

# Chapter 3

## The terrestrial reserve system

### Introduction

3.1 Australia's conservation estate is made up of a complex patchwork of parks and reserves, managed by various Commonwealth, state and territory agencies, under a range of systems. Overlaid on this reserve system are other conservation management frameworks, in particular World Heritage and National Heritage listings, which reflect the fact that different sites have different levels of heritage significance at different geographic scales.

3.2 Australia today has over 600 national parks. Over 28 million hectares of land is designated as national parkland, which accounts for almost four per cent of Australia's land areas. However, an even larger proportion of the conservation estate is in other types of reserves and other land tenures. A further six per cent or more of Australia is protected and includes conservation areas within state forests, nature reserves, indigenous protected areas and conservation reserves. \$87 million has been invested by the Government since 1997, directly increasing the size of the reserve system by 25% over that time.

3.3 This diversity of protected areas is brought together through the National Reserve System (NRS). The NRS is a system of terrestrial protected areas that contribute to the conservation of Australia's biodiversity. It has been collaboratively developed by the state, territory and Australian Governments, non-government organisations and Indigenous landholders.<sup>1</sup>

3.4 During mid-2004 various state and territory nature conservation agencies provided information on terrestrial and marine protected areas in their jurisdiction to the Department of the Environment and Water Resources (DEW). This information was compiled into a database of statutory protected areas called the Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD).

3.5 The CAPAD records information on all protected areas in Australia. The database has been used to produce statistics on protected areas meeting the currently agreed criteria for inclusion in the National Reserve System (NRS). This information is used by the Commonwealth and the states and territories in the monitoring and assessment of the reservation status of land for conservation purposes in Australia.

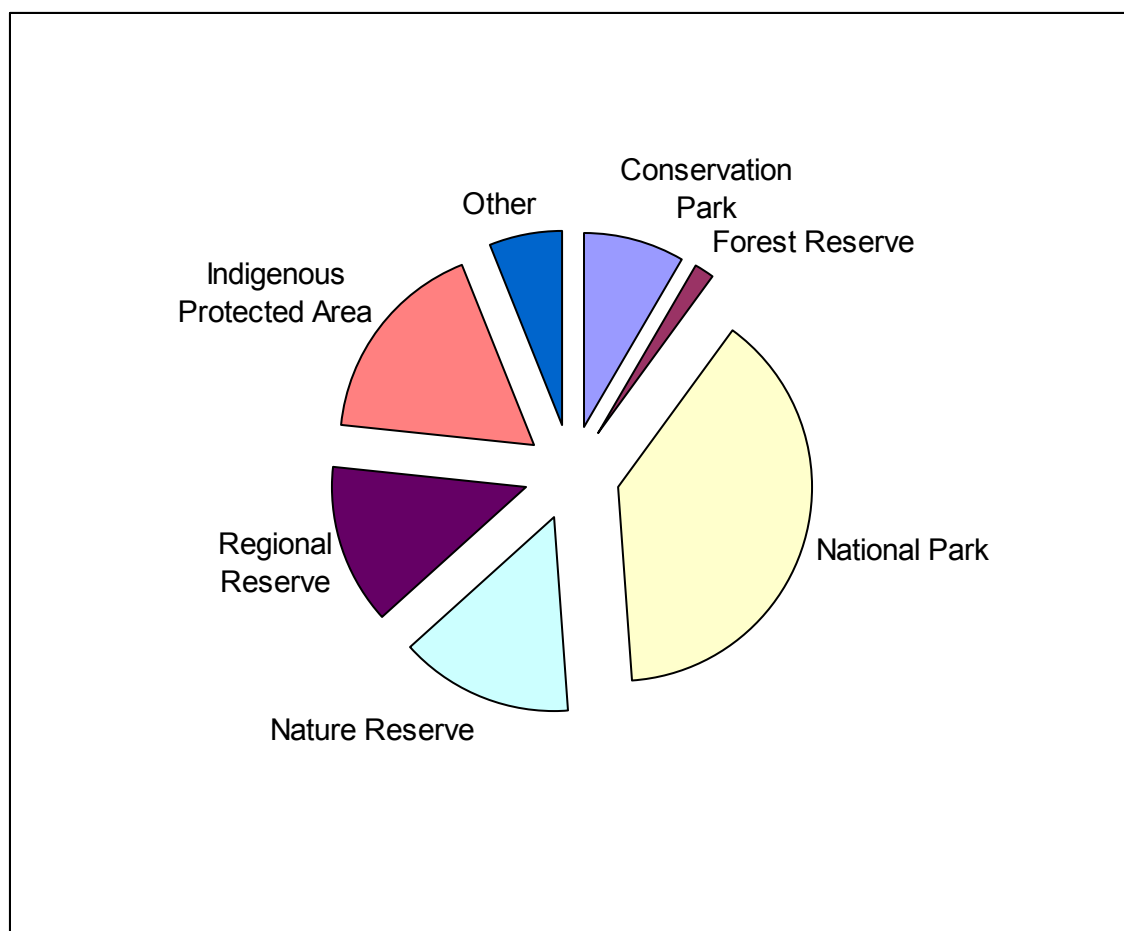
3.6 As of 2004 terrestrial protected areas in Australia totalled over 768 million hectares, accounting for 10.52 per cent of Australia's landmass. There are many

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1 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 13.

different types of protected areas making up this percentage of protected land, and CAPAD provides a list of all terrestrial protected areas in Australia by type, including national parks, historic reserves, conservation reserves, forests reserves, indigenous protected areas, and state parks, just to name a few. (See Appendix 6 for a CAPAD summary of terrestrial protected areas by type.) Figure 3.1 shows the contribution of some of the main categories of reserve to the 80 million hectares of conservation estate recorded in 2004.

**Figure 3.1 Land tenure and the conservation estate**



Source: CAPAD 2004 data.

3.7 The Australian national parks system differs markedly from that of some other countries. In the United States of America (USA) the national parks system is managed by the Federal government, and the states do not have management or legislative control over them as is largely the case in Australia. In addition to managing these parks, the USA's Park Service supports the preservation of natural and historic places and promotes outdoor recreation outside the system through a range of

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grant and technical assistance programs which are available to the state authorities and other parties if they wish to apply for them.<sup>2</sup>

3.8 Australia's system of national parks also contrasts with that of Canada in that, for the Canadian National Parks Act and Regulations to apply, it is a constitutional requirement that national park lands must be federal government property. Within the provinces, where the provincial governments administer most lands, a federal-provincial agreement is usually negotiated whereby the province transfers administration and control of the land to the Canadian federal government for a new national park. Within the Canadian northern territories, it is the practice to seek the concurrence of the territorial government for a new national park through negotiation of a federal-territorial agreement. Where lands are subject to a comprehensive land claim by Aboriginal people, a new park can be established as part of a negotiated claim settlement or a national park reserve can be established pending the resolution of the claim.<sup>3</sup>

3.9 In Australia, the term 'national park' is more of a generic term that can apply equally to parks that are under the control or ownership of the states, territories and/or the Commonwealth. In both the USA and Canada the term usually only applies to those parks managed by Federal government agencies.

### **Commonwealth reserves**

3.10 While over 10 per cent of Australia's land is classified as protected land, much of this land comes under the jurisdiction of the various state and territory governments. The Commonwealth is responsible for a relatively small percentage of these protected areas.

3.11 The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) allows the Governor-General to declare an area of land that is owned by the Commonwealth or held under lease by the Commonwealth, to be a Commonwealth reserve. The Commonwealth must obtain the consent of the state to acquire land for the purpose of declaring it a Commonwealth reserve if the land is dedicated or reserved under state law for purposes related to nature conservation or protecting areas of historical, archaeological or geological importance or significance to Indigenous persons.<sup>4</sup>

3.12 As was explained to the committee during the hearings, the Commonwealth's environment and heritage portfolio is responsible for six Commonwealth national

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2 National Parks Service U.S.A., web site, *The National Park Service - A Brief History*, Bureau Historian 2006, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/hisnps/NPSHistory/briefhistory.htm>, accessed 20 December 2006.

3 Parks Canada, web site, *Negotiating a new parks agreement*, <http://www.parksCanada.ca/>, accessed 20 December 2006.

4 Cape York Land Council, *Submission 117*, p. 3.

parks, 13 marine protected areas, two botanic gardens and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. These properties represent just three per cent of Australia's terrestrial protected area estate in the national reserve system. Of Australia's current marine protected area estate, 98 per cent of the area is being managed by the Commonwealth (see chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the marine reserve system).<sup>5</sup>

3.13 Currently, there are a number of Commonwealth reserves which are declared under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), made up of a combination of National Parks, Botanic Gardens and Marine Protected Areas.<sup>6</sup>

3.14 The Commonwealth National Parks declared under the EPBC Act are:

- Booderee National Park
- Christmas Island National Park and Conservancy
- Kakadu National Park
- Norfolk Island National Park
- Pulu Keeling National Park and Cocos (Keeling) Islands Conservancy
- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.<sup>7</sup>

3.15 With at least 18 percent of Australia's land currently being owned or controlled by Indigenous people,<sup>8</sup> some parks are leased back from their Indigenous traditional land owners by the Commonwealth. In the case of Uluru-Kata Tjuta, Kakadu and Booderee national parks, joint management has involved the transfer of ownership of each of these national parks to Australia's Indigenous people on a lease-back arrangement in exchange for future continuity of national park status of the land and shared responsibility for park management.<sup>9</sup>

### **State and territory reserves**

3.16 While the Commonwealth is responsible for the management of six terrestrial national parks, there are 600 or more national parks that are being managed by various

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5 Mr David Borthwick, Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 84.

6 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Parks and Reserves*, [www.deh.gov.au/parks/index.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/index.html), accessed 20 November 2006.

7 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Commonwealth National Parks, Reserves, and Botanic Gardens*, [www.deh.gov.au/parks/commonwealth/index.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/commonwealth/index.html), accessed 20 November 2006

8 Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, *Submission 167*, p. 1.

9 Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, *Submission 167*, p. 4; Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Parks and Reserves*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/index.html>, accessed 18 December 2006. See chapter 9 for further discussion of Indigenous land ownership and management.

state agencies.<sup>10</sup> Those agencies which are empowered to manage the conservation estate at a state and territory level are:

- Environment ACT
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Parks Victoria
- Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service
- National Parks and Wildlife Service SA
- Department of Environment and Conservation (WA)
- Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory; and
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.<sup>11</sup>

3.17 Each of these agencies manage a vast range of parks and reserves that do not come under the jurisdiction or the funding of the Commonwealth. They include the majority of places in Australia known as national parks. Other agencies and departments are also involved in state and territory management of important parts of the conservation estate. This estate includes diverse high profile and intensely visited locations in Australia, such as:

- Kosciusko National Park in New South Wales. Kosciusko National Park encompasses 673 542 hectares and is the largest national park in NSW and one of the largest conservation reserves in Australia.<sup>12</sup> Between one and two million people visit the park each year.<sup>13</sup>
- Mossman Gorge, covering 56 500 hectares, located in the Daintree National Park in Queensland. This area has one of the highest visitation rates of all tourist destinations in the Wet Tropic region at over 360 000 visitors per annum.<sup>14</sup>
- Rottnest Island in Western Australia, a reserve managed by the Rottnest Island Authority, receives over half a million visitors each year. The Island is

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10 Mr Peter Cochrane, Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 107.

11 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Protected Area Management Agencies in Australia and New Zealand*, [www.deh.gov.au/parks/hoa/index.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/hoa/index.html), accessed 20 November 2006.

12 NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, web site, *Kosciusko National Park - Plan of Management*, [http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/k\\_np\\_mgmtplan](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/k_np_mgmtplan), accessed 12 December 2006.

13 NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, web site, *Kosciusko National Park celebrates 60 years*, [http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/media\\_040604\\_kosciusko60](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/media_040604_kosciusko60), accessed 13 December 2006.

14 Wet Tropics Management Authority, *Annual Report and State of the Wet Tropics Report 2005–2006*, p. 112.

11 kilometres long, 4.5 kilometres at its widest point, and the land area measures 1900 hectares.<sup>15</sup>

3.18 The most recent official statistics from the Department of the Environment and Water Resources CAPAD provides the number of hectares of terrestrial protected areas and the percentage of land these areas occupy in each Australian state and territory (Table 3.1).<sup>16</sup> The extent to which jurisdictions contain protected areas varies dramatically across Australia with the Australian Capital Territory having the highest percentage of protected area at 54.77 per cent coverage, while Queensland has the lowest with 4.98 per cent.

3.19 The state with the greatest number of hectares of protected land is Western Australia with over 27 million hectares, followed closely by South Australia with just over 25 million hectares of protected land. The Australian Capital Territory, at just over 129 000 hectares, has the lowest number of protected hectares of land.

**Table 3.1: Summary of Protected Areas by Territory and State**

State or Territory	Area (ha)	% PA Total
ACT	129 146	54.77
NSW	6 134 350	7.66
QLD	8 619 427	4.98
SA	25 344 280	25.75
NT	6 931 835	5.14
TAS	2 590 444	37.87
VIC	3 746 083	16.46
WA	27 399 534	10.84

Source: Department of the Environment and Heritage, The Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD), <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/nrs/capad/index.html>, accessed 12 December 2006.

## World Heritage Areas

3.20 Australia has long recognised the importance of preserving its rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage. Australia was one of the first signatories to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage

15 Rottneest Island Authority, web site *About Rottneest Island*, <http://www.rottnestisland.com/en/default.htm>, accessed 11 December 2006.

16 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *The Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD)*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/nrs/capad/index.html>, accessed 12 December 2006.

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and since then, 182 countries have ratified the treaty.<sup>17</sup> A central element of this convention is the creation and maintenance of a global register of places with universal heritage value, the World Heritage List.

3.21 Sites nominated for World Heritage listing are subject to careful assessment, before being inscribed on the list as representing the best examples of the world's cultural and natural heritage. With 16 World Heritage properties, Australia has well above the average of less than five areas per member party.<sup>18</sup> The World Heritage Convention states that the primary goal for World Heritage management is 'to protect, conserve, rehabilitate, present and transmit World Heritage Areas for future generations'.<sup>19</sup>

3.22 Australia's 16 World Heritage Areas are places or areas that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), has agreed are deserving of special protection because they represent the best examples of the world's cultural and natural heritage. Some of these areas, such as Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Purnululu National Parks, are jointly managed by the Aboriginal traditional owners as UNESCO World Heritage Areas.<sup>20</sup>

3.23 Australian properties listed as World Heritage Areas are:

- Heard and McDonald Islands
- Macquarie Island
- Tasmanian Wilderness
- Australian Fossil Mammal Sites
- Lord Howe Island
- Central Eastern Rainforests
- Willandra
- Shark Bay
- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park
- Kakadu National Park
- Fraser Island

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17 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Celebrating 25 Years of Australia's World Heritage*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/publications/world-heritage-display.html>, accessed 5 December 2006.

18 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Celebrating 25 Years of Australia's World Heritage*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/publications/world-heritage-display.html>, accessed 5 December 2006.

19 Wet Tropics Management Authority, *Submission 156*, p. 3.

20 Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal, web site, *National Parks*, <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/nationalparks>, accessed 28 November 2006.

- Wet Tropics of Queensland
- Great Barrier Reef
- Greater Blue Mountains Area
- Purnululu National Park
- Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens.<sup>21</sup>

3.24 While some of these World Heritage listed properties are managed by the states and territories, legislation under the Commonwealth's *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, stipulates that any action (development or otherwise) requires Commonwealth approval if the action has, will have, or is likely to have a significant impact on these areas.<sup>22</sup>

3.25 World Heritage properties in Australia do not become Commonwealth property, and ownership rights are not affected by listing. In Queensland, for example, the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is shared between the Commonwealth and Queensland governments, and the management of other World Heritage sites is carried out primarily by environmental protection authorities in conjunction with government and community partners.<sup>23</sup>

### **National Heritage List**

3.26 The National Heritage List is Australia's list of places or groups of places with outstanding heritage value to the nation - whether natural, Indigenous or historic or a combination of these.<sup>24</sup> Places on the National Heritage List are protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* which requires that approval be obtained before any action takes place which has, will have, or is likely to have, a significant impact on the national heritage values of a listed place.<sup>25</sup> This mechanism provides for a high level of protection to listed properties, including national parks.

3.27 Currently there are 39 places listed on the National Heritage List, with a large proportion of these being national parks and reserves. Five new national parks were recently added to the National Heritage List as announced by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage in December 2006. The National Heritage List now includes the following parks and reserves:

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21 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Australia's World Heritage*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/worldheritage/index.html>, accessed 4 December 2006.

22 Australian Network of Environmental Defender's Offices, *Submission 145*, p. 9.

23 Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland, *Submission 175*, p. 4.

24 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Australian Heritage*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/index.html>, accessed 18 December 2006.

25 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *National Heritage*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/index.html>, accessed 18 December 2006.



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- Kurnell Peninsula
  - Recherche Bay (North East Peninsula) Area
  - Glass House Mountains National Landscape
  - Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Lion Island, Long Island and Spectacle Island Nature Reserves
  - Warrumbungle National Park
  - Royal National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area
  - Grampians National Park (Gariwerd)
  - Stirling Range National Park.<sup>26</sup>

3.28 The former Minister the Hon. Ian Campbell said that the inclusion of five new national parks on the list recognised Australia's reputation for having some of the most rich and diverse natural heritage in the world and would help ensure the preservation of these parks for future generations. The Minister outlined the reasons for their inclusion, stating:

Sydney's Royal National Park has been included in the list with the Garawarra State Conservation Area because of its outstanding richness in plant and animal species and its contribution to the beginning of the Australian conservation movement. Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park has an exceptional concentration of biodiversity with 24 plant communities, more than 1000 native plant species and 100 species of moths and butterflies. The dramatic volcanic landscape, biodiversity and stunning natural beauty earned the Warrumbungle National Park its place on the list, while the Grampians National Park was recognised for its powerful landscape, natural beauty and Aboriginal rock art. The Stirling Range is an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot and its inclusion in the National Heritage List will afford it greater protection for future generations.<sup>27</sup>

As with the World Heritage List, listing on the National Heritage List does not affect land tenure and is not confined to national parks.

### **Conservation objectives beyond the public conservation estate**

3.29 In addition to the role of government agencies in managing the conservation estate on public land, nature conservation on private land also helps to meet national conservation objectives. There are various Commonwealth, state and territory schemes encouraging private conservation, and these play an important role in enhancing Australia's efforts towards conservation objectives.

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26 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *National Heritage*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/national/index.html>, accessed 18 December 2006.

27 Senator the Hon. Ian Campbell, Australian Minister for the Environment and Heritage, 'Our National Parks receive highest heritage honour', Press Release C349/06, 15 December 2006.

3.30 In addition to individual private land owners and managers who may be working towards conservation objectives, there are also dedicated non-government organisations (NGOs) involved in the purchase and management of land specifically for conservation purposes. The Australian Bush Heritage Fund and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy are amongst the organisations whose aims include purchasing large tracts of land with the major objective of preservation of the natural environment.

3.31 A more detailed discussion of the importance of private interests and the valuable contribution their involvement makes to Australia's conservation estate will take place in chapter 11 of this report.

### **Planning for the future of the reserve system**

3.32 The Australian, state and territory governments have committed themselves to a "Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative" (CAR) system of reserves or protected areas. This ensures that significant examples of the extensive range of Australia's ecosystems are protected for the benefit of present and future generations. More specifically CAR means:

- *Comprehensive* – refers to the inclusion within protected areas of examples of regional-scale ecosystems;
- *Adequate* – refers to ensuring sufficient levels of each ecosystem is included within a protected area network to 'provide ecological viability and integrity of populations, species and communities';
- *Representative* – refers to the inclusion of areas at a finer scale, which reflect the variability within ecosystems.<sup>28</sup>

3.1 The goal of a CAR system of reserves for Australia is endorsed by the Australian government and the state and territory governments as signatories to the National Strategy for Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity (1996), and the National Forest Policy Statement (1992). Through these agreements, the various governments have agreed to work together in a partnership approach to achieve the aims of the CAR system.<sup>29</sup>

3.33 Three processes contribute to the development of a CAR system of protected areas: the National Reserve System (NRS); the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA); and the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA). While both the NRS and RFA will be discussed in more detail in this chapter, the NRSMPA will be discussed in chapter 4.

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28 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 14.

29 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, pp 13–14.

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### *National Reserve System (NRS)*

3.34 The NRS program was formed in 1997 as part of the establishment of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) to accelerate the protection of Australia's landscapes, flora and fauna for future generations. Since its inception the Australian Government has spent over \$80 million building the NRS and adding more than 20 million hectares to the nation's protected land areas.<sup>30</sup> The NRS platform is founded on strong partnerships between the Australian government and the state and territory governments and this is embedded in the NRS Directions Statement.<sup>31</sup>

3.35 The National Reserve System (NRS) program stimulates biodiversity conservation through reserve establishment and management in both government and non-government sectors across Australia. It has been effective in raising awareness across successive government and non-government organisations about the importance of achieving a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) system of reserves in Australia as a means of conserving biodiversity.<sup>32</sup>

3.36 Australia has nine Protected Area (PA) systems, one in each state and territory as well as the Commonwealth Government system, and these collectively join to form the National Reserve System which together covers over 10 per cent of the Australian land mass.<sup>33</sup>

3.37 The NRS allows Australian governments and conservation organisations to address the gaps in the comprehensiveness of the reserve system at the national scale. This is achieved using the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) as the planning framework.<sup>34</sup>

3.38 A systematic approach to planning the NRS requires mapping methods that will best reflect biodiversity in the landscape, 'to clearly identify reservation targets, to set priorities to meet those targets' and to monitor progress towards building a CAR reserve system.<sup>35</sup> The IBRA framework provides those tools.

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30 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *The National Reserve System Programme 2006 Evaluation*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/publications/nrs/evaluation/index.html>, accessed 19 December 2006.

31 Gilligan, B, *The National Reserve System Programme 2006 Evaluation*, Syneca Consulting Pty Ltd, November 2006, p. 11.

32 Gilligan, B, *The National Reserve System Programme 2006 Evaluation*, Syneca Consulting Pty Ltd, November 2006, p. 11.

33 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 14.

34 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 14.

35 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 24.

3.39 IBRA divides the Australian land mass into 85 biogeographic regions and 404 sub-regions. Each region is a land area made up of a group of interacting ecosystems that are 'repeated in similar form across the landscape'.<sup>36</sup> Appendix 7 contains the most recent map provided by the Department of the Environment and Water Resources of the IBRA boundaries and includes a visual representation of the terrestrial protected areas across Australia within those boundaries.<sup>37</sup>

3.40 The IBRA framework provides a planning mechanism for the development of the NRS. All biogeographic regions have been allocated a priority ranking of Very High, High, Medium or Low. These rankings indicate the priority status of the different regions for inclusion in the NRS. The collaborative NRS Directions Statement directs that each state, territory and the Australian government must aim to have implementation plans in place for each IBRA priority region by 2006. The priority ranking system assists governments to decide how to best prioritise funding and other resources based on the level of classification of a reserve area within the IBRA framework.<sup>38</sup> Chapter 12 has a more detailed discussion of NRS funding.

3.41 An independent evaluation of the NRS program was undertaken in 2006 by Mr Brian Gilligan to inform ongoing development of policy frameworks for implementation of current and future natural resource management initiatives. The evaluation addressed the extent to which the program is achieving its objectives consistent with the overall objective of the NHT; the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the program; the extent to which the program links with the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) program; and the extent to which the program contributes to achieving other Australian Government policy objectives.

3.42 The evaluation found that, overall, the NRS program is consistent with, and contributes to, achieving the overarching objectives of the NHT. The review recommended, *inter alia*, that the program should be reinstated as a national program; funding levels should be reviewed by the Australian Government; the application of national standards for protected area management should be given high priority; the CAR criteria should continue to be used for the purpose of planning and assessing acquisition proposals by the program, and the contribution made by IPAs to the expansion of the NRS should be recognised and enhanced.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Department of the Environment and Heritage, website, *The National Reserve System*, [www.deh.gov.au/parks/nrs/index.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/nrs/index.html), accessed 20 April 2006.

37 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *IBRA Version 6.1*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/nrs/ibra/version6-1/index.html>, accessed 1 December 2006.

38 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, pp 9, 27, 50–53.

39 Gilligan, B, *The National Reserve System Programme 2006 Evaluation*, Syneca Consulting Pty Ltd, November 2006, pp 2–9.

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### ***Regional Forest Agreement (RFA)***

3.43 In 1992 the Commonwealth, state and territory governments began the process which led to the formation of the National Forest Policy Statement (NFPS). The NFPS was argued to be a first, major step towards resolving years of conflict and dispute between environmentalists and loggers over forest use.<sup>40</sup>

3.44 Key elements of the NFPS include a commitment to the development of the CAR reserve system, and the implementation of strategies to protect old-growth forests and wilderness as part of that system. While many forest ecosystems are already represented in other conservation reserves across Australia, the nationally agreed criteria for a conservation reserve system for forests provides an added objective basis for evaluating and subsequently ensuring conservation of biological diversity and other values within the CAR reserve system.<sup>41</sup>

3.45 The establishment of Regional Forests Agreements (RFAs) are a key element in the National Forest Policy Statement's approach as part of the CAR system. RFAs seek a reasonable balance between the conservation of Australia's forest estate and its enduring use for economic production and recreation.

3.46 RFAs are 20-year plans for the conservation and sustainable management of Australia's native forests. There are 10 RFA's in four states: Western Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales. These agreements provide certainty for forest-based industries, forest-dependent communities and conservation. As the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) points out, RFA's are the result of years of scientific study, consultation and negotiation covering a diverse range of interests.<sup>42</sup>

3.47 It is important to note that the NRS covers terrestrial ecosystems other than those considered under the RFA process. The RFA process provides for 'specific forest and woodland ecosystems in specific forested regions'. RFAs establish forest reserves only and are strategies for ecologically sustainable forest management.<sup>43</sup>

3.48 While it is the Commonwealth government's role to coordinate a national approach to environmental and industry-development issues, it is the state and territory governments who have constitutional responsibility for forest management.

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40 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, web site, *Regional Forest Agreements: Why?*, <http://www.affa.gov.au/content>, accessed 5 December 2006.

41 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, web site, *Nationally Agreed Criteria (JANIS) for the Establishment of a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia*, <http://www.affa.gov.au/content>, accessed 21 December 2006.

42 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, web site, *Regional Forest Agreements (RFA)*, <http://www.affa.gov.au/content>, accessed 5 December 2006.

43 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 14.

The 20-year RFAs attempt to provide a balance between the environmental, social, economic and heritage values that forests can provide for current and future generations.<sup>44</sup>

3.49 During the inquiry concerns were raised about the impact that RFAs were having on state forests, and that the current system was undermining the conservation process. Mr Graham Crossley of the Australian Trail Riders Association pointed out that:

My understanding is that the first regional forest agreement process was designed to stop conflict between the environmental people and logging interests and was directed in that regard. The land was assessed, essentially, for either conservation purposes or timber production. Timber production targets were set. I think that they were 50 per cent at the 1995 sawlog production level. The Commonwealth entered into an agreement with the states and provided a bag of money to go along with those agreements. Conservation assessed land has essentially moved into reserve categories. Timber production land had those timber production targets carried out against them. Subsequent to that, there was a state election in New South Wales and state forest land moved over into the reserve system, yet the production targets remained the same. That had the effect that the same amount of timber was coming off a smaller and smaller base. I have explored this topic with some senior state forest managers who said that they have done some modelling on it and that their belief is that in 25 years time there will be no mature trees left in the Central and North Coast state forest areas. I believe that this is a perverse outcome of the regional forest agreement process.<sup>45</sup>

3.50 Although RFAs have been an important element in developing the conservation estate, this has not meant that the results are without controversy. Concerns were raised that the degradation of biodiversity was more likely to occur in forests which were being fully protected in the national parks system, yet neglected:

You can see the degradation and what happens to these areas once they are taken out of active forest production management. There are simply no resources there to manage them. If there were the resources, would you knowingly put a well managed, productive state forest into a national park and then leave it? I cannot imagine that anybody with any sort of serious policy or who cares about the environment would want that to happen. Yet that is exactly what happens, time and time again. Once they have been put into a national park, they are basically just left.<sup>46</sup>

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44 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, web site, *Regional Forest Agreements: Why?*, <http://www.affa.gov.au/content>, accessed 5 December 2006.

45 *Committee Hansard*, 12 May 2006, p. 60.

46 Mrs Catherine Murphy, National Association of Forest Industries, *Committee Hansard*, 20 October 2006, p. 22.

3.51 These concerns highlight the fact that reserves require ongoing management, and this is discussed further in subsequent chapters.

## Conclusion

3.52 The historical origins of reserves as areas created in some cases before federation has led to differences in funding levels across the various jurisdictions, and a proliferation of types of park and reserve. This resulted in the early 1990s in Australia having around ten times more national parks compared with other countries, even though the percentage of allocated land was quite similar.<sup>47</sup> This fragmented system goes some way to explaining the different declaration regimes and various management plans for the conservation estate across Australia. Australia's World Heritage properties are also affected. Because Australia's 16 World Heritage Areas are governed under a variety of legislative regimes, on the ground management may be the responsibility of Commonwealth, state and territory government agencies, local government or, in some cases, private landholders.<sup>48</sup>

3.53 There are many facets to the creation and management of the conservation estate in Australia. The preceding chapters have provided some background on the history of the parks system and an overview of how the terrestrial parks and reserve system operates today. This background knowledge is essential to any discussion of the adequacy of the parks and reserve system. The next chapter outlines the distinctive origins and nature of the marine reserve system. Subsequent chapters of this report seek to examine more closely specific issues in relation to Australia's conservation estate to determine what, if any, changes may need to take place in order to improve and enhance the system as it exists today.

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47 Wescott, G.C., 'Australia's Distinctive National Parks System', *Environmental Conservation*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Winter 1991, p. 338.

48 Wet Tropics Management Authority, *Submission 156*, p. 1.

