

WILDERNESS POLICY

AUGUST 1989

NPNCA

1. INTRODUCTION

The Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 provides for the declaration and management of wilderness areas.

There is growing awareness and concern within the community that land satisfying the criteria for wilderness status should be identified and protected. This concern has several aspects:

Natural ecological systems are essential to life on Earth. Wilderness areas are examples of the most natural, undisturbed land remaining. Their other characteristic of remoteness puts them at a lesser risk of degradation than more accessible areas of natural land.

The identification and protection of wilderness areas serves as an object lesson in a world of limited resources. If the best areas can not be protected what hope is there for areas where degradation and pressure from competing land uses already exist.

The best of nature, protected as wilderness, represents a vast store of knowledge, ideas and resources yet to be discovered. Human society will certainly benefit from such wealth, as it has in the past. Wilderness protection maintains the widest range of options for the future.

The protection of wilderness maintains opportunities for solitude and self-reliant recreation that have always existed and are now recognised as an important part of human experience.

This Policy identifies the objectives of wilderness management and sets out a code of management by which they may be achieved.

2. DEFINITION OF WILDERNESS AREA

A wilderness area is a tract of land substantially unmodified by modern technological society, sufficiently large and remote to make practical the long term protection of its natural systems.

3. OBJECTIVES OF WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT

3.1 To conserve and enhance the natural and remote qualities of wilderness areas, in particular:

- * to protect them from disturbance by modern technological society;
- * to maintain their ecological processes;
- * to allow communities of indigenous plants and animals to continue to flourish and evolve in the wild.

3.2 To maintain opportunities for solitude and self-reliant recreation where compatible with 3.1, above.

3.3 To educate the public in the concept of wilderness.

4. OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE

To manage designated areas of the CALM estate as wilderness in accordance with the above objectives.

5. POLICY

5.1 General Principles

The Department will:

- i) Designate appropriate areas of the conservation estate as wilderness.
- ii) Carry out all management operations in a manner consistent with the maintenance of wilderness quality.
- iii) Adopt a management planning process that sets specific priorities for, and schedules the removal of existing incompatible uses and/or structures except those permitted by this Policy.

- iv) Adopt a management planning process that sets specific priorities for, and schedules appropriate rehabilitation to be undertaken following the removal of incompatible structures and uses.
- v) Disallow any additional incompatible uses and/or structures, except those provided for in this Policy.

5.2 Access and Transport

The Department will:

- i) Not permit the use of any form of mechanised transport except for emergency or essential management operations.
- ii) Liaise with the appropriate authorities controlling aircraft movements to prohibit over-flying under 1500m except for emergency and essential management operations. Overflying above 1500m will also be sought to be excluded or minimised as practicable.
- iii) Not permit the landing of aircraft, except for helicopter access for emergency and essential management operations. Any constructed helipads will be rehabilitated as soon as possible. Existing airstrips will be rehabilitated as soon as possible.
- iv) Not permit the making of vehicle tracks. Existing vehicle tracks will be removed and rehabilitated as soon as possible.
- vi) Not permit the entry or use of domestic animals in wilderness areas.

5.3 Recreation

The Department will:

- i) Provide for the determination of long-term environmental and social visitor carrying capacities in management plans.
- ii) Manage visitor numbers in accordance with the area's environmental and social visitor carrying capacities.

- iii) Allow organised tours only if they are consistent with the maintenance of wilderness quality and operate according to a minimum impact code. Permitted tours will be monitored and regulated where necessary to prevent adverse impacts on wilderness quality and opportunities for solitude.
- iv) Avoid the use of constructed walking tracks, signs, track markers and other management devices except for essential management operations [see (ii) above and 5.9].
- v) Allow recreation, including camping only in accordance with a minimum impact code.
- vi) In any guide books the Department will encourage such recreation as occurs to be dispersed throughout the area.

5.4 Cultural Values

The Department will:

- i) Protect places and artifacts of significance to Aboriginal people under relevant State and Commonwealth Aboriginal heritage legislation.
- ii) Endeavour to ensure that access by Aboriginal people to their sites of significance and protection of these sites is, as far as possible, by methods compatible with the maintenance of wilderness quality.
- iii) Conserve non-Aboriginal structures listed as being significant by either the National Trust or Government heritage bodies, using access and methods compatible with the maintenance of wilderness quality.
- iv) Record and remove other non-Aboriginal cultural structures and artefacts, unless the only method of removal significantly reduces wilderness quality in the long term, in which case they will be allowed to deteriorate naturally.

5.5 Fire

The Department will:

- i) Use techniques for fire management that are consistent with the maintenance of wilderness quality except for emergency management operations (see 5.9).
- ii) Base fire management on continuing research into fire ecology, customary Aboriginal burning practices and the quality of the particular wilderness area.
- iii) Prohibit the use of heavy machinery for fire suppression except where it is considered to be the only way of preventing long term loss of wilderness quality.
- iv) Conduct fire management practices designed to protect land adjacent to wilderness areas only on the land outside the wilderness areas.

5.6 Research

The Department:

- i) May permit research which will contribute to the implementation of wilderness management objectives.
- ii) May Permit research which will not affect wilderness quality and which can not be carried out elsewhere.
- iii) Will not permit research not covered in (i) and (ii) above.

5.7 Biological Conservation

The Department will:

- i) Manage those species which are gazetted likely to become extinct or are rare or otherwise, in need of special protection, as far as possible, in a way that is consistent with the maintenance of wilderness quality.
- ii) Take action to maintain, and where possible restore, natural processes and communities.

5.8 Non-Indigenous Species

The Department will:

- i) Control, and where appropriate remove non-indigenous species, where on the balance such removal would significantly improve wilderness quality.
- ii) Take action where required to prevent the establishment of non-indigenous species.

5.9 Emergency and Essential Management Operations

- i) The Department will carry out all emergency and essential management operations in a manner consistent with the maintenance of wilderness quality.
- ii) The Department may permit the following emergency and essential management actions providing they only cause short term degradation of wilderness quality:
 - * Control and removal of non-indigenous species.
 - * Conservation of species and communities which are likely to become extinct, or are rare or in need of special protection.
 - * Protection of fire sensitive species.
 - * Management of visitor use in accordance with environmental and social carrying capacities.
 - * Provision of devices or action where, otherwise, public safety would be seriously threatened.
 - * Restoration of natural processes and communities.
 - * Research.
 - * Maintenance of Aboriginal culture.

Where degradation of wilderness quality results from the above actions rehabilitation will be undertaken as soon as practicable.

5.10 External Influences

The Department will:

- i) Avoid, where possible, the impact of activities including services and infrastructure associated with tourism outside the wilderness area which may degrade the area's wilderness quality.
- ii) Provide, where appropriate, for management activities essential to the maintenance of the wilderness area's quality to be carried out on land outside the wilderness area.
- iii) Maintain water quality and flow regimes as close as practicable to their natural state over the whole catchment in the case where a wilderness area does not occupy a whole catchment.

5.11 Designated Wilderness Areas

- i) The establishment of wilderness areas should be through the management planning process.