

Submission to the Senate inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

The funds and resources available for management of Australia's national parks and other conservation reserves are small and could limit the ability of agencies to achieve the legislative objectives set for the agencies. However such a conclusion is conditional on limited data and evaluation. It is important that any review of the effectiveness of funding and provision of resources for parks and reserves be based on evidence and not on here-say or unsubstantiated assertions.

There is a great need for studies to quantify the relationships between the levels of funding and resources and the conservation status of native plants and wildlife. Such studies have shown overseas, for example in Africa, that large amounts of funding (~US\$220/km²) were required to allow elephant and black rhinoceros abundance to increase in the face of strong poaching (Leader-Williams & Albon 1988 *Nature* **336**, 533-535). Australia does not have such problems with poaching however there are many other on-ground management issues that require active management, in order to conserve plant and animal species. Such on-going issues are management of weeds and animal pests, management of habitats such as by use of fire and by exclusion of fire, and management of park visitors in a manner compatible with park or reserve objectives. The on-going management allows natural succession and other ecological processes to occur.

Many national parks and reserves have been created in recent decades. However the cumulative area may now exceed the capacity of organisations to manage the areas. That assessment requires examination and could be done by examining data on the cumulative area of reserves and funds allocated to management agencies. It has been estimated that funds for park management in Australia average about A\$3.59/ha/year (Buckley and Sommer 2000 CRC for Sustainable Tourism). This is below the global average of A\$8.93. If parks and reserves had comprehensive biodiversity monitoring programmes then an assessment could be made of the effectiveness of funds allocated and spent. Such monitoring programmes do occur elsewhere, such as for birds in the United Kingdom, and in the case of farmland birds, are recognised by the UK government as a headline indicator of sustainable development and quality of life.

Over the last 20 years there has been an apparent shift from government only, to government and private agencies managing conservation reserves. There have been many statements that government national parks do not conserve all species and communities, but little actual evaluation of the effectiveness of government and non-government parks and reserves. Such evaluation is needed.

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