

Chapter 10

Responding to the management challenge

10.1 Recurrent themes have emerged throughout the inquiry of the many different threats and management challenges that are faced by the conservation estate. The most obvious theme is that conservation objectives have to be understood and pursued in a whole-of-landscape context. The second theme is that effective management means effective planning for all the uses of land that occur in and around areas of the conservation estate. Thirdly, there is debate around the adequacy of funding and resources in the park system, particularly in regard to the management of the existing conservation estate.

10.2 Taking into account these themes, this chapter will look at the challenges that arise when trying to managing parks for a range of uses, including the impact of recreational use, visitor numbers, and tourist developments within the parks system. It will also examine the effect of staffing levels and other resources on the management of the conservation estate, and how public education and maintaining public support for the parks system represents a challenge for parks managers. Management planning incorporating a whole of landscape approach was discussed in chapter 9.

Managing for a range of uses

10.3 The committee was made aware of issues surrounding the threats and impacts arising directly from human activity within national parks and the management challenge this presented. The most commonly identified problems were managing the range of recreational activities, the management of visitor numbers, and the development of tourist infrastructure within park boundaries.

Recreational use

10.4 In terms of responding to management challenges, it is important to have an understanding of both the opportunities that are, or could be, available to the significant array of recreational users of the national parks system, and the impacts that these users have on protected areas.

10.5 To this end the committee raised questions about the use of national parks by recreational users, for example horse riders, four wheel drivers, mountain bikers and caravanners, and to what extent such use was generally permitted in national parks. As Mr Alan Feely of the Queensland Government outlined:

Our tracks are open, public tracks rather than management tracks. They are generally open to four-wheel drives. We do not have horse riding in national parks, but the minister has been discussing that and we do have other options for that. There is a range of other tenures and other tracks. We are looking at that at the moment. There is mountain biking in Cairns and at various parks and state forests. We are very keen to ensure that people

understand that parks are part of the lifestyle of Queensland and that they are there to be used providing we can protect the underlying biodiversity values—and we would advocate that for most things.¹

10.6 Some recreational users were dissatisfied that they were not allowed access to national parks. The Snowy Mountains Horse Riders Association (SMHRA) expressed their concerns:

Horse riding and many other recreational uses are prohibited from National Parks based on the Precautionary Principal. The adoption of the Precautionary Principal is rarely if ever substantiated (as required). We contend that horse riding areas should be increased and widened to disperse and reduce any perceived impacts instead of crowding into smaller and smaller areas. As a result of this concentration of activity, the impacts naturally will be intensified and again used as a means of convenient adverse impact for the anti horse riding lobby.²

10.7 The SMHRA went on to argue the significant community benefits of allowing horse riding in national parks, especially in relation to search and rescue operations. It was claimed that restricted access to national parks by horse riders meant that the opportunities for gaining valuable experience and training in rugged terrain was being lost:

In defence of retaining this historical knowledge we note that whilst much of a foot searcher's energies are used in watching where they are stepping and focusing on not getting lost or injured themselves, a horse rider has the benefit of being able to actually scan the landscape around him and leave the groundwork and terrain to his horse. Consequently the rider has a greater capacity to seek out people in dense bush and can endure much longer search hours without rest. With continued restrictions on horse riding, these vitally important skills will be lost forever, we are the last generation with this experience and expertise to pass on.³

10.8 Four wheel drive enthusiasts were among the types of recreational users who displayed a sense of frustration at the lack of access to pursue their interests:

Over the last couple of decades there has been a significant shift in the management and subsequent access to national parks, conservation areas and public lands. During this period there has been a significant rise in the conservation movement which has resulted in reduced access for groups such as ours for recreation access. During this period we have experienced lockouts and restrictions to access public lands, resulting in less places to go, specifically areas close to the major regional areas.⁴

1 *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2006, p. 22.

2 *Submission 205*, pp 8–9.

3 *Submission 205*, pp 10–11.

4 Bayside Offroaders Club Inc., *Submission 48*, p. 3.

10.9 Mountain bikers were another group who also expressed frustrations. Along with concerns about restricted access to some areas, the issue was mainly one of concern with the poor standard of available mountain biking trails, and planning for these could be improved. The Adelaide Mountain Bike Club stated:

Historically, many trails in our natural areas have evolved in an ad-hoc manner which did not consider long term sustainability. Once, either the number of trail users increased or additional types of trail users, such as cyclists, were incorporated then these trails demonstrate signs of deterioration. World's best practice for trail design and maintenance can ensure narrow trails over natural surfaces within our parks are sustainable. Some existing trails might be able to be modified to meet world's best practice, and some trails may need to be closed down and rehabilitated now to prevent further damage. Trails to meet world's best practice are more expensive and take more time to design and construct compared to the traditional ad-hoc type of narrow trails.⁵

10.10 Government agencies acknowledged the concerns of recreational users who feel that their access to conservation reserves is too constrained, but pointed out that there was already significant access available for many recreational park users and a balance needs to be maintained. As Dr Tony Fleming of NSW National Parks and Wildlife explained:

There are some sectors of the community, and some locations, where they feel that their recreational use is not adequately catered for. We need to look at each case on its merits, through the planning process, whether it is development of management plans for parks or through the broader planning processes such as I have described, with the visitation management plans...I would argue very strongly that there is a lot of access, that a lot of different recreational groups enjoy parks and that when they come they have a great time. Many thousands of kilometres of tracks and trails are available for horse riding and for four-wheel drive use. I acknowledge that for some individual parks there is a concern that there is not enough access for those uses, but we have tried to strike a balance in those cases, and in some parks we will look more closely at it.⁶

10.11 The committee also heard evidence of new trends emerging by recreational users of parks which posed significant threats to some areas and needed to be managed. Professor of Ecotourism at Griffith University, Ralf Buckley, stated:

If I were to use one example of the current trends, one of the things not mentioned during the last discussion is that many national parks now suffer major problems from groups of people on pyramided SMS messages. For example, at five minutes notice 500 people might arrive with trail bikes and

5 *Submission 124*, p. 1.

6 *Committee Hansard*, 12 May 2006, p. 5.

decide to ride down a walking track in the middle of the night. That is not easy to manage, but it is starting to happen.⁷

10.12 Despite the damaging threat posed by some reckless users of national parks, many recreational users displayed a strong interest in conservation, showing that their recreational goals were not necessarily inconsistent with those of conservationists and parks managers. The Phoenix Four Wheel Drive Club of Victoria highlighted their commitment to the environment, as did the Victorian Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs:

In the twenty first century, Phoenix Four Wheel Drive Club resolves that all public land should receive a level of management that is commensurate with the needs of that environment - rather than man's use of it.⁸

Our members, where they can, assist the management authorities in track clearing, field and park management, rehabilitation and land care. We all have an obligation to care for the bush.⁹

10.13 One solution put forward to the committee to increase opportunities for recreational users of national parks was to encourage the use of less intact ecosystems for recreational pursuits:

Adjoining areas can be allocated for some of these activities and there is scope for governments to help acquire such land. The development of a mountain bike park in an old quarry not far from Cleland, Brownhill Creek and Waite reserves is a good example of how governments can help release the pressure on nearby high quality vegetation.¹⁰

10.14 In terms of finding solutions to some of the challenging issues surrounding the recreational use of parks and reserves, it was suggested that more regulation was needed in order to plan for such park users to ensure that the values of protected areas were not compromised. The Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society suggested that:

...the unregulated use of a reserve for multiple purposes may depreciate some of its values. For example, excessive tourist development and/or recreational activities in a reserve may significantly reduce its value for the conservation of biodiversity. Competent planning and management should minimise such problems.¹¹

10.15 Other solutions included the idea that park resources and conservation values could be better maintained if community groups and recreational users were more involved in management processes. As Mr Ian Coombs argued:

7 *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2006, p. 73.

8 *Submission 23*, p. 8.

9 *Submission 40*, p. 8.

10 Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve, *Submission 94*, p. 4.

11 *Submission 83*, pp 2–3.

What is lacking is resourcefulness in active management with inclusion of voluntary contribution by community groups. If interest groups were welcomed to actively contribute to management, and be treated with respect as part owners of the asset (rather than as pariahs) then great improvements would be made. For example: Parks Association members could be invited to participate in research observations and collections of data, track maintenance and all other things in accord with their skills and interests.¹²

10.16 In fact there were numbers of recreational groups who signalled to the committee their willingness to be involved in such programs, in exchange for better access to national parks. The Caboolture 4WD Club stated in their submission to the inquiry:

The lack of access to certain areas for clubs, such as ours, has been identified as an issue in fire management strategies. We are in a position to contribute to track clearing and other management issues, even if on a volunteer basis.¹³

10.17 Some recreational organisations spoke of attempts to actively engage more closely with parks agencies to contribute to park management goals, but felt they did not receive adequate support in pursuing those goals. The Queensland Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs advised the committee:

For a number of years on numerous occasions FWD Qld has suggested to the QPWS, a more cooperative approach to managing public lands that would allow the 4WD community to assist forestry personnel to maintain keys areas of public lands. The suggestions were often met with enthusiasm from the field staff just to be dropped at a later date by office staff...The 4WD recreation movement has recognised for many years that in order to be sustainable we needed to be more involved in conservation activities and reduce our impact on the environment....With the cooperation and support of the recreational users, including the 4WD recreation movement we could revolutionise land management principles by developing alliances that ensure access to the community and environmental education which is based on sustainable use – not lock up and forget.¹⁴

10.18 While some witnesses to the inquiry argued that more needed to be done to facilitate this type of joint relationship with parks agencies, there was also evidence that some government agencies have taken proactive steps to encourage recreational users to co-contribute to the management of parks. This was evident from the advice given by NSW National Parks and Wildlife to the committee:

Every time we develop a plan of management for a national park...the key considerations are how access will be provided, the range of uses that are going to occur in those areas and whether access is for purposes such as

12 *Submission 212*, p. 2.

13 *Submission 14*, p. 1.

14 *Submission 24*, p. 7.

bushwalking or whether it is for horse riding or fourwheel driving. All those things have to be considered in the development of a plan of management...There is always a balancing act between competing uses, and sometimes uses are incompatible in the same area of land. But overall, we acknowledge that these are all legitimate recreational activities and we have to provide opportunities for them to occur—particularly as the reserve system grows and opportunities in other parts of the landscape may be constrained.¹⁵

Recommendation 10

10.19 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.

Recommendation 11

10.20 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.

Bio-cultural uses by Traditional Owners

10.21 Along with recreational users, there are others who rely on the conservation estate out of necessity, lifestyle, or tradition. For example, Indigenous landowners may use conservation areas for the harvesting of plant and animal species needed in order to sustain their existence.

10.22 The customary take of sea turtles was an issue that was raised during the inquiry, where it was pointed out that current levels of customary hunting may not be sustainable:

While we support sustainable traditional hunting for sea turtles in principle, it appears that an increasing take of turtles, particularly adult female turtles by indigenous people in north Queensland Marine Protected Areas (MPA) is going to rub up against sustainability. The hard facts of this issue are that:

- In Northern Australia the harvest of sea turtles and their eggs is ongoing and significant;
- The breakdown of some traditional checks and balances has meant some take is not sanctioned by elders within a community;
- The use of power boats allows access over far greater distances and the capture of turtles is easier...

15 Dr Tony Fleming, *Committee Hansard*, 12 May 2006, p. 3.

Far greater resources are needed to tackle the issue of determining and controlling the sustainable take of sea turtles and their eggs. This must be done by working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, and the reality is that a sustainable harvest increasingly appears to be a zero level of take.¹⁶

10.23 However, it was argued that singling out the customary take of turtles from other issues was a simplistic approach:

There is no research that I am aware of that differentiates Indigenous customary take of turtles—and I will throw in dugong as well—from some of the impacts of a range of other factors, including feral predation of nests in relation to turtles, marine strikes, by-catch, loss of seagrass beds and run-off through rivers from agricultural production. I think this is an area where very visible Indigenous harvesting can be highlighted as the one factor that might impact on populations, but I think the scientific evidence suggests that there is a number of variables that we have to take into account...before we look to limit the customary rights of Indigenous people to harvest species we need to look at what else is impacting on those species.¹⁷

10.24 The Committee heard evidence in Cairns from the Aboriginal Rainforest Council, which represents 18 Aboriginal tribal groups covering the Wet Tropics world heritage area. In April 2005, the tribal groups signed a regional agreement with the Wet Tropics Management Authority, the Environment Protection Agency / Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service, the Queensland Department of Resources and Mines and the federal Department of Environment & Heritage. The agreement

recognises the significant contribution Rainforest Aboriginal people make to the management of the region's cultural and natural heritage values of the wet tropics area

10.25 and commits to mechanisms for cooperative management of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area.¹⁸

10.26 Ms Alison Halliday, the Acting Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Rainforest Council, explained that 'we see culture and biodiversity as one and the same. You cannot get culture without biodiversity and you cannot get biodiversity without culture. We basically call it "biocultural".¹⁹

10.27 The Chairperson of the Cape York Land Council, Mr Michael Ross, expressed frustration at the lack of involvement of traditional Aboriginal owners in the management of National Parks on Cape York, saying the creation of National Parks

16 Neil Mattocks and Ian Bell, *Submission 70*, pp 1–2.

17 Professor Jon Altman, *Committee Hansard*, 16 June 2006, pp 82–83.

18 *Submission 198*, Attachment 2.

19 *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, p. 63.

was one way in which the 'traditional owners have had their land taken away from them':

The failure of the Queensland government to hand back national parks means that our elders are passing away without having their connection to their country recognised. Our land is our life. We look after it and it looks after us. Without our land, our children's future in Cape York is uncertain. Traditional owners should be allowed to take back responsibility for their country. When they do, benefit will flow. There will be community development, employment and skill acquisition for our young people. Aboriginal owners need to manage and work in the park and not be patient onlookers, which we have been for many years. Proper Aboriginal involvement also benefits the national park, using our traditional knowledge of fire, animals and plants to manage country. All things great and small, alive and dead, moving and still, seasonal and annual are all connected and viewed as resources, food, natural calendars and essential messengers.

10.28 The committee was of the view that establishing improved consultation with elders regarding population levels and appropriate take, as well as developing joint management strategies that supported traditional owners' authority, might be steps needed to ensure sustainable continuous bio-cultural use by traditional landowners.

Tourism

10.29 Tourism is also recognised as an important activity in national parks, and the committee heard from a range of witnesses who had differing views about the pros and cons of allowing tourism in national parks. It was generally recognised that it was a challenge to achieve a sustainable balance between tourist activities and conservation, and that this needed appropriate and effective management:

Whilst tourism is an important component of recreational access to reserves, a key emerging issue is how increasing tourism and visitation can be effectively managed to deliver ecologically sustainable human use without degrading the area's natural and cultural heritage. The TNPA supports the need for reserve management plans to have an integrated visitor strategy.²⁰

10.30 The tourism industry itself is not at odds with those aims, also having recognised the broader benefits of preserving the conservation estate to ensure long term viability. As the Tourism and Transport Forum Australia stated:

The tourism industry, and particularly many of the members of the TTF, have a huge stake in ensuring the preservation and proper management of the parks and also in the sustainable growth of tourism to this country, as it is such an important export earner, job creator and regional development catalyst. Fundamentally our members and our industry are committed to sustainability—the economic sustainability of the tourism assets, whether

20 Tasmanian National Parks Association, *Submission 78*, p. 3.

they are natural assets or other built attractions, and the social and environmental sustainability of them.²¹

10.31 The committee heard evidence that, in addition to conservation concerns, tourist activities are a significant management issue as they also place demands on park rangers, particularly in larger centres such as Sydney. Much of the demand is from local tourists and tourism businesses:

Certainly in New South Wales you have a ring of parks around Sydney. With nearly five million people in Sydney, they get a lot of visitation. Being the gateway for international and domestic flights, you get a lot of visitors coming into Sydney, and then they sprawl out from the hub of Sydney. Just from my experience, yes, there is a major tourism reliance on the parks in those larger centres. I know from my experience and from the feedback I am getting from my ranger colleagues that a lot of the local tourism operators strongly rely on us.²²

10.32 The committee noted the importance of encouraging Indigenous participation in ranger work to enhance and promote tourism. This issue was highlighted during the inquiry when the Queensland Government discussed its support for such initiatives:

We think that parks, World Heritage, tourism and the environment are a natural fit with Indigenous cultures, and we have begun some initiatives to encourage Indigenous people to work with us as rangers, through management rights to the land and through tourism opportunities that flow from it.²³

10.33 The tourist industry recognises the value of employing Indigenous people in tourism. One resort manager in Uluru told the committee that:

In El Questro—which is another business that I look after—out of 190 employees, there are 11 Indigenous positions filled. I have to say that I was very proud to see them there. They were laughing. They love their jobs; they were dealing directly with the people.... We even have an Indigenous employment person on staff whom we pay for.²⁴

10.34 While some progress has been made in encouraging Indigenous employment within the industry, it is evident that there are still improvements to be made in encouraging such employment and fostering relationships between the traditional landowners, tourism operators and the community. The committee received some suggestions:

21 Ms Joyce Dimascio, *Committee Hansard*, 12 May 2006, p. 22.

22 Mr Adrian Johnstone, Australian Ranger Federation Inc., *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, pp 67–68.

23 The Hon. Desley Boyle, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2006. p. 8.

24 Mr Gareth Boyte, Voyages Hotels and Resorts, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2006, p. 6, 12.

One would be increased employment programs. I think traditional owners are of the view that the tourism industry often does not give the right messages about their culture, their beliefs and information about the park, so we certainly want to improve that. There is a tourism consultative committee. Some of the major players from the tourism industry and traditional owners, including some of the board members, sit on that committee. I often sit on that committee. That is one forum where we are trying to improve those relationships and agreements.²⁵

10.35 It is clear from the preceding discussion that there are many facets to the issue of allowing and encouraging tourism in parks, including such things as conservation issues, demands on resources and encouraging Indigenous employment. The topic at large is summarised in the following quote from Professor Ralf Buckley:

Tourism in parks is currently a contentious issue in Australia. Protected area management agencies (PAMA's) have to provide for increasing numbers of visitors, while tour operators try to obtain preferential access to icon sites, and tourism promotion agencies try to recast protected areas as regional tourism honeypots. As with many other environmental issues, Australia seems to have adopted a strange and ambiguous blend of developed and developing-country politics, policies and practices.²⁶

Visitor numbers

10.36 While it is apparent that tourism is well established on a broad scale throughout Australia's national parks and conservation reserves, there are ongoing concerns about how the balance between visitor numbers and conservation objectives can and should be managed.

10.37 The majority of park managers and government agencies attempt to keep records which are as accurate as possible about visitor numbers, and park managers are well aware of the pressures placed by visitors in particular reserves – especially where visitor numbers are highly concentrated. However, a compilation of the total visitor numbers to all of Australia's national parks annually is difficult to source and there appears to be no single comprehensive or consistent database that summarises this information on an Australia-wide basis.²⁷

10.38 Information compiled by the Department of Environment and Water Resources via the annual National Visitor Survey (NVS) does provide some indication of the number of visitors to national and state parks over recent years, although the

25 Mr Sean Moran, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Central Land Council, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2006, p. 19.

26 Ralf Buckley, *Tourism in Parks: Australian Initiatives*, International Centre for Ecotourism Research, Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, 2004, p. 194.

27 Carrie Stefan, 'Parks and Tourism Partnerships: An Industry Perspective', *Tourism in Parks: Australian Initiatives*, Ralf Buckley, ed., International Centre for Ecotourism Research, Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, 2004, p. 58.

survey only records visits to parks where nights have been spent away from home and therefore does not necessarily include numbers for day trippers. This means that in reality the number of visitors to parks may in fact actually be higher than those recorded by this survey. Nevertheless, the information does provide a useful overview idea of the number of visitors to parks Australia-wide, as Table 10.1 shows.

Table 10.1 Sum of Overnight Trips (000) to National or State parks and expenditure (\$000)

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Visitors	10 646	9507	4723	4652	4293	5032	5617
\$	6 720 406	6 747 962	4 294 715	4 225 242	4 060 386	4 803 580	5 431 796

Source: Extracted from Department of Environment and Heritage web site, *State of the Environment 2006: Indicator: LD-13 Value of and numbers participating in landscape-based tourism and recreation*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/soe/2006/publications/drs/indicator/155/index.html>, accessed 18 January 2007.

10.39 The above figures show that in 2004 there were at least 5.6 million recorded surveyed visitors to parks generating over \$5.4 billion in revenue. While these numbers show a downward trend from visitor numbers in 1998-99, such numbers still point to significant visitor activity that has the potential to result in significant impacts on parks and park resources.

10.40 Collective data provided by parks agencies of visitation numbers to national parks during 2001-02 estimated that there were 63 million visits during that year.²⁸ This is significantly higher than the 5.6 million visits recorded by the national visitor survey above, and shows how contrasting the visitor data from different sources can be.

10.41 Information from the Director of National Parks 2005-06 Annual Report shows that an estimated 1.4 million visitors visited made use of Commonwealth reserves in 2005-06, primarily in Booderee, Uluru, Kakadu and the Australian National Botanic Gardens. The Director relied on data collected and analysed by Tourism NT for the Northern Territory parks (Kakadu and Uluru) and explained that these data have consistently shown high visitor satisfaction at both parks. The data ceased to be collected in 2005-06 and new survey arrangements are being developed and implemented for all Commonwealth high visitation parks to measure future visitor satisfaction.²⁹

28 Carrie Stefan, 'Parks and Tourism Partnerships: An Industry Perspective', *Tourism in Parks: Australian Initiatives*, Ralf Buckley, ed., International Centre for Ecotourism Research, Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, 2004, p. 59.

29 Department of the Environment and Heritage web site, *Director of National Parks Annual Report 2005-06: Director's Review*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/publications/annual/05-06/review.html#vm>, accessed 19 January 2007.

Figure 10.1 High tourism levels: coaches lined up at Uluru National Park

10.42 To plan for the potential impact of visitor numbers in the future, it makes sense for parks managers to have some idea of the projected future increase in visitor numbers in particular conservation regions. Such projections have been formulated for the Wet Tropics region as summarised in Table 10.2 below.

Table 10.2 Wet Tropics visitor trends and projections, 1993-2016

	Trends				Projections		
Visitor details	1993	1996	1999	2001	2006	2011	2016
Domestic							
Number ('000)	1 456	1 640	1 773	1 900	2 180	2 450	2 700
Average per day	19 147	20 219	21 859	23 425	26 877	30 205	33 288
International							
Number ('000)	541	642	837	940	1 250	1 550	1 850
Average per day	10 375	11 611	1 405	16 740	22 260	27 630	32 945
Total ('000)	1 997	2 292	2 610	2 840	3 430	4 000	4 550
Average per day	29 523	31 830	36 764	40 164	49 137	57 80	66 233

Source: Extracted from Department of Environment and Heritage web site, *State of the Environment 2006: Indicator: BD-25 Tourism activities based in areas of high biodiversity significance*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/soe/2006/publications/drs/indicator/112/index.html>, accessed 18 January 2007.

10.43 These figures predict that between 2006 and 2016 total visitor numbers to the Wet Tropics region are expected to increase from around 49 000 to 66 000 visitors per day, and increase of over 30 per cent over the next ten years. It would be logical to expect that this type of surge in visitor numbers would place significant additional pressure on parks in the area. Therefore, those involved in the formulation of management plans for Australia's conservation estate in the short term might need to take into account such long term indicators in order to implement appropriate conservation measures and allocate resources to account for such increases.

10.44 The impact of visitor numbers, not only in the future but in the present day, throughout Australia's protected areas was an issue raised by a number of witnesses to the inquiry. As the Mountain Cattleman's Association of Victoria pointed out:

I come to the threats to national parks. People pressure, which I have already referred to, is one. As we become more affluent, there is more pressure on the parks. As you know, there are more four-wheel-drives, greater expectations and more leisure time³⁰

10.45 The negative impacts of visitors to national parks were also raised by the Tasmanian National Parks Association, which cited walking track and road degradation as evidence of intense pressure. The Association was concerned about the threat of tourism in conservation reserves:

Tourism, through creeping development and the attrition of natural and wilderness values, is a major threat to the integrity of Australia's reserves and the achievement of sustainable conservation and protection of their associated values. For example, within Tasmania the demand for car-parking at places like Dove Lake and the Blowhole and for camping in coastal reserves outstrips supply leading to overcrowding and loss of naturalness...While these are usually carefully managed to minimise the environmental impacts, they are never the less degrading to the naturalness of the reserves and cumulatively dramatically altering the quality and tone of visitor experience from one of informal naturalness based on the reserve being an anti-thesis to the 'developed' world to a contrived built environment experience offering a range of consumption choices not dissimilar to the world outside the reserve..... the qualities that people visit parks for need to be carefully managed when developing them for visitation.³¹

10.46 The National Parks and Wildlife Service of NSW highlighted their concerns about the impact of tourists on popular locations and the challenge this posed to the management of parks:

What that means is that you are getting a lot of people in a restricted number of locations, because tourism tends to promote a small number of areas..... The challenge is to manage those sites in a way which sustains

30 Mr Douglas Treasure, *Committee Hansard* 5 June 2006, p. 72.

31 *Submission 78*, p. 5.

the impact of those numbers of people on them and also keeps them looking fresh and enjoyable.³²

10.47 The committee heard how the number of visitors to Mossman Gorge in the Daintree National Park was placing significant pressure on park facilities and resources (see Figure 10.2):

...having been out in the field with the Mossman people only a few weeks ago in the Mt Windsor Tablelands area, these poor people are spending all of their time managing the infrastructure, such as you have just described, and they are desperate to get back out there. Daintree National Park, and the associated forest reserves and state forests, is a huge chunk of land—it is hundreds of thousands of hectares—and they are really keen to get out there and manage it. The World Heritage area is not just rainforest; it is eucalypt forest on the edge, in the lowlands and behind the rainforest as well, and we have got feral animal problems and we have got weed problems. These poor people are very keen to get out there. They are doing the best they can, but they have not got time to get away from that infrastructure.³³

Figure 10.2 Crowded car parking facilities on a weekday at Mossman Gorge



32 Dr Tony Fleming, *Committee Hansard*, 12 May 2006, p. 21.

33 Dr Paul Williams, *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, pp 24–25.

10.48 One witness to the inquiry explained that the types of problems being experienced at places like Mossman Gorge could be ameliorated by proper management planning:

I do not specifically know what the problem is at Mossman Gorge, but in my opinion this all relates back to management plans. If you have a good management plan for a park, you develop a capacity for tourism and other threats. I hate to say it, but too many people can be a threat to the natural values of a national park. Inappropriate location of facilities has been a major problem for this department...If you have a management plan, you can look at a specific site, develop guidelines for appropriate and sustainable use for visitors and for recreational opportunities. I am not saying that we should exclude these areas, but we should use them carefully.³⁴

10.49 The committee heard evidence where park management plans had strived to include measures to adequately manage tourism and visitor numbers. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service advised:

Management plans give us and the community some good, high-level direction. We looked at Fraser Island yesterday. They set very clear frameworks there in terms of how we might manage the place and what we do with regard to fire—the strategic fire management plans—what we might do in terms of priorities for weeds and pests, and long-term views of what areas are to be set aside for possible high-level tourism infrastructure versus what areas are to be set aside for more remote experiences. The area we looked at on Fraser yesterday was obviously a very high tourism area to go to the north of the island and some of it is designated remote, so there is limited access there and that is done intentionally. It gives you a mix of opportunities to manage and plan and set those rules in place. I think it is important for the iconic parks like Fraser, in particular, to put those rules in place.³⁵

10.50 The committee also heard evidence that, some sectors of the tourism industry were working in close collaboration with state governments to plan for sustainable visitor numbers. As the Queensland Tourism Industry Council pointed out:

We are currently working with the Queensland government on a site capacity process under the heading of ‘tourism in protected areas’—national parks in Queensland at least. As part of that process, it is envisaged that we will grade high-visitation sites in terms of vulnerability or preciousness. For the most highly valued sites and most highly visited sites, we would certainly envisage that it would be plausible to have a mandatory requirement for those operators who are allowed to bring visitors into those sites that they comply with a higher level of operational practice, for lack of

34 Mr David Green, *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, p. 25.

35 Mr Alan Feely, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2006, p. 9.

a better word. We would have no issue with that being made mandatory in such circumstances.³⁶

10.51 One solution put forward to the committee was that tourists and other park users might make less of an impact on protected areas if they were allowed to spread more widely around the area:

Anyone who has visited the Royal National Park over a weekend will agree that unless they move away from the more popular areas the experience is more like a city park. It is encouraging that so many people wish to visit such areas but there is need to spread the impact into other areas otherwise the prime reason of protecting flora and fauna are threatened.³⁷

10.52 The committee was interested to see how other countries dealt with the pressure of increased visitor numbers in their reserves. In New Zealand, there were similar problems experienced to those in some Australian parks. The New Zealand Department of Conservation provided the committee with an overview of their experiences and how they might deal with such issues:

In the last three or four years we have started to experience people pressures that we have not had before. That is purely off the back of tourism. We are finding that some of the icon sites like Milford Sound and some of the glaciers, things that you cannot see in other places, are now having pressures when people arrive. Our monitoring is showing that people are finding that there is a perception of crowding that we have not had before. We have been doing that monitoring for about three years now. On the glaciers, in particular, we have got to that point where people are saying, 'We don't think this is really what we expected.' Within the conservation management strategies I talked about that are now being redone for the second 10-year term, we try to set guidance for activities at places. This time around, we will be looking at what sorts of numbers we think we might have so that when a new concessionaire comes along and says, 'I would like to take some people to do this activity in this place', we can say, 'That'll be okay, there's enough scope left to allow for that' or, 'There isn't any scope, we're sorry, there's no opportunity'.³⁸

10.53 Having high numbers of visitors was not always perceived as having a negative impact on protected areas if managed well and if adequate facilities were provided:

There is a lot of controversy about whether more visitors to a protected area are going to automatically desecrate the area. Quite a lot of the research that we are involved in is saying that more people in the park can actually do good things, as long as the access and the experience is such that it is well managed.....Sometimes smaller numbers going into parks without those

36 Mr Daniel Gschwind, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2006, p. 61.

37 North Coast Environment Council, *Submission 28*, p. 5.

38 Mr John Cumberpatch, *Committee Hansard*, 20 October 2006, pp 11–12.

management services and facilities can do far greater damage—as you would appreciate, I am sure—than some of the larger, perhaps more controlled numbers. So I think that we have to be really cognisant of that.³⁹

10.54 The Department of the Environment and Water Resources advised the committee about measures being taken to ensure adequate facilities for visitors to Commonwealth national parks, while at the same time stressing the importance of maintaining the balance between tourism and the protection of natural assets:

We do our best to provide high-quality facilities. We work very closely with tour operators and the tourism industry to address any issues that they raise that appear to be barriers to visitation. However, we do place a priority on protecting the natural assets that we are looking after as well, so that does not mean it is open slather for tourism. We enjoy close relationships with the tourism industry and tour operators in the parks where we have significant visitation. Only four of our properties in particular have high visitation. Others are much more remote. For some of them, visitors are a few hundred a year, if that in a couple of cases because they are very remote. If the industry is large enough we will have formal consultative committees. And, again, if the industry is large enough and the park is large enough we will have specific staff identified as tourism and visitor services managers or there will be a tourism and visitor services unit in the park whose job will be to liaise and work closely with the tourism industry.⁴⁰

Development of tourist infrastructure

10.55 One of the challenges faced by governments and their environmental management agencies is achieving a sustainable balance in permitting development in conservation areas. The management of tourist developments in particular is an area that will be examined more closely in order to gain an understanding of how such challenges might be addressed.

10.56 The Commonwealth's *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* requires that Commonwealth approval be obtained for any development action proposed on Commonwealth land, including within and adjacent to national parks and conservation reserves.⁴¹ Developments not on Commonwealth land require approval under the individual legislation of each State or Territory in the jurisdiction where any development action is proposed. This means that any developments, tourist or otherwise, located in State and Territory reserves are approved by individual government and the legislation differs somewhat between each of these jurisdictions.

10.57 Approvals processes aside, there is ongoing debate about the merits or otherwise of allowing tourist developments within and around areas of conservation

39 Ms Wendy Hills, Tourism Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 78.

40 Mr Peter Cochrane, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 104.

41 Department of the Environment and Heritage web site, *About the EPBC Act*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/epbc/about/index.html>, accessed 19 January 2007.

value including national parks. In terms of this debate, the benefits of allowing tourist related developments inside protected areas have been argued strongly. During the hearings Professor Ralf Buckley pointed out that, in addition to the obvious financial benefits, there are other reasons for encouraging private development:

.... where there are large and relatively inaccessible national parks, such as some of those in the Top End, where it is not realistic for all tourist accommodation to be outside the park, because the parks are too big. So there has to be some tourist accommodation inside the park. Very often there are iconic sites where people tend to gather, and very often the parks agencies themselves would like to have visitors cluster at those points so they know where they are and what they are doing... where parks agencies were happy to have commercially managed tourist accommodation and infrastructure in particular areas, essentially as a visitor management tool.⁴²

10.58 Others advocated having tourist developments located nearby but outside national parks, with only essential infrastructure within the confines of the parks themselves:

Such infrastructure should principally be for the needs, interests and abilities of day visitors, with overnight accommodation facilities to be sited outside such reserves.⁴³

It is quite possible for Governments to create a “win-win” for both the local economy and the environment by allowing for privately owned tourist developments outside national parks as has been done at Cradle Mountain, at Freycinet National Park and which could have been done at Cockle Creek, southern Tasmania, instead of excising part of the South-West National Park to hand over to a (non-local) developer.⁴⁴

10.59 Some put forward concerns about the lack of uniformity of guidelines for development approvals in such areas, and that ad hoc approvals for developments should not be permitted. The Australian Network of Environmental Defender’s Offices (ANEDO) cited an example from Tasmania, where the *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999* was altered to allow the development of a tourist resort at Cockle Creek. Their submission stated:

...a management plan cannot provide adequate protection if the response to a development that is inconsistent with the plan is to alter the plan, rather than refuse the development.

Amendment of Management Plans on an ad hoc basis to permit new developments periodically has the potential to significantly undermine the management planning process and purpose. ANEDO supports entrenched

42 *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2006, pp 73–74.

43 Tasmanian National Parks Association, *Submission 78*, p. 7.

44 Ms Catherine Errey, *Submission 25*, p. 2.

legislative processes that require public participation and consultation as well as Federal assessment in such circumstances.⁴⁵

10.60 ANEDO noted that special legislation to allow development sometimes involved the revocation of parks and reserved land, and that this process had become regular in NSW during the last five years. They cautioned that revocation should be subject to clear protocols:

ANEDO submits that revocation must only occur in exceptional circumstances, and does not support revocation to facilitate commercial developments in parks or wilderness areas. If there is no alternative to revocation, there must be clear protocols in place including large offset ratios of compensatory reservation.⁴⁶

10.61 And continuing with the argument against allowing continued development within the reserve system, it was suggested that parks were becoming too much of a tourist industry resource. As the North Coast Environment Council argued:

There has been a tendency for tourism operators and authorities to view the Park system as a resource for their use. They therefore often demand facilities which do or can have adverse effects upon the primary purpose of the Park namely conservation of flora and fauna. As a large export earner for Australia there is no doubt that one of the major attractions for overseas visitors are the National Parks whether they are Uluru or the Great Barrier Reef or Kakadu. However if they are over developed they can become “theme parks” and their value to both tourism and the protection of flora and fauna are diminished.⁴⁷

10.62 Recent figures show how developments are forging ahead in some areas of environmental significance. The State of the Environment Report 2006 shows that there were 62 tourist developments underway in areas of high biodiversity significance in south-western Australia during 2002. These included both public and private sector tourist accommodation and tourism infrastructure projects totalling around \$265 million.⁴⁸

10.63 The Commonwealth has also invested heavily in tourist developments in national parks. In May 2006 the Federal government announced additional funding for Kakadu and Uluru which was to include a capital injection of \$5.45 million to begin the development of a major new visitor node at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park – the largest development in the park since the cultural centre in 1995. This 'sunrise project'

45 *Submission 145*, p. 13.

46 *Submission 145*, p. 17.

47 *Submission 28*, p. 5.

48 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Indicator: BD-25 Tourism activities based in areas of high biodiversity significance*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/soe/2006/publications/drs/indicator/112/index.html>, accessed 18 January 2007.

would develop a new viewing area to the south-east of Uluru, at a site chosen by the park's traditional owners – providing an all-day experience for visitors, with panoramic views of both Uluru and Kata Tjuta, and new Indigenous business opportunities to enhance the park's World Heritage values. The development would accommodate a potential doubling in visitor numbers and eventually replace the current congested sunrise viewing area.⁴⁹

10.64 It is apparent then that Commonwealth, State and Territory governments all support both private and public sector tourist developments within the sphere of national parks and reserves. The objectives of tourism and related developments are not necessarily inconsistent with the aims of conservation, providing these are well-managed to support a healthy symbiotic relationship.

10.65 The legislation of each jurisdiction is in place to ensure that proposed developments and development actions, whether public or private sector initiatives, are consistent with conservation objectives. An additional layer of protection in relation to tourism developments can also be assured through the effective use of management plans for individual parks and conservation areas, and the role of such plans will be discussed in more detail below.

Staffing – the over-arching issue

10.66 During the inquiry lack of staffing and inadequate funding were recognised as key threats to protected areas and posed serious management issues. Issues related to the adequacy of funding are considered in chapter 12.

10.67 The Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) graphically illustrated the impact that reductions in staff numbers has had in achieving its management objectives, including its ability to initiate projects and access research. Ms Josh Gibson, Executive Director of the WTMA noted the impact of declining funding:

It has resulted in a reduction of staff numbers over the years. It has also reduced our capacity to be able to initiate a number of programs and projects. Currently we are in a situation where most of the money that we receive is utilised for salaries and direct operational costs. One of the key issues is ensuring that we do have discretionary funds to be able to progress a number of key initiatives...We are tasked with ensuring that our World Heritage area is managed to the highest standard. It is not only what we do in terms of the highest standard and best practice; it is also about how we do it. That is the participatory approach. That all takes resources. If we want to manage this area to the highest standard and in line with best practice, we need to have access to good science and to good research. We also need to

49 Department of the Environment and Heritage, web site, *Director of National Parks Annual Report 2005-06: Director's Review*, <http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/publications/annual/05-06/review.html#vm>, accessed 19 January 2007.

have access to resources to engage meaningfully with the community. That is really where there has been a bite.⁵⁰

10.68 Submissions noted that problems of inadequate budgets and staffing numbers have been exacerbated by the rapid growth in protected areas in a context of fairly static, or even declining, staffing and budget levels.

Increases in the conservation estate have not been accompanied by a concomitant increase in staffing levels. By world standards the ratio of conservation land area to conservation staff is amongst the highest. While this is in part achieved by efficient management practices there are some management tasks which are essentially labour intensive and there must be doubt that there are sufficient resources to meet management requirements.⁵¹

10.69 While staffing levels have increased over recent years, some submissions suggested that they have not kept pace with increases in the reserve area.⁵² As discussed in chapter 12, in NSW the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) engaged 185 rangers and 477 field officers/tradespeople in 1997. In 2005, 256 rangers and 570 field officers/tradespeople were employed by NPWS.⁵³ In Queensland, terrestrial and marine managed areas in 2006 were staffed by 620 permanent ranger positions (both full-and part-time), whereas in 2002 some 470 rangers were employed.⁵⁴

10.70 Submissions also noted that in comparison with overseas countries Australia spends less on its parks' management than many comparable countries. Professor Geoff Wescott of Deakin University in a comparative study of several countries found that Australia spends less than Canada and far less than the USA on its national parks and reserve system, and employs far fewer staff than both those countries.⁵⁵ This issue is further discussed in chapter 12.

10.71 A study by GHD Pty Ltd compared the operating budgets, in real terms, for conservation management agency in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia from the late 1990s to recent years. The study found that the operational budgets of these agencies increased in line with reserve expansions in real terms in the case of NSW, Victoria and Western Australia, but declined in the case of Queensland.⁵⁶

50 *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, p. 8.

51 Coast and Wetlands Society, *Submission 7*, p.3.

52 Professor Geoff Wescott, *Submission 49*, Attachment 1, p. 6; NAFI, *Submission 186*, p. 7; Mr David Green, *Submission 66*, p. 1.

53 NSW Government, *Submission 155A*, p. 2.

54 Queensland Government, *Submission 175*, p. 17.

55 *Submission 49*, Attachment 1, p. 6.

56 *Submission 164*, pp 5–7.

10.72 The GHD study found that there were considerable differences in the level of resourcing per unit area reserved for each state. Resourcing levels in NSW and Victoria were at least double those in Western Australia and Queensland. Only in Western Australia had the operational expenditure per unit reserve area increased continuously in real terms. In Queensland the expenditure per unit area declined in real terms, whilst in NSW there has been a steep recent decline. In Victoria a recent increase in funding per unit area reinstated investment levels to those reported in the 2000-2001 reporting year.⁵⁷ A further discussion of this study is contained in chapter 12.

10.73 The Australian Ranger Federation (ARF) commented on the decline in operational funding for national parks:

We are getting more funding than we did 10 years ago, but unfortunately along the way there have also been other incremental increases to do with fixed costs and a few other things. So our actual operational budgets—being able to achieve objectives on the ground—have actually fallen.⁵⁸

10.74 The ARF argued that this has had serious consequences for management activities:

...we are increasingly pressured into applying for special projects funding in an attempt to prop up the shortfall. Ironically, the special projects funding is not designed to pay for operational activities and the constraints placed on the funding are increasingly designed to ensure it doesn't get spent in that way. The result is that we build infrastructure and engage in activities which can be paid for with this funding, but cannot maintain what we have nor continue in a productive way, the management activities we initiate with that funding.⁵⁹

10.75 Ms Kristen Appel of the ARF stated that 'the operational budget is probably the one thing that affects the rangers the most—in particular, if you are looking at whether we are achieving the objectives of our parks. We are the ones on the ground trying to do that, and it is very hard'.⁶⁰

10.76 Several witnesses commented on the decline in the operational budgets in Queensland in particular, and the negative effects that this is having on parks management. Witnesses argued that natural resource management issues, such as fire, pest and weed control are often being neglected:

57 *Submission 164*, p. 9.

58 Ms Kristen Appel, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 64.

59 *Submission 57*, p. 2. Operational funding funds on-ground activities, such as eradication programs, leasing of offices, power costs and overtime. Salaries are not included. See Ms Kristen Appel, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, pp 70–72.

60 *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2006, p. 73.

Through the efforts and pressure of conservation groups...additional project funding has been given by the state government to initiate basic—and I mean basic—park protection work for fires, weeds and ferals. However, a long-term funding commitment—not three-year, short-term programs—by state and federal governments is required to address pest management problems. Otherwise, park standards will deteriorate rapidly.⁶¹

There is currently insufficient ranger time allocated to implementing weed and feral animal management on parks...Increased available funding for weed and feral animals has been provided to QPWS, however the primary limiting factor in weed and feral animal control is labour, and the increase in funds is not available to be spent on casual, temporary staff.⁶²

10.77 Witnesses also pointed to the imbalance in resources devoted to maintaining visitor infrastructure as compared to habitat management:

...there is inequity in allocation of current resources—and I am referring to funding and staff time—state wide, whereby a larger proportion of operational funding is directed to visitor and departmental infrastructure, development and maintenance than to NRM issues. The department has an ongoing capital works program but limited fire, pest and weed funded programs.⁶³

A high proportion of rangers' time is spent maintaining visitor infrastructure (i.e. camp grounds and walking tracks). While visitor infrastructure is very important and must be maintained, its maintenance currently occurs at the cost of limited habitat management. Increased resources are needed to be able to manage both visitor infrastructure as well as the habitats, for which visitors come to see.⁶⁴

10.78 Witnesses emphasised the importance of maintaining sufficient operational funding and staffing levels for 'on-the-ground' activities in national parks:

The thing with management of any rural landscape is that it requires people to do the management. The biggest cost that my organisation has is people, and you have to have people to do the pest plant and animal control, to do the fire management and to do the other things that are necessary. If you do not have staff in remote areas or adequate staff in areas that require a high concentration of natural resource management skills then you are not going to get the job done effectively.⁶⁵

...staff time doing on-ground work is a critical resource that is far too limited...There are at least four causes for this: not enough field staff employed, moving staff from remote areas to regional centres, holding

61 Mr David Green, *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, p. 21.

62 Dr Paul Williams, *Submission 34*, p. 3.

63 Mr David Green, *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, p. 21.

64 Dr Paul Williams, *Submission 34*, p. 2.

65 Mr Doug Humann, ABHF, *Committee Hansard*, 5 June 2006, p. 11.

positions vacant for too long, and too high a proportion of staff time spent maintaining visitor infrastructure and filling in paperwork rather than managing the land.⁶⁶

10.79 Insufficient 'on-the-ground' staff can lead to a lack of physical up-keep of parks the increased risk from fire and other threats:

The people [staff] that go out to the parks do not have ownership of the parks because all they are doing is visiting. They are just doing a job; they are going out and back and that is it. The natural resource aspect of the park is downgraded. The maintenance is downgraded...There is vandalism, theft, stock invasion and a whole range of issues. We will be opening the doors to threats if there are no staff on park managing them.⁶⁷

10.80 There are also increased risks for neighbourhood properties:

There not only was insufficient funding left for management of conditions as they stood but now there is not a custodian on site much of the time to gauge progress on those issues, particularly when it comes to fire. It is left for neighbouring properties to manage or alert parks to these issues in many cases.⁶⁸

10.81 Witnesses also commented on the problems of 'destaffing' parks, especially in remote areas in Queensland.

...keeping rangers based on remote parks is essential for appropriate land management....Weeds in particular are an increasing problem requiring extra efforts, because ongoing control programs for existing weeds need to be maintained, plus each year additional weeds establish in parks, thus requiring additional work....

Fire management in parks requires a great deal of staff time to implement appropriately...more funds are also needed to increase the availability of ranger time to implement and evaluate fires, including funding for travel, overtime for night burns and possibly even casual extra employment.⁶⁹

10.82 Similar arguments were advanced by AgForce Qld. AgForce noted that the Queensland National Parks & Wildlife Service has recently introduced a new policy regarding the remote management of national parks that effectively removes permanent staff who live within these parks and has replaced them with 'roving teams' that periodically visit the parks concerned:

66 Dr Paul Williams, *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, p. 19.

67 Mr David Green, *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, p. 23.

68 Mr Brett De Hayr, Chief Executive Officer, AgForce, Queensland, *Committee Hansard* 21 April 2006, p. 88.

69 Dr Paul Williams, *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2006, pp 19–20; See also Dr Paul Williams, *Submission* 34, pp 1–2.

AgForce believes that the vast size of National Parks in Queensland makes this policy impractical and unworkable. The strategy raises serious concerns that there will be a more relaxed approach to the management of feral animals, weeds, fire and general monitoring of National Park visitors.

Withdrawing fulltime staff is in contradiction with the 'Good Neighbour' policy that was implemented to ensure that National Parks are integrated with the local community and adjoining neighbours. Landholders not have difficulty locating the relevant person in charge of their adjoining Park when trying to undertake management actions. This causes concerns for emergency situations such as bushfires, where immediate action is required.⁷⁰

10.83 Mr Damien Head, Member of the AWU-Queensland Branch, noted that 'on the issue of rangers in remote parks, undoubtedly there is a benefit if you can have rangers in the park. There are going to be better neighbour relations through that incidental contact. It might be passing on the road. Those opportunities can be missed'.⁷¹

10.84 In Western Australia, by contrast, the Department of Environment and Conservation has maintained a physical presence on many properties acquired for conservation purposes. Mr Keiran McNamara, Director-General of the Department noted that:

We have kept caretakers, and sometimes the people we have bought the stations from, on a number of those leases. We have kept them on nine of the 23. That is quite deliberate. You do not necessarily need to keep the people on in every case but we have kept people on. In the early stages we basically remove pastoral infrastructure and stock to begin the process of ecological restoration for park and reserve purposes, but we have a very strong commitment to nature-based tourism and recreation.⁷²

10.85 The committee believes that adequate staffing and funding levels are essential to the proper functioning of national parks and reserves. The committee notes that while some states have increased their operational budgets in real terms in line with reserve expansions this has not occurred in all states. The committee believes that states and territories should aim to maintain their operational budgets in real terms in line with any expansion of the conservation estate.

10.86 Evidence indicates that staffing resources, especially on-the-ground staff, need to be present to address natural resource management issues, such as fire, pest and weed control. There also needs to be sufficient balancing of resources devoted to parks' programs so that important conservation management programs are not disadvantaged in the allocation of overall parks' resources. The committee also

70 *Submission* 160, p. 1.

71 *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2006, p. 118.

72 *Committee Hansard*, 1 September 2006, p. 44.

believes that the allocation of rangers' time, in particular, needs to be devoted to their primary tasks related to conservation management activities.

Marine management challenges and resourcing

10.87 The committee heard that existing staff levels were inadequate to plan for, monitor and manage marine protected areas. There was concern that in some states, marine sections do not have a dedicated budget, which makes it difficult to determine where resources are being allocated.⁷³ Mr Anthony Flaherty noted that marine staff require specialist skills, and expressed concern about the availability of appropriate training:

Over the last decade we have seen, particularly in South Australia, the dropping off of marine and coastal components in a number of the natural resource training programs that are meant to be churning out rangers. Some of them might get it in the university system, but a lot of that has been lost... There is also a real need—and Victoria is doing it—to make sure you are retraining or giving new skills to current terrestrial staff, so that they know what they are meant to be doing and they do not see marine protected areas as a threat or another impost on their job or another loss of resources that they could otherwise be spending on terrestrial park systems.⁷⁴

10.88 Evidence was received from marine scientists that we do not have sufficient knowledge of the Australian marine environment, and this may affect our capacity to make informed management decisions. Mr Craig Bohm made this point in relation to commercial fish species:

We do not actually have a national audit to really determine independently what species are being overfished, what species are not, what species have already been overfished and what species are threatened.⁷⁵

10.89 The Australian Marine Sciences Association identified a significant knowledge gap in relation to invertebrate marine species:

It is also important to recognise that some 95% of Australia's marine biodiversity is represented by the invertebrate phyla, and the bulk of these have yet to be discovered or described.

We are potentially in the position of losing functionally important marine invertebrate species, without ever knowing they existed.⁷⁶

73 Mr Anthony Flaherty, Marine and Coastal Community Network, South Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 6 June 2006, p. 4.

74 Marine and Coastal Community Network, South Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 6 June 2006, p. 12.

75 Australian Marine Conservation Society, *Committee Hansard*, 6 June 2006, p. 27.

76 *Submission 125*, p. 3.

10.90 To redress this gap in knowledge, it is critical that more specialised taxonomists be trained and engaged to classify and describe marine fauna:

Australia's taxonomic experts are mainly employed in State museums and herbaria of which there are only a limited number (~15) around the country and in CSIRO. Individual taxonomists tend to specialise in a particular group of organisms and therefore can only provide limited coverage of the wide diversity of Australia's marine biota. While taxonomic problems are few in marine mammals or birds and slightly greater in fishes, they are overwhelming for the limited number of taxonomists involved with the 30+ phyla of invertebrates and algae occurring in the marine environment.⁷⁷

10.91 Alongside the lack of scientific knowledge about marine environments is a lack of public awareness about what is under the sea and why it needs protection. The committee heard that as so few people experience the marine environment first-hand there is a limited appreciation about the value of the marine estate:

The problem with the marine estate is that there are so very few people who actually stick their head under the water. Most people basically see the sea; they do not see what is beneath the sea. A number of people take things out of the sea—recreational fishers and commercial fishers—but even then you are limited to the dive fisheries like abalone fishers and scallop fishers who actually spend large amounts of time under water. There are very few recreational divers in Australia, compared to, say, the terrestrial estate and the number of bushwalkers or birdwatchers who can get out there and be vocal advocates for protecting wildlife and habitat.⁷⁸

10.92 Mr Anthony Flaherty advocated educating the community as a means of cultivating support for marine protected areas and sanctuaries:

We really need the ability to get out good images to show people what exists under the sea to help them understand why it needs protection—and that needs some investment. It is difficult to get good-quality images. We try very hard, and we have a very strong dive network of people who are willing to donate images for our public talks and other things. If the agencies are out there looking under the water, there is a need to communicate why we are protecting these areas; otherwise, people's perceptions are, 'That was a good spot to fish; why can't I fish there anymore?' If a place is a good spot to fish, it probably means that there is a lot of marine wildlife under there.⁷⁹

10.93 Dr Gina Newton endorsed the need for public education, stressing the need to distinguish between terrestrial and marine parks:

77 Australian Marine Sciences Association, *Submission 125*, p. 3.

78 Mr Anthony Flaherty, Marine and Coastal Community Network, *Committee Hansard* 6 June 2006, p. 6.

79 Marine and Coastal Community Network, South Australia, *Committee Hansard* 6 June 2006, pp 5–6.

People are very used to understanding and living with national parks on land, and that probably took a while to get into the psyche of the community. Similarly, marine protected areas I guess need that lead time to get into the psyche, and perhaps people need to be educated to understand that marine parks are very different to terrestrial parks.⁸⁰

10.94 The committee was informed of the Australian Marine Conservation Society's attempts to educate consumers of seafood. The AMCS has published a successful and useful resource the *Australia's Sustainable Seafood Guide*, which classifies seafood abundance or scarcity and encourages consumers to purchase only seafood that has not been overfished. However, currently the effectiveness of this public education is limited as there is no established system of accurate labelling in regard to seafood. Mr Craig Bohm told the committee:

We have come to a point in our history where we are trying to standardise the marketing names. It is really early days. With regard to quality control and public health, there are a range of mandatory requirements in place but, with regard to information provision about sources, sustainability and companies that provide the seafood, this sort of information is not yet forthcoming...I cannot think of a time when I have not spoken to industry about labelling, labelling clarity and identifying individual fisheries where I have not had industry saying, 'Yes, we want that too.' It is a fairly complicated and antiquated system of just getting fish names standardised in Australia, so there is quite a bit of work to go into the whole labelling side.⁸¹

10.95 The committee believes that there is a need for consumers to be provided with adequate and correct information in regard to seafood which they may purchase. It is apparent that at present this information is not available on a consistent and accurate. The committee encourages those in the seafood industry to work towards product labelling in their industry.

Maintaining public support for parks

10.96 Loss of public support as a consequence of perceived unsatisfactory consultation and/or poor management practices was identified as a threat to parks in several submissions, particularly those for whom recreational access was a major issue. The Australian Trail Horse Riders Association noted that:

We believe that unless a widespread support for the national park system is engendered within the community by people participating in and valuing the parks, we will lose support. I believe that will probably become the single greatest threat to the whole park system.⁸²

80 Australian Marine Sciences Association *Committee Hansard* 16 June 2006, p. 45.

81 Australian Marine Conservation Society, *Committee Hansard*, 6 June 2006, p. 37.

82 Mr Graham Crossley, *Committee Hansard*, 12 May 2006, pp 55–56; See also Mirani Shire Council, *Submission 196*, p. 2.

10.97 Similarly, Horse SA argued that:

Marginalizing the broader public who wish to enjoy parks for tourism, recreation, social and cultural values (social includes mental health, physical health, family relationships) through not spending equal funding, higher level thought or requirement to consider these (and validate on ground delivery). This is a failure to “pay it forward” to ensure our migrants and future children understand what the values of the landscape are.⁸³

10.98 In Queensland, the Tableland Trail Horse Riders Club stated that:

There is also the threat of public cynicism about National Parks. The huge areas concerned and the limitations and cost of access throughout Far North Queensland is already an unpopular concept in the eyes of the general public, as noted in Lakefield National Parks.⁸⁴

10.99 Loss of public support was also cited as a response to dissatisfaction with fire management. Mr Clyde Leatham submitted that:

Given the devastating fires in Canberra and the Vic Alps and other areas in recent years, and given that these fires escaped from improperly fire managed crown lands, public support for more parks, etc is declining.⁸⁵

10.100 Many submissions argued that the perceived decline in support for national parks should be addressed by increased public education about the benefits and value of parks. One submission noted that:

To provide sufficient resources for national parks the community has to be convinced that it is worthwhile for their taxes to be spent in that way. This means more and more education in schools, industry and the community to encourage everyone to understand that:

- looking after the environment is part of looking after one’s own health and the health of future generations;
- it requires management on bio regional or at least a catchment level;
- all land across the landscape (regardless of ownership) should be managed according to its vulnerability and that needs to include areas (such as national parks) put aside with the primary purpose of conservation;
- if necessary it is worthwhile waiting longer for some other type of local amenity rather than short-change on funding for management of national parks.

In other words a greater value should be placed on the benefit of national parks.⁸⁶

83 *Submission 185*, p. 2. See also Bayside Offroaders Club, *Submission 48*, p. 6.

84 *Submission 26*, p. 1.

85 *Submission 45*, pp 5–6.

86 Ms Maureen Baker OAM, *Submission 42*, p. 3.

10.101 Some submissions saw community education as a way to address misconceptions or adversarial attitudes in relation to the values and objectives of national parks. The Clarence Valley Branch of the National Parks Association of NSW, told the inquiry:

Many of the threats to sound management of the reserve system result from ill-informed ideas of the value and the objectives of national parks. There should be sufficient funding to allow agencies to provide good resources for community education, interpretation and support for some guided activities, such as flora and fauna observation...Success in this area would lead to fewer problems that result from inappropriate demands and activities, with a consequent freeing up of resources to be devoted to national park objectives.⁸⁷

10.102 Ms Victoria Jansen-Riley saw benefits in public education about specific issues related to park management:

There could also be more funding directed towards education of the public (perhaps via both Councils and Parks and Wildlife) eg in relation to preserving natural values of the areas they live in – why mass clearing is to be avoided; why vehicles are not allowed on beaches, etc.⁸⁸

10.103 The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition argued that community education about the importance of national parks should be a responsibility of government:

Provision of education services to the community...should include educating the community in the importance of national parks as places where natural values are protected and their importance to future generations.⁸⁹

10.104 The Tasmanian National Parks Association noted that the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service has recognised the need to promote the value of parks to the Tasmanian community and has built strong positive relationships with the local community.⁹⁰ The Victorian National Parks Association, by contrast, stated that there has been a 'marked decrease' in community conservation education in recent years at the Commonwealth and Victorian Government levels.⁹¹

10.105 Both the Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition and the Clarence Valley Branch of the National Parks Association of NSW cited the NSW NPWS Discovery Ranger program as a successful example of community outreach.⁹²

87 *Submission 142*, p. 4.

88 *Submission 51*, p. 2.

89 *Submission 140*, p. 3.

90 *Submission 78*, p. 8.

91 *Submission 146*, p. 4.

92 *Submission 140*, p. 3; *Submission 142*, p. 4.

10.106 Dr Marc Hockings of the University of Queensland made the point that better education about the social and economic benefits of protected areas is required at all levels, to inform and support management decisions:

There is little understanding in the wider community of the social and economic values of protected areas and little data on economic flows generated by parks in a form that is recognized by Treasury officials and politicians who are making budget decisions that affect protected areas. The Commonwealth Government, through the National Reserves System program could play a leading role here in establishing a program to provide a more thorough understanding of these values and the contribution that they make to the Australian community. This information is needed to support a program of awareness and advocacy both within the general public and amongst key decision makers.⁹³

10.107 The committee believes that it is important to encourage and maintain public support for the conservation estate. The committee supports increased public education initiatives emphasising the importance of national parks and their value as community assets and the necessity to preserve these assets for future generations. The committee considers that parks management has an important role in providing increased community education in educating the public in relation to the value of the conservation estate.

Pastoralists and management practices

10.108 An issue raised during the inquiry was the use of leasehold lands, whose primary purpose is agricultural production, for conservation. Vast areas of the continent are under leasehold and contain significant ecosystems and constituent biota, particularly in the more arid regions. Some jurisdictions are looking at how legislative provisions may provide for leasehold properties, or, portions of such properties, to be managed for conservation.⁹⁴

10.109 In Western Australia since 1989, for example, some 29 whole pastoral leases, comprising 4.5 million hectares, have been purchased by CALM (now DEC). This comprises 10 per cent of the productive land in the rangelands. In the Kimberley region over 30 per cent of pastoral leases have been acquired by government for a variety of purposes.⁹⁵

10.110 Evidence to the inquiry raised several concerns about the land management practices of DEC in relation to leasehold land acquired for conservation purposes. These concerns centred on the lack of on-the-ground staff on properties and the

93 *Submission 110*, p. 2.

94 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, *Directions for the National Reserve System – A Partnership Approach*, 2005, p. 45.

95 Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA, *Committee Hansard*, 31 August 2006, p. 36.

consequent adverse effects this is having with regard to a range of property management issues.

Homesteads have been left empty, old access roads left to become overgrown with scrub and trees. Little regular or co-ordinated action is taking place to manage the native and feral animals on these properties many of which contain permanent water holes or river pools. Without proper access roads control will be difficult if not impossible.⁹⁶

10.111 Some of the problems identified include the lack of maintenance of fire breaks and fire access tracks. A representative of the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA noted that in usual station activities firebreaks and access tracks are kept open and accessible but it is not the case in CALM estates.

You need to be able to get into these places. It is no use flying over them from the air. You cannot see what is happening on the ground from up in the air. There needs to be access. To gain this access, there has to be management, there have to be people on the ground doing these sorts of things.⁹⁷

10.112 The lack of maintenance of boundary fencing was also a concern. Murchison Shire noted that the exemption of DEC from the Dividing Fences Act (WA) effectively makes any DEC owned property neighbouring an active pastoral property 'a very real liability for the active pastoral station' as DEC is under no obligation to maintain or repair boundary fences.⁹⁸

10.113 An additional concern raised was the lack of early detection of fire threats due to the lack of physical presence on DEC properties:

Fire is a valuable tool in pastoral management, however if under managed, damage to both brittle environments, stock and infrastructure can be devastating. A proactive approach to fire detection and control is required.⁹⁹

10.114 Witnesses also noted the lack of control of feral animals and weeds caused by the lack of on-the ground presence on DEC properties:

The control of feral animals—cats, foxes, goats et cetera—takes time, money, people and consistency. Control of plants and weeds is the same thing: if there is nobody there to see it when it comes up or when the

96 Mrs Foulkes-Taylor, *Submission 211*, p. 1.

97 Mrs Morrison, *Committee Hansard*, 31 August 2006, p. 36. See also Mrs Foulkes-Taylor, *Submission 211*, p. 1.

98 Shire of Murchison, *Submission 208*, pp 1–2. See also Mrs Foulkes-Taylor, *Submission 211*, p. 1.

99 Mrs Morrison, *Submission 210*, p.1.

problem happens and there is not the staff there to get on it, spray it, pick it or do whatever, it will not happen.¹⁰⁰

10.115 The social and economic implications of a lack of a physical presence were also highlighted. The social impact includes fewer people to undertake community tasks and carry out a range of community tasks vital to small, often isolated communities.

The pastoral community has always been a sparsely populated one however with the advent of the conservation land grab... the national rural downturn and now the drought people are becoming the endangered species.¹⁰¹

10.116 The Shire of Murchison provided the example of the two stations sold to DEC in the shire which previously represented active family units that contributed socially towards the local community. The Shire argued that DEC should attempt to attract family units to these properties to assist in the survival of the shire.¹⁰²

10.117 Economic implications include a reduced tax base, including rates paid by landholders for the upkeep of essential services. Reduced numbers of people on pastoral properties also have flow-on effects to other service providers in, for example, local towns.¹⁰³

10.118 Witnesses at Muggon Station were concerned with the lack of access to water at abandoned DEC station homesteads. With the increasing popularity of outback tourism, many tourists are using station roads and in the event of a breakdown are unable to gain access to water at these stations. The current policy of removing taps, rainwater tanks and windmills is of great concern.

10.119 DEC had a different perspective to the pastoralists in relation to land management practices on land acquired for conservation purposes.

10.120 The department indicated that it seeks to preserve an on-the-ground presence on properties. In nine of the 23 leases acquired by DEC caretakers have been kept on properties, in some cases the former owners of these properties:

You do not necessarily need to keep the people on in every case but we have kept people on. In the early stages we basically remove pastoral infrastructure and stock to begin the process of ecological restoration for park and reserve purposes, but we have a very strong commitment to nature-based tourism and recreation.¹⁰⁴

100 Mrs Morrison, Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA, *Committee Hansard*, 31 August 2006, p. 36. See also Mr Keynes, *Submission 209*, p. 2.

101 Mrs Morrison, *Submission 210*, p. 2.

102 *Submission 208*, p. 1.

103 Mrs Morrison, *Submission 210*, p. 2; Mrs Webb-Smith/Mrs Morrison, Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA *Committee Hansard*, 31 August 2006, pp 37–40.

104 Mr McNamara, *Committee Hansard*, 1 September 2006, p. 44.

10.121 Mr McNamara, Director-General of DEC stated that the accusation that the department's program is 'depopulating the rangelands' is a 'myth':

I have been on many pastoral stations, both working stations and the ones that we have acquired...By and large, due to the economic circumstances of the last decade, on most of those stations, particularly the sheep ones, there is just the family and maybe one extra hand. We have come in, in many cases, at the end point of a process of significant downsizing of those communities and I think we will help give some of them another future—or another part of their future.¹⁰⁵

10.122 The department indicated it has been provided with increased management resources to deal with additional land purchases. In the Gascoyne-Murchison area, for example, DEC was allocated \$6.4 million for the acquisition program and in excess of \$1 million per annum in recurrent expenditure.¹⁰⁶

10.123 In relation to the issue of fire, DEC questioned the notion that increased fire threat comes from DEC acquired properties, especially in the Kimberleys:

The notion that all fires and pestilence come from crown land is nonsense. I honestly would have thought in the Kimberley that the ignition points would be independent of land tenure to a considerable degree, and in fact pastoral burning for pasture management purposes would probably have more escapes beyond pastoral leases than deliberate burning on crown reserves would have in the other direction.¹⁰⁷

10.124 The department acknowledged that fire in the Kimberley region and fire outside the south-west of the state remains a concern but claimed that it is addressing this issue:

Fire in the north and inland is a problem, and altered fire regimes—with the cessation of traditional Aboriginal burning and with large, intense wild fires that run for months and cover hundreds and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of hectares in single fires—are a serious problem in terms of the homogenisation of that landscape.¹⁰⁸

10.125 CALM stated in its submission that the state government has 'allocated significant additional funding' in recent years for fire management in the south-west and also in the more remote parts of the state.¹⁰⁹ This funding is allowing for improved fire preparedness and on-ground fire management. Additional fire ecology

105 Mr McNamara, *Committee Hansard*, 1 September 2006, p. 45.

106 Mr McNamara, *Committee Hansard*, 1 September 2006, p. 39.

107 Mr McNamara, *Committee Hansard*, 1 September 2006, p. 39.

108 Mr McNamara, *Committee Hansard*, 1 September 2006, p. 40.

109 CALM, *Submission 135*, p. 16.

research has also been funded and a fire ecologist has been appointed to the Kimberleys.¹¹⁰

10.126 The committee notes the concerns expressed by pastoralists and others on the impact of DEC land management practices and the lack a physical presence has on local landholders. The committee believes that where state or territory governments have acquired properties for conservation purposes the relevant authorities should ensure that effective land management practices are in place including proper maintenance of properties and control of threats to the environment and, wherever possible, provision for an on-the ground presence.

110 CALM, *Submission 135*, p. 16; Mr McNamara, *Committee Hansard*, 1 September 2006, p. 40.

