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← *Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park completed Talinguru Nyakunyatjaku, it's new viewing area in 2009–10. The award-winning facility offers visitors a chance to see Australia's most iconic landmark while providing information on its cultural and environmental importance. Pictured is an Anangu dancer at the official opening of the viewing area. Photo Grenville Turner*

The year in review

The 2009–10 financial year saw a number of major achievements across the Commonwealth parks and reserves, as well as significant improvements in the way Parks Australia does business.

Through a restructure of Parks Australia we have developed a stronger foundation for all aspects of our work, including creation of a new science-based branch to better inform and support our planning, management and action to protect biodiversity.

In 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, we launched Bush Blitz to help document the plants and animals in Australia's National Reserve System. Bush Blitz, Australia's largest nature discovery project, is the brainchild of Parks Australia's Australian Biological Resources Study which is now leading a three-year multimillion dollar partnership between the Australian Government, BHP Billiton, Earthwatch Institute Australia, the National Scientific Reference Site Network and others (see www.bushblitz.org.au). We also established a new leadership role for the Australian National Botanic Gardens in coordinating Australia's diverse seedbank efforts that secure the future of native plants that may be under threat in the wild.

We have had success with a number of our weed and feral animal control programs. Control of bitou bush in Booderee National Park has continued to reduce high density infestations, and Booderee has seen a jump in the number of brush-tail possums and other key indicator species thanks to a decade of effective fox management. At Ulugu–Kata Tjuta National Park, the annual *tjakura* (great desert skink) survey showed the vulnerable reptiles are breeding well in the park, and native plants are bouncing back in areas where the aggressive weed buffel grass has been removed. Norfolk Island has tapped great community support, with school students helping to tackle one of the island's major environmental challenges, weed control, by clearing a significant area of morning glory and replacing it with native plants.

Unfortunately this year has also brought some disappointments. Despite the enormous efforts of park staff, scientists, zookeepers and vets, the rescue mission for the pipistrelle bat on Christmas Island was unsuccessful and the species is now believed to be extinct, although we continue to monitor potential habitat. The Minister has described the pipistrelle's story as a wake-up call that emphasises the need for a new ecosystem-wide approach to environmental management.

Even the remote and uninhabited island atoll of Pulu Keeling National Park is not safe from threats to its biodiversity, with concern about the potential impact of the yellow crazy ant on the park's important seabird populations. Park staff have activated a crazy ant management plan, drawing on the success of control programs on Christmas Island.

Concerns remain about the decline of small mammals in Kakadu National Park, reflecting a trend across much of northern Australia. However, biodiversity hotspot surveys at Anlarr and Mamukala in Kakadu resulted in one of the best trapping results for years, indicating that these areas may be an important refuge for small mammal populations.

→ *Booderee National Park is famed for its crystal clear water and sparkling white beaches. The park took out the top award for Indigenous tourism in Australia at the National 2009 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards and received a highly commended in the best tourism attraction category. Photo June Andersen*



On a positive note, we resumed aerial baiting of crazy ants on Christmas Island, with 99 per cent success in destroying targeted supercolonies and with no impact on red crabs. It has been a year of 'rediscoveries' on Christmas Island, with scientists finding four species feared to have been lost. They are an orchid that had not been seen for over 100 years, the Lister's gecko which had not been seen since 1987, a coastal skink which had not been seen since 2004 and a Christmas Island pink blink snake last seen in 1985.

We are making good progress with major infrastructure projects in our reserves. We are moving ahead with a construction project to pipe water from Lake Burley Griffin to the Australian National Botanic Gardens, on track for completion in November 2010. The pipeline will ensure a sustainable water supply for the Gardens' plants and free up valuable drinking water for Canberra's residents. Both Booderee and Norfolk Island National Parks have reduced their environmental footprint by installing solar power systems. At Norfolk Island, signs and brochures have been replaced, providing up-to-date information for visitors.

The Minister formally opened Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park's new viewing area, called Talinguru Nyakunytjaku, at a well attended event in October 2009. The celebrations included women's and men's *inma* (dance) performed by Anangu traditional owners as part of a stunning sunrise ceremony. This new visitor destination offers spectacular views of Uluru and Kata Tjuta from an area previously inaccessible. The tourism industry and visitors alike are delighted by the outstanding facilities.

Our performance on Indigenous employment did not meet expectations with direct Indigenous employment remaining steady, although indirect employment outcomes improved. To turn this around we are taking steps to replace some of the more inflexible Australian Public Service positions with more flexible arrangements, including traditional knowledge consultancies, cultural advisor roles and casual employment. While we need to do better on employment outcomes, our jointly managed parks continue to make an important contribution to government efforts to closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage (see case study on page 18).

This year we continued our strong partnerships with the tourism industry. Western Australia's Kimberley region was announced as Australia's tenth National Landscape, highlighting its outstanding nature-based tourism experiences. Our National Landscapes partnership with Tourism Australia has become a central element of the Australian Government's National Long-term Tourism Strategy. Visitor surveys continued to record high levels of satisfaction at our popular reserves, and the parks have won several tourism awards. Booderee's awards were capped off by the national Indigenous Tourism award in the 2009 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards and a commendation in the best tourism attraction category. In March we launched Kakadu's Tourism Master Plan, which sets clear tourism directions for the park and presents opportunities for new experiences and visitor infrastructure over the next decade.

Norfolk Island National Park won the gold environment, history and heritage category of the 2009 Norfolk Island Tourism Awards. The park also won its first ever Norfolk Island Tourism Better Business Initiative award, recognising its efforts to promote the island as a wonderful tourist destination. The Australian National Botanic Gardens' Australian Plant Name Index Team gained a CSIRO team award for their innovation and achievements for this nationally significant project.

Our parks and reserves are embracing new ways of engaging visitors. Earlier this year, the Gardens and Norfolk Island National Park both launched Facebook pages, uploading information daily on events, walks, research and more. Their fans are growing steadily and they are seeing increased interaction from virtual visitors. Norfolk even saw visitors participating in the park's reptile survey by posting their own pictures online.

Management planning for our reserves progressed this year. The new management plan for Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park came into effect in January, flagging the intention to eventually replace the contentious Uluru climb with other visitor experiences. Climate change strategies for Kakadu, Booderee and the Gardens were finalised and the strategies for Norfolk Island and Uluru–Kata Tjuta are in their final stages of development.

Systematic assessment of each of Australia's marine bioregions in the south-west, north-west, north and east continued through the Marine Division of the department. We anticipate that a suite of new Commonwealth marine reserves will be established when the marine bioregional planning process is completed.

Financial matters

Overall, we have achieved good progress in all our major projects. Our work has been set against a background of increasing budget pressures that have demanded further efficiencies in staffing, structures and operations.

Park use fees were reintroduced at Kakadu in April 2010, coinciding with the substantial reduction of the special budget supplementation that had provided a substitute for fees. We delayed the planned introduction of e-ticketing arrangements for Kakadu, Uluru–Kata Tjuta and Booderee until we could resolve a number of technical issues.

This year we recorded a surplus, arising from minor delays in several repairs and maintenance projects which will be completed in 2010–11. Our financial control framework remains sound and is well regarded by internal and external auditors, continuing our history of good financial performance.

Our people

Our capacity to meet our challenges relies on skilled and dedicated staff, so continuing to invest in building and extending our staff is a high priority. A number of senior staffing changes warrant special mention. Dr Judy West joined Parks Australia to head the new Parks and Biodiversity Science Branch. Judy is an internationally renowned botanist and previously headed the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research. Anna Morgan also joined Parks Australia as acting assistant secretary of the new Parks Operations and Tourism Branch. We recruited Peter Byron as the new general manager of the Australian National Botanic Gardens and Christine Burke to replace Lara Musgrave as manager of Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park.

Significant departures from Parks Australia included the well-earned retirements of three long-standing senior employees: Bruce Leaver, Helen Halliday and Sarah Pizzey. Anne-Marie Delahunt has moved to another part of the department after nearly four years with Parks Australia. Their contributions will be missed and we wish them all the best. I would also like to acknowledge the retirement of long-serving Kakadu board members Jacob Nayinggul, Jane Christophersen, Jessie Alderson, Victor Cooper and Denise Williams. Murray Fagg celebrated 40 years at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and the Norfolk Island National Park Advisory Committee celebrated 25 years with five members who had served since its establishment.

Australia Day awards went to the Australian Biological Resources Study team for successfully restructuring their grants program and forging innovative industry partnerships and to Leanne Wilks for her drive and commitment to delivering a long-term strategy for the National Reserve System. In August 2009 Linda Tulloch received a Secretary's Award in recognition of her sustained contribution as administration manager at Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park.

Sadly, this year was also marked with the sudden passing of two well-loved and respected staff members: Kevin McLeod and Andrew Gooley. Kevin was a long-time department employee and was responsible for developing a number of successful programs involving Indigenous people in conservation while Andrew had more recently joined Christmas Island National Park. Our sympathies are with their families and friends.

Finally thank you to all members of the senior management team in Parks Australia for their commitment and support throughout this year. An example of the great effort our employees make was recognised through an inaugural Australian Government silver award for the best online presentation of an annual report last year.

Looking ahead

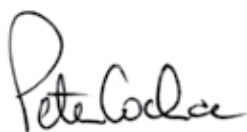
In the year ahead we will focus on tackling biodiversity challenges in our parks and reserves, improving training and employment opportunities for Indigenous staff, and providing even more rewarding visitor experiences through stronger partnerships with the tourism industry. I especially look forward to making further headway in the important task of improving the coordination and targeting of our science investment. While operational funding pressures remain, I am confident that we are in a strong position to continue to meet our many challenges and deliver our responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

Certification

This annual report was prepared in accordance with the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*, Finance Minister's Orders under that Act and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The Director's review and the rest of this annual report, except the financial statements for the Australian National Parks Fund and the Auditor-General's report on those financial statements, constitutes the Director of National Parks' report of operations.

The holder of the office of the Director of National Parks is responsible under section 9 of the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* for the preparation and content of the report of operations in accordance with Finance Minister's Orders.



Peter Cochrane
Director of National Parks
4 October 2010



Peter Cochrane at Uluru

