



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the former
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts report:

Conserving Australia:
Australia's national parks, conservation reserves
and marine protected areas

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Conserving Australia: Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas (April 2007)

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the report by the former Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Conserving Australia: Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas* (the report), tabled in April 2007. The Committee examined the funding and resourcing of Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas under the former Howard Government.

Australian governments have long recognised that our natural environment is under threat. Climate change is a major threat, but it is not the only one. Our biodiversity, our clean air, our fresh water, our oceans, landscapes and special places are also under threat from the long established impacts of human use, including land clearing, urban development, invasive species, pollution and unsustainable use of natural resources.

The Australian Government has taken a pro-active approach to natural resource management and environment conservation through national reform in a number of key areas, including the way in which our environmental and natural resource assets are protected and funded. There have been major investments in our national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas and a shift in approach that prioritises investment in the skills and knowledge of our communities, including Indigenous Australians, to foster more effective partnerships with regional and other organisations to deliver landscape-scale change.

A number of issues identified in the report have been addressed and prioritised for funding under the first phase of Caring for our Country, and the government announced in the 2012-13 Budget the continuation of this initiative for another five years from 2013-14 to 2017-18.

In November 2012, the Australian Government announced the proclamation of 40 new Commonwealth marine reserves. This brings to an end the development of the Commonwealth waters component of the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas, as agreed by all Australian governments in 1998. The new reserves came into effect on 17 November 2012. They comprise the Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve and the South-west, North-west, North and Temperate East Commonwealth marine reserves networks. These reserves are in addition to the existing South-east Commonwealth marine reserve network (established in 2007), Heard Island and McDonald Islands Marine Reserve (established in 2002) and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The new Commonwealth marine reserves add more than 2.3 million square kilometres to Australia's marine reserve estate, resulting in a total area of 3.1 million square kilometres of Commonwealth waters (across 60 reserves) being managed primarily for biodiversity conservation.

Other initiatives have included: the continued engagement of Indigenous peoples to declare and manage Indigenous Protected Areas; development of the National Wildlife Corridors Plan; and support offered to land managers through the Biodiversity Fund under the Clean Energy Future Plan.

Table 1 presents the Australian Government's response to the majority report of the Committee.

The Australian Greens, while supporting many of the recommendations of the majority report, identified a number of key recommendations that they did not support as well as issues which they believed had not been given adequate consideration. These comments were presented as a minority report.

As with issues raised in the majority report, the Australian Government has progressed a number of these issues through new and ongoing initiatives. For example, the Biodiversity Fund is seeking to address the impacts of climate change on our biodiversity, including through funding for the management of threats to protected areas as well as privately owned land. Similarly, the Australian Government has established the National Wildlife Corridors Plan which embeds the concept of resilience into managing Australia's private and publicly-owned and managed land. Table 2 presents the Australian Government's response to the minority report.

Table 1. Majority Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

Rec #	Recommendation	Response
1	<p>The committee recommends that in all future negotiations for the establishment of Marine Protected Areas, the oil and gas industry be part of the process so that all stakeholders are fully aware of the range of issues that impact upon the marine environment.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>The Australian Government has ensured that stakeholders, including the oil and gas industry, have been involved in discussions of the factors relevant to the location and zoning of new Commonwealth marine reserves. Consultation has been undertaken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • through development of the draft bioregional profiles, • in identifying areas for further assessment, • during the 90 day consultation periods on the draft marine bioregional plans and draft Commonwealth marine reserve network proposals for the South-west, North, North-west and Temperate East Marine Regions and the Commonwealth marine reserve proposal for the Coral Sea Region, and • during the 60 day consultation period on the final Commonwealth marine reserves network proposals for the South-west, North-west, North and Temperate East marine reserve networks and for the Coral Sea marine reserve. <p>Further consultation was undertaken during the two 30 day consultation periods on the preparation of management plans for each of the regional marine reserves networks and the Coral Sea.</p>
2	<p>The committee recommends that specific consideration be given to the level of capacity for coastal NRM groups and to the funding arrangements made available to NRM groups to assist in acquiring the necessary marine expertise.</p>	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>'Coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats' was one of six national priority areas addressed under the first five years of Caring for our Country.</p> <p>Under Caring for our Country (2008-13), the Australian Government has provided regional natural resource management organisations in coastal regions with a regional base level funding which they were able to direct to activities consistent with the coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats priority area.</p>

Rec #	Recommendation	Response
3	The committee recommends that all governments give greater priority to Indigenous knowledge and participation in park management generally, and fire management in particular.	<p>Agree</p> <p>For its part, the Australian Government recognises the value that Indigenous knowledge plays in the sustainable management of Australia's natural resources and encourages Indigenous participation. Since 1985, the Australian Government has had a legislative provision for the participation of Indigenous people in managing national parks, where the park includes Indigenous land and is managed by the Australian Government.</p> <p>Through a range of initiatives, the government provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for the employment of Indigenous rangers under the Working on Country program. • Investment in Indigenous Protected Areas, bringing together Indigenous knowledge and contemporary land management practices to protect and manage environmental and cultural values for all Australians. • Funding for improvement of Indigenous knowledge and participation in natural resource management. • Funding for Indigenous participation in the carbon market through the use of traditional fire management practices in the northern savanna regions. <p>The government's commitment to Indigenous land and sea management makes a valuable contribution to Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and provides a meaningful way for Indigenous Australians to be involved in achieving a sustainable environment.</p>
4	The committee recommends the implementation of all recommendations made in the 2004 Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References committee report <i>Turning back the tide - the invasive species challenge</i> that have not yet been addressed.	<p>Agree in part</p> <p>The committee report, <i>Turning back the tide</i>, made 27 recommendations. The Australian Government, through the response tabled in September 2007 under the Howard Government, agreed wholly or in principle with 24 of the recommendations, and disagreed with three recommendations.</p> <p>The Australian Government response to the <i>Turning back the tide</i> committee report can be viewed at http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/invasive-challenge.html.</p>

Rec #	Recommendation	Response
5	The committee recommends that the Government response to the 2004 Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References committee report <i>Turning back the tide - the invasive species challenge</i> be finalised.	<p>Agree</p> <p>The Australian Government response to the committee report, <i>Turning back the tide</i>, was tabled in September 2007 under the Howard Government.</p>
6	The committee recommends that the Commonwealth, States and Territories boost the resilience of reserves against the effects of climate change by focussing on increasing their connectivity, so that they contain a continuum of different climatic zones, altitudes and ecosystem types.	<p>Agree</p> <p>The Australian Government has implemented a number of initiatives to boost the resilience of reserves against the effects of climate change, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring for our Country which invests in expanding the National Reserve System and will continue to invest in the protection and conservation of biodiversity through strategic land and seascape conservation and restoration initiatives. • The National Wildlife Corridors Plan which establishes a framework to retain, restore and manage ecological connections across the landscape. • The Biodiversity Fund which aims to improve the resilience of Australian landscapes to climate change by improving the connectivity of native vegetation in the landscape. • Establishment of marine reserves under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>. The marine reserves are focusing on increasing their connectivity, so that they contain a continuum of different climatic zones, altitudes and ecosystem types.
7	The committee recommends that management plans clearly identify practical on-ground outcomes and that protected area agencies have in place comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programs to continually assess management effectiveness and the extent to which protected area values are being maintained.	<p>Agree</p> <p>The Australian Government notes that jurisdictions are responsible for implementing on-ground actions through their respective park agencies.</p> <p>The Australian Government's Director of National Parks management plans are structured on key result areas, and include performance indicators and evaluation measures.</p>

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8	<p>The committee recommends that best practice preparation and revision of reserve management plans should ensure that stakeholders are consulted at the commencement of planning processes, rather than beginning with seeking comment on draft plans.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>The government undertakes early engagement with stakeholders as this is critical to the development of management plans for conservation reserves. Early engagement leads to more effective negotiations where all parties develop a greater awareness of opportunities and constraints.</p> <p>Management plans for Commonwealth reserves are prepared in accordance with the requirements of national legislation – the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (EPBC Act).</p> <p>The EPBC Act provides for public consultation both before a management plan is prepared and again when a draft is available.</p>
9	<p>The committee endorses the Gilligan report findings and recommends that the Commonwealth substantially increase funding to the Indigenous Protected Areas Program and that funding for this Programme also be provided by state and territory governments.</p>	<p>Agree in part</p> <p>The Australian Government significantly expanded funding to the Indigenous Protected Areas program over 2008-13 under Caring for our Country.</p> <p>Funding from state and territory governments to support Indigenous Protected Areas is a matter for each jurisdiction.</p>
10	<p>The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government examine ways to encourage State and Territory Governments and their relevant agencies to engage more fully in programs that provide opportunities for recreational groups and users to contribute in positive ways to the conservation and maintenance of park resources.</p>	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>The Australian Government, through the National Landscapes partnership between Parks Australia and Tourism Australia, has been leading a collaborative approach to conservation and tourism, with strong industry support, to promote and improve the visitor experience in Australia's iconic natural and cultural environments and encourage greater support for their conservation.</p> <p>The Australian Government has in place initiatives aimed at engaging the recreational sector in contributing to conservation goals, including through cooperation with state and territory governments. For example, in 2007 the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority developed Bleachwatch as a community-based coral reef monitoring initiative to enable managers, tourism operators and community members to report observations of coral bleaching.</p>

Rec #	Recommendation	Response
11	The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government examine ways to encourage State and Territory Governments and their agencies to work collaboratively with recreational groups to identify further opportunities for activities such as horse riding, mountain biking and four wheel driving, where these activities will not unduly impact on the environment.	<p>Do not agree</p> <p>Recreational groups are able to contribute ideas for recreational activities in Commonwealth reserves through the public consultation processes associated with preparation of management plans. For Commonwealth reserves with significant visitation, there are formal arrangements in place to consult with tourism representatives or bodies, and/or there are representatives of tourism interests on boards of management.</p>
12	The committee recommends that every jurisdiction implement, where appropriate, legislative or administrative reforms that ensure that conservation covenants are registered on the title of the land.	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>Recommendation 12 is not directly relevant to the Australian Government. The issue of registration of conservation covenants on land titles is a matter for state and territory jurisdictions.</p>
13	The committee recommends that all governments, in consultation with the ATO and private conservation organisations, examine improved tax treatment for private initiatives that provide long-term, secure conservation benefits.	<p>Do not agree</p> <p>Tax treatment for business and private initiatives that provide conservation benefits were examined as part of the 2009 Australia's Future Tax System Review. Tax incentives are one of several mechanisms, including targeted investments and grants, available to support conservation activities.</p> <p>On 2 November 2012, the Not-for-profit Sector Tax Concession Working Group (Working Group) released a consultation paper on tax concessions for the not-for-profit (NFP) sector, including conservation organisations. The Working Group is seeking feedback on how tax concessions for the NFP sector could be made fairer, simpler and more effective.</p>

Rec #	Recommendation	Response
14	The committee recommends that all states and territories publish comprehensive information in a national consistent form on funding levels for ongoing management of national parks and reserves, including staffing resources, and that this information be published annually in the relevant annual reports.	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>The Australian Government notes that this recommendation is a matter for state and territory jurisdictions. The detail of reporting on funding levels for ongoing management of national parks varies across jurisdictions according to applicable legislation and policies of each government.</p> <p>Reporting on the Australian Government's reserves and associated resource information referred to in the recommendation is well established and detailed in the annual reports of the Director of National Parks.</p>
15	The committee recommends that all states and territories, at a minimum, maintain their budgets for national parks and reserves in real terms to meet expansions in the reserve estate and operational requirements.	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>Funding for national parks and reserves is an issue for consideration by each jurisdiction in the overall context of their annual budgets.</p>
16	The committee recommends that the Commonwealth review the funding formula under the NRS Program to take greater account of the on-going management costs borne by the states and territories.	<p>Agree</p> <p>Since the committee's report, the funding formula for the terrestrial National Reserve System (NRS) program was reviewed, but the core \$2 for \$1 principle has remained for acquisition of NRS properties under Caring for our Country's NRS criteria and priorities.</p>
17	The committee recommends that in the upcoming NHT3 funding round the Commonwealth significantly increase the funding allocation directed to the NRS Programme.	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>The Australian Government provided approximately \$180 million to the National Reserve System program as part of Caring for our Country across 2008-13. The government has confirmed funding for Caring for our Country of over \$2 billion over five years from 2013-14 and the strategic objectives for this period.</p>

Rec #	Recommendation	Response
18	The committee recommends that the Commonwealth consider substantially increased funding for World Heritage Areas.	<p data-bbox="880 228 1093 252">Agree in principle</p> <p data-bbox="880 280 2029 499">In November 2009 the Environment Protection and Heritage Council adopted the Australian World Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement. The agreement articulates the roles and responsibilities of the Australian Government and the states to ensure that Australia meets its international obligations for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of Australia's cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value.</p> <p data-bbox="880 528 1984 592">In that agreement, the Australian Government agreed that it is responsible for the costs of Australian Government owned or controlled World Heritage properties.</p> <p data-bbox="880 620 2058 759">Under Caring for our Country, the Australian Government has provided more than \$63 million to manage listed World Heritage Areas over 2008-13. The government has confirmed funding for Caring for our Country of over \$2 billion over five years from 2013-14 and the strategic objectives for this period.</p>

Table 2. Minority Report from the Australian Greens

	Recommendation	Response
A	Substantially and urgently increase funding of the National Reserve System in order to meet existing targets.	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>Since the committee report was released, the Australian Government has increased funding to the National Reserve System program by providing approximately \$180 million as part of Caring for our Country across 2008-13. The government has confirmed funding for Caring for our Country of over \$2 billion over five years from 2013-14 and the strategic objectives for this period.</p>
B	Ensure that the next round of the National Heritage Trust (NHT3) better integrates natural resource management (NRM) and the National Reserve System (NRS).	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>The Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative integrated delivery and funding of the previous Natural Heritage Trust, National Landcare, Environmental Stewardship and Working on Country programs across 2008-13, and included the National Reserve System as one of six national priority areas for investment.</p> <p>Caring for our Country reformed the way in which the Australian Government invests in the protection of Australia's unique environment, and pursues sustainable management of our natural resources. It aims to deliver an environment that is healthy, better protected, well managed, resilient, and able to provide essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.</p> <p>The government has confirmed funding for Caring for our Country of over \$2 billion over five years from 2013-14 and the strategic objectives for this period.</p>
C	Increase funding for research into and management of threats to protected areas (including fire, pests and weeds).	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>Since the issuing of this committee report, a number of relevant studies have been commenced and/or completed, with funding from the Australian Government, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a national case-study to integrate climate change into management of disturbance regimes, using fire as an example, in areas managed for biodiversity conservation, • a review of the vulnerability of the Australian Government reserve system to climate change, • an assessment of the impacts of climate change on the development and management of the National Reserve System, and • the vulnerability of World Heritage values of Australia's World Heritage properties to climate change impacts.

D	Give greater priority to consideration of the impacts of climate change on protected areas and significantly increase research funding for predicting and assessing the likely impacts of climate change on the resilience of our ecosystems.	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>The Australian Government gives significant priority to consideration of the impacts of climate change on protected areas and increased research funding for predicting and assessing the likely impacts of climate change on the resilience of our ecosystems. Refer to the response to Recommendation C in the Minority Report for examples of research on the impacts of climate change supported by the government.</p>
E	Ensures protected area planning incorporates the concept of resilience.	<p>Agree</p> <p>The Australian Government takes a strategic approach to improving the resilience to climate change of Australian natural assets, including protecting and managing refuge areas in both marine and terrestrial environments, and allowing for altitudinal and latitudinal change trends via the Natural Reserve System. [See also response to the Majority Report Recommendation 6.]</p>
F	Increase funding for marine protected areas.	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>The Australian Government has provided an ongoing commitment to implementing and managing the nation's marine reserves network. Funding to this program will support implementation and management activities for declared marine reserves networks and marine bioregional plans.</p> <p>In the first five years of Caring for our Country the government invested \$200 million to Reef Rescue, to help protect and preserve the Great Barrier Reef for future generations, through work to improve water quality and mitigate the impacts of climate change on the reef.</p> <p>The government has committed a further \$200 million over five years from 2013-14 to continue the Reef Rescue program under the second phase of Caring for our Country.</p> <p>In November 2012 the Government announced funding of around \$100 million to implement a Fisheries Adjustment Assistance Package to support the creation of the network of Commonwealth marine reserves.</p>

G	<p>Complete the protected area system in northern Australia as a matter of urgency, and commit resources to long-term planning for sustainable regional development.</p>	<p>Agree in principle</p> <p>The Australian Government has recognised there is a pressing need to improve the management of our natural resources in remote and northern Australia. Through the first five years of Caring for our Country, 'natural resource management in remote and northern Australia' was one of six national priority areas. This focus secured better environmental and natural resource management outcomes in these places, particularly for Indigenous groups. A significant mechanism to achieve this was the expansion of the National Reserve System (NRS), including the declaration of Indigenous Protected Areas. The priority for the NRS is to increase the area that is protected in bioregions with less than 10 percent of their area protected by the NRS.</p> <p>Since 2008, the area of protected areas under the NRS in northern and remote Australia has increased by over 17.5 million hectares, with the addition of 22 properties and 15 Indigenous Protected Areas.</p>
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