

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Volume 1 Cross-Cutting Activities

ANNUAL REPORT 2007–08

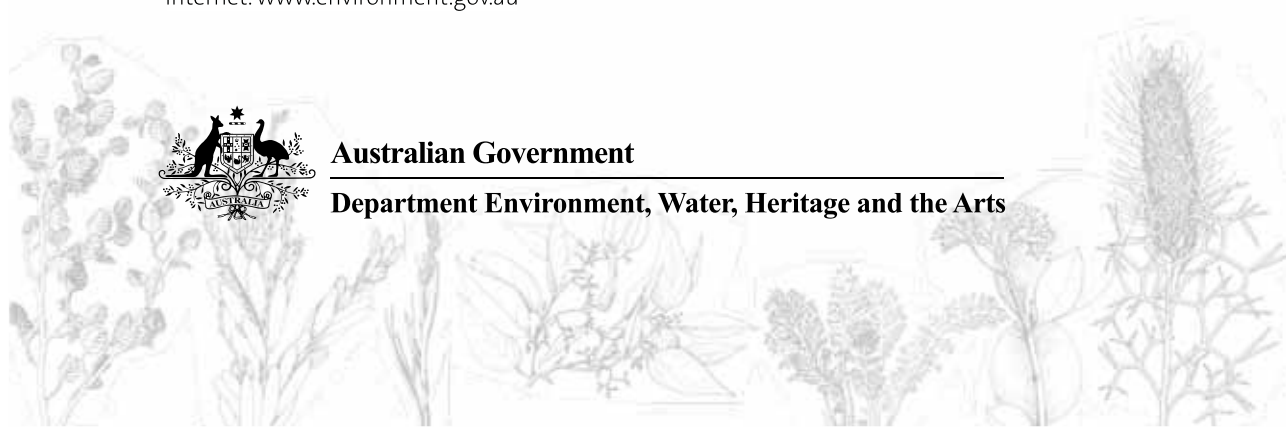
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Australian Government

Department Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts





Cross-cutting activities

Cross-cutting activities



The department provides a range of other services that contribute to all outputs under the outcome structure.

Main responsibilities for this output

- International policy advice
- Environmental economic advice
- Environmental information
- Public affairs
- Environmental research
- Support for environment and heritage organisations
- Indigenous engagement

- Sustainability education
- Online information

Policy
Coordination
Division

Corporate
Strategies Division

Objectives

- Represent the department's interests internationally and provide policy advice for the minister and officials attending international meetings and events.
- Provide economic advice and analysis to the department to inform policy and program development.
- Develop and maintain databases of environmental information to inform policy advice and to monitor progress on environmental protection.
- Communicate information to the public and stakeholders about the government's

environment, water, heritage and the arts programs and policies.

- Conduct scientific research programs into improving the understanding of, and response to, environmental challenges.
- Support organisations to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment.
- Support Indigenous interests in the areas of culture and land management.
- Promote behavioural change in support of more sustainable work practices and lifestyles on the part of individuals and organisations.

International policy advice

The department represents Australia's interests on environment, water, heritage and arts issues domestically and in broader international forums. This work includes formulating policy and providing briefing material to the minister and officials attending international meetings and events.

In addition to active involvement in the range of issue-specific international forums detailed in other chapters of this report, in 2007–08 the department contributed to policy decisions at meetings of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Environment Program, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Pacific Regional Environment Program.

The department contributed to the development of strategic partnership agreements with the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It also engaged in bilateral forums with selected countries in the Asia–Pacific region.

United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development is a multilateral forum that promotes dialogue on sustainable development and builds partnerships between governments and stakeholders. The Forum held its sixteenth session in New York from 5–16 May 2008. Themes under discussion included agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa.

Australia upholds the importance of practical action at the multilateral, regional, bilateral and national levels, and the demonstration effect of broad communication of successful initiatives. Fact sheets on several Australian initiatives were distributed, including

the Signposts for Australian Agriculture project and the International Forest Carbon Initiative.

United Nations Environment Program

The role of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is to provide leadership and promote partnerships for environmental protection. The department represented Australia's interests at the tenth special session of UNEP's Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum, held in Monaco from 20–22 February 2008. A number of decisions were adopted at the meeting, covering chemicals management, sustainable development of the Arctic region and an invitation to the United Nations Economic and Social Council to consider proclaiming an International Decade for addressing Climate Change for the period 2010–2020. Ministerial-level consultations focussed on mobilising funds to meet the climate change challenge, international environmental governance and United Nations reform.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The department represented Australia's interests at meetings of the OECD's Environment Policy Committee (EPOC), which were held in November 2007, February and June 2008. A focus of the meetings was to determine the OECD's program of future work, especially on issues linking economic and environmental policy formulation. An officer of the department chaired EPOC during 2007–08. The department was active in meetings of EPOC's working groups and an expert group on climate change.

The department supported the attendance of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts at an OECD Round Table on Sustainable Development and the OECD Environment Ministers' Meeting held on 27–29 April 2008. At the meeting, ministers noted and welcomed: publication of the

OECD Framework for Effective and Efficient Environmental Policies; the OECD Council recommendations on resource productivity; and implementation of the strategic approach to international chemicals management.

OECD Environment Performance Review of Australia

The department assisted the OECD in finalising its second Environmental Performance Review of Australia. The review focused on Australia's environmental progress since the OECD's last report in 1998 and provided 45 recommendations for future action. The major themes of the review were environmental management, sustainable development and international commitments.

The final report was launched publicly on 19 March 2008 by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the Minister for Climate Change and Water, and the Director of the OECD Environment Directorate. The report's conclusions and recommendations can be viewed on the department's website.

Pacific Regional Environment Program

The Pacific Regional Environment Program is the primary intergovernmental environmental organisation working in the Pacific. Its mandate is to promote cooperation and provide assistance to Pacific Island Countries in protecting the environment and implementing sustainable development. The program has 21 Pacific Island member countries and 4 countries with direct interests in the region.

The department represented Australia's interests at the eighteenth meeting of the program held in Apia, Western Samoa from 11-14 September 2007. The meeting focussed on marine species conservation, invasive species control and implementation of the Montreal Protocol. Australia contributed

a paper on its development of a template for streamlining reporting by Pacific Island Countries and another on genetic resources in the Pacific.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The department supported the attendance of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Thirteenth Conference of the Parties, which was held in Bali from 3-14 December 2007.

The conference culminated in the adoption of the Bali Roadmap and associated action plan. The minister held a number of bilateral discussions on energy efficiency initiatives, the coral triangle and of other environmental issues.

Bilateral activities

China: The department hosted a senior delegation from the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection in November 2007. The meeting provided an opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise on environment industries, environment protection technologies and protection of waterways.

Indonesia: The department continued to collaborate closely with Indonesia through the Australia-Indonesia Joint Working Group on the Environment. Particular areas of interest were climate change, hazardous waste and environmental management in mining.

Japan: The department hosted a senior delegation from Japan's National Institute of Rural Engineering in March 2008. The objective of the delegation was to learn about Australia's responses to climate change. Its particular interests were water security and infrastructure for environment and agriculture.

New Zealand: The department hosted bilateral environment policy discussions with New Zealand in November 2007 covering sustainability, whaling, biodiversity, forests, water, oceans, engagement with Pacific island countries and climate change.

Pacific islands: During much of 2007–08 an officer from the department was out-posted to the Pacific Regional Environment Program, to work with its executive on developing key planning documents and performance reporting processes.

Papua New Guinea: The department supported attendance by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts at the Australia–Papua New Guinea Ministerial Forum in April 2008. Outcomes of the meeting included the signing of a joint understanding on the Kokoda Track and a memorandum of understanding on Australia’s Tsunami Early Warning System. The portfolio will continue to engage with Papua New Guinea on environmental issues in the Torres Strait Protected Zone, through the Torres Strait Environment Management Committee. The moratorium on seabed drilling and mining in the Torres Strait has now been extended indefinitely.

South Korea: The department hosted a delegation from South Korea’s Jeju Island World Heritage Site in December 2007. The objective of the delegation was to benchmark best practice management of natural and cultural heritage, and sustainable tourism. The delegation visited Kakadu National Park and the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Listed sites.

Environmental economics advice

Overview

The Environmental Economics Unit provides economic analysis and advice to divisions and work groups in the department to help them develop policies, programs and advice that take into account environmental, economic and social considerations.

Summary of main achievements

The Unit contributed to management of the \$10 million National Market Based Instruments Pilot Program under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. Ten of the 11 pilot projects approved under round 1 of this program are now complete. A further eight pilot projects and a capacity building project have been funded under round 2.

The Unit provided economic advice on the Environmental Stewardship Program, the OECD Environmental Performance Review and the Tasmanian Pulp Mill assessment. It also provided advice on projects associated with the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan, consulted on economic aspects of the National Plan for Water Security, and provided economic assistance on a range of waste management, heritage, marine, vegetation and National Reserve System issues and projects.

The Environmental Economics research hub, under the Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities program, has commenced a range of research projects that will allow the Unit to access broad environmental economics research to support policy and program development. The hub focuses on four themes including establishing markets, climate change impacts, analytical enhancement and environmental valuation. Part of the Unit’s role is to link the research with the work being undertaken in relevant topic areas within the department.

State of the Environment Report

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 requires that a report on the state of the Australian environment be provided to the federal environment minister every five years. The third State of the Environment (SoE) report was tabled in parliament in December 2006, and can be found on the department's website.

A key finding of the 2006 SoE report is that a lack of accurate and nationally consistent environmental data has made it impossible to give a comprehensive picture of the state of Australia's environment. Consequently, a major focus of work has been on exploring ways to improve the information base and use this information to guide Commonwealth environmental policy development. Specifically, work has involved:

- reviewing the indicators used in the 2006 report to consolidate or reduce data requirements and identify priorities for investment in data acquisition and analysis
- liaising with other jurisdictions and Commonwealth agencies to develop better arrangements for co-ordination and access to environmental information
- further development of the reporting system for the SoE report, including the capacity to be used on an ongoing basis.

Environmental Resources Information Network

The Environmental Resources Information Network (ERIN) area manages environmental information on behalf of the department. This includes collating national datasets on environmental assets and pressures, undertaking extensive analysis, and presenting the results to the department and the Australian community through maps and interactive tools. The area supports a wide range of the business processes of the department, including administration of major funding programs and implementation of legislation. In 2007–08 ERIN:

- collaborated with the Bureau of Rural Sciences, and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics to deliver the Natural Resource Management Spatial Information System project. This project brought together and analysed natural resource information to help set priorities for government investment. ERIN analysed a wide range of environmental information for the project, including threatened and migratory species, World Heritage Areas, Ramsar wetlands and protected areas. It produced more than 150 maps summarising these analyses
- incorporated sophisticated computer modelling techniques into the processes used to map distributions of listed threatened and migratory species. Distribution maps were produced for 17 species included in the list of threatened species under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Maps for another 22 threatened species and 2 threatened ecological communities were reviewed and updated. A further 21 maps are currently under review
- developed a new national database on weeds, which is available online

- at www.weeds.gov.au. The site brings together information on weeds and weed management at the national level and provides links to weed management activities across Australia. It links to information and services on Australian Government and selected state and territory web sites
- prepared a new online Environmental Reporting Tool, which assists members of the public in searching for matters protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The tool generates a list of protected matters that may occur in, or near, a selected area
 - prepared a new map maker tool for the Australian Natural Resources Atlas. The tool allows members of the public to view and query natural resources data from the Atlas or make a map of a region of interest (www.anra.gov.au)
 - produced over 80 publication quality maps for the south-west and north-west marine bioregional profiles, as the first phase of preparation of a bioregional plan for these areas (www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp)
 - collaborated with the states and territories to incorporate improved vegetation data into the National Vegetation Information System, which provides information on the extent and distribution of vegetation types in Australian landscapes
 - produced maps of the Murray-Darling Basin to support the implementation of the Water Act 2007
 - provided detailed site and location maps to accompany the nomination of eleven Australian Convict Sites under the World Heritage Convention
 - coordinated development of a National Historic Shipwrecks Database and Administration system, which will be released in 2008–09
 - undertook analysis of Tasmanian forests with ‘outstanding universal value’ within, and surrounding, the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, in support of a report to a mission of enquiry from the World Heritage Committee
 - undertook a review of the application of remote sensing data and products within the department and portfolio agencies.

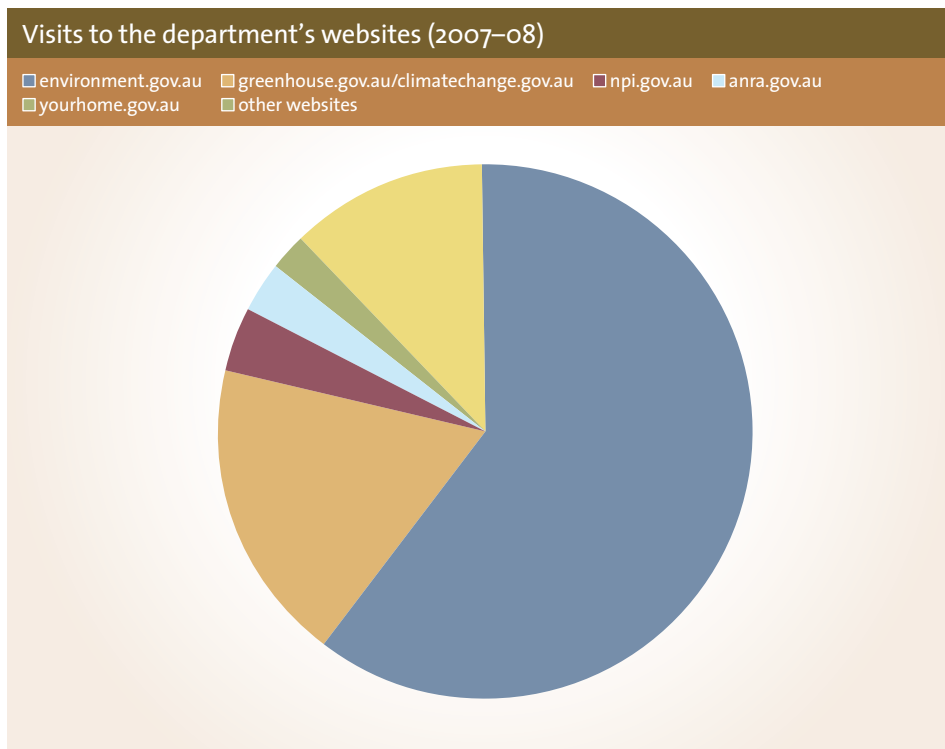
Online Information

The department’s websites provide public access to substantial holdings of information. Throughout 2007–08 the department continued to restructure, redesign, and rewrite its websites to improve public access to online information, culminating in the launch of totally redeveloped heritage (www.environment.gov.au/heritage) and parks (www.environment.gov.au/parks) websites.

In addition, Machinery of Government changes necessitated a major review and update of the content on all departmental websites and the incorporation of four arts websites. The department continued to manage greenhouse websites on behalf of the Department of Climate Change.

A successful upgrade of the departmental intranet was completed during 2007–08. The new intranet includes tools and collaborative workspaces that provide departmental staff with better ways of presenting, accessing, finding, working on and sharing information.

During 2007–08 there were over twelve million visits to the department’s websites. The most popular were the main website (www.environment.gov.au), with over seven million visits, and the Australian Greenhouse Office/Climate Change website (www.greenhouse.gov.au/www.climatechange.gov.au), with over two million visits.



Results are based on 'unique user sessions'. 'Other departmental websites' include: Arts and Culture, Artbank, Australian Alps National Parks, Australian Heritage Council, Australian Heritage Directory, Community Water Grants, Cultural Ministers Council, Cultural Data Online, Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum, National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research, Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme, Natural Heritage Trust, Natural Resource Management, Sustainability in Government, Travel Smart Australia, Used Oil Recycling, Water Rating, Waterwatch, Weeds in Australia.

Public Affairs

Communication is important to the department and a variety of strategies are put in place to engage with the Australian public, all levels of government, and stakeholders ranging from peak organisations to concerned individuals.

World Heritage communications activities increased after Australia gained a seat on the prestigious World Heritage Committee. In December 2007 the Arts portfolio was transferred to the department, adding a variety of new audiences to the public affairs communications mix.

Highlights, priorities and standout announcements communicated in 2007–08 included:

- Heritage achievements such as the listing of Bondi Beach and the Myall Creek Massacre site, and the discovery and protection of the wrecks of HMAS Sydney II and the HSK Kormoran.
- The introduction of the Green Vouchers schools program, helping schools develop energy and water efficiency initiatives.
- Information campaigns to support the delivery of the \$50 million water entitlement buyback, the On-Farm Efficiency, Off Farm and Metering Funding pilot programs, and Community Water Grants funding to help community groups develop and implement projects to use water wisely.

- Promoting the Water Efficiency Labelling Scheme, including an industry campaign for the mandatory labelling of whitegoods.
- Communications about the new \$12.9 billion Water for the Future program.
- A multi-media campaign to encourage energy efficiency by Australian householders.
- The launch of the Australian Government Caring for our Country initiative.
- Australia's international campaign to protect whales.
- Since its establishment in 2006–07, the *Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge* hub has become a major centre for research in the north, particularly on to the sustainable use of Australia's tropical rivers and estuaries. Achievements during the year included: developing working relationships with indigenous communities and catchment management groups in key study catchments; and the installation of three eddy covariance towers in the Daly catchment, to provide data on evapotranspiration, net carbon dioxide (CO₂) flux and sensible heat exchange.

Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities (CERF)

The CERF program has two main components: the \$60 million nation-wide research component comprising the CERF Research Hubs, CERF Fellowships and CERF Significant Projects; and the \$40 million Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF) for research on the Great Barrier Reef, tropical rainforests and Torres Strait.

Research Hubs

In addition to MTSRF, the CERF program funds seven collaborative, multi-institutional research hubs designed to foster professional partnerships between researchers, end users and policy makers. Key results achieved during 2007–08 include:

- Strengthening the links between research, policy and management through: the development of communications protocols; holding seminars, workshops and training courses; and holding a whole-of-program conference in October 2007. Research hubs have also undertaken stakeholder training.
- The *Landscape Logic* hub has established a water quality monitoring project in the Duck River catchment in north-west Tasmania that will provide phosphorus, nitrogen and ammonia readings as frequently as every 5 minutes, 24-hours a day, and upload the data to a website. This will be used to help explain the links between land-use management and the impact on water ecosystems, and guide future management decisions in the region.
- The *Applied Environmental Decision Analysis* hub has developed evidence-based frameworks for optimal allocation of funds to threatened species management, biological hotspots and conservation actions over regions. Its work in the urban fringe of Melbourne has led to changes in methods used by various government agencies to assess biodiversity values in Melbourne's growth corridors and green wedges. A multi-action conservation plan is being developed for Melbourne's peri-urban grasslands, in collaboration with the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment.
- The *Prediction and Management of Australia's Marine Biodiversity* hub is working with the Tuna industry stakeholder group in identifying options

to offset unavoidable effects of fishing on protected species such as turtles.

- The *Australian Centre for Applied Marine Mammal Science* funded a number of projects to improve knowledge of the whales, dolphins, seals and dugongs in our region. This hub has supported ground-breaking research on blue whales in the Bonney Upwelling.
- The *Environmental Economics* hub worked on using the strength of market mechanisms to create incentives for environmental protection. It also held a series of workshops and seminars on international climate policy for government policy makers, researchers and the Australian public.
- In April 2008, the *Taxonomy for the 21st Century* hub held a forum, with over 40 taxonomists from across Australia attending. It also began work on its web-based delivery system for taxonomic information.

Fellowships and Significant Projects

In 2007–08 the Minister approved funding for four Fellowships and ten Significant Projects.

CERF Fellowships

- Prof Phillip Lake, (Monash University): Drought and Aquatic Ecosystems: Impacts and Responses.
- Dr Stephen Hamilton (Michigan State University, USA - Griffith University): Waterholes in a changing climate: Hydrological vulnerability and implications for ecological services and cultural values.
- Prof Gene Likens (Institute of Ecosystem Studies, Millbrook, NY - Australian National University): Developing a basis for a Long-term Ecological Research Network in Australia and a systematic approach to environmental monitoring.
- Dr Reginald Watson (University of British

Columbia, B.C. - University of Tasmania): Ecosystem model analysis to address fisheries management issues in south eastern Australia and the implications of climate change.

CERF Significant Projects

- Prof Ary Hoffmann (University of Melbourne): Predicting and monitoring climate change in insects: from genes to distribution shifts.
- Dr Graham Edgar (University of Tasmania): Volunteer monitoring of the state of Australian rocky reef communities.
- Prof David Bowman (University of Tasmania): Using tree rings of an Australian conifer as a bio-indicator of decadal-scale environmental change.
- Prof Stephen Dovers (Australian National University): Sustainable Farms: Future pathways for rural landscapes.
- Professor David Pannell (University of Western Australia): INFFER: Investment Framework For Environmental Resources.
- Dr Darren Baldwin (La Trobe University): Determining Watering Regimes to Protect Floodplains under Hyper-Drought Conditions.
- Dr Graham Marshall (University of New England): Improving economic accountability when using decentralised, collaborative approaches to environmental decisions.
- Dr Samantha Setterfield (Charles Darwin University): Optimizing weed risk management investment, through improved spatial distribution and benefit cost analysis modelling.
- Assoc Prof Nathan Bindoff (Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems CRC): Climate Futures for Tasmania: Prospects, Impacts and Information for Adaptation Options.
- Dr Elaine Barclay (University of New England): Order with and without law: Understanding perceptions and attitudes towards formal and informal controls of environmental resource transgressions.

Performance Indicator	2007–08 results
Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities (administered item) ¹	
Extent to which projects successfully contribute to furthering Australia’s understanding of critical areas of environment research.	All research is publicly available and reported to end-users through seminars, workshops, publications, and websites. Results are delivered progressively over the life of the program. Work on an evaluation framework was begun. It will assist with the task of assessing program outcomes.
Percentage of projects delivered to a satisfactory standard, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the project contract (Target: 100%)	100%. All progress reports that were due during 2007–08 were received. All projects are delivering results in accordance with the terms and conditions of the project contract.
Number of projects funded	4 new CERF Fellowships and 10 new CERF Significant Projects contracts were funded during 2007–08.

¹ Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities is an administered item under output 1.5; resources are reported in the chapter on human settlements.

Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF)

The MTSRF Annual Research Plan for 2007–08 includes 48 research projects under five research themes: Status of Ecosystems; Risks and Threats to Ecosystems; Halting and Reversing Decline of Water Quality; Sustainable Use and Management; and Enhancing Delivery.

In February 2008 the minister announced additional funding for nine university scholarships over 3 years, for research projects on the environmental challenges facing north Queensland.

The second MTSRF research synthesis conference was held in April 2008. It brought together researchers and stakeholders to discuss research progress and information needs and to foster communication and cooperation across disciplines.

Support for environmental and heritage organisations

Taxation concessions

The Register of Environmental Organisations is a list of approved environmental organisations. Donations of money or property to these organisations for the conservation of the natural environment are tax deductible. During 2007–08 the department assisted 159 organisations interested in applying to join the register. Ministers approved the listing of 49 organisations and their public funds on the register. Four organisations and their public funds were removed from the register at their request. At 30 June 2008 the register listed 437 organisations, compared to 392 at 30 June 2007.

Statistics for 2006–07, the most recent available, show that the public donated more than \$114 million to tax-deductible environmental organisations to help protect and enhance the natural environment.

Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations

The Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations program assists community-based environment and heritage groups to meet the administrative costs of their activities. In this year's funding round, 152 organisations were awarded grants totalling \$620,800. A further 25 organisations awarded multi-year funding in previous rounds, were paid grants totalling \$127,600 during 2007–08.

Indigenous policy and engagement

The department delivered approximately \$78.2 million in 2007–08, through a range of programs to support Indigenous people's engagement in land and sea management, heritage protection and the arts across Australia. These programs align with the Australian Government's 'Closing the Gap' agenda.

This year the department focused its efforts on building an Indigenous workforce to deliver land, sea and heritage management services to the government by contracting Indigenous ranger groups. With the inclusion of the Indigenous arts, culture and language programs in December 2007, the department also worked to build the links between country, culture, identity and language, to maximise the environmental, heritage, cultural and social outcomes possible from its Indigenous specific programs.

Working on Country

Working on Country provided job opportunities for Indigenous people to undertake environmental work to protect, conserve and manage Australia's environment and heritage, while meeting their aspirations for caring for their country.

The first year of the Working on Country program has received a positive response across Australia with high demand for program funds. Indigenous land and sea rangers have welcomed the recognition of, and support for, their work by government. Fourteen projects commenced in 2007–2008 with a budget of \$16.9 million over three years to contract 92 rangers.

Project work includes wetland protection work in the Coorong; surveys for nationally listed threatened species such as the Southern marsupial mole, Northern quoll, Northern hopping mouse and Black-footed

rock wallaby; protection of Great desert skink and Bilby populations in the Gibson, Great Sandy and Great Victoria Deserts; mapping and control of Weeds of National Significance; controlling key threatening processes such as feral foxes and cats; monitoring and management of turtle and dugong populations; and caring for cultural places and sharing of traditional knowledge. In total, about 58.44 million hectares of Indigenous land and approximately 6,180 kilometres of coastline are currently being managed under Working on Country.

Initially 14 projects commenced in 2007–2008 with a budget of \$16.9 million over three years to contract 92 rangers. By May 2008, 75 Indigenous rangers had commenced employment on the program. In March 2008 a further nine projects with 44 Indigenous rangers were approved for funding, totalling \$14.6 million over five years. Seven of these projects started in 2007–2008. Maps 1 and 2 show the geographic spread, environmental activities and the number of Indigenous rangers employed as at May 2008.

Northern Territory Healthy Country, Healthy People Schedule

Through 2007–08 the department continued to implement the government's commitment to improved environmental and Indigenous employment outcomes under the Northern Territory Healthy Country, Healthy People Schedule (the Schedule).

The Schedule supports Indigenous engagement in the sustainable management of land and seas in the Northern Territory. The co-operative arrangements between the Northern Territory Government, the Australian Government and Indigenous Land Councils have delivered a clear strategy to guide investments in ranger groups. Seven multi-agency multi-year projects to a value of

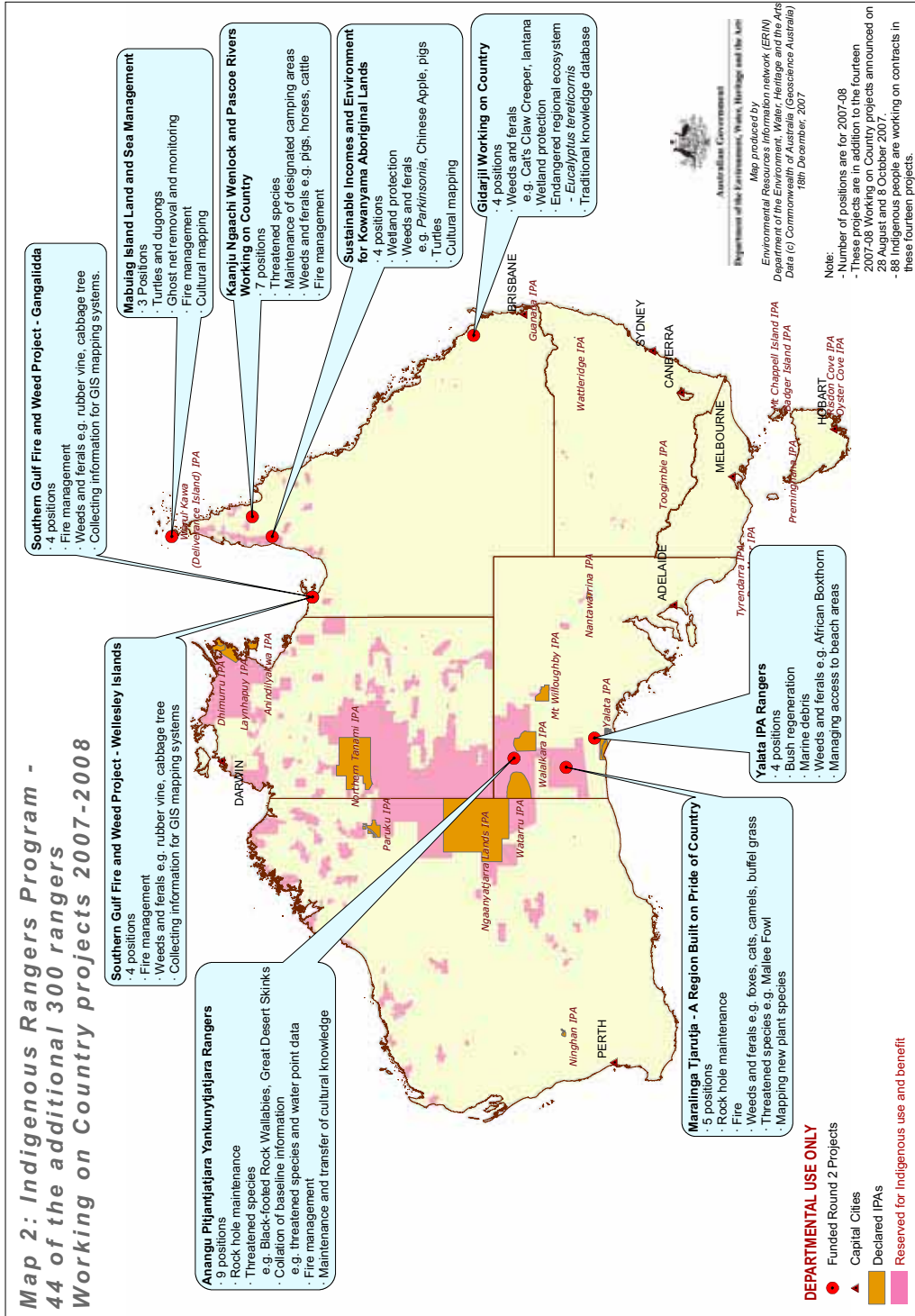
\$2.5 million have already been funded under the Schedule. They are delivering environmental and heritage services to governments and providing greater certainty of funding to Indigenous communities.

Working on Country Northern Territory

In September 2007 the Australian Government allocated \$27 million over three years to the department for Indigenous rangers to provide environmental services to the Australian Government in the Northern Territory. This was part of the creation of Australian Government funded jobs, in place of program payments Community Development Employment Projects in the Northern Territory.

The department has been successful in brokering contracts that will employ around 160 Indigenous people to provide land and sea management services. These positions are managed in parallel with the 136 rangers contracted under the national Working on Country program.

Map 2: Indigenous Rangers Program - 44 of the additional 300 rangers Working on Country projects 2007-2008



Cross-cutting activities

Sustainability Education

The department promotes and supports the use of education to achieve change towards sustainability in individuals and organisations across all sectors of society. It involves formal schooling, further and higher education, business and industry, communities and households, and governments. Sustainability education goes beyond raising awareness to developing the skills, knowledge and values that promote behaviour supportive of more sustainable lifestyles.

During 2007–08 the department provided national leadership and coordination for the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI). More than 2,500 Australian schools (25 per cent of schools nationally) and 570,000 students across Australia are now participating in AuSSI. Individual schools have reported reductions in waste collection of up to 80 per cent, reductions in water consumption of up to 60 per cent, and savings on energy consumption of 20 per cent, with commensurate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Schools are also achieving financial savings and broader social and educational benefits from increased school pride and interest in learning.

Programs

The United Nations has declared 2005 to 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, in recognition of the role education plays as a critical tool in our efforts to achieve more environmentally, economically and socially sustainable development. Australia's response—*Caring for Our Future*—sets out our vision, goals and approach to the Decade.



Students from Ahmedabad, India displaying their Global Communities for Sustainability project. Photo: Snehal Bhatt. Courtesy of the Centre for Environmental Education, India

Initiatives in education for sustainability include: a national advisory council; consultative arrangements with the states/territories through the National Environmental Education Network; the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative, an applied research program in education for sustainability; and a community grants program. Work has also been undertaken on the development of a new national action plan on education for sustainability. Australia continues its commitment to provide leadership in education for sustainability in the Asia-Pacific, through the exchange of information and resources with other countries and participation in international forums.

Summary of main achievements

The National Environmental Education Council was renamed the National Council on Education for Sustainability to reflect its broader focus in providing expert advice to the minister on education and learning for sustainability. A number of new members were appointed.

AuSSI achieved measurable environmental, financial, educational and social outcomes through a whole-of-school approach to education for sustainability. It is coordinated by the Australian Government and is being implemented in all states and territories, in partnership with education and environment agencies. AuSSI complements other environmental education activities in schools and provides access to resources and professional learning in education for sustainability. In April 2007 the Australian Government formalised arrangements with the states/territories for delivery of AuSSI through the endorsement by the Environment Protection and Heritage Council of a national partnership statement for the initiative.

A number of research reports were completed by the Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability (ARIES) at Macquarie University. They covered sustainability in the public sector, professional development in climate change adaptation, coastal management education, rural industry practices in Great Barrier Reef catchments, sustainability education in local government and a case study on sustainability in Noosa Shire.

The Institute commenced major projects partnering corporations and business schools, to embed sustainability into the training of potential industry leaders, working with major corporations in the building and food sectors to improve

the sustainability of their supply chains, and working with stakeholders to make sustainability education part of the mainstream teacher education systems in two states. The work of the Institute with business schools is being used as a guide for embedding sustainability learning in higher education institutions in the Asia-Pacific.

In recognition of Australia's international reputation as a leading player in education for sustainability, the department was invited to lead a government stream at the Fourth International Conference on Environmental Education sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), held in Ahmedabad, India in November 2007. The Conference provided an opportunity to share experiences in developing national approaches to education for sustainable development.

In conjunction with the Indian Government and the Centre for Environment Education, the department implemented an innovative Global Communities for Sustainability project, partnering Indian and Australian schools working on local sustainability projects. Departmental representatives also participated in various international consultations on education for sustainability, focussing on vocational education and training, biodiversity education and education for international understanding.

Work has continued on the development of a new national action plan on education for sustainability, to replace the first national action plan on environmental education released in 2000.