

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2009

Outcome:	1	Question No:	10
Program:	1.2		
Division/Agency:	Parks Australia Division		
Topic:	National Reserve System Strategy		
Hansard Page ECA:	Written Question on Notice		

Senator BIRMINGHAM asked:

1. How many jobs will be created to manage the 25 per cent increase in land that is to be locked up under the strategy?
2. What fire mitigation strategies will be implemented to reduce the increased threat of large scale bushfire that comes with locking up vast tracts of land?

Answers:

1. It is not possible to calculate this figure. The number of jobs created through the establishment of protected areas will vary in response to location, scale, the number of visitors and overall management objectives. However, nature based tourism and recreation generate significant income for the Australian economy through employment in the protected area and in the surrounding communities and regions.

For example, in the year ending June 2009 there were 3.3 million international nature visitors, 64% of all international visitors to Australia. The top nature activity for these visitors was visiting National/State Parks (66%). In the June Quarter 2009, these visitors spent \$2.4 billion during their trip, an increase of 8.1% on the same period in 2008. (Source: Tourism Research Australia, International Visitor Survey)

2. All Australian Government-funded protected areas under the National Reserve System must have management plans. Fire mitigation strategies are included, as appropriate for the property, in the management planning process.

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Outcome:	1	Question No:	66
Program:	1.1		
Division/Agency:	Parks Australia		
Topic:	Management of Christmas Island National Park		
Hansard Page ECA:	34 (20/10)		

Senator LUNDY asked:

Senator LUNDY—I want to follow up on some of the questions asked by Senator Siewert about Christmas Island. I understand there is to be some investment in improving accessibility of the national park, particularly in the Dales area of Christmas Island. Could you take that on notice and provide details to the committee about that investment?

Mr Cochrane—I will. I understand it needs upgrading and I will give you a good response to that.

Senator LUNDY—Thank you. In fact, if you could give an overall summary about the management of the Christmas Island National Park, that would be great.

Mr Cochrane—Okay.

Answers:

Investment in improving accessibility of the national park, particularly in the Dales area of Christmas Island.

\$500,000 has been allocated from the Director of National Park's capital budget funds in 2009-10 to upgrade visitor services infrastructure, including the Dales area. Much of the park visitor infrastructure is aged and the Dales is one of the more popular visitor destinations on Christmas Island. In the Dales area the existing boardwalk, car park and road access, will be upgraded. Other visitor infrastructure may be upgraded, replaced or developed following detailed scoping of these works.

The upgrade will give high priority to low maintenance materials and construction methods suitable for remote tropical environment, and provide improved access for community and tourists while protecting the environmental values of the Dales and other areas. The full \$500,000 investment is expected to be expended over both 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years.

Summary of the management of Christmas Island National Park

There are a number of key *threats* or management issues identified on the island that provide the focus of attention of our activities.

- A rapid decline in the Island's biodiversity. Some major threats such as crazy ant impacts on red crabs and cat impacts on ground nesting seabird populations are known. However other threats, including those responsible for the decline in threatened endemic reptiles

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and the pipistrelle bat, and the impact of climate change on the marine and terrestrial environment are unclear.

- Maintenance of tourism and visitor management and infrastructure. Aging infrastructure and increasing visitor pressure are increasing the focus required on providing infrastructure and visitor services.
- Management of the impacts of growing population pressures largely resulting from the expansion of detention activities. These include vehicle impacts on migrating red crabs; quarantine threats and use of ground water.

There are a number of key *strategic management activities* being undertaken currently on the island these include:

- Revision of the Christmas Island National Park Management Plan. The Park is managed in accordance with the EPBC Act. The third Christmas Island National Park management plan expired in March 2009. The Park is still being managed in accordance with the third plan while the fourth plan is being prepared.
- A Christmas Island Recovery Plan for threatened species listed under the EPBC Act is also under preparation. The plan will identify island wide species and ecosystem threats and recovery priorities and actions. Recovery Plans have implications for the Commonwealth as under the EPBC Act (s268) ‘A Commonwealth agency must not take any action that contravenes a recovery plan’ and (s269) ‘the Commonwealth must implement a recovery plan to the extent to which it applies in Commonwealth areas’.
- In 2009 the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts established a Christmas Island Expert Working Group of eminent scientists to review biodiversity threats. In their Interim Report the Group made 28 recommendations including better coordination of environmental governance arrangements. The final report is due in early 2010.
- In 2009 the Director of National Parks commissioned a study to assess the conservation values in Commonwealth waters of the Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Island remote territories. The study will compile environmental data to assist in assessing the need for improved environmental protection of the marine environment in these waters.

Major on-ground environmental management programs undertaken by the Park staff include:

- Yellow crazy ant (YCA) management. Funding of \$4 million 2007-2011 includes management (aerial baiting, monitoring etc) and research components.
- Biodiversity management and monitoring particularly the biennial Island Wide Survey.
- The recent commencement of a captive breeding program for the blue tailed and forest skinks, both of which have suffered significant and rapid declines.
- Christmas Island Mine-site to Forest Rehabilitation (CIMFR) Program to rehabilitate relinquished mine leases. Funded from the conservation levy paid by Christmas Island Phosphates. A new MoU between the Director of National Parks and the Attorney General’s Department is being negotiated.
- Protecting migrating red crabs from traffic impacts. Includes road closures, education, and infrastructure (ie crab fencing and road underpasses).
- Cat and rodent management. Park staff are working with island stakeholders to manage cats including preparation of an island wide cat management plan.