

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Submission by the Conservation Commission of Western Australia, March 2006

Background

The Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee has requested submissions by March 1 2006 in relation to 'the funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas' with particular reference to a range of factors related to objectives and government performance.

These factors are:

- a. the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
- b. whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;
- c. any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
- d. the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans; and
- e. the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

Details of the functions of the Conservation Commission of Western Australia in supporting the creation and management of conservation reserves¹ are provided in Appendix 1.

There are four key functions relevant to this inquiry which can be summarised as follows:

Function 1: *to have vested in it conservation reserves (as well as State forest and timber reserves) managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM);*

A summary table of the land and waters vested in the Conservation Commission follows.

Table 1. Land vested in the Conservation Commission

Tenure Classification	Area (ha) as at 30 June 2005	Area (ha) as at 30 June 2004
National park	5 591 090	5 092 680
Conservation park	745 195	704 113
Nature reserve	10 856 529	10 827 872
State forest	1 304 631	1 729 677
Timber reserve	123 346	141 446
Sections 5(1)(g) & 5(1)(h) reserve	233 348	232 251
TOTAL	18 854 139	18 728 039

¹ in this submission the term "conservation reserves" is used to describe national parks and other terrestrial conservation reserves managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Function 2: *to develop and advise the Minister for the Environment on policies for the conservation and management of biodiversity throughout the State;*

In meeting its objectives to develop and maintain policy and provide policy advice to the Minister for the Environment, the Conservation Commission provided comment during 2004-2005 on the following major policies and related issues either in development or under review by CALM or by other relevant agencies:

- Ningaloo and Cape Range World Heritage Area Nomination – World Heritage Consultative Committee
- Review of Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management – Environmental Protection Authority
- Draft Environmental Protection (Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands) Policy 2004 – Environmental Protection Authority
- Preliminary Position Statement No. 9 Environmental Offsets – Environmental Protection Authority
- South West Yarragadee Water Supply Sustainability Evaluation Scoping Report – Water Corporation
- Wungong Catchment Environment and Water Management Project – Water Corporation
- Towards a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Western Australia Discussion Paper – CALM
- Fisheries Management Paper No. 179 – A draft policy for the translocation of brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) into and within Western Australia for the purposes of recreational stocking, domestic stocking, commercial and non-commercial aquaculture – Department of Fisheries

Function 3: *to develop management plans through the agency of CALM for the conservation estate;*

The Conservation Commission and CALM maintain a rolling three-year set of priorities for the preparation and review of management plans. Since the formation of CALM under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* the preparation of management plans and, in some cases the review and rewriting of management plans has led to the following current conservation reserve management plans:

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Table 2. Finalised management plans at 30 June 2005

Conservation Reserve	CALM Region	Commencement
Mooradung Nature Reserve	Swan	21/2/86
Nature Reserves in the Shire of Wyalkatchem	Wheatbelt	21/2/86
Nature Reserves in the Shire of York-Northam	Swan	10/7/87
Shannon and D'Entrecasteaux National Parks	Warren	8/1/88
Benger Swamp Nature Reserve (five-year term)	South West	12/2/88
Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park	South West	21/4/89
Yanchep National Park	Swan	29/9/89
Waroona Reservoir and Catchment Area	South West	16/3/90
Logue Brook Reservoir and Catchment Area	South West	16/3/90
Cape Range National Park	Pilbara	23/3/90
Dampier Archipelago Nature Reserves	Pilbara	31/8/90
Lane Poole Reserve Swan,	South West	14/12/90
Fitzgerald River National Park	South Coast	19/7/91
South Coast Region	South Coast	13/3/92
Walpole-Nornalup National Park	Warren	3/7/92
Shoalwater Islands Nature Reserves	Swan	20/10/92
Matilda Bay Reserve	Swan	21/5/93
John Forrest National Park	Swan	19/8/94
Goldfields Region	Goldfields	24/2/95
West Cape Howe National Park	South Coast	4/8/95
Yalgorup National Park	Swan	15/8/95
Lesueur National Park – Coomallo Nature Reserve	Midwest	13/10/95
Dryandra Woodland	Wheatbelt	14/11/95
Purnululu National Park and Conservation Reserve	Kimberley	5/3/96
Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve	South Coast	7/6/96
Wanjarri Nature Reserve	Goldfields	2/7/96
Canning River Regional Park	Swan	5/12/97
Nambung National Park, Wanagarren, Nilgen and Southern Beekeepers Nature Reserves	Midwest	11/9/98
Leschenault Peninsula Conservation Park	South West	8/1/99

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Conservation Reserve	CALM Region	Commencement
Esperance Lakes Nature Reserves	South Coast	11/5/99
Karijini National Park	Pilbara	15/6/99
Stirling Range and Porongurup National Parks	South Coast	3/12/99
Swan Estuary Marine Park and Adjacent Nature Reserves	Swan	7/4/00
Jurabi, Bundegi Coastal Parks and Muiron Islands	Pilbara	25/08/00
Serpentine National Park	Swan	3/10/00
Shark Bay Terrestrial Reserves	Midwest	3/10/00
Jurien Bay Marine Park	Midwest	30/6/05
Rowles Lagoon Conservation Park and Clear and Muddy Lakes Nature Reserve	Goldfields	19/1/01
Carnac Island Nature Reserve	Swan	4/10/03
Yellagonga Regional Park	Swan	15/07/03
Forest Management Plan	Swan, Warren and South West	1/1/04
Herdsmen Regional Park	Swan	3/12/04
Turquoise Coast Island Nature Reserves	Midwest	24/3/05
Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve	Swan	27/05/05
Forrestdale Lake Nature Reserve	Swan	27/05/05

In addition, there the following conservation reserve management plans were in preparation or under review at June 2005:

Beeliar Regional Park
 Cape Range National Park and proposed extensions
 Dampier Archipelago Island Nature Reserves and section 5(1)(g) reserves
 Esperance Coastal Reserves
 Jandakot Regional Park
 Kalbarri National Park
 Kennedy Range National Park
 Kimberley Regional Plan
 Lake McLarty Nature Reserve
 Lane Poole Reserve
 Millstream-Chichester National Park
 Parks of the Darling Range (including: *National Parks* - Avon Valley, Canning, Gooseberry Hill, Greenmount, John Forrest, Kalamunda, Mundaring, Pickering Brook, Serpentine, Susannah Brook, and Walyunga. *Regional Parks*, Chidlow, Kalamunda, Kelmscott-Martin, Wungong)
 Parks of the Leeuwin Ridge, Scott National Park and Gingilup Nature Reserve
 Proposed St John Brook and Jarrahwood Conservation Parks
 Rockingham Lakes Regional Park

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Shannon and D'Entrecasteaux National Parks
Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve
Tuart Forest
Walpole Wilderness Area
Wellington National Park and proposed Conservation Parks
Wheatbelt Regional Plan
Woodman Point Regional Park
Yanchep and Neerabup National Parks and Neerabup Nature Reserve

Function 4: *to assess the performance of CALM in implementing management plans.*

The Conservation Commission has developed a policy to guide its performance assessment function with respect to the implementation of management plans for which it has responsibility (see Appendix 2). The following performance assessments have been completed or are in development.

Completed

Wanjarri Nature Reserve Management Plan 1996-2006
Forest Management Plan 2004-2013 – Establishment of Fauna Habitat Zones

In preparation

Forest Management Plan 2004-2013 - Prescribed Burning Planning and Implementation
Lesueur National Park and Coomaloo Nature Reserve Management Plan 1995-2005
Dryandra Woodland Management Plan 1995-2005
Yalgorup National Park Management Plan 1995-2005

Background to marine conservation reserves

In this State marine protected areas are vested in the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority, with a similar responsibility for management planning and performance assessment of marine reserves. The Western Australian Government has announced its intention to combine the Conservation Commission and Marine Parks and Reserves Authority into a Biodiversity Commission which will have responsibilities for both terrestrial and marine protected areas. This will further assist with the integration of management planning and management between terrestrial and marine conservation reserves.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Responses to Inquiry Factors

The Conservation Commission has reviewed, and endorses, the detailed submission developed by CALM as the agency with principal responsibility for conservation reserve management in Western Australia. In addition, the Conservation Commission offers the following comments under each of the inquiry factors:

a. the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;

National parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas (conservation reserves) provide and protect numerous environmental, social and economic values. Conservation reserves are the most effective land use type able to achieve and sustain conservation benefits in circumstances of change. For this reason they have been identified as the principal tool through which the Convention on Biological Diversity attains its goal for biodiversity conservation (UNEP-SCBD 2001²). Beyond this fundamental value, conservation reserves also provide social benefits for the community through the provision of opportunities for interaction with nature and often provide special spiritual and cultural benefits.

Biodiversity warrants special protection because of the wide range of values that different people and society place on it. The *Australia State of the Environment Report 2001*³ has summarised these as:

Direct utilitarian value

Biodiversity is consumed by humans as food and is used to feed stock. It provides materials such as timber and fibre, medicines, chemicals and genetic material.

Indirect utilitarian values

Indirect utilitarian values include the maintenance of 'ecosystem services' or important ecological processes. Examples include maintaining water quality in catchments, moderating atmospheric processes or weather, conserving the structure or fertility of soil, maintaining coastal function, assimilating or removing wastes from water or soil, maintaining evolutionary potential in ecosystems, sequestering carbon emissions, cycling of nutrients, pest control, and pollination of crops.

Aesthetic and recreational values

Biodiversity has aesthetic and recreational uses for humans, both in the form of specific taxa such as flowers, birds, trees or whales, and as components of natural or semi-natural landscapes such as the Great Barrier Reef and the wetlands of Kakadu National Park.

² United National Environment Programme Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Global Biodiversity Outlook, 2001

³ *Australia State of the Environment Report 2001* (Biodiversity Theme Report), Prepared by: Dr Jann Williams, RMIT University, CSIRO Publishing on behalf of the Department of the Environment and Heritage

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Scientific and educational values

Scientific discovery can lead to the development of utilitarian values. It will often be through scientific research, other forms of investigation and learning about community or Indigenous knowledge that such uses will be recognised. Also, the variety of life is of educational value across a wide variety of subjects and disciplines (e.g. biology, biochemistry, ecology, genetics and agronomy).

Intrinsic, spiritual and ethical values

Various cultural and religious systems (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) place value on components of biodiversity. Also, there is the ethical position that non-human forms of life have intrinsic value and a right to exist independent of any use to humans.

Future or 'option' values

For all of the above values, there is the added dimension of keeping options open for the future. We are uncertain as to what species and populations are crucial to ecosystem services, or the actual significance of some of these services. Similarly, there may be uses for species or genetic diversity yet to be discovered, such as for food or medicine. And, if the values held in society change as they have in the past, then what is viewed as unimportant now may be more highly valued in the future.

All the values identified above are evident in Australian society, and many individuals will value biodiversity for more than one of these reasons. Perhaps the most important change in understanding in the long term has been the recognition of the reliance of biodiversity on functioning ecosystems, and its role in maintaining ecological processes. This recasts biodiversity science, policy and management in important ways. Managing just a few species and protecting a small selection of natural areas is not sufficient to protect Australia's biodiversity.

Another major and continuing change is the attention being paid to indirect (or underlying) as well as direct (or proximate) causes of biodiversity loss. For example, land clearing by farmers is a direct cause of biodiversity loss in Australia. The indirect causes lie in the social, institutional and economic settings that influence farmer behaviour and farm profitability. This includes the information available to landholders, economic conditions affecting rural industries and perverse incentives encouraging clearance.

This shift in emphasis deepens our understanding of the processes of biodiversity loss and allows more sophisticated policy responses. In the land clearance example, strict regulation is invited by the direct cause, whereas understanding the indirect cause invites the use of incentive mechanisms, forward planning, information provision and other approaches.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Conservation reserves can also have significant roles in supplying the social and economic development of rural and regional areas. The establishment of national parks frequently leads to direct economic benefits to localities through tourism with analysis indicating this can be valued at tens of millions of dollars at a regional level within Western Australia. This has been described in work undertaken by the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism⁴.

The various values that conservation reserves can have and hence the objectives they should be managed for are identified through legislation in the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*. For the most significant types of conservation reserves these are:

For terrestrial conservation reserves;

S56.1(c) *in the case of national parks and conservation parks, to fulfil so much of the demand for recreation by members of the public as is consistent with the proper maintenance and restoration of the natural environment, the protection of indigenous flora and fauna and the preservation of any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest;*

(d) *in the case of nature reserves to maintain and restore the natural environment, and to protect, care for, and promote the study of, indigenous flora and fauna, and to preserve any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest;*

For marine conservation reserves;

S13A (1) *The reservation of a marine nature reserve shall be for —*

- (a) the conservation and restoration of the natural environment;*
- (b) the protection, care and study of indigenous flora and fauna; and*
- (c) the preservation of any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest.*

S13B (1) *The reservation of a marine park shall be for the purpose of allowing only that level of recreational and commercial activity which is consistent with the proper conservation and restoration of the natural environment, the protection of indigenous flora and fauna and the preservation of any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest.*

S13C (1) *The reservation of a marine management area shall be for the purpose of managing and protecting the marine environment so that it may be used for conservation, recreational, scientific and commercial purposes.*

In terms of design objectives for conservation reserves nationally agreed criteria have been set to provide for a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) reserve system. The target for this is 15% reservation on a bioregional basis, which is designed to ensure biodiversity conservation and social and economic values are protected.

⁴ Carlsen, Jack. *Assessment of the Economic value of recreation and tourism in Western Australia's national parks, marine parks and forests*, Sustainable Tourism CRC 2004.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

b. whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;

One of the principal mechanisms for progressing the achievement of a CAR reserve system in Western Australia is the National Reserve System Program which establishes a cooperative approach to facilitating additions to the conservation estate between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. However in terms of the level of resources provided for this program there has been reduction in support for acquisitions by the Commonwealth Government. Advice from CALM indicates a dramatic decline in the level of Commonwealth input in recent years. For the last ten years of the program the Commonwealth contribution to this program in Western Australia was \$12.3 million compared to the CALM contribution of \$24.1 million. This in a program that was designed to see the Commonwealth's contribution at twice that of CALM's in recognition of the ongoing management costs that CALM would be responsible for. This reduction appears to have been caused by a change in Commonwealth priorities for support away from the acquisition of land for conservation reserves to support for private protected areas and Indigenous Protected Areas. While these other types of protected areas are able to complement the formal reserve system they cannot protect the values identified above to the same extent as they lack the same level of statutory protection and are not provided with the same level of management expertise or systems.

In terms of management requirements, environmental, social and economic benefits can be achieved with very minimal resourcing. For example, the process of establishing an area as a national park provides immediate benefit through the provision of statutory protection (e.g. formal legal protection against inappropriate uses); frequently a social benefit through the community's perception that a "good" has been done; an economic benefit driven by visitation, and environmental benefits through the ability to apply existing management systems developed through years of experience and knowledge. With the application of a small level of resources many newly created reserves in Western Australia can be provided with significant benefits. For example experience with pastoral land acquisitions shows that destocking and the closure of water points has an immediate and long term benefit to biodiversity.

Trends in expenditure by CALM have also been increasing over time beyond that required to account for inflation. Expenditure on the management of conservation reserves has increased from \$40.5 million in 1996 to \$105.1 million in the 2004-2005 financial year. Even more significant increases have been seen in capital expenditure in conservation reserves.

Notwithstanding the ability of agencies to manage large areas of conservation reserve with limited resources and the progressively increased resources available for management, better results are always achievable with more resources. As it is a function of the Conservation Commission to assess the performance of CALM in its management of conservation reserves the adequacy of resources is of particular interest. The results of independent assessments will enable shortcomings in resources to be identified and appropriate strategies to be developed. This may include reprioritization of resources within CALM, or the ability to use this information to support requests for additional resources for the agency from State or Commonwealth governments.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

c. any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;

The current objectives and management systems for conservation reserves in Western Australia are very clearly articulated in legislation, policy and organizational arrangements within government at the State level. While it is possible that the government of Western Australia may change its priorities and thus reduce inputs for acquisition and management of the conservation estate there is no indication that this is likely to occur. Indeed recent funding decisions resulting in substantial increases in resources in, for example, fire management indicate the reverse.

As noted above the apparent shift in the Commonwealth government's priorities away from the support for the creation of conservation reserves threatens the achievement of objectives to establish a CAR reserve system.

There are a number of specific threats to the values of conservation reserves in Western Australia and a range of management responses have been developed to mitigate the impact of these. They include:

- Feral pests and weeds – significant feral pests include foxes, cats and goats. In addition the likely spread of the cane toad into Western Australia has been recognized and is the subject of active management programs. Strategies to control the impacts of these threats have been developed and are being implemented. For example in the case of the fox a broad scale baiting program (Western Shield) is believed to be the main cause of the recovery of population levels of a number of endangered native mammals.
- Fungal pathogens – the most significant fungal threat to Western Australia's biodiversity is *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. This fungus is now widespread in the south west of the State. Because of the high level of susceptibility of many of Western Australia's unique flora, this threat has been the subject of a high level of research effort and management responses. Although this pathogen is widespread in other parts of Australia and the World, the unique nature of Western Australia's flora arguably places it as the State at most threat from this pathogen.
- Fire management – although a natural process, wildfire poses a threat because of changes to the context in which it occurs. This has happened for many reasons. Fire regimes have been altered by the influences of humankind. Assets, both property and natural assets, need to be protected. Conservation reserves may be small islands in the midst of cleared farm land. For these reasons active management through reduction of risks (e.g. reducing fuel loads through prescribed burning) and fire suppression are required to protect the values of conservation reserves as well as life and property that may be affected should wildfires on reserves spread to private landholdings. The manner in which prescribed burning occurs however remains controversial and in need of further research and policy development.
- Salinity and altered water regimes (groundwater and surface water) – the clearing of large parts of WA for agriculture has resulted in significant impacts to conservation reserves and biodiversity through the changes to hydrology that have resulted. This threat is of such significance in its scale and the difficulty of its repair and management that it is beyond the scope and responsibility of CALM to resource. Resources for research and specific management of key conservation reserves through such mechanisms as diversion drainage have been implemented.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

- Climate change – dealing with climate change is a global issue that cannot be addressed by direct management intervention from land management agencies. However the threats of climate change to biodiversity that may arise from reduced rainfall or increased temperature should be the subject of risk management by conservation agencies. One mechanism to do this is to ensure that there is adequate reservation to provide for refuges or north-south migration. Given this threat and the potential impacts it may be that for some particularly vulnerable ecosystems a risk analysis may identify the need for higher levels of representation in the conservation reserve system.
- Developments that directly or indirectly impact on reserves such as mining, infrastructure and other development – these generally pose a localized threat to existing conservation reserves but can be more significant in preventing the establishment of new reserves through concerns that this may affect future access for development, for example in areas with high mineral prospectivity.

Should there be any new threat or a significant increase in the level of threat from those existing higher levels of management input will be required in order to maintain the objectives for conservation reserves.

As noted under Part b of this response one of the functions of the Conservation Commission is to assess the performance of CALM. It is the intention of the Commission to include the above listed threats (or management responses to these threats) in its performance assessment program. For this calendar year it is anticipated that assessments of CALM prescribed burning, and of feral pest and weed management, will be completed. The results of these assessments will go to providing independent data on the level and adequacy of resources provided and enable consideration of reprioritization within CALM or the seeking of additional allocations from Government.

d. the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans; and

The State Government has the principal responsibility to manage impediments to the creation of a CAR reserve system. One of the more significant impediments to establishing the CAR reserve system is the wide range of existing interests that frequently overly areas required to achieve reservation targets. This includes leaseholders in pastoral areas, native title interests and mineral resource developers. The record of Western Australia in establishing new conservation reserves within the bounds of these competing interests has been successful in a number of instances in recent years with the substantial acquisitions resulting from the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy, a region hitherto seriously under represented in conservation reserves. More recently progress in identifying and securing key additions to the conservation estate has also been made in the process of negotiating pastoral leases that are due for renewal in 2015 and with agreements over the progression of the Ord River Stage 2 Scheme which saw significant additions to the conservation.

The management agency also has a responsibility to those landholders neighboring conservation reserves, to the local community, to local government and to integrate as much as practicable with other natural resource management processes. Poor or under-resourced management and inadequate communication over management

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

objectives and actions can lead to community (and hence government) reluctance to embrace the creation of conservation reserves. In recognition of this CALM has developed a "good neighbor policy" that spells out commitments and processes to be undertaken by CALM at the local and regional level.

Experience has shown that mining, water and infrastructure interests can also be impediments to the creation of reserves. In the case of mining interests experience has shown that it is difficult to create new conservation reserves where there is a very strict policy position on not allowing access for exploration. So a more secure basis for conservation reserves may result in fewer being created, whereas a more flexible approach can result in fewer objections to the creation of reserves. In Western Australia some of these areas of conflict have been able to be resolved, in some instances through compromise on both sides such as the limiting of the depth of the conservation reserve so that future access to resources beneath may be allowed with less constraint than would otherwise have been possible.

The presence of potential water sources within proposed reserves such as a viable dam site has also been an impediment in some instances. It is the view of the Conservation Commission that this should not be an impediment as the creation of a reserve in these areas serves to protect a number of future options including water resources. Government and the community will ultimately decide which values are most important to it.

Infrastructure interests such as potential future road development fall into a similar category as water in not needing to be an impediment to the creation of reserves. Experience of infrastructure developments within conservation reserves in Western Australia has shown that locations and management of impacts are adequately dealt with through routine environmental impact assessment and approval processes.

The overall long term plan for Western Australia is to establish a CAR reserve system with 15% representation of ecosystems. This has most recently been endorsed in the Government of Western Australia's Towards a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Western Australia Discussion Paper (December 2004). It is the view of the Conservation Commission that this target should be seen as a minimum based on existing knowledge of values and threats. As noted above there may be instances where a higher level of representation is warranted because of a threat of unknown proportions such as climate change.

e. the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

Details of the status of conservation reserves in Western Australia are detailed in the CALM submission. Overall the current area of conservation reserves in Western Australia is approximately 7%, well under the 15% target.

As noted above it is a function of the Conservation Commission to assess the performance of CALM in respect of the management of these reserves and to report publicly on this. While to date limited performance assessment work has been completed it is anticipated that in the coming years this aspect of performance will be comprehensively reported.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Appendix 1

Information of the functions of the Conservation Commission of Western Australia

1. Conservation Commission of Western Australia

The Conservation Commission of Western Australia (Conservation Commission) was established on 16 November 2000 by the *Conservation and Land Management Amendment Act 2000*. It is a statutory authority and body corporate and is directly responsible to the Western Australian Minister for the Environment.

The Conservation Commission is comprised of 9 members with appropriate knowledge and skills appointed by the Governor in the recommendation of the Minister for the Environment. It is supported by 5 staff. It also is provided with considerable support from the Department of Conservation and Land Management (the Department).

It has 19 million hectares of terrestrial conservation reserves (including national parks, conservation parks and nature reserves), State forest and timber reserves vested in it, being about 7.5 per cent of Western Australia. This is an increase of some 220 000 ha since 2000. The Conservation Commission is responsible for management plan preparation for these lands through the agency of the Department. The Conservation Commission is also responsible for assessing and auditing the Department (and the Forest Products Commission in the case of State forest and timber reserves) in respect of the implementation of those management plans. It also has policy advisory functions in relation to vested lands and waters, and broader biodiversity conservation matters.

The Conservation Commission and its predecessors have been providing Western Australian governments with independent expert advice for some 50 years. In 1976 the National Parks Authority was formed to provide these services on a more professional basis in respect to national parks. A Western Australia Wildlife Authority had also existed in parallel for several decades, having nature reserves vested in it. Both former Authorities were replaced by the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority in 1985. The Lands and Forest Commission was also formed in 1985 with a similar role in respect to the timber production estate (State forest and timber reserves). When the Conservation Commission was formed in 2000 it assumed the responsibilities of the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority and the Lands and Forest Commission.

Several of the original members of the Conservation Commission had served for a number of years on the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority and provided an important continuity link. Three of these people are still Commissioners.

In 1997, management planning responsibility for marine reserves was transferred from the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority to the newly-formed Marine Parks and Reserves Authority. The Western Australian Government's environment policy, *Labor's plan for our environment*, includes merging the terrestrial and marine responsibilities of the Conservation Commission and the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority into a new Biodiversity Commission.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

The Conservation Commission fulfils an important role in community engagement associated with Western Australia's biodiversity conservation system. This includes:

- Widespread community support for the practice of vesting the State's conservation estate in community-based statutory authorities.
- The practice of vesting the State's conservation estate in community-based statutory authorities helps to establish, convey and reinforce that the State's conservation estate belongs to the community.
- Community-based vested bodies can provide the Minister with a valuable source of informed independent advice which might not be available through the Department.
- Community-based vested bodies can act as a "buffer" between the Minister and the community on a range of issues.

2. Management Planning

Management Plans for vested land are required to be prepared by the Conservation Commission under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*. They set out what the management objectives are for the land, including environmental, social, economic and heritage values, and the approach to be taken to achieve these objectives. Importantly, they provide for an appropriate balance of uses, such as recreational and commercial activities, based on local and wider community values and expectations.

The *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* sets out the required process for developing a management plan. The requirements are that the Conservation Commission prepares proposed management plans through the agency of the Department, followed by a two month public consultation period during which any member of the public may provide a written submission on the proposed plan. The proposed plan must also be provided to other relevant agencies, including local governments and other relevant Ministers, such as the Minister for Mines, Minister for Forest Products or the Minister for Water Resources, with adequate time for them to make a considered response. The proposed plan, after appropriate modifications are made, is then submitted to the Minister for the Environment for approval.

While that is the statutory process, the Conservation Commission and the Department, in preparing proposed management plans implement a procedure whereby there is greater opportunity for community involvement, particularly in the early stages of plan development. The process often includes the establishment of a park advisory committee to ensure local community issues about reserves are thoroughly considered.

Should there be a need to amend an existing management plan the same process is followed, with the Minister for the Environment's final approval required.

A key link between the Conservation Commission and the Department is through the Commission's Management Planning Review Committee which works closely with the Planning Branch of the Department to ensure management plans are developed in accordance with the Commission's views and objectives. The staff of the Planning Branch are the agency of the Department through which the Conservation Commission prepares management plans.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

From the Conservation Commission's formation in 2000 to June 2005, the following numbers of management plans have been developed for terrestrial conservation reserves.

Final	6
Draft	14
Amended	1
In preparation	14

Details of the plans and the management plan development program can be seen at www.naturebase.net/national_parks/management/index.html

Marine conservation reserve plans are developed by the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority through the agency of the Department. The Western Australian Government has announced it is considering the merging of the Conservation Commission and Marine Parks and Reserves Authority into one body, a Biodiversity Commission.

The Conservation Commission has been working with the Department and the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority to improve the consistency of approach to planning the management of the State's terrestrial and marine reserves and to better engage local communities in the planning process. Further improvement of the management planning process will be an ongoing focus of the Commission's attention.

In its management plan development role, the Conservation Commission has access to a variety of "Best Practice" publications for guidance. It is anticipated that the increased strategic understanding of how the management plans fit in the wider reserve management system will assist the Department's management planning staff in consistently producing plans that provide useful mechanisms for achieving the objectives, provide measures for measuring success and facilitate effective adaptive management to address management issues that arise during the life of a plan.

Once management plans are in place, the Conservation Commission has a key statutory function in the assessment and audit of the implementation of the plans. This is an ongoing role and is discussed below.

3. Auditing

The Conservation Commission conducts performance assessments in accord with section 19(1) (g) of the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*; i.e. to 'assess and audit the performance of the Department and the Forest Products Commission in carrying out and complying with the management plans'.

Performance assessments help inform the Conservation Commission's policy development function and its responsibility to advise the Minister of conservation and management of biodiversity components throughout the State.

A document has been developed detailing the policy and guidelines for performance assessment, based on international approaches. This is now being used as a basis for the range of audits being conducted by the Conservation Commission. The document is provided in Appendix 2.

Conservation Commission's Submission

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Audits have been conducted on elements of forest management and implementation of reserve management plans. A major program of auditing has commenced this year now that the policy and guidelines for performance assessment have been developed. Copies of completed Conservation Commission performance assessments are available at www.conservation.wa.gov.au.

4. Recognition of Western Australian Protected Areas

Our conservation reserve system is internationally recognized as a result of meeting a range of criteria as discussed by Worboys et al (2005) – 'Protected Area Management Principles and Practice'.

The areas meet the IUCN definition of a protected area, i.e.

'an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resource, and managed through legal or other effective means'.

In addition our reserves:

- Where they support other uses, are in keeping with the primary purpose of protection and maintenance of biodiversity
- Are able to be classified into one or more of the six IUCN categories
- Are secured and managed for the long term by legal means, through a combination of the *Land Administration Act 1997* and *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*.

The Conservation Commission is supportive of conservation covenants on private land, pastoral leasehold land managed by private interests for biodiversity outcomes, and indigenous protected areas. However in each of these cases there is not the security of purpose of biodiversity protection which is secured and managed for the purpose through a long term legal framework. These arrangements do however provide some opportunities for communities to be engaged in biodiversity protection so that regional biodiversity outcomes are progressed.

Conservation Commission's Submission
**Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation
reserves and marine protected areas**

Appendix 2

**Interim Conservation Commission policy and guidelines for the
performance assessment of conservation reserve and forest
management plans and biodiversity management in WA**