



Building the National Reserve System

The National Reserve System – Australia’s network of parks, reserves and protected areas – is a vital part of our national effort to conserve biodiversity.

It protects examples of Australia’s distinctive landscapes, plants and animals for future generations, and is often referred to as nature’s safety net in the face of climate change.

The Australian Government is investing \$180 million over five years to accelerate development of the National Reserve System. This is one of the six national priorities of the Government’s \$2.25 billion initiative *Caring for our Country*.

The funding will be rolled out from 1 July 2008. It will help to add important habitat to the National Reserve System in two ways.

- **Helping to buy land for new reserves**

Under *Caring for our Country*, partners can apply for help from the Australian Government to buy land for new reserves.

The Government will provide up to two-thirds of the cost of purchasing an approved property, which will then be owned and managed as part of the National Reserve System by the partner organisation.

- **Supporting conservation covenants**

Often landowners, such as farmers, have stretches of habitat on their properties that they would like to see protected for future generations. If this habitat is a priority for addition to the National Reserve System, then the landowner can apply for Government support to protect it.

The landowner will need to sign a perpetual conservation covenant – like an environmental contract – in which they agree to protect that part of their property. They are free to continue earning a living from the rest of their land, and can receive help from the Government to manage their ‘protected area’.

This help is tailored to the needs and circumstances of each landowner, but it can include advice, professional services, materials and/or funding. Because the covenants are ‘perpetual’, the covenanted area will be protected even if the land is sold. This is a fundamental requirement for addition to the National Reserve System.

Improvements

The \$180 million investment through *Caring for our Country* significantly increases Australian Government funding for the National Reserve System.

It also improves the way funding is delivered in several key ways.

- Administrative processes will be streamlined to maximise the money hitting the ground as new parks and reserves.
- Standard monitoring and reporting systems will be set up across all protected areas funded by the Australian Government, to better track on-ground outcomes.
- The Government will provide up to a maximum of two-thirds of the purchase price for land for new reserves. This will improve transparency and accountability, and guarantee that every dollar the Government invests will leverage at least an extra 50 cents.
- The Government will enhance the existing partnerships, working harder to involve Indigenous communities, farmers and local government in building the National Reserve System.
- The Government will implement strategic approaches to protecting key remnants of bushland in peri-urban areas.
- Funding will be prioritised so that the major gaps in the current reserve system are targeted, alongside those areas that greatly improve the resilience of key biodiversity values in current protected areas.
- A three-year funding cycle will be instituted, so properties that can't be purchased and paid for within one financial year don't have to be overlooked.

Responding to change

These improvements have been driven by some new challenges and opportunities that have emerged in recent years:

- Demographic changes and drought in rural Australia have seen many properties of high conservation value becoming available for purchase, whilst development pressures around major cities and in coastal areas have highlighted the need for urgent action to protect key areas.
- State processes have highlighted urgent priorities, as have crown land lease renewal processes and increased land acquisition budgets.
- The growth of the private conservation sector in recent years has resulted in more opportunities and options being available to fund, establish and manage new protected areas.
- There is an urgent need for accelerated action to respond to the threat that climate change poses for our biodiversity.

The goal remains the same

The Commonwealth will continue to work with the states and territories, conservation groups, the private sector and other partners to develop a comprehensive, adequate and representative National Reserve System.

The existing bioregional framework will remain the Commonwealth's strategic roadmap for developing the reserve system. This 'IBRA' framework was developed and adopted by the Commonwealth, states and territories in the early 1990s, and has been used to monitor progress and identify priorities for new reserves ever since.

It is built on robust science and is regularly reviewed and updated in collaboration with the states and territories.

For more information visit www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/science/scientific-framework.html

Priority areas

Over the next five years there will be a particular focus on the remaining bioregions with very low levels of protection – places such as the arid lands of Central Australia and the Mitchell grass country of north-western Queensland.

The Commonwealth will also target areas of conservation significance on a global scale, such as the world's largest relatively-intact sub-tropical savannah, which stretches across Australia's north from Cape York to the Kimberley.

Find out more

For more information on the National Reserve System and the Commonwealth's investment in building it through *Caring for our Country* visit www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs

For more information on Caring for our Country as a whole visit www.nrm.gov.au/funding/future.html

You can also find out more by calling the Community Information Unit at the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, on 1800 552 008 (free call).