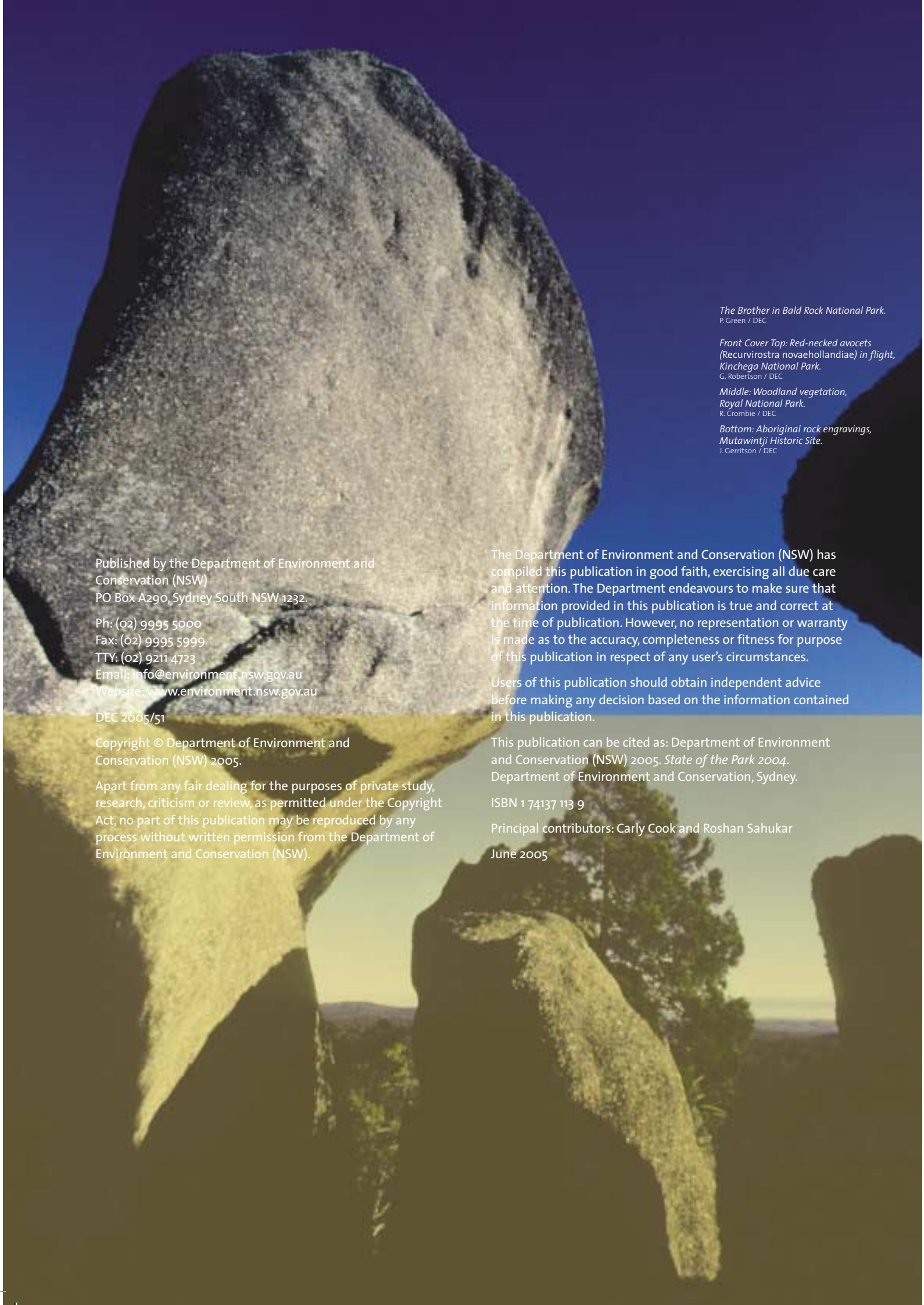




State of the Parks 2004





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The Brother in Bald Rock National Park.
P.Green / DEC

Front Cover Top: Red-necked avocets (Recurvirostra novaehollandiae) in flight, Kinchega National Park.
G. Robertson / DEC

Middle: Woodland vegetation, Royal National Park.
R. Crombie / DEC

Bottom: Aboriginal rock engravings, Mutawintji Historic Site.
J. Gerritson / DEC

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Foreword

Protected areas around the world, including formal park systems, conserve a wealth of spectacular natural and cultural values and provide communities with opportunities for recreation and enjoyment in natural settings. Communities around the world love and cherish these areas for their intrinsic beauty, their cultural and spiritual connection, and for their role in conserving biodiversity and other values.

The significance that communities place on these values is reflected in that more than ten per cent of the world's land surface is now some form of protected area. As natural areas become progressively rarer and more degraded the importance of maintaining and where possible improving the condition of these areas has become an ever-increasing responsibility for land managers. Countries around the world are seeking to better understand how well current management is conserving the values within those areas and to use this information to continually adapt and improve management strategies.

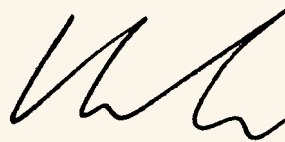
One of the major outcomes of both the 2004 World Parks Congress in South Africa and the recent Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Bangkok, is an international commitment to developing systems for evaluating management effectiveness in protected areas. Internationally, a number of countries are developing these systems for a relatively small number of parks.

Wilderness area in Guy Fawkes River National Park.
A. Cox / DEC



In New South Wales however, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has already taken a major step forward and is developing a system to evaluate and monitor all aspects of park management within the entire park system of over 600 parks. This information is presented publicly in this *State of the Parks 2004* report.

While this is a complex process that will be refined over time, this report marks a large step forward in understanding the impact of management in a large and diverse park system such as we have in New South Wales. The system that has been developed by the NPWS has attracted both national and international attention for the valuable contribution the State of the Parks program is making to improving our understanding and management of parks.



Hon. Bob Debus
NSW Minister for the Environment



Foreword

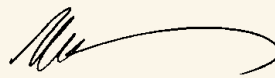
The work of the NSW government demonstrates the importance of parks to a healthy New South Wales. The NSW park system forms the cornerstone of the protected area network in New South Wales, areas vital for functioning ecosystems that provide the NSW community with clean air and water and maintain natural processes. The protection of cultural heritage is another important role of government and the park system is critical for protecting Aboriginal and historic heritage objects, places and landscapes that contribute to our spiritual well-being and reflect on our shared histories. By providing world-class opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of natural areas, the park system contributes to building awareness of and support for conservation in New South Wales. This *State of the Parks 2004* report is a key part of demonstrating to the New South Wales community a commitment to effectively managing this valuable resource on their behalf.

Understanding the values within the park system and evaluating the outcomes of management is essential to being able to adapt and improve management practices. The NSW State of the Parks program will provide park managers in New South Wales with information and a tool to support decision-making. Learning and refinement are intrinsic parts of this program, so it will be improved as it is used and lead to better management.

The NPWS manages the park system on behalf of the NSW community and this *State of the Parks 2004* report is also about providing better information to the public on the management of their park system. Over time the State of the Parks series will help build a picture of trends in the condition and management of the parks of New South Wales. In being transparent and accountable for the management of the park system, the NPWS is inviting the NSW community into a partnership to ensure its ongoing protection.



Lisa Corbyn
Director General
Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW)



Dr Tony Fleming
Head NPWS
Deputy Director General
Department of Environment and Conservation

Green and gold bell frog, Litoria aurea.
R. Kingsford / DEC



Context

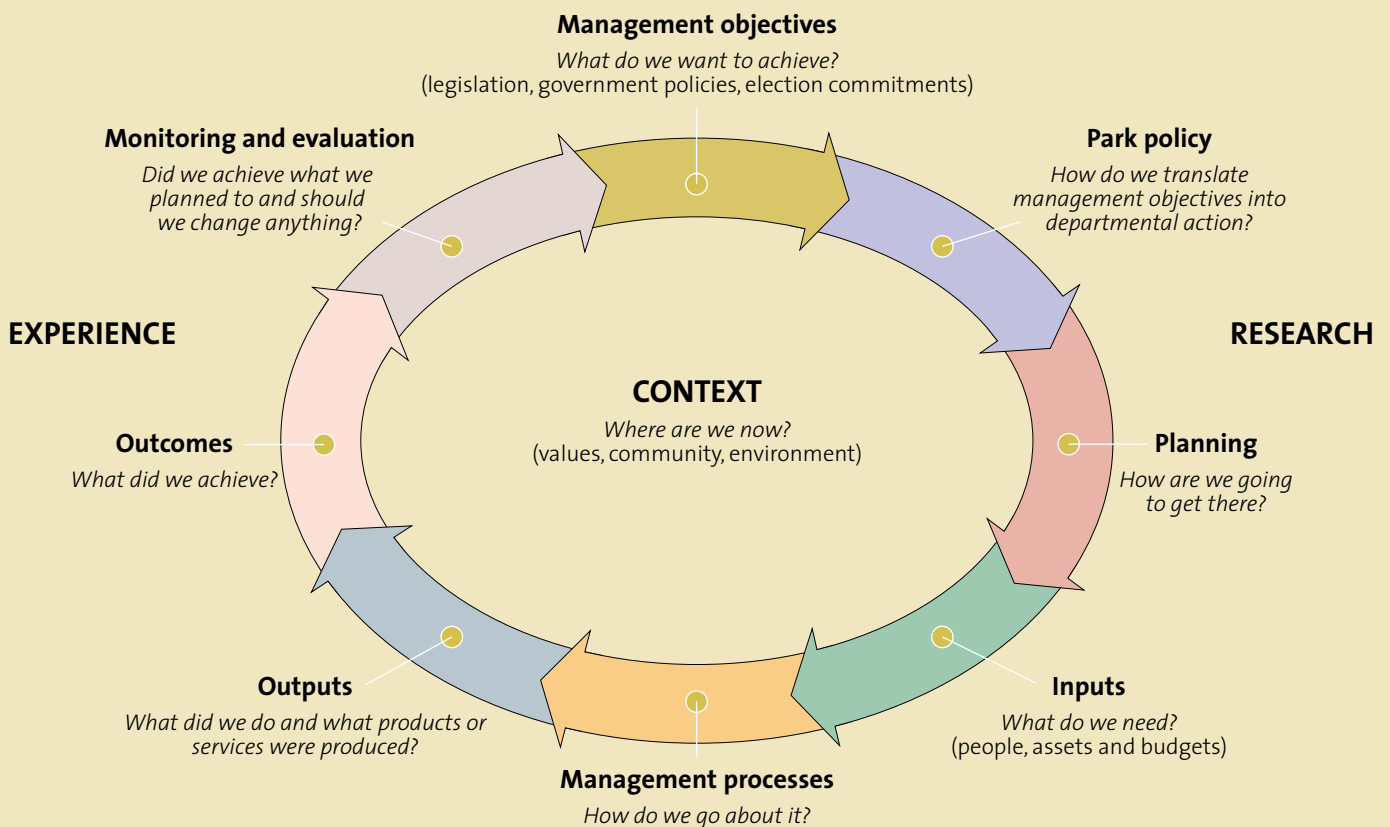
To ensure continual improvement in the management of the cultural and natural heritage of New South Wales, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is developing an integrated Park Management Framework (PMF). This system will enable the NPWS to consistently implement its practices and approaches to management across all parks. The development of the PMF is being guided by park management needs and is taking into account the findings of the performance audit conducted by the NSW Audit Office into the management of natural and cultural heritage in the NSW park system (NSW AO 2004). While the Audit Office acknowledged that the NPWS has a complex and challenging role, they praised the range of excellent practices and approaches to management that are implemented by the NPWS (NSW AO, 2004).

The audit report also recommended that, for the NPWS to support continuous improvement and accountability, it needed integrated systems for establishing specific objectives and priorities for management and for measuring and evaluating the results of management actions. Many of the NPWS's current management practices are outlined in the *State of the Parks 2004 Management action* document (DEC 2005a).

The State of the Parks program is recognised as a significant and ambitious initiative to measure and evaluate the management performance of the NPWS against defined objectives in an open and accountable manner. To date it is one of the largest attempts to measure park management effectiveness in the world. The results of the initial effort at this by the NPWS are presented in this report. However, to build on the gains that have already been made, the NPWS is building a larger and more comprehensive PMF.

Figure 1

Park Management Framework (adapted from Hockings *et al.* 2000. See Figure 2, page 10).



Many of the components of the Park Management Framework (Figure 1) are already in place and efforts have been made to ensure the underlying IUCN management framework (see Figure 2 on page 10) is tailored to the needs of the NSW park system. The PMF will ensure that legislation and policy provide consistent direction for our park managers with standardised approaches to support the planning we need to reach our goals. Through our resources, our staff and our recurrent budget, the standardised approaches in our plans will be implemented and their success will be measured using robust monitoring techniques. This will ensure that the results of our management efforts are captured in a consistent and comparable way and thus provide a more rigorous and relevant assessment of management success. This information, in addition to research carried out in parks will then be used, in consultation with our stakeholders, to refine our management approaches and identify any gaps in our policies or our understanding of the park system.

Importantly, the PMF exists in the context of the values of the park system, the pressures on those values and communities that surround and use parks.

While some of the PMF may sound intuitive, implementing a consistent approach across a park system as large, diverse and decentralised as that in NSW is a considerable challenge. Park managers around the world are facing this same challenge and as yet no simple solution has been adopted. In this *State of the Parks 2004* report we present a starting point from which the NPWS will work towards continuous improvement and greater accountability. While the NPWS is already achieving excellent results in some aspects of management, other aspects will improve through fully realising the benefits of the PMF.

Blue Mountains National Park.
S. Cottrell / DEC



Audit and Compliance Committee Statement

In May 2004, the independent members of the National Parks and Wildlife Audit and Compliance Committee were invited to participate in an audit of the 2004 State of the Parks program. This audit had four objectives:

- to determine if the process used to develop the State of the Parks survey follows best practice principles and was adequately designed to capture the data appropriate for determining the condition of reserves and their management effectiveness
- to determine whether the process used to capture information from the survey was appropriate, meaningful and comprehensive
- to determine whether the process to interpret these data was appropriate, meaningful and comprehensive
- to identify methods for improving data collection and reporting for the 2005 State of the Parks program arising from the audit.

In order to meet these objectives we participated in a range of discussions with National Parks and Wildlife Service staff.

The committee met with Dr Marc Hockings of the University of Queensland who presented the framework behind the development of the survey and explained the different ways this framework had been applied around the world. He described the consultation processes used to ensure that the survey collected information of greatest use to park managers in New South Wales. The committee members were satisfied by the information presented and with the process employed to develop to the State of the Parks survey.

The committee also spoke with the NPWS IT specialists responsible for the design of the electronic survey form and the database to store these data. The IT specialists described the safeguards put in place to ensure that all of the information captured by the survey form was accurately transposed into the database. The committee was satisfied that the processes employed during the data capture phase were appropriate and that information was not lost or distorted during these processes.

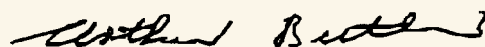
Alan Lisle, the biometric consultant involved in the State of the Parks program described to the committee the statistical analyses that he undertook and planned to undertake to interrogate these data

for the *State of the Parks 2004* report. He explained the measures he took to ensure that the statistics were robust and that only strong relationships within these data were reported. The committee was satisfied with the descriptions provided by Lisle and with the data analyses and application.

To further ensure that these data were reliable enough to be subjected to statistical analyses the audit committee met with each of the NPWS field branch directors. The directors examined a sample of parks that were known to them and assessed whether in their opinion the survey results were accurate. The committee was confident that while there were some differences between the survey results and the directors' assessments that these were not sufficient to influence the sample when it is reported at the statewide level.

The committee members also attended a series of regional staff workshops. At these workshops staff were provided with some results relevant to their Field Branch and were asked about potential improvements to the survey and ways in which the information gleaned from the survey could be useful to them. During these workshops the committee was satisfied that appropriate processes were used to capture suggestions made to the State of the Parks team.

Through examining the design, administration, analysis and review of the SoP survey, the committee has confidence that the process is capable of determining the condition and management effectiveness of reserves to an acceptable standard for the first iteration. While it is acknowledged that consistency and reliability could be improved, the audit confirmed that these data are robust at the statewide level and can confidently be used in writing the *State of the Parks 2004*. The review process has also provided confidence that every effort will be made to improve consistency and objectivity in the next iteration of the survey and that the resulting information will be more robust and able to be used more widely in future.



Arthur Butler
Chair National Parks and Wildlife Audit and
Compliance Committee

Summary

The park system is integral to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage within New South Wales and provides world-class opportunities for recreation and enjoyment. In New South Wales the park system contains 661 parks and reserves, constituting 5,986,921 hectares or 7.4 per cent of the state. In such a large park system it is important that the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has a good understanding of the condition of and pressures on the values present in order to effectively manage and maintain those values.

This *State of the Parks 2004* (SoP) report demonstrates a strong commitment in New South Wales to measure and report publicly on the management of the NSW park system. As part of the larger SoP program, the NPWS has developed a system to draw on existing information on park management, and where necessary, utilise the experience and knowledge of professional park managers. This report draws on:

- (i) detailed data on a subset of representative park types and areas of New South Wales
- (ii) broad information from a survey about all aspects of management for the entire NSW park system (639 parks as at 30 June 2003) and
- (iii) available data from existing NPWS data sets.

This report marks an important step in better understanding the condition of and pressures on the park system. The NPWS is committed to refining and expanding the SoP process over time to improve the usefulness of the information presented and incorporate more quantifiable data.

Through collecting, analysing and interpreting this information, this report provides valuable insights into the:

- rapid growth of the park system over the past ten years and the progress made towards ensuring it is comprehensive, adequate and representative (Chapter 3)
- area of the park system being covered by a plan of management and the importance of this planning to achieving positive outcomes for park values (Chapter 4)
- knowledge available to inform planning and decision-making for managing natural values (Chapter 4)

- efforts made by the NPWS to mitigate the impacts of some of the most serious pressures facing park values (Chapter 5)
- development of an understanding and management of cultural values in New South Wales and some of the related challenges faced by the NPWS (Chapter 6)
- performance in providing appropriate opportunities for public appreciation and enjoyment (Chapter 7)
- success of environmental education programs run by the NPWS such as *Discovery* (Chapter 7)
- ways in which the NPWS involves the community in conservation, the adequacy of this involvement and the types of relationships the NPWS has with its neighbours and other interest groups (Chapter 8).

The State of the Parks program has provided a wealth of information that is being utilised by the NPWS in a range of ways to improve conservation and recreation outcomes for the NSW park system. The results of this program are already being used in strategic planning measures and will be progressively integrated into all levels of park management. The program will be further refined and developed over the next few years to ensure that the information provided is as useful as possible and to develop a data set that can provide insights into trends in management.

Eucalypt covered with dew.
S. Ruming / DEC

