

Thematic Report on Mountain Ecosystems

Please provide the following details on the origin of this report.

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Date of submission:	<i>12 may 2003</i>

Please provide summary information on the process by which this report has been prepared, including information on the types of stakeholders who have been actively involved in its preparation and on material which was used as a basis for the report.

The information used to develop this report was drawn from consultation with the Australian Alps Liaison Committee Secretariat, Media and Community Projects Officer and Program Co-ordinator and the website: <http://www.australianalps.ea.gov.au/>.

Introduction:

Australia is a predominantly dry and flat continent with few areas of what is widely accepted to be mountains. However, Australia's primary mountain region is addressed through a series of protected areas known as the Australian Alps.

Stretching from Canberra through Brindabella Range and the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales and along the Great Dividing Range through Victoria, the Alps form a 1.6 million hectare chain of protected areas crossing State and Territory borders on the roof of southern Australia. The parks contain plants and animals found nowhere else in the world, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage, outstanding tourism and recreation opportunities and the catchment areas for some of Australia's most important rivers.

Mountain Ecosystems

1. What is the relative priority your country accords to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems?					
a) High	X	b) Medium		c) Low	
2. How does your country assess the resources available for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems, both domestic and international?					
a) Good		b) Adequate	X	c) Limiting	d) Severely limiting
3. Has your country requested financial assistance from GEF for funding the activities for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems?					
a) no					X
b) yes, please provide details					

Assessment, Identification and Monitoring

4. Has your country undertaken any assessment of direct and underlying causes of degradation and loss of biological diversity of mountain ecosystems?	
a) no, please specify the reasons	
b) yes, please specify major threats and their relative importance, as well as gaps	X
c) If yes, please specify the measures your country has taken to control the causes of loss of mountain biodiversity	X
<p>Please see website: http://www.australianalps.ea.gov.au/ for the range of published assessments related to degradation and loss of biological diversity. This also applies to questions 5 through 7.</p> <p>Australia's primary Alps region is protected through a series of National Parks (Protected Area or Reserve) as are several other Mountains regions.</p> <p>The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and working group reports, combined and the regional climate projections released by the CSIRO in May 2001 indicate that Australia can expect to be generally warmer and drier, but with increased floods and storm surges. Australia's natural systems will have difficulty adapting, with vulnerable areas including the Great Barrier Reef, alpine ecosystems, wetlands and riverine systems and woodlands. Climate change will affect biodiversity and it presents serious challenges for management aimed at conserving biodiversity. (Environment Australia 2001, <i>State of the Environment Report</i>: 106).</p>	
5. Has your country identified taxonomic needs for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity of mountain ecosystems?	
a) no, please specify the reasons	
b) yes, please specify	X
6. Has your country made any assessment of the vulnerability or fragility of the mountains in your country?	
a) no, please specify the reasons	
b) yes, please specify the results and observed impacts on mountain biodiversity	X

7. Has your country made any assessment important for conservation of biological diversity of mountain ecosystems at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels? (You may wish to use the Annex I of the Convention for categories of biodiversity important for conservation)	
a) no, please specify the reasons	
b) yes, some assessments or monitoring undertaken (please specify)	X
c) yes, comprehensive assessments or monitoring programmes undertaken (please specify where results can be found, and opportunities and obstacles, if any)	

Regulatory and Information System and Action Plan

8. Has your country developed regulations, policies and programs for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems?	
a) no	
b) yes, please specify sectors	X
Australia's primary Alps region spanning New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory is protected through a series of National Parks (Protected Area or Reserve) as are several other Mountains regions. These parks are protected through relevant State and Territory regulation.	
9. Has your country applied the ecosystem approach (adopted at COP 5) in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems?	
a) no	
b) yes, please provide some cases or examples	X
Australia's primary Alps regions is protected through a series of National Parks which are managed at the lowest appropriate level (principle 2) in a manner that allows multiple use (principle 1, determined through consultation as per principle 12) within the limits of the ecosystem (principle 6)	
10. Does your national biodiversity strategy and action plan cover mountain biological diversity?	
a) no, please specify why	
b) yes, please give some information on the strategy and plan, in particular on mountain biodiversity	X
It is consider part of our representative reserve system.	
11. Has your country disseminated the relevant information concerning management practices, plans and programmes for conservation and sustainable use of components of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems?	
a) no	
b) yes, please provide details where information can be retrieved concerning management practices, plans and programmes	X see question 4

Cooperation

12. Has your country undertaken any collaboration with other Parties for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems at the regional level or within a range of mountains?	
a) no	X not with other countries but between Australian States and Territories
<p>b) yes, please specify the objectives of this collaboration and achievements</p> <p>To look after these protected areas the national park agencies in New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT and the Commonwealth agreed in 1986 to work together to cooperatively manage the Australian Alps.</p> <p>A major step towards co-operative management of the Australian Alps National Parks was the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding. Commonwealth, NSW, ACT and Victorian Ministers responsible for nature conservation signed the Memorandum in July 1986, thereby agreeing to future co-operation in the management of the areas. The objectives of the MOU are to co-operate to achieve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protection of the landscape • protection of native plants and animals and cultural values • protection of the mountain catchments • provision of outdoor recreation opportunities to encourage enjoyment and understanding of the alpine environment. <p>This is effected mostly through interaction at the regional and district level by operational staff, and is regarded as a leading international example of effective conservation planning and management across jurisdictions (Environment Australia, 2001, State of the Environment Report: 82).</p> <p>The MOU is still the only agreement of its kind in Australia, and has been highly successful. The internationally respected World Conservation Union (IUCN) holds the MOU as the best example of its kind in the world. National park managers and rangers from mountain areas around the globe now come to Australia to see our system of cooperative management in action.</p>	

13. Has your country signed or ratified any regional or international treaty concerning mountains?	
a) no	
b) yes, please specify which treaty and provide as much as possible a report on the progress in the implementation of the treaties, including any major constraints in the implementation of the treaties The Alps MOU is a regional agreement signed by the heads of state and national governments to work cooperatively, across several different legislative boundaries, to manage the Australian Alps national parks as one biogeographical region.	X

Relevant thematic areas and cross-cutting issues

14. Has your country taken account of mountain ecosystems while implementing thematic programmes of work on agricultural; inland waters; forest; and dry and sub-humid lands biological diversity?	
a) no	
b) yes – but in only one or two thematic programmes of work	X
c) yes, included in all programmes of work	
d) if yes, please specify details	
15. Has your country taken any measures to ensure that the tourism in mountains is sustainable?	
a) no , please specify why	
b) yes, but in early stages of development (please specify the reasons)	
c) in advanced stages of development (please specify the reasons)	
d) relatively comprehensive measures being implemented (please specify the reasons) The Recreation and Tourism Working Group, under the Australian Alps Cooperative Management Programme, coordinate projects in walking track management, minimal impacts, and recreation planning. The Australian Alps are a fragile environment. They are also becoming increasing popular with people who are learning to appreciate the natural values and the recreation opportunities available in the Alps. The increasing numbers of visitors to the Alps national parks is having an effect on the areas' natural and cultural heritage. Escapes from fires, expanding campsites, bacteria in creeks and rivers, erosion, deterioration of walking tracks and the destruction of historic huts have all become more common in recent years. Fortunately many visitors have adopted the ethic of minimal impact recreation. We can minimise the damage to the natural environment by learning to tread softly and this reduces the need to place restrictions on visitors. The Australian Alps Liaison Committee has produced a series of seven codes covering a range of recreation activities available in the Australian Alps. The codes adopt the key messages of the international Leave No Trace program and contain	X (see website)

<p>commonsense information to protect the natural and cultural environment and encourage safety in the Australian Alps:</p> <p>Care for the Alps: leave no trace River Users Code Car-based Camping Code Snow Camping Code Cycling Code Bushwalking Code Huts Code for Visitors Horseriding Code</p> <p>Research is also being undertaken by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre Mountain Tourism Subprogram on the ecological, cultural and economic value of Australia's mountains to tourism.</p>	
<p>16. Has your country taken any measures to protect the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems?</p>	
<p>a) no</p>	
<p>b) not relevant</p>	
<p>c) yes, but in early stages of policy or programme development</p>	
<p>d) yes, in advanced stages of development</p>	
<p>e) some programmes being implemented</p> <p>The Cultural Heritage Working Group of the Australian Alps Cooperative Management Program aims to take measures to protect traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities but not necessarily for the sustainable use of biodiversity. An Aboriginal Heritage Liaison and Directions report contains directions from the Aboriginal communities associated with the alps on how they would like their values managed. Those values include traditional and natural environment values. This is but one of the projects the Cultural Heritage Working Group has managed (see question 17).</p> <p>All of the individual agencies associated with the Alps have in varying degrees attempted to develop their own Aboriginal heritage management policies, systems and strategies. In recent years there has been a much stronger commitment to engaging Aboriginal communities and individuals to provide the guidance and indeed direct involvement in what and how this should be achieved. The latter is reflected in the joint management agreement that the ACT government has entered into with the Ngunnawal community with regard to the management of Namadgi National Park. There is a <i>Kosciuszko Aboriginal Heritage study</i> and consultation of the Kosciuszko Aboriginal Working Group and other Aboriginal interests in review of the <i>Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management</i> (NSW National Parks Service). It is also envisaged that the review of the <i>Alpine National Park Plan of Management</i> (Parks Victoria) will involve Aboriginal consultation.</p>	<p>X</p>
<p>f) comprehensive programmes being implemented</p>	

17. Has your country developed any programmes for the protection of natural and cultural heritages in the mountains?	
a) no	X (see website)
<p>b) yes, please provide some information in the programmes</p> <p>A number of working groups, operating under the Australian Alps Liaison Committee progress programmes on various issues, including natural and cultural heritage.</p> <p>The Natural Heritage Working Group has the following key result area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An improved understanding and enhanced management of the natural ecosystems of the Australian Alps national parks. <p>This is proposed to be achieved through the following strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify threats to the nationally significant values of the Australian Alps national parks and using a region-wide [bioregional] approach, develop appropriate threat-abatement strategies; 2. Develop principles and criteria to focus research and management action on priority species/habitats/communities and natural features of the Australian Alps; 3. Investigate the response of alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems to threatening processes or activities and develop appropriate management strategies; 4. Develop indicators to monitor the health, condition and trend of alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems and catchments; 5. Involve interested stakeholders and encourage strategic partnerships in the activities of the Natural Heritage Working Group and its projects. Disseminate information and recommendations resulting from projects undertaken. <p>To ensure the protection of significant natural heritage values, the Natural Heritage Working Group (NHWG) of the Australian Alps Cooperative Management Programme has funded a project to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the gaps in the natural heritage information about the Australian Alps, • identify the significant biodiversity features of the Australian Alps national parks, and • assign priority status to biodiversity features for allocation of resources for future research throughout the Australian Alps national parks. <p>The report <i>Protecting the Natural Treasures of the Australian Alps</i> is the outcome of this six-month project. It will now form the basis for assessment of all project proposals submitted to the NHWG for funding consideration.</p> <p>Natural Heritage Conservation management was further enhanced this reporting period with the production of an integrated, interactive electronic database using the information collected from earlier work on the <i>Natural Treasures of the Australian Alps</i>. The database provides field practitioners and decision makers with easy access to information on the status of the significant natural features of the Australian Alps and their immediate threats.</p>	

<p>The Cultural Heritage Working Group has the following key result area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An improved understanding of the unique Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage values of the Australian Alps national parks which is incorporated into effective protection and management programs. <p>This is proposed to be achieved through the following strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify threats to the nationally significant cultural values of the Australian Alps national parks and develop appropriate threat abatement strategies 2. Engender a sense of value and ownership within the agencies and community, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage of the Australian Alps national parks; 3. Identify and address gaps in current knowledge of cultural heritage values within the Australian Alps national parks; 4. Provide tools and processes that will assist agencies and relevant community groups to undertake cultural heritage projects within the Australian Alps national parks; and 5. Identify opportunities for the involvement of indigenous people in the management of the Australian Alps national parks. 	
18. Has your country established protected areas in mountains?	
a) no	
<p>b) yes, please specify the percentage of mountains under protected areas out of total mountain areas in your country</p> <p>About 60% of the high country in NSW, ACT and Victoria is now national park. Other areas of public land in the Alps are used for timber production (state forests) and winter recreation (which occurs in Alpine Resorts as well as national parks and state forests).</p>	X
19. Has your country undertaken any activities to celebrate the International Year of Mountains and Eco-tourism?	
a) no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • b) yes, please specify <p>International Year of Mountains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early in 2002 two special supplements were published and distributed in several national newspapers and these were distributed widely around the country and overseas. • A <i>Biodiversity Blitz</i> was held in Kosciuszko National Park in January 2002 when 140 scientists spent four days surveying for birds, animals, plants, insects, fish, lichens, etc. The data accumulated during this very intensive survey was subsequently published by the Institute of Alpine Research, as a comprehensive report on the status of the native biota in the Mt Kosciusko area. • The Institute of Alpine Studies together with the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Development (Mountains program) also compiled and published a book providing an overview of research studies being 	X

carried out in mountain areas in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania.

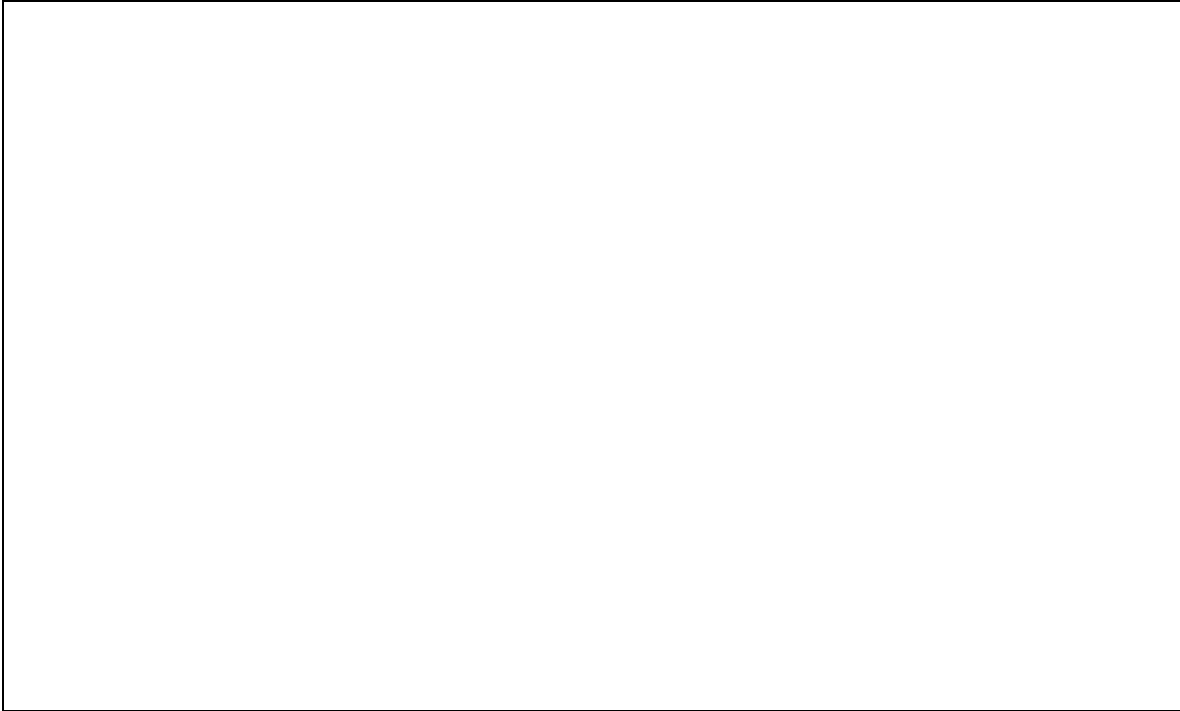
- In Tasmania the Mt Wellington festival focussed on the mountain as a dominant landscape feature and backdrop to Hobart. The festival has been established and will now be a major annual event in Hobart.
- The Alps Liaison Committee has organised and supported the development and publication of a mountains education kit for schools. Interest in this kit has been expressed by a number of overseas education organisations and similar kits will no doubt be produced elsewhere.
- Many brochures and other educational material was published and / or distributed widely during the IYOM, such as *Care for the Alps*, *Australian Alps National Parks*, *Australian Alps Walking Track* and a *Mountain Huts Guide*.
- Research personnel associated with the Institute of Alpine Research initiated a number of specific 'IYOM' research programs, focussing on issues of worldwide mountain significance, such as the establishment of long-term monitoring sites to assess the impact of predicted global warming on alpine vegetation. Similarly several studies as part of collaborative international mountain programs were commenced and will be continued over the next decade or more.
- The major event and culminating event of the year was the *IYOM Conference* held at Jindabyne in the Snowy Mountains. The conference was attended by some 300 participants with presentation being given under three conference themes – mountains of meaning, mountains for the future, mountains for tourism. Several overseas guest speakers attended the conference and workshop sessions. The conference was supported by several community functions and introduced by a very significant community picnic day and Aboriginal cultural event (Kaju), the latter included Aboriginal dancing, music, and stories of the mountains and their significance to Aboriginal people.

International Year of Ecotourism

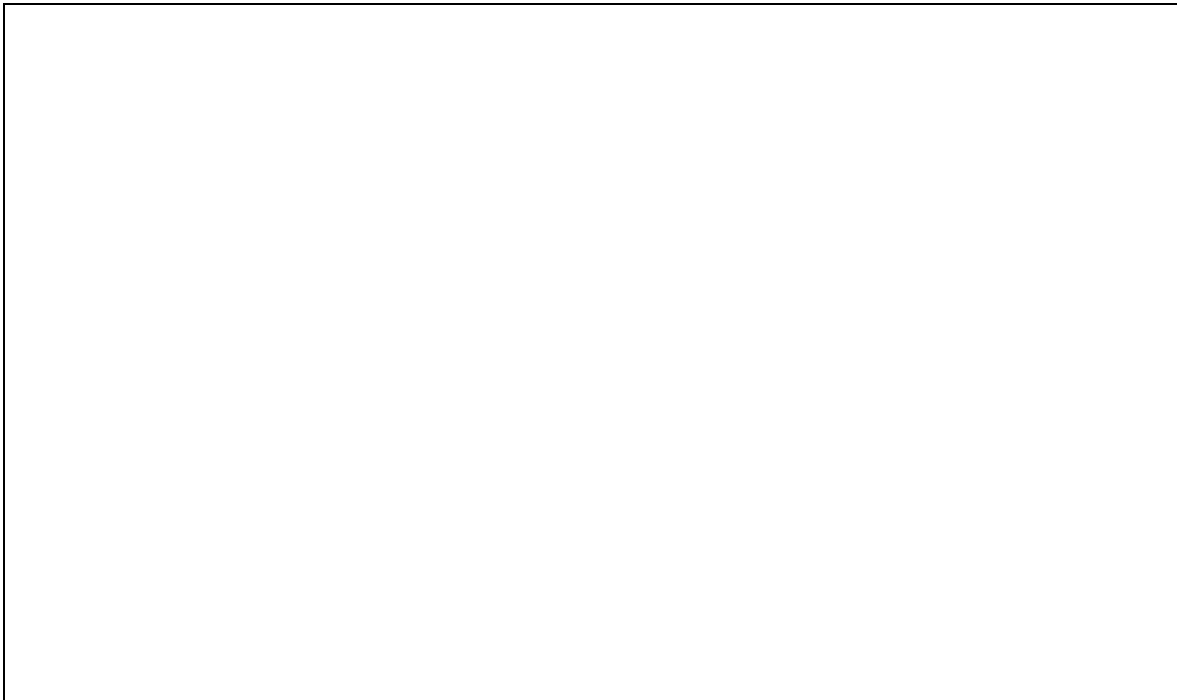
- 2002 Ecotourism Association of Australia International Conference, Cairns, 21-25 October 2002
- Ecotourism Australia-Wide Online Conference, 6-7 August 2002, Australian Heritage Commission and Ecotourism Association of Australia
- For outcomes of this conference see:
www.ecotourismaustraliawide.net/flash/intro.swf
- Conference Website: www.ecotourismaustraliawide.net
- Cairns Charter on Partnerships for Ecotourism:
www.ecotourism.org.u/charter.cfm

Case-studies

Please provide case-studies made by your country in conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in mountain ecosystems.

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Further comments

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