

Call for PhD Candidates

People and Nature

How can we create environmental solutions that work not only for nature, but also for people?

The Centre for Nature Positive Solutions is seeking highly motivated PhD candidates interested in advancing research at the interface of people and nature. Our research explores how human values, behaviours, experiences, knowledge systems, and decision-making processes influence conservation, restoration, and environmental management outcomes.

As a PhD candidate, you will join an interdisciplinary team working across social and environmental sciences to address some of the world's most pressing sustainability challenges. Projects may involve community engagement, Indigenous partnerships, citizen science, environmental psychology, conservation social science, participatory mapping, policy analysis, or mixed-methods research combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Research topics

This is a general call for PhD candidates interested in the human dimensions of environmental management. Projects may explore a range of topics such as those outlined below, but we also welcome related research ideas aligned with this broader theme.

Community Benefits to Wetland Restoration and Nature Finance

Exploring how the social, cultural, recreational, and economic benefits of healthy ecosystems can be quantified to support restoration planning, natural capital accounting, environmental markets, and nature-positive investment.

Community Perceptions and Environmental Decision-Making

Investigating community perceptions, values, trade-offs, barriers, and opportunities associated with conservation, restoration, climate adaptation, and nature-based solutions to support more inclusive, equitable, and socially acceptable environmental planning and policy.

Indigenous Knowledge and Co-Design

Partnering with Traditional Custodians to facilitate knowledge exchange and co-production, integrating Indigenous knowledges, cultural values, and community aspirations into environmental management, restoration, monitoring, and decision-making processes.

Environmental Communication and Behaviour Change

Understanding how interventions such as policy, communication campaigns, and other programs shape environmental behaviours and collective action, and how these approaches can be used to support positive environmental and societal outcomes.

People–Nature Relationships and Wellbeing

Exploring how people experience, value, and connect with nature, and how these relationships influence wellbeing, place attachment, environmental stewardship, and support for conservation and restoration across diverse communities and landscapes.

RMIT's Centre for Nature Positive Solutions

RMIT's Centre for Nature Positive Solutions (CNPS) is a multi-disciplinary team with a proven track record of conducting impactful research that addresses the world's most pressing environmental challenges, including climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. Grounded in cutting-edge science, CNPS focuses on innovative research that transforms the conservation, restoration, and management of ecosystems, ensuring a sustainable future where both people and nature can thrive. CNPS develops solutions that mitigate climate change, protect aquatic biodiversity, foster economic growth, and promote capacity building and community wellbeing.

With a dynamic team of 20+ researchers at RMIT University, we collaborate globally to provide actionable guidance and solutions that empower communities, industries, and governments. Our core team has over 50 years of collective research experience, with expertise in ecology, biogeochemistry, microbiology, environmental economics, remote sensing, social science, mapping, and modelling. CNPS includes internationally recognised researchers with more than 300 peer-reviewed publications.

Supervisors

Dr Maria Palacios is a Senior Research Fellow and Science Communicator at CNPS, whose expertise lies in driving nature-based solutions research (e.g. coastal wetland restoration) that engages industry stakeholders and empowers local communities. Her research explores how to enhance knowledge, shift perceptions, and influence behaviours that support environmental stewardship and effective ecosystem management.

Dr Lily van Eeden is a Senior Lecturer in RMIT University's Department of Applied Chemistry and Environmental Sciences and an interdisciplinary scientist specialising in conservation biology and human behaviour. Her research explores how people interact with nature and how human actions influence environmental outcomes. Drawing on expertise across the natural and social sciences, she develops applied, impact-focused research that supports conservation decision-making and behaviour change across government, industry, and community sectors

Supervisory teams will be assembled based on project needs and may include experts from across RMIT as well as government, industry, NGO, and academic partner institutions.

Location: RMIT University is based in Melbourne, Australia

Competitive RMIT Scholarships

Scholarship Information

Scholarships are required to complete a PhD in Australia. **Competitive RMIT Scholarship** rounds open in June (annually) for domestic and international applicants. Successful candidates may receive a stipend (approx. AUD \$36,245 per year) and tuition fee support for up to 3.5 years, subject to eligibility.

Candidate Skillset

We encourage applications from individuals with strong communication skills, demonstrated capacity for independent research, and a genuine interest in making a real-world impact through applied research.

A strong CV for this competitive scholarship scheme may include:

- A Master's or Honours degree in a similar field.
- First-authored publication(s) in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.
- Good communication skills and demonstrated ability to work independently
- Relevant work experience (e.g., industry, government)

How to apply?

Interested applicants are invited to email Dr Maria Palacios (maria.palacios@rmit.edu.au), if they meet the following [PhD eligibility criteria](#).

Please include:

- A short cover letter (max 1-page) outlining your research interests and experience
- A detailed CV with contact details for two academic referees
- Academic transcript(s)
- IELTS/TOEFL/PTE score ([if applicable](#))

Please contact Dr Maria Palacios (maria.palacios@rmit.edu.au) for any enquiries.

Application Deadline

Please submit your expression of interest (EOI) directly to the supervisory team by:

- **31 July 2026 (International applicants)**
- **31 August 2026 (Domestic applicants)**

Applications will be assessed on a rolling basis. Candidates who are shortlisted and endorsed by the supervisory team will be invited to submit a formal application through RMIT University according to the following deadlines:

Applicant type	RMIT EOI Deadline	RMIT Full Application
International Students	30 August 2026	30 September 30, 2026
Domestic Students	30 September 2026	30 October 30 2026