Australia has been an influential participant at Montreal Protocol meetings and is a leader in attempts to secure a phase out of all significant ozone depleting substances.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- won recognition from the United Nations Environment Program as a world leader in collecting and disposing of halons;
- supported the international phase out by 2005 of methyl bromide, a significant ozone depleting substance used by the agricultural and horticultural sectors and developed a national strategy for its phase-out in Australia; and
- brought the increase of halon 1202 to the world's attention and called for international action at the Working Group to the Montreal Protocol in July 1998.

During the next Parliament, the Howard/Fischer government will continue to support international efforts to protect the earth's ozone layer including:

- encouraging countries to meet their commitment to phase-out all non-essential ozone depleting substances;
- promoting the phase-out of non-essential uses of halon by encouraging countries to develop national halon management strategies based on Australia's mandatory program;
- progress the phase-out of CFC use in metered dose inhalers;
- implement the phase-out of methyl bromide by developing alternate broad spectrum fumigants; and
- leading international efforts to eliminate halon 1202.

## **J. Protecting Australia's Forests**

### **(i) Regional Forest Agreements**

Nearly 20 per cent or 156 million hectares of Australia's land mass is dominated by forests and woodlands, which include over 700 species of eucalypts. Our forests are a major component of Australia's biodiversity, ranging from the tropical rainforests of the north to the unique karri forests of Western Australia.

The Howard/Fischer government, in partnership with the States, has been supporting the development of Regional Forest Agreements in 12 forest regions where commercial harvesting takes place. The goals of those Agreements, which will last for 20 years, are to:

- create a world-class forest reserve system that protects the biodiversity, old growth, wilderness and heritage values of our forests in accordance with scientifically developed national criteria;
- ensure that commercially harvested forests are managed according to principles of ecologically sustainable forest management; and
- provide security and new opportunities to those industries that rely on our native forest resource.

The success of the Regional Forest Agreement process has been recognised internationally. It is achieving protection of forests in excess of the 10 per cent recommended by the World Conservation Union and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

During the past two years the Howard/Fischer government has:

- provided more than \$81 million to expedite the Regional Forest Agreement process and to support the most comprehensive scientific studies of our forests ever undertaken;
- completed Regional Forest Agreements for Tasmania and the East Gippsland and Central Highland regions of Victoria which have created more than half a million hectares of new conservation reserves; and
- introduced legislation to ensure the security of each Regional Forest Agreement.

The Coalition will continue to support the Regional Forest Agreement process. During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- immediately seek to finalise Regional Forest Agreements for Eden in New South Wales and the south-western region of Western Australia; and
- ensure that by the end of 1999, Regional Forest Agreements will have been completed for:
  - the Southern, Lower North East and Upper North East regions of New South Wales;
  - the Gippsland, Upper North East and Western regions of Victoria; and
  - the South East region of Queensland; and
- maintain the prohibition of woodchip exports from forests not covered by regional forest agreements after January, 2000.

## **(ii) Protecting the World's Forests**

The World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre have estimated that nearly two-thirds of the World's forests have been destroyed and that 94 per cent of the remainder are unprotected.

Australia has expertise and experience in forest conservation and sustainable forest management relevant to international efforts to protect forest biodiversity.

For these reasons, during the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- actively participated in the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and other international forest organisations to achieve better conservation outcomes;
- funded the development of an Asia-Pacific Code of Forest Practice;
- provided, on average, \$15 million a year through the AusAID program for international forest projects; and
- taken the lead in developing international forest conservation guidelines to be put to the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests early in 1999.

More can be done, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. During the next Parliament, a Coalition government will:

- seek to establish a partnership with the historic World Bank/World Wide Fund for Nature forest alliance whose principal objective is the protection of an additional 50 million hectares of forests by 2010;
- ensure that federal government agencies, such as AusAID, work with the World Bank/WWF forest alliance to ensure that funding programs are complementary and support ecological sustainable forestry in recipient nations;
- establish an International Forests Taskforce comprising non-government stakeholders and government agencies. The Taskforce will be established to help maximise the effectiveness of Australia's international contribution.

## **K. Rivers and Wetlands**

### **(i) Rivers**

In establishing the Natural Heritage Trust, the Howard/Fischer government recognised the importance of improving the health of Australia's river systems.

Through initiatives such as Rivercare, the National River Health Program, Waterwatch and support for the Murray-Darling Commission, the Coalition has oversighted improved water flows, sustainable agricultural practices and protection of river ecosystems.

The Howard/Fischer government also supports the COAG water reform framework and the commitment to make substantial progress towards allocating environmental flows for stressed and over-allocated rivers by the end of 1998 and for other river systems by 2001.

During the next Parliament the Coalition will:

- continue to drive the COAG water reform process to ensure adequate environmental flows for Australia's rivers;
- support the National River Health Program and Waterwatch; and
- expand the number of water quality monitoring sites on key rivers for use in the National Land and Water Resources Audit and regional and catchment management plans.

### **(ii) Waterwatch**

With the financial support of the Natural Heritage Trust, Waterwatch has grown from 200 groups in 16 catchments, to nearly 1800 groups in more than 150 catchments. It is estimated that more than 50,000 Waterwatch volunteers are monitoring more than 4000 sites across Australia.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will expand the program into more catchments and regions:

### **(iii) The Murray-Darling Basin**

The Murray-Darling basin is Australia's largest river system. It has enormous significance as an environmental and economic resource for the agricultural

industries within the basin.

Prevailing dry conditions throughout the Murray-Darling basin during the past three years have highlighted the importance of healthy ecological processes.

During the last two years, the Howard/Fischer government has supported the rehabilitation of the Murray-Darling basin. It has:

- committed \$163 million to support the Murray-Darling 2001 Initiative in the first five years of the Natural Heritage Trust;
- maintained the historic cap on water diversions from the basin, consistent with 1993/1994 levels of consumption and development;

The Coalition will continue to support the rehabilitation and protection of the Murray-Darling.

#### **(iv) RiverWorks Tasmania**

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has provided \$8.75 million from the Natural Heritage Trust for RiverWorks Tasmania to improve the water quality of Tasmania's riverways.

Through RiverWorks Tasmania, the Coalition supported projects to improve the quality of the Derwent, Tamar, Huon, King and Queen Rivers.

The Mount Lyell copper mine in western Tasmania caused particular pollution problems for the King and Queen Rivers and Macquarie Harbour. A further \$7.5 million has been provided to address this problem.

#### **(v) Wetlands**

The Coalition recognises that wetlands are an important natural resource and part of Australia's environmental heritage. Australia has 49 wetlands of international importance listed under the Ramsar Convention.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- finalised a national wetlands policy and ensured that nearly two-thirds of the 49 Ramsar sites have management plans in place or under development; and
- supported a range of community groups to undertake management planning and 'on-ground' works to conserve and rehabilitate wetlands.

The Coalition will continue to support the national effort to protect Australia's wetlands. Passage of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill 1998* which includes Ramsar wetlands as one of the matters of national environmental significance, will strengthen the effort.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will seek to:

- finalise management plans for all Ramsar listed wetlands;
- nominate new Ramsar wetlands of international significance, to achieve a comprehensive and representative coverage of Australia's most important wetlands;
- lead the development of a multi-lateral Migratory Waterbird Agreement for the Asia-Pacific region, building on the existing agreements for migratory birds Australia has with Japan and China; and
- continue to expand the *East Asian/Australian Shorebird Reserve Network*, and implement the *East Asian/Australian Shorebird Network Action Plan*.

#### **(vi) Lake Eyre Basin and the Coongie Lakes**

The Coalition recognises the significant conservation value of Lake Eyre and the Coongie Lakes and their associated river systems.

The Howard/Fischer government has sought to protect the Basin during the past two years: The government has:

- signed an historic Lake Eyre Basin Heads of Agreement which will lead to an integrated catchment management agreement;
- provided more than \$500,000 from the Natural Heritage Trust to establish a local community-based Lake Eyre Basin Co-ordinating committee to oversee preparation of a strategy to conserve the Basin; and
- worked with the Queensland and South Australian governments to ensure that the draft Water Management Plan for the Cooper Creek in south-western Queensland maintains the ecological integrity of river flows to the Coongie Lakes.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to work towards the conservation of Lake Eyre Basin and the Coongie Lakes. The Coalition will exercise its influence and power to ensure that the integrity of these systems are not threatened by inappropriate development.

## **L. Supporting Community Action And Increasing Our Knowledge Base**

### **(i) Green Corps**

The Howard/Fischer government has recognised the enthusiasm of young Australians and their desire to make a direct contribution to the protection of our environment through the establishment of the Green Corps.

The Green Corps has provided an opportunity for 3,600 young Australians to participate, for six month periods, in 'on-ground' conservation projects while at the same time increasing their skills and knowledge.

As a result of the Green Corps:

- almost 750,000 trees have been planted;
- 880 kilograms of seeds have been collected;
- 242 kilometres of protective fencing has been erected;
- 14,500 hectares of weeds have been removed; and
- 345 kilometres of walking tracks have been constructed.

The Coalition will continue to support the Green Corps.

### **(ii) Environmental Education**

The Coalition believes in increasing awareness of environmental issues through education.

The Howard/Fischer government has therefore supported an Environmental Education and Information Program which directly supports the work of environmental education organisations.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- continue to support provision of quality, practical educational material for teachers and students through the Environmental Education and Information Program.

### **(iii) Supporting Conservation Organisations**

Australians have, in large numbers, demonstrated their commitment to the environment through involvement in the range of voluntary conservation organisations that exist at the local, State and national levels.

During the past two years the Howard/Fischer government has:

- maintained funding for the Grants to Voluntary Conservation Organisations (GVCO) program, which provides financial support to regional, State and national environment groups; and
- established the National Environment Consultative Forum which allows leading conservation organisations to meet formally with the Minister for the Environment and Commonwealth officers.

The Coalition will:

- continue to support the GVCO program; and
- continue to consult with leading conservation organisations through the National Environment Consultative Forum.

### **(iv) State of the Environment Reporting**

The Howard/Fischer government supports State of the Environment reporting to inform Australian's about the condition of their environment, the effects of human activities and the implications for human health and economic well-being.

The first National State of the Environment Report was published in 1996 and received wide acclaim.

The Coalition will continue to support preparation of the second report, to be published in 2001.

### **(v) Environment Resources Information Network**

The Howard/Fischer government has maintained support for the Environment Resources Information Network (ERIN) which, through the Internet, provides the community and policy makers with access to major environmental databases.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will support the further development of ERIN and seek to improve public access to the database.

## **M. Working with the International Community**

The Coalition recognises that the Australian government is able to play a significant role in promoting improved environmental protection and practices within its region and at international fora. Australia has expertise and experience of direct relevance to other nations.

### **(i) APEC**

The Howard/Fischer government has worked to ensure that environmental and sustainability issues are integrated into APEC's broad agenda. In particular, the government has supported the work of APEC's sustainable development ministers, particularly in relation to sustainable cities.

The Coalition supports:

- APEC leaders' decision to make sustainability integral to their approach to increased economic co-operation; and
- APEC's goal to double the number of cities and local governments that have local Agenda 21 plans by 2003.

### **(ii) United Nations Environment Program**

The Howard/Fischer government has been instrumental in attempts to reinvigorate the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and restore it to the principal driver of environmental outcomes within the United Nations system.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to support greater involvement by governments in all aspects of UNEP's work.

### **iii Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora**

The Coalition supports CITES as the main mechanism to control the international trade of endangered species and wildlife.

During the next the Parliament, the Coalition will:

- nominate the Great White Shark for listing on the CITES's schedules;  
and
- assess a possible role for CITES in protecting stocks of the Patagonian toothfish and, if other international mechanisms prove unsuccessful, Southern Blue Fin Tuna.

#### **(iv) Hazardous Wastes**

The Coalition supports the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal as the principal international mechanism for regulating the movement of hazardous wastes.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to support implementation of the Basel Convention.

## **Part 2 Preserving Australia's Heritage**

Australia is a continent of outstanding heritage value. Caring for this heritage is a significant responsibility of all Australians and every tier of government. It is a responsibility the Coalition recognises and accepts at the federal level.

### **A National Strategy for Heritage Protection**

In recent decades, local, State and the federal governments have made considerable advances in the way they manage and seek to protect Australia's heritage places. However, there remains a lack of clarity between the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government.

For these reasons, the Howard/Fischer government, with the States and Territories, has started developing Australia's first, comprehensive, national heritage places strategy.

The Strategy will provide an historic opportunity to:

- improve the way in which all levels of government identify and protect heritage places;

- establish 'best practice' and consistent standards for heritage protection across all jurisdictions; and
- remove gaps in existing heritage regimes.

To implement these goals the Coalition aims to conclude the development of the strategy by the end of 1998. In developing the strategy the Coalition will:

- recognise that the Commonwealth has an on-going leadership role in relation to heritage protection;
- seek the adoption by all jurisdictions, of comprehensive, consistent and transparent standards for heritage identification and protection that use world's best practice;
- support the establishment of a national list of heritage places for which the Commonwealth will have protective powers;
- maintain the Australian Heritage Commission as the Commonwealth's principal heritage advisory body, consistent with its new responsibilities and restructuring resulting from the national heritage places strategy;
- establish a new Register of Commonwealth-owned heritage places, and heritage places within Commonwealth territories; and
- establish, in partnership with the States, Territories and non-government organisations a new Australian Heritage Places Inventory which will, through the Internet, provide a consolidated database of all significant heritage lists and registers.

## **B Financial support for heritage conservation**

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has provided

record funding for the protection, identification and restoration of Australia's heritage places. The government:

- supported the National Estate Grants Program;
- allocated more than \$70 million from the Federation Fund for the establishment of the Federation Cultural and Heritage Projects Program and supported a range of other Federation Fund projects that will help protect important heritage sites.

During the next Parliament the Coalition will establish a new, **\$3 million a year, Cultural Heritage Projects Program** to support the restoration and conservation of built and indigenous heritage. The program will absorb the National Estate Grants Program.

## **C Protecting Commonwealth-owned heritage places**

In 1997, the Howard/Fischer government published the findings of the Schofield inquiry into the management of Commonwealth owned properties.

The Coalition acknowledges that the federal government, in providing national leadership, has a responsibility to demonstrate best practice in managing Commonwealth-owned heritage places. It will finalise its response to the Schofield report as a matter of priority.

## **D Improving Co-ordination within the Commonwealth**

The Coalition recognises that there are advantages in ensuring co-ordinated management of heritage issues within the Commonwealth bureaucracy. This reflects both administrative efficiency and also the inextricable links between natural and cultural heritage places.

The Coalition will therefore transfer responsibility to Environment Australia for the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act* following the passage of the new bill. This will recognise the holistic way in which cultural and natural landscapes are increasingly being managed. It also will link the Australian Heritage Commission, which has led efforts to promote indigenous heritage conservation, and the Commonwealth's other responsibilities in this important area.

### **Part 3 - Protecting and Understanding Antarctica**

Australia has responsibility for 42 per cent of Antarctica - a continent of incredible beauty and significant biological resources and of great scientific and practical interest to Australia. The Coalition is committed to protecting this special region and increasing our understanding of its influence on Australian and global environmental systems.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- increased the level and proportion of Antarctic funding spent directly on scientific research;
  
- successfully nominated Australia's sub-Antarctic islands -Macquarie Island and the Heard and Macdonald Islands - for World Heritage listing;
  
- provided \$500 000 to the AAP Mawson Hut appeal which has supported urgent conservation work on the historic and unique huts built during Sir Douglas Mawson's 1911-14 Antarctic expedition;
  
- increased efforts to stop illegal fishing in the Southern Ocean through both diplomatic initiatives and direct enforcement action; and
  
- actively promoted Hobart as the location for the Secretariat for the Antarctic Treaty and confirmed Hobart as Australia's gateway to the Antarctic.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- maintain Australia's lead in efforts to protect the Antarctic environment, and ensure that Australian activities in the region continue to meet the highest environmental standards;
  
- examine options for a more flexible and efficient multi-ship operation to support the Antarctic research program and to improve our marine research capabilities;
  
- to facilitate the work of the Antarctic science program, investigate options for provision of an intercontinental air transport capability

between Australia and its Antarctic territory. The link must be cost-effective and meet the highest environmental standards;

- continue to work with other nations to stop illegal fishing in the Southern Ocean and promote strong measures at the 1998 meeting of nations that are parties to the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources to achieve this goal and provide an additional \$15.8 million to police our sub-Antarctic waters;
- continue to support Hobart as Australia's gateway to the Antarctic; and
- retain all four permanent Australian Antarctic research stations.

#### **Part 4 Providing World-Class Weather Forecasting**

The quality of our weather forecasting service is essential to many of Australia's industries and the safety and well-being of the broader Australian community.

During the past two years, the Howard/Fischer government has:

- provided an additional \$4.6 million a year for three years in response to the Slatyer review of the operations of the Bureau of Meteorology;
- established, in co-operation with the CSIRO, a joint High Performance Computing and Communications Centre which has provided Australia with world-class weather computing systems;
- entered a joint project to develop a new pilotless aircraft, known as "Aerosonde" to improve Australia's capacity to monitor and collect data from tropical cyclones;
- approved the development of a wave buoy network to improve marine weather services and increase marine safety; and
- established an agricultural-meteorology specific web site, SILO, to assist rural communities.

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will continue to support Australia's weather forecasting services. The Coalition will:

- enhance services to provincial centres and rural areas through field meteorological offices;
- further improve the Bureau of Meteorology's vital public services, such as cyclone, flood, severe storm and fire weather warning services;
- further improve climate monitoring and prediction techniques;
- increase public access to Bureau information, particularly through the World Wide Web; and
- improve the quality of data provided to the agricultural sector.

## Part 5 Funding Arrangements

During the next Parliament, the Coalition will:

- provide an additional \$250 million to the Natural Heritage Trust from the sale of the second, 16 per cent, tranche of Telstra to ensure the Trust's operations during the life of the next Parliament; and
- provide an additional \$90 million over three years to support a new 'Living Cities' program and the implementation of a national oceans policy.

The Coalition will provide funding from consolidated revenue for the following new measures:

<b>New Measures</b>	<b>1999/00</b> <b>(millions)</b>	<b>2000/01</b> <b>(millions)</b>	<b>2001/02</b> <b>(millions)</b>	<b>Total</b> <b>(millions)</b>

The Living Cities Program	15.000	20.000	15.000	50.000
Oceans Policy Implementation	10.000	10.000	10.000	30.000
Increased Great Barrier Reef surveillance	1.000	1.200	1.200	3.400
Cultural Heritage Projects Program	2.200	2.200	2.200	6.600
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>28.200</b>	<b>33.400</b>	<b>28.400</b>	<b>90.000</b>

Consolidated revenue funding for the oceans policy implementation will be complemented by \$20 million from the Natural Heritage Trust.

The Cultural Heritage Projects Program will absorb the existing National Estate Grants Program bringing total funding from \$6.6 million to \$9 million over three years.

*Authorised by L. Crosby, Liberal Party of Australia, Corner Blackall & Macquarie Sts, Barton, ACT, 2600*