

Australia launches 'Green Army' for environment

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File photo of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney, Australia

Australia on Saturday launched its 'Green Army' which plans to recruit up to 15,000 young people for projects to conserve and rehabilitate the environment—the biggest land care mobilisation in the nation's history.

Under the scheme, teams of [young people](#) will do work such as planting trees, restoring koala habitats, cleaning up creeks and rivers, conserving

cultural heritage sites and monitoring threatened species.

"The Green Army is on the march from today," Prime Minister Tony Abbott told reporters at a site in Sydney which will be revitalised through the initiative.

"It's the largest environmental workforce Australia has ever mobilised for land care."

Abbott, who once described [climate change](#) science as "absolute crap" and whose government recently abolished a carbon tax aimed at reducing greenhouse emissions, said the Green Army would make a practical difference.

"I regard myself as a conservationist—always have, always will," he said. "There can be no more practical conservation measure than this Green Army work here and, increasingly, right around our country."

Abbott urged young people between 17 and 24 with a passion for the environment to sign on to the scheme under which they will spend six months on a project and be paid a wage similar to that of a traineeship of about Aus\$10-\$16 (US\$9.30-\$14.90) an hour.

Environmental groups have been critical of Abbott's government which last month gave the environmental go ahead for a massive coal mine in central Queensland.

In June, conservationists hailed a UNESCO decision to reject an Australian government bid to revoke World Heritage status for parts of the Tasmanian Wilderness.

The UN's cultural body has also said Australia's Great Barrier Reef could be put on a list of endangered World Heritage Sites if more is not

done to protect it.

The reef is under growing pressure not just from climate change and the destructive coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish, but agricultural runoff and rampant coastal development linked to mining.

Environment Minister Greg Hunt said the Green Army scheme would start with 196 projects but the government hopes that there will be 1,500 projects around the country over the next three years.

"It's about projects around Australia... which will help improve river banks, revegetate, encourage threatened species' recovery, shore up sand dunes, be engaged in the health and rehabilitation of both urban and rural landscapes," he said.

"Secondly, it's about ensuring that young people have training and work skills and opportunity."

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