# [***Australians far less aware of biodiversity loss than climate crisis, research finds***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:68H3-0D21-DY4H-K086-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Lisa Cox

**Highlight:** However, a majority of Australians think more money should be spent on the environmentFollow our Australia news live blog for the latest updatesGet our morning and afternoon news emails, free app or daily news podcast

**Body**

Half of Australians are unaware of the extent of the nature crisis despite agreeing governments need to do more to support the environment, research by the ***Biodiversity*** Council suggests.

Graeme Samuel, the former competition watchdog head who chaired a 2020 review of Australia’s environmental laws, says a campaign is needed to bring public awareness of ***biodiversity*** decline in line with the understanding of the climate crisis.

The ***Biodiversity*** Council, which is a partnership between 11 Australian universities, surveyed people about their attitudes to nature.

The online poll of about 4,050 people found although most (63%) understood how unique Australia’s wildlife was and 83% rated looking after nature as important to them, many were not aware of the extent of ***biodiversity*** ***loss*** in Australia.

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The [*research*](https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/media/uploads/2023_6/202305_biodiversity_concerns_survey_report.pdf) found that fewer than half (43%) were aware Australia had one of the highest rates of mammal extinction in the world and just more than half (54%) knew most of Australia’s forests had been lost since colonisation.

Awareness of climate change and how it affected nature was much higher, with 74% indicating they understood global heating was having a direct impact on wildlife and ecosystems.

Winnifred Louis, professor of psychology at the University of Queensland and one of the report’s authors, said there were many psychological biases that could lead to a gulf between the state of the environment and how people perceived it.

Louis said when changes in the environment were gradual it could be difficult for people to notice.

“People’s opinions can be influenced by a few key species, so if they see whales they feel the oceans must be doing OK, even if many other species are missing and if whales are in much smaller numbers than in past decades,” she said.

“Without specialist training, people may not recognise the difference between environments that are green and full of diverse native plants, and environments that are green and full of weed species.”

Louis said much reporting and discussion on the state of nature was focused on “big ticket” species, such as bilbies or koalas, rather than things people could relate to in their local area.

Samuel’s 2020 review of national laws found Australia’s environment was in [*unsustainable decline*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jul/20/australias-environment-in-unsustainable-state-of-decline-major-review-finds) and successive [*Australian governments had failed*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jan/28/australia-urged-to-overhaul-environment-laws-and-reverse-decline-of-our-iconic-places) to protect the country’s unique species and habitats.

He said the public’s understanding of the nature crisis was years behind the level of awareness of the climate crisis.

He called for a shift in focus from individual charismatic species – such as the koala – to flora and fauna generally and what they mean for people.

“I think we need a major awareness campaign to bring people up to the same level of awareness and sensitivity to ***biodiversity*** as they have for climate change,” he said.

“We’ve got a lot to do to raise awareness. It is so important.”

The ***Biodiversity*** Council’s survey found the majority of respondents were concerned for Australia’s ***biodiversity***, with at least two-thirds very or extremely concerned about waste and pollution, land-clearing, extinction of species and the ***loss*** of pollinator species and natural places.

About three-quarters (72%) said more money should be spent on the environment.

Scientists have estimated about [*$2bn is needed annually*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/oct/05/show-us-the-money-environment-groups-say-after-labor-sets-goal-of-preventing-any-new-extinctions) to recover Australia’s full list of almost 2,000 threatened plants, animals and ecological communities.

Brendan Wintle, a professor of conservation ecology at the University of Melbourne and lead councillor at the ***Biodiversity*** Council, said about half of Australia’s economy relied on natural systems.

He said the ***loss*** of ***biodiversity*** would have serious consequences for clean air, food and water, human health, Indigenous culture and national identity.

“Many people would be shocked if they realised the actual state of Australia’s ***biodiversity***,” Wintle said.

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