

# 1 Director's review



## **Director's report**

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## Director's report



*Peter Cochrane  
Director of National Parks*

We have achieved good progress in all of our major projects, against a background of increasing cost pressures that are demanding further efficiencies in staffing, structures and operations. Significant achievements in 2007-08 include: the rebranding of Kakadu National Park to emphasise its Aboriginal culture and experiences; the declaration of 14 new marine protected areas; the completion of the first stage of rehabilitating old uranium mining sites in the south of Kakadu, including Guratba (Coronation Hill); and the launch of the National Landscapes partnership with Tourism Australia and this initiative's first eight candidate sites.

Progress on feral animal and weed control across the park estate remains challenging. There has been continued success with control of mimosa and grassy weeds in Kakadu, foxes at Booderee, and progress with reducing buffel grass infestations at Uluru and bitou bush at Booderee. This contrasts with rising numbers of feral animals and an apparent collapse in small mammal populations in Kakadu, and on Christmas Island, the re-emergence of yellow crazy ant super colonies and declining mammal and reptile populations. A major research project to develop a biological control mechanism to reduce yellow crazy ant numbers is about to commence, in response to concerns about the cost and long-term effectiveness of our current focus on baiting.

The federal election in November 2007 saw a change in government, with the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP appointed as the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. Minister Garrett launched the new Kakadu brand in the park in late July 2008 and released the park's first Tourism Master Plan for public comment. The launch of the Kakadu brand was the culmination of nearly three years work by the Board of Management, park staff and consultants. It repositions and rebrands the park to emphasise its Aboriginal ownership and culture. The new logo and colours flow through to uniforms and signage, visitor information and a new dedicated website for Kakadu, co-hosted with NT Tourism.

The potential impacts of climate change are a growing priority. We are working to reduce water use, our carbon footprint and to identify priority adaptation measures in our reserves. A recent review of operations in Booderee National Park identified specific actions to reduce energy use, water consumption and waste outputs within

the park. The Australian National Botanic Gardens continues to develop and implement water and energy saving measures to reduce operating costs and to ensure the future of the living collection.

Our major infrastructure projects have progressed well. Federal Member for Lingiari, the Hon Warren Snowdon MP, announced the completion of the first stage of the new \$15 million Uluru-Kata Tjuta viewing area in June 2008, with the opening of a new eight kilometre section of road to the South of Uluru. Stage 2 of the project, which includes new viewing platforms and visitor amenities, will be completed in the coming year.

A new creek crossing has been completed at Kakadu's Jim Jim Creek, providing safer and more reliable access to the Twin Falls area during the dry season. Major upgrades to road infrastructure and visitor facilities have also occurred on Norfolk Island and at Booderee National Park.

All mining leases in the south of Kakadu, including Guratba (Coronation Hill), have been incorporated into the park. Rehabilitation works are progressing on time and on budget. The removal of asbestos and derelict buildings from El Sherana Mining Camp in the south of Kakadu is complete. A small number of remaining structures are being conserved for their heritage value and will be restored to a safe and sound condition in the near future.

Monitoring of our natural heritage in our reserves is showing mixed results. The mala population reintroduced at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is progressing well. Twenty-five new animals were tagged during the recent survey and a number of female mala were carrying young. The number of tjakura breeding burrows has decreased in the past year, which may be as a result of environmental conditions at the time of the survey. Preliminary results from regular fauna monitoring in Kakadu suggest a dramatic collapse in small mammal populations and species richness across the park. Further monitoring and associated research will be needed to confirm and understand these findings and to develop an appropriate management response.

The first phases of the Northern Territory Emergency Response were introduced in August 2007. They brought major changes to welfare provisions and Land Rights Act permits with significant new powers for the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) over Aboriginal land, membership of community councils, leasing of Aboriginal townships, community stores, use of computers and access to alcohol. Good working relations continued between Parks Australia, local Indigenous communities and FaHCSIA.

The Prime Minister's apology to the stolen generations on 13 February 2008 was a momentous day. Small celebrations involving local Indigenous communities were held at our jointly managed parks and a number of traditional owners from Booderee, Kakadu and Uluru were at Parliament House in Canberra for the main ceremony.

The South-east Commonwealth Marine Reserve Network came into effect on 3 September 2007, increasing the Commonwealth marine reserve estate to almost 50 million hectares. This reserve network is the first temperate, deep sea marine reserve

network in the world. It includes significant underwater features such as underwater canyons and seamounts with a diverse range of marine life. Some species occurring in these areas are new to science and found nowhere else in the world. A management plan for the reserve network, which will also cover the management of Macquarie Island Commonwealth Marine Reserve, is currently under development.

New Commonwealth marine reserve proposals will be identified through the Government's systematic assessment of each of Australia's marine bioregions in the south-west, north-west, north and east over the next three years. In the light of the outcomes from the south-east marine bioregional planning process, the forthcoming bioregional plans are expected to significantly add to the Commonwealth marine reserve estate.

Regional tourism, business and government interest in the National Landscapes concept continues to grow rapidly. Eight candidate areas were launched by the Minister for Tourism, the Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP, in July 2008. The eight National Landscapes are: the Australian Alps, Flinders Ranges, the 'Green Cauldron' on the north NSW-south Queensland coast, the Wilderness Coast spanning southern NSW and eastern Victoria, the Blue Mountains, the Great Ocean Road, the Red Centre, and the Kakadu region. A wide range of key regional stakeholders participated in highly successful planning workshops for these sites during the year. This project, a partnership with Tourism Australia, is identifying and reshaping the domestic and international presentation, planning and marketing of Australia's world class nature-based tourism experiences.

I record my deep appreciation for the continued support, energy, passion and ideas from my senior management team and Parks Australia staff members more generally. Individually and collectively you make the difference. It's a great team effort.

The coming year holds even more challenges. Foremost among these will be securing a more sustainable and adequate funding base to manage the Australian Government's protected area estate. Another challenge is that in many respects our business remains the same, year on year. We need to protect nationally and internationally significant natural and cultural values; provide for world-class visitor experiences that are rewarding and safe; improve opportunities for Indigenous owners, local enterprises, residents and others to participate in the regional economy, whether directly within the parks system or through associated activities. We need to continually reduce the threats and risks to the assets, people and values for which we are responsible. Despite this continuity of purpose, there are new issues that face us, such as adapting to climate change. We need to regularly refresh our approaches and priorities, to ensure that we remain relevant and tuned to the challenges ahead and to the changing needs and expectations of the broader Australian and international community.

This annual report was prepared in accordance with the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*, Finance Minister's Orders under that Act and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The Director's review and the rest of this annual report, except the financial statements for the Australian National Parks Fund and the Auditor-General's report on those financial statements, constitutes the Director of National Parks' report of operations.

The holder of the office of the Director of National Parks is responsible under section 9 of the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* for the preparation and content of the report of operations in accordance with Finance Minister's Orders.



Peter Cochrane  
*Director of National Parks*  
26 September 2008



## The year in review

### Managing the natural heritage of our reserves

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

- The South-east Commonwealth Marine Reserve Network (Reserve Network) came into effect on 3 September 2007. This large network covers 388,517 square kilometres and includes 14 reserves, which are representative examples of the diverse seafloor features and associated habitats found in the South-east Marine Region. The South-east Marine Region stretches from the far south coast of New South Wales, around Tasmania and Victoria and west to Kangaroo Island off South Australia, and includes the Macquarie Island EEZ. The former Tasmanian Seamounts Marine Reserve has been encompassed by, and incorporated into, the larger Franklin Commonwealth Marine Reserve
- A discussion paper: *The impacts and management implications of climate change for the Australian Government's Protected Areas* was released on 31 March 2008. The report was prepared by Hyder Consulting and provides insights into likely changes and impacts across the Commonwealth reserve estate from changes in climate, such as temperature, rainfall distribution and increased fire events—impacting on endemic and threatened species that have a limited distribution. These findings will provide valuable inputs as we develop new management plans for our reserves, and important baselines for future research
- The first four-year phase of our ten-year yellow crazy ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) control strategy for Christmas Island is well underway. A major focus of the strategy is to develop a new ant-bait and to identify and introduce a bio-control measure for the exotic scale insects that are a major food source for the ants. Crazy ant infestation is accelerating, although it is nowhere near the levels recorded in 2001 before the major aerial baiting project was initiated. Our labour-intensive hand-baiting continues in the more accessible parts of the park. A Crazy Ant Scientific Advisory Committee has been appointed to provide high-level scientific guidance for this strategy and its implementation
- The decline in Christmas Island's population of pipistrelle bats (*Pipistrellus murrayi*) appears to be continuing, and the species has been listed as critically endangered. Our current management response includes placing and monitoring artificial roosting boxes in the park, an active research program to investigate potential causes of mortality, and exploring possibilities for a captive breeding program

- The implementation of the Christmas Island Mine-site to Forest Rehabilitation (CIMFR) program continues. The Memorandum of Understanding for the CIMFR with the Attorney-General's Department has been extended by a further three years to February 2010
- A major project to separate potable and non-potable water reticulation in the ANBG is well underway. Design work commenced for an alternative, non-potable water supply. The increasing cost and declining reliability of supply of water is challenging, and if not addressed adequately will inevitably result in a phased shut-down of horticultural activity. Water costs for irrigation of the ANBG have risen by over 200 per cent in three years
- The rehabilitation of the old legacy uranium mining sites in Kakadu is tracking well, with Guratba (Coronation Hill) and Sleisbeck rehabilitation and revegetation completed, old mine sites made safe, and the successful removal of asbestos and derelict buildings from El Sherana Mining Camp
- The latest count of Uluru's mala (rufous-hare wallaby, *Lagorchestes hirsutus*) is very encouraging—numbers have more than doubled since the first mala were introduced to our feral-proof enclosure almost three years ago. Staff and local *Anangu* captured 51 very healthy animals. Thirteen of the 22 females were carrying pouch young—and 25 of the animals caught and tagged were actually born in the park
- The eleventh annual tjakuṛa (great desert skink, *Egernia kintorei*) survey took place in March 2008. While an increased number of burrows were counted this year, there was a marked decrease in breeding burrows; leading to concerns that predation rates are substantially affecting recruitment levels. No mulgara were trapped during the ninth annual murtja (mulgara, *Dasyercus cristicauda*) survey in November 2007. However, evidence of the presence of mulgara, including breeding burrows, was found to be widespread during the tjakuṛa survey in March 2008, alleviating concerns about the status of the population



Recent surveys indicate that the mala population at Uluru is increasing steadily

- A collaborative project between Parks Australia and scientists from several research institutions began a relocation program for the Cocos Island buff-banded rail (*Gallirallus philippensis andrewsi*) to Direction Island in the Cocos group. This endangered bird is unique to the Cocos Islands. It now only occurs in the national park, with only around 700 birds left. Twenty adult birds were initially relocated to the island, with further relocations to occur if these flourish
- A major collaborative project with the Northern Territory Biodiversity Conservation Division commenced in 2008. This project involves targeted threatened species surveys in recognised biodiversity hotspots in Kakadu, largely in the Arnhem Land Plateau. The first survey in this three-year project was completed in May 2008 and involved Kakadu National Park and NT Government staff members, a neighbouring Indigenous ranger group and senior traditional owners from Arnhem Land. Results indicate continued decline in some mammal species, consistent with regional trends. The park continues to support research and monitoring to determine the cause of these declines
- Increasing cost pressures on Norfolk Island are reducing the scope of our efforts and will adversely impact on island biodiversity. Weeding projects are not keeping pace with incursions. Consideration is being given to reducing rehabilitation works on Phillip Island to concentrate resources on the main island
- Women from the Natural and Cultural Resources section of Uluru and *Anangu* women from Mutitjulu have controlled buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) at *Pulari* after two years of considerable effort. *Pulari* is a women's sacred site at the base of Uluru, once choked with the invasive grass. The buffel grass was removed by hand, with assistance from teams led by Conservation Volunteers of Australia
- A major program to monitor broad-scale trends in Kakadu's fauna continued in 2007. Fauna surveys were undertaken at regular monitoring plots in the park that have historically been used to record vegetation changes in response to fire. These plots form part of a broader regional investigation of trends, and include Litchfield and Nitmiluk National Parks. Preliminary results from these surveys indicate a major decline in both the abundance of small mammals, and the number of species caught. These results mirror those being recorded elsewhere in the Top End, and are of great concern. Urgent action is being planned to address the most likely causes, which include further reducing fire frequency and intensity, reducing feral animal numbers and exploring the potential for building enclosures to exclude predators in key habitats
- A PhD research project was supported to examine critical relationships between magpie geese (*Anseranas semipalmata*) and wetland food plants, seasonal dispersal patterns of geese, the impact of disease on populations and the likely ramifications of sea level rise (through GIS-based models)
- A collaborative project with the NT Government continued, seeking to better understand the ecology and biology of two species of coastal dolphins, the Indo-Pacific humpback (*Sousa chinensis*) and Australian snubfin (*Orcaella heinsohni*)

- Booderee has commenced a program to reduce the park's carbon footprint. The park has already installed new energy efficient electric barbeques, shower touch pads, waterless urinals and timer lights in amenity blocks, and flow reducers on all outdoor taps. Visitors and campers have responded well to the changes
- Two marine surveys were completed at the Coringa-Herald National Nature Reserve in 2007. Results of the surveys were combined producing a comprehensive analysis of coral, macroinvertebrate and fish communities in the reserve. Ecological communities were found to be in a similar condition to those described in previous surveys, with very little recovery of hard coral cover
- Significant progress was made in the 3-dimensional underwater mapping of the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve and the Cod Grounds Commonwealth Marine Reserve which will aid in the protection of the critically endangered grey nurse shark

### 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.

- Kakadu commenced a review of recorded cultural material, storage of cultural objects, and cultural heritage databases, in consultation with *Bininj/Mungguy*. The review will include development of protocols to ensure that these sensitive cultural resources can be accessed appropriately and in a user-friendly format. A partnership agreement between the National Archives of Australia and the Director is being negotiated for long-term storage and protection of irreplaceable audio and video materials



*Rock art conservation and maintenance in our parks is undertaken with the assistance of traditional owners*

- Kakadu established the *Gun-mayali* ('sharing of knowledge' in the Kunwingku language) Room at Kakadu Headquarters for use by *Bininj* to access cultural materials and records held by the park
- Kakadu held extensive consultations with staff and traditional owners in all districts about their preferred approach and priorities for cultural heritage under the 5th Kakadu Management Plan. Issues discussed included rock art maintenance, oral history collection and cultural activities that support the transfer of knowledge between generations and between traditional owners and staff
- A Scientific and Cultural Heritage Consultative Committee was established for Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. One of its first priorities was to define opportunities, practicalities and requirements for an archaeological survey and research program

- Staff worked with senior *Anangu* to maintain the *Ara Irititja* cultural heritage database at Uluru, entering information and stories on individual photographs and films into the database and adding scanned images of Uluru from the Mountford Collection

### Working with traditional owners

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

- We have entered into updated service level agreements with Booderee and Wreck Bay. They provide the community with a guaranteed level of maintenance work each year on a variety of park assets, including the park's roads, tracks and walking trails
- Following intensive consultation with traditional owners and the tourism industry, a new brand has been developed for promoting Kakadu. It includes a new logo for the park, a new uniform for staff members, and a new Visitor Guide. These were formally launched in the park in July 2008 by the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP at the invitation of the Board of Management



*Hon Peter Garrett AM MP with Jacob Nayinggul and Peter Cochrane at the launch of the new Kakadu brand*

- A draft tourism master plan for Kakadu was released for public comment. It seeks to address the park's target market and outlines opportunities for new and existing Indigenous enterprises
- The provisions of the *Northern Territory Emergency Response Act* commenced on 14 September 2007. An amendment Bill to restore the requirement for a permit to enter Aboriginal land was introduced into Parliament but was not passed before the election. The park's regulatory controls over film and photography continued to be applied, despite some uncertainty over their interaction with the new legislation. Amendments to the Act were re-introduced into Parliament in August 2008

- Constructive relationships were established and maintained between the Muṯitjulu community, parks staff, and FaHCSIA during the first phase of NT Emergency Response
- Mediation continued between the parties to the Native Title claim over Jabiru township and two adjoining areas of Kakadu
- Parks Australia sponsored the Muṯitjulu Council Chairman and an *Anangu* staff member to attend a two-day workshop on Indigenous Business Development in Darwin. Our aim is to support community members in accessing information and building skills, to assist economic development in the community and foster the establishment of *Anangu* businesses in the park
- Quarterly meetings of the Boards of Management of Kakadu and Uluru were held and also additional special meetings to discuss particular aspects of Management Plans and issues requiring traditional owner advice
- While relations between the Wreck Bay community and staff at Booderee are sound, the Board of Management was unable to meet during the year, due to community issues and a lengthy process of nominating and approving new board members

## Welcoming our visitors

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

- An estimated 1.47 million people visited Commonwealth reserves in 2007–08. There were increased numbers at Kakadu and Booderee, but an overall decline of 1.3 per cent, led by a significant decline of nearly 30,000 over the year at Uluru, with a resultant impact on park revenue
- Visitor surveys have been instituted for Kakadu, Uluru and Booderee
- The first stage of the new Uluru-Kata Tjuta viewing area was completed, with the opening of a new eight kilometre section of road to the south of Uluru on 16 June 2008. The new road modifies the loop around the rock and offers visitors vastly improved views of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, taking them into areas of this majestic landscape that were previously inaccessible to the public. This stage of the project has come in on time and budget, thanks to excellent project management, particularly by Mike Johnson and Peter Cullen. The second stage of construction has commenced and will provide paths, elevated walkways and platforms



*The Nourlangie rock art site at Kakadu is popular with visitors throughout the year, and the main gallery is wheelchair accessible*

- The partnership between Tourism Australia and Parks Australia is now firmly established. The product of this partnership, the National Landscapes initiative, was launched at the Australian Tourism Exchange in Perth in June 2008 by the Tourism Australia Board Chair, Mr Rick Allert. This initiative aims to identify landscapes that offer world-class, uniquely Australian, nature-based experiences to Tourism Australia's target market. Eight candidate sites have been launched by the federal Tourism Minister, the Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP. This initiative has attracted enthusiastic support from the national tourism industry and a wide range of regional stakeholders in each candidate area

- Fires at Booderee during November 2007 destroyed visitor facilities at Cave Beach. The park was closed for a short period of time to ensure visitor safety and the majority of damaged infrastructure has been repaired or replaced
- The boat ramp at Murray's Beach in Booderee was upgraded during the winter of 2007. This is the primary boat launching ramp in the park and is used extensively during the summer months. Construction work was undertaken on schedule



*Morgan Brown and Martin Fortescue from Booderee National Park, mopping up after the wildfire at Cave Beach in November 2007*

- A new office was opened in the Cocos-Malay community on Home Island, to provide a base for community education programs and to raise awareness about Pulu-Keeling National Park and its values
- A major upgrade to the Jim Jim Creek crossing in Kakadu was completed successfully, enabling safer access to the Twin Falls area during the dry season
- New closure times were instituted for the Uluru climb to reduce the risks to visitor safety during the hottest months of the year (December-February). The closure of the climb after 8:30am each day was implemented following consultation with the tourism industry. It attracted no adverse comment from visitors or industry
- A new facility, the Botanical Resource Centre was established at the ANBG for the general public to identify plants with computer tools, microscopes and specimens. This was an initiative between the ANBG and the Friends of the ANBG and was opened by Her Excellency Mrs Marlena Jeffery on 15 May 2008
- The ANBG promoted the cultural values of Australian native plants with the exhibitions: 'Caring for Land', 'Friends School Photographic Exhibition', 'Local Colour', 'Botanical Art Group Exhibition', 'Growing Home, the Street Trees of Canberra', 'A Tree in the Palm of your Hand Bonsai Exhibition' and 'Snakes Alive!'
- Booderee National Park was awarded a Distinction in the Tourist and Caravan Park

(up to 4 Star) category at the South Coast tourism excellence awards. It was also a Finalist in the Adventure Tourism or Eco Tourism category. The park's iconic Murray's Beach was named the South Coast's most environmentally-protected beach in the Keep Australia Beautiful Clean Beach Awards

- The partnership between Parks Australia and Tourism NT was recognised by a 'highly commended' award from the Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF), the peak industry group for the Australian tourism, transport, aviation and investment sectors, at their Annual Awards night on 28 November 2007

## Working with partners and stakeholders

We work closely with a wide range of tourism interests, scientific organisations and other government agencies. We are fortunate to benefit from the knowledge and energy of hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life who contribute significantly to our outcomes.

- A major new facility, the Australian Tropical Herbarium, was established in Cairns through a partnership between the Australian National Herbarium, the Queensland Herbarium and James Cook University. This new facility combines the existing herbaria in Atherton and Mareeba and will provide a strong focus for tropical plant taxonomy and systematics
- The Marine Division commenced development of education kits, consisting of a DVD, booklet and poster series. The intent of the kit is to provide the community with information on the values of marine protected areas, how they are managed and, importantly, influencing positive behaviour and attitudes toward marine conservation management
- Parks Australia participated actively in the international review of the IUCN protected area category guidelines, which are used in Australia and many other countries to structure management and reporting of protected areas
- The Director represented Australia at two international meetings, dealing with protected areas under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), held in Rome and Bonn in 2008
- Representatives from park agencies from the Northern Territory and Victoria, Parks Canada and the New Zealand Department of Conservation participated in the Parks Australia forum meeting held in Darwin in November 2007. The presentations and discussions were rated highly by all participants. These interactions enhanced our strong relationships with these agencies
- The Discovery Channel filmed a documentary in Kakadu for Animal Planet, as part of an eight-part series on climate change, to be aired internationally next year. The crew were particularly interested in the impact that salt-water intrusion might have on the Ramsar wetlands and on the magpie geese, which rely on a freshwater feed
- The Australian National Botanic Gardens hosted a workshop in Canberra to initiate

work on a national approach to climate change education. One key aim is to help Australia's largely urban populations connect with the natural world, learn about climate change, and what they can do to make the world more sustainable. Education staff members from botanic gardens around the country participated



*Representatives from botanic gardens across the country attended a workshop at the ANBG to determine a draft national climate change adaptation strategy and action plan for botanic gardens*

- Mick Jeffery from Christmas Island National Park attended the first International Pacific Invasive Ant Conference in Hawaii. The team on Christmas Island are pioneering crazy ant control. Mick was able to exchange advice and experience with other delegates and establish links with other experts in the field. The conference attracted over 150 ant specialists from across the Pacific
- The ANBG is contributing to a review of seed banking in Australia, in cooperation with State and Territory botanic gardens and the Kew Gardens *Millennium Seed Bank* project. The aim is to develop a long-term national germplasm strategy
- The ANBG maintained its strong ties with CSIRO Plant Industry in jointly managing the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research and the Australian National Herbarium
- Kakadu hosted the Weed Management Workshop in November 2007 and a subsequent Fire Management Workshop in April 2008 bringing researchers, traditional owners and park staff together to discuss and debate current knowledge and emerging issues
- A whole of government partnership approach to managing marine reserves has ensured stronger engagement with the Australian Customs Service, other Australian Government agencies, and a range of state government agencies
- Business agreements were made with State Government agencies in Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria to provide for surveillance and compliance services within the South-east Commonwealth Marine Reserve Network
- The 35 metre Australian Customs Vessel, *Ashmore Guardian*, was successfully deployed to Ashmore Reef in April 2008. This vessel was specially modified for working at Ashmore. It accommodates up to 10 Customs officers and government officials, to provide a near permanent compliance and management presence at Ashmore Reef. Since beginning operations, Customs officers have distributed information to crew and passengers of 45 traditional Indonesian fishing vessels, 2 motorised Indonesian fishing vessels and 4 recreational sailing vessels. Warnings were also issued to a number of traditional vessels found in the closed area. During this period, the Department utilised the vessel to survey sea snake populations, known to be declining in the area, as well as continue environmental monitoring projects such as marine debris collections

- In May 2008, the Marine Division hosted a 2-day workshop in Brisbane on science for managing remote coral reef marine protected areas (MPAs). The main aims of the workshop were to discuss knowledge gaps relevant to adaptive management of remote coral reef MPAs and to improve the application of research findings into adaptive management of MPAs.

The workshop was attended by 34 participants, including reserve managers, scientists and representatives from the Coral Triangle Initiative. The main outcomes from the workshop included improved understanding of how science can support adaptive management of MPAs, identification of options for improving communications and partnerships among scientists and managers, and establishment of a functional network for ongoing discussions and support



*A partnership with the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA (PIRSA) provides sea patrols to monitor activities within the Great Australian Bight Marine Park (Commonwealth Waters)*

- In January 2008 CSIRO scientists and their US colleagues conducted a voyage to the southern parts of the South-east Commonwealth Marine Reserve Network. The research undertook high resolution video surveys, as well as targeted benthic sampling, and went deeper than ever before in Australian waters. The results from this work will provide greater understanding of the values of the reserves and will inform the ongoing research plan for the network
- The Director of National Parks participated in a meeting of heads of park agencies from around the world in October 2007, held in Inverness, Scotland, to discuss global environmental challenges affecting protected areas. Issues discussed included the role of protected areas in sequestering carbon, adapting to climate change, social and economic values of protected areas, and measuring and reporting on management effectiveness
- Effective partnerships with research organisations continued, including the Australian National University (through an Australian Research Council linkage grant) on a major project on fire and biodiversity at Booderee, collaboration with scientists in the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service monitoring the impacts of fire on vegetation and small mammals in Kakadu, CSIRO on marine biodiversity and bioregion characterisation, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, James Cook University, Charles Darwin University and the University of Queensland
- A wide range of volunteers continued to provide valuable support for reserve management, public education and scientific research, especially through the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens and the Conservation Volunteers Australia teams on weed control at Uluru

## Managing our business and people

We continued to progressively review and improve our business and people management practices and to aim for higher standards. Our staff continued to be our most significant and outstanding resource.

- Our safety record continues to improve, with a reduction in safety incidents
- The appointments at Kakadu, Uluru and Christmas Island of new park managers, Sarah Kerin, Lara Musgrave and Marjorie Gant saw women leading these three parks for the first time. Anne Duncan's appointment as Director of the ANBG further boosted the number of female executive level staff in Parks Australia
- A new Executive level position of Director, Tourism and National Landscapes, was created to support the escalating workload of the partnership with Tourism Australia. Hilary Schofield was appointed to this role
- Lyn Valentine joined the Darwin office to head the Parks Policy and Services Section
- Con Boekel retired from his position as Assistant Secretary of Parks Australia South after a long career in the APS. His long, diverse and valuable contributions to the Department were acknowledged by the Secretary. Of particular note was Con's passionate championing of the need for a long-term commitment to substantial investment in the development and employment of Indigenous staff and support for Indigenous enterprises. He saw these as a key to more effective biodiversity conservation and a means of improving Indigenous well-being. He contributed significantly to the initiation and design of the new Working on Country Program and additional support for Indigenous Rangers
- Many other staff members contributed above and beyond what could reasonably be expected, and moved on to other pastures. Steve Ewings played a valued role as acting Uluru Park Manager, following the resignation of Rowan Foley. John Henderson returned to Victoria after nearly ten years valued service at Norfolk and Uluru
- Graeme Beech took leave from his position at Booderee to help establish effective management arrangements for the Kokoda Track in PNG—an initiative of the Prime Minister
- Formal recognition of outstanding staff occurred through Australia Day Awards to Ismail Macrae (long-term contribution to conservation, through management of the natural and heritage values of the Cocos-Keeling Islands Territory, including Pulu Keeling National Park) and David Philips (outstanding contribution to the establishment and management of the Australian Government's parks and park policy development for more than 25 years). A Secretary's Award was presented to Mike Johnson for his valued practical and expert technical and engineering advice for field staff and managers, the preparation of innumerable tender and contract specifications, and the oversight of most major construction projects in Kakadu and Uluru over the last 15 years

- Over 120 staff members were trained during the year in Risk Management and Parksafe
- Several major insurance claims that addressed the damage caused at Kakadu by Cyclone Monica, and by a severe local storm at Mary River, were finalised
- The new Government committed \$1.5m towards addressing the water infrastructure needs of the ANBG. The first steps in securing and delivering an alternative water supply were initiated with design work to separate out the ANBG irrigation system from the potable water supply system. Tenders were called for the design and costing of infrastructure for the supply of water from Lake Burley Griffin
- A major investment in upgrading our approach to occupational health and safety resulted in the completion of over 70 Job Safety Assessments
- Five graduates from Booderee National Park and Wreck Bay gained their Certificate III in Tourism (Operations) from Illawarra TAFE
- Compulsory tour guide training for Kakadu is now in place in cooperation with Charles Darwin University. Training is available on-line
- Two of Uluru's *Anangu* trainee rangers, Wayne Curtis and Phillip Driffen, started their traineeships in October last year
- Marine Division staff completed a shipboard safety course to ensure they are adequately prepared to carry out patrols to Commonwealth marine reserves
- Active Junior Ranger programs continued in the three jointly managed parks, working closely with local schools
- The new Norfolk Island and Botanic Garden Plan of Management 2008-2018 was completed in February 2008
- Preparation of Management Plans commenced for:
  - Christmas Island National Park
  - Australian National Botanic Gardens
  - Booderee National Park
  - South-east Commonwealth Marine Reserve Network
- The Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Draft Management Plan is expected to be released for public comment in late 2008
- Our financial control framework is sound and well regarded by internal and external auditors. We recorded a small surplus, which is largely the result of lower depreciation arising from slight delays in several projects. Chief Executive Instructions have been reviewed and reissued. We continue to improve our financial management policies and procedures in the light of better practice guidance and standards

## Looking ahead

Our funding pressures are intensifying. The one year extension, for 2008-09, of the supplementation received to compensate for the abolition of Kakadu park-use fees in 2004, has triggered urgent consideration of alternative income streams for the park for introduction in the following financial year.

Invasive weeds and introduced animals continue to pose major threats despite good progress on some fronts.

Further investment is essential to improve training and employment opportunities for traditional owners of our three large parks. Improving visitor facilities, refreshing the presentation and interpretation of our parks and enhancing partnerships with the tourism industry, remain high priorities.

We need to increase our efforts to address climate change through reducing our emissions and by adapting our management approaches in the light of the best available information on anticipated impacts. Securing an alternative water supply to maintain the living collection at the Australian National Botanic Gardens remains a pressing issue needing resolution.

Our revenue base needs to diversify and grow to help us meet these challenges.

While the purpose and nature of our work continues to retain and attract talented and committed staff, we need to continue to acknowledge and value their contributions and achievements and to invest in building skills and capabilities.

We also need to continue to regularly re-think how we work, to find further efficiencies across our business, and ensure we make the best use of our resources.