



**Submission to the Senate Environment,
Communication, Information Technology & the Arts
Committee:**

**Inquiry into National Parks, Conservation
Reserves and Marine Protected Areas**

February 2006

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2006 Senate Inquiry into Protected Areas: ACF's Key Points

- *One the whole, Australians highly prize their national parks and conservation areas; because of their cultural, economic, social and ecological significance, as well as for their intrinsic value.*
- *Reservation is widely-recognised as a very effective means of investing in biodiversity conservation, protection of natural and cultural values, and of sustainably reaping the direct and indirect rewards of healthy intact ecosystems. Australia's national parks and conservation reserves pay for themselves many times over.*
- *As a developed country, and the custodian of mega-diverse and largely unique natural heritage, Australia has an especially important responsibility to take a long-term view and ensure the conservation of natural and cultural values; our loss is the world's loss. Our protected areas - community, public and private - are integral to our conservation effort.*
- *Crucially, the Australian Government is obligated by international agreement – as a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity - to proactively conserve our natural heritage, to adopt a strong ecosystems-based approach to land and water management, to develop equitable governance and benefit-sharing arrangements for conservation, and to consolidate our protected area network. The States and Territories are similarly obligated by intergovernmental agreement.*
- *Australia needs to recognise a diversity of protected area governance types; in line with the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Community-conserved areas should receive greater recognition in Australia and, especially, where Indigenous peoples' customary management continues to protect areas of globally significant natural and cultural value.*
- *The primary objective of protected areas is the conservation of natural and cultural values and the maintenance of ecosystem services.*
- *Threats to PA values and objectives include not only direct biophysical threatening processes, but also the direct and indirect impacts of a range of failures of policy and political will, including the failure to properly manage the whole environment for conservation and ecosystem health, to deal with large-scale threatening processes like climate change, to properly recognise diversity in governance, or to raise community appreciation of protected area values.*
- *Australian governments have made important and impressive commitments to a comprehensive, adequate and representative National Reserves System; including expanding the conservation estate, co-operative strategies with time-bound targets, the NHT, Indigenous Protected Areas, trialling public- private-community partnerships for conservation, and bioregional and natural resource assessments.*
- *However, there is still important and urgently needed work to do: NRS funding has deteriorated significantly in recent years. Moreover, conservation management of PAs appears patchy, the integration of PAs into regional or catchment-scale planning looks to be poor, and, overall, governments' progress towards key nationally-agreed biodiversity targets is slow and piecemeal. The Australian Government has failed to keep pace with international best-practices standards in protected area management*

- *As a matter of urgency, governments should re-commit the resources and political will needed to consolidate the NRS, broaden the CAR criteria to include resilience; with a funding commitment of \$350M over six years on a 2:1 cost-sharing arrangement between the Commonwealth and the States/Territories.*
- *Other priorities include reserving high conservation value ecosystems, strengthening selection, building resilience to climatic and other changes, developing a network of well-designed, world-class marine national parks and freshwater protected areas, upgrading conservation management and systematic ecological monitoring in and around PAs, strengthening partnerships, and developing appropriate 'conservation economies' (particularly in northern Australia).*

Recommendations

ACF urges the Committee to support the following key recommendations:

- A. All governments should renew their commitment to national biodiversity targets and objectives.
- B. As a matter of urgency, the Australian Government should lead the way by re-committing the resources and political will needed to consolidate the NRS; with a funding commitment of \$350M over six years on a 2:1 cost-sharing arrangement between the Commonwealth and the States/Territories.
- C. The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council should re-examine the emerging regional NRM delivery model to better assess its capacity to manage for protected area values and objectives; with a view to strengthening integrated conservation management across landscapes.
- D. Governments should strengthen community-conservation efforts, by recognising and exploring how a diversity of governance types fits within Australian legislation and practice (including recognition of Indigenous peoples and local communities), by developing optimal policy mixes that encourage conservation management outside of the public conservation estate, and by consolidating and re-investing in the National Reserves System.
- E. Governments should explore and pilot models of economic development that are ecologically and culturally appropriate to, in particular, northern Australia; where opportunities exist to avoid the mistakes of traditional development that has left much of southern Australia with a costly environmental legacy.
- F. Governments should trial different approaches to integrating Indigenous and other local knowledge systems and the best conservation science, and augment the CAR approach to better take account of Traditional Owners' knowledge, rights and culture.
- G. The Australian Government should initiate a *National Indigenous Caring for Country Programme*, including an Indigenous Protected Areas Sub-programme, to complement the NHT and NRS with a focus on Indigenous

peoples. The programme should be funded initially at \$200M *per annum* and be developed by CoAG into Federal/State partnerships, with the Australian Government providing enhanced investment in line with the States meeting legislative and policy reform milestones that provide for Indigenous Protected Areas.

- H. CoAG should (i) negotiate an agreement to develop a single national Act for Australia's oceans (including state waters, and cross-cultural legal frameworks to integrate Indigenous customary marine tenure systems), to ensure excellence in regional marine planning; and (ii) develop a world-class system of marine national parks as the core elements of strong marine regions.
- I. CoAG should negotiate an agreement to develop a national framework for protecting freshwater ecosystems of high conservation value; and commit to purchase water at market prices from willing sellers for environmental flows to ensure the health of Ramsar-listed wetlands and other freshwater protected areas.
- J. All governments should undertake a comprehensive study of protected areas' staffing, resources and agency morale with a view to ensuring the best practice management of public conservation estate, and to strengthening community confidence in public agencies.
- K. All governments should actively encourage sympathetic conservation management outside of reserves, and establish effective 'good neighbour' policies and programmes to strengthen community support for protected areas.
- L. The Australian Government should reinstate the Grants to Voluntary Environment & Heritage Organisations to enable community groups to engage in the development of protected area policies and help build community support and understanding of PAs.
- M. CoAG should commit to legislation for systematic, long-range ecological monitoring to ensure Australia can track the health of its protected areas over time, and undertake adaptive management.
- N. As a matter of urgency, all governments should act now to develop a national framework to reduce the risk to protected area values arising from climate change; including both strong, proactive mitigation and resilience-building strategies.

1. Preface

ACF's Interest in Parks, Reserves and other Protected Areas

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) is committed to inspiring people to achieve a healthy environment for all Australians. ACF is Australia's leading national not-for profit environmental organisation, funded almost entirely by its members and supporters. For forty years we have been a strong voice for the environment;

promoting solutions through research, consultation, advocacy, education and partnerships. We work with the community, business and government to protect, restore and sustain biodiversity and a healthy environment, and to build a sustainable society.

We have played a key role in strengthening protection for some of Australia's most outstanding natural assets, including the Franklin River, Kakadu, the Daintree Rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef. In the last few years, we have helped in the restoration of flows to the Snowy River, the banning of radioactive waste dumps in SA, reining in broadscale land clearing in Queensland, the promised rehabilitation of the Jabiluka mine site in Kakadu and the declaration of new Marine National Parks in Victoria.

We have helped to make salinity, sustainable agriculture, water and energy urgent national issues, and pushed hard for national action on climate change, river health, and Tasmania's forests. We are working to strengthen conservation management across whole landscapes and to improve regional marine planning. ACF has a focus on models of economic development that respect Indigenous cultures and rights, and ensure the protection of the north's relatively healthy ecosystems.

2. Introduction

2.1 ACF welcomes the opportunity to take part in this important inquiry into the role and responsibilities of government in establishing and maintaining Australia's protected areas.

2.2 As at 2001, less than ten percent of the continent is in national parks and conservation reserves. The protection of Australia's oceans is even less well-developed. In addition, some areas with high natural and cultural values are maintained through ongoing Indigenous management under customary law as community conserved areas. Nevertheless, even adding private land conservation reserves, the total proportion remains very low, particularly in northern Australia and across the rangelands. A far smaller fraction of Australia's marine jurisdiction is zoned for some kind of protection. Nevertheless, this relatively small area of land and water contributes generously to Australia's GDP, to our culture, and to our lives.

2.3 Many global prioritisation exercises have highlighted parts of Australia where greater protection is urgently needed. Conservation International recognises two biodiversity "hot-spots:" one in the south-west region of Western Australia and one covering the eastern Australian rainforests – both areas are urgently in need of greater protection. Conservation International have now supplemented the hotspot and wilderness prioritisation, with maps of global distribution of protected and unprotected sites of high urgency for the coverage of mammals, amphibians and threatened birds. The analysis identifies regions in Australia that are on two or more of the priority maps:

- Northern Australia, encompassing the tropical savannas wilderness, and giving priorities within that to Cape York Peninsula, the west Kimberley and Arnhem Land for mammals, amphibians and threatened birds; and

- South-west Western Australia, encompassing both a hot-spot and priority areas for mammals, amphibians and threatened birds.

Other priorities for Australia that emerge from these studies are:

- East coast rainforests and tall eucalypt forests for mammals, amphibians and threatened birds, and potentially some parts also as a hot-spot;
- Tasmanian wilderness; and
- Australian deserts.

2.4 Many terrestrial national parks and conservation reserves sit in a highly fragmented landscape, surrounded by other land uses, often managed unsympathetically to conservation. In some cases, marine protected areas, like the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, face threats arising from land-uses in the catchments that flow into reef waters, and from other sea uses.

2.5 Australia's dedicated conservation estate – national parks and nature reserves, public, private and communal – are the backbone of the national effort to stem the loss of biodiversity and the deterioration of critical life-support services, and to protect natural and cultural values. All other strategies to sustain our natural heritage and manage our land and seascapes appropriately hinge on our protected areas.

2.6 The conservation of Australia's natural and cultural heritage requires a comprehensive and sustained effort, with support from all political parties and all sectors of society.

2.7 ACF strongly supports a comprehensive, adequate, representative, well-managed and properly resourced system of protected areas across the country, and throughout our oceans. In addition, the protected area system needs to be resilient in the face of global change – building resilience requires new criteria for the selection of new protected areas, and new and improved approaches to build the physical and human capacity of existing protected areas.

2.8 The National Reserve System Directions Statement 2005 makes the point that is *seven times* as cost-effective to protect natural ecosystems as it is to attempt to rehabilitate or restore them once they have been destroyed or significantly degraded.

2.9 The need to maintain and consolidate the national system of protected areas is as great as it ever was, if not more so given threatening processes like global climate change.

3. The Importance of Australia's Protected Areas

Values

3.1 Much has been written about the variety of important values of Australia's protected areas; direct and indirect, quantifiable and non-quantifiable. Even so, our understanding of these values is an emerging field.

- 3.2 It is clear that our protected areas are fundamental to Australia's sustainable development; economically, socially and culturally.
- 3.3 **Economics, Commerce and Sustainable Development:** On economic grounds alone, PAs prove their worth time and again. For instance, a 1997 Queensland study estimated that the 12.5 million visits to that state's protected areas per year generated \$1.2 billion in consumer spending, supported 6,000 jobs directly, as well as around 15,000 more jobs indirectly¹.
- 3.4 Based on this and similar studies, it is reasonable to argue that the direct and indirect dividends to private business and economies - local, state and national - is well worth the relatively small scale of public investment in Australia's protected areas.
- 3.5 In addition, the indirect economic benefits from maintaining ecosystem services - pollination, nutrient cycling, water quality, etc. - should not be under-estimated. Although difficult to gauge with certainty, the monetary value of healthy ecosystems has been estimated at well over \$1,000 billion to Australian industry (CSIRO, cited in *Natural Advantage* 2000). Likewise, several Australian capital cities rely on drinking water produced in protected areas.
- 3.6 Moreover, the full potential of appropriate economic development centring on protected areas - particularly Indigenous Protected Areas - remains untapped. The growth of industries like nature-based tourism, for example, depends on well-managed protected areas; a point well made by the Tourism and Transport Forum in the 2004 report *A Natural Partnership: Making National Parks a Tourism Priority*. Similarly, the 2003 Australian Government report *Pursuing Common Goals: Opportunities for Tourism and Conservation* clearly states that much of the total income from tourism in Australia is dependent on "the country's natural environment, unique wildlife and cultural heritage." It is worth noting that tourism is second only to mining in contribution to GDP by sector - around \$70 billion annually.
- 3.7 The economic returns from our national parks and conservation reserves are undoubtedly in the order of billions annually, if not more. Needless to say, sustainably capitalising on the economic value of our national parks and reserves is largely dependent upon how adequately governments resource their acquisition and up-keep.
- 3.8 The monetary value of protected areas is notoriously hard to calculate and, while undoubtedly impressive, is not by itself the only, nor even the best reason for setting aside areas of special significance. The economic worth of biodiversity, however, is an important yet often missing ingredient in political decision-making and public debate. Historically, community groups have had to battle short-sighted and narrow-minded interpretations of economic value just to begin to establish a case for protected areas. As one author puts it:

¹ Cited in Commonwealth of Australia 2005 *National Reserves System Directions Statement*, Environment Australia, Canberra.

*The character of national parks in Australia has been, and still is, strongly determined by the materialist perception that national parks and wilderness areas are, in essence, 'worthless lands.'*²

- 3.9 It is more or less precisely because native biodiversity and natural systems have not, traditionally, been given adequate legal protection from unrestrained industrial, urban or agricultural development that community-based conservation campaigns have been waged over the years.
- 3.10 **Aesthetics, Recreation, Education & 'Naturalness':** Economic benefits aside, quite simply, Australians treasure their national parks and conservation reserves. Millions of us, together with millions of our overseas guests, visit national parks and reserves all over the country for a variety of reasons; recreation, science, curiosity, etc. Moreover, people need never visit an area and still they will support its protection as a park or reserve. After all, most Australians have never seen the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Area firsthand, yet most would be disturbed to know that its natural heritage values are threatened by over-fishing, pollution, and climate change.
- 3.11 People often appreciate parks and reserves for the contrast they provide with an increasingly urbanised and industrialised landscape. For many, knowing that we have not converted every square centimetre of the country for production, tasteless commercial development or human habitation is reason enough to set aside areas for strict protection of their inherent natural character.
- 3.12 The appeal of protection may be on the basis of 'naturalness,' aesthetic and recreation, environmental education, posterity, protection of native wildlife, the rights of future generations, or the rights of Traditional Owners to observe traditional culture and customs or some combination of these and other values.
- 3.13 **Indigenous cultural heritage and economic empowerment:** Indigenous peoples' have a central role in ensuring an effective protected area system to provide the cornerstone of conservation action in the 21st Century. A world class protected area system ensures natural and cultural heritage will be protected for future generations through strong conservation actions that fully respect human rights, including Indigenous peoples' land and cultural rights.
1. Protected areas developed with the support and consent of Indigenous peoples also have a major and significant role to play in strengthening and renewing Indigenous peoples' cultures and special links to their traditional lands. However, some protected areas have been developed on Indigenous peoples' lands without their consent or as a deliberate means of preventing Indigenous people remaining on their traditional land, such as the Archer River Bend National Park in Queensland. The legacy of these actions needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

² Hall 1992, *Wilderness of Wasteland*. p234.

- 3.14 Indigenous Protected Areas are one Australian example of the IUCN governance type “community conserved areas” and can provide another vehicle for empowering communities through pride in their land; enabling them to care for country and pass on important traditional ecological knowledge to successive generations. Moreover, Australia is only just beginning to appreciate the great value of Indigenous customary knowledge to conservation and natural resource management, i.e. what Indigenous Australians can teach non-Indigenous Australians about looking after the land and seas. This appreciation grows as a direct result of partnerships and dialogue with Traditional Owners around protected areas; a process which cannot be rushed. Nevertheless, while Indigenous Protected Areas remain an Australian Government initiative only, they will always remain marginal to our protected area system. The Australian Government has a national leadership role to play to foster the recognition of community conserved areas and Indigenous Protected Areas by State and Territory governments.
- 3.15 **National Identity:** Protected areas, great and small, have helped to shape our national identity: Uluru, Kakadu, the Reef, the Tasmanian wilderness, Ningaloo, the Prom, the High Country, to name a few. All are cultural icons, of which many if not most Australians are justifiably proud. These places and their natural character continue to inspire our art, music, popular culture, and sense of self.
- 3.16 **Intrinsic Value:** There is also a view that natural systems and biodiversity should not ultimately require a defence on the grounds of their use – economic, spiritual, social, psychological or cultural. Rather, natural systems and biodiversity are intrinsically valuable, and humans have no right to continue to irretrievably degrade or destroy them other than to meet genuine needs (see, for example, Callicott 1997). It follows that we should restrict our use of our protected areas to activities compatible with their core objectives of natural and cultural heritage conservation. This view is shared by ACF.
- 3.17 Recognition of intrinsic value helps to reinforce an ethic of restraint that is of even greater importance in Twenty-First Century Australia; when so much of the continent has been ‘developed’ to satisfy seemingly insatiable demands for natural resources; when population pressures are increasing; and when pressures from commercial and other vested interests for unrestricted access to parks are ongoing.
- 3.18 **Cost-effective Conservation & Restoration:** Australia’s protected areas are the backbone of our biodiversity conservation efforts. We hold them and the living natural wealth they harbour in trust for the world, for generations to come. Australia’s biodiversity and natural systems are of global significance, and our responsibility to protect them is high; not least because we have more than enough resources at our disposal to do so properly.
- 3.19 Protected areas are one of the most cost-effective public policy tools for the conservation of Australia’s native biodiversity. The Prime Minister’s Science, Engineering and Innovation Council estimated that an investment of \$300-400M would achieve 80% protection of the full range of regional ecosystems (an established national target), save 14,700 native species and result in collateral

benefits of \$2,000M³. That is, a rate of return nearly six times the public investment (Possingham, *et al.* 2002). Collateral benefit here refers to the expansion of diverse recreational and tourism opportunities that would ensue from a mix of public land, private land purchases and covenanting agreements.

3.20 The Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment (2002) notes that sample areas of around two-thirds of the country's regional ecosystems are included in national parks and formal reserves. Given the pressures – especially land clearing – on Australia's remnant natural ecosystems, the role of parks and reserves in setting aside at least some remnants of our ancient natural heritage becomes especially important.

3.21 Finally, parks and reserves can form the nuclei of landscape repair and ecological restoration efforts, which are such a focus for many rural and regional communities around Australia. Given the stresses on our land and seascapes from climate variability and, increasingly, from climate change, the maintenance of a strong network of protected areas is essential in any adaptation or resilience building strategy – such as that espoused by the Australian Government.

Objectives of Protected Areas

3.22 The chief objective of national parks and conservation reserves should be the protection of native biodiversity and natural ecosystems for their own sake, as well as the maintenance of cultural heritage, together with research, education, appropriate forms of recreation, conservation management, ecosystem services, and collateral economic and social benefits, i.e. IUCN protected area categories I-IV.

3.23 The governance arrangements for protected areas should reflect the full diversity of human society, and provide opportunities for all peoples to participate fully in their ongoing protection and management. A policy paradigm shift has occurred over the last decade from protected area as islands, managed reactively with a narrow focus on conservation and control of the activities of local people, to protected areas as elements of a network, managed adaptively with a broader focus on socio-economic and cultural objectives, and established and run together with local peoples (Borrini-Feyerabend *et al.* 2004a). Central to this paradigm shift has been the adoption of a new classification system for protected areas recognising diversity in governance.

³ Possingham, H., Ryan, S., Baxter, J. & Morton, S. 2002. *Setting Biodiversity Priorities*. A paper prepared as part of the activities of the working group producing the report *Sustaining our Natural Systems and Biodiversity* for the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council in 2002. DEST, Canberra. p9.

Table 2.1 A classification system for protected areas comprising both management category and governance type

Governance types PA Categories	A. Government Managed Protected Areas			B. Co-managed Protected Areas			C. Private Protected Areas		D. Community Conserved Areas		
	Federal or national ministry or agency in charge	Local/ municipal ministry or agency in charge	Government-delegated management (e.g. to an NGO)	Transboundary management	Collaborative management (various forms of pluralist influence)	Joint management (pluralist management board)	Declared and run by individual land-owner	... by non-profit organizations (e.g. NGOs, universities, co-operatives)	... by for profit organizations (e.g. individual or corporate land-owners)	Declared and run by indigenous peoples	Declared and run by local communities
Ia – Strict Nature Reserve											
Ib – Wilderness Area											
II – National Park											
III – Natural Monument											
IV – Habitat/ Species Management											
V – Protected Landscape/ Seascape											
VI – Managed Resource Protected Area											

- Co-managed areas are those with formally shared authority, while community conserved areas are those where authority is recognised and devolved to Indigenous and local people.
- Co-managed areas throughout the world show diversity in their means of sharing power in decision making, for example through voting arrangements on management boards.
- Community conserved areas are proving particularly useful in achieving conservation outcomes on land to which Indigenous peoples have strong connections and rights.

3.24 ACF is deeply sceptical of trends towards ‘multiple use’ in national parks and conservation reserves; where these allow intrusive or ecologically unsustainable activities, such as uranium mining in World Heritage Areas.

3.25 The World Conservation Union’s (IUCN) scheme for protected areas classification encompasses a range of objectives, from strict conservation of largely unmodified ecosystems (or at least unmodified by industrialised European occupation), with little or no disturbance except for research and conservation management actions (which may include replication of natural disturbance régimes); to the preservation of cultural heritage (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous); to areas of measured natural resource use more or less flexibly managed to avoid the deterioration of living resources, including biodiversity.

4. Threats & Challenges to Protected Area Objectives & Management

- 4.1 It is important to recognise that there is an array of indirect as well as direct threats that may operate on PAs, and that it is often the case that several of these act in concert.
- 4.2 It is similarly important to understand that the long-term efficacy of protected areas is strongly influenced by the condition of the environment in which they sit.
- 4.3 *Indirect and policy-related threats to protected areas may include:*
- 4.3.1 Population and commercial pressures for inappropriate development in and around protected areas, particularly along the coast, in peri-urban areas, in parts of Northern Australia.
 - 4.3.2 The failure of economics and commerce to account for the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services, for their deterioration;
 - 4.3.3 Poor integration of protected area needs and threats into regional NRM or catchment management;
 - 4.3.4 The failure of governments to plan for the long-term, either by making strategic policy interventions to reduce the risks to protected areas from threatening processes like climate change and over-allocation of river systems, or to design PA networks with long-term ecological and climatic changes in mind;
 - 4.3.5 Failure either to draw up management and/or recovery plans for protected areas and their values, or – more often perhaps - to properly allocate resources, including trained and experienced personnel, to carry out these plans;
 - 4.3.6 A generally low ecological literacy and a poor appreciation of the importance of protected areas ‘beyond borders,’ and/or outright denial of ecological problems, fuelling a hostile attitude towards protected areas;
 - 4.3.7 The inadequacy of resourcing to establish and maintain protected area networks (including PAs on private land), or to ensure sympathetic management ‘off-reserve.’
 - 4.3.8 The poor specification of goals for protected area and broader ecosystem management;
 - 4.3.9 The limitations of current ecological science, particularly with regard to understanding threatening processes, natural disturbance régimes, and identifying appropriate management approaches; together with a failure of policy-makers and political leaders to act in accordance with best available science when it is available;
 - 4.3.10 Poor recognition of the strong outcomes from community-conserved areas managed by Indigenous Australians over millennia;
 - 4.3.11 Failure to develop appropriate systems to support and strengthen Indigenous peoples’ knowledge and management approaches;
 - 4.3.12 Lack of political will and leadership to strengthen and defend Australia’s protected area network, and the pandering to narrow vested interests for political reasons;
 - 4.3.13 Lack of systematic ecological monitoring to chart progress and adapt management if necessary;

- 4.3.14 Poor coordination and communication amongst and within governments, and other stakeholders;
- 4.3.15 Failure to properly engage relevant stakeholders in protected areas design, acquisition and management – including Traditional Owners, private land managers, conservation groups, etc; and
- 4.3.16 Failure to maintain the morale and resources of public agencies with the primary responsibility for managing protected areas.

4.4 The more ‘day-to-day’ threats that protected area managers and policy makers must contend with may include:

- 4.4.1 Invasive species;
- 4.4.2 Damage incurred by intensive resource extraction, e.g. mining;
- 4.4.3 Altered hydrology, leading to salinisation, water-logging and/or lack of environmental river flows;
- 4.4.4 Unsustainable visitor pressures and intrusive activities;
- 4.4.5 Altered fire regimes
- 4.4.6 Inadequate institutional arrangements and resources to, for instance, support equity and diversity in governance; and
- 4.4.7 Environmental contamination, e.g. pesticide spray drift or pollution of waterways.

5. Government’s Role & Responsibilities in Protected Area Management

- 5.1 All nations and their governments bear a responsibility to conserve the world’s natural and cultural diversity, and maintain the critical life-support services upon which life depends, and to ensure that the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystems are equitably shared, within and between generations.
- 5.2 Wealthier developed countries like Australia have an even greater responsibility than poor ones, especially given our relatively strong capacity to invest in conservation research and action, as well as the tradition of professionalism in our public service, and our relatively well-educated and well-informed population.
- 5.3 Australia is the only developed nation widely recognised as ‘megadiverse’. That is, we are the custodians of an extraordinary wealth of different living things and bioregions. This in turn means that Australian governments - as well as industries and communities - have an especially high responsibility to protect the natural environment.
- 5.4 Australia is also one of the sites of mega cultural diversity in the world, with two language families and scores of ethno-linguistic groups; this outstanding cultural diversity is directly linked to the natural diversity and urgently in need of protected area systems and arrangements that recognise, respect and enhance this interconnection
- 5.5 Additionally, given multiple environmental values, and given market failures to account for biodiversity properly, governments should act in the long-term public

interest to place limits on environmentally damaging activities, consistent with sustainability principles. This includes setting aside for legal protection areas of special ecological, cultural, geomorphological and/or cultural significance.

- 5.6 The conservation estate should be governed by the most appropriate, legitimate authority, and take account of the full range of IUCN governance categories. Public-private partnerships may, from time to time, prove valuable, but given the private sector's record of discounting the long-term for short-term profit, government should retain primary management responsibility.
- 5.7 Government may also play an enabling and supportive role in cross-sectoral partnerships to manage conservation estate on private and community-owned (including Indigenous) land.
- 5.8 Various international treaties and agreements - including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the World Heritage Convention - bind Australia to conservation goals and duties.

As a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Australian Government is obliged to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The Seventh Conference of the Parties (COP 7) to the CBD in Kuala Lumpur in 2004 adopted a programme of Work on Protected Areas, and set targets and timelines for the strengthening of PAs in both the marine and terrestrial spheres, and for equity and governance:

- **Target:** Establish by 2008 mechanisms for the equitable sharing of both costs and benefits arising from the establishment and management of protected areas.
- **Target:** Full and effective participation by 2008, of Indigenous and local communities, in full respect of their rights and recognition of their responsibilities, consistent with national law and applicable international obligations, and the participation of relevant stakeholders, in the management of existing, and the establishment and management of new, protected areas.

- 5.9 All Australian governments – state and federal – have repeatedly committed themselves to achieving the goal of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas, on land and in the sea. All governments have signed the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity. The Strategy, which makes special mention of the centrality of protected areas to the conservation effort, and includes various goals (see below) with regard to reserves and their management, also stresses the responsibility to ensure sympathetic off-reserve management (Commonwealth of Australia 1996).
- 5.10 This last point, that even a CAR system of parks and reserves is not sufficient to arrest the loss of biodiversity and the decline in ecosystem health, is now well-recognised by governments, scientific bodies and non-governmental organisations. ACF therefore argues for the addition of "resilience" to the CAR criteria.
- 5.11 Resilience can be achieved through measures to:

- Strengthen the physical capacity of protected areas:
 - Develop corridors for biota and link these to larger network of protected areas through regional planning;
 - Ensure land-uses adjacent to parks and reserves are compatible with ongoing protection of the natural and cultural values (through regional NRM planning);
 - Relieve other direct environmental pressures (for example, there should be no mining in protected areas);
 - Select protected areas through criteria that reflect ongoing natural processes as well as natural biodiversity patterns; in particular using the natural heritage categories of biodiversity, evolution, natural integrity, ongoing natural processes, aesthetic values and contribution to knowledge.

- Strengthen the human capacity of protected areas via:
 - Strengthening the morale and resources of agencies with a mandate to manage protected areas – enabling them to effect good, long-term conservation management and community engagement;
 - Strengthening the status and culture of Indigenous peoples linked to protected areas, and engaging Indigenous peoples’ capacity to undertake land and sea management within protected areas;
 - Selecting protected areas through processes that engage Indigenous and other local communities’ knowledge and interests;
 - Create protected areas only with the informed consent of Indigenous Traditional Owners.

- Build management capacity
 - Developing more effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders who have a strong interest in the future of protected areas;
 - Adopting best-practice approaches based on the IUCN Guidelines, for example ensure visitor management is based on limits of acceptable change planning.

- Monitoring and evaluating management effectiveness, including by:
 - Undertaking a review of the arrangements in Australia to provide for diversity in governance;
 - Establishing legislation for systematic national ecological monitoring.

5.12 Annexe 6 of the CBD, adopted in 2000, lays out the principles of the Ecosystem Approach. In Australia, this might be called ‘integrated catchment management’ or ‘marine ecosystem management.’ It is now generally recognised that governments alone cannot do the job, and that all sectors of society need to work together to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources.

The ecosystem approach is an integrated management strategy applying to land, water, and living resources, which regulates preservation and sustainable utilisation in an equitable manner. The approach is to be put into action through practical activities at the national level, focusing on those levels of biological organisation at which the most important structures, processes, functions and

relations between organisms and their environment are to be found. The ecosystem approach acknowledges that humankind, with all its cultural diversity, is an integral part of ecosystems⁴.

- 5.13 Adoption of the ecosystem approach to management recognises that humanity is an integral part of ecosystems, and notes that national governments should:
- Reduce those market distortions that adversely affect biological diversity;
 - Align incentives to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use; and
 - Internalise costs and benefits in the given ecosystem to the extent feasible.
- 5.14 The commitment of governments to regional delivery of natural resource management (NRM) under the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust (round 2) (established by a series of bilateral agreements), and to the National Water Initiative has seen some movement towards meeting the objectives of the ecosystem approach.
6. ACF further suggests that to give full effect to CAR objectives, governments should:
- Work with best available science and communities to set achievable but challenging targets for conservation of areas of high natural and cultural value and ecological restoration;
 - Identify and correct deficiencies in the design and management of protected areas;
 - Develop approaches to ensure protected areas are only created with the informed consent of Traditional Owners, and mechanisms to recognise and redress the impacts of protected areas created without consent;
 - Improving equity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities – strengthening the identity and culture of Indigenous Australians through land and water management;
 - Support Indigenous ecological and management knowledge, and the cultural basis of management, through ensuring resources are available for the recording of Indigenous peoples' knowledge under their own control;
 - Improve information on biodiversity and threatening processes, by adequately investing in conservation science;
 - Ensure biodiversity conservation is a priority in natural resource management programmes and regional delivery;
 - Strengthen proactive conservation management in areas outside of reserves, including agricultural areas;
 - Improve monitoring and reporting of ecological condition and conservation management across all tenures, including by enabling community and industry participation;
 - Improve public appreciation of PAs, and their ecological, social, cultural and economic importance;
 - Raise ecological literacy in the community, work with the community and private sectors to demonstrate the importance of PA's, and encourage community participation in protected area management;
 - Strengthen the resources available to protected area managers and institutions to enable them to carry out their responsibilities;

⁴ Further information can be obtained from www.biodiv.org

- Building an enabling environment and the capacity for community conservation and co-management at all levels;
- Make strategic policy interventions to address key threatening processes, and address the market, policy and institutional failures that lead to biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.

7. Is Government Meeting the Challenge?

7.1 Australia has made substantial progress towards a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas. This is most notable for terrestrial areas, less so in the case for freshwater and marine environments.

7.2 Australian governments have also made some significant progress towards diversifying PA models and developing cross-sectoral partnership, including joint management with Traditional Owners, the establishment of an Indigenous Protected Areas programme, private land trusts, community conservation and conservation incentives for private landholders.

7.3 All states and territories have expanded their conservation estate. Less effort has been put into resourcing their monitoring and management, and only now are governments making a start towards the integrated management of whole land and seascapes for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services maintenance.

7.4 The political appeal of declaring a new national park often seems more appealing than the announcement of raising expenditure on management to maintain and enhance the conservation values of a park.

7.5 Australian governments have made small steps towards addressing some of the underlying policy, market and institutional failures that lead to biodiversity loss, but there is still much to do.

7.6 The development of national bioregional management frameworks - the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) and its marine and coastal counterpart, the IMCRA - has meant a more strategic approach to protected areas acquisition and management.

7.7 There is been reasonably good record of co-operation amongst governments in the field of protected area; as shown by the development of the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity and the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT).

The Natural Heritage Trust and the National Reserves System

7.8 Despite shortcomings, the NHT (both the first and second phase; quite different programmes in many respects) has substantially improved the country's environmental information base, and hence enabled better conservation planning and management; the National Land & Water Resources Audit, in particular, has been pivotal in developing a better national picture of the state of Australian

ecosystems through a series of national assessments, including the Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment (2002).

- 7.9 NHT funding for the National Reserves System programme, in particular, has been crucial in establishing new protected areas, including Indigenous Protected Areas and private land conservation estate. The NRSMPA has similarly been important for marine protected areas. A stated goal of the NHT is to enhance the national reserve system, and advance the principles of the ecosystem management in practice.
- 7.10 ACF is deeply concerned that NHT2 appears to have systematically excluded Indigenous interests in protected areas acquisition and management.
- 7.11 The NRS programme's 2:1 cost-sharing arrangement has made it possible to leverage substantial state and territory, private, and community investment in PAs acquisition and management.
- 7.12 A sustained and strategic funding stream is fundamental to maintaining and upgrading the national reserve system, i.e. meeting nationally-agreed targets for a CAR system of protected areas. Funding is crucial to meeting acquisition costs, to basic and applied conservation science (including benchmarking studies), to effective stakeholder engagement, to strategic planning, to managing the threats to PA objectives and values outlined above, and so on.
- 7.13 Funding of this kind now, coupled to a long-term commitment, is a strategic investment in the future of Australia's natural assets that is likely to yield greater returns to the community and to industry into the future.
- 7.14 ACF deplores the steady erosion of the Australian Government's funding commitment to the NRS; from \$20.6M in 2001-02 to around \$6M in 2005-06 according to the Department of Environment & Heritage.

Protected Areas in NRM

- 7.15 Note how small even the first of these figures is in proportion to the total natural resource and environmental budget of the Australian Government; which, in 2004-05 was approximately \$190M. As important as it is to invest in sustainable landscape management beyond protected areas, it is especially important to remember that protected areas are a key element in sustainable NRM. The point has already been made that they are also a cost-effective approach to maintaining natural heritage and ecosystem services.
- 7.16 Reserve and off-reserve management should be complementary, and public investment in both should reflect this principle. It is unclear to what extent parks and reserves have been adequately addressed in the shift towards regional NRM delivery, but early indications give us cause for concern.
- 7.17 ACF believes that there is an urgent to strengthen the scientific underpinning and strategic delivery of regional NRM at the same time as consolidating the NRS.

7.18 Given the benefits of a consolidated NRS (as shown by Moreton, *et al.* 2001), given that governments are slipping behind in meeting their conservation targets (see below), and given the cost-effectiveness of reservation, ACF believes that the Council of Australian Governments should - in line with PMSEIC's recommendation - commit to six years funding of \$350M to augment the NRS on a 2:1 cost-sharing arrangement between the Commonwealth and the states/territories.

Staffing and Resources

7.19 The Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment concluded that the standard of Australia's protected area management was 'fair' for little more than half of 57 bioregions assessed. A further 33% had management regarded as 'good' or 'very good.'

7.20 There are reasons to believe that parks staff and management plans are under-resourced in many instances. ACF would welcome a comprehensive assessment of protected area staffing and resources, and their cost-effectiveness.

7.21 When governments - often for short-term political or financial reasons - reduce staff numbers and management resources, they run the risk of degrading community confidence in protected area managers and the support for protected areas themselves.

7.22 It is equally important to ensure good neighbour relations between public and private land managers; as the Victorian Government has sought to do via its 'Good Neighbour' policy. Experience suggests that this approach pays off by encouraging sympathetic conservation actions on private land and reducing resentment of public lands.

7.23 ACF generally supports managers' calls for adequate resources and political support to ensure best practice management of our national parks and conservation reserves.

Marine Protected Areas and Ecosystem Management

7.24 See section 2.3 of the attachment *Out of the Blue* for a thorough analysis of progress in regard to MPAs.

7.25 ACF expects Australia to develop a world's best practice network of marine regional plans with strong marine national parks at the core of each region, including:

- at least 30% of each marine habitat in the region, identified using the best-available science;
- parks of sufficient size, number and closeness to one another to maintain the region's remarkable ocean life and vital ecosystem links;
- biodiversity conservation, together with the protection of cultural values, as its core objectives;

- measures that protect the parks from ‘panic’ exploitation prior to their proclamation;
- strategies to clearly communicate the environmental, social and economic benefits of the network to the Australian community; and
- clear and measurable goals for community education, communications, marine monitoring, compliance and enforcement, and adequate investment in park managers and marine science.

7.26 Despite the welcome oceans policy initiative by the Australian Government, the country’s marine environment is still subject to the vagaries of eight different governments, numerous local governments and hundreds of different laws. This creates administrative costs and inconsistencies that encumber environmental managers and resource users. ACF and the National Environmental Law Association have proposed a single Australian Oceans’ Act to better ensure consistency across jurisdictions, certainty for all stakeholders, and security for the marine environment (see attachment).

Community Engagement in Protected Areas Policy and Management

7.27 To a varying degree, governments encourage community involvement in protected areas design and management. Proper stakeholder engagement is essential to the success of protected areas, and to ensuring their benefits go beyond their borders.

7.28 ACF notes that a review of the NRS by the Department of Environment & Heritage is taking place simultaneously with this Senate Inquiry. This follows a discussion paper and process commissioned by the NRM Ministerial Council last year (see ACF’s submission attached). While it is certainly important that non-governmental organisations are encouraged to participate in policy development, it is equally important that governments – at every level - take into account their capacity to do so.

7.29 In 2005 the Minister for Environment & Heritage decided to withdraw the longstanding Grants to Voluntary Environment & Heritage Organisations (GVEHOs) for anything other than on-ground conservation works. (Needless to say, this is the purpose of other existing funding streams, such as Landcare and Envirofund.) This decision effectively makes it harder for local or regional environmental groups, who generally find it difficult to raise funds, to become involved in the planning and policy processes affecting protected areas. In turn, this may mean that the quality of policy and planning is impoverished, and the role of the community in protected areas management diminished.

River Health and Freshwater Protected Areas

7.30 In 2004 a conference convened by IRN and WWF Australia recommended that the Council of Australian Governments negotiate an agreement to develop a national framework for protecting freshwater ecosystems of high conservation value.

- 7.31 More recently government and international bodies have proposed high conservation value area networks. The National Reserve System Taskforce has recommended that freshwater ecosystems be incorporated within the National Reserve System.
- 7.32 The Queensland Government announced a Wild Rivers Policy in 2004 and is currently translating that policy commitment into legislation. However, ACF is concerned that the Wild Rivers Policy has failed to take account of the need to effectively engage Traditional Owners in the selection, management and governance of these new freshwater protected areas.
- 7.33 The National Water Initiative includes a commitment to identify freshwater ecosystems of high conservation values and manage these systems to protect those values (NWI s 25x). The 3rd World Conservation Congress held by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) passed a resolution recommending that all member states establish high conservation value area networks.
- 7.34 Despite the level of interest and commitment evident from the number of proposals, there is no agreed framework for an Australian high conservation value areas system or even any widespread common understanding of what such a system would consist of. In our view, the proliferation of proposals, each using slightly different terminology and applying to a slightly different scale, is indicative of both widespread support for the concept of a high conservation value areas network and the need for a central institution, or a collective such as CoAG, to promote the development of a flexible *national* framework.
- 7.35 We believe that the final form of such a framework should be the result of wide-ranging discussions including a variety of stakeholders. However, it is currently possible to identify the necessary components of a protected areas framework using proposals for freshwater protected areas, existing examples of such areas, and comparisons to terrestrial and marine protected areas. See the attached ACF/Inland Rivers Network document *Vision for a Framework under the NWI for Protecting High Conservation Value Freshwater Areas in Australia*.
- 7.36 It is especially important that all Governments follow through on their commitment to the National Water Initiative; using all agreed measures and principles, including market mechanisms to recover water for conservation and environmental restoration.

Joint Management of Kakadu National Park

- 7.37 ACF is aware that there are many problems with current arrangements for joint management at Kakadu National Park, which is under direct Australian Government control and is a World Heritage area. ACF is calling for a major review to identify ways of strengthening the joint management arrangements to ensure greater equity for the Traditional Owners, to support the primacy of their decision-making in the Park, and to greatly strengthen the cultural basis of management. ACF is addressing particular details relevant to this in our comments on the Draft management Plan for Kakadu.

Targets and Objectives for Biodiversity Conservation

- 7.38 According to a recent study undertaken by Griffin NRM Pty Ltd (2004) for WWF Australia, Australian governments are behind in meeting a number of national biodiversity targets, including those relating directly to the consolidation of the NRS Objective 1.2 of the National Objectives and Targets for Biological Diversity Conservation 2001-2005.
- 7.39 As at June 2001, the Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment found that 9.2% of the country was protected as a formal park or conservation reserve; encompassing around two-thirds of Australia's ecosystem diversity for which there is data (68 out of 85 according to the assessment). About 5% of ecosystems are represented in private and Indigenous protected areas.
- 7.40 Approximately half of the country's bioregions are a high priority for further reservation and proactive conservation management actions if Australia is to meet its target of a CAR reserve system. Moreover, around 1,500 ecosystems are now recognised as threatened; many of these should be targeted for protective management. Given the high level of fragmentation of terrestrial ecosystems, it is also important to focus attention on maintaining and restoring habitat connectivity between ecological communities.
- 7.41 Amongst the assessment's key recommendations were calls for legislated framework for ecological monitoring (together with proper resourcing), and an urgent call to consolidate the reserves system given the pressures on native vegetation and river systems. ACF supports these calls wholeheartedly.

Climate change and protected areas

- 7.42 The Australian Government has acknowledged that climate change is a very serious problem and that large reductions in greenhouse pollution are required. By 2020, Australia's greenhouse pollution is projected to be more than 20% *above* 1990 levels. Most of this is due to the 60% increase in pollution from the energy sector. In its review of Australia's national energy policy the International Energy Agency has concluded that promoting sustainability are Australia's single biggest policy challenge.
- 7.43 CSIRO projections for climate change in Australia indicate, on current trends, an increase in average annual temperatures by 0.4-2.0°C by 2030, with further rises of 1.0-6.0°C anticipated by 2070. Given the numerous human pressures and impacts on Australian ecosystems, rapid climate change could not have happened at a worse time in our history.
- 7.44 The biodiversity impacts of abrupt climate change are uncertain, although we can expect at least a similar magnitude and rapidity of biodiversity loss as occurred to the emergence of the planet from the last Ice Age, at which time species loss and ecosystem dysfunction would have been substantial. This and previous climatic shifts, including that at the end of the Pleistocene 1.8 MYA, are known to have led to major shifts in species ranges and marked re-distribution of

ecosystems and biomes – all in an environment that was not as fragmented or stressed as it is today, and with little or no pressures from human activities. Habitat fragmentation has confined many species to relatively small areas within their previous ranges, with reduced genetic variability. Globally, then, the loss of wild biodiversity associated with anthropogenic climate change is likely to be severe, and the first, best action is to protect priority ecosystems:

For a given ecosystem, functionally diverse communities are more likely to adapt to climate change and climate variability than impoverished ones. In addition, high genetic diversity within species appears to increase their long-term persistence. It must be stressed, however, that the effect of the nature and magnitude of genetic and species diversity on certain ecosystem processes is still poorly known. The ability of ecosystems to either resist or return to their former state following disturbance may also depend on given levels of functional diversity. This can have important implications for the design of activities aimed at mitigating and adapting to climate change. Therefore, conservation of genotypes, species and functional types, along with the reduction of habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, may promote the long-term persistence of ecosystems and the provision of ecosystem goods and services⁵.

7.45 Australia certainly needs to develop an adaptive response to climate change – one that minimises other stresses on ecosystems. It is good to see the start of nationally co-ordinated government action in this regard. However, the absence of an adequate national commitment to restoring environmental flows in rivers like the Murray, to maintaining and expanding the National Reserves System, to maintaining experienced management of the Great Barrier Reef, or to strategically restoring ecological function in degraded landscapes – all measures that would seem to be the essential underpinnings of an adaptive management strategy - is strikingly at odds with the Australian Government's focus on adaptation to climate change.

7.46 Climate change will have particularly adverse impacts on Indigenous communities; their connexion to traditional lands and seas. Sacred sites and other sites of high cultural heritage significance may be directly affected by inundation and other physical changes. The seasonal availability and location of plants and animals used in the customary economy may change. Social processes for passing traditional knowledge between generations can also be adversely affected by rapid bio-physical change.

7.47 Recent scientific work on the likely impacts of climate change on the planet's natural environment have highlighted the importance of emissions reduction strategies to limit the damage:

Reducing the concentrations of greenhouse gases — and reducing them soon — could minimize [global] warming and hence the number of

⁵ Convention on Biological Diversity (2003) *Climate Change and Biodiversity*, Executive Summary of the report on Interlinkages Between Biological Diversity and Climate Change, CBD Technical Series no. 10 [2003] <http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/cross-cutting/climate/interlinkages.asp>

*extinctions. The threat to life on Earth is not just a problem for the future. It is part of the here and now*⁶.

7.48 Tackling climate change is a global challenge; one that requires strong local action. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage investment in our energy system we need a strong, nationally consistent policy framework that creates a long-term price signal for greenhouse pollution and consistently supports and drives the development and deployment of new low greenhouse technologies. Without short and long-term investment signals companies will not be able to justify to their boards or investors the necessary up-front investment in R&D and the deployment of low-carbon technologies. Core elements of a national framework that proactively tackles climate change are:

- Set a goal and pathway to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 60% by 2050.
- Set a binding milestone for 2020 to ensure progress towards the 2050 goal.
- Australian governments implement a national emissions trading scheme no later than 2008.
- Make a clear statement that no government will provide indemnity against any future exposure to a carbon régime for any new industrial facility.
- Create markets for the deployment of clean energy technologies so they contribute to 20% of Australia's energy system by 2020.
- Set in place policies to meet specific national energy efficiency targets.
- Implement a systematic, integrated approach to re-building resilience across priority ecosystems, and the communities and agencies that manage them; as well as minimising threatening processes.

7.49 Given the enormous economic and social value of protected areas, early action – national and international - to develop a clean, renewable energy economy will have enduring benefits. Early action will also be far less costly.

7.50 Conversely, by its current inaction, the Australian Government runs the risk of severely degrading great iconic areas like the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu and the Alps. Act today or risk losing the Reef, regional communities and industry. The science suggests that the window of opportunity is small and may, in some instances, already be closing. This only reinforces the need for strong, concerted and timely action to cut greenhouse pollution and build resilience.

Attachments

1. ACF & the Inland Rivers Network *Vision for a Framework under the NWI for Protecting High Conservation Value Freshwater Areas in Australia*
2. ACF & the National Environmental Law Association *Out of the Blue, A Discussion Paper on an Australian Oceans Act.*
3. Figgis, P. 2004 *ACF Submission in response to the NRS Directions Statement.*
4. Hill, R. *Global Trends in Protected Areas*

⁶ Pounds, J. A. & R. Puschendorf (2004) 'Clouded Futures,' *Nature* 427(8): 107-9