

# Chapter 2

## Values and objectives of the conservation estate

### Introduction

2.1 Australia's conservation estate contributes significantly to the environmental, social, cultural and economic wealth of the Australian community. Parks and reserves are seen today as the foundation of conservation efforts to protect biodiversity and cultural and natural heritage. The conservation estate not only facilitates the protection of cultural and natural heritage values but also delivers a wide range of ecological benefits 'including clean water and air, climate modulation, habitats for resource species (eg fish stocks) and resources for scientific research'.<sup>1</sup>

2.2 The values and objectives of protected areas have changed over time. Originally the focus was on the conservation of scenic and recreational areas. More recently, the protection of biodiversity has been foregrounded:

Australia has a long history of recognising the values of natural and wilderness areas through the creation of national parks and protected areas. In the tradition of most western nations, the development of national parks initially began with the objectives of conserving scenic and recreational values in close proximity to urban centres. However, throughout the twentieth century, there has been an increasing awareness in the need to protect land and ecosystems for their biodiversity values and for their natural and cultural heritage values.<sup>2</sup>

2.3 The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN) similarly noted the evolving nature of the values and objectives of protected areas and submitted that there is now a focus on economic and social benefits as well as their conservation and recreational value:

The understanding of the values and objectives of protected areas is an evolving field. Comparatively recently parks were mainly valued for conserving natural and cultural heritage and outdoor recreation. Increasingly they are understood to be crucial to sustainable development and have many direct and indirect economic and development benefits. The understanding of their central role in Australia's tourism industry has only been fully recognised since the early nineties, the term 'ecosystems services' - the profound benefits which derive from intact systems is similarly new. An emerging area of great importance is the social value of parks to physical, mental and spiritual health.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Tasmanian National Parks Association, *Submission 78*, p. 2.

2 Australian Network of Environmental Defender's Offices, *Submission 145*, p. 4.

3 *Submission 137*, p. 12.

2.4 WWF-Australia submitted that the national parks and other conservation reserves provide an 'effective policy mechanism' to safeguard a range of ecological, social and economic values. More specifically, they argued that the economic value of national reserves is substantial and growing.<sup>4</sup>

2.5 Fundamentally however, there is no single parks concept or objective. There exists a multiplicity of rationales for the preservation of the landscape through the formation of reserves. At one end of the scale, parks and reserves can be sought principally by those desiring to preserve large tracts of land for the purposes of recreational activities such as motor sport and skiing. At the other end of the scale, they can be desired by scientists and conservationists who may be seeking to limit human activity in these areas with the sole aim of preserving these environments in their pristine state.<sup>5</sup>

2.6 The reservation of significant areas of land brings with it significant environmental, economic and social benefits and is an investment in Australia's future. Not only does the conservation estate play a critical role in protecting lands and seas, natural features, wildlife and associated cultural values for present and future generations, it also forms a platform for the tourism industry, making a major contribution to Australia's national and international appeal. Public investment in a comprehensive park system ensures a responsibility to future generations as well as bringing substantial ecological, economic and societal benefits.<sup>6</sup>

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4 *Submission 161*, p. 12.

5 Hoggett, J. 'The Uses and Value of National Parks: Does More Mean Worse?', *IPA Background*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2005.

6 Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Northern Territory Government, *Submission 16*, p. 1.

**Figure 2.1 The economic benefits of the conservation estate: tourists in Uluru National Park**



2.7 While the Commonwealth government plays an important role in conservation, the state and territory governments are the predominant owners and managers of the Australian parks system. The Australian Government, through the Director of National Parks, manages Commonwealth parks and reserves including areas located on external island territories and within Australian waters beyond the State limit of three nautical miles. Each Australian state and territory government also has their own protected area management agencies to manage reserves under their respective jurisdictions.<sup>7</sup>

2.8 When the colonies joined to form the Australian Federation, and the Constitution was declared in 1901, this set the basis for the state-run national parks system that Australia has today. Because the Constitution did not list environmental planning and management as a Federal responsibility, this meant that the states were responsible for national parks by default. The management of Crown public land has remained with the states from 1901 until the present day.<sup>8</sup>

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7 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Parks and Reserves*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/index.html>, accessed 27 November 2006.

8 Wescott, G.C., 'Australia's Distinctive National Parks System', *Environmental Conservation*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1991, p. 331.

2.9 One of the difficulties with this arrangement is the coordination of the activities of nine different governments, meaning that uniform environmental protection is not easily achieved. Each state and territory has its own legislation and benchmarks for the declaration and management of conservation reserves, with the Commonwealth being responsible only for those areas within the Federal jurisdiction.<sup>9</sup>

2.10 This arrangement has led to some anomalies in the how the Australian national parks system is structured, as an examination of the development of the conservation estate over time reveals.<sup>10</sup>

## History

2.11 A discussion of the current values and objectives of the conservation estate is incomplete without an understanding of how the national parks and reserve system in Australia has evolved. The national reserve system has a long history which reflects the changing aims and values of both Governments and society as a whole.

2.12 When the first European settlers came to Australia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and through the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a general policy that unused land and land not cleared of trees and vegetation was a waste. This led to large scale land clearance, and conservation was not a consideration throughout this era of Australia's history.<sup>11</sup>

2.13 The first actual nature reserve to be declared in Australia was the Jenolan Caves Reserve, located in New South Wales, in 1866. This was closely followed by Tower Hill public park in Victoria in 1866, (subsequently upgraded to national park status in 1892) and in 1871 Kings Park was declared in Western Australia.<sup>12</sup>

2.14 Australia's first national park, however, was proclaimed in New South Wales on 26 April 1879. Originally named the 'The National Park' it was renamed 'Royal National Park' when Queen Elizabeth II visited it in 1955. This park was the second such park to be declared in the world after Yellowstone National Park in the United States of America was declared in 1872.<sup>13</sup>

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9 Hall, C.M., *Wasteland to World Heritage: Preserving Australia's Wilderness*, Melbourne University Press, 1992, p. 47.

10 Wescott, G.C., 'Australia's Distinctive National Parks System', *Environmental Conservation*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1991, p. 331.

11 Hall, C.M., *Wasteland to World Heritage: Preserving Australia's Wilderness*, Melbourne University Press, 1992, p. 79.

12 Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Submission 126*, p. 2.

13 Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal web site, *National Parks*, <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/nationalparks>, accessed 28 November 2006; Wescott, G.C., 'Australia's Distinctive National Parks System', *Environmental Conservation*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1991, p. 331.

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### ***Sites for public recreation***

2.15 The early days of the Royal National Park saw it used mostly as places of leisure and recreation for the residents of Sydney rather than for nature conservation. A dance hall was built there during the 1940's, and prior to that, land was cleared for large areas of lawns and a train line was set up between Loftus and Audley, two towns within the Park.<sup>14</sup>

2.16 Various colonies followed the example of New South Wales in the creation of national parks. South Australia declared 'The National Park' at Belair in 1891, Parks were not created in Queensland and Tasmania until after federation. In 1908 Queensland named Witches Falls at Tambourine Mountain as its first national park, while Tasmania declared Mt Field and Freycinet national parks in 1916.<sup>15</sup>

2.17 As the history of the NSW Royal National Park highlights, the earliest rationale for the formation of conservation estate across Australia was to set aside areas mainly for the purposes of public leisure and recreation. As early European settlers found the Australian landscape harsh and unforgiving, attempts were made to change the landscape into more familiar English-looking countryside.<sup>16</sup>

2.18 It is only in recent decades that perceptions have changed in Australian society to incorporate the objective of environmental conservation and the protection of biodiversity as the major rationale behind the expansion of the conservation estate. Along the way, the ideological clash between the utility of the natural environment and its preservation has had a marked effect on the attitude of Australians.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Places for remote area recreation, resource conservation***

2.19 In the 1920s and 1930s, recreational activities such as bushwalking became increasingly popular and led to lobbying for areas to be set aside for these purposes, protecting them from competing land uses such as extractive industries. This resulted, for example, in the creation of the Blue Mountains National Park in NSW, the first stage of which was declared a park in 1932.<sup>18</sup> Setting aside land for other possible

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14 Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal web site, *National Parks*, <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/nationalparks>, accessed 28 November 2006; Wescott, G.C., 'Australia's Distinctive National Parks System', *Environmental Conservation*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1991, p. 331.

15 Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Submission 126*, p. 2; Wescott, G.C., 'Australia's Distinctive National Parks System', *Environmental Conservation*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1991, p. 331.

16 Environmental Protection Agency Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, web site, [http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks\\_and\\_forests/history\\_of\\_parks\\_and\\_forests/](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/history_of_parks_and_forests/), accessed 28 November 2006.

17 Hall, C.M., *Wasteland to World Heritage: Preserving Australia's Wilderness*, Melbourne University Press, 1992, p. 78.

18 NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, *State of the Parks 2004*, Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, p. 16.

future uses was also a motivation behind the creation of some parks. One of the reasons for the creation of Kosciusko National Park in NSW was to protect its hydroelectric potential, and significant sections of the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme were built within this park. The establishment of Kosciusko was prescient too in its recognition that reserves can provide ecosystem services such as soil and water conservation.<sup>19</sup>

2.20 Wilderness and remote natural area preservation became a major environmental policy issue in Australia from the 1960's. An increased demand for the preservation of Australia's wilderness was fuelled by heightened public awareness in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century regarding threats to the conservation values of places such as the Great Barrier Reef, Fraser Island, the Australian Alps, Kakadu, Shark Bay and south-west Tasmania among other places. Combined with this increasing awareness of conservation however, was a continued acceptance of the value of preserving such areas for remote area recreation and for tourism.<sup>20</sup>

2.21 In the mid-1970's the Commonwealth took a more substantial role in the management of the natural environment, through the creation of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Australian Heritage Commission, and through the passing of federal environmental protection legislation.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Iconic locations***

2.22 The protection and marketing of iconic locations – sometimes referred to as monumentalism – has always been an important motivation behind the creation of parks. This was the rationale behind the creation of one of the United States' most famous parks, Yellowstone.<sup>22</sup> In Australia, too, popular natural attractions have often been amongst the first sites to receive protection in some form of reserve. The creation of a park at Jenolan Caves in the nineteenth century was an example of this.

2.23 In 1975 the Commonwealth enacted the *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975* and formed the Australian National Park and Wildlife Service. The first terrestrial national parks were established under the Act in 1977 (Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park) and in 1979 (Kakadu National Park). Both of these parks are identified as areas of universal significance under the World Heritage

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19 NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, *State of the Parks 2004*, Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, p. 15.

20 Hall, C.M., *Wasteland to World Heritage: Preserving Australia's Wilderness*, Melbourne University Press, 1992, p. 1.

21 Australian National Parks, web site, <http://www.australiannationalparks.com>, accessed 28 November 2006; Hall, C.M., *Wasteland to World Heritage: Preserving Australia's Wilderness*, Melbourne University Press, 1992, p. 1.

22 Suh, J. & Harrison, S., 'Management Objectives and Economic Value of National Parks: Preservation, Conservation and Development', *Discussion Paper No. 337*, School of Economics, University of Queensland, 2005.



Convention,<sup>23</sup> and include frequently visited sites that have also provided images synonymous with Australia's natural environment.

2.24 The preservation of such iconic natural assets pointed to a growing recognition by government and society of the value of preserving such places not only for their natural heritage value but also for their international recognition value, effectively putting Australia more firmly on the world map.

### ***The development of marine protected areas***

2.25 While significant attention was given to the formation of terrestrial parks in Australia during the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, it was not until the late 1930's that something resembling a marine national park was declared in Australia. In 1937 an area around Green Island near Cairns was brought under the Protection of the Fisheries and Oyster Acts. The prevailing attitude until then was that seas were an infinite sink of resources, although the idea of degradation was of some concern to scientists.<sup>24</sup>

2.26 From then on the development of marine parks steadily gained pace. By the end of 1977 there were 35 declared areas and 55 more were proposed. One of the most prominent marine reserves to be declared during that time was at the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland.<sup>25</sup>

2.27 The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was established in 1975 as a multiple-use marine park. It was declared a World Heritage Area in 1981, internationally recognised for its outstanding natural values. As explained by the Department of the Environment and Water Resources (DEW – formerly the Department of the Environment and Heritage), it comprises one of the world's largest and most complex ecosystems, ranging from fringing coastal reefs to mid-shelf lagoons, outer reefs and then to the open ocean. As the world's largest coral reef ecosystem, and a comparatively pristine area with lower human pressure compared to other coral reef systems in the world, it is also a critical global resource.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Hall, C.M., *Wasteland to World Heritage: Preserving Australia's Wilderness*, Melbourne University Press, 1992, p. 41; Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Submission 126*, pp 2–3. The *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975* under which Uluru and Kakadu were both recognised and managed was replaced in 2000 by the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The Director of National Parks and all parks and reserves established under the former Act continue under the EPBC Act.

24 Hundloe, T.J., 'Parks in the Marine Environment', *The Value of National Parks to the Community: Proceedings of the Second National Wilderness Conference, University of Sydney, 23–25 November 1979*, Australian Conservation Foundation, 1980, p. 168.

25 Hundloe, T.J., 'Parks in the Marine Environment', *The Value of National Parks to the Community: Proceedings of the Second National Wilderness Conference, University of Sydney, 23–25 November 1979*, Australian Conservation Foundation, 1980, p. 168.

26 Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Submission 126*, pp 2–3.

2.28 The rationale for the creation of marine reserves is akin to that for the creation of terrestrial parks. The objectives include the preservation of marine ecosystems and biodiversity for nature's sake alone, and the conservation of marine ecosystems for sustainable human use over the long term.<sup>27</sup>

2.29 Working towards those objectives, in the 1990's the Australian Government began to create an Oceans Policy (1999) which would set the guidelines for establishing a more systematic approach to the protection and management of marine areas, and this approach will be expanded upon in chapter 4 of this report.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Conflict over the creation of parks***

2.30 The creation of reserves, on land and at sea, has been a source of social and political conflict, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. The first prominent example of such conflict between nature conservation and hydroelectric development was at Lake Pedder in the late 1960s. The conservation of the Great Barrier Reef involved conflict over oil exploration, shipping and fishing and, more recently, the management of intensive tourism. The drive by non-government organisations to support the extension of the conservation estate, particularly in the forests of eastern Australia, resulted in intense debates over land use, particularly in relation to forestry activities, but also, again in Tasmania, in relation to hydroelectric development.

2.31 These conflicts resulted in protests, blockades, arrests and legal challenges at many locations in Australia, most notably in south-west Tasmania, the rainforests of NSW, and in the Daintree area of northern Queensland. They sometimes pitted social movements against governments, sometimes governments against each other, and environmental conservation became a topic of major political importance.

2.32 These debates about land use and the desirability of setting areas aside for conservation were crucial parts of a public discussion about the importance of conservation and how it should be achieved. They also triggered the creation of the bulk of the reserves in the forested areas along Australia's Great Dividing Range and in Tasmania. Legal cases, particularly the Franklin Dam dispute, changed the approaches of governments to conservation, as well as having impacts on the constitutional landscape that are still being felt in all areas of Australian public policy. However, these conflicts were fought out overwhelmingly within a particular set of ecosystems in the wetter parts of Australia.

2.33 The same period also saw recognition of the role of Indigenous Australians as custodians and managers of significant areas of Australia with important conservation values. This led, for example, to Uluru being returned to Indigenous traditional

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27 Hundloe, T.J., 'Parks in the Marine Environment', *The Value of National Parks to the Community: Proceedings of the Second National Wilderness Conference, University of Sydney, 23–25 November 1979*, Australian Conservation Foundation, 1980, p. 172.

28 Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Submission 126*, p. 8.



owners in 1985, with Indigenous custodians leasing it back to Parks Australia.<sup>29</sup> Since that time, governments around Australia have entered into a range of partnership arrangements with Indigenous people for some conservation reserves.

### *A change in focus*

2.34 Two things combined to see a gradual change in emphasis in conservation through the 1990s. The science of conservation was placing an increased emphasis on habitat conservation and on recognising that the full range of ecosystems and biodiversity were legitimate targets for conservation efforts. Greater attention was paid to conservation beyond the coasts and forests of eastern and south-west Australia. More conservation reserves appeared in the arid, semi-arid and rangeland areas of Australia. Because much of this land was freehold or leasehold, more attention was also paid to how conservation objectives could be achieved in partnership with private landholders. This is examined more fully in chapter 11.

2.35 The bitter conflicts of the 1980s created a desire amongst many stakeholders to find processes that would allow consultative, rational and balanced approaches to be taken to land management. Examples included the development of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment in 1992,<sup>30</sup> the emergence of Ecologically Sustainable Development as a framework for managing impacts on the environment,<sup>31</sup> experimentation with new institutional arrangements such as the Commonwealth's Resource Assessment Commission, and bilateral agreements to manage major conservation areas, such as the Wet Tropics in Queensland. Conflicts over forest use were also a driving force behind the development of the Regional Forest Agreements, discussed further in chapter 3, which help plan for the conservation and management of forested areas of Australia.<sup>32</sup>

### **Contemporary conservation values**

2.36 The conservation estate is currently meeting a wide range of objectives. This range reflects the complex history of reserves, as well as the many values which governments and other land managers want to see reflected in reserve systems:

There has been a history of reserving and protecting areas for their scenic and recreational values, and ... current legislative categories of protected

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29 World Heritage web site, *Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/worldheritage/sites/uluru/index.html>, accessed December 2006.

30 Department of the Environment and Water Resources, *Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/esd/national/igae/>, accessed December 2006.

31 Department of the Environment and Water Resources, *National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/esd/national/nsesd/index.html>, accessed December 2006.

32 Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, *Regional Forest Agreements. Why?* <http://www.affa.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=D2C48F86-BA1A-11A1-A2200060B0A01805>, accessed December 2006.

areas recognise a range of different values which warrant special protection and management for the relevant area.<sup>33</sup>

2.37 Ensuring the conservation estate reflects diverse values and meets diverse needs is not an easy task. In NSW the Department of Environment and Conservation has noted:

A challenge for the NPWS is to assess the condition of the entire NSW park system against a contemporary set of values that may not align with the reasons for which parks were initially created.<sup>34</sup>

2.38 There is no question that the preservation of natural and cultural values is the predominant aim of the contemporary conservation estate. However, other objectives are also extremely important. These include the preservation of ecosystem services (such as clean water from undisturbed catchments), recreational opportunities and tourism services, and land occupation and use for Indigenous people.

2.39 Many of these values and objectives have been articulated through national and international agreements around conservation, as well as through management planning processes administered by state and territory governments. The Department of the Environment and Water Resources explained that:

The values and objectives for the declaration and purpose of reserves have been developed from a range of policy agreements. The agreements give effect to a number of international and national policies including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (1992); and the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity (1996).<sup>35</sup>

2.40 Australia's conservation estate values are also tied in with international conservation efforts, through the work of the World Conservation Union:

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) is the world's largest and most important conservation network. The Union brings together 82 States, 111 government agencies, more than 800 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership...The IUCN has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies.<sup>36</sup>

2.41 The IUCN has outlined five types of values that protected areas can represent:

- Biodiversity/science values:

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33 Australian Network of Environmental Defender's Offices, *Submission 145*, p. 8.

34 *State of the Parks 2004*, Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, p. 15.

35 Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Submission 126*, p. 6.

36 *IUCN Overview*, [www.iucn.org/en/about/](http://www.iucn.org/en/about/), accessed 20 November 2006.

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- Protected areas are a principal avenue through which the full range of Australia's ecosystems are protected, thereby contributing to the conservation of biodiversity
  - Protected areas 'provide critical outside laboratories for scientific research into the functioning of ecological systems and processes'
  - Geodiversity values:
    - Protected areas protect geodiversity features or the 'abiotic' dimension of the land and sea – mountains, cliffs, caves, valleys, dunes, coral reefs, fossil sites etc
    - Geodiversity features are frequently key scenic attractions providing beauty, interest and tourism value
    - Geodiversity can also be of Indigenous cultural value
  - Economic values:
    - Protected areas provide 'ecosystem benefits', which in turn may yield economic benefits (or prevent economic costs) to the community, for example, through contributing to good water quality and soil stability and preventing costly environmental problems such as salinity and soil erosion
    - Protected areas contribute to the tourism industry forming the key scenic attractions across the states as well as providing activities in marine environments such as diving and whale and dolphin watching
    - Protected areas generate employment
    - Parks that are jointly managed with Indigenous people generate income for Indigenous communities
  - Cultural/social values:
    - Protected areas safeguard sites of social, cultural and spiritual value
    - Protected areas, Indigenous Protected areas and Community Conserved Areas may help protect sites of significant cultural value to Indigenous Australians and enhance understanding of, and respect for, Indigenous culture
    - Sites of cultural value such as pioneer settlements may be protected by protected areas
    - Community health and well-being can be enhanced by protected sites by offering places of beauty and outdoor recreation plus other community gatherings
    - 'wildlife and wilderness inspire the creative community and generate expression in art, music, publishing and filmmaking'
    - urban protected areas provide a site for environmental education and self reliance training (through school camps etc)

- Spiritual/ethical values:
  - Protected areas safeguard areas which hold spiritual value for many community members
  - The protection of, and respect for, other life forms is an ethical position held by some in the community<sup>37</sup>

### **Diverse values, diverse conservation objectives?**

2.42 The many different values for which conservation reserves are managed, the complex history of nature conservation, and the maintenance of nine different jurisdictional reserve systems across the continent, are all factors that have combined to create an at times bewildering proliferation of reserve types.

2.43 Australia currently has over 50 different types of conservation reserve, over numerous different land tenures and different management arrangements.<sup>38</sup> The Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD) lists 55 types of tenure, not including Indigenous Protected Areas, in the terrestrial estate alone.<sup>39</sup> Some of this land is managed by state or territory statutory agencies solely charged with the maintenance of the conservation estate; some areas are managed by departments of conservation within a broader portfolio of environmental responsibilities; other areas are managed by state agencies with responsibility for water supply, production forestry or crown lands generally. Some of the land is not managed by public agencies at all, but is in private hands.

2.44 The management objectives of areas vary hugely. There are conservation lands within urban areas that are heavily modified ecosystems, and regularly visited by individuals from surrounding homes and businesses. There are remote reserves that are primarily managed to protect key wildlife species and see almost no visitors at all. There are parks that contain major tourist resort development, and others that surround urban water supply dams. Some reserves cater for significant levels of organised tourism, such as Fraser Island, and others where most of the visitation is by individuals and families, but which nevertheless see hundreds of thousands of visits every year, such as Mossman Gorge in north Queensland.

2.45 Concern was expressed during the hearings that the diversity of terminology might be hampering the ability to communicate with the public about parks and about the recreational opportunities they present:

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37 World Commission on Protected Areas, *Submission 137*, pp 12–18.

38 Mr Brian Gilligan, *Committee Hansard*, 16 June 2006, p. 2.

39 Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Summary of Terrestrial Protected Areas in Australia by Type*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/nrs/capad/2004/national/nat-type04.html>, accessed December 2006.

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It would really assist us and go a long way towards protecting our natural environment if there were a national understanding of what a national park is and core definitions applied across all states and territories of Australia.<sup>40</sup>

2.46 Tourism industry representatives, such as Ms Dimascio, of the Tourism and Transport Forum, also thought the marketing could be more coordinated, though they recognised that the labels of the parks need not necessarily inhibit that.<sup>41</sup>

2.47 There is an internationally recognised categorisation of reserves available. The IUCN has recognised that the many values of conservation lands can underpin a range of types of conservation area. It maintains a system of six categories of reserve:

- Category Ia - Strict Nature Reserve: Protected Area managed mainly for science.
  - Area of land and/or sea possessing some outstanding or representative ecosystems, geological or physiological features and/or species, available primarily for scientific research and/or environmental monitoring.
- Category Ib - Wilderness Area: Protected Area managed mainly for wilderness protection.
  - Large area of unmodified or slightly modified land and/or sea, retaining its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition.
- Category II - National Park: Protected Area managed mainly for ecosystem conservation and recreation.
  - Natural area of land and/or sea, designated to protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for this and future generations: exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area: and provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.
- Category III - Natural Monument: Protected Area managed for conservation of specific natural features.
  - Area containing one or more specific natural or natural/cultural feature which is of outstanding value because of its inherent rarity, representative or aesthetic qualities or cultural significance.
- Category IV - Habitat/Species Management Area: Protected Area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention.

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40 Ms Kristen Appel, Australian Ranger Federation, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 65.

41 Ms Joyce Dimascio, *Committee Hansard*, 12 May 2006, pp 29–30.

- Area of land and/or sea subject to active intervention for management purposes so as to ensure the maintenance of habitats and/or to meet the requirements of specific species.
- Category V - Protected Landscape/Seascape: Protected Areas managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation.
  - Area of land, with coast and seas as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, cultural and/or ecological value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the protection, maintenance and evolution of such an area.
- Category VI - Managed Resource Protected Areas: Protected Area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems.
  - Area containing predominantly unmodified natural systems, managed to ensure long term protection and maintenance of biological diversity, while providing at the same time a sustainable flow of natural products and services to meet community needs.<sup>42</sup>

2.48 Australia uses the IUCN's definitions in its National Reserve System (NRS), discussed in the next chapter, by requiring that the management objectives of NRS reserves be consistent with the IUCN definition of a protected area.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, 'all protected area categories across each jurisdiction have notionally been assigned to one of the IUCN protected area categories'.<sup>44</sup> A summary table of the number of Australia's terrestrial protected areas by IUCN management category is attached at Appendix 4, and of Australia's marine protected areas at Appendix 5. These tables also show the number of hectares of protected area in each IUCN category.<sup>45</sup>

2.49 The committee believes the work of the IUCN provides an adequate basis for understanding the range of values that form the foundation of Australia's conservation estate, as well as a range of reserve types that can give expression to those values. It would seem that the public, park managers and tourism operators could all benefit from going a step further than just nominally assigning each reserve to one of these categories. The time may be right for a review and rationalisation of how reserves are labelled and how the reserve system is managed as a whole. This is not in any way a criticism of any government or agency involved in park management. On the contrary,

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42 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, Appendix 1, pp 62–64.

43 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 14.

44 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System: A Partnership Approach*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 14.

45 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *National Data Summary*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/nrs/capad/2004/national/index.html>, accessed 1 December 2006.



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it is clear that there has been tremendous progress in conservation management and good cooperation between governments in reaching the point at which Australia now finds itself. It is that progress and cooperation that makes even better coordination across the country possible.

2.50 The cornerstone principles for continued national cooperation on conservation objectives should be recognition of the full range of functions performed by reserves; a landscape approach to planning and management; and continued progress toward 'the establishment and maintenance of a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) system of protected areas in Australia'.<sup>46</sup>

### **Indigenous people and the conservation estate**

2.51 Indigenous Australians have a unique relationship with Australia's land and sea, and this extends to its conservation estate. There are several features of this relationship that are important for this report, and to any discussion of conservation in Australia:

- Indigenous Australians have lived and often continue to live on, or with continuing connection to, the land that is now part of the conservation estate and as such have a special, longstanding relationship to that country;
- Indigenous land management practices have helped shape the modern landscape and biodiversity, and their knowledge or continuing use of such practices will be important to the ongoing protection of conservation values;
- Conservation areas are often on crown land that has never been freehold or leasehold, and may be subject to native title claims or rights, giving indigenous people a legal as well as historical role to play in the ongoing management of such land; and
- Areas of the conservation estate may play a particularly prominent role in the economy of some Indigenous communities, whether directly through traditional uses or park management employment, or indirectly through things like tourism industry opportunities and as the cultural underpinning for Indigenous art.

A number of vital areas of Indigenous involvement in the conservation estate are discussed throughout this report, including Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), tourism and Indigenous management practices.

### **Discussion about objectives**

2.52 While the various government agencies have broadly accepted the idea of a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system and its objectives, the

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46 Department of the Environment and Heritage, *Submission 126*, p. 7. The CAR system of protected areas will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

committee heard during the inquiry a range of different views from witnesses about what the objectives for the conservation estate are, or should be.

2.53 Dr Paul Williams stated that the primary values of Australia's conservation estate were the habitats, and associated native fauna and flora, that occur within those areas. In addition he stated that much of the conservation estate also had cultural values, but that the primary objective of national parks in particular was to ensure habitats were maintained in good condition (i.e. with high native species diversity, limited impacts from exotic species and the continuation of ecological processes, such as appropriate fire regimes and hydrological cycles in wetlands) so that sustainable populations of the native species were protected within those estates. Dr Williams also argued that national parks should be a venue for all Australians and their visitors to experience the Australian bush.<sup>47</sup>

2.54 The CSIRO proposed that Australia's protected areas had two distinct and overlapping objectives. One was to provide recreational opportunities and inspirational values and the other role was to conserve biodiversity by promoting the protection of ecosystems, natural habitats and viable populations of species.<sup>48</sup>

2.55 The view of the Department of the Environment and Heritage South Australia was that the conservation estate was enormously important in providing core areas for the long-term conservation of biodiversity. They went on to explain that such areas protected a range of biological, geological and heritage values. Not only that, but the conservation estate also encompassed many areas of great importance to Aboriginal people, provided important areas for tourism and recreation activities, and protected many indigenous and non-indigenous heritage sites and places.<sup>49</sup>

2.56 The Conservation Commission of Western Australia's view was that the conservation estate provided and protected numerous environmental, social and economic values. They explained that these reserves were the most effective land use type able to achieve and sustain conservation benefits in circumstances of change, and that beyond this fundamental value, the conservation estate also provided social benefits for the community through the provision of opportunities for interaction with nature and often provided special spiritual and cultural benefits.<sup>50</sup>

2.57 WWF Australia, while being mainly concerned about conservation objectives, argued that the conservation estate was an effective policy mechanism to conserve a range of ecological, social and economic values. They believed that protection of

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47 *Submission 34*, p. 1.

48 *Submission 41*, p. 5.

49 *Submission 194*, p. 2.

50 *Submission 141*, p. 6.

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natural assets to maintain national and regional biodiversity values should be the primary objective of Australia's national parks and other conservation reserves.<sup>51</sup>

2.58 It was the view of the Tasmanian National Parks Association that the primary objective of the reserve system should be conservation of biodiversity and natural and cultural heritage. However, they submitted that aside from their primary conservation purpose, the conservation estate was valuable for providing opportunities for recreational, cultural and tourism activities based on their protected values.<sup>52</sup>

2.59 In general, witnesses expressed more than one objective as the rationale behind the creation and management of the conservation estate. The range of ideas and values expressed by each of the witnesses, while they overlapped to a great extent, pointed to nature conservation as being the overarching objective, but a great majority did not isolate this aim from recreation, tourism and economic benefits.

### ***Biodiversity, conservation and national parks objectives***

2.60 One of the major objectives behind Australia's modern day conservation estate system is for the conservation of the natural environment and the protection of biodiversity. Highlighting the importance of Australia and its global environmental responsibilities, the Australian Network of Environmental Defender's Offices (ANEDO) stated:

Australia is one of the 17 'megadiversity' nations, and the EDO views it as having a responsibility to protect biodiversity because it is home to 10 per cent of the world's biodiversity.<sup>53</sup>

2.61 However, as the CSIRO pointed out in terms of the practical limitations of balancing biodiversity conservation with other priorities:

The best that we can do is to try to ensure that biodiversity is well represented in the reserve system. We have to think of it as a system; we cannot think of them as isolated pieces of land. The current biodiversity that we have is well represented and the range of environments that we have are also well represented.<sup>54</sup>

2.62 The Wilderness Society felt that the conservation of biodiversity and the protection of our natural heritage demanded a landscape-wide approach - one that recognised the importance of ecological connectivity. They claimed that:

The processes that sustained and regenerated ecological systems and all their components operated across a range of spatial and time scales, and that

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51 *Submission 161*, p. 12.

52 *Submission 78*, pp 2–3.

53 Ms Rachel Walmsley, *Committee Hansard*, 12 May 2006, p. 69.

54 Professor Christopher Margules, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 4.

many, if not most, work at space and time scales that far exceed those at which humans manage land and natural resources.<sup>55</sup>

2.63 Others pointed out the role that the current conservation estate system played in achieving key conservation objectives. The Department of Conservation and Land Management Western Australia argued that the National Reserve System (NRS) and the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA) were viewed as major planks of biodiversity conservation. They expanded on this by stating that they also provided for a range of other benefits, including ecosystem services, education and scientific values, spiritual places, support for industries such as nature-based tourism, and contributing to the state and regional economies and employment.<sup>56</sup>

2.64 And providing a broader international view, as Ms Penelope Figgis from the IUCN pointed out:

The conservation of biodiversity should be seen in virtually every nation of the world as a strategic objective. It is about, in effect, the country's defence. It is a defence issue. You are defending your agriculture. You are defending your tourism. You are defending your fisheries. You are defending the quality of life of your people.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Human activity and national parks objectives***

2.65 Some witnesses to the inquiry considered that human activity and its interaction with the natural environment needed to be considered more prominently in conjunction with the biodiversity objective. As was pointed out by Dr Susan Moore:

Using the IUCN category as a national park, for example, has almost equal attention to people and biodiversity. When you move through to strict nature reserves, it is predominantly biodiversity. The IUCN categories are very important in terms of consistency of approach. That is particularly important.<sup>58</sup>

2.66 It was along the lines of the IUCN categories affording scope for human activity that the CSIRO argued that a key approach to protecting biodiversity was an understanding of what human activities were compatible with it. As they stated:

Protecting an area's biodiversity does not have to mean that all other uses are excluded.<sup>59</sup>

2.67 The CSIRO went on to explain:

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55 *Submission 131*, p. 4.

56 *Submission 135*, p. 9.

57 World Commission on Protected Areas, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 60.

58 *Committee Hansard*, 1 September 2006, p. 71.

59 *Submission 41*, p. 4.

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Biodiversity is the variety of life. From the micro-organisms that fix nitrogen in soils to the tree kangaroos and coral reefs that draw tourists and their dollars, biodiversity provides many services it would be hard to do without. We need biodiversity for its direct contribution to human welfare. Biodiversity is the biological component of the natural resource base that we all depend on. In addition, by protecting biodiversity we also satisfy important cultural, spiritual, aesthetic and recreational needs.<sup>60</sup>

2.68 The key thrust of these statements was the idea that providing for the needs of human beings was not inconsistent with the aims of both nature conservation and the protection of biodiversity, and that modern day objectives behind the creation of the conservation estate allowed for this balance.

## **Conclusion**

2.69 While there are many types of reserve across the different jurisdictions, there is a broad consensus on many of the functions of much of the conservation estate. However, as this chapter shows, the range of objectives met by that estate is wide, the consensus is not complete, and significant diversity of opinion remains about some aspects of the objectives and management of conservation reserves. The wide range of objectives has underpinned the creation of a very diverse conservation estate, which is the subject of the following two chapters. The committee then turns to threats to the reserve system, and this will reveal how some of the management challenges arise from the diversity of views about what parks and reserves are for.

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60 *Submission 41*, p. 5.

