

NATIONAL PARKS

Completing Australia's National Reserve System

Summary

- All levels of Australian governments have committed to the establishment of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas that is effectively and equitably managed, well connected and integrated into the wider landscape.
- The National Reserve System (NRS) is the backbone of biodiversity conservation in Australia: comprised of a multi-jurisdictional, multi-tenured mosaic of areas managed for conservation (not exclusively) on public, private and indigenous owned and managed land.
- While the Federal Government has substantially progressed the National Reserve System, funding support in recent years has lagged, and significant strategic expansion is required before it can be considered as even a basic "finished system", i.e. complete and robust.
- Completing the National Reserve System requires protection of: unrepresented bioregions; areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services; landscapes that connect and integrate the system.
- The National Reserve System program assists by collaborating with other governments, community organisations, businesses and individuals to purchase high conservation significant land or protected land through the use of conservation covenants.
- Federal Government leadership can drive investment in the expansion and management of the National Reserve System, encourage opportunities for traditional owners, and align conservation efforts.

Context

The National Reserve System is essential to progressing Australia's commitment to the following targets and goals:

- Convention on Biological Diversity 1992.
- Aichi Targets (especially Target 11).
- Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010.
- 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (especially Goal 15).

With growing evidence that access to the natural environment improves health and wellbeing, prevents disease and helps people recover from illness, the National Reserve System can also progress the Commonwealth Department of Health's vision of "Better health and wellbeing for all Australians, now and for future generations".

Issues

The National Reserve System remains incomplete, lacking comprehensiveness, adequacy, representation and connection as follows:

- A third of bioregions are under-represented including the Brigalow Belt -North and South, Mulga Lands, Channel Country (Queensland & Northern NSW), Riverina (southern NSW) and Pilbara (WA) Southern Volcanic Plains (Vic), Flinders Lofty Block or Narracorte Coastal Plain (SA). The majority of sub-bioregions are also under-represented.
- Many areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services (e.g. Important Bird Areas and Centres of Plant Diversity, refugia, threatened species habitat and critical habitat) have no protection mechanism.
- The existing network lacks connections



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with and integration into the wider landscape necessary for building ecosystem resilience, especially in the face of climate change.

- Much of the existing network is exposed to threatening processes with low protection mechanisms.
- Completion of the National Reserve System will rely increasingly on partnerships between a variety of land managers, including all levels of government, conservation agencies, community groups, the indigenous community and private landholders. Australian Government investment and policy settings have played a leading role in strategic growth of the National Reserve System in Australia. They provide a critical stimulus for non-government investment.
- Australian society is benefiting far greater than its governments' investment in strategic growth and maintenance of the National Reserve System - a fraction of this amount is needed to complete the reserve system.

The National Reserve System has a good scientific knowledge base in *Directions for the NRS Strategy: A partnership approach 2005*.

National leadership and a vision, supported both financially and administratively, is required for Australia to uphold its international reputation as a world leader in protected area establishment and management, and to manage risks compromising the long-term survival of its unique wildlife.

Further reading

See the National Parks Australia Council Briefing Paper **Progressing the National Reserve System**.

Policy recommendation

The Federal Government must allocate adequate resources, including funding of \$660 million over three years, to assist states, territories and community partners in completing strategic acquisition of the National Reserve System.

This includes:

- **Helping state, territories and non-government partners complete the strategic acquisition to the National Reserve System.**
- **Improving the capacity of indigenous people to manage Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), and where strategic to expand the IPA network.**
- **Incentivise, establish and manage private land conservation covenants.**
- **State, territory and local governments, private and Indigenous partners would likewise need to boost financial commitments to both expand and maintain new protected areas to meet the agreed National Reserve System strategic objectives.**

ABOUT US

The National Parks Australia Council (NPAC) has a mission to protect, promote and extend national park 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 acts as a united voice supporting conservation of the National Reserve System across Australia.

Victorian National Parks Association
Visit www.vnpa.org.au

National Parks Association of NSW
Visit www.npansw.org.au

National Parks Association of Queensland
Visit www.npaq.org.au

Nature Conservation Society of South Australia
Visit www.ncssa.asn.au

Tasmanian National Parks Association
Visit www.tnpa.org.au

National Parks Association of the ACT
Visit www.npaact.org.au