

Educate and activate your local members of parliament

You can help us protect Australia's WildCountry by educating and activating your local member of parliament. It is vital that your elected representatives are aware of the environment issues that you are passionate and concerned about. They need to know that you want them to support and introduce policies that will protect Australia's WildCountry.

You can do this in a number of ways including; meeting with them, writing to them or calling them. Please let this guide empower you to help us protect our precious environment.

Beginners guide to educating and activating your local members of parliament.

Step 1) Decide which members of parliament (MPs) you want to contact and find their contact details.

Most politicians have specific responsibilities, decision making roles or areas of interests in Government. It is important to know your local MP's role/s in Government as this will help you identify which MP's have a direct role in decision making on issues that concern you. This will also help you tailor your discussion and requests to suit the individual MP's interests.

For example, if your MP is a spokesperson or minister for the environment they make decisions on policies that have a direct impact on the environment. This is the MP you would target to promote new policies that will protect Australia's WildCountry. Ask them not to approve an environmentally destructive activity they may be assessing on behalf of the Commonwealth and State Government.

If the MP is a spokesperson on climate change you may wish to talk to them about the urgent need for policies to halt climate change by reducing our fossil fuel emissions and protecting and restoring Australia's forests and natural ecosystems.

Where possible, establish a relationship with your local, State and Federal MP's and meet with them regularly. If you can not meet with them write personal letters, and it's good to send follow up letters after any meeting you have with them.

Step 2) Decide the issue you want to discuss and what you are asking them to do.

It is important to be clear about the issue you want to discuss with your MP as well as what you are asking them to do as your elected representative.

You may chose to talk to your local member of parliament about supporting polices to protecting Australia's WildCountry including our marine environment, the Kimberley, Great Western Woodlands, Cape York, Queensland's Wild Rivers, Tasmania's Forests, Victoria's Forests, River Red Gums, or to halt climate change.

Once you have decided upon the issue that you will discuss, it is worthwhile to prepare a brief letter for your MP. Preparing a letter is simple, just write down the key things you want to say to them, including facts and information, and clearly outline what you want them to do.

Information about all of our campaigns is available for you to use when preparing briefs or letters to your MP. Click here to find some key facts and information about the issue or campaign that you want to talk to your MP about.

Step 3) Decide how you want to contact your local MP and follow the steps outlined in the guides below to educate and activate them.

Guide to meeting with your local member of parliament

Contact your MPs office by phone or in person to request a meeting with them.

It is likely that you will speak to and make arrangements with the MPs receptionist or advisor.

Introduce yourself and explain that you live in their electorate and would like to discuss the issue/s that you have decided upon, with your local member of parliament.

Your local member is obliged to meet with you so you should be able to make an appointment for a meeting with their receptionist or advisor. Make sure you know a number of dates and times that you could meet with your MP before you contact their office.

Preparation for the meeting with your MP

Wear comfortable and respectable clothing to the meeting.

Try not to wear clothing that attracts attention to it and detracts from your message. You only have a short time with the member so there is no time for distractions.

Take one or two friends or family members to the meeting with you.

Always attend meetings with at least one other and no more than three individuals. Having more than three people meet with a MP can make communication difficult. Having two people present enables you to agree on

what took place; allows one of you to focus on non-verbal communication; gives you each an opportunity to think about what you want to say next and enables one of you to take notes if required.

Prepare a short brief with the key facts and your request.

Remember that you do not need to be an expert to educate and activate your local MP. However, it is always a good idea to do some research and note down some facts to take into your meeting. This helps to guide your discussion; helps keep the information fresh in your mind and will make you feel more comfortable during your discussion.

During the meeting with your local MP

Introduce yourself to your MP and tell them why you wanted to meet with them. Confirm how long the meeting will be so you know how much time you have.

To begin, tell them about the issue that you want to discuss and ask them if they know much about the issue.

If you are talking to them about a specific place or environment that you want the Government to protect ask your MP if they have been there, try to work out whether they share your passion and appreciation for the environment, or if they have had similar experiences to you.

Ideally you want to hear from your MP as often as you speak yourself. Listen carefully to what they say so you understand their position on the issue, how much they already know and take note of any misunderstandings of the issue that you may be able to clarify.

After you have talked about the issue and why it is important to you give them the letter you have prepared for them which includes information about the issue and outlines what you want them to do.

Reiterate what you want them to do and ask them to confirm their understanding of what you have asked, as well as a plan of action.

Finally, ask for a follow up meeting so you can meet again, share more information with them and resolve any misunderstandings that they have about the issue. This is also a good way for you to “check up on them” and see that they have done what they promised they would do.

What can you ask your local member to do?

You can ask you elected member of parliament to do a number of things for you.

You may ask them to:

- Promote and implement a policy to protect the place that is important to you;
- Convince their political party to support your proposed conservation initiative;
- If they are not the minister or politician who will make the final decision about the proposal to protect an important issue, ask them to contact the relevant minister on your behalf and ask them to.

Remember to listen very carefully as to what action/s your member agrees to. Often MPs make statements that sound reasonable but offer very little substance. If this occurs you may want to diplomatically suggest some firmer action on their part.

As soon as the meeting is over, check with your partner that you both agree on what the MP has agreed to do.

Always keep a united front with your partner. Do not give the member the opportunity to see any disagreements you may have.

Seize the opportunity to go lobbying when you have the chance, even if you see your local MP at events or down at the local shops!.

The best way to develop your lobby skills is to go and do it.

Follow up after your meeting

If any key decisions are made, or you feel the need for a formal record, you may wish to follow up with a letter confirming the outcome of your meeting and thanking the member. Always ensure that any promises made during the meeting are followed up as soon as possible.

After your meeting please contact your community campaigner at the Wilderness Society and let us know how things went. It is good to debrief with campaigners so they keep up to date with the progress of the campaign; and so they can give you a heartfelt thank you!