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# PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS FORUM

*A sense of place, for all people, for all time*

## AGENDA FOR ACTION





Western Australia is home to a vast array of plants and animals in beautiful and varied landscapes. Many of these plants and animals occur nowhere else on earth, some are rare species, and others are relics from ancient environments. This inheritance is one that must be protected by everyone for all people, for all time.

Parks and protected areas<sup>1</sup> offer the best means of conserving plant and animal species, the natural communities that they form, and the landscapes and seascapes where they are found. Parks and protected areas also give people the chance to experience and connect to the natural world.

The world's natural environments are in decline from activities such as habitat loss, land degradation, urban development, introduced species and pollution, and now they face the impacts of climate change. These assaults mean that the importance of parks and protected areas has never been greater.

Parks and protected areas are essential to maintain natural and cultural diversity. They are necessary for society to appreciate, value and care for that diversity. They provide places for people to visit and learn about, and they foster a sense of place and belonging and contribute to the values of our community.

A secure, publicly owned and publicly managed system of parks and protected areas is critical to maintaining the diversity of plant and animal life and conserving natural landscapes, and in so doing, ensuring the wellbeing of our society. These areas cannot stand alone and need the support of other lands and waters – public and private – managed for similar purposes.

Parks and protected areas provide scientific benchmarks from which we can evaluate human and natural impacts on natural and cultural values, as well as providing sources of information for study and understanding of the natural and cultural world. This is particularly the case in relation to climate change, because parks and protected areas provide information on its impacts while also contributing to mitigating climate change.

Parks and protected areas are often places where Indigenous peoples can maintain their cultural values, which are inextricably linked to nature and 'Country'. They also provide one means for the development of a range of social benefits for Indigenous people including employment and income.

Parks and protected areas provide important ecosystem services such as helping to regulate the climate and moderate weather, giving us clean air and water, retaining soil and recycling soil nutrients, protecting catchments and storing carbon. The cost of repairing and replacing those services would be insurmountable.

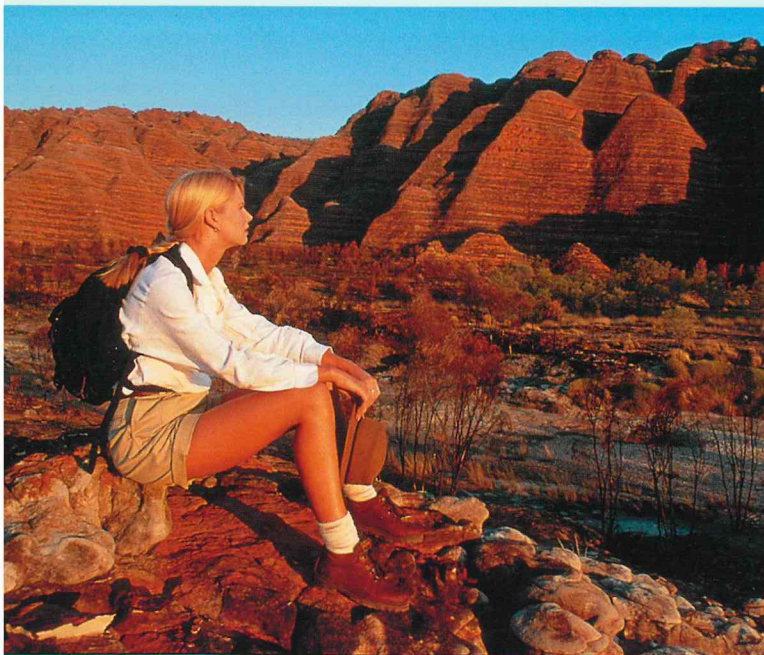
<sup>1</sup> A protected area is an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means (IUCN 1994)





This Forum recognised that:

- A) Climate change is a major threat to the world's environment and society and is expected to have profound impacts on the unique biodiversity of Australia. Parks and protected areas are essential refuges for species affected by the impacts of climate change. They contribute to moderating the impacts of climate change and serve as indicators of change.
- B) The protection of biodiversity as well as of landscapes and seascapes and places of geological significance and those other attributes that are valuable to society's wellbeing should continue to be pursued vigorously by further developing the parks and protected areas system.
- C) Progress has been made towards achieving a comprehensive, adequate and representative parks and protected areas system in Western Australia and also nationally. However, on land we are only half way there and marine areas are greatly under represented in the Western Australian protected areas system.
- D) Estuarine, river and wetland systems are under severe threat and special attention to their reservation and protection is needed.
- E) The integrity of parks and protected areas is being compromised by a lack of sufficient resources for management. Adequate staffing is essential to protect values, to encourage enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of parks and protected areas by visitors, and to engage with local communities.
- F) Indigenous peoples have strong and valid aspirations for involvement in parks and protected areas. They can make a significant contribution to the protection and management of natural and cultural values, as well as benefiting from this involvement.
- G) Privately owned areas managed for their conservation values make an important contribution to preserving and protecting our natural and cultural systems.
- H) Connectivity between parks and protected areas, private reserves and other private land with natural and cultural values across the landscape is an increasingly important strategy in conserving biodiversity and managing the effects of climate change.
- I) Parks and protected areas have the potential to provide for a range of sustainable human activities including well-planned and managed tourism, which make a significant contribution to local and regional economies and to the social wellbeing of the community.
- J) The contribution of parks and protected areas to the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals and the community needs to be more widely understood and valued.





# AGENDA FOR ACTION

Consequently, this Forum endorsed an **Agenda for Action** for Western Australia:

- 1) Pursue a minimum target for a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of terrestrial parks and protected areas of around 15 per cent of total land area by 2018, while reviewing the need for higher targets for some bioregions and for specific values such as threatened and restricted ecosystems and biological communities. The expansion of the marine protected areas system should be pursued as a matter of priority in order to meet the criteria for a comprehensive, adequate and representative system, with an immediate emphasis on the Kimberley and the South Coast.
- 2) State legislation should be amended to reflect the values and benefits of parks and protected areas, and include targets to be attained in the development of a terrestrial and marine parks and protected areas system. All relevant legislation should be reviewed to remove unintended impediments to attaining these targets. To assist in the complementary protection and management of other lands and waters, the biodiversity conservation legislation should be introduced to Parliament as a matter of priority.
- 3) The rights, needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples as they relate to access to land for conservation, tourism and community benefits should be reflected in legislation relating to parks and protected areas and biodiversity conservation, with greater effort being made to increase community appreciation and understanding of these aspirations. Funding should be made available for the participation of Indigenous people in the planning and management of parks and protected areas.
- 4) The contribution through complementary acquisition and management of protected areas by non-government organisations should be reflected in legislation, incentives for private conservation should be enhanced and impediments in legislation and policy to such a contribution should be removed.
- 5) The provision of increased resources for parks and protected areas should be a priority for all stakeholders, with particular priority given to funding a substantial increase in the number of on-ground managers.
- 6) The rights, needs and aspirations of local communities and neighbours should be considered in the acquisition of lands and waters for parks and protected areas and in their management.
- 7) The total value that parks and protected areas contribute to the welfare of Western Australian society needs to be further researched and documented. More effective communication and education on the values and benefits of parks and protected areas should occur, since this is critical to government and protected area agencies attracting involvement in and support for these areas.
- 8) Research to help to understand the impacts of climate change on Western Australia's parks and protected areas should be carried out urgently and programs to help mitigate these impacts should be implemented as a priority.
- 9) Further forums should be conducted across jurisdictions and organisations in Australia to help understand and promote the value of parks and protected areas to our way of life. Such forums should include government, non government, private, commercial and not-for-profit organisations and ensure representation from Indigenous communities, the young and those often at the margins of society.
- 10) Future discussions of parks and protected areas will aim to develop processes that encourage further participation and input from a wide range of sectors, including young people as well as seniors, and rural as well as metropolitan residents in the planning and management of parks and protected areas.

*This statement reflects the views of participants at the Parks and Protected Areas Forum and is not necessarily the adopted policy of the host organisations.*

Photos - Department of Environment and Conservation and Tourism WA