

NATIONAL PARKS



Maintaining the Values of
Australia's National Reserve
System of Protected Areas



National Parks Australia Council

**NATURE
FOR LIFE**



NATIONAL PARKS

A Matter of National Significance

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Research papers of the National Parks Australia Council

The National Parks Australia Council presents a series of five research papers to influence public debate and government decision making concerning the enhancement and management of Australia's terrestrial and marine estate.

- Maintaining the Values of Australia's National Reserve System of Protected Areas
- Completing Australia's National Reserve System of Protected Areas
- Enhancing Landscape Connectivity
- National Parks - a Matter of National Environmental Significance
- Australia's Marine Protected Areas

The National Parks Australia Council has a mission to protect, promote and extend national parks systems within Australia. NPAC was formed in 1975. We are a national body that coordinates and represents the views of a range of State and Territory non-government organisations concerned with protecting the natural environment and furthering national parks. NPAC provides a forum for regular communication between state and territory national parks associations and related organisations to act as a united voice supporting conservation of the National Reserve System across Australia.

To learn more about NPAC visit www.npac.org.au

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Executive summary

The National Reserve System is the primary mechanism to conserve and prevent its decline as well as its associated ecosystem service and cultural values. However, the establishment of a protected area network on the ground is not enough to protect these values: the National Reserve System by itself needs to be effectively and equitably managed.

Current management of the National Reserve System and its evaluation is inconsistent and hasn't incorporated adaptive management practices into the system. As a result, we can't assess whether the values these areas were protected for in the first place are being adequately conserved and we are not able to adjust management practices according to knowledge regarding the efficacy of existing management practices for protecting the very values we are trying to conserve. This is a particularly important consideration in this era of changing climate that will impact on biodiversity in ways we cannot predict but must be able to respond to effectively.

These deficiencies are one of the priority actions recognised in Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System is the development of a nationally agreed management framework and standards to provide for consistent management planning for the National Reserve System. In relation to management, priority actions in this key strategy document include:

- Development of a nationally agreed management framework and standards to provide for consistent management planning for all National Reserve System protected areas.

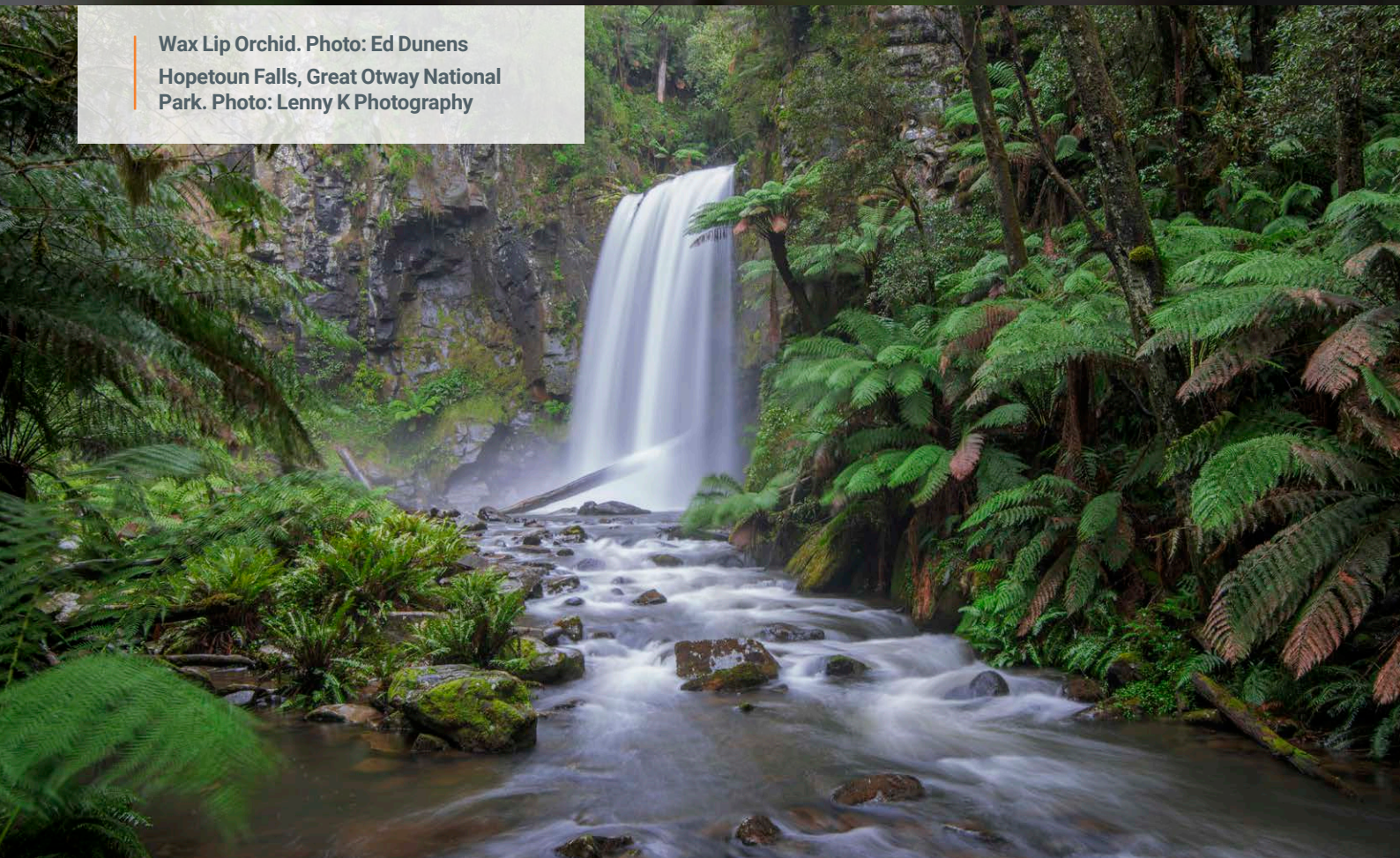
- Application of adaptive management strategies that incorporate lessons learnt into ongoing management to ensure flexible and effective responses to emerging threats.
- Development and application of a National Management Effectiveness Framework to evaluate the management of protected areas of all types consistently with the goals of the National Reserve System.
- The stimulation of funding from a variety of sources and use other incentives to enhance protected area management capacity to meet National Reserve System standards.

Although the development of a nationally agreed management framework and standards to provide for consistent management planning for all National Reserve System protected areas etc is a 'priority action', little progress has been made and management of the National Reserve System continues to be disparate and seriously under-resourced: these 'priority actions' remain entrenched in policy rhetoric.

The Australian Government has a pivotal role in progressing this. Importantly, the government can provide national leadership and can coordinate a national approach to developing an efficient system of, and funding for, the management of the protected area estate, which is a significantly better option than the scattered approach that is currently in place.



Wax Lip Orchid. Photo: Ed Dunens
Hopetoun Falls, Great Otway National
Park. Photo: Lenny K Photography



Ensure the Conservation Values of the National Reserve System are Retained

Recommendation 1

Develop and implement National Reserve System conservation management standards that aim to ensure that all protected areas, such as national parks, retain the values that led to their gazettal, particularly in the face of climate change and other threats.

Background

The establishment and management of the National Reserve System is the primary mechanism to conserve and prevent its decline as well as its associated ecosystem service and cultural values.¹

Australia's National Reserve System comprises over 10,000 protected areas covering almost 18% of Australia's landmass. Every protected area has been allocated an International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected area category, for which the protected area needs to be managed for (see Appendix 1). The IUCN has also developed guidelines for appropriate management

objectives under each category. Table 1 provides information on the number and contribution (area) of each IUCN category to the National Reserve System.

Approximately 48% of the terrestrial protected area estate is publicly owned and managed by the Commonwealth, state or territory governments.

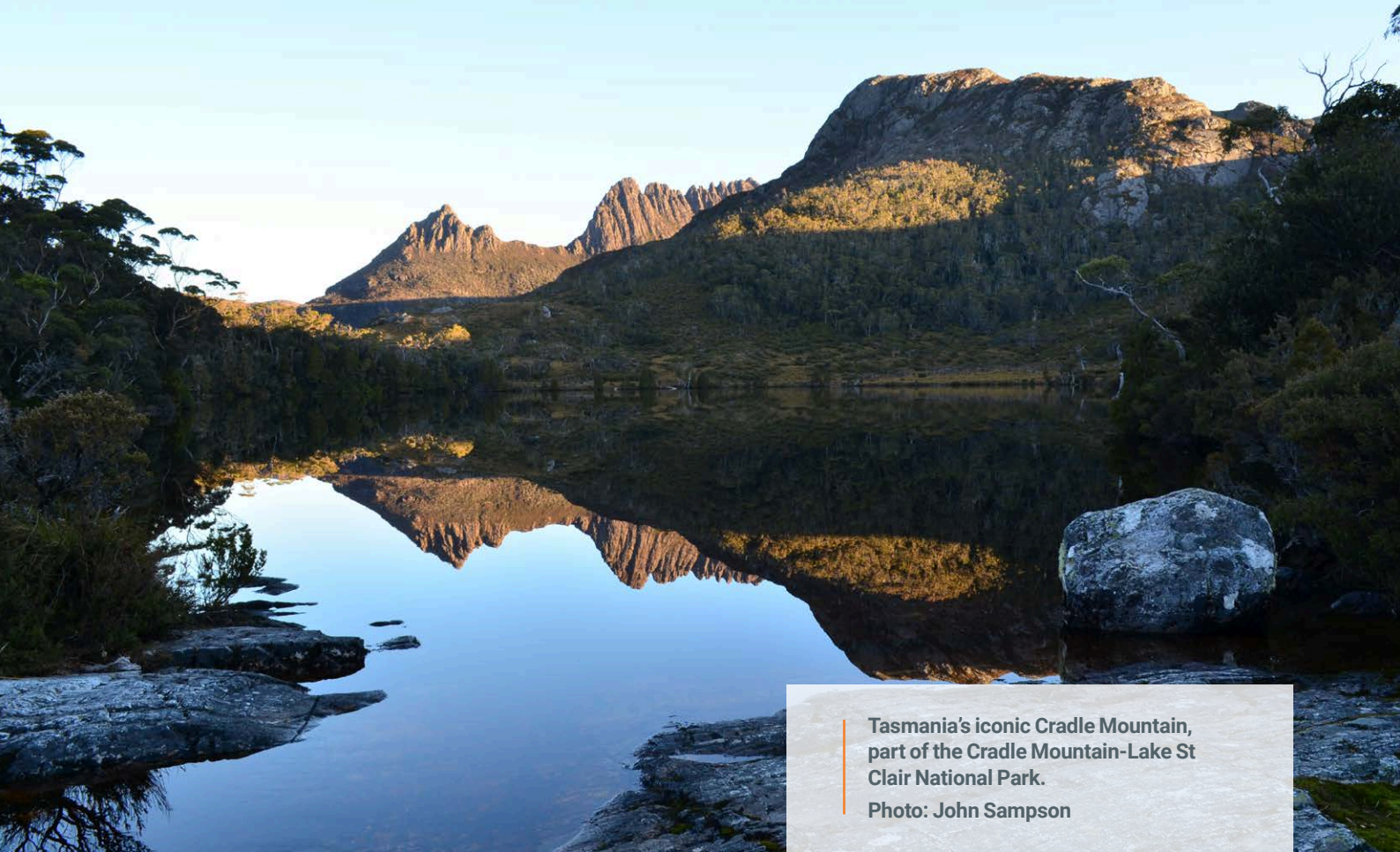
The remainder includes Indigenous Protected Areas (40%) that are managed by indigenous communities, jointly governed estate (7%) and private organisations (~ 5%).

With regard to responsibility for management, protected areas fall into two categories: those acquired with federal government financial

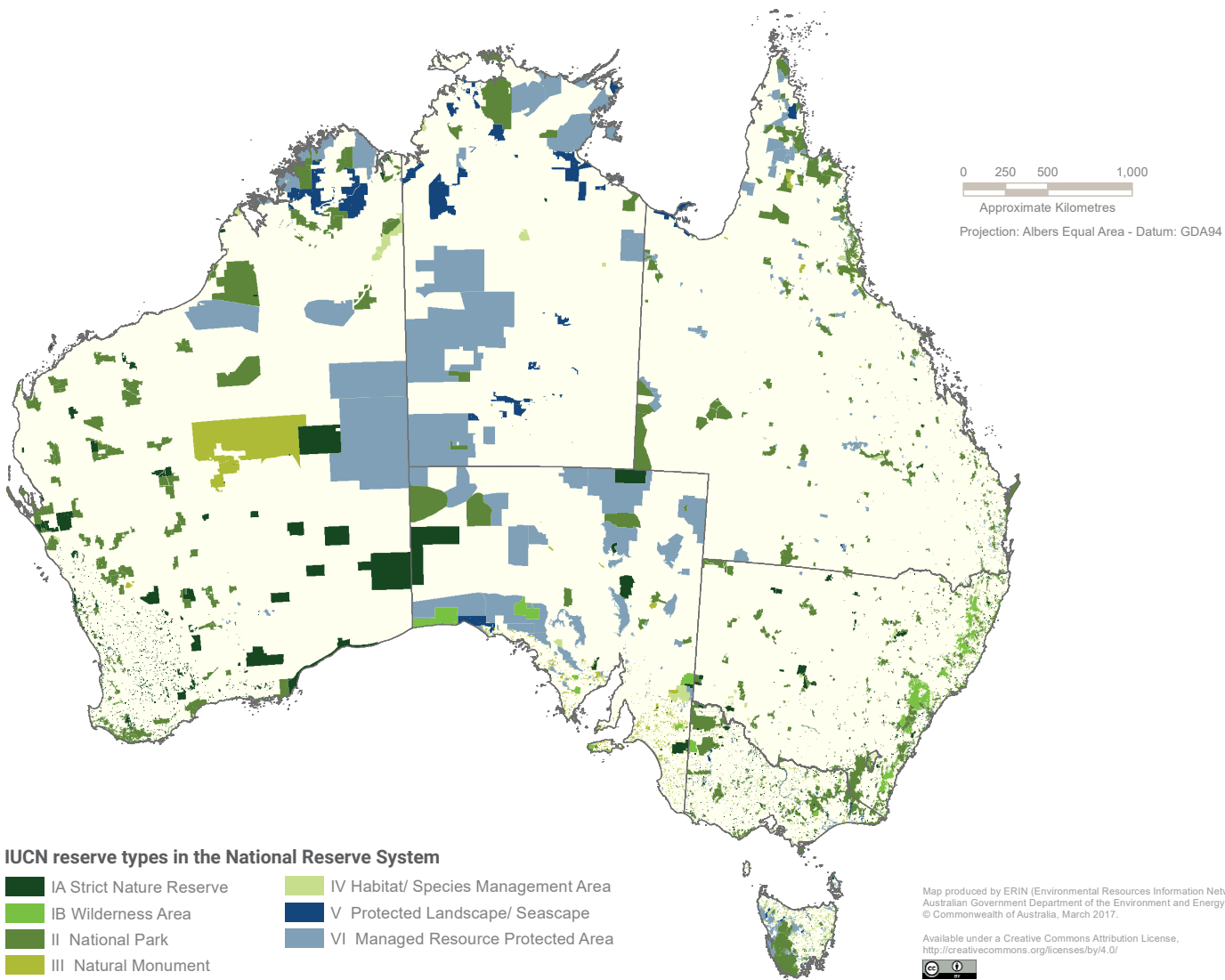
Protected area management effectiveness is now a key element of a broader examination of progress towards the Convention on Biological Diversity strategic plan and its constituent Aichi Targets – especially Target 11, which addresses the contribution that an effectively and equitably managed protected area system can make to the overall goals of the convention:

By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.

- Convention on Biological Diversity 2011



Tasmania's iconic Cradle Mountain, part of the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park.
 Photo: John Sampson





The remote Purnululu National Park in the Bungle Bungle Range is one of the most striking geological features in Western Australia.

Photo: Broome & The Kimberley Holidays

contributions; and those obtained by each state/territory without federal government financial assistance. This is an important distinction as it influences the development of management plans: protected areas financed by the Australian Government, including protected areas on Commonwealth land, the development of a Plan of Management is necessary and guidelines have been developed that include some of the main elements of protected area management, including adaptive management, management effectiveness, and monitoring and evaluation (based on IUCN international guidelines for management of protected areas).

For the rest, that protect areas not financed by the Australian Government, which includes the vast majority of protected areas in Australia, the relevant state/territory agency is responsible for developing and funding the delivery of management plans, which may or may not align with the IUCN's international guidelines for management of protected areas.

Although some Australian jurisdictions are proceeding to implement management effectiveness regimes and cyclic State of the Parks reporting, many do not have such programs in place and are therefore unable to demonstrate that the conservation values that led to their gazettal are being maintained (or ideally enhanced) through

ongoing management efforts. Arguably, requiring such a framework should be equitably and consistently applied across the National Reserve System.

Standardisation of management of the National Reserve System, and all this entails, has been repeatedly recommended and identified as a priority action by independent experts (e.g. Gilligan, 2006³; Hawke, 2009⁴) and by whole-of-government bodies, including various task groups established under the Natural Resource Managerial Council, such as the National Biodiversity Strategy Review Task Group in relation to the conservation of biodiversity and most significantly, the National Reserve System Task Group that developed the Strategy for the National Reserve System (the Strategy).^{5,6}

The purpose of the Strategy for the National Reserve System is to provide national guidance for improved crossjurisdictional coordination and supports collaborative action by protected area managers and key stakeholders to enhance the National Reserve System, and identifies a number of priority actions to achieve the national targets for a National Reserve System.

In relation to management, priority actions include (but is not limited to):

- Development of a nationally agreed management



IUCN CATEGORY	NAME	NUMBER	Area (ha)	Contribution to National Reserve System (%)
IA	Strict Nature Reserve	2,413	16,137,987	11.74
IB	Wilderness Area	64	5,173,203	3.76
II	National Park	1,086	38,053,578	27.67
III	Natural Monument	2,414	8,060,172	5.86
IV	Habitat/Species Management Area	2,783	3,107,346	2.26
I-IV Total		8,760	70,532,285	51.29
V	Protected Landscape/Seascape	359	7,921,641	5.76
VI	Managed Resource Protected Area	1,213	59,047,221	42.94
V-VI Total		1,572	66,968,862	48.70
NA		7	404	0.00
Total		10,339	137,501,551	100.00

Table 1. Terrestrial Protected Areas in Australia by IUCN Management Category.²

Line here for information source if needed

framework and standards to provide for consistent management planning for all National Reserve System protected areas.

- Application of adaptive management strategies that incorporate lessons learnt into ongoing management to ensure flexible and effective responses to emerging threats.
- Development and application of a National Management Effectiveness Framework to evaluate the management of protected areas of all types consistently with the goals of the National Reserve System.
- The stimulation of funding from a variety of sources and use other incentives to enhance

protected area management capacity to meet National Reserve System standards.

Despite recommendations by experts and acknowledgement by the Australian government time and time again, of the importance of standardising management of the National Reserve System, including adoption of the principles of adaptive management, monitoring and evaluation, and secure and appropriate levels of funding etc., little has been done to progress this: these 'priority actions' remain entrenched in 'policy rhetoric'.

The issues

1. Management

Adaptive management

Adaptive management is crucial for addressing the implications of climate change and other current and emerging threats to the long-term viability of protected areas.

Under a scenario of uncertainty driven by climate change, the effectiveness of current management regimes will become increasingly uncertain as biodiversity and the nature of threats shift in protected areas: management strategies that address current threats may become less applicable and will need to be modified, or changed completely in the future.

Increasing uncertainty indicates the need to apply adaptive management frameworks to the implementation of management strategies, which deal explicitly with uncertainty. Park managers will, however, require the legislative and institutional backing to adopt adaptive management approaches.

Key points

- Adaptive management needs to be the basis of the management framework of all protected areas and barriers to the effective implementation

of adaptive management frameworks across the reserve system should be identified.

- Any new standardised adaptive management framework must be flexible enough to allow land managers to focus on the primary actions required to conserve biodiversity in that particular area and that may not exist elsewhere, such as different species of feral animals or weeds.

Inconsistent Management Regimes

Despite being a 'priority action', the development of a nationally agreed management framework and standards to provide for consistent management planning for all National Reserve System protected areas, little progress has been made and management of the National Reserve System continues to be disparate and seriously under-resourced.

These inconsistent management regimes across Australia do not provide systematic protection, systematic management nor allow for the systematic reporting of our national biodiversity. We cannot gauge the success of the National Reserve System for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and other natural values and as such compromises Australia's ability to accurately report (e.g. in accordance with

The National Reserve System forms a national protected area network, and must be managed as such. A secure and well-managed National Reserve System is essential for conserving Australia's biodiversity values. It is important to have nationally consistent approaches to adaptive management and the evaluation of management effectiveness to inform the maintenance of biodiversity assets, enhance transparency and provide a basis for good governance, accountability and provide the foundation for building ecosystem resilience, buffering natural systems against pressures and threats, including climate change and protect the overall integrity of the National Reserve System.



| Humpback Whales migrate north along Australia's eastern coastline from April to November. Photo: Michael Dawes | Flickr | CC BY-NC 2.0



| Woodland and forest understorey plants provide critical habitat for many wildlife and insect species.
Photo: Alison Hetherington

Article 26 of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Aichi Biodiversity Targets) on the success of measures it has taken to implement the convention and the effectiveness of these measures.

Key points

- Establishment and implementation of national standards for protected area management has not been achieved and remains a significant challenge. This is a high priority; much needs to be done to turn these policy intentions into sound management on the ground.
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Monitoring and Evaluation

There is a lack of effective and systematic monitoring systems for evaluation of management of protected areas, and currently some state/territory jurisdictions do not have in place complete state/territory-wide systems for monitoring and reporting on all aspects of protected area management.

As such, it is not possible to gauge the effectiveness of management strategies for retaining the biodiversity and other values of the protected area estate: it is impossible to determine if the conservation values that these areas are prized for are being adequately protected.

Monitoring should demonstrate that there is a direct benefit to the conservation of nature on the property and that there is no loss of biodiversity values, or where change is unavoidable (e.g. due

to a changing environment), this is detectable and attributable to circumstances beyond the control of land managers, and plans can be adapted accordingly and alternative measures to ensure the conservation of biota affected by these changes can be taken.

Key points

- An effective and nationally consistent monitoring and evaluation programme that is consistent with the principles of adaptive management should be established to assess the on-going health and vitality of ecosystems in the National Reserve System.⁷
 - Assessments of management performance should be undertaken and reported at regular intervals (e.g. rolling audits of National Reserve System reserves with at least 30% of the reserves audited every 5 years), and should be centralised and accessible to the public and protected area managers, perhaps as an extension to the CAPAD.
-

Allowable Uses

What is or isn't allowed in protected areas differs across jurisdictions in accordance with the various relevant federal, state or territory legislation.

However, standardisation of management of the National Reserve System necessarily includes unified agreement and adoption of activities,

EXAMPLE

The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service has developed an adaptive management approach that is highly regarded because it requires evaluation of management effectiveness – the IUCN best practice framework for management only checks whether prescribed actions have been implemented, not whether they have been effective in achieving their stated objective.

or uses, that are and are not permissible within each protected area in accordance with its IUCN category. Noting that in some instances when protected areas are established, some activities cannot be precluded from the protected area because of pre-existing rights like mining, grazing, beekeeping and traditional use - i.e. the initial proclamation of the reserve was dependent on allowing them to continue. This is particularly important as national parks and other protected areas, such as Wilderness Areas, that exist to protect Australia's natural heritage, are increasingly under pressure to cater for self-interest groups and enterprises seeking to undertake a plethora of potentially harmful, 'high impact' activities. Single-issue political parties, some recreationalists and commercial interests are mounting campaigns that advocate allowing activities that are completely at odds with the conservation of natural heritage values.

Governments are responding to this pressure by attempting to lower protection standards across the protected area estate to accommodate these demands (e.g. 4WD, horse riding, grazing, hunting/fishing, tourism development, mining, logging, recreational infrastructure).

The Australian Government's willingness to bend to the will of industry has been demonstrated recently with regard to granting approval to activities that would significantly compromise the values of Australia's unique and outstanding natural heritage. For example:

- The draft 2014 management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area attracted criticism from the World Heritage Committee at its 2015 meeting for changes that 'directly threaten the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property'.
- The 2013 approval for a plan for a huge coal port development, that would cause irreversible damage to the Great Barrier Reef marine park area – another World Heritage Area – generated a great

deal of controversy and condemnation from around the world, eventually forcing the government to consider alternative options for disposal of the dredge spoil.

These poor decisions have resulted in increased international scrutiny and criticism being directed at Australia with regard to the management and 'allowable use' of protected areas, and have been internationally embarrassing for the federal government.

In addition, consideration needs to be given to potentially harmful activities undertaken in proximity to protected areas that may compromise the natural heritage values within those areas. For example, mining near the boundaries of national parks and nature reserves may degrade their conservation values in many ways, such as disrupting or polluting rivers or groundwater within a park.

Key points

- Allowable uses within each IUCN category of protected area should be standardised nationally, and in accordance with internationally accepted guidelines.
 - All allowable uses must support the primary nature conservation objective and should be consistent and secure from external influences. Every effort should be made to reduce and remove uses that are counter to the nature conservation objective, and these need to be specified.
 - All activities proposed in proximity to protected areas (particularly those within IUCN categories Ia, Ib, II and IV) that may have potentially negative impacts (e.g. mining) should be assessed to ensure protected areas remain unharmed.
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2. Tenure

The purpose of establishing national standards is to create a uniform framework that provides for consistent management for all protected areas within the National Reserve System across Australia: the standard of protection for areas within the National Reserve System should not be contingent upon the nature of land ownership. It is appropriate that the same management standards apply to protected areas under both private and public ownership.

All efforts should be made to ensure that the same management standards apply to protected areas on both public and private land – without jeopardising the future of conservation on private land. For example, private landholders, including indigenous landmanagers, may need to be supported (e.g. access to expertise) and compensated for any increased management requirements that may occur in order to implement best practice and consistent management of areas protected for their natural heritage values.

Key points

- Standardised management of the protected area network must apply irrespective of tenure.
- Any new standardised adaptive management framework must adequately accommodate for the interests and needs of private landholders.

3. Funding and Delivery

Governments across all jurisdictions do not invest enough in protecting the environment and appears to be philosophically inclined towards privatisation and outsourcing in preference to providing adequate resourcing to the public sector in order for it to fulfil its statutory responsibilities. This is particularly apparent in protected area management.

Securing sufficient funds for effective management is vital if protected areas are to continue to provide benefits and fulfil their role in biodiversity conservation. However, financial resources are often a constraining factor in the effective management of protected areas, falling well short of needs globally and nationally.^{8,9}

Responsibility for developing and implementing plans on public lands is generally though relevant Park, Regional or District Managers. However, the link between preparing a plan and implementing it is not usually explicit.⁷ The findings of the ANZECC report (2000) found that there were at most only tenuous links between management plans and priority setting and budget allocation. Consequently, there is no guarantee that identified management actions will have funding allocated

TASMANIA

“Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service has been subject of ongoing budget cuts and redundancy programs to the point where it is has barely enough staff to undertake essential day-to-day activities; it no longer has the resources to implement a program of quality management planning.”

– Nicholas Sawyer, retired TPWS employee

for delivery. This, and the fact that increasingly limited resources are available for the delivery of management plans (e.g. insufficient staff), undermines any chance of effective management of the National Reserve System.

Key points

- There needs to be dramatic and sustained investment in the National Reserve System to enable effective management.
 - New and innovative approaches are needed to secure funding for management.
 - Integration of management plans with policy and strategy frameworks and budgeting etc... is essential if management plans are to achieve their objectives.
-

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

“The valuable work undertaken by our park rangers and supporting staff has been steadily eroded over recent years. From hundreds of rangers there are now fewer than 100 remaining to cover the oversight, management and monitoring of all parks in the state, and is grossly inadequate.”¹⁰

Role of the Australian Government

One of the priority actions recognised in Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System is the development of a nationally agreed management framework and standards to provide for consistent management planning for all National Reserve System protected areas.¹¹ The Australian Government needs to make this a priority and take steps to make this happen.

A nationally coordinated approach to developing an efficient system of management of the protected area estate will be a better option than the scattered approach that is currently in place.¹²

1. Leadership

The Australian Government has:

- The power and responsibility to ensure that management plans that reliably provide information on the status of our national parks and other protected areas are implemented and are adequately resourced across jurisdictions: to effectively drive the reform of management of Australia's National Reserve System.
- A critical role to play in the development and promotion of best practice management approaches for protected areas through cooperative arrangements among the jurisdictions and across all land tenures.
- A significant role to play in developing a national regulatory framework for the management of protected areas that supports a broader landscape or bioregional approach to biodiversity conservation as recommended in the recent review of the EPBC Act and is in line with the ecosystem approach promoted under the Convention on Biological Diversity.⁷

Role of the Department of the Environment

A leadership role in the development of such an

initiative is best placed with the federal Department of Environment.

- The Department could form the hub of a co-ordinated, multi-institutional approach to addressing critical issues in reserve management.
- As an incentive to encourage land managers to achieve the best possible outcomes for biodiversity on their land, the Australian Government could initiate an award programme, such as an Excellence in Innovative Protected Area Management Awards, that recognises and rewards land managers for outstanding achievements with regard to the protection of biodiversity, or other natural values, on their land.
- A reporting system, such as State of the Parks report, which identifies programs to monitor management effectiveness and progress towards achieving protected area objectives, should be in place and publically accessible via the federal Department of Environment's websites, ideally as an addition to CAPAD.

2. Funding

Sustainable, long-term funding is needed for the management of the National Reserve System.

- The means to ensure this needs to be explored and developed, including increasing the incentives and benefits to private and public landowners managing protected areas within the National Reserve System in accordance with the requirements of a national management framework and standards.
- State and territory governments are bound in perpetuity to maintain properties purchased with federal financial contributions, and many require a high level of management resources. Consideration should be given to provision of federal funds to the development and implementation of management plans for these properties.



Norfolk Island is home to a plethora of species found nowhere else in the world, including the Norfolk Island Pine and critically endangered Norfolk Island Green Parrot. Photos: Cathryn O'Donnell; Luis Ortiz-Catedral (green parrot).

- Federal and state and territory governments could agree to develop regional level funding targets for the management of protected areas and identify opportunities for, and barriers to, adaptive management.

3. Role of Other Land Managers

It is imperative that all levels of government and other land managers as appropriate (e.g. indigenous land managers) cooperate and agree to establish standards of best practice management for protected areas; agree to fair and transparent management funding; and incorporate capacity building requirements in all protected area programmes.

BEST PRACTICE STANDARDS

The intent is not for the Australian Government to assume the role of management of protected areas within the National Reserve System, but for it to ensure that management of Australia's protected area estate is undertaken in accordance with best practice standards.

Endnotes

- 1 Evans et al. (2011)
- 1 Biodiversity Decline Working Group (2005). A national approach to biodiversity decline. Report to the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. Online: <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/publications/national-approach-biodiversity-decline-australia>
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- 3 Gilligan, B (2006). The National Reserve System Programme 2006 Evaluation. Report prepared for the Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra, p81.
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- 8 Financing Protected Areas Task Force of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of IUCN, in collaboration with the Economics Unit of IUCN (2000). Financing Protected Areas. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.
- 9 Funding for public land management comes primarily from State/Territory Governments with Commonwealth funding for some reserves through competitive grants. Private land is managed largely through corporate partnerships, donations and grants from State and Commonwealth.
- 10 Conservation Council SA, The Wilderness Society and Nature Conservation Society SA (2014). 2014 State Election Agenda for SA Background Document.
- 11 Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030, priority action 4.1, p 49.
- 12 The Australian Government is currently intending to standardise the process and criteria for listing threatened species etc... across the nation. A similar process could be given to standardising management of the National Reserve System.

References

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National Parks Australia Council

The National Parks Australia Council (NPAC) is a national body that represents state and territory organisations concerned with protecting the natural environment and furthering national parks. It has six member organisations, representing all states and territories except Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Victorian National Parks Association

The Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) shares a vision of Victoria as a place with a diverse, secure and healthy natural environment cared for and appreciated by all.

Website: www.vnpa.org.au

Email: vnpa@vnpa.org.au | Phone: (03) 9347 518



National Parks Association of NSW

The mission of the National Parks Association of NSW (NPA NSW) is to protect, connect and restore the integrity and diversity of natural systems in NSW and beyond, through national parks, marine sanctuaries and other means.

Website: www.npansw.org.au

Email: npansw@npansw.org.au | Phone: (02) 9299 0000



National Parks Association of Queensland

The National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) is dedicated to promoting the preservation, expansion, good management and presentation of National Parks in Queensland.

Website: www.npaq.org.au

Email: npaq@npaq.org.au | Phone: (07) 3367 0878



National Parks Association of the ACT

The National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) was established in 1960. The Association works to promote national parks and the protection of fauna and flora, scenery, natural features and cultural heritage.

Website: www.npaact.org.au

Email: admin@npaact.org.au | Phone: (02) 6229 3201





| Royal National Park, Australia's first national park. Photo: M Eckert | Flickr | CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Tasmanian National Parks Association

The mission of the Tasmanian National Parks Association (TNPA) is to preserve the integrity of, and expand, the Tasmanian national park system, and to ensure appropriate management of their natural and cultural values.

Website: www.tnpa.org.au

Email: info@tnpa.org.au | Phone: 0427 854 684

Tasmanian
National Parks
Association



Nature Conservation Society of SA

The primary objective of the Nature Conservation Society of South Australia (NCSSA) is to foster the conservation of the State's wildlife and natural habitats.

Website: www.ncssa.asn.au

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National Parks Australia Council



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Australian Capital Territory: www.npaact.org.au