



# Strategic Plan 2024–29

Protect tomorrow together





## Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Environment Protection Authority acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, honours the ancestors and the Elders both past and present and extends that respect to all Aboriginal people.

We recognise Aboriginal peoples' spiritual and cultural connection and inherent right to protect the land, waters, skies and natural resources of NSW. This connection goes deep and has since the Dreaming.

We also acknowledge our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who are an integral part of our diverse workforce and recognise the knowledge embedded forever in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship of Country and culture.

# About this plan

The NSW Environment Protection Authority's (EPA) Strategic Plan outlines our ambition for achieving positive environmental and human health outcomes over the next five years and beyond.



**Rayne de Gruchy**  
*NSW EPA Chair*



**Tony Chappel**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

The plan sets out the areas of focus where the EPA as the State's independent regulatory authority, can have the biggest impact in securing a healthy, functioning, clean and productive environment for our community and future generations.

It outlines how we will act to deliver effective stewardship for the environment to protect, restore and enhance the NSW environment and human health. It sets out our commitment to strong and effective regulation and our focus on high quality environmental outcomes across all of our work. Addressing our most formidable environmental challenges – climate change, transition to a circular economy, and safeguarding our land, water, air and community from pollution – are at the heart of our proposed actions.

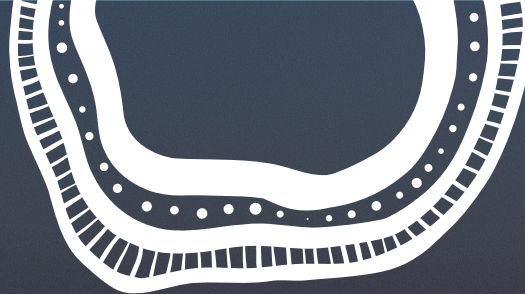
Integrating the learnings and wisdom accumulated by Aboriginal Elders since deep time in environmental change and management is a priority that cuts across all elements of the EPA's work and is foundational in meeting our Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal Peoples.

As we work to deliver effective environmental stewardship, deep listening and collaboration will be essential if we are to successfully navigate solving our environmental challenges.

In all of this, we are committed to:

- working with and learning from Aboriginal people in caring for Country
- developing effective policy solutions in partnership with the community, industry and other government agencies
- acting as a strong and effective regulator
- fostering education and positive behaviour change.

If the EPA can continually improve, and engage deeply with others in its work, we will make meaningful progress towards the sustainable, inclusive, prosperous and thriving future we all aspire to create in NSW.



# EPA's Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal Peoples

The NSW Environment Protection Authority acknowledges Aboriginal peoples as the enduring Custodians of the land, sea, waters and sky of New South Wales.

We recognise the entire NSW landscape, including the lands, waters, plant and animal species and seas, has spiritual and cultural significance to all Aboriginal peoples of NSW. By this understanding there is no separation of nature, wellbeing and culture. The health of the natural environment, and the health of people and culture, are intimately connected.

The EPA is committed to prioritising meaningful relationships with Aboriginal peoples to deepen our understanding of how best to Care for Country. Through our partnership with the EPA Aboriginal Peoples Knowledge Group, we fully acknowledge and embrace the invaluable knowledge they hold and provide to enhance our work as environmental stewards.

The Group comprises members from Rainforest, Desert, Saltwater and Freshwater people, coming together as a unified voice for Country.

We listen to the Group as it guides, advises, nurtures and challenges us to uphold the 12 principles outlined in the EPA's Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal Peoples:

- 1** Work in respectful partnership with Aboriginal peoples.
- 2** Actively learn from and listen to Aboriginal voices, cultures and knowledges.
- 3** Respect Aboriginal peoples' knowledges and science as an equal to western science.
- 4** Weave Aboriginal knowledges and science with conventional science into the EPA's decision making.
- 5** Act boldly and bravely to play our part to mend and heal Country together.
- 6** Ensure Aboriginal knowledges, science and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) is protected, and Aboriginal peoples have free, prior informed consent.
- 7** Address both the tangible and intangible cultural elements of environmental protection.
- 8** Deliver on results that have direct benefits for Aboriginal communities.
- 9** Embed consistent, meaningful and trustworthy engagement with Aboriginal communities.
- 10** Develop Aboriginal cultural competency across the agency.
- 11** Increase Aboriginal employment across the agency to exceed public sector Aboriginal employment targets, and identify specific occupational gaps.
- 12** Monitor the impact of this Commitment to Aboriginal peoples, Country, cultures and spirit.

This collaboration ensures our strategic initiatives are firmly grounded in principles of respect and sustainability.



# Stewardship is at the heart of what we do

*Blue Mountains National Park.  
Credit: Destination NSW.*

As an environmental steward and NSW's primary environmental regulator, we are committed to a sustainable future.

We are leading environment protection for today and tomorrow where:

- the land is healthy, the water is clean and the air is clear
- Aboriginal voices, cultures and knowledges guide us to protect our diverse ecosystems together
- we contribute our science, regulation and expertise to overcome environmental challenges and enable sustainable prosperity.

Stewardship is at the heart of what we do and guides the decisions we make every day.

As a steward of the environment, we are responsible for protecting, restoring and caring for our unique ecosystems.

We are:

- focused on outcomes
- guided by empathy to understand the concerns and perspectives of our stakeholders
- committed to collaboration to overcome environmental challenges together.

We embrace a stewardship mindset in partnership with Aboriginal peoples to care for Country and protect tomorrow together.

## Our organisation's approach to stewardship

We step into the shoes of the people we serve. We continually strive to improve how we work, so that we are well-placed to protect the environment and our community. Investing in our organisation and our people is investing in a better NSW.

Our stewardship approach ensures that:

- consistent, strong regulatory settings operate effectively to protect the environment and human health
- Aboriginal voices, cultures and knowledges guide our approach to caring for Country
- our people are safe and capable and our organisation is inclusive
- we collaborate with stakeholders to address current and emerging risks
- we both enable and drive innovation with science, data insights and evidence
- we continually review and improve our regulatory practice
- we develop long-term environmental quality objectives to guide industry decisions and deliver effective outcomes over time.

# Our Regulatory Framework

## Our Regulatory Framework shows how we work.

We use our Regulatory Framework to implement the Strategic Plan.

The framework sets out how we regulate to improve outcomes for the environment and the health of our community. It describes eight regulatory elements and how we use them to assess the greatest risks, address environmental issues, and enable and drive environmentally responsible behaviour.

When needed, we take action against individuals, businesses and organisations to enforce legal obligations that protect the environment and human health. We act in the public interest when exercising all our regulatory functions. This includes deciding what action to take, consistent with our prosecution guidelines and as required by legislation. Our Regulatory Framework and Regulatory Policy give further details of how we regulate.

Figure 1: The eight elements of our Regulatory Framework



# Our strategic choices

The world is facing environmental and human health challenges, previously unseen in scale, impact and complexity. Over the next five years we will focus on the aspects of Country requiring sustained attention to prevent further harm, restore damaged ecosystems and enhance conditions for improved biodiversity.

We have made strategic choices about the environmental and human health outcomes the EPA will deliver over the next five years that will support a sustainable, prosperous society as we work to protect tomorrow together.

# We take a stewardship approach to environmental regulation

Figure 2:  
Our stewardship approach





# 1 Care for Country



Country is lands, waters, skies and everything within. Aboriginal peoples hold a spiritual and cultural obligation to protect Country, as Country is kin – ‘Mother’. Country provides everything we need to survive and thrive, and we all share the responsibility to care for Country, listening to and learning from Aboriginal knowledges, ensuring a two-way knowledge exchange.

We have chosen to reflect caring for Country in our Strategic Plan to recognise and be guided by Aboriginal peoples’ environmental stewardship of the land sea and waterways.

## Land

Caring for soils, plants, animals and ecosystems means healthy land can sustainably support a healthy society. Our work limits degradation from human land use, and we restore and enhance the quality of the environment.

### Outcomes:

1. Stronger protection of the environment and community from high-risk legacy contamination and emerging chemicals.
2. Stronger protection of the environment and community through the provision of planning development advice and regulating pollution from industry.
3. Improved ecologically sustainable forest management through adaptive regulation of native forestry operations.
4. Better regulation of land through embedding Aboriginal voices, cultures and knowledges.

## Water

Living waterways that sustained our First Peoples continue to support healthy Country, environment and society. We partner with government agencies and Aboriginal peoples to prevent, regulate and respond to water pollution to improve water quality and health.

### Outcomes:

1. Our waters support life and are cleaner and safer.
2. Water quality and health in NSW are supported by effective and collaborative long-term policy and programs.
3. Aboriginal peoples participate in EPA decisions that affect the health of natural waters across NSW, and the voices of Aboriginal peoples are heard.

## Air

Breathing clear air is essential for health and wellbeing. The EPA strives to keep our air clean by measuring air quality, setting standards, regulating industries and responding to air pollution events. In this plan, greenhouse gas emissions are addressed under the ‘Drive climate action’ on page 10.

### Outcomes:

1. Air quality is protected and improved through strengthened management of the most critical sources of pollution.
2. Enhanced real-time and accessible air monitoring and modelling supports more effective place-based regulation, cleaner air and clearer skies.

## Community

The health of the environment is intricately connected to the health and wellbeing of communities. We must monitor, manage and mitigate as risks arise.

### Outcomes:

1. Communities are proactively informed about, and less exposed to, environmental risks to their health and wellbeing.
2. Fewer communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental issues, and communities are supported by embedding environmental justice principles in our work.

# 2

## Drive climate action



Human activity is fuelling rapid changes to our climate. The disruption to seasons and ecosystems threatens the connected web of lands, waters, plants and animals that humans depend on for life.

Without substantial action, climate change poses a major threat to humanity and most living systems on Earth. We can already see its effects, and they are predicted to worsen over time.

We are shifting our focus to helping government, industry (especially our licensees), Aboriginal communities and the broader community to minimise and manage the causes and consequences of climate change.

We recognise the role we have to play in this whole-of-state effort. Our *Climate Change Policy* outlines how we are expanding our regulatory focus to more explicitly address the causes and consequences of climate change.

It sets out three objectives:

- to maximise the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of NSW in the context of a changing climate and current and emerging international and national policy settings and actions to address climate change
- to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with the NSW Government's net zero targets
- to make NSW more resilient and adapted to a changing climate.

The policy document is complemented by our *Climate Change Action Plan 2023–26*. It describes how we'll deliver on the policy's objectives and outlines the specific actions we'll take as part of our evolving regulatory response to the climate crisis.

**Outcomes:**

1. Our communities today and future generations enjoy a healthier environment through the transformative changes driven by our *Climate Change Policy* and *Climate Change Action Plan 2023–26*.
2. Licensees respond to the challenges of climate change and collectively reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, helping to meet the targets in the *NSW Net Zero Plan*.
3. Open, transparent data on greenhouse gas emissions, including data on fugitive methane emissions,\* enables greater emissions reductions.
4. Resilience to the impacts of climate change increases, enabled by strategic partnerships with public land managers and industry to support adaptation and agility, and reduce exposure to climate risk.

\* Fugitive methane is methane emitted by an industrial activity that is not from a point source of combustion but includes flaring. Examples include venting of gas from coal mines and gas processing facilities, leaks from pressurised gas lines, and surface emissions from waste facilities (such as landfills) and sewage treatment plants.

# 3

## Enable a safe circular economy



Using resources once and throwing them away is unsustainable. That’s why NSW is transitioning to a circular economy where we design products for repair and reuse, recover materials for recycling and keep resources in use for as long as possible.

A circular economy is an economic system aimed at minimising waste and promoting the continual reuse of resources. The circular economy aims to keep products, equipment and infrastructure in use for longer, improving the productivity of these resources.

Waste that is poorly managed and disposed of can lead to environmental and human health problems for current and future generations and is not in keeping with our commitment to caring for

Country. While keeping materials and products out of landfill makes good environmental sense, reuse, repair and recycling also benefits the NSW economy. Enabling a circular economy stimulates growth in the resource recovery sector as well as creating new industries and jobs through innovation and investment in circular goods and services.

As we move away from a linear economy of ‘take, make and dispose’ to a circular one of ‘reduce, reuse, repurpose and recycle’, collaboration between industries, governments and communities in NSW is essential.

The *NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041* outlines the actions we will take over the next six years to transition to a circular economy by 2041.

A circular economy is at the heart of becoming a sustainable society, as it is circularity that underpins sustainability. A circular economy ensures that future generations can enjoy our resources and have a quality of life equal to or better than our current one.

**Outcomes:**

1. The necessary systems, infrastructure and regulatory settings are incentivising the transition to a circular economy.
2. Potential harm associated with managing waste and recovered materials is minimised.
3. Communities, industry and government are actively participating in the circular economy.



# Core regulation underpins our work

Under the environment protection legislation we administer, and our other statutory obligations, we are responsible for regulating a broad range of activities and their associated risks to the environment and communities.

**These activities can be categorised into the following broad themes:**

 <p>air and odour</p>	 <p>climate change</p>
 <p>contaminated land</p>	 <p>dangerous goods</p>
 <p>industrial chemicals</p>	 <p>native forestry</p>
 <p>noise</p>	 <p>pesticides</p>
 <p>plastics</p>	 <p>radiation</p>
 <p>waste and circular economy</p>	 <p>water</p>



## State emergency response and incident management

The EPA has an important role in helping communities, industries and public land managers to prepare for and recover from incidents, emergencies and disasters that pose a risk to or impact the land, air, and water, including cultural and natural heritage assets and wildlife. This includes preventing, preparing for, responding to and recovering from environmental challenges, such as fire and flood. Our role in State emergency and incident response is part of how we contribute to caring for Country.

Under the NSW emergency management arrangements, the EPA is the lead agency for the Environmental Services Functional Area. In this capacity, we work with combat agencies such as Fire and Rescue NSW, functional areas such as Engineering Services, and supporting agencies, in responding to emergencies and leading prevention, preparedness and recovery activities. The *State Emergency Rescue and Management*

Act 1989 (SERM Act) and State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) set out these emergency management arrangements.

Our trained incident management staff can be deployed to major incidents such as fires, explosions, spills, contamination or radiation incidents, and provide advice to protect the environment and human health in response and recovery, as well as providing sampling and monitoring expertise. As a regulator, the EPA investigates and acts on suspected breaches of environmental legislation that have caused or contributed to an incident.

## Our annual Targeted Compliance Program

Every year we identify projects for focused and coordinated compliance action. This program is one of a number of important elements of our proactive response to critical issues and emerging risks to the environment and our community. We publish our Targeted Compliance Program (previously referred to as our Regulatory Priorities) on our website each year.

## Our reporting

We will monitor and report on our progress.

We report on our performance to our Board, NSW Treasury, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, and the people of NSW. Our performance results are published in our Annual Report and the EPA Board's annual Regulatory Assurance Statement.

Our Annual Report offers our community, industry and partners the opportunity to see how we are delivering on our Strategic Plan and EPA Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal Peoples.



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