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← The Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra had the honour of being the first garden to contain Canberra's centenary correa cultivar – Correa 'Canberra Bells'. First planted in 2010, the cultivar is going to be ready for the public to purchase in 2013, the year of Canberra's centenary celebrations.

The Minister

During 2009–10 the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP continued as Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts, with responsibility for the Director of National Parks.

The Minister's responsibilities in relation to the Director include assessing proposals for establishment of Commonwealth reserves and conservation zones under the EPBC Act; approving management plans for Commonwealth reserves; establishing and appointing members to boards of management for Commonwealth reserves jointly managed with Aboriginal owners; resolving disputes between the Director and boards of management; and approving Commonwealth reserve use fees and other charges.

During 2009–10 the Minister made official visits to Uluru–Kata Tjuṯa, Booderee and Christmas Island National Parks. In October 2009, the Minister joined traditional owners to open Talinguru Nyakunytjaku – a new \$21 million visitor facility including roads, toilet facilities and a viewing area at Uluru–Kata Tjuṯa National Park. His visit to Booderee included meeting stakeholders and landowners on the neighbouring Heritage Estates to discuss a decision to restrict further housing development due to likely impacts on the park and endangered species. The Minister's visits also enabled him to meet with park staff and stakeholders and to assess the condition of these parks.

The Minister approved the Uluru–Kata Tjuṯa National Park management plan in January 2010.



The Minister touring Bowra Station.

The Director of National Parks

The Director of National Parks is a corporation sole established under Division 5 of Part 19 of the EPBC Act, and a Commonwealth authority for the purposes of the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (CAC Act). The corporation has a single director—the person appointed to the office named the Director of National Parks.

The current office holder is Peter Cochrane, who was first appointed as Director in October 1999 and was reappointed to the position by the Governor-General on 12 December 2008 for a period of five years.

The EPBC Act requires the Director to perform functions and exercise powers in accordance with any directions given by the Minister, unless the Act provides otherwise. The Minister responsible for the CAC Act may via a General Policy Order also notify the Director under the CAC Act of general government policies that are to apply to the Director. No General Policy Orders were issued to the Director in 2009–10.

The EPBC Act provides for the proclamation and management of Commonwealth reserves and conservation zones. The term 'Commonwealth reserve' includes all the areas proclaimed under the EPBC Act with names such as national parks, marine parks, national nature reserves, marine national nature reserves, marine reserves and botanic gardens. This report generally uses the term 'reserves' to encompass all parks and reserves under the EPBC Act.

The Director of National Parks is responsible under the EPBC Act for the administration, management and control of Commonwealth reserves and conservation zones. The Director is assisted by staff of Parks Australia, a division of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. In this report, reference to Parks Australia means the Director of National Parks and Parks Australia staff members.

Statutory functions

The Director is responsible for the administration of Divisions 4 and 5 of Part 15 of the EPBC Act (Commonwealth reserves and conservation zones) and Regulations made for the purposes of those divisions. The functions of the Director as set out in subsection 514B(1) of the EPBC Act are:

- to administer, manage and control Commonwealth reserves and conservation zones
- to protect, conserve and manage biodiversity and heritage in Commonwealth reserves and conservation zones
- to contribute to the protection, conservation and management of biodiversity and heritage in areas outside Commonwealth reserves and conservation zones
- to cooperate with any country in matters relating to the establishment and management of national parks and nature reserves in that country
- to provide, and assist in the provision of, training in the knowledge and skills relevant to the establishment and management of national parks and nature reserves

- to carry out alone or in cooperation with other institutions and persons, and to arrange for any other institution or person to carry out, research and investigations relevant to the establishment and management of Commonwealth reserves
- to make recommendations to the Minister in relation to the establishment and management of Commonwealth reserves
- to administer the Australian National Parks Fund
- any other functions conferred on the Director under the EPBC Act or any other Act
- to do anything incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the functions mentioned above.

As at 30 June 2010, seven Commonwealth terrestrial reserves (national parks, botanic gardens) and 26 Commonwealth marine reserves (marine parks, marine reserves, marine nature reserves) were declared under the EPBC Act and were the responsibility of the Director.

There are two conservation zones declared under the Act. The Coral Sea Conservation Zone was declared in May 2009 covering an area of nearly one million square kilometres. The scientific assessment of the Heard Island and McDonald Islands Conservation Zone has been finalised.

Terrestrial reserves are managed by staff of Parks Australia which assists the Director in carrying out the Director's responsibilities. In 2009–10, under delegation from the Director, staff of the department's Australian Antarctic Division managed the Heard Island and McDonald Islands Marine Reserve while Marine Division staff managed the remaining 25 Commonwealth marine reserves. The locations of the Commonwealth reserves and conservation zones are shown at Figure 1.

In addition to management of Commonwealth reserves, the Director is engaged in a partnership with Tourism Australia to identify and promote National Landscapes which capture the essence of Australia and offer distinctive natural and cultural experiences. Parks Australia's interest in the program is to enhance and promote the role of protected areas in the social and economic well-being of regional Australia.

Non-statutory functions

The Director has also been delegated functions and powers by the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts and the Secretary of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts for programs that complement the Director's statutory functions. Under these delegations, the Director administers the National Reserve System Program and the Indigenous Protected Areas Program, both of which are significant components of the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative. The Director also manages the Australian Biological Resources Study and the development of Australian Government policy on management of Australia's genetic resources including regulating access to such resources in Commonwealth areas, and provides coordination and leadership in meeting Australia's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity. The outputs of these non-statutory functions are reported in the department's annual report.

Financial summary

A surplus result was achieved for 2009–10 due largely to delays in repairs and maintenance work in several parks, asbestos rehabilitation works in Kakadu and Uluru–Kata Tjuta and lower than expected depreciation expenditure, caused by capital works delays.

Overall, income for 2009–10 was up by 1.3 per cent against budget and expenditure was down by 6.2 per cent against budget. An analysis of the variances is in Table 1.

Table 2 summarises income and expenses information for the Director of National Parks. Audited financial statements are in Chapter 6 of this report.

Management of marine protected areas is undertaken by the Marine Division and the Australian Antarctic Division under delegation from the Director, is funded separately and is excluded from this financial summary.

Table 3 shows a five-year overview of financial, staffing and area information for Commonwealth terrestrial and marine reserves and Table 4 provides an overview of individual reserves for 2009–10.

An Agency Resourcing Statement was introduced to Portfolio Budget Statements for government departments in 2008–09 to provide information about the various funding sources that CAC Act agencies draw upon during the year. An Agency Resourcing Statement that reconciles to cash reserves in the financial statements for the Director of National Parks is provided at Appendix A.

Table 1: Analysis of variance against budget 2009–10

Business area	Income	Expenses
Jointly managed parks	Down \$0.195 million due to lower than expected entry fees and the continuation of entry fee discount in Uluru. This amount is offset by an increase in entry and camping fees in both Kakadu and Booderee.	No material variance to budget.
Other parks and reserves	Up \$0.653 million due to increased sale of goods and services at the Australian National Botanic Gardens and accrued revenue at Christmas Island for the rehabilitation of mine sites.	Down \$0.668 million due to underspends for the natural resource management and wild cat abatement projects along with delays in visitor centre repairs and maintenance at Christmas Island.
Governance, corporate services and executive	Up \$0.450 million due to greater than expected interest revenue primarily from delays in operating expenditure and capital works.	Down \$3.770 million primarily due to significant investment in project planning for asbestos remediation and repairs and maintenance.

Table 2: Overview of financial results 2009–10

		2009 Actuals \$000s	2009 Restated ^(d) \$000s	2010 Actuals \$000s	2010 Budget \$000s	2010 Variance \$000s
Jointly managed parks ^(a)	Income	39,284	39,284	40,681	40,876	(195)
	Expenses	(37,824)	(39,189)	(41,732)	(41,729)	(3)
	Surplus/(Deficit)	1,460	95	(1,051)	(853)	(198)
Other terrestrial parks and reserves ^(b)	Income	16,259	16,259	18,360	17,707	653
	Expenses	(15,791)	(15,988)	(17,152)	(17,821)	669
	Surplus/(Deficit)	468	271	1,208	(114)	1,322
Total for terrestrial parks and reserves	Income	55,543	55,543	59,041	58,583	458
	Expenses	(53,615)	(55,177)	(58,884)	(59,550)	666
	Surplus/(Deficit)	1,928	366	157	(967)	1,124
Governance, corporate services and executive ^(c)	Income	7,013	7,013	11,945	11,495	450
	Expenses	(7,562)	(7,562)	(7,845)	(11,615)	3,770
	Surplus/(Deficit)	(549)	(549)	4,100	(120)	4,220
Total for Director of National Parks	Income	62,556	62,556	70,986	70,078	908
	Expenses	(61,177)	(62,739)	(66,729)	(71,165)	4,436
	Surplus/(Deficit)	1,379	(183)	4,257	(1,087)	5,344

(a) Kakadu, Uluru–Kata Tjuta and Booderee National Parks.

(b) Includes Calperum and Taylorville Stations which are not formal reserves.

(c) Governance, corporate services and executive includes administration, finance, legal, insurance, planning, interest income and bank charges.

(d) Refer to Note 1.17 of the Financial Statements.

Table 3: Five-year overview of terrestrial and marine Commonwealth reserves

	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10
Number of staff (full-time equivalent)					
Management of terrestrial reserves	274.5	270.6	274.0	293.0	290
Management of marine reserves	15.3	17.5	16.3	16	15
Area of Commonwealth reserves (hectares)					
Terrestrial reserves area (number of reserves)	2,131,407 (7)	2,130,774 (7)	2,130,774 (7)	2,130,774 (7)	2,130,774 (7)
Marine reserves area (number of reserves)	27,245,378 (13)	27,245,678 (14)	49,844,075 (26)	49,844,075 (26)	49,844,075 (26)
Visitors to Commonwealth terrestrial reserves					
Number of visitors	1,430,515	1,485,727	1,466,560	1,410,021	1,445,381
Safety incidents recorded (including staff and visitors etc.)					
Minor injury or near miss	156	157	141	101	126
Moderate injury	68	47	63	52	41
Major injury	12	3	6	8	20
Death	1	0	1	4	2
Compliance and enforcement					
EPBC Act incidents detected	243	372	197	126	203
Warnings and cautions issued	195	287	131	56	147
Infringement notices issued	9	38	59	20	38
Cases taken to court	7	17	3	0	2
Court convictions	5	13	3	1	0
Court cases pending at year end	2	4	2	1	2
Financial summary—terrestrial reserves (\$ millions)					
Operations					
Total operating expenditure ^(a)	56.85	59.29	62.05	61.25	58.88
Total operating revenue ^(b)	59.02	62.99	63.03	62.63	59.04
Financial position					
Current assets	21.80	19.51	28.50	29.30	41.67
Non-current assets	138.90	139.11	149.33	151.04	151.53
Current liabilities	15.38	9.47	9.77	10.91	17.80
Non-current liabilities	0.45	0.58	0.64	0.49	0.53
Total equity	144.87	148.57	167.42	168.95	174.87
Financial summary—marine reserves (\$ millions)					
Total operating expenditure	3.58	5.53	4.51	4.55	2.80
Total operating revenue	3.58	5.53	4.51	4.55	2.80

(a) Also includes governance, corporate services, executive and the management contract for Calperum and Taylorville Stations which are not Commonwealth reserves.

(b) Includes revenue from all sources including appropriations and externally raised revenue.

Table 4: Overview of individual reserves in 2009–10

Reserve name	Area (hectares)	Year declared	IUCN category ^(a)	Operating cost (\$000s)	Capital expenditure (\$000s)	External revenue ^(b) (\$000s)	Payment to traditional owners (\$000s)
Jointly managed national parks							
Booderee National Park	6,379	1992	II	6,923	787	1,218	558
Kakadu National Park	1,979,767	1979	II	21,945	2,748	3,197	1,655
Uluru—Kata Tjuta National Park	132,566	1977	II	12,864	5,475	7,217	2,011
Other Commonwealth terrestrial reserves							
Australian National Botanic Gardens	85	1991	IV	9,652	1,336	1,809	
Christmas Island National Park	8,719	1980	II	5,204	957	1,619	
Norfolk Island National Park and Botanic Garden	656	1986	II	1,065	202	114	
Pulu Keeling National Park	2,602	1995	II	597	0	91	
Commonwealth marine reserves^(d)							
Ashmore Reef National Nature Reserve	58,337	1983	la	75			
Cartier Island Marine Reserve	17,238	2000	la	0			
Cod Grounds Commonwealth Marine Reserve	314	2007	la	168			
Coringa—Herald National Nature Reserve	885,249	1982	la	0			
Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Nature Reserve	187,726	1987	la	0			
Great Australian Bight Marine Park (Commonwealth Waters)	1,937,162	1998	VI	150			
Heard Island and McDonald Islands Marine Reserve	6,465,845	2002	la	84			
Lihou Reef National Nature Reserve	843,670	1982	la	104			
Lord Howe Island Marine Park (Commonwealth Waters)	300,287	2000	IV	118			
Mermaid Reef Marine National Nature Reserve	53,987	1991	la	93			
Ningaloo Marine Park (Commonwealth Waters)	243,513	1987	II	130			
Solitary Islands Marine Reserve (Commonwealth Waters)	15,233	1993	VI	240			
South-east Commonwealth Marine Reserve Network (inc Macquarie Island)	38,845,800	2007	1a, II, IV, VI	814			

(a) The IUCN protected area classification system comprises seven management categories, not all of which have been applied to reserves declared under the EPBC Act. Sections of some reserves are zoned a different IUCN category from the reserve as a whole, to reflect the management strategy for those sections.

(b) External revenue represents total revenue from the income statement less revenue from government.

(c) In addition to the operating costs for each reserve, \$903,090 was spent across the 25 marine reserves managed by the Marine Division on professional services, permits and performance assessment systems, training, communications, workshops and conference attendance, surveillance and enforcement activities.

Overview of the Director of National Parks' responsibilities

Joint management of nationally significant protected areas

Parks Australia has a long and proud history of working with Indigenous Australians in the joint management of protected areas. The Director, together with traditional owners, jointly manages three national parks: Kakadu and Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Parks in the Northern Territory, both World Heritage listed, and Booderee National Park in the Jervis Bay Territory.

Traditional owners maintain strong links to their country in these parks, links that are demonstrated through their cultural and spiritual beliefs and traditional use and management of their country. Parks Australia supports traditional owners in maintaining their living culture and incorporates traditional land management practices in park management.

Kakadu National Park is an Aboriginal living cultural landscape. A strong relationship exists between Bininj and their country, ongoing traditions, cultural practices, beliefs and knowledge. An estimated 15,000 rock art sites and innumerable artefacts and sites of cultural, archaeological and historic significance in the Kakadu region contribute to archaeological evidence indicating that people have lived continuously in the region for at least 50,000 years.

Kakadu contains almost an entire major tropical river catchment (the South Alligator River catchment) and large representative examples of the wet-dry tropical ecosystems of northern Australia. The park is ecologically and biologically diverse, encompassing the sandstone plateau and escarpment, monsoon forests and extensive areas of savanna woodlands as well as riverine environments such as billabongs and floodplains. Large areas of the park are listed as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention and many species that occur in the park are protected under international agreements.

Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park is the physical and metaphoric heart of Australia. This living cultural landscape is a world class visitor destination, a key part of Australia's iconic Red Centre and, along with Kakadu, was one of the first areas to be identified as part of a National Landscape. Parks Australia works together with the Anangu traditional owners to protect, conserve and document the cultural and natural heritage of the park using *Tjukurpa* as a guiding influence. Located in the Greater Sandy Desert bioregion which includes parts of the Northern Territory and Western Australia, the park plays a significant role in contributing to long-term biodiversity conservation in the region. The park has a particularly rich and diverse suite of arid environment species and supports populations of a number of relict and endemic species.

Booderee National Park at Jervis Bay is of great significance to its traditional owners, the Wreck Bay Aboriginal community, who are increasingly involved through a unique and evolving joint management model in running and servicing the park. Jervis Bay is one of the major biogeographic nodes in Australia and contains a variety of relatively undisturbed marine and terrestrial habitats. The park protects most of the Bherwerre Peninsula, the bay's southern peninsula, Bowen Island and the waters and seabed in the southern part of the bay.

Kakadu's Indigenous rangers—Closing the Gap

Samantha Deegan lives in the Kakadu area with her family and has been employed full-time on the Kakadu Indigenous Ranger Program since early 2009.



Sam at Kakadu

The program, funded through the Australian Government's Working on Country program, is helping to boost Indigenous job opportunities in the park. It contributes to the Closing the Gap target of halving the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous job outcomes within a decade.

'The Kakadu Indigenous Ranger Program is great—it's helped me get real experience across lots of different areas in Kakadu,' Samantha said.

'Since I started in the ranger program, I've worked in the Mary River District doing weed work and helping to open visitor sites like Gunlom and Koolpin Gorge after the wet season. I've helped coordinate staff training, and worked in the Bowali Visitor Centre giving tourists advice on great things to do at Kakadu. I've also completed a fair bit of training with the park, and at the moment I'm working on a project to record the oral histories of senior traditional owners in the park, which I'm really enjoying.

'I grew up at outstations in Kakadu and my kids are now growing up in the park and going to school here. I love working in the field, and in future my goal is to work as a full-time ranger in the Jim Jim District in Kakadu.'

In 2009–10, the Kakadu Indigenous Ranger Program provided salaried job opportunities for 11 Indigenous community rangers within the park. The success of the program is underpinned by the park's strong partnership with the Warnbi and Werenbun Aboriginal Corporations. Rangers in the program are employed through these two Indigenous corporations. They are then based at Kakadu where they receive training and mentoring, and work in many different park management roles.

To date, six people involved in the program have gone on to Australian Public Service roles within the park, with other participants building the experience and skills necessary to win such positions in the future.

There are many social and economic benefits to the Kakadu Indigenous community, as rangers develop networks and increase their social participation through employment while enhancing their own living standards and those of their families.

The Kakadu Indigenous Ranger Program is currently funded until June 2013, which will ensure Kakadu continues to contribute significantly to Closing the Gap for Indigenous communities through jobs in conservation and park management.

Booderee staff work cooperatively with the adjoining New South Wales Jervis Bay National Park and Jervis Bay Marine Park to protect the region's biodiversity. Intensive control of foxes and other invasive species has led to recovery of species such as the endangered eastern bristlebird and has paved the way for the planned reintroduction of several species of small mammals long extinct in the area covered by the park.

Parks Australia's relationship with Indigenous communities in the jointly managed parks continues to develop. Staff are building strong business models and providing opportunities for Indigenous employment and enterprises in these parks, moving towards self-management by the traditional owners. In building a knowledge-based approach to management, Parks Australia is committed to ensuring that traditional knowledge is utilised effectively.

Parks Australia works with the Northern Territory Government, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in implementing the Australian Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response and the Closing the Gap initiative. The jointly managed parks in particular work closely with their respective Indigenous communities and residents to provide Indigenous training and employment opportunities and support Indigenous owned and operated enterprises.

More information on Commonwealth jointly managed reserves, including performance results for 2009–10, can be found in the State of the Parks report at www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/annual/09-10.

Protecting unique island ecosystems

Parks Australia manages three national parks located in Australia's ocean territories. Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean and Norfolk Island in the Pacific Ocean are home to unique and fragile endemic flora and fauna that have evolved for a long period in isolation. These remote island parks have immense scientific, educational and conservation value and Parks Australia is working to develop more holistic models for their management.

Christmas Island supports a wide range of unusual species and habitats, some found only on the island, and is of great international conservation and scientific interest. Although the island has been mined for phosphates since the late 1890s, most of its rainforest ecosystem remains intact and Christmas Island National Park now protects about two-thirds of the island environment, including two wetlands recognised as internationally important under the Ramsar Convention.

The island has an extraordinary diversity and abundance of land crabs, especially red crabs which are the island's 'keystone' species as they influence the structure and species composition of the island's rainforest. Red crabs are renowned for their annual wet season migration, when up to an estimated 50 million march to the sea to spawn. The island also provides the last remaining nesting habitat for two threatened seabird species (Abbott's booby and the Christmas Island frigatebird) and supports many endemic plant and animal species.

The island's geology, unique rainforest and spectacular views are well represented in the park. The establishment of the park has not however prevented the continuing incursion of exotic species, disrupting the functioning of the island's natural ecological processes. Foremost are yellow crazy ants which have severely reduced numbers of red crabs and pose a significant threat to many other species; a major control program is ongoing and has been accelerated, with some encouraging results.

The presumed extinction of the endemic pipistrelle bat during the year focused attention on the need to promote a more integrated approach to management of the island's biodiversity. The final report of an expert working group appointed in February 2009 stressed the need for measures such as improved quarantine procedures if further extinctions were to be avoided. Despite the loss of the pipistrelle, the rediscovery during the year of two endemic reptiles and an orchid species not recorded for many years was an encouraging development.

North Keeling Island is an isolated coral atoll in the Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands and its relatively untouched environment is a valuable biological resource. It is one of the few tropical islands in the Indian Ocean to have largely escaped the damaging effects of human settlement.

Pulu Keeling National Park comprises North Keeling Island and its marine area extending to 1.5 kilometres from the shore. The park is listed as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. It is an internationally recognised seabird rookery and in particular supports one of the world's largest remaining populations of the red-footed booby. Pulu Keeling's forests and other flora are examples of the original vegetation of the region and include a number of species not now found elsewhere in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands while the park's waters are one of the last areas of pristine reef systems in the world.

Norfolk Island National Park is jointly proclaimed under Commonwealth and Norfolk Island legislation. Set in the south-west Pacific Ocean, the Norfolk Island Territory provides a link between tropical and temperate oceanic island environments and is home to unique assemblages of flora and fauna.

The park covers 13 per cent of Norfolk Island and comprises remnant areas of subtropical rainforest and viney hardwood forest that once covered the island prior to human settlement; the park is habitat for a range of threatened plants, birds and other species. Neighbouring Phillip Island, which is included in the park in its entirety, is free of damaging introduced species such as cats and rats and is home to large numbers of nesting seabirds.

Management of Norfolk Island National Park has a strong focus on habitat restoration through controlling invasive species, planting native vegetation and controlling erosion. The park and adjacent Norfolk Island Botanic Garden also provide educational, scientific, cultural and recreational opportunities for Norfolk Island residents and visitors and are a valuable resource for the Norfolk Island tourism industry.

More information on the management of Commonwealth island national parks, including performance results for 2009–10, can be found in the State of the Parks report at www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/annual/09-10.



Conserving Australia's biodiversity through a National Reserve System

The National Reserve System is Australia's network of protected areas and aims to conserve examples of the full range of Australia's terrestrial ecosystems. It represents the collective conservation effort of Australian, state, territory and local governments, non-government organisations, the business sector, private and Indigenous landholders, and catchment and natural resource management bodies to formally protect biodiversity in perpetuity.

Parks Australia manages the National Reserve System element of the Caring for our Country initiative. The program supports the acquisition and covenanting of properties to establish protected areas to be managed for nature conservation as part of the National Reserve System, targeting under-represented and vulnerable areas for inclusion.

During 2009–10 Caring for our Country contributed over \$35.8 million to the National Reserve System towards the purchase of 27 properties, covering up to 1.14 million hectares, and over \$2.7 million to strategic projects for the establishment of protected areas on private lands.

A particular highlight was the establishment in June 2010 of Witchelina reserve in outback South Australia. At 4,200 square kilometres one of the largest properties ever purchased for the National Reserve System, Witchelina is owned and managed by the independent Nature Foundation SA. The property forms a vital habitat link between Lake Torrens and the Northern Territory.

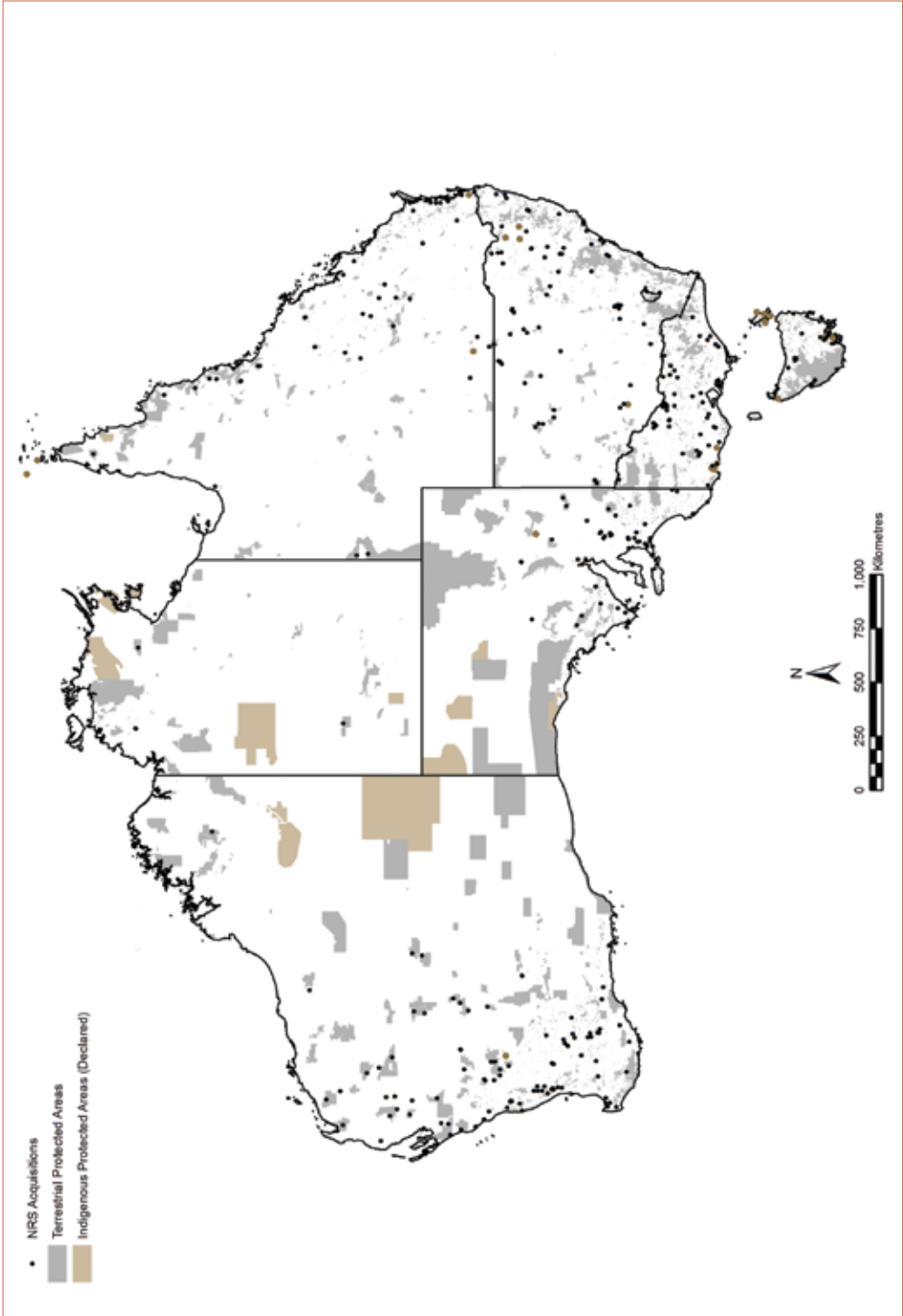
Protected areas managed by Indigenous people make an important contribution to the National Reserve System. The Indigenous Protected Area element of Caring for our Country supports Indigenous communities to manage their land for conservation, so that the biodiversity and heritage of this land are protected for the benefit of all Australians.

The program helps Indigenous communities develop plans to manage their land's natural and cultural values and provides ongoing support for work to control threats such as weeds, feral animals and wildfire.

The declaration in September 2009 of the Djelk and Warrdeken Indigenous Protected Areas in Arnhem Land created a huge conservation corridor stretching from Kakadu's stone country to the Arafura Sea. Together the Djelk and Warrdeken Indigenous Protected Areas cover more than 2,000 square kilometres and are the culmination of years of work undertaken by the traditional owners and their representative Indigenous organisations. The areas are home to many endemic and threatened species while thousands of individual occupation and rock art sites record the rich cultural heritage of the Aboriginal people who live there.

Outputs of the National Reserve System and Indigenous Protected Area programs, including performance results for 2009–10, are reported in the department's annual report.

Figure 2: Acquisitions under the National Reserve System program and declared Indigenous Protected Areas as at 30 June 2010



Witchelina, a major link in Australia's outback wildlife corridor

Witchelina is a vast conservation area in the arid heartland of South Australia. At 4,200 square kilometres, more than twice the size of greater Adelaide, Witchelina is the largest property ever purchased for the National Reserve System through Caring for our Country.

The Nature Foundation SA purchased the property for conservation with almost \$2 million from the Australian Government, a contribution from the South Australian Government and a series of environmental offset payments from resource companies.



Gecko found at Witchelina

Witchelina has been hit hard by Australia's long drought, but with recent rains and plans for careful management the property is on track to make a strong recovery.

Witchelina's stony plains shelter the leathery gibber dragon and its red sand dunes are home to huge burrowing frogs. Witchelina's 'old man saltbush' plains and acacia dune-fields provide ideal habitat for threatened small mammals such as the vulnerable dusky hopping mouse and the peregrine falcon.

When it rains in this arid environment the creek beds burst with water, and wildflowers such as the iconic Sturt's desert pea flourish. When wet, Witchelina's creeks and waterholes act as arid zone refuges for nomadic ducks, sandpipers and other waterbirds. The nationally vulnerable thick-billed grass wren finds it home in Witchelina's chenopod shrublands and in winter, the blue-winged parrot visits the reserve's grasslands and woodlands from Tasmania.

The new reserve forms part of a vital habitat link between South Australia's Lake Torrens and the Northern Territory, covering almost 10 million hectares. Witchelina is part of the world's first transcontinental wildlife corridor being created through the heart of Australia's outback, between Port Augusta and Arnhem Land.

Witchelina has a long social history. The property straddles the boundary between the traditional lands of the Adnyamathanha and Arabunna peoples who have continued strong spiritual connections to their country. After European occupation, Witchelina operated as a pastoral station for more than 140 years.

The reserve significantly increases the area protected in the under-represented Flinders Lofty Block bioregion, taking total levels of protection from 5.6 per cent to almost 9 per cent.

Witchelina also increases protection in the Stony Plains bioregion to 7.35 per cent. The aim of the National Reserve System program is to protect at least 10 per cent of each of Australia's distinct bioregions, so purchases such as Witchelina make an important contribution to our national conservation effort.

The Director is also responsible for the management of Calperum and Taylorville Stations, adjoining pastoral leases located near Renmark in South Australia, comprising over 300,000 hectares of predominantly open mallee bushland and Murray River floodplains. The two stations form part of the Riverland Biosphere Reserve. They include wetlands recognised as internationally significant under the Ramsar Convention as well as large areas of intact mallee which are habitat for several nationally endangered species. Both properties are deeded to the Director of National Parks and are managed by Austland Services Pty Ltd (a company established by the Australian Landscape Trust) under contract to the Director.

More information on the management of Calperum and Taylorville Stations, including performance results for 2009–10, can be found in the State of the Parks report at www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/annual/09-10.

Protecting the marine environment

Australia's vast coastal waters and oceans contain some of the greatest arrays of marine biodiversity on Earth. Australia is the world's largest island, with a coastline stretching for over 32,000 kilometres. Australia's marine jurisdiction is larger than the mainland and covers some 14 million square kilometres of ocean.

The Director is responsible for a network of 26 Commonwealth marine reserves plus two marine conservation zones that have been declared under the EPBC Act. The reserves extend across the range of marine environments within Australia's marine jurisdiction, from southern sub-Antarctic waters through temperate southern waters to the tropical north.

Of the 26 declared Commonwealth marine reserves, management of the Heard Island and McDonald Islands Marine Reserve is delegated to the Australian Antarctic Division, in recognition of the division's wider responsibilities for the Heard Island and McDonald Islands Territory and its expertise in working in the remote sub-Antarctic environment. The remaining Commonwealth marine protected areas are managed by the department's Marine Division under delegation from the Director.

A conservation zone is an interim protection measure while an area of land or sea undergoes a thorough assessment process to determine the need for permanent protection.

Two conservation zones have been declared in areas of Australia's oceans and are being assessed for possible inclusion in marine reserves. The Heard Island and McDonald Islands Conservation Zone was declared in 2002 and complements the marine reserve; the Coral Sea Conservation Zone covering some 972,000 square kilometres east of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was declared in 2009.

More information on the management of Commonwealth marine reserves, including performance results for 2009–10, can be found in the State of the Parks report at www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/annual/09-10.

Through the Marine Division, the Australian Government is supporting a world-leading program of regional marine planning across Australia's ocean jurisdiction. Under the program, marine bioregional plans are being established for each of five regions—south-east, south-west, north-west, north and east—to guide the Minister, sectoral managers and industry in making decisions about the key conservation issues and priorities in each region.



The hawksbill turtle is a large marine turtle with a distinctive parrot-like beak. It lives in coral and rocky reefs in Australia's tropical waters and breeds in the northern areas of the Great Barrier Reef and on beaches in the north-west of Western Australia. It is listed as a vulnerable species and can take up to 30 years to reach adulthood. Photo Glen Cowans glencowans.com

One of the major outcomes of the marine planning process is the identification and establishment of new marine protected areas, as part of developing a representative system of marine protected areas in Commonwealth waters. The Australian Government is committed to establishing this system by 2012, building and expanding on the existing network of Commonwealth marine reserves.

The release of more areas for further assessment in April 2010 marked an important milestone in efforts to assess the unique economic and environmental values of the Australian east coast marine environment. These areas will be examined more closely to determine the best placement of marine reserves to protect the marine environment in a way that minimises impacts on industry.

Commonwealth marine reserves in turn are a major component of the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas. In the early 1990s Australian governments agreed to establish a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas covering Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone. The system aims to contribute to the long-term ecological viability of marine and estuarine systems, to maintain ecological processes and systems, and to protect Australia's marine biodiversity at all levels.

More information on marine bioregional planning can be found in the department's annual report.

Understanding and studying Australia's biodiversity

Commonwealth botanic gardens

Parks Australia is the custodian of three botanic gardens: the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Norfolk Island Botanic Garden and Booderee Botanic Gardens.

The Australian National Botanic Gardens is a major national scientific, educational and recreational resource located in Canberra. The Gardens was one of the first botanic gardens in the world to adopt the study and display of indigenous species as a principal goal and the living collection currently contains one-third of the nation's known flowering plant species. As part of the living collection the Gardens is the custodian of one of the largest collections (in terms of species) of Australian plants with an emphasis on threatened species. The Gardens also provides a diverse range of education and public programs to raise awareness of the value of Australia's unique flora. This year a new position of national seedbank coordinator was established at the Gardens to lead Australia's seedbanking efforts.

Norfolk Island Botanic Garden maintains a living and herbarium collection of Norfolk Island's flora and contributes to raising awareness among the local community and visitors to the island through education and interpretation programs.

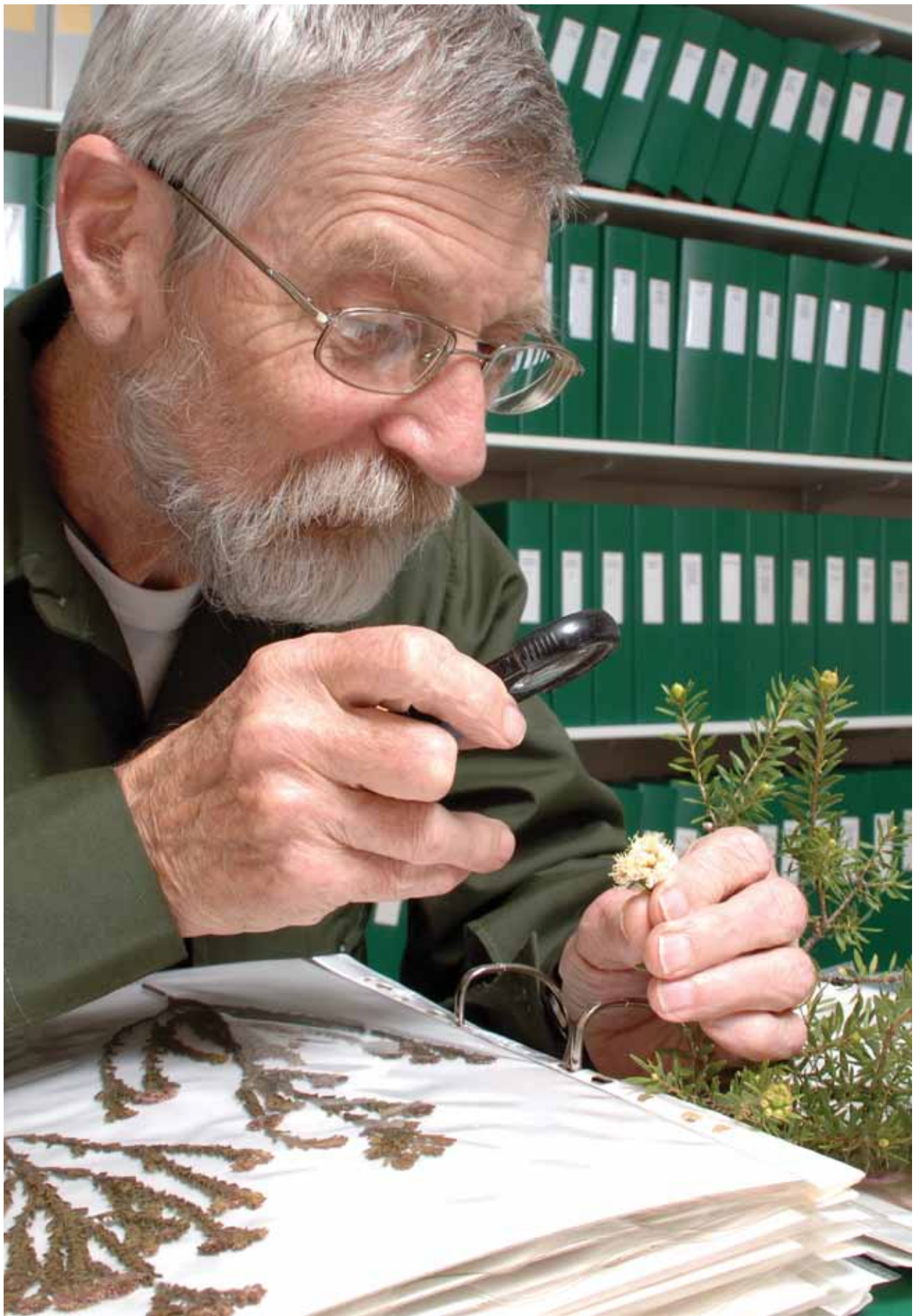
Formerly an annex to the Gardens and now part of Booderee National Park, Booderee Botanic Gardens represents the regional biodiversity of south-east coastal New South Wales with a strong focus on the relationship between plants and the park's Indigenous owners, the Wreck Bay Aboriginal community.

More information on the work of these botanic gardens, including performance results for 2009–10, can be found in the State of the Parks report at www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/annual/09-10.

A knowledge bank of Australia's biodiversity

Parks Australia's work on enhancing and sharing knowledge of Australia's biodiversity is delivered via the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research and the Australian Biological Resources Study.

The Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research is a joint venture between the Australian National Botanic Gardens and CSIRO Plant Industry. Its principal function is to document the identity, origin, occurrence, distribution and human impact of Australia's native and introduced plant species. The centre's cornerstone is the Australian National Herbarium which houses a collection of approximately 1.2 million plant specimens, documenting the diversity of the Australian flora and providing voucher specimens for research, environmental studies and for the Gardens living collection. The herbarium is a major contributor to national projects which aim to disseminate biodiversity information, notably Australia's Virtual Herbarium and the Atlas of Living Australia, as well as to international projects such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. The 10 year agreement between the Director and CSIRO that underpins the Centre expired in 2009. A new agreement has been negotiated and will be finalised in 2010.



The aim of the Australian Biological Resources Study is to provide national support and leadership for the naming and classification of species to underpin world-class science-based decision-making. It pursues this aim through strategic funding partnerships that support species discovery research and invest in Australia's biodiversity collections. Its range of taxonomic publications, electronic databases and identification tools provides national references for species names and, through the National Taxonomy Research Grant Program, the Australian Biological Resources Study provides the only ongoing source of funding for taxonomic research in Australia. It also contributes to international forums and projects including the Global Taxonomy Initiative and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. Decline in Australia's taxonomic capability is a particular challenge which the Australian Biological Resources Study is helping to address, through training and mentoring new scientists and supporting taxonomic research.

The highlight for the year was the development and launch of the Bush Blitz project, which will help to provide the first national snapshot of the biodiversity contained in the National Reserve System. Bush Blitz is a partnership with BHP Billiton, Earthwatch Institute Australia, the National Scientific Reference Site Network and Caring for our Country.

Outputs of the Australian Biological Resources Study, including performance results for 2009–10, are reported in the department's annual report.

Managing access to genetic resources

The Director is responsible for development of Australian Government policy on management of Australia's genetic resources including regulating access to such resources in Commonwealth areas and benefit sharing arrangements. Parks Australia also works with state and territory agencies to support a nationally consistent regulatory approach for access to and use of Australia's native genetic and biochemical resources, and to promote best practice in managing access to genetic resources. Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory have joined the Australian Government in enacting measures to implement a nationally consistent approach to access and benefit sharing.

In September 2009 a National Forum on Biodiversity, Biodiscovery and Traditional Knowledge was held to inform Australia's position on the development of an international regime of access and benefit sharing. The Minister welcomed over 130 people to the forum including leading international and Australian scientists.

Outputs of the program to manage access to genetic resources, including performance results for 2009–10, are reported in the department's annual report.

Providing national leadership

Parks Australia is the Australian national focal point for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Director of National Parks is the focal point for one of the key thematic areas of the convention, namely protected areas. Parks Australia, as the lead for the Australian Government, works to enhance Australia's reputation as a positive and strategic party to the convention. Activities such as enhancing and sharing knowledge of Australia's biodiversity and promoting nationally consistent management of access to genetic resources contribute to implementing Australia's obligations under the convention. The Australian National Botanic Gardens supports national coordination of the role of Australia's botanic gardens in conserving biodiversity through national forums such as the Council of Heads of Australia's Botanic Gardens.

Australia's National Landscapes

Australia's National Landscapes, a partnership between Parks Australia and Tourism Australia, is identifying and promoting Australia's top 15 exceptional natural and cultural experiences to the international market. Parks Australia's interest in the program is to enhance and promote the role of protected areas in the social and economic well-being of regional Australia. Parks that are important to the social fabric of a region are parks that are valued.

National Landscapes to date are the Red Centre, the Australian Alps, the Great Ocean Road, Kakadu, Australia's Coastal Wilderness, Greater Blue Mountains, Flinders Ranges, Australia's Green Cauldron, Kangaroo Island and the latest, the Kimberley (announced in 2010). Candidates in Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania are seeking recognition as National Landscapes.

All National Landscapes must have effective locally driven management arrangements in place that are committed to protecting Australia's distinctive natural and cultural assets. Local steering committees play a critical role.

National Landscapes has attracted enormous interest in Australia as a framework for best practice long-term strategic regional tourism planning. The initiative has been identified by industry bodies as a successful model for conservation and tourism partnerships and regional collaboration. National Landscapes was also recognised in the Australian Government's National Long-Term Tourism Strategy, launched in December 2009.

Experience development strategies that focus on the delivery of a small number of outstanding and iconic visitor experiences will be produced by each National Landscape. The strategies consider what visitor experience the regions will offer; where the experiences will be offered (and where they will not); how the experiences are best delivered; what infrastructure or services are needed to deliver them; and what levels of visitor interpretation are needed to build appreciation of the natural and cultural values of the destination.

Strategies have now been completed for the Australian Alps and Australia's Coastal Wilderness. Both are demonstrating very positive early results including aligned regional heritage strategies, walking trails, new product development and regional discussion of appropriate tourism development in natural environments.

→ *Australia's iconic landscapes are a major drawcard for visitors, with national parks such as Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta attracting hundreds of thousands of people each year. The National Landscapes initiative – a partnership between Tourism Australia and Parks Australia – is building on the natural link between tourism and conservation to market Australia's world-class visitor experiences. The Alps, pictured here, is one of ten National Landscapes that stretch across Australia from South Australia's Kangaroo Island to the Kimberley in Western Australia. Photo Tourism Australia*



