

THE  
VALUE OF PARKS



INSPIRE  
REFRESH  
CONSERVE  
PROTECT  
PLAY



## Acknowledgements

This document has been developed by Parks Forum, Australia and New Zealand's peak body for parks organisations, in partnership with IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas and The People & Parks Foundation.

Parks Forum Ltd was incorporated in 2004 to support the development of a strong, vibrant and cohesive park industry, to provide leadership in parks management in New Zealand and Australia, and to improve the standing of the industry within the community. Membership is by park organisation.



PARKS CONNECTING  
COMMUNITIES

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) is the world's leading global network of protected area specialists. As a Commission of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) its international mission is to promote the establishment and effective management of a world-wide representative network of terrestrial and marine protected areas, as an integral contribution to the IUCN mission



The People & Parks Foundation is an Australian based not-for-profit charity. Founded on the concept that a healthy environment, a healthy community and a healthy lifestyle are inextricably linked, the Foundation's programs encourage people to combine the benefits of physical and mental activity with the health benefits of interaction with nature.



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The Steering Committee wishes to acknowledge David Cochrane, Amanda Cox, Clare Nicolson, John Senior, David Clarke and Ingrid Sieler for their significant contribution to the development of this publication.

### Primary Sponsor

This document has been generously supported by Department of Environment and Climate Change, NSW.



NSW **National Parks  
and Wildlife Service**

### Additional Sponsors

Financial and in-kind support from the Department for Environment and Heritage, South Australia and from Parks Victoria is acknowledged.



Department for  
Environment and Heritage



Healthy Parks  
Healthy People

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Produced by Parks Forum in partnership with IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and The People and Parks Foundation. Printed May 2008.

ISBN 978-0-646-49197-4

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# FOREWORD



*The human species has evolved from, and been nurtured by, the natural environment – we are a biological product of the earth itself. This deep connection is one that we must all remember. Our parks are the storehouse of our past and, more importantly, of our future.*

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All over the world the natural wealth of the planet is in retreat. A mere 100 years ago vast areas of the Earth's forests, oceans, grasslands and deserts were barely touched by humans. Today, virtually every corner of the earth is impacted and struggling to maintain healthy natural systems.

Throughout humanity's evolutionary journey we have lived intimately with nature, understanding that it is the source of our water, food, clothes, tradeable goods, transport and shelter. We have imbued our land and seascapes with special meaning, spirits, stories and songs. This acute ancient connection has largely been lost, yet our intellects and feelings remind us of our ultimate dependence on nature.

Even in our increasingly urbanised lives, most people still have a strong need to 'touch green', to immerse themselves in a natural space – in their own garden, a local park, a large recreation area on the city's edge or a great national park or reserve of Australia or New Zealand. These natural spaces often become our favourite places, having special meaning in our lives. They are crucial to our sense of wellbeing.

Yet, the importance of these vital remnants of the natural world is often underestimated. Our iconic parks and vast natural landscapes not only give us a sense of place and reflect our culture, they also form the basis of a multi-billion dollar tourism industry, and a window through which we are seen by the rest of the world.

Large national parks are the strongholds of our plants, animals and ecosystems with all the values and benefits they bestow, from protecting water quality to providing habitat for marine fisheries. Parks near and in our cities breathe peace and tranquillity, and sustain fun, family time, exercise, sport and the healthy outdoor lifestyle that is such a feature of life in Australia and New Zealand.

I commend this document and its messages on the value of parks to you. The stunning images and case studies highlight how our diverse parks are vital assets to the social, cultural, environmental and economic health of our communities.

Parks deliver many benefits to Australians and New Zealanders now; their importance will only increase with time as the stresses of urbanisation, population growth, climate change and resource depletion impact on our societies. It is our responsibility to ensure the ongoing protection and good management of parks for present and future generations to enjoy and cherish.



John Landy AC CVO MBE

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“Today it is clear  
that protected  
areas are  
fundamental  
necessities for  
the livelihood  
of the whole  
of society.”<sup>1</sup>



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# CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES



*Uluru–Kata Tjuta, the Great Barrier Reef, the Blue Mountains, the Grampians, Fraser Island, Milford Sound, Tongariro, Mt Cook – to name the parks of Australia and New Zealand is to name the most valued and loved landscapes and seascapes in both countries. Our urban parks offer refreshing multi-use spaces like Kings Park in Perth, Centennial Parklands in Sydney and Auckland’s unique Domain, built around an extinct volcano.*

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The value of urban parks, protected areas and private land trusts will only increase as we head towards a future destined for significant challenges. In the first three decades of the 21st century the world’s urban population is predicted to rise from 2.9 billion to 5 billion. The demands of this huge population increase – resources for construction, water, fuel, food and fibre – will place the world’s ecosystems under tremendous pressures, exacerbated by climate change.

## *Parks bestow hope for the future.*

We are already witnessing unprecedented loss of biodiversity and failing of the natural systems that support life on Earth.

Parks protect and conserve biodiversity. They play a vital role in keeping our air and water clean and providing essential services to farming. Parks offer refuges for threatened species and buffers against the impacts of climate change.

Local, regional and state economies benefit significantly from parks. They are a major drawcard for the recreation and tourism industries, and significant sources of employment for local communities and of flow-on economic benefits.

Parks are inspiring and pleasant places to exercise and improve physical and mental wellbeing for today’s sedentary society that is more vulnerable to stress, mental health issues and obesity than ever before. Parks are venues for community sporting activities and places to meet and celebrate with family and friends.

Parks are the scene of excitement, refreshment, relaxation and solitude. They have been a part of our culture for hundreds of years. To the Indigenous people of Australia and New Zealand many parks represent a profound spiritual link to the land. Parks managed by Indigenous peoples can engender improved social and economic outcomes for their communities.

Strategies for ensuring the long-term survival of humanity must include large, healthy park systems across the world. Australia and New Zealand have the capacity to play their part in building and maintaining these systems.

## *Our nations must invest significantly more in parks.*

Only by strengthening our system of protected areas, establishing more urban green spaces and increasing our knowledge and communication of the benefits that parks bring, will we have the capacity to respond to the challenges before us.

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“...protected areas face many challenges, but their most critical role is in stemming the current global species extinction crisis and supporting sustainable development.”<sup>2</sup>



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# PROTECTING OUR NATURAL WORLD



*The environmental value of parks is immense and increasingly significant in our urbanised world. Our networks of diverse parks protect and conserve unique species, ecosystems, landscapes, marine environments and geological features. Parks also supply us with resources. As climate change takes hold, parks will grow in value by protecting carbon-storing vegetation and buffering habitat.*

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## Conserving nature

International efforts to stem the loss of global biodiversity reside principally in parks. Large healthy parks provide safe havens for species by protecting vital habitat and helping them retain their natural resilience to climatic changes. Many city parks conserve what is left of our dwindling urban biodiversity.

Since European settlement, the habitat of many native New Zealand and Australian species has been severely depleted or destroyed. Without parks to protect the habitat that remains, these species will be increasingly threatened by human settlement.

*New Zealand has over 5800 native species of which around half are listed as 'threatened'. Australia has almost 1600 threatened species (340 fauna and 1250 flora).<sup>3</sup> Their continued survival relies, in many cases, on the protection of parks.*

Parks also form the core of a new, innovative approach to conservation that is establishing habitat linkages through vegetation corridors across the landscape – on public and private lands. Many scientists view 'connectivity conservation' as the best way of maximising nature's resilience against climate change and other threats.<sup>4</sup>

Parks such as zoological and botanical gardens also help secure populations of species in the long term. Joint threatened species recovery programs use the latest scientific breeding and release techniques to prevent species extinctions.

## Sustaining the variety of life

Parks protect a huge variety of plants and animals that may one day play an important role in human health and biotechnology. One quarter of the world's medicines and pharmaceuticals are derived from plants and another quarter from animals. We have used for food only about 3000 of the 75,000 known food plant species; only 150 species have been cultivated on a large scale. Plant and animal products are used widely in industry and biotechnology.<sup>5</sup> We have only begun to scratch the surface of the possibilities.

The protection afforded by parks allows scientists to secure diverse species for varied research with potentially huge benefits for humanity. To date, only a small percentage of Australia's endemic species have been examined for their pharmaceutical and bio-discovery potential.

*Griffith University's Pharmaceutical Research Institute is investigating coastal marine organisms and rainforest plants from Queensland, for products with potential therapeutic cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and respiratory use.<sup>6</sup>*

## Protecting the Earth's outstanding features and processes

Parks protect significant geological and geographical features of New Zealand and Australian land- and seascapes. These physical features are often national icons as well as major tourist attractions and regional economic generators.



Picture the Bungle Bungle massif in Purnululu National Park, Western Australia, the erosion stacks of the Twelve Apostles and weathered lunette of Mungo National Park, New South Wales, and the massive dunes of Fraser Island, Queensland. In New Zealand, the volcanoes Taranaki and Ruapehu, geothermals of Taupo and Rotorua, Fox and Franz Josef mountain glaciers and Milford Sound fiords are visions splendid.

Fossils, karsts and cave features like stalactites and stalagmites engage park visitors in educational and scientific enquiry, and introduce them to our natural history.

*Formed more than 30 million years ago, the world renowned Waitomo Glowworm Caves are a spectacular example of a limestone karst and cave system. First explored in 1887 by Maori Chief Tane Tinorau and English surveyor Fred Mace, the two levels including the Glowworm Grotto, the Cathedral and the Tomo (a 16 metre ancient waterfall) enthral and educate hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.<sup>7</sup>*

## Storing carbon

Parks are significant assets in the fight against climate change. They contain large areas of native forests which remove carbon dioxide (the most abundant greenhouse gas) from the atmosphere and store it for generations. Forests account for almost 60% of the carbon that exists in the Earth's vegetation and soils.

*Australia's forests store an estimated 1.5 billion tonnes of carbon. The carbon store has accumulated from forest plants having removed almost 38.5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, about 70 times Australia's annual net greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>8</sup> Around 13%<sup>9</sup> of Australia's native forests are protected in parks.*

*Similarly, New Zealand's indigenous forests are carbon reservoirs. Along with forest-scrub, they store an estimated 1.9 billion tonnes of carbon (in above and below ground vegetation, including litter<sup>10</sup>). About 80% of the indigenous forest of New Zealand is part of the network of protected areas.<sup>11</sup>*

## Maintaining clean air and water

Vegetation cleans and filters water, traps sediment, recycles nutrients, stabilises slopes and slows runoff to improve the quality of water for human consumption, agriculture and power generation. Without the large expanses of intact native vegetation that parks protect, the costs of water filtration and flood mitigation would skyrocket.

*The Ramsar-listed Whangamarino Wetland in New Zealand plays a critical role in flood control on the Lower Waikato River. Its water storage during peak flows, of which there have been several in the last decade, negates the need for public works and their costs, and reduces damage to surrounding farmland.<sup>12</sup>*





*Namadgi National Park provides up to 85% of Canberra's water from the Cotter Catchment in the ACT. The economic value of this eco-service alone is estimated to be at least \$100 million per year.*

*A recent study of water filtration by permanent wetlands, many of which are protected in parks, calculated that they provide more than \$7000 worth of water purification per hectare each year.<sup>13</sup>*

Trees act as the 'green lungs' of our cities and towns. Their leaves naturally filter the air by stabilising dust<sup>14</sup> and absorbing pollutants<sup>15</sup>. A United States study estimated that dust levels in an urban park in Georgia were 60% lower than outside the park.<sup>15</sup>

## **Supporting primary industry**

Parks protect important native habitat for many bird and other animal species that provide significant economic benefits to farmers. Bees, moths, butterflies and other insects play a crucial role in the pollination of many food crops; insectivorous birds and bats eat pests of pastures and crops; and birds of prey control vermin such as mice and rats.

*Honeybees account for 90–100% of the yield in crops such as almond, apple, avocado, blueberry, cherry, rockmelon, watermelon and zucchini. Crops such as canola and cotton can gain yield increases of more than 15% with honeybee pollination.<sup>16</sup>*

Without parks protecting a vast array of beneficial species, farmers would need to use pesticides more often and production would decline in crops that rely on pollination, with significant social, economic and environmental consequences.

## **Cooling our cities**

The green spaces in urban areas break up reflected heat from hard surfaces to bring a cooling effect. Through the shade they provide, trees can buffer buildings from excessive heat and reduce energy consumption and the costs of air-conditioning. The evaporation from a large tree is estimated to produce the cooling effect of 10 room-sized air-conditioners.

*Brisbane City Council has mapped the landscape assets of the city and identified that urban parks with shade trees provide greater cooling 'services' (by up to 5°C) than those areas without shade trees.<sup>17</sup>*

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“A healthy parks system is a vital component of a healthy community.”<sup>18</sup>



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# BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



*Contact with nature enriches our psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Parks are places of adventure and challenge, exercise, peace and quiet, recreation, gathering and relaxation. In them, we find a sense of enjoyment, strong community spirit and wonder in nature. Parks offer a range of recreation activities to bring families and friends together in appealing places.*

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## Improving physical health

The huge variety of spaces in parks, from trackless wilderness and mountain peaks to quiet green corners in local neighbourhoods, encourage all forms of exercise. Urban parks are places for organised and casual sport and exercise, from football to Tai Chi. Their play spaces and outdoor activity areas build up children's and young people's wellbeing.<sup>19</sup> More natural protected areas allow a range of healthy and vigorous outdoor activities like hiking, mountain biking, canoeing and mountaineering.

Recent research<sup>20</sup> has found that natural environments offer low-cost preventative and remedial opportunities for public health. Good health initiatives are now understood to be crucial in controlling healthcare costs and governments are investing in programs to promote healthier lifestyles.

Parks are pleasant and accessible settings for combating the effects of our increasingly sedentary lifestyles, such as obesity, high blood pressure and depression. Our parks are alive every day with people jogging, walking, cycling and even working with personal trainers.

*In New Zealand, 53,000 people annually walk the Queen Charlotte Track<sup>21</sup> and 14,000 walk the Milford Track<sup>22</sup>.*

*A study in the United States found that people who used local parks for recreation reported fewer visits to the doctor than did non-park users. Active park users were found to be healthier than non-park users for a number of measures including blood pressure, body mass index and levels of depression.<sup>23</sup>*

## Enhancing mental health and wellbeing

In Australia and New Zealand today, one in five people will experience depression, and more than 6 million working days are lost each year in Australia as a result.<sup>24</sup> Regular exercise in green spaces has many mental health benefits.

*In a study of people suffering from mental illness, 90% or more of them indicated that green exercise activities had benefited their mental health, they had greater self esteem, focus of mind, were more relaxed, more motivated, enjoyed an improved quality of life, and felt 'refreshed and alive'.<sup>25</sup>*

Postnatal depression is the most prevalent mood disorder associated with childbirth and affects up to 15% of childbearing women.<sup>26</sup> Contact with nature in parks can make a difference.

*The World's Greatest Pram Stroll (Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales)<sup>27</sup> and the monthly Buggy Walk (Wellington)<sup>28</sup> are regular initiatives that promote and facilitate the formation of pram strolling groups to meet, exercise and socialise at local parks. These groups reduce social isolation to mitigate against the impact of postnatal depression.*

*Strong evidence of the advantages of contact with nature encouraged the Royal Children's Hospital to integrate a hospital-park system of landscape design into its new location adjacent to Royal Park in Melbourne.*



Recent studies on nature-based or ‘ecotherapy’ interventions in mainstream medical treatment have shown that they help speed recovery, reduce prescription drug dependency and lower nursing support. Ecotherapy is emerging in the western world as a clinically valued treatment option. In the United Kingdom it is a core component of the public mental health strategy.

*An Australian ecotherapy study Feel Blue Touch Green indicated that for people experiencing depression, anxiety or social isolation, participation in a conservation group undertaking environmental programs has mental and physical health benefits and improves general wellbeing.<sup>29</sup>*

## Bringing people together

In parks, families and friends can come together to have fun, celebrate important occasions or just relax and take time out. This immense social value is part of the ‘glue’ of a healthy society.

Across Australia and New Zealand, tens of thousands of people participate in parks volunteering and Friends of Parks groups. They meet regularly to socialise and contribute to park management.

*Pacific Island and new migrant communities are encouraged to use and engage with their regional parks at Auckland Regional Council. The Diverse Communities program helps them become aware of recreational and educational programs, exercise, and build appreciation of New Zealand’s unique natural environment, its history and how to care for it. The program supports community cohesiveness and encourages participants to take part in landcare and volunteer programs together with the council’s 2500 registered volunteers, numerous schools and private corporations.<sup>30</sup>*

As venues for adult and junior sporting clubs, parks provide space for physical exercise, and support team building, making friends and building a sense of civic pride.



## Supporting science and learning

Many parks include critical ‘outside laboratories’ for scientific research on the functioning of ecological systems and processes. In 2003–2004, Queensland alone issued 215 permits for scientific research in national parks.<sup>31</sup>

In park programs such as Sea Search<sup>32</sup> and Reef Check<sup>33</sup> everyone can learn about the vital importance of protecting our environment and develop a love of nature that is the basis for any conservation ethic.

People can learn from formal interpretation programs run by park managers and incidentally through brochures, signage or casual observation. School groups use parks for a broad range of environmental education activities.

*The Naracoorte Caves National Park in South Australia, a World Heritage listed park, offers unique educational programs for school children covering World Heritage values, geology, cave science, palaeontology, bats and their biology, and tourism. The programs take a hands-on approach to learning. Students can reconstruct skeletons, dig for fossils and tour caves to learn about evolution, extinction, adaptation and conservation.<sup>34</sup>*

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“Parks bring measurable direct and flow-on economic benefits to local, regional and national economies. These economic benefits enable communities to function and prosper, allowing them to build social cohesion, social capital and healthy communities.”<sup>35</sup>



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# CONTRIBUTING TO OUR ECONOMY



*The importance of parks to economic growth and wellbeing cannot be overstated. Parks contribute directly to the local, regional, state and national economies of Australia and New Zealand through tourism, employment (on and off parks) and expenditure on park management and services. Parks also encourage private and public sector investment in roads, tourism infrastructure and commercial services, and have considerable recreational value to visitors. Property close to urban parks has been shown to have higher values. Parks also offer free space for events and recreational activities.*

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## Underpinning our tourism industry

Parks are the central focus for our nations' tourism industries, which are significant contributors to national economies. Nature- and culture-based tourism is the fastest growing sector in the Australian tourism market. Every year, thousands of people visit national icons such as Uluru–Kata Tjuta, Kakadu, Cradle Mountain, Great Barrier Reef, Flinders Ranges, Milford Sound, the Franz Josef Glacier and the geothermal springs of Rotorua – all of which are protected in parks.

*Across Australia the natural attractions offered by national parks and marine parks attract around 80 million visits annually. Visits continue to grow as more people are motivated by 'the enjoyment and experience of nature'. Parks represent the greatest tourism assets in Australia – over 40% of all international visits take in a national park.<sup>36</sup>*

National parks are also a conduit to the development of regional areas. Tourism expenditure as part of a park visit or expedition, provides vital support for regional economies.

*The contribution of national parks, marine parks and forests to the regional economies of the Southern Forest Region and Gascoyne Coast Region of Western Australia are significant to regional communities.*

*Expenditure attributed to visitors to the national parks, marine parks and forests in the two regions in 2004<sup>37</sup> was:*

<i>Southern Forest Region</i>	<i>\$61.9–70.5 million</i>
<i>Gascoyne Coast Region</i>	<i>\$127–138 million</i>

## Supporting the recreational industry

In response to growing demand for adventure experiences, ecotourism operators are increasing their expenditure on vessels, vehicles and equipment for fishing, rock climbing, rafting and canoeing, mountain bike riding, orienteering and hiking pursuits.

*Our marine parks help to sustain recreational fishing by conserving species diversity, natural interactions between species and other important ecological processes. The recreational fishing industry in Australia is worth an estimated \$2.9 billion per year.<sup>38</sup>*

The significant outdoor clothing and equipment manufacturing industry and retail market caters for individuals from the casual bushwalker to the more adventurous fisher, rock climber or diver. Over 1200 camping and outdoor recreation equipment stores sell merchandise across Australia and New Zealand and many more businesses support recreational activities with the sale of boats, 4-wheel drives, tents, caravans and camping trailers.<sup>39</sup>

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## Employing people

Parks directly employ staff, and generate local and regional economic activity in maintaining and managing parks. Visitors spend money on park services such as food, accommodation and entrance fees. Parks cost money to manage but generate a greater and significant economic benefit.

*At the Grampians National Park, Victoria, \$2.6 million was spent on park management services in 2001. Expenditure by tourists generated a substantial economic benefit to the state's economy of \$246 million.*<sup>35</sup>

Park benefits flow on to other supporting industries such as accommodation, food, souvenir and recreation providers. Parks across Australia and New Zealand issue at least 5000 licences to commercial tourism operators for a diverse range of activities.<sup>40</sup>

*Each year nearly 2 million tourists and 4.9 million recreational visitors visit the Great Barrier Reef. It generates 54,000 full-time jobs and contributes \$5.1 billion dollars to the Australian economy.*<sup>41</sup>

*Parks can provide Indigenous employment and, with the increasing number of jointly managed parks, create small businesses. Parks Australia directly employs over 50 Indigenous people in Kakadu, Uluru–Kata Tjuta and Booderee National Parks and many more are actively involved in running the parks through Indigenous-owned enterprises and joint management arrangements.*<sup>42</sup>

## Enhancing property values

Urban parks also have clear economic values. Proximity and park views add to the residential value of a home.

*Eminent US researcher Dr John Crompton has concluded that neighbouring an urban park can add 20% to house values, creating a genuine financial offset to the cost of not developing park space as residential space.*<sup>43</sup>

## Providing free space for the community

Parks (and particularly urban parks) are used by local communities for promotional and recreational activities and as places to meet and gather. They contribute to the development of cohesive and vibrant societies.

Urban parks are of huge economic value to their respective communities and are often the feature of local promotions and events aimed at encouraging local, interstate and international visitors. Melbourne's ambience is determined in large part by its magnificent public parklands, including the Royal Botanic Gardens.

*The Adelaide Park Lands, which ring the CBD, cover an area of 688 hectares. In 2005–2006 the park lands contributed over \$130 million to the South Australian economy from 2.7 million general visitors, 1.3 million visitors to its Botanic Gardens, 83,737 patrons of its golf links and the conduct of more than 800 events.*<sup>44</sup>

*Floriade, Australia's premier spring festival attracts over 300,000 visits annually to Commonwealth Park in Canberra. Interstate and international visitors (48%) and local visitors help to contribute \$13.8 million in direct expenditure to the capital's economy.*<sup>45</sup>

Across Australia and New Zealand, a host of commercial and community activities, including social and corporate group activities, take place in our metropolitan parks every day. The community and business have the advantage of the free, or minimum cost, space.

*Without access to the public open space that metropolitan parks provide, it was estimated that community service groups would incur an additional \$10.6 - \$14.6 million in program costs per year in the Greater Sydney region.*<sup>46</sup>





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“Places of cultural heritage enrich people’s lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape.”<sup>47</sup>



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# REFLECTING OUR CULTURE



*Parks protect sites of great social, cultural and spiritual value to Australian and New Zealand communities. They are part of our living culture and a window to our past. Their significant role in safeguarding the heritage of our Indigenous cultures goes back thousands of years. They also conserve and protect the cultural heritage of European settlement sites in Australia and New Zealand.*

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## Inspiring our hearts and souls

Of all the benefits our magnificent parks provide, it is their capacity to inspire us that may be the most important. At mountains, waterfalls, gorges, forests, reefs, islands, deserts and wetlands we can lose ourselves in nature, and find tranquillity, enjoyment or adventure. The profound meaning of parks was displayed when the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games torch began its journey at Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park.

*Australia has many great photographers inspired by our spectacular wilderness and natural areas. The late Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis were two of Australia's greatest wilderness photographers whose work has become synonymous with campaigns to protect Tasmania's natural heritage.*

The natural world has always been a central inspiration for writers, artists, philosophers and musicians. In modern times the environment is a key subject matter for movies, documentaries and books.

Art galleries contain an array of paintings that record historic landscapes and also capture a different view of nature.

*The National Gallery of Victoria, in partnership with Parks Victoria, has developed a gallery 'trail' of exhibition paintings, *The Altered Land*, which highlights environmental and park management issues and illustrates the ways in which artists have captured the changing Australian landscape.*

*In the Flinders Ranges National Park, Ikara is an award-winning public art project that acknowledges the contribution of the Adnyamathanha people to the region's changing physical, social and cultural landscape from the dreaming, through European settlement and the pastoral era, to the present. Ikara (meeting place) is used by the Adnyamathanha people as a place of inspiration and to communicate and share their culture with visitors.*

## Conserving Indigenous cultural landscapes

For Indigenous peoples the natural and spiritual worlds are closely intertwined. The health of landscapes, plants and animals is integral to cultural wellbeing and, in some areas, livelihood. Many parks are truly 'cultural landscapes'. New Zealand's Ruapehu volcano, which is *tapu* or sacred to Maori, and the rock art galleries of Kakadu have been recognised as World Heritage.

*New Zealand's parks give particular recognition to Maori history. Te Kauri Park, named after the spectacular Kauri tree, is one of many parks that conserve the connection to past use of the landscape. The park protects the remains of kumara 'gardens' and shell middens, evidence that Maori travellers used to pass through the land on their journeys inland.<sup>48</sup>*

In many park systems the traditional owners, jointly or wholly, manage parks. They contribute to decision making and inform planning and operations with traditional ecological knowledge.



Indigenous management can mean that visitors to parks are exposed to the richness of Indigenous stories and views of the world around them. They may, in turn, better understand and respect Indigenous people.

*Kaumataua (elders) are working with Manukau City Council to protect significant cultural sites. The Otuataua Stonefields are possibly the largest neolithic archaeological site in the world. In the historic reserve that protects them, the Makaurau Marae cultural interpretation program tells visitors of ancestral history, traditions and interaction with the environment. Pukaki Marae kaumatua believe that their co-management relationship for the Pukaki Lagoon Explosion Crater site will develop a park that is recognised for its natural and cultural heritage, landscape and recreational values, for all the people of Manukau City.<sup>49</sup>*

The participation of Indigenous communities in park management also has social and economic benefits.

*Of the communities involved in Indigenous Protected Areas in Australia:*

- 85% report that this improved early school engagement
- 74% report that this makes a positive contribution to the reduction of substance abuse
- 95% report economic participation and development benefits.<sup>50</sup>

*Nitmiluk National Park located near Katherine is one of the Northern Territory's major national parks and drives the regional tourism economy. In 1989, the land was handed back to the Jawoyn traditional owners who have since jointly managed the park with the Territory Government. "The Park is ... a key to our children's future, providing training, employment and commercial opportunities. We welcome the many people from over the world that come to see Nitmiluk. We want them to enjoy the Park and learn about Jawoyn culture and how we own and manage the Park." (Robert Lee, 2002, Chairman, Nitmiluk National Park Board).<sup>51</sup>*



## Conserving European cultural history

Cultural and historic sites that reflect the rich and exciting history of European settlement in their buildings and landscapes are the focus of some parks.

Significant sites in Australia include the Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania, the historic lighthouse keepers' settlements of Kangaroo Island and the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens in Melbourne, which is the first non-Aboriginal cultural site in Australia to achieve World Heritage Listing.

In New Zealand, parks protect important European heritage sites such as the Government Buildings Historic Reserve in Wellington, the Arrowtown Chinese Settlement in Central Otago and the Campbell Island World Heritage Site, which served as a base for sealing, whaling, wartime coastal defence and meteorological observation.

*The Port Arthur Historic Site contains many traces of its former uses, including the 19th century prison and the later free township of Carnarvon/Port Arthur. The site interprets and conserves evidence of the diverse historical periods that have created Port Arthur. Today the site attracts over 250,000 visitors and contributes \$20 million to the local economy annually.<sup>52</sup>*

## Supporting many cultures

Our urban parks are increasingly the site of a range of community and multicultural activities including festivals and special events such as ethnic community garden schemes and migrant community days, which support communication, engagement and cooperation.

*A survey conducted at Bobbin Head in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park showed that 20% of respondents spoke a language other than English at home – the most common being Mandarin and Cantonese.<sup>53</sup>*

The NSW Parks and Wildlife Service has researched the significant value of parks to ethnic communities. Macedonian migrants indicate that parks allow the community to come together *en masse* to speak their language, drink grappa, sing and dance without fear of ridicule.<sup>54</sup>

*Sydney Olympic Park has hosted many festivals including the Brazilian Ritmo, the Hindu Deepavali, the Arabic Carnivale, the India-Australia Friendship Fair and the Bengali New Year or Boishakhi Mela. The large surrounding Arabic community uses the park for many ceremonies including celebration of the end of the Ramadan and Haj festivals.<sup>55</sup>*

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“Protected areas are genetic storehouses that promise a healthier future for the planet and its peoples. Safeguarding these precious areas means safeguarding our future.”<sup>56</sup>



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# INSURING OUR FUTURE



*Urban parks, the large regional parks on our city edges, and the great national parks and reserves of Australia and New Zealand are real and tangible assets of extraordinary value – economically, environmentally, culturally and socially. They are a vital part of the physical and social infrastructure of our nations.*

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Large healthy park systems will form a critical part of our response to deal effectively with the increasing pressures of climate change, population growth and urban expansion. Parks will help ‘insure’ our future. We must invest more seriously in parks to ensure that they continue to deliver their current benefits and can be used for further benefit in the future.

It is time that we started treating parks as the critical global assets that they are by taking the following essential steps.

## **Greening our cities, building our reserves**

We need to extend our parks in cities and towns, on the urban periphery, and across the landscape and seascape. Our urban landscapes need plentiful and varied parks and green space connected by more cycling and walking trails.

Beyond our cities and towns, we need to continue to build comprehensive, adequate and representative systems of protected areas and encourage conservation on all types of public and private land.

*The task is urgent.*

## **Valuing our parks**

Traditionally, the value of parks, particularly their economic value, has not been estimated and thus the cost of failing to maintain these assets has not been fully considered. All assets – bricks and mortar, intellectual property, institutions, social networks – must be maintained or they will deteriorate. Our parks are no exception. We must continue to support research that evaluates, quantifies and communicates the many values and benefits of parks as a basis for continued investment.

## **Working together for healthy parks**

The future of parks is collaborative and inclusive. The Healthy Parks Healthy People program – state parks bodies working with sporting and health organisations – promulgates the link between a healthy parks system and wellbeing. This collaborative approach is the way of the future.

Nature conservation has also moved well beyond federal and state government and the environment movement to include Indigenous people, private landowners, private land trusts, community groups, schools, local governments and corporations. It is, after all, in everyone’s interest.

In the future we need mechanisms to build bridges and link portfolios, creating partnerships for industry improvement and development. They must also extend internationally to share knowledge and expertise.



## **Managing parks for survival under climate change**

Australia and New Zealand are forecast to experience a variety of climatic changes. Changing weather patterns will deepen threats to native plants, wildlife and their habitats. Good management practices, such as fire management and pest control, will be even more important.

A 2007 report from WWF–Australia and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas stressed three priorities to assist nature to survive:

expand parks and protected areas to secure key refuges for species; manage threatening processes, particularly feral animals and weeds; and maximise linkages and connectivity in the broader landscape to ensure natural processes can continue.<sup>4</sup>

## **Investing in our future**

The evidence in this document demonstrates the benefits of our parks to environmental, economic and social health. It calls, loudly and strongly, for increased investment in parks, and in their management and promotion.





*We are intrinsically linked  
to our environment.*

*How we manage the cumulative  
threats to nature of climate  
change and rapid urbanisation  
will determine the social,  
cultural and economic viability  
of our communities.*

*Ultimately, environmental  
health is the foundation of  
human health and wellbeing.*

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