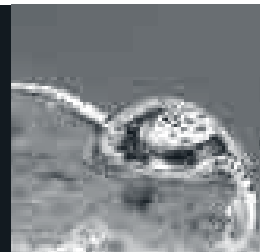


# 1 Director's review



## **The year in review**

Managing the natural heritage of our reserves

Managing the cultural heritage of our reserves

Working with traditional owners

Welcoming our visitors

Working with partners and stakeholders

Managing our business and people

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## The year in review

This year has been one of significant achievements and continuing challenges for the agency and our staff. Our successes in protecting and presenting park values to visitors were offset to some extent by escalating cost pressures and the impacts of weather-related events. On balance, the natural and cultural values of the Australian Government's protected areas are conserved and well presented to visitors, though there are growing risks in several areas.

The Government announced enhanced funding for new visitor facilities and measures to accelerate action on pressing management issues. In May 2007 the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, announced an additional \$15 million for the completion of a major new visitor facility at Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park, the sunrise viewing area to the south-east of Uluru. This world-class facility will provide a range of new visitor experiences as well as the prospect of new business opportunities for the tourism industry and Aboriginal people. The old sunrise viewing area will be closed and rehabilitated, removing a major visitor safety risk in the park.

The Government also announced provision of \$31.7 million to the Australian Customs Service over the next four years to increase patrols to protect the natural values of Ashmore Reef National Nature Reserve and Cartier Island Marine Reserve which are threatened by illegal foreign fishing. The purchase of a dedicated vessel based at Ashmore will allow increased surveillance and protection of these remote reserves. The Government also provided \$4 million for the first phase of a new 10-year strategy to control the invasive yellow crazy ants on Christmas Island, building on our earlier success in reducing the threat the ants pose to the island's famous red crabs.

The appointment of the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP as Minister for the Environment and Water Resources and the Hon John Cobb MP as Assistant Minister in January 2007 saw a change in portfolio for Parliamentary Secretary Greg Hunt. Mr Hunt was responsible for several important protected area initiatives during his time with the portfolio and took a very energetic and active interest in parks and Indigenous issues. I wish him well in his new role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In April 2007 the report of a year-long parliamentary investigation into protected areas was tabled in the Senate. The report praised the management of Commonwealth reserves and called for more resources for Australia's protected area system while raising important issues about wildfire management and the impacts of climate change. The assistance of Parks Australia staff was appreciated and acknowledged by the Senate committee. The Government is considering the report's recommendations.

We commissioned a major consultancy to examine the impacts and management implications of climate change on the Australian Government's protected area estate. The report, to be released in late 2007, will identify gaps in the existing knowledge base and provide an assessment of the likely implications of climate change for each

reserve. Its findings will play an important role in addressing and adapting to climate change in Commonwealth reserves.

Last year's announcement of a network of marine protected areas in the south-east marine region was realised in late June 2007 with the proclamation of 13 new reserves covering 226,000 square kilometres of waters off New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. When the reserves come into effect in September 2007 they will represent the first such network of marine reserves at this scale in the world. Interim management arrangements have been developed for the new reserves.

The establishment of the Cod Grounds Commonwealth Marine Reserve in May 2007 in Commonwealth waters off New South Wales was also significant. This new reserve protects an area of underwater pinnacles which is an important aggregation site for the critically endangered east coast population of the grey nurse shark.

Stage 3 of Kakadu National Park was re-proclaimed to include former mining leases in the park, including those covering Guratba (Coronation Hill), thereby concluding a long and contentious saga over mining in this region.

A series of intense weather events placed added pressure on some Commonwealth reserves. On the evening of 27 February 2007 a ferocious hailstorm hit parts of Canberra, causing millions of dollars damage to houses, businesses and institutions including the Australian National Botanic Gardens, with glasshouses and the plant nursery badly affected. In early March, Cyclone George produced huge rains and record flooding in Kakadu, as well as a destructive tornado that passed within a few hundred metres of the Mary River ranger station. A massive road repair programme was required but Kakadu's emergency response worked well and no injuries resulted. Only days later, Christmas Island was placed on high alert with the approach of Cyclone Jacob. Fortunately the cyclone changed course and missed the island; however high winds and flooding rain uprooted trees and closed the national park for five days while roads and tracks were cleared.

Notwithstanding delays due to the significant floods in Kakadu, it is pleasing to report good progress with the first year of rehabilitation works on old uranium mining sites in the southern part of the park. Contracts for the first stages of tailings containment design and removal of asbestos have been awarded. Funding for the four-year rehabilitation programme was a highlight of last year's report.

### Managing the natural heritage of our reserves

The natural heritage values of our terrestrial and marine reserves face constant pressures and we regularly monitor and adjust our management actions to meet these challenges.

- There have been some significant successes with weed and feral animal control, but additional resources are required to adequately address existing and emerging issues in the long term



- There has been a reduction in heavy infestations of bitou bush in Booderee National Park due to a sustained control effort over the past three years. New infestations continue to be treated
- Booderee's endangered fauna populations continue to recover well from the 2003 fires, supported by a major fox control effort
- Fauna species at Uluru are in good shape, with increased populations of key threatened species and a growing population of the recently reintroduced mala (rufous hare-wallaby)
- Seabird populations and coral reefs in remote marine reserves are generally healthy
- Biodiversity on Christmas Island continues to decline due to yellow crazy ants and weeds, with significant efforts being made to monitor and protect the remaining pipistrelle bat population
- Weed incursions represent a major threat to Norfolk Island National Park and Botanic Garden and to Christmas Island National Park, and are an increasing problem for Kakadu
- The increasing cost of water and the prospect of harsher water restrictions have created a major challenge for the long-term future of the living collection at the Australian National Botanic Gardens

## Managing the cultural heritage of our reserves

The cultural heritage values and landscapes that we protect include Indigenous living culture as well as sites of historic significance.

- Collection of oral histories from traditional owners at Kakadu and Uluru continued. A partnership agreement with the National Archives of Australia was finalised to ensure the proper long-term storage and protection of irreplaceable audio and video materials
- Traditional owners from Uluru visited the Museum of South Australia and the National Museum of Australia to inspect their holdings and to repatriate certain ceremonial items
- The DVD developed last year to assist media representatives understand the natural and cultural context of Uluru was used extensively and received a national multimedia award
- Kakadu Culture Camp became the first wholly Indigenous-owned business to be accredited as a Savannah Guides site

## Working with traditional owners

Our close relationship with traditional owners in managing the three mainland national parks is one of the most rewarding aspects of our work.

- The fifth management plan for Kakadu was completed and came into effect, representing more than three years work by the Kakadu National Park Board of Management and numerous detailed consultations with traditional owners and stakeholders

- Work on a new Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park management plan is well advanced and a draft is expected to be available for public comment late in 2007
- Relations with the Mutitjulu community in Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park were challenging but constructive. One of the challenges for that relationship included the appointment of an Administrator to the Mutitjulu Community Aboriginal Corporation as well as the Government's proposed emergency intervention into the affairs of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. This new approach, including welfare reform, will have significant impacts on the community and its residents
- While relations between the Wreck Bay community and staff at Booderee are strong, the board of management was unable to meet for a considerable period due to community issues
- Traditional owners and staff from all three jointly managed parks participated in a Pacific Islands World Heritage meeting in New Zealand in February 2007
- Four Bininj students were among seven Kakadu rangers who became the first to win formal qualifications in a new workplace land management course developed by Kakadu and Charles Darwin University that evaluates and accredits practical skills in the field
- In December 2006 Booderee ranger Darren Brown was the inaugural winner of the Rick Farley scholarship for Indigenous people working in conservation. The award, by the conservation organisation Bush Heritage Australia, is supporting Darren to complete his traineeship in conservation and land management while working as part of the Australian National University's ground breaking project examining the effects of fire on Booderee's ecology
- Booderee National Park received a WWF award as one of the nation's 10 most outstanding protected areas for the decade 1992–2002



*Greg Bourne, CEO from WWF Australia, Julie Moore, Chair of the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council, and Senator the Hon Ian Campbell attending a presentation for Booderee National Park ranking as one of the top 10 outstanding protected areas in Australia*

## Welcoming our visitors

This year we saw the results of several long-planned projects to enhance visitors' experience.

- An estimated 1.4 million people visited Commonwealth reserves in 2006–07, with increased numbers at Booderee, Kakadu and the Australian National Botanic Gardens

- The cessation of visitor survey data collection for the Northern Territory parks in 2005–06 triggered development of new survey arrangements to measure visitor satisfaction which will commence in 2007–08
- A series of track markers and major new interpretive displays were installed at key visitor sites around the Uluru base walk. The solar powered displays combine motion sensing voice recordings with text panels providing cultural interpretations and stories
- The new sunrise viewing facility being developed at Uluru is on track for completion next year
- Visitor facilities at Norfolk Island have been progressively upgraded including reconstruction of the Duncombe Bay Road which leads to the popular Captain Cook Monument lookout
- The new Kakadu branding strategy is nearing completion. Developed from the Shared Tourism Vision, it will help map the future of cultural and natural tourism to the park and wider region. This has been a major collaborative effort with the board of management, park staff, Tourism NT, Tourism Australia and other agencies to develop the first-ever destination branding for an Australian national park
- The partnership with Tourism NT in refocusing and enhancing a major campaign marketing Kakadu and Uluru to domestic and international markets resulted in significant increases in visitor expenditure in both regions. Expenditure by international visitors to Kakadu more than doubled in 2006

## Working with partners and stakeholders

Our many partner organisations include tourism interests, scientific organisations and other government agencies. In the parks, we greatly value the knowledge and energy of volunteers from all walks of life.

- We worked in partnership with Tourism Australia on the National Landscapes initiative. In December the Red Centre was announced as the first 'national landscape', to be developed and promoted for nature-based tourism. The major industry lobby group, the Tourism and Transport Forum, is strongly endorsing and supporting the National Landscapes initiative
- Partnerships with research organisations continued, including the five-year fire and biodiversity study at Booderee with the Australian National University (through an Australian Research Council linkage grant) and work with scientists in the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service, CSIRO, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, James Cook University, Charles Darwin University and the University of Queensland
- In April 2007 Kakadu hosted a symposium on landscape change in the park involving over 80 scientists, park staff and traditional owners
- Work with volunteers continued, providing valuable support for reserve

management especially through the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens and the Conservation Volunteers Australia teams on weed control at Uluru

- We hosted a range of distinguished visitors during the year, including the Governor-General and Mrs Jeffery who visited Kakadu and Christmas Island. President Tarja Halonen of the Republic of Finland and her husband, and the Danish Prince and Princess of Orange, visited Uluru
- In December 2006 Kakadu hosted six villagers from Tonda Wildlife Management Area in Papua New Guinea to share experiences and knowledge on wetlands management. Under the Tri-National Wetlands Agreement, Kakadu partners with Tonda and Indonesia's Wasur National Park in Irian Jaya
- A whole-of-government partnership approach to managing marine reserves has seen a stronger engagement with the Australian Customs Service, other Australian Government agencies and a range of state government agencies



*Prince Willem-Alexander, Prince of Orange, and Princess Máxima of the Netherlands learn a little about Tjukurpa and Anangu rock art from ranger Mick Starkey near Mutitjulu Waterhole, Uluru*

## Managing our business and people

We continued to review and improve our business and people management practices and to aim for the highest standards. Our staff continued to be our outstanding resource and willing to take on new challenges as they arise.

- The organisational review of staffing arrangements at Kakadu was endorsed by the Minister and has now been successfully implemented without major disruption to ongoing park management activities
- The financial outcome for the year was pleasing with a small surplus achieved, due in large part to delays in capital and rehabilitation works arising from adverse weather. Surplus and deferred funds will be used to continue those works in 2007–08
- The Government's assessment of statutory authorities following the Uhrig review continued, with the implications for the status of the Director of National Parks and the future of the statutory corporation unclear
- As an agency the Director of National Parks continued to benchmark its performance on reporting and on risk management. The agency won our third silver award at the Australasian Reporting Awards for last year's annual report, and

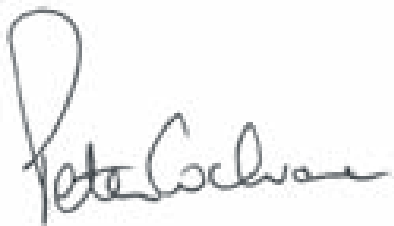
improved our Comcover risk benchmarking score, placing us in the 'advanced' category

- A vehicle rollover in Kakadu and serious injury to a staff member led to a Comcover improvement notice which prompted systematic training throughout the agency on use of 4WD vehicles. A major effort was also made during the year to improve occupational health and safety outcomes generally, including completion of over 70 new job safety analyses
- There were a number of staffing changes among park and section managers. Gae Mackay took over as Director, Policy, Services and Support in the Darwin office and Anne Duncan joined Parks Australia as Director of the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Wendy Murray departed the Cocos (Keeling) Islands after almost 10 years for the Supervising Scientist Division and Julian Barry changed career, becoming a solicitor and barrister after his many years at Uluru and in the Darwin office. Glenn Meade returned to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service after a very successful secondment as park manager at Kakadu
- Many staff occupied senior positions in a temporary capacity. I would like to particularly acknowledge Martin Fortescue (Booderee) and David Phillips (Canberra) for work above and beyond the normal call of duty
- A number of staff were recognised during the year via awards. Robin Nielsen (former Director of the Australian National Botanic Gardens) received a Minister's award for sustained excellence in managing the ANBG and Meryl Triggs received a Minister's award for sustained and dedicated fostering of Parks Australia's relationship with the tourism industry, especially in the Northern Territory. Australia Day awards were made to Marjorie Gant (Booderee) for establishment of sound administrative systems at the park and excellence in managing visitor services; and to the Norfolk Island National Park weed team, recognising their crucial role in progress towards restoring the island's natural ecosystems
- Staff of the Marine Protected Area Management Teams within the Marine and Biodiversity Division managed a vast marine reserve estate on behalf of the Director of National Parks through the implementation of 11 management plans for Commonwealth marine reserves. In 2006–07 significant marine research and monitoring projects across the marine reserve estate have been undertaken to help us better understand the importance and status of the biodiversity within our reserves. Compliance and enforcement capabilities have substantially increased
- In August 2006 the Marine Protected Area Development Section was awarded the Minister's Achievement Award for outstanding contributions towards the development and finalisation of the South-east Marine Protected Area network
- With the completion of the major south-east additions to the estate, the responsibilities of the Marine Protected Area Management Section had grown to the point that it was split into two new sections, with responsibilities respectively for managing marine protected areas in the northern and southern waters of Australia

## Looking ahead

The pressures on the natural values of our reserves are ever present and increasing. In many areas we are making progress but invasive weeds and introduced animals continue to challenge us, especially in the island parks. Provision of training and employment opportunities for traditional owners of our three large parks must be improved, especially in light of the Government's emergency intervention in the affairs of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Improving visitor facilities and enhancing partnerships with the tourism industry remain high priorities. We will need to urgently address the findings of the soon-to-be-released climate change report and adapt our management activities accordingly. An adequate, cost-effective secure supply of water to maintain the living collection at the ANBG is our most pressing issue for resolution in 2007–08, and is triggering a fundamental rethink of the ANBG's role. Improving and diversifying our revenue base will be fundamental to being able to meet these and future challenges.

Meeting stakeholders' expectations and achieving our goals is only possible through the work of our dedicated staff. I acknowledge and applaud their sustained and excellent effort over the past year and with their ongoing support I am confident we will continue to deliver our responsibilities effectively and efficiently in 2007–08.



Peter Cochrane

Director of National Parks





*Pulu Keeling National Park is a breeding habitat for thousands of red-footed boobies each year*