



# about Australia

## Australia's protected areas

- Australia is the driest inhabited continent in the world and was part of Gondwana, the giant landmass that once connected the southern continents of Africa, Antarctica, Australia, India and South America and broke up more than 100 million years ago.

Recognising the need to protect and conserve the natural heritage arising from this historic connection, Australia set up a nationwide network of parks and reserves called the National Reserve System. It conserves examples of Australia's natural landscapes and native plants and animals for future generations. Many Australian species date back to Gondwanan times—the Wet Tropics of Queensland, for example, contain 13 of the 19 families of the most ancient flowering plants known to survive from the days of Gondwana. The Wet Tropics are one of Australia's 15 World Heritage properties listed for their natural values by the United Nations.

Australia's evolving National Reserve System aims to include samples of all ecosystems at an appropriate regional scale. At early 2008, the National Reserve System included over 9000 parks and reserves covering almost 900 000 square kilometres, or more than 11 per cent of Australia's continental land area. In addition to those on the mainland and in Tasmania, there are protected areas located on Australia's oceanic islands and external territories, comprising Norfolk Island (6.5 square kilometres), Lord Howe Island (12.47 square kilometres), Christmas Island (87 square kilometres), Macquarie Island (131.82 square kilometres), Heard Island and McDonald Islands (370 square kilometres) and

Antarctic Specially Protected/Managed Areas (80.15 square kilometres) in the Australian Antarctic Territory.

### National parks and other protected areas

Under the Australian Constitution, the creation and the management of national parks and other nature conservation areas are the responsibility of state governments. However, six national parks, two botanic gardens and 27 marine protected areas are administered by the Australian Government. These include the iconic Uluru–Kata Tjuṯa National Park in central Australia, and Kakadu National Park in the north.

At early 2008, the parks and reserves within the National Reserve System included national parks, Indigenous Protected Areas, nature reserves conservation parks and protected areas on private land.

Australia is considered a world leader in jointly managing protected areas with the land's Indigenous traditional owners. The first joint management arrangement was made with the traditional owners of Kakadu National Park, who lease the land to the Australian Government. Uluru–Kata Tjuṯa National Park and Booderee National Park

are also jointly managed. A growing number of state government managed parks are now being managed with their indigenous owners. A number of other reserves operate under related cooperative management arrangements with advisory committees or councils. In addition, Indigenous people have voluntarily declared 24 Indigenous Protected Areas on their lands, covering more than 200 000 square kilometres.

## Marine protected areas

Australia's protected areas are not only concentrated on dry land—with such significant natural treasures as the Great Barrier Reef, there is a need to extend protection into the sea as well. There are 200 marine protected areas, covering 64.8 million hectares. They range from Commonwealth Marine Parks, such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, to fish habitat reserves, fish sanctuaries, aquatic reserves, conservation areas, marine parks and marine and coastal parks.

## World Heritage areas

Australia has 17 World Heritage properties. Most are also designated as national parks. Two are listed solely for their cultural values. Around the world, 180 countries have agreed to the World Heritage Convention and more than 812 sites are now on the World Heritage List. Some Australian sites are among the very few properties on the list that meet all four criteria for natural heritage or have been selected for both natural and cultural criteria. For further information see the World Heritage fact sheet.

## Tourism

Australia's national parks and reserves are major drivers of national and international tourism, attracting millions of visitors every year and generating billions of dollars for the Australian economy.

Protected areas offer visitors experiences that are uniquely Australian, such as camping, bushwalking, river cruises, educational camps, wildlife tours and engagement with Indigenous culture. The majority of international visitors to Australia include one or more nature-based activities in protected areas as part of their itineraries.

## *Caring for our Country*

In 2008, the Government committed \$2.25 billion over five years for a new program to protect Australia's unique natural environment and improve the sustainable management of our natural resources. *Caring for our country* promotes biodiversity, sustainable farm practices, natural resource management in remote and northern Australia and the development of community skills, knowledge and engagement in environmental protection. It supports our natural icons, coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats and the National Reserve System.

Under the *Caring for our country* program, funding has been allocated for programs to protect the Great Barrier Reef, repair fragile coastal ecosystems, save the endangered Tasmanian Devil, fight the Cane Toad menace and control other feral animals and weeds, improve water quality in the Gippsland Lakes of southern Australia, employ additional Indigenous rangers, expand the Indigenous Protected Area network and assist Indigenous Australians enter the carbon trading market.

## For further information

Department of the Environment, Water,  
Heritage and the Arts

[www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)

Australian Tourist Commission

[www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com)

For further information about other  
aspects of contemporary Australia, go to  
[www.dfat.gov.au/geo/australia](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/australia).

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Western Australia coastline.

