

La Niña provides a boost for Australia's environment, but report card still mixed

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Credit: The Australian National University

Last year was a "bumper" one for Australia's environment on the back of significant rainfall, but climate change, habitat destruction and invasive species remain ongoing threats, according to the latest edition of

Australia's Environment Report.

Led by Professor Albert Van Dijk from The Australian National University (ANU), the [annual report](#) analyzes vast amounts of satellite and field data to calculate 15 environmental indicators.

They are summarized into score cards for all Australian regions.

For 2022, the national score was 8.7 out of 10—the highest since 2011—due to improvements in [water availability](#), vegetation growth and [soil conditions](#).

"Overall, it appears the nation's environmental conditions made a comeback in 2022," Professor Van Dijk said.

While flooding claimed lives and destroyed homes in parts of the country in 2022, much of the flora and fauna that depend on the rains flourished.

In particular, New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory achieved their highest state-level scores this century.

"It was a great year for our wetlands, the best in decades. It was also a bumper year for many farmers, with growth in dryland cropping a huge 49% better than the 20-year average," Professor Van Dijk said.

"Australia's environment is in much better shape than it would have been without the last three wetter years."

Despite this, the underlying trend of climate change continues to impact our farming, health and safety, as well as our natural ecosystems and biodiversity, the researchers warn.

"La Niña normally brings cooler conditions, but while the average temperature was the coolest since 2012, it was still quite warm, at 0.5°C above the long-term average," Professor Van Dijk said.

"The ocean around Australia was warmer than ever. So while the environment is in a relatively good place, the impacts of climate change are apparent and will become progressively worse."

It was also another worrying year for our wildlife, with 30 species added to the official Threatened Species List in 2022.

According to Professor Van Dijk, their long-term decline is driven by [invasive species](#), [habitat destruction](#) and, increasingly, the impacts of [climate change](#).

"A lot of these species were heavily impacted by the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires. But amid the gloom, some species proved resilient to fire," he said.

More information: The full report and score cards for individual regions are available online [here](#).

Provided by The Australian National University

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