

MEDIA RELEASE

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Marginal seat polling shows environment a key issue for federal election

Polling in Australia's most marginal seat, Gilmore (NSW), indicates that the environment will play a role in determining who wins the seat in the federal election.

Gilmore is being contested by a packed field of candidates, and community groups who conducted the polling say the results mean they cannot afford to ignore the nature and climate crises gripping Australia. When announcing the election yesterday, the Prime Minister made no reference to nature or the climate crisis.

The results send a clear message to all parties that they must promise strong policies that address public concerns around environmental degradation, and reverse the hostility that the federal government has shown to protecting wildlife and dealing with our heating climate.

The polling, conducted on 12 & 13 March 2019, showed that:

- **88%** of voters are 'concerned about environmental degradation' across Australia;
- **73%** support creation of a 'new Federal Environment Protection Authority with strong powers';
- **51%** more likely to vote for a candidate with strong environment commitments;
- **82%** support for 'government investment in creating and managing national parks';
- **74%** support for protection of forests for wildlife, water, climate mitigation and recreation as 'best use of forests' compared to 19% support for logging and;
- **60%** support for ending native forest logging and 'using public funds to assist retraining and redeploying timber workers';
- **53%** support renewables and storage to supply our energy needs, compared to 24% for coal

Dr Oisín Sweeney, President of the Jervis Bay Regional Alliance said that national parks are integral to what makes the south coast such an attractive place to live and visit, and clearly Gilmore voters recognise that.

"But there's much more to do to preserve our spectacular environment - like protecting Lake Wollumboola and forests that are constantly under threat from development and logging. We challenge all Gilmore candidates to publicly commit to reinstate federal funding – brutally cut by Tony Abbott - to help the NSW government take the next steps in growing the national parks network."

Barbara Roberts, President of Coastwatchers highlighted the growing public concern around the need to deal with the escalating climate crisis.

"The strong public support for renewables over fossil fuels and the protection of forests gives politicians a clear pathway forward: a rapid transition to renewables and an end to industrialised logging will see emissions fall and more carbon stored in forests. Collectively, this offers the best possible chance of avoiding catastrophic impacts of climate change."

Harriett Swift, spokesperson for the South East Region Conservation Alliance (SERCA) welcomed the strong support for the protection of native forests and said it sends a clear message that people want to see the destruction of their forests end – and are willing to invest public money to see it happen.

“Gone are the days when people accepted the destruction of forests as a necessary regional industry. Forests are now seen by a strong majority as an asset to be valued and protected for the benefit of the whole community. Unfortunately, neither Liberal nor Labor is yet as progressive on this front as the Gilmore electorate.”

Lyndon Schneiders, National Campaigns Director for the Wilderness Society, said the support in Gilmore for new laws and institutions to better protect our environment was very encouraging.

“It’s blindingly obvious that our laws and institutions are failing the environment, and therefore failing communities by facilitating the destruction of our natural heritage. It’s time for environmental governance to be taken to a new level with the laws, agencies and budgets required to do the job properly.”

Terry Barratt, Chairperson of the Shoalhaven Branch of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and long-term resident of Gilmore said he was “pleased but not surprised” at the concerns of voters about the environment, and their recognition of the need for more effective action to protect and manage the rich biodiversity of the electorate.

"We hope and expect that all candidates in the coming election respond to the strong community concern by committing to work to reverse the recent years of neglect of our natural world". **ENDS**

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