



Australian
National
University

Fenner School of
Environment & Society

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2024

February 2020



The Fenner School of Environment & Society recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are custodians of profound knowledge of Australia's environment and ways of living. We acknowledge that the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples are the Traditional Owners of the land on which our campus sits and that our staff and students travel through the traditional lands of many nations as they work and study.

We pay our respects to Elders, past, present and emerging. The Fenner School of Environment & Society commits to always respect the land upon which we stand and ensure that the voices of the First Peoples are both heard and listened to so that we may move towards a future marked by cooperation and shared respect.



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OUR HISTORY

The Fenner School of Environment & Society at the Australian National University was founded in 2007, bringing together the former Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies and the School for Resources, Environment and Society, which was itself formed by an earlier merger between the School of Forestry and Department of Geography.

These origins go some way to explaining the cross-disciplinary nature of the school.

The School is named in honour of internationally renowned scholar, Professor Frank Fenner (1914–2010).

Professor Fenner was one of Australia's most decorated scientists. He was a foundation Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science, a Fellow of the Royal Society (UK) and a Foreign Associate of the National Academy of Sciences (USA). While he is best known for his role in the global eradication of smallpox, Professor Fenner was also passionate about the environment.

In 1971 Professor Fenner wrote:

The rational utilisation of natural resources in a way which is biologically, culturally and economically acceptable to man requires the skills and understanding of integrated groups of people of different disciplines brought together with the common commitment to seek solutions to the practical problems of natural resource management.

In 1973, Professor Fenner became the founding director of the new Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the ANU.

Today the Fenner School of Environment & Society is one of the longest-standing and most influential centres for cross-disciplinary environmental research and education. Our staff includes world leading experts from a diverse range of fields working together to tackle the world's biggest environmental challenges. The school sits within the College of Science at the Australian National University. We are host to the Institute for Water Futures and the Climate Change Institute, and partners in other institutes across the university. We collaborate widely with other schools, other universities, and institutions around Australia and the world.

In 2019 the school took the opportunity to come together to review its purpose and strategic objectives for the coming five years.

WHO WE ARE

The Fenner School of Environment & Society is a community of scholars who seek academic excellence and practical outcomes from their work by applying a collaborative, collegiate and creative approach to research, education, and engagement with society.



Statement of Purpose

Our purpose is to help develop a more environmentally sustainable world.

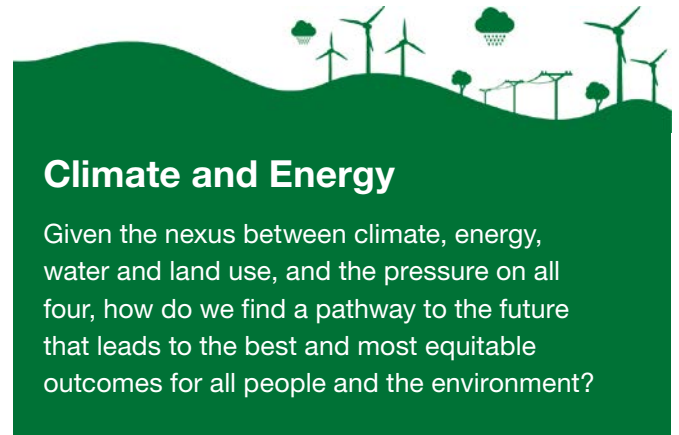
We draw on a culture of cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary practice and develop national and international partnerships to address “wicked problems”, which are complex, contested and have intertwined environmental and social dimensions. Through effective engagement we work to ensure that our research and education influences practice, policy and attitudes, leading to improved outcomes for society.

Our work contributes towards achievement of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Recognising that education is a vital pathway to achieve sustainability, we deliver an education program that is inclusive of the diversity of undergraduate, postgraduate and research students who want to learn about environmental sustainability. We provide our graduates with the practical and intellectual skills required to have an ongoing impact for the benefit of all.

THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS

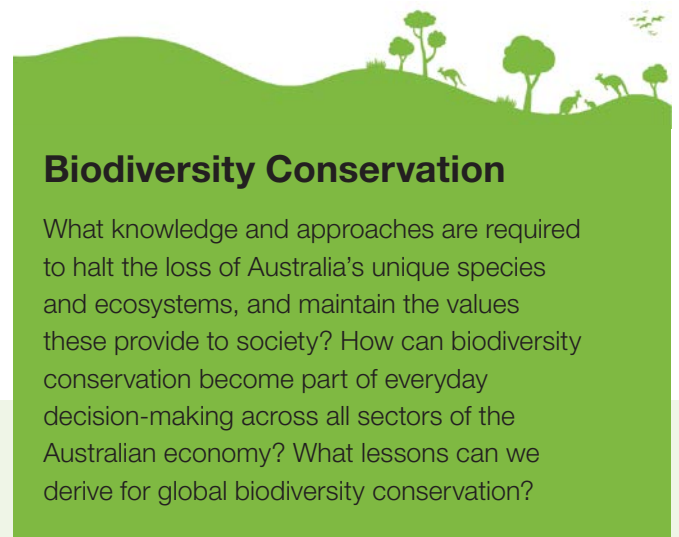
The School's purpose requires that we are active in a wide range of areas, but we place priority on addressing the following seven themes in our research, education and engagement.

The orientation of our activity in each theme is defined by an overarching and integrative question.

A graphic for the 'Climate and Energy' theme. It features a dark green background with a white silhouette of a landscape. The landscape includes rolling hills, several wind turbines, and a solar panel array. The text is in white.

Climate and Energy

Given the nexus between climate, energy, water and land use, and the pressure on all four, how do we find a pathway to the future that leads to the best and most equitable outcomes for all people and the environment?

A graphic for the 'Biodiversity Conservation' theme. It features a light green background with a white silhouette of a landscape. The landscape includes rolling hills, various trees, and several kangaroos. The text is in white.

Biodiversity Conservation

What knowledge and approaches are required to halt the loss of Australia's unique species and ecosystems, and maintain the values these provide to society? How can biodiversity conservation become part of everyday decision-making across all sectors of the Australian economy? What lessons can we derive for global biodiversity conservation?

A graphic for the 'Indigenous Peoples and the Environment' theme. It features a teal background with a white dotted line forming a wavy border at the top. To the right is a white stylized sun or flower icon. The text is in white.

Indigenous Peoples and the Environment

What collaborative methods and approaches can be developed that lead to better caring for country and deeper engagement between universities and Traditional Owners?



Water, Soil, Food

What tools and processes can we develop to support next generation 'Integrated Water Resource Management' that are informed by current technology, collective learning and knowledge sharing? What practices and policies will support appropriate food availability without further degrading soil, water, biodiversity and climate?



Integrative Methods

What innovations in methods are required so that we can work across boundaries of different disciplines in science and policy and with a wide diversity of stakeholders to advance practice and policy for sustainability?



Forests and Fires

What practices and policies are required to deliver economically, socially and environmentally sustainable forest and fire management across the region's natural and built landscapes, in a climate with more extreme weather events?



Urban Sustainability

How can our understanding of cities as human-dominant, complex systems be used to turn them into powerhouses of technological, social and cultural innovation that are liveable, resilient and sustainable? What are the prerequisite mechanisms and pathways to achieve this?

AREAS OF ACTIVITY

The School is committed to excellence in three vital areas of activity: research, education and engagement.

The overarching outcome we seek from all these activities is to create a positive social and environmental impact (Fig 1). Our strategy is to seek wherever possible to link our activity across these three areas. Therefore we teach what we research and vice versa, and we engage to advance research impact and improve our education. We educate our students in a way that leads to greater social engagement, and so on.

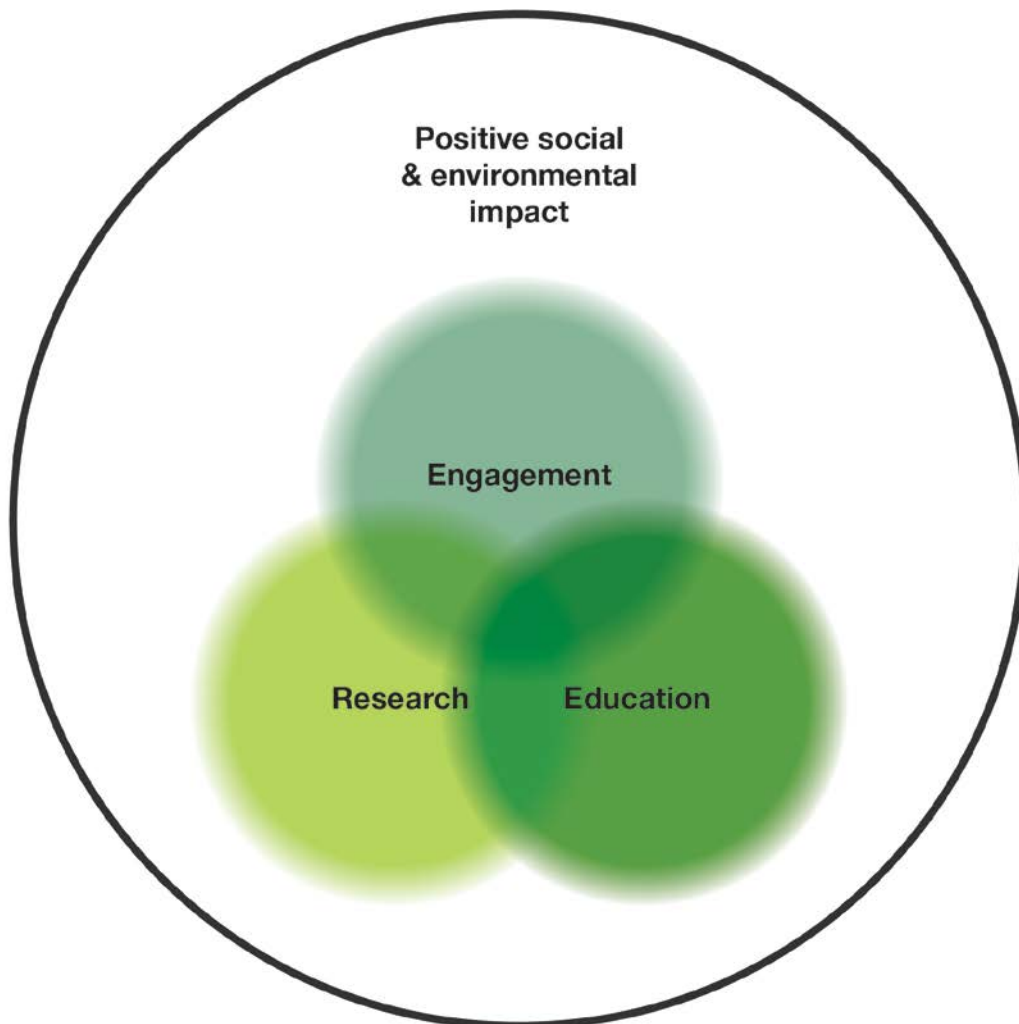


Figure 1: The School is active in three interlinked areas, all with the intent to create a positive social and environmental impact

The overlapping activities with fuzzy boundaries reflect that we do not silo these activities but seek to interlink them. Our most integrated activities, at the overlap of the three areas, are transdisciplinary in nature, where research education and engagement occur simultaneously and School staff and students work side by side with non-academic collaborators.

Across each of the three areas of activity we have identified strategic goals, each matched with priority actions.

Research

Our Goal is to build Australia's capacity to tackle wicked environmental problems of national and international significance, and to foster collaborative research links throughout the ANU that reinforce its status as a place for excellence in inter-disciplinary research.

Priority action

Establish the Institute for Water Futures and foster its development towards becoming an international authority on sustainable water management.

Priority action

Make significant contributions through collaborative learning with Indigenous Peoples that improves the well-being of people and caring for country.

Priority action

Use our excellence in long-term landscape-scale ecological research and monitoring as the foundation for improved practice and policy for conservation of biodiversity and natural assets across landscapes of people and nature.

Priority action

Partner with other schools to develop joint appointments and research collaborations on issues of national and international importance.

Education

Our Goal is to train work-ready graduates with adaptable lifelong skills who are outward-looking, resilient and able to accommodate complexity with disciplinary depth and multi-disciplinary breadth. Our graduates will have cross-cultural intelligence for collaboration and professional integrity.

Priority action

Develop distinctive postgraduate and undergraduate programs that build on research excellence within the School and across the ANU, that are accessible and integrate student diversity in order to produce graduates who are contemporarily relevant and future leaders.

Priority action

Continually improve our curriculum to ensure courses are contemporary, adaptive and maximise research led teaching that builds on our strengths.

Priority action

Continually improve our curriculum to ensure we attract students from a wide range of programs across the ANU to embed sustainability knowledge and practice in other disciplines.



Engagement

Our Goal is to support our staff and students in building constructive collaboration with partners outside of academic circles (e.g. government, civil society, NGOs) to enhance the development and application of knowledge for sustainability.

Priority action

Engage non-academic partners in the establishment and implementation of research (knowledge co-creation) to foster the development of practical solutions that are applied in society. This should include partners who do not traditionally see environmental academics as allies.

Priority action

Integrate non-academic partners into our teaching to increase our student's understanding of their community and make practical contributions for a better society.

Priority action

Contribute to significant national and international initiatives that create better outcomes from research, support policy processes and raise sustainability standards globally.



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