

Draft NSW National Parks System Directions Statement



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Published by:

Office of Environment and Heritage

59 Goulburn Street, Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box A290, Sydney South NSW 1232

Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)

Phone: 131 555 (environment information and publications requests)

Phone: 1300 361 967 (national parks, general environmental enquiries, and publications requests)

Fax: +61 2 9995 5999

TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 131 555

Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 131 555

Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Report pollution and environmental incidents

Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only) or info@environment.nsw.gov.au

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The Hon Gabrielle Upton, MP
Minister for the Environment

Foreword

We are proud of our national parks, which protect forever some of the best examples of the nature, culture and history of our great state. Beginning with the world's second oldest national park, Royal National Park, successive generations have built an enviable network of beautiful open space, wilderness and cultural treasures.

Protecting land in the national parks system is the cornerstone of our commitment to biodiversity conservation. This Government's commitment to conservation extends beyond national parks to supporting the contribution of private landholders to conserving and managing biodiversity on their own land. The Government recognises a holistic approach is required that ensures the national parks system and private land conservation complement each other and establish an effective protected area system across the state.

Of course, our national parks protect other values as well as biodiversity. Increasingly, they are places to celebrate and support the culture of Aboriginal peoples, maintaining or re-establishing connection with the land and its cultural sites, with over a quarter of the national parks system jointly managed with Aboriginal peoples. National parks reflect the geological diversity of the state, protect wilderness and wild rivers, and save for future generations some of our most stunning scenery and landscapes. Not only a treasury of historical sites, they are also a place of recreation today for millions of people.

Evidence shows the overwhelmingly positive contribution of national parks to communities, including clear and long-lasting economic benefits from creating new national parks. We are becoming better informed in our assessment of new national parks and drawing on greater scientific and economic expertise to support decision-making.

Reservation is a social and economic as well as an environmental and heritage decision. This Government is committed to close engagement with stakeholders in the decision-making process. Without damaging the sensitive commercial negotiations involved in buying private land, we involve and inform stakeholders as part of decisions about where and when to extend the national parks system.

The way we manage our national parks continues to improve, recently gaining international recognition through the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List. As well as striving for more effective management, national parks managers need to adapt their approach to address environmental pressures from climate change, new pests and weeds, and emerging cultural and recreational expectations.

It is my great pleasure to present the *Draft NSW National Parks System Directions Statement*. It sets out clearly the challenges and opportunities for growing the national parks system. It reports on progress towards the long-term goal of building a comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks system and sets specific targets over the next five years.

Draft NSW National Parks System Directions Statement

We are now looking for your feedback on this draft statement. We will use this feedback to assist us in developing a national parks system that will continue to be the pride of future generations.

The Hon Gabrielle Upton, MP
Minister for the Environment

Purpose and objectives

Introduction

Across the world, protected areas are recognised as the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation, as drivers of human health and wellbeing, and as vital resources for tourism and local economies.

The national parks system in New South Wales is the proud legacy of 138 years of collaborative involvement by governments, volunteer groups and individuals. It began in 1879 with the establishment of what is now Royal National Park, the world's second oldest national park.

Fifty years ago, in 1967, New South Wales was the first state to set up a dedicated National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) under Minister Tom Lewis AO.

Over seven million hectares of New South Wales are now managed and protected for conservation by NPWS. This network of some 870 parks covers close to 9% of the state.

But the job is still unfinished. Many of the state's ecosystems are not well represented in parks. For the conservation of these ecosystems, and to improve the management configuration of existing parks, we need to acquire land for the national parks system.

NPWS acquires land for the NSW national parks system through various means including the transfer of other public land, the voluntary sale or transfer of private land, bequests and donations, and biodiversity offsets. This document sets out how and why new parks will be established over the short term, including the targets and priorities for acquiring new land.

Objectives of the national parks system

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* sets out the fundamental objectives of the NSW national parks system, which are to:

- conserve the full range of habitats and ecosystems, plant and animal species and landforms found across the state
- conserve areas of significant cultural heritage, including places, objects and features of significance to Aboriginal people, as well as rural, unique and working heritage; places of scenic beauty and landscapes and natural features of significance; wilderness areas and wild rivers; water catchments; popular places for nature-based recreation; and certain icons of national significance
- foster public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation.

To meet these objectives, New South Wales is working to build a national parks system which is comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR). Based on rigorous science, the CAR framework is the gold standard for public land conservation.

For more information about how these objectives are defined and measured, including the CAR framework, see *National parks system principles and approaches*.

Purpose of the Directions Statement

Building a comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks system will require ongoing effort, and will come about through the accumulation of individual decisions about

acquiring and reserving land. The purpose of this Directions Statement is to shape these decisions over the short-term to ensure progress towards our long-term objectives.

This statement revises and updates the *New South Wales National Parks Establishment Plan 2008* (DECC 2008). It sets out the short-term priorities for conservation and the long-term targets we aspire to.

This Directions Statement incorporates two sections which add more detail:

- **National parks system principles and approaches** describes how land is added to the national parks system and the key concepts underpinning decisions.
- **National parks system status and targets** provides details on the status and future targets of the national parks system, statewide and for each bioregion.

How it will be used

The NSW Government will use this Directions Statement to inform land acquisition, transfer and reservation decisions for the national parks system. It will shape both planned additions and actions to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Guided by this statement, these decisions will build a public national parks system for New South Wales that:

- is comprehensive, adequate and representative of the state's biodiversity
- protects and conserves socially and culturally important values
- provides opportunities for public enjoyment, education and the growth of scientific knowledge
- contributes to clean air, clean water and healthy communities.

The strategic guidance provided by the statement will help NPWS to:

- demonstrate and be accountable for why a land acquisition, transfer and reservation decision has been made
- include socio-economic information and community views in decision-making
- ensure that public investment protects environmental and cultural values while also providing benefits for local and regional economies
- report to the NSW public about progress towards the long-term goals of the national parks system.

The statement reflects the best current understanding of the status of the national parks system and the biodiversity of New South Wales. It is important to recognise that data is incomplete, especially in western areas and for certain groups of native animals and plants. Individual reservation decisions will continue to rely on detailed assessment in the context of strategic directions.

Conservation in New South Wales

The Directions Statement focuses on building a public land national parks system, permanently protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. The NSW Government recognises the national parks system is only one of many conservation options that will be needed to achieve our ambitious goals.

The vital importance of improving biodiversity conservation across the whole landscape has recently been recognised in wide-ranging NSW Government reforms of land management. A key initiative is the creation of a new Biodiversity Conservation Trust as a not-for-profit statutory body directing historic public investment in private land conservation.

The Trust's decisions will be guided by a Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy. This will work in tandem with this Directions Statement, ensuring New South Wales will bring public and private conservation options together to achieve our conservation objectives. A draft Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy is currently being publicly exhibited and is available for comment on the [Office of Environment and Heritage website](#).

What is the relationship between the *National Parks System Directions Statement* and the *Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy 2017-2037*?

The directions statement and the strategy will work together to build a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) protected areas network across public and private land.

The private land conservation program and the land acquisition program for the public land national parks system share the same broad biodiversity objectives and apply some of the same strategies. However, these programs provide different opportunities across New South Wales.

The public land acquisition program builds on the existing network of public land over large areas to sustain tracts of resilient and viable ecosystems. In regions where remnant vegetation is scarce, opportunities for further additions to the national parks system are limited and private land conservation is critical to prevent further biodiversity loss and improve connectivity in the landscape.

Private land conservation can expand the range of natural values that are protected and provide buffers and corridors to enhance the network of reserves.

Benefits of the national parks system

While the NSW national parks system is the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation, and will be an important factor in minimising the effects of climate change on biodiversity, land is also protected for a range of other reasons. The national parks system protects Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and artefacts, historic heritage buildings and sites, geological heritage, important areas of public open space for enjoyment and recreation, and resources for scientific study and education.

By providing permanent conservation across all these values, the national parks system benefits New South Wales and beyond. Some examples of the benefits beyond biodiversity provided by the national parks system include:

- supporting Aboriginal cultures by ensuring or restoring access to places and resources for cultural and spiritual practices
- connecting people from diverse cultures with their heritage
- enabling more people to engage with and enjoy their local environment and heritage
- affording recreational opportunities, volunteering and community-based stewardship programs to improve community wellbeing
- building thriving local economies by encouraging regional business development partnerships based on natural assets and experiences
- contributing to regional and local economies through employment and public investment
- supporting agricultural production and healthy communities by maintaining our natural systems, and the contribution of those systems to ecosystem services such as improved air and water quality
- improving the amenity of adjoining lands through scenic and environmental protection
- promoting integrated (cross-tenure) landscape management

- protecting the genetic diversity of species as a potential resource, e.g. the potential for discovering new biochemical products derived from wild plants.

Research also shows that visiting a park for recreation and relaxation can have benefits for individuals' health and sense of wellbeing, including lowering stress levels and blood pressure, boosting immunity, promoting healing, improving mental wellbeing and enhancing our perception of quality of life.

The management of the NSW national parks system takes account of diverse values and seeks to maximise the benefits expected from reserving land. NPWS is actively working to meet landscape-scale conservation challenges, particularly pest and weed impacts and the impacts of climate change on our bushfire risk, while also managing a significant asset portfolio.

The strength of NPWS management has been widely recognised, with NSW parks included in the global standard of good practice for protected areas, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List. Partnerships with other land managers, Aboriginal traditional owners, communities and businesses will continue to underpin the effective management of the NSW national parks system.

In many ways, reserving land is a social and economic as well as an environmental and heritage decision. The NSW Government is committed to enhancing local community participation in land management, and to capitalise on visitor and other tourism opportunities associated with the establishment of new parks.

Socio-economic assessment

We have an increasing body of evidence about the socio-economic impacts of the national parks system across New South Wales. This evidence shows that parks present new opportunities for regional growth and development, and the economic wellbeing of the communities in which they are located. Building the national parks system diversifies regional economies and stimulates business investment in rural and regional New South Wales. This occurs because of increased tourism, government investment in jobs and infrastructure, and increased local housing demand.

The overall picture is positive, and analysis shows that the greatest benefits accrue in regions where there are few parks already in existence, such as in western New South Wales. However, the addition of land to the national parks system can also affect rural and remote communities in negative ways over the short term, particularly during the transition period when new parks are being established.

To maximise the benefits for rural and regional communities and mitigate any negative impacts, the NSW Government approach to acquiring land for reservation will have a stronger focus on socio-economic assessment. The goal is to foster a consistent, transparent decision-making process that considers socio-economic costs and benefits, together with improved opportunities for community engagement.

Relatively small additions of land to existing parks, inholdings (small portions of land surrounded by existing national park), or land that is already zoned for protection in a local environmental plan, are not likely to have a significant social or economic impact. For all other acquisitions, NPWS will be required to undertake socio-economic assessment of new park proposals. This will inform the NSW Government of the likely socio-economic outcomes for local communities and identify issues for consideration in the decision-making process about acquiring land. This includes making the most of opportunities for parks to contribute to regional and rural New South Wales and support diversification of local economies.

Other intended or expected social and economic benefits will also be identified. Primary considerations will include:

- community employment and business development opportunities
- Aboriginal joint management
- community assets, including visitor facilities or improved community access
- ecosystem services
- community health benefits.

Careful consideration of these assessments can result in a decision not to acquire land for the national parks system. This is particularly the case if there are concerns over potential negative impacts on local communities that cannot be mitigated.

Innovative solutions

This Directions Statement focuses on public reserved land. However, to reach the ambitious targets set out here, we will need to use a range of tools for the permanent protection of natural and heritage values – beyond formal additions to the national parks system.

Private landholders have a crucial part to play in protecting and conserving the unique biodiversity of New South Wales. Many landholders carry out important actions at their own cost that protect wildlife, restore habitats, and enhance the diversity and quality of ecosystems. The importance of private land for biodiversity conservation has long been recognised, with many threatened species and ecological communities found only on privately owned and managed lands. The goals for conserving biodiversity set out in this statement cannot be achieved without supporting private landholders.

For those areas within the public national parks system, we need to test and use new solutions to improve biodiversity outcomes. Creating predator-proof exclosures on parks is one such initiative, to trial innovative approaches to halting species decline by managing threats and improving ecosystem health. By partnering with expert and academic providers, we can harness outside resources to help solve a conservation challenge and contribute to the goals of the national parks system.

Similarly, the NSW Government is investing in the *Saving our Species* program to secure as many threatened species as possible in the wild for the next 100 years. While more than 80% of the state's threatened species are present within the national parks system, we need to target our efforts to ensure viable populations persist throughout the landscape. The program commits to spending more money on threatened species more efficiently, across both public and private land and in partnership with the community. It sets a clear management framework for determining priorities between species and planning the most effective recovery actions for securing species in the wild.

We will continue to pursue new and innovative opportunities to improve conservation. New partnerships between government, industry and the community will be essential, as will leveraging public expertise in biodiversity management so conservation activities and programs can extend across different land tenures. Funding will continue to become more targeted as we refine the use of prioritisation and learn where the best results can be found.

As social expectations change it is vital that public land management approaches change to meet them. The national parks system will continue to be the foundation of conservation. The question is, what can be built on this foundation to ensure our environment and heritage is valued, protected, enjoyed and supports a prosperous and healthy New South Wales.

Setting priorities

This Directions Statement sets out our priorities for the near-term, guiding acquisition towards our long-term goals. These priorities will be applied using a transparent and scientifically robust decision-making process that balances conservation, social and economic considerations.

In setting these priorities, we have taken into account that the national parks system develops slowly over time. Many parks are developed through a process of accumulation, involving a series of individual decisions about acquiring and reserving parcels of land. Land for the national parks system is acquired on a voluntary basis, so its acquisition depends entirely on suitable land becoming available.

This statement has a long-term outlook. It recognises that progress towards the goals is unlikely to be linear and is often difficult to predict. Building the national parks system is the work of generations; only in hindsight will we be able to see to what extent we have created a truly comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks system.

Targets

The principle of a system that is comprehensive, adequate and representative remains the first level of prioritisation for new additions to the national parks system. Our progress over the long-term towards improving measures of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness underpins all our prioritisation decisions.

Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030 (NRMMC 2009) guides the development of the National Reserve System. The strategy specifies the main short-term priority as filling key gaps in the comprehensiveness of the reserve system at the national scale. It also establishes quantitative targets for comprehensiveness and representativeness that are detailed in *National parks system status and targets* (page 22). New South Wales' progress against these targets is also presented in *National parks system status and targets* and summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Status of comprehensiveness and representativeness of NSW bioregions (January 2017)

Planning regions and corresponding bioregions	Bioregion area (ha)	Area (ha) of bioregion in NPWS parks system	Percentage of bioregion in NPWS parks system	Comprehensiveness (%)	Representativeness	
					Number of subregions that have met the national target / total number of subregions	No. of NSW Landscapes (by subregion) yet to be sampled to meet national target
Coast and coastal ranges						
NSW North Coast	3,962,538	981,887	24.8	92	15/19	10
South East Corner	1,153,601	496,905	43.1	97	3/3	0
South Eastern Queensland	1,647,041	228,468	13.9	95	5/6	2
Sydney Basin	3,573,566	1,442,897	40.4	98	12/13	2
Tablelands and western slopes						
Brigalow Belt South	5,624,738	487,079	8.7	65	0/9	30
Nandewar	2,074,882	85,945	4.1	70	1/4	11
New England Tableland	2,860,298	275,059	9.6	86	8/19	19
NSW South Western Slopes	8,103,373	187,445	2.3	54	0/3	52
South Eastern Highlands	4,989,020	731,469	14.7	85	5/12	23
Australian Alps	464,297	377,307	81.3	100	1/1	0
Central western plains						
Cobar Penepplain	7,377,221	193,922	2.6	50	1/5	36
Darling Riverine Plains	9,419,258	249,813	2.7	48	0/9	51
Riverina	7,022,691	256,949	3.7	78	0/5	16
Far west						
Broken Hill Complex	3,763,318	75,617	2.0	38	1/4	21
Channel Country	2,340,662	218,779	9.3	41	0/5	16
Mulga Lands	6,591,283	290,027	4.4	59	2/10	21
Murray-Darling Depression	7,935,880	462,433	5.8	70	0/3	17
Simpson-Strzelecki Dunefields	1,095,797	119,146	10.9	43	0/1	8

Directions Statement priorities

In the context of building a comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks system we emphasise certain thematic conservation priorities. For more information about these priorities see *National parks system principles and approaches*.

Priorities will also be driven by government directions and initiatives. This includes the allocation of funds through the NSW Environmental Trust for the purchase of land for the national parks system. Other examples include the *Saving our Species* program, acquiring koala habitat and the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy. Complementing the latter strategy will mean a focus on regional ecosystems that are poorly represented in the national parks system, some of which are represented in Figure 1 (for further discussion see *National parks system status and targets*).

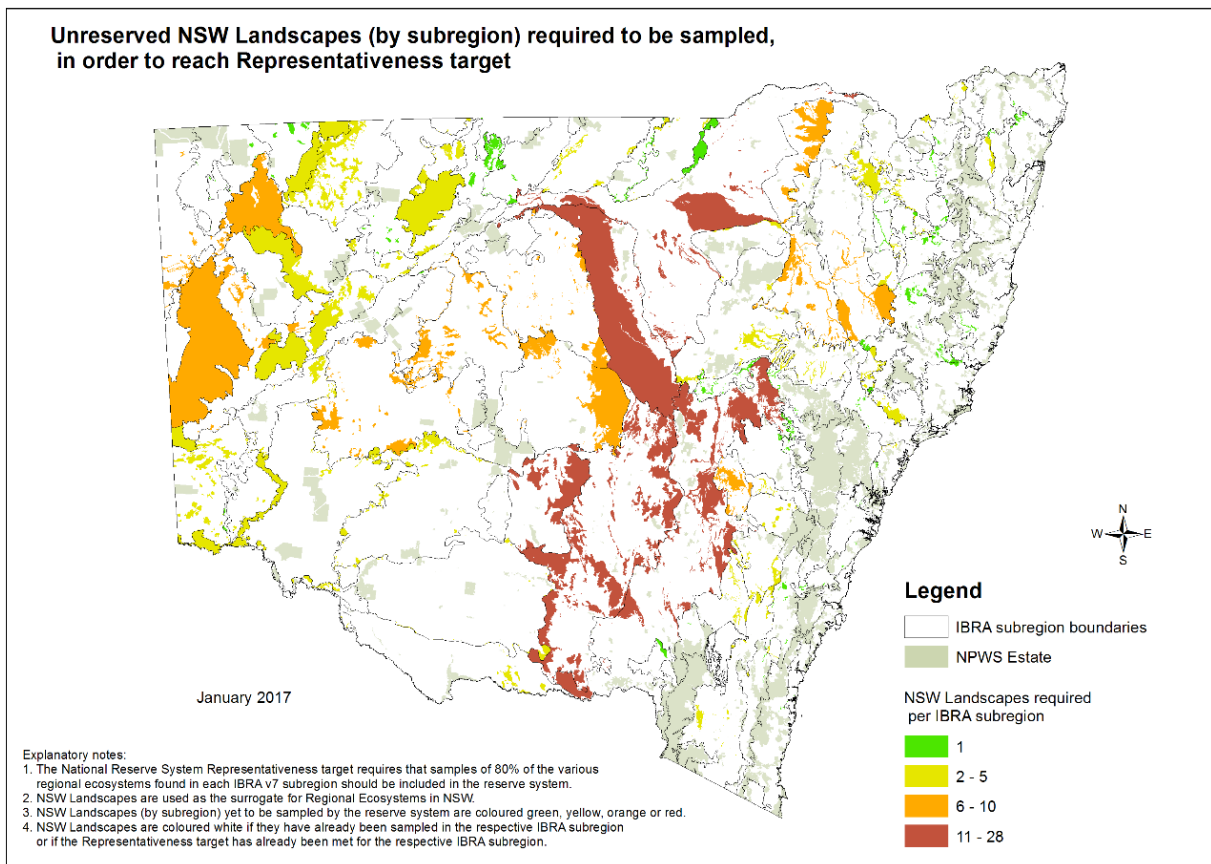


Figure 1 NSW Landscapes (by subregion) that are candidates for reservation

Five-year Directions Statement target

By 2022 the national parks system will include examples of another 10 NSW Landscapes which are either currently not represented within, or are inadequately protected in, the NSW national parks system.

When measuring progress towards a comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks system it is important to understand that development of the system occurs through the accumulation of individual acquisition, transfer and reservation decisions. Buying private land to add to the national parks system depends entirely on suitable land becoming available.

Under these circumstances, progress towards our goals is unlikely to be linear and is often difficult to predict. The Directions Statement target has been chosen to guide progress while allowing flexibility in where and how the national parks system grows.

For national reporting purposes, regional ecosystems in New South Wales are defined by a dataset called NSW Landscapes (Mitchell 2002; Ecological Australia Pty Ltd 2008). These 571 landscape types are considered the best available surrogate for this purpose. New and more detailed vegetation information is becoming available for New South Wales that will enable the development of an up-to-date and nationally consistent alternative for NSW Landscapes.

NSW Landscapes (by subregion) that are candidates for contributing to this target are those where the 'Number of NSW Landscapes (by subregion) yet to be sampled to meet national target' shown in Table 1 (last column) is greater than zero. Figure 1 shows the distribution of these candidate NSW Landscapes (by subregion) across New South Wales as at January 2017.

Inclusion of these NSW Landscapes (by subregion) in the national parks system over the next five years will ensure we progress towards our long-term goals. The NSW Government will report on progress against this target through annual reports and parliamentary budget processes. The target will be reviewed for ongoing reporting beyond 2022.

National parks system principles and approaches

This section describes how land is added to the national parks system and the key concepts underpinning decisions to acquire, transfer or reserve land for permanent conservation.

What is the National Reserve System?

The National Reserve System consists of lands and waters throughout Australia that meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition of a protected area:

A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

In New South Wales, the foundation of the terrestrial National Reserve System is the NSW national parks system created through the reservation of land under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. It includes several different formal categories under the Act:

- national parks
- nature reserves
- state conservation areas
- Aboriginal areas
- regional parks
- historic sites
- karst conservation reserves.

Each of these categories has a specific set of objectives that drive its management and use. They may have local, state, national or even international significance.

Why reserve land?

A fundamental principle which underpins international, national and state conservation policies is the need for a network of protected areas to support the broader sustainable management of natural environments on land and in the sea.

On land, a public national parks system is the cornerstone of this network of protected areas. Conservation by private and other public landholders builds on this foundation, adding to the areas conserved and often improving the system's integrity and connectivity across the landscape.

Reservation under the National Parks and Wildlife Act secures conservation of the land and its values for the long-term. This provides certainty for planning and management and provides assurance that our natural environment and heritage are managed on behalf of the people of New South Wales, now and for the future. It also ensures ongoing community access to these lands.

There is a clear international and national policy framework which promotes and guides our effort to improve the national parks system.

Summary: national parks system policy framework

International

Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 7 2004) and associated 'Aichi targets' set out in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020

UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)

Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) (1971)

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979)

Bilateral migratory bird agreements with Japan, China and Republic of Korea

Guidance from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), including the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines

Standards established for the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas

National

Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010–2030 (NRMMC 2010)

Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030 (NRMMC 2009)

National Wildlife Corridors Plan (Commonwealth of Australia 2012b)

Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment

National Forest Policy Statement (Commonwealth of Australia 1992)

Australia's Native Vegetation Framework (COAG 2012)

State

National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974

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Priorities for Biodiversity Adaptation to Climate Change (DECCW 2010)

Regional

Regional and local conservation plans, e.g. Lower Hunter Regional Conservation Plan (DECCW 2009), Far North Coast Regional Conservation Plan (DECCW 2010a)

National Local Government Biodiversity Strategy (ALGA 1999)

Regional and local biodiversity management plans, e.g. Northern Rivers Regional Biodiversity Management Plan (DECCW 2010b)

The CAR framework

New South Wales is working to progressively build a national parks system that is more comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR). Based on international and national agreements and underpinned by rigorous science, the CAR framework is the gold standard for conservation reserves design.

The key concepts of the CAR framework are:

- **Comprehensive** refers to the aim to conserve samples of each element of biodiversity (represented by ecosystems) in the protected area system.
- **Adequate** refers to how much of each ecosystem should be sampled to provide ecological viability and integrity of populations, species and communities.
- **Representative** gives more depth to the measure of comprehensiveness. A representative protected area system will sample the full range of biological variation within each ecosystem by sampling the range of environmental variation typical of the ecosystem's geographic range.

Together, these three factors set the parameters for a protected area system that includes all elements of biodiversity, provides for resilience against threats, and can sustain itself over the long-term.

How land is reserved

Land is only acquired for the national parks system through voluntary means. If land is both available and suitable, NPWS will then investigate options for acquiring the land.

The first step is a thorough and comprehensive assessment process, drawing on scientific information and underpinned by strategic statewide objectives that provide the long-term framework for building our national parks system. This Direction Statement is a key document in setting the objectives, principles and targets that determine the value of a potential addition.

As well as the contribution of the land to the objectives of the national parks system, factors considered when deciding whether to acquire land include:

- whether the values we have identified are vulnerable to loss or irreparable damage
- the condition of the land
- how likely it is that an opportunity to protect these values will occur again
- whether reservation is the best way to protect the values of the land, or whether other tools such as private land conservation are available
- whether the purchase provides value for money to the NSW public
- whether there are other public interests involved (such as mineral and forestry interests)
- whether adding the land to the national parks system will produce unwanted socio-economic impacts.

Once land has been acquired, it will be reserved so that it can be protected in perpetuity. Reservation is a legal process involving notification in the NSW *Government Gazette* and may take some time. The National Parks and Wildlife Act provides for the Minister to hold and manage land after it has been acquired, while it is waiting for reservation.

Planning and investment takes place in establishing the park, tackling priority issues such as weeds and pests, fire management and fencing. For most new parks, there will be early opportunities for visitor access, to maximise environmental and community benefits.

It is rare that a single acquisition and its subsequent reservation will finalise the configuration of a park. Normally after an initial reservation, flow-on acquisitions and reservations will occur to finalise the boundaries. This usually happens over an extended time frame. The target shape of a park may also change over time due to changes in neighbouring land use, shifting community expectations about uses of the park, or new park management requirements affecting access.

Bioregions

Our approach to acquiring land for the national parks system is underpinned by the Australian Government categorisation, *An Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia*.

Bioregions (an abbreviation of biogeographic regions) are large regions of relatively similar geology, geography and geomorphology. Each bioregion supports a suite of native plants and animals which is distinct from adjoining bioregions.

Bioregions provide a useful way of describing the component biological and geographical parts of New South Wales and therefore provide a sound basis for landscape planning, including planning to improve the national parks system.

When we look at both the biological and geographical aspects of bioregions, together with their links to social and economic forces, it is clear we need to take a tailored approach to reservation across bioregions to achieve the most effective outcomes.

There are 18 bioregions in New South Wales (Figure 2).

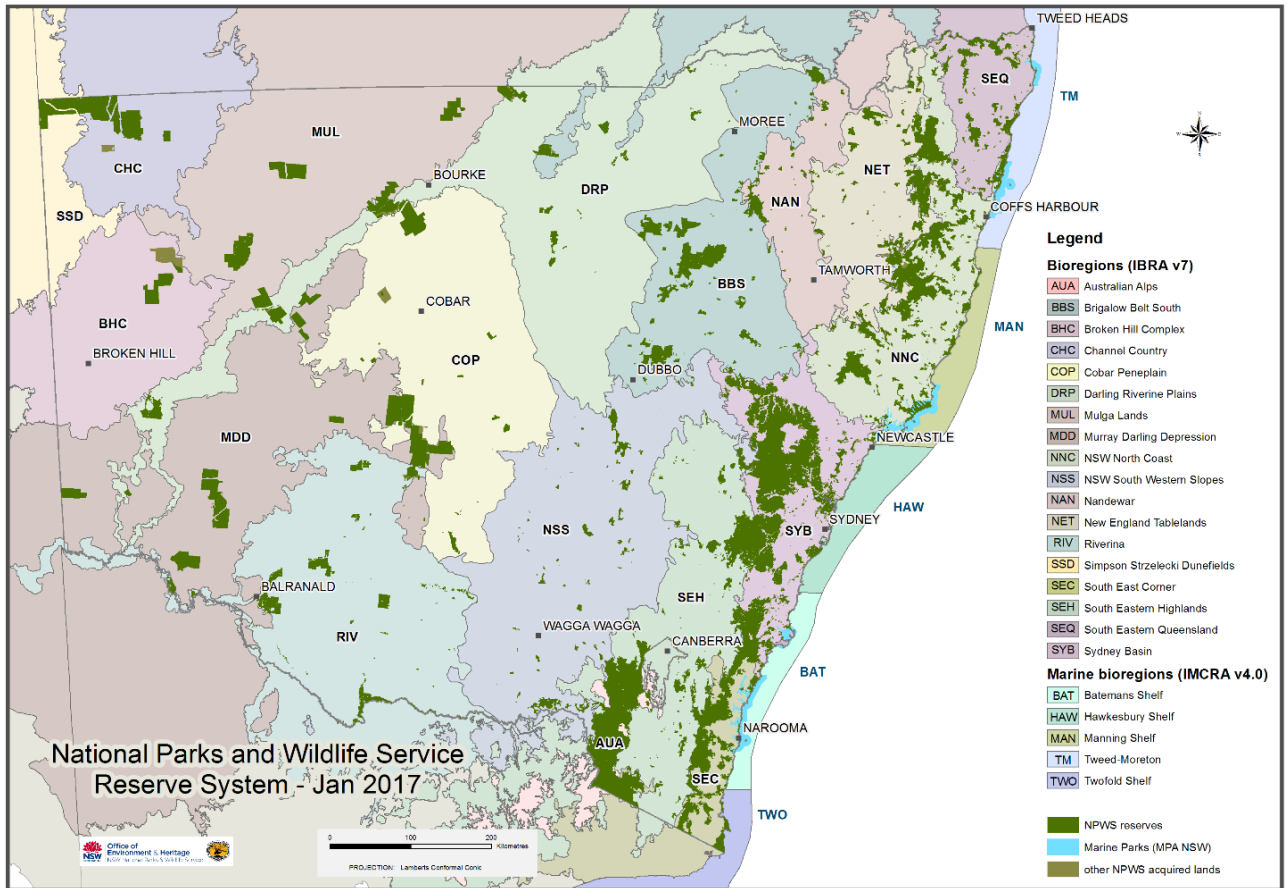


Figure 2 Bioregions in New South Wales – adapted from *Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia* (IBRA, Commonwealth of Australia 2012a) and *A Guide to the Interim Marine and Coastal Regionalisation for Australia* (IMCRA, Commonwealth of Australia 2006)

Regional focus for planning

New South Wales is a diverse state and the national parks system has developed along different historical paths in different regions. The Directions Statement priorities will be applied considering these regional contexts.

NPWS has identified five national parks system planning regions across New South Wales. The regions group together bioregions that are at similar stages of park development to help focus attention on the work required across the state to develop a comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks system (Figure 3).

These planning regions also allow NPWS to be more specific about what types of land are of interest over the longer term for incorporation into the national parks system.

Information about the status of each of the bioregions and targets for additions to the national parks system is contained in *National parks system status and targets*.

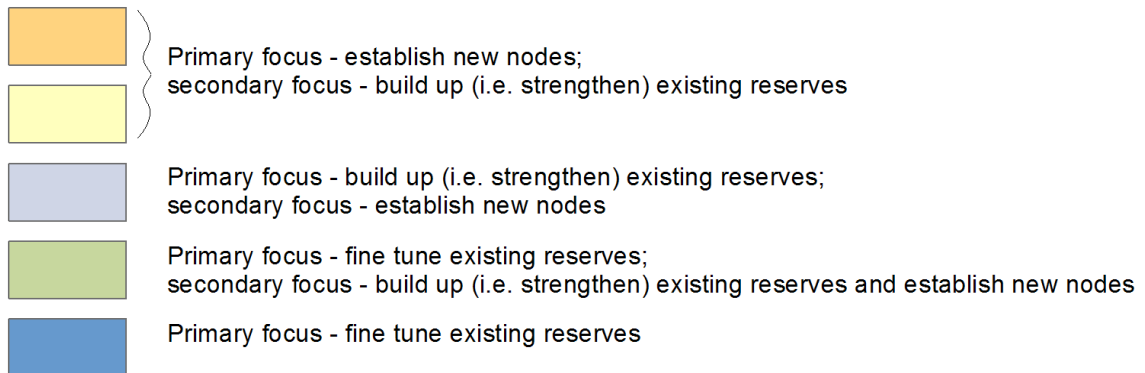
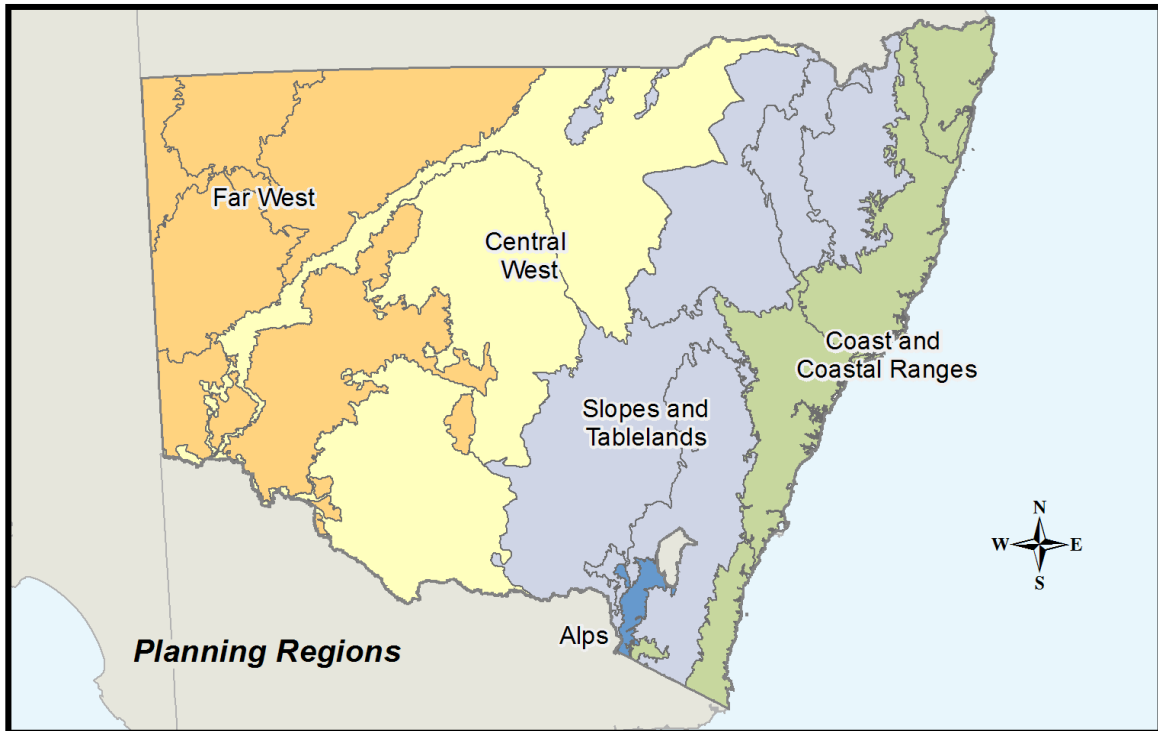


Figure 3 NSW national parks system planning regions

Thematic conservation priorities

The following thematic conservation priorities have been developed by collating information from statewide, regional and site-based studies undertaken by NPWS, other government agencies, local government, private conservation organisations and scientific institutions.

Poorly reserved ecosystems, threatened species and habitats

Increasing the representation of poorly conserved ecosystems in the national parks system contributes to reaching the national goal of a protected area system that is comprehensive, adequate and representative. Protecting as many different ecosystems as possible will support the protection of as many species as possible, and is an important strategy for minimising the effects of climate change on biodiversity (Dunlop & Brown 2008).

This is also important in the context of the NSW Government's significant commitment to the recovery of threatened species and ecological communities in the wild under the *Saving our Species* program. This program, which allocates more than \$100 million over five years from 2016–17, will assist significantly in ensuring that threatened species are better secured for long-term survival, including those that occur in the national parks system.

Where appropriate, the addition of land to the national parks system will also focus on species and ecological communities being targeted by other government programs. For instance, \$10 million over five years from 2016–17 has been committed to purchase and permanently conserve land that contains priority koala habitat. This is an important contribution to the NSW Koala Strategy and additional to *Saving our Species* funding. The targeted purchase program will help to achieve the strategy's aim to secure the koala in the wild in New South Wales for 100 years.

Areas experiencing increasing habitat modification, development and the regulation of natural water flows are likely to face the greatest threat and will receive high priority for better protection within parks.

Connectivity conservation

Connectivity conservation is based on the concept that interconnected systems of habitats within a landscape can better support populations, communities and natural ecological processes than fragmented areas of natural habitat. Features that contribute to landscape connectivity include contiguous habitat, 'stepping stones' of intermediate habitat, and buffer zones around existing habitat areas.

The definition of connectivity conservation expressed here is intended to encapsulate it in the broadest landscape sense, as well as at a finer level of detail (e.g. habitat connectivity). Potential acquisitions and transfers will be informed by their landscape context, taking into consideration broader conservation measures occurring across all land tenures.

The long-term viability of many parks and of the whole national parks system may rely on the maintenance or re-establishment of vegetated corridors between parks or other core areas of native vegetation. These corridors allow animals to move across the landscape for daily or seasonal migration and for plant seeds to disperse in response to gradual environmental changes. They will assist in building the resilience of plants and animals to a changing climate. Corridors also act as pathways enabling access to, and connecting, places of cultural value.

Important conservation connectivity directions include:

- contributing to the Great Eastern Ranges corridor, being the north–south corridor from the Border Ranges to the Australian Alps
- protecting altitudinal corridors between the coast and the coastal ranges
- protecting key corridors on the NSW tablelands and western slopes
- supporting those corridors most important in building resilience to a changing climate.

Improving management

Many parks are still in their early stages of development, which impacts their long-term viability and management requirements. For some parks, practical or legal access to the park from surrounding lands may be lacking. Climate change will influence the existing threats to current parks, providing further impetus for us to improve their boundaries and increase their effective areas.

NPWS will maintain an active program of fine-tuning park boundaries by adding strategic parcels of land to existing parks. Priorities for fine-tuning boundaries lie mainly in the eastern half of New South Wales along the coast, in the ranges, and on the tablelands and western slopes.

Important acquisitions for improving park design include:

- areas that will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of park management
- areas required to create or improve management access or public access to parks
- inholdings (areas of private or Crown land embedded within a park)
- areas that help to consolidate and improve the overall shape of a park
- appropriate Crown lands of high conservation value that adjoin parks
- areas that will buffer parks from adjoining land uses that may impact park values
- areas that will buffer parks from the local effects of climate change
- high priority intertidal areas adjoining coastal and estuarine parks.

Culturally important landscapes and places

Protecting landscapes and places important to people has always been one of the roles of the national parks system. NPWS will pursue opportunities to preserve landscapes and places of importance to people for their heritage, aesthetic, scientific or social value.

Aboriginal people have a connection to all of New South Wales, and the whole of the national parks system has cultural value. It is recognised that all land added to the national parks system, whether it is for biodiversity conservation or other values, will contain Aboriginal cultural values.

Acquisition priorities will include areas of special cultural value or significance to Aboriginal people such as those that:

- provide for ongoing cultural uses, ensure the continuing exercise of cultural responsibilities, or enable the re-establishment of cultural activities
- provide a link between reserved lands and a wider cultural landscape that is part of a broader storyline, such as critical parts of Dreaming paths
- are significant to a community for the objects they contain or for landscape features of significance, such as rock art, stone quarries, fish traps or ceremonial grounds.

More generally, cultural heritage priorities will also include:

- outstanding examples of their kind that are poorly protected or under threat of degradation or loss outside the national parks system
- areas of cultural significance that are not otherwise accessible to the community
- iconic lands with aesthetic or recreational values
- lands within identified wilderness areas
- lands that will protect wild rivers, wetlands and catchments
- certain scenic landscapes or features such as the Illawarra escarpment and the Blue Mountains.

Wetlands, floodplains, lakes and rivers

Australia's rivers, wetlands, lakes and estuaries provide essential ecosystem services and habitat for many species. The effects of climate change will place increasing stress on these

systems. Along with coastal environments, they are culturally important to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Priorities for protection will include wetlands, rivers and floodplains, estuaries, inland saline and freshwater lakes, and coastal lakes.

Important water catchments

The strategic reservation of lands in water catchments can be effective in protecting both water quality and biodiversity. Protecting water catchments ensures that important downstream aquatic ecosystems, such as high conservation value coastal lakes, wetlands, streams, estuaries and near-shore marine environments, are better protected from pollution and siltation.

The land acquisition and transfer program will seek to protect lands in the catchments of community water supplies, coastal lakes, estuaries and important parts of marine parks.

This Directions Statement does not cover the establishment of protected areas in the marine environment. However, we recognise that marine and terrestrial ecosystems do not exist in isolation from each other. The existence of a neighbouring marine park or aquatic reserve is a positive consideration when assessing priorities for reservation. The interface between marine and terrestrial environments tends to involve high visitor use areas requiring clear management responsibilities. Consequently, for most terrestrial coastal parks, reservation to low water mark will remain a high priority.

Places with significant geodiversity

Geodiversity provides the foundation for life: ecosystems and the life forms within them depend on bedrock, soils, landforms and other geological features and processes for their survival. Geodiversity is also important in understanding the way in which many of the Earth's systems and processes work.

Human activities can impact water quality, hydrology, the processes that form and develop soils, and local wind patterns, often resulting in the deterioration or loss of geological features that have formed over millions of years. Often described as relics or fossils, these features provide important evidence of past life and atmospheric, landform, geological, hydrological and biological processes.

Much of the state's significant geological features are already protected in the national parks system, however, there is an identified need to improve the representativeness of our geodiversity in this system (OEH 2011a, 2011b).

The priority placed on acquiring lands with geodiversity significance will be informed by a mix of values including: representativeness, rarity, importance for research or understanding landform history or geological processes, and their cultural and social importance (including educational, biological, aesthetic, scenic, historical, sense of place, spiritual and recreational values).

Measuring progress

In 2010 the Australian Government endorsed the Convention on Biological Diversity *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020*, known as the 'Aichi targets' after the prefecture in Japan that hosted the international meeting. Of relevance to the building of the national parks system, and the protected area system more generally, is Aichi Target 11:

By 2020, at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10% of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscape and seascape.

Aichi Target 11 has been adopted as a national goal for Australia, with 19.63% of the country in the National Reserve System (CAPAD 2016). New South Wales contributes to this goal, in addition to setting targets for our own national parks system to ensure it is ecologically representative.

When considering targets, it is relatively easy to provide a measure of how **comprehensive** and **representative** the national parks system is in NSW. At the bioregional and subregional scale respectively, we can measure what proportion of the range of ecosystems (NSW Landscapes) have been sampled in the national parks system. While not perfect, at the current stage of the national parks system's development, this gives a strong indication of its progress towards being comprehensive and representative.

However, a simple measure of whether this sampling is **adequate** is much more difficult to quantify. Adequacy is based on a wide range of factors including size, shape, connectivity and condition of the parks and their sampled ecosystems, and the degree of alienation of surrounding lands. Some of these factors are difficult to measure or difficult to measure in a meaningful way. For this reason, this Directions Statement does not propose targets to measure whether the national parks system is adequate but instead will monitor the improvement in the percentage of each NSW Landscape being protected, while additionally considering other factors. This is consistent with the approach being taken for identifying priority investment areas in the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy, which will promote the conservation of private land. Progress will be monitored across both public and private protected areas.

We will also progress towards an adequate national parks system by applying Australian Government guiding principles for building the national parks system:

- the boundaries of parks should be set with strong ecological integrity (such as catchments)
- large parks are preferable to small ones, though a range of sizes may be appropriate to adequately sample conservation values
- boundary-to-area ratios should be minimised and linear parks avoided (except for riverine systems and corridors as may be appropriate)
- parks should be developed across major environmental gradients if feasible and appropriate
- each park should contribute to satisfying as many conservation criteria as possible
- impacts of threatening processes should be minimised (particularly from adjoining areas)
- parks should be integrated with landscape conservation efforts and mechanisms such as the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy.

National parks system status and targets

This section describes the targets used to measure progress in establishing a comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks system and the status of the system towards meeting that objective.

Statewide reservation status

Reservation status provides a very coarse and overarching measure of progress towards meeting the objective of protecting as many of the state's ecosystems as possible.

Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030 (NRMMC 2009) guides the development of the National Reserve System. The strategy specifies the main short-term priority as filling key gaps in the comprehensiveness of the national parks system at the national scale. It also establishes the following quantitative targets for comprehensiveness and representativeness:

- comprehensiveness – examples of at least 80% (by number) of all regional ecosystems in each bioregion will be represented in the National Reserve System by 2015
- representativeness – examples of at least 80% (by number) of all regional ecosystems in each subregion will be represented in the National Reserve System by 2025.

While New South Wales is recognised globally as a leader in some areas of protected area management, and the number of poorly conserved bioregions and subregions has been decreasing over time, there is still work to do to meet comprehensive, adequate and representative national targets in some areas of the state. It is acknowledged that these targets are challenging to achieve, and indeed, the date for achieving the 'comprehensiveness' target has passed. Building a CAR system of protected areas is considered to be a long-term objective and private land conservation is expected to play an increasingly important role in complementing the national parks system.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of land in the national parks system in each of the 18 NSW bioregions. It demonstrates that the bioregions in eastern New South Wales contain relatively high levels of reserved lands while the levels of reservation further west are much lower.

Figure 5 looks at reservation levels for each of 571 surrogate regional ecosystems; that is, NSW Landscapes (Mitchell 2002; Ecological Australia Pty Ltd 2008). It shows that many NSW Landscapes remain poorly reserved even within the otherwise well-reserved eastern regions. In general, the best-protected NSW Landscapes are those on the steep ranges of eastern New South Wales, many coastal landscapes and the Australian Alps. The poorly protected landscapes include:

- most landscapes in far western New South Wales
- the northern, central and southern highlands and western slopes
- landscapes on the richer soils of the coastal lowlands.

Most of these landscapes occur on private lands, which reinforces the need to complement the national parks system with targeted conservation measures on private land. This is being addressed through the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy.

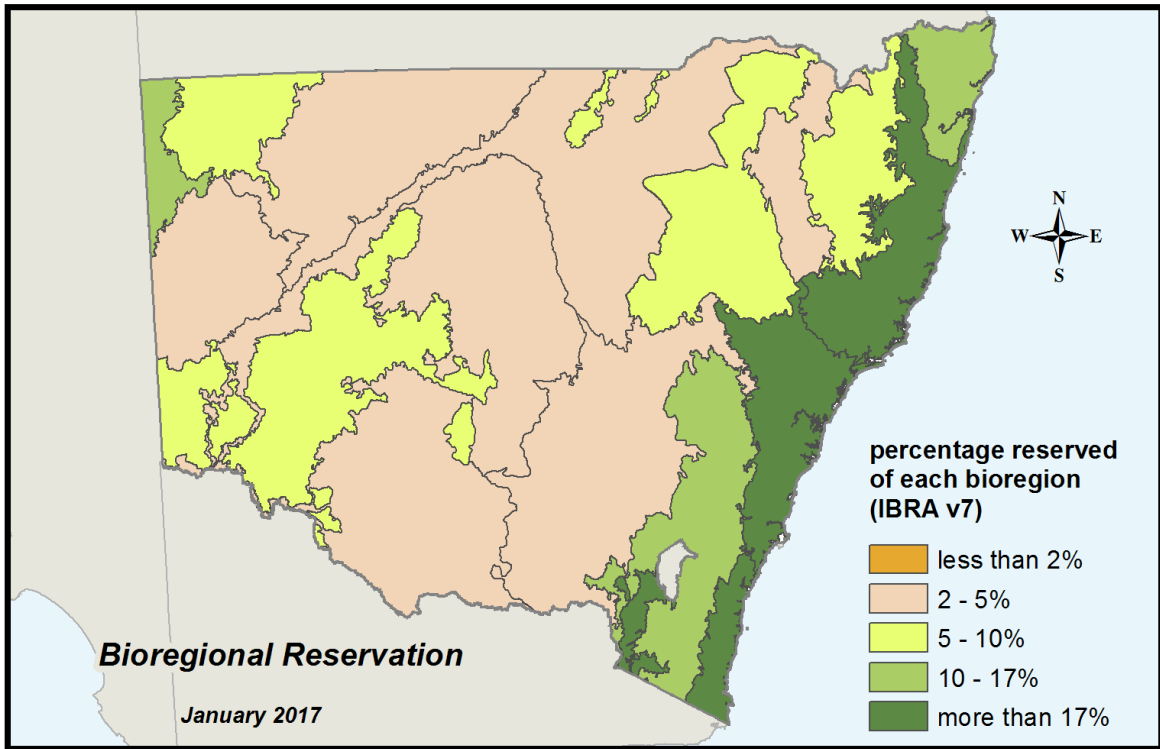


Figure 4 Proportion of each terrestrial bioregion protected in the NSW national parks system

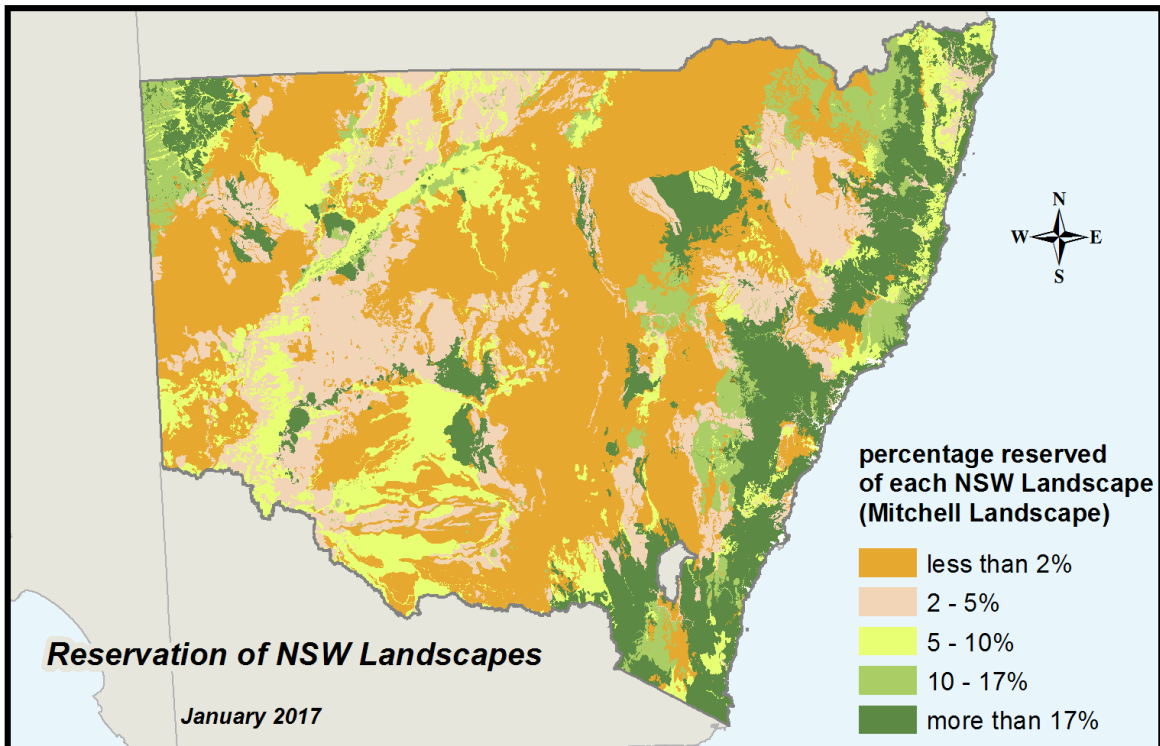


Figure 5 Proportion of each NSW Landscape protected in the NSW national parks system

Comprehensiveness

Of the 18 bioregions in New South Wales, seven have 80% or more of their NSW Landscapes sampled in protected areas ('comprehensiveness' target).

Representativeness

At a finer scale, of the 131 subregions in New South Wales, 54 have 80% or more of their NSW Landscapes sampled ('representativeness' target). This increases to 59 if secure private land conservation mechanisms are also considered (OEH 2017).

Figure 1 shows the NSW Landscapes that would contribute towards achieving representativeness in the 77 subregions where the 80% target has not been met in the national parks system, if reservation of those NSW Landscapes was to occur. NSW Landscapes are coloured where they have not yet been sampled by the national parks system. As indicated in the Figure 1 key, the colours represent the number of NSW Landscapes required to be sampled by the national parks system to meet the 80% representativeness target for each respective Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA) subregion. The number of subregions where the 80% target has not been met drops to 72 if secure private land conservation mechanisms are also considered. It is anticipated that such mechanisms will contribute to future reporting on the achievement of national targets.

To ensure progress is made towards an increase in representativeness of the NSW national parks system, NPWS has adopted the following target for the first five years:

By 2022 the national parks system will include examples of another 10 NSW Landscapes which are either currently not represented within, or are inadequately protected in, the NSW national parks system.

Progress towards meeting this target will be reviewed in 2022 to determine future targets.

Adequacy

Of course, achieving comprehensiveness and representativeness goals is only one indicator of progress towards an ideal national parks system. It gives no consideration to the matter of adequacy, as discussed in more detail in *National parks system principles and approaches*. The reservation of a regional ecosystem not yet represented in the national parks system in a subregion will produce an increase towards meeting the representativeness target, regardless of the size or viability of the reserved area. For this reason, in areas of the Figure 1 map that are coloured white, further land may still be required to be reserved to achieve a comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks system. Priority will be given to those NSW Landscapes that are furthest from achieving comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness.

Figures 1 and 4 to 7 demonstrate the challenges of building the national parks system and biodiversity protection in the central west and far west of the state relative to the eastern coastal areas. Comparable statistics for each bioregion are shown in the following regional profiles.

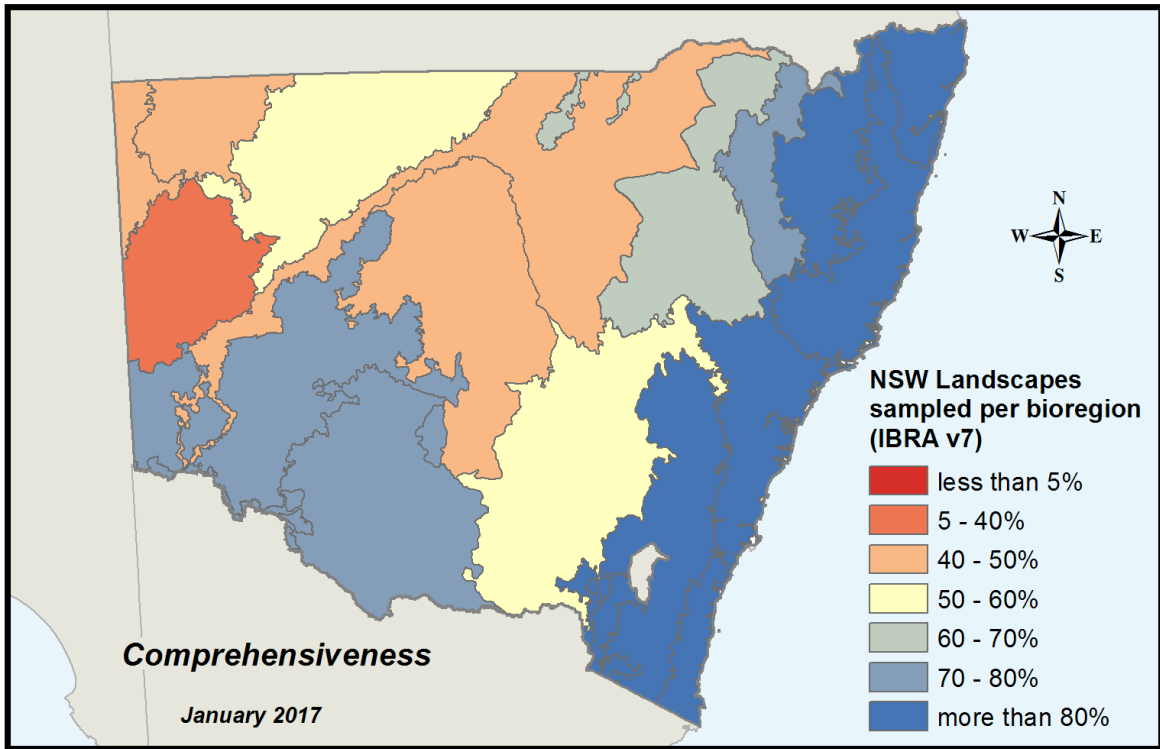


Figure 6 Comprehensiveness of the NSW national parks system as defined for National Reserve System reporting

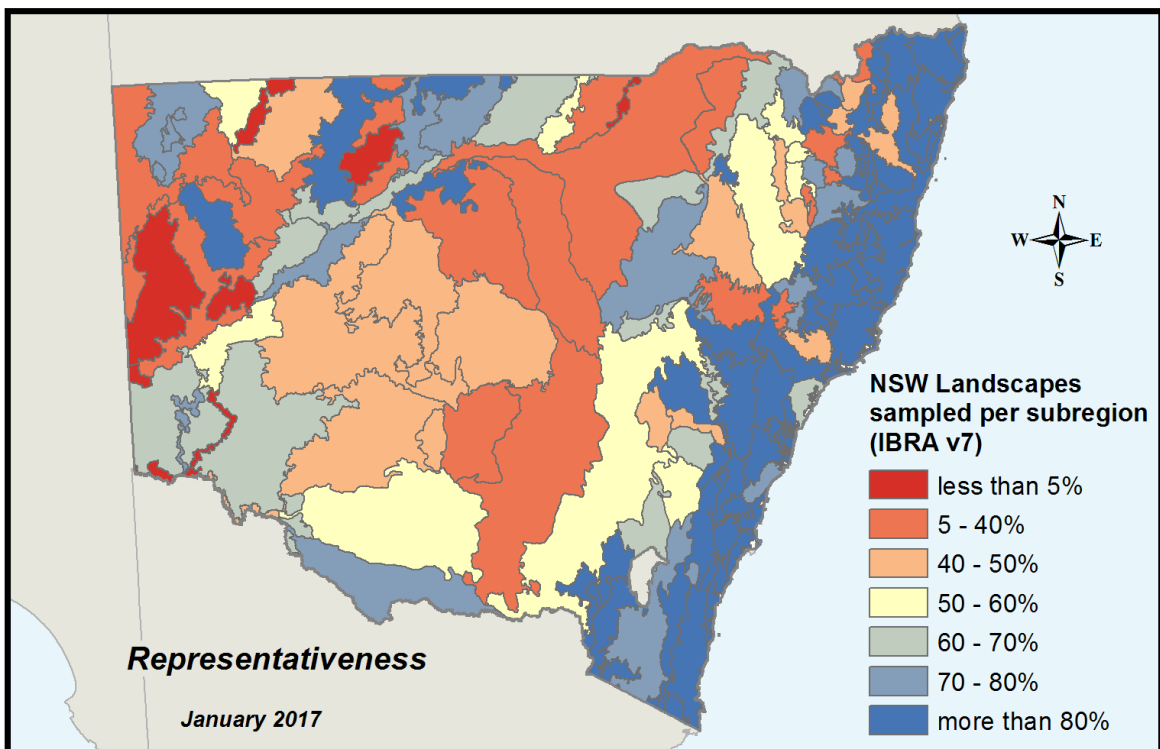


Figure 7 Representativeness of the NSW national parks system as defined for National Reserve System reporting

Regional priorities

The following synopsis of each NSW national parks system planning region indicates how the broader thematic conservation priorities will apply to each region in practice. There will, of course, need to be some level of flexibility to respond to emerging government priorities and initiatives.

Additionally, there are priorities common to all regions. These include:

- regional ecosystems that are poorly represented in the national parks system, to support and complement landscape conservation efforts and mechanisms such as the priority investment areas identified in the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy
- landscapes and places of special significance to Aboriginal people
- improve external boundary configurations, or acquire inholdings, of an existing park
- buffer parks from adjoining land uses that may be threatening park viability
- secure public access to existing parks
- support and complement the *Saving our Species* program.

Coast and coastal ranges bioregions

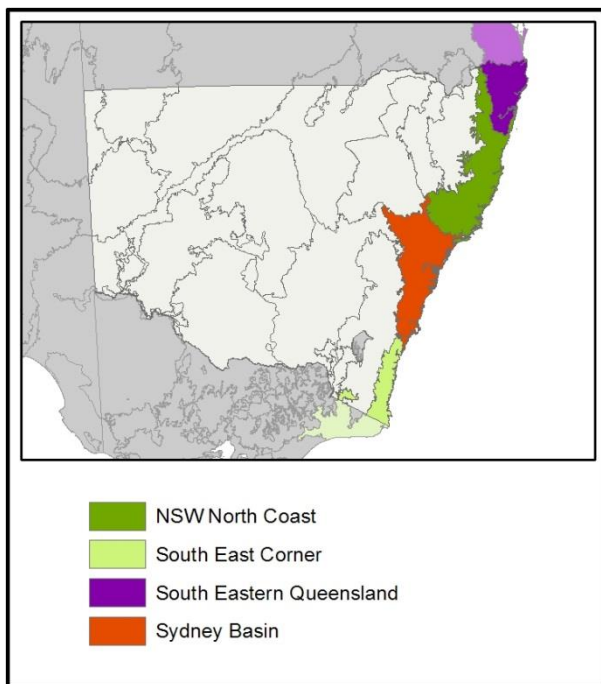


Figure 8 Coast and coastal ranges bioregions

Located on the eastern fall of the Great Dividing Range, this planning region is characterised by relatively high annual rainfall compared with inland New South Wales, as well as rugged ranges, coastal valleys, floodplains, dune systems, estuaries, forests, and coastal heathlands and wetlands. It retains large proportions of its original native vegetation, although the coastal valleys, floodplains, lowlands and other lands on richer soils have been extensively cleared with their ecosystems poorly protected and highly threatened. Major threats to conservation values include land clearing for the expansion of agricultural, rural residential, urban, industrial and transport activities and infrastructure.

Over 500 parks are located wholly or partly within the coast and coastal ranges bioregions, protecting over 30% of the land area. Most of these parks lie along the more rugged ranges and coastlines.

Building the national parks system in these bioregions will focus primarily on fine-tuning existing park boundaries. A secondary focus will be on establishing corridors that capture poorly protected and highly threatened ecosystems on the lower slopes of the coastal ranges, the coastal valleys, floodplains and estuaries, and remnant ecosystems on rich volcanic soils.

Park establishment in this planning region is an integral part of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative, which is a landscape-scale connectivity conservation program operating across all land tenures.

Near-term directions

- Consolidate the north–south corridor along the eastern ranges between Sydney and Victoria.
- Establish a north–south corridor between the Border Ranges and the Hunter Valley.
- Establish east–west coast-to-ranges corridors to assist with climate change adaptation and consolidate the existing east–west corridor near Jervis Bay.
- Link key corridors between the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage property on the north coast and northern ranges.
- Consolidate, and link unconnected parts of, coastal parks.
- Link small parks.
- Private land zoned ‘E1 – National parks and nature reserves’ under local environmental planning instruments.
- Poorly reserved ecological communities and species adjoining parks.
- Crown land of high conservation value adjacent to parks.
- Land previously identified for priority reservation in the Upper and Lower North East NSW Regional Forest Agreements and the Lower Hunter Regional Conservation Plan.
- High priority intertidal, estuarine and lake bed areas that adjoin existing coastal and estuarine parks.
- Identified wilderness areas.
- Karst areas of high significance associated with The Castles Nature Reserve and Willi Willi Caves Nature Reserve and Willi Willi National Park.
- Catchments of community water supplies, coastal lakes, estuaries and important parts of marine parks.

Directions for the longer-term development of the national parks system

- NPWS will seek to establish some new parks which incorporate poorly protected forests, woodlands, shrublands and wetlands of the:
 - lower slopes of the coastal ranges
 - coastal valleys, floodplains and estuaries and remnant ecosystems of the rich volcanic soils
 - western parts of the Sydney Basin Bioregion
 - Cumberland Plain in Western Sydney
 - Illawarra Coast and the lower Shoalhaven and Bega river valleys.

Table 2 Vital statistics – Coast and coastal ranges bioregions, January 2017

Measure for NSW portion of bioregion	NSW North Coast	South East Corner	South Eastern Queensland	Sydney Basin
Area (ha)	3,962,538	1,153,601	1,647,041	3,573,566
Remaining native vegetation cover	69%	85%	53%	68%
Number of NPWS-managed parks	227	35	113	161
Area in NPWS-managed parks (ha & %)	981,887 24.8%	496,905 43.1%	228,468 13.9%	1,442,897 40.4%
Comprehensiveness*	92%	97%	95%	98%
Representativeness*				
Number of subregions that have met the national target/Total number of subregions	15/19	3/3	5/6	12/13
Number of NSW Landscapes (by subregion) yet to be sampled within the NSW national parks system to meet the national target	10	0	2	2

* National Reserve System target is 80%.

Tablelands and western slopes bioregions

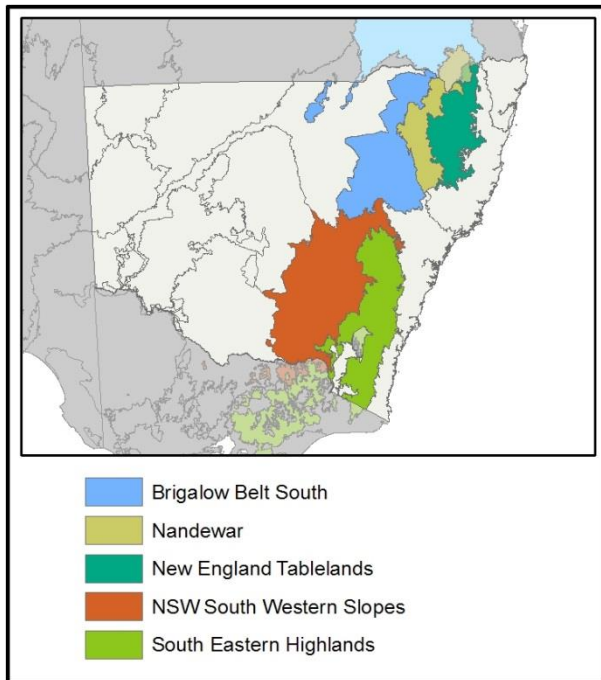


Figure 9 Tablelands and western slopes bioregions

The eastern parts of this planning region constitute the mainly undulating highlands of the New England Tableland Bioregion, the South Eastern Highlands Bioregion and the Liverpool Range. These areas form the catchment divide between the eastern and western flowing river systems of New South Wales.

The western fall of these highlands, comprising the Nandewar, Brigalow Belt South and NSW South Western Slopes bioregions, is a mix of flat, undulating and rugged landscapes.

These bioregions occupy the eastern part of the NSW sheep-wheat belt where land-use activities have led to extensive clearing of between 56% and 86% of their native vegetation.

Only a few large native vegetation patches are left in these bioregions: the Pilliga and Goonoo forests and Kaputar Range. The remaining native vegetation is distributed in thousands of small to medium-sized isolated patches often separated by extensive areas of cleared agricultural and grazing land. Because of this habitat loss and fragmentation, the threats to biodiversity in these bioregions are very high.

Between the remnant patches of native vegetation, an extensive network of narrow corridors of native vegetation has survived, mainly inside public lands, such as travelling stock reserves, road reserves and land along stream banks. These support important ecosystems and habitats, and provide vital habitat links between native vegetation remnants across the bioregions.

Over 300 NPWS parks lie wholly or partly within the tablelands and western slopes bioregions, protecting about 7.4% of the land area.

The primary focus for building the national parks system in these bioregions will be on the strategic build-up of many existing small parks to bolster their long-term viability, improve their management and enhance their role in landscape connectivity. The strategic establishment of new parks will also assist in achieving comprehensiveness and representativeness targets and reinforce conservation connectivity.

Near-term directions

- Establish or strengthen landscape connectivity between small parks or within the key corridors:
 - Liverpool Range between Towarri and Coolah Tops national parks
 - lowlands between Coolah Tops and Warrumbungle national parks and Goonoo State Conservation Area
 - land between Pilliga Nature Reserve and Warrumbungle National Park
 - land between Terry Hie Hie Aboriginal Area, Mount Kaputar National Park and Boonalla Aboriginal Area
 - east–west upper Murray River corridor between Kosciuszko National Park and Woomargama National Park near Albury
 - land along the Abercrombie River valley linking Blue Mountains National Park to Copperhannia Nature Reserve.
- Protect threatened or poorly reserved ecological communities, such as those on the lower slopes adjacent to Mount Kaputar, Towarri and Coolah Tops national parks.
- Identified wilderness areas.

Directions for the longer-term development of the national parks system

- • Karst areas of high significance:
 - adjacent to Wombeyan Karst Conservation Area, Oak Creek and Wee Jasper nature reserves, and Blue Mountains and Kanangra-Boyd national parks
 - in the South Eastern Highlands and NSW South Western Slopes bioregions.
- Riverine forest communities and adjacent box–eucalypt woodlands of the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers.
- Box–eucalypt woodlands and native grasslands, particularly on the Liverpool Plains, Gwydir floodplains and Monaro tableland.
- Wetlands and riparian communities throughout the bioregions.
- Poorly reserved ecosystems in the Nandewar Bioregion and western parts of the New England Tableland Bioregion.

Table 3 Vital statistics – Tablelands and western slopes bioregions, January 2017

Measure for NSW portion of bioregion	Brigalow Belt South	Nandewar	New England Tablelands	NSW South Western Slopes	South Eastern Highlands
Area (ha)	5,624,738	2,074,882	2,860,298	8,103,373	4,989,020
Remaining native vegetation cover	38%	39%	44%	14%	39%
Number of NPWS-managed parks	70	33	71	67	124
Area in NPWS-managed parks (ha & %)	487,079 8.7%	85,945 4.1%	275,059 9.6%	187,445 2.3%	731,469 14.7%
Comprehensiveness*	65%	70%	86%	54%	85%
Representativeness*					
Number of subregions that have met the national target/Total number of subregions	0/9	1/4	8/19	0/3	5/12
Number of NSW Landscapes (by subregion) yet to be sampled within the NSW national parks system to meet the national target	30	11	19	52	23

* National Reserve System target is 80%.

Australian Alps Bioregion

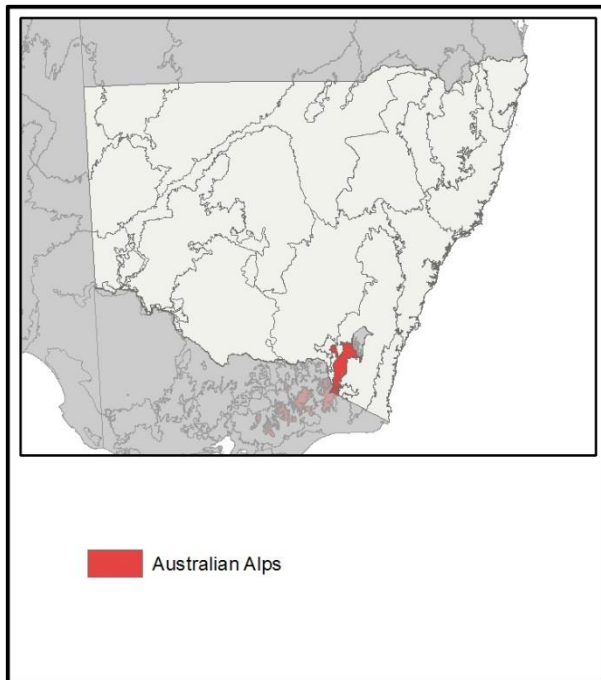


Figure 10 Australian Alps Bioregion

The Australian Alps Bioregion has a unique climate and biodiversity. It straddles the New South Wales – Victorian border and supports alpine forests, woodlands, shrublands, grasslands and wetlands.

The region is largely uncleared with over 81% protected in the national parks system in New South Wales, mostly within Kosciuszko National Park. Despite its high level of reservation, many ecosystems and species in this region are under considerable threat from climate change, where projections indicate warmer and drier conditions.

Because of the very high level of reservation in this region, the focus for building the national parks system will be on possibly acquiring a few small and strategic additions to existing parks to improve park management.

Near-term directions

- Areas linking parts of Yaouk Nature Reserve.
- Parts of the Gungarland lands on the eastern border of Kosciuszko National Park.
- Small additions to Scabby Range Nature Reserve.

Table 4 Vital statistics – Australian Alps Bioregion, January 2017

Measure for NSW portion of bioregion	Australian Alps
Area (ha)	464,297
Remaining native vegetation cover	97%
Number of NPWS-managed parks	6
Area in NPWS-managed parks (ha & %)	377,307 81.3%
Comprehensiveness*	100%
Representativeness*	
Number of subregions that have met the national target/Total number of subregions	1/1
Number of NSW Landscapes (by subregion) yet to be sampled within the NSW national parks system to meet the national target	0

* National Reserve System target is 80%.

Central western plains bioregions

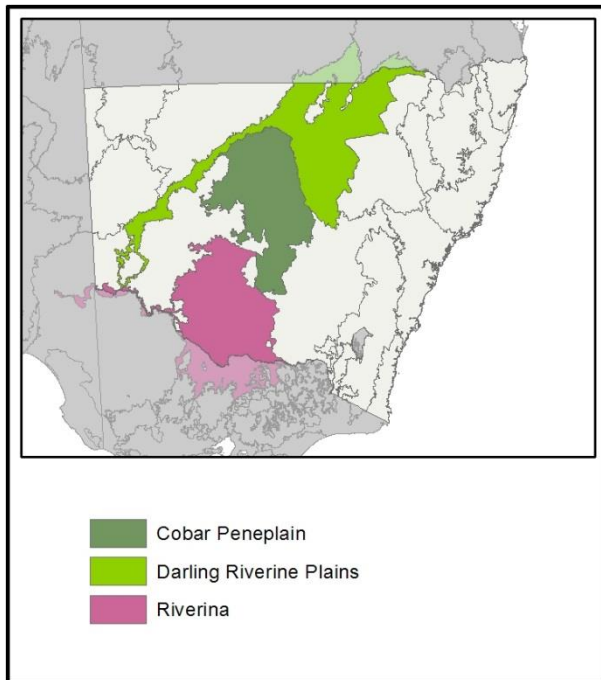


Figure 11 Central western plains bioregions

The Riverina and Darling Riverine Plains bioregions largely consist of vast floodplains separated by the Cobar Peneplain Bioregion, an undulating plain interspersed with low rocky ranges. The climate is semi-arid and all bioregions are characterised by active land-use change involving shifts from grazing to agriculture often accompanied by water extraction for irrigation. The levels of reservation are low.

Vegetation clearing that has occurred in the eastern parts of the planning region (which covers the western area of the NSW sheep-wheat belt), means opportunities for reservation are reduced and threats to conservation values remain high.

The western part of the planning region is mainly pastoral leases within the NSW Western Division. Lower rainfall and past controls on clearing on these leases have helped these areas retain most of their native vegetation. However, livestock grazing pressure has modified much of the remaining vegetation.

Over 60 parks lie wholly or partly within the central western plains bioregions, protecting 2.8% of the land area. The very low levels of reservation in these bioregions require the establishment of new parks and many of the existing parks require consolidation.

Near-term directions

- Improve comprehensiveness and representativeness.
- Establish connectivity 'stepping stones' from which to develop larger parks or contribute to protected area networks over the longer term.

Directions for the longer-term development of the national parks system

- Wetlands and riparian communities of the Darling Riverine Plains and Riverina bioregions.

- Woodlands and grasslands of the Riverina, the upper Darling Riverine Plains and the eastern parts of the Cobar Peneplain bioregions.
- Riverine forest communities and adjacent box–eucalypt woodlands of the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers.
- Belah, myall and wilga–rosewood–whitewood woodlands.
- Brigalow tall shrublands, chenopod shrublands and carbeen open forest.
- Box–eucalypt woodlands and native grasslands, particularly on the Gwydir and Culgoa floodplains.
- Iconic wetlands, such as end-of-system wetlands, lignum shrublands, marshes and ephemeral lakes.
- Representative examples of geodiversity such as isolated low ranges and ridges and Cenozoic leucitite outcrops.

Table 5 Vital statistics – Central western plains bioregions, January 2017

Measure for NSW portion of bioregion	Cobar Peneplain	Darling Riverine Plains	Riverina
Area (ha)	7,377,221	9,419,258	7,022,691
Remaining native vegetation cover	67%	52%	51%
Number of NPWS-managed parks in bioregion	21	24	24
Area in NPWS-managed parks (ha & %)	193,922 2.6%	249,813 2.7%	256,949 3.7%
Comprehensiveness*	50%	48%	78%
Representativeness*			
Number of subregions that have met the national target/Total number of subregions	1/5	0/9	0/5
Number of NSW Landscapes (by subregion) yet to be sampled within the NSW national parks system to meet the national target	36	51	16

* National Reserve System target is 80%.

Far west bioregions

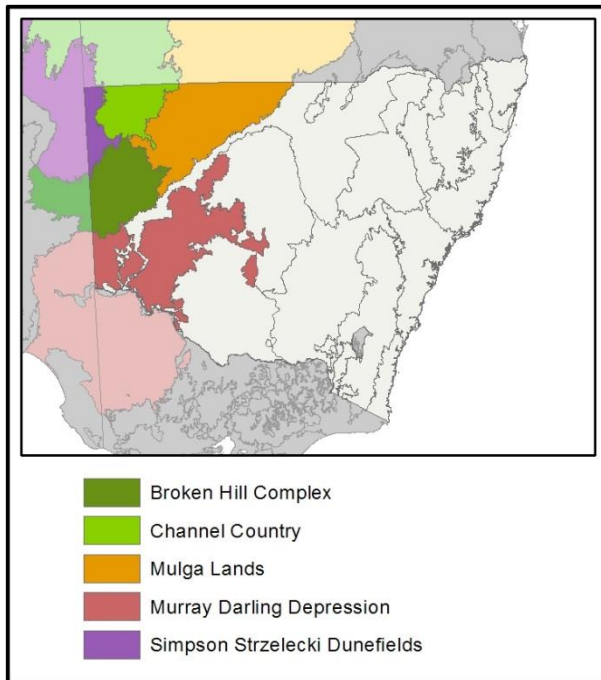


Figure 12 Far west bioregions

Located in the far western pastoral zone of New South Wales, this planning region is characterised by arid to semi-arid climates, high levels of remnant native vegetation cover and few existing parks. Most land in this bioregional group is Crown leasehold held as perpetual pastoral leases known as Western Lands Leases.

Except for the southern part of the Murray–Darling Depression, where higher average rainfall attracts a growing agricultural activity, and interest in mineral sand mining is increasing, the threats to these bioregions from broad scale clearing at present are relatively low compared with those to the east.

Over 30 parks lie wholly or partly within the far west bioregions, protecting about 5.3% of the land area.

Due to the relatively lower levels of threat, development of the national parks system in these bioregions is happening over a considerably longer term.

Near-term directions

- Improve comprehensiveness and representativeness.
- Establish connectivity ‘stepping stones’ from which to develop larger parks or contribute to protected area networks over the longer term.
- Build up existing parks.

Directions for the longer-term development of the national parks system

- Establish new primary nodes, incorporating areas of wetlands and floodplains of the Cuttaburra Creek and Bulloo River Overflow.
- Address low levels of reservation in the Broken Hill Complex Bioregion.

- Acquire representative examples of isolated low ranges and ridges between Broken Hill and Cobar and sites with significant bedrock structural features within the Curnamona Craton in the Broken Hill region.

Table 5 Vital statistics – Far west bioregions, January 2017

Measure for NSW portion of bioregion	Broken Hill Complex	Channel Country	Mulga Lands	Murray–Darling Depression	Simpson–Strzelecki Dunefields
Area (ha)	3,763,318	2,340,662	6,591,283	7,935,880	1,095,797
Remaining native vegetation cover	100%	100%	99%	89%	100%
Number of NPWS-managed parks	4	2	7	20	1
Area in NPWS-managed parks (ha & %)	75,617 2.0%	218,779 9.3%	290,027 4.4%	462,433 5.8%	119,146 10.9%
Comprehensiveness*	38%	41%	59%	70%	43%
Representativeness*					
Number of subregions that have met the national target/Total number of subregions	1/4	0/5	2/10	0/3	0/1
Number of NSW Landscapes (by subregion) yet to be sampled within the NSW national parks system to meet the national target	21	16	21	17	8

* National Reserve System target is 80%.

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