

# Chapter 3

## ISC tasks and Methodology

This chapter looks first at the purpose and management principles of national parks in New South Wales (NSW), then outlines the tasks of the Independent Scientific Committee (ISC), its terms of reference and its approach to assessing the values of Kosciuszko National Park.

### Purpose and management principles of national parks in New South Wales

In evaluating the values of the park, the ISC took into account the purpose of a national park established under New South Wales (NSW) legislation, and the management principles that are the basis for management of NSW national parks.

The National Parks and Wildlife Amendment Act 2000 provides (s.30E(1)) that:

*“The purpose of reserving land as a national park is to identify, protect and conserve areas containing outstanding or representative ecosystems, natural or cultural features or landscapes or phenomena that provide opportunities for public appreciation and inspiration and sustainable visitor use and enjoyment so as to enable those areas to be managed in accordance with subsection (2).”*

The Act requires that national parks be managed in accordance with the following principles (s.30E (2)):

- a) the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem function, the protection of geological and geomorphological features and natural phenomena and the maintenance of natural landscapes;
- b) the conservation of places, objects, features and landscapes of cultural value;
- c) the protection of the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations;
- d) the promotion of public appreciation and understanding of the national park's natural and cultural values;
- e) provision for sustainable visitor use and enjoyment that is compatible with the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values;
- f) provision for the sustainable use (including adaptive reuse) of any building or structures or modified natural areas having regard to the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values; and
- g) provision for appropriate research and monitoring.

The Act also requires that the following matters be taken into consideration in the preparation of a plan of management:

- relevant management principles;
- conservation of biodiversity, including the maintenance of habitat, ecosystems and populations of threatened species;
- protection and appreciation of objects, places and structures of cultural significance, and tracts of land;
- protection of landscape values and scenic features;
- protection of geological and geomorphological features;
- protection of wilderness values and the management of wilderness areas;

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- maintenance of natural processes;
- rehabilitation of landscapes and the reinstatement of natural processes;
- fire management; in the case of a plan of management for a national park, nature reserve or karst conservation reserve, the prohibition of the execution of any works adversely affecting the natural condition or special features of the park or reserve;
- potential for the reserved land to be used by Aboriginal people for cultural purposes;
- provision of opportunities for public understanding, enjoyment and appreciation of natural and cultural;
- heritage values, including opportunities for sustainable visitor use;
- adaptive reuse of buildings and structures;
- appropriate (including culturally appropriate) and ecologically sustainable use of the reserved land, including use by lessees, licensees and occupiers of the land;
- preservation of catchment values;
- encouragement of appropriate research into natural and cultural features and processes;
- including threatening processes;
- identification and mitigation of threatening processes;
- statutory natural resource management, land use management plans and land management practices of land surrounding or within a region of the reserved land;
- regional, national and international context of the reserved land, the maintenance of any national;
- and international significance of the reserved land and compliance with relevant national and international;
- agreements, including the protection of world heritage values and the management of world heritage properties;
- benefits to local communities;
- social and economic context of the reserve so as to ensure, for example, that the provision of visitor facilities is appropriate to the surrounding area or that pest species management programs are coordinated across different tenures;
- protection and management of wild rivers; and
- impact of the management and the use of land acquired under Part 11 on the reserved land's management.

## Terms of reference for the ISC

The terms of reference required the ISC to:

- Identify, describe and report on the condition, and trend in the condition, of the park's natural, cultural, recreational, economic and social values;
- Prepare a statement of significance of the values of the park including review of the "Schedule of significant natural features";
- Identify and report on key pressures on the park's values including any works that adversely affect these values;
- Identify and report on key opportunities for the park's values to be protected including the quality and adequacy of NPWS's strategies to foster public appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the park's natural and cultural values;
- Identify appropriate research, monitoring and key performance indicators required for the management of the park's natural and cultural features;
- Provide advice on the strategies developed by the Community Forum for managing the park.

## Approach to the task

The ISC met over a six-month period in 2002, to undertake an objective assessment of the park's values and provide independent advice about those values. The committee developed a methodology that was sufficiently flexible to be applicable to all of the disciplines and areas of expertise involved, and sufficiently consistent to meet the standards of rigour and integrity necessary for scientific and technical studies. In their individual assessment of particular values of the park, each member of the committee addressed the terms of reference. Chapter 4 explains how the terms of reference were addressed in considering each of the individual values.

## Criteria for evaluating significance

No single set of criteria could embrace all of the core and derived values that the ISC has identified for Kosciuszko National Park in response to the requirements of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* (NSW). In evaluating the nature and level of the values, criteria have been used appropriate to the type of value under consideration. The significance summary and the topic chapters provide advice on the rationale for the identified significance of each of the parameters evaluated.

## **International significance criteria**

Values for international significance were assessed using criteria appropriate to the value under consideration.

Internationally recognised criteria are established for areas listed under various international agreements and conventions. These criteria can apply to the themes and specific areas of the listings without necessarily applying to all values of the park. Examples are the criteria used for listing the park as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) biosphere reserve, and those for listing the Blue Lake and its environs as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Kosciuszko National Park is not part of a World Heritage Property; thus, the World Heritage criteria for natural and cultural heritage are not fully appropriate here, although it can be argued that aspects of the park would meet these criteria if the park were to be nominated.

For most values, this assessment used an adaptation of criteria indicated by the draft national criteria recently adopted for Australia (see below) and criteria put forward by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC)<sup>1</sup> (1996).

### **Biosphere reserves**

Biosphere reserves are areas of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems promoting solutions to the problem of how to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use. Collectively, such reserves form a global network within which exchanges of information, experience and personnel are promoted.

Biosphere reserves are internationally recognised and serve in some ways as 'living laboratories' for testing and demonstrating integrated management of land, water and biodiversity. Each biosphere reserve is intended to fulfil three complementary and mutually reinforcing basic functions:

- a conservation function, to conserve landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation;
- a development function, to foster economic and human development that is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable; and
- a logistic function, to provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange related to local, national and global issues of conservation and development.

### **World Conservation Monitoring Centre criteria**

A useful tool that was used by the ISC is the set of criteria developed by UNEP WCMC (1996) to assist in assessing sites for inclusion in protected areas, which can be adapted to help identify globally and nationally significant sites<sup>1</sup>. The WCMC criteria state that sites containing the following species or ecosystems are likely to be globally significant:

- endemic threatened species;
- globally threatened species for which the country holds a significant part of the world population;
- other globally threatened species;
- ecosystems unique to the country; and
- ecosystems for which the country holds a significant part of the world total.

### **International application of Australian criteria for national heritage places**

The draft criteria for national heritage places recently adopted by Environment Australia and the Australian Heritage Commission were applied by the ISC to identify values with international significance where this was appropriate to the values under consideration. These were adapted as shown below:

- 1 A place that is a component of the natural or cultural environment that is of outstanding international value for future generations and the present community because of any of the following:
  - a) its importance in the course, or pattern, of the Earth's natural or cultural history;
  - b) it possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history that are important at an international level;
  - c) it has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the Earth's natural or cultural history;
  - d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of: (i) a class of the Earth's natural or cultural places; or (ii) a class of the Earth's natural or cultural environments;

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<sup>1</sup> In 1988, the independent, non-profit World WCMC Conservation Monitoring Centre was founded jointly by IUCN, WWF the World Wildlife Fund and UNEP. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) was established in 2000 as the world biodiversity information and assessment centre of the United Nations Environment Programme UNEP.

- e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued internationally;
- f) its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at an international level at a particular period;
- g) its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- h) its importance as part of the developing traditions and customary law of Indigenous peoples;
- i) its special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the Earth's natural or cultural history.

### **National significance criteria**

The criteria that have been used to establish national significance include the WCMC criteria, and the draft criteria for national heritage values developed in 2002 by Environment Australia and the Australian Heritage Commission.

#### ***World Conservation Monitoring Centre national criteria***

The WCMC (1996) criteria state that, as a general guide, protected area sites that are large (by national standards) can be regarded as being at least of national significance. Nationally significant sites are likely to contain:

- nationally threatened populations of globally non-threatened species;
- endemic non-threatened species; or
- species-rich ecosystems.

#### ***Draft criteria for national heritage values***

The Australian Heritage Commission, a statutory body that advises the Commonwealth Government on heritage, maintains a list of natural and cultural heritage places called the *Register of the National Estate*.

The most recent criteria developed by Environment Australia and the Australian Heritage Commission will be adopted as a consequence of legislation before Parliament in 2002. This legislation proposes that a special list of national heritage places be developed comprising natural, historic and indigenous places that are of outstanding national heritage value to the Australian nation.

The draft criteria for the national heritage values are:

- 1 A place that is a component of the natural or cultural environment of Australia is eligible for entry to the National Heritage List if it is of outstanding national value for future generations and the present community because of any of the following:
  - a) its importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history;
  - b) it possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history;
  - c) it has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history;
  - d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of: (i) a class of Australia's natural or cultural places, or; (ii) a class of Australia's natural or cultural environment;
  - e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;
  - f) its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;
  - g) its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
  - h) its importance as part of the developing traditions and customary law of Indigenous peoples; and
  - i) its special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history.

#### ***Additional national criterion for non-heritage values***

The values of Kosciuszko National Park include some 'non-heritage' values. The criterion adopted by the ISC for identifying the national significance of these non-heritage values is: 'Other nationally important values that contribute to the social and economic well-being of Australia.'

### **State or regional significance criteria**

The criteria used to define significance at state or regional level are primarily derived from the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* (NSW) and the *Heritage Act* (NSW).

The definition of 'state' is clear, but the concept of 'regional' is more abstract and has been used as appropriate in the sense of the park in its landscape setting, as a bioregion, the ecosystem service delivery area immediately around the park, or the local government areas surrounding the park.

The key to the significance levels is the context of the value; for example, regional movement of Aboriginal people or regional consideration of pastoral history imply different regional boundaries to each other and to the bioregion boundary.

#### **State criteria from the National Parks and Wildlife Act**

The NSW state criteria are derived from the *National Parks and Wildlife Act*, Division 2 Management principles, which are set out elsewhere in this report. They are broad criteria and principles that extend beyond the traditional natural and cultural heritage values.

#### **State criteria from the NSW Heritage Act**

'State significance' has been defined in the *Heritage Act* (NSW) as the basis for listing places on the State Heritage Register. The criteria in the Act have been used to assist in assessing the type and level of significance of 'items' (the term used in the Act) in the Kosciuszko National Park.

State heritage significance, in relation to a place, building, work, relic, moveable object or precinct, means significance to the State in relation to the historical, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural or aesthetic value of the item (S.4A(1), *Heritage Act* 1977).

To be assessed for listing on the State Heritage Register an item, in the opinion of the Heritage Council, is required to meet one or more of the following criteria:

- an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history;
- an item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history;
- an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW;
- an item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- an item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history;
- an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history; or
- an item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments.

#### **Additional state or regional criterion for non-heritage values**

The values of Kosciuszko National Park include some 'non-heritage' values. The criterion adopted by the ISC for identifying the state or regional significance of these non-heritage values is:

'Other nationally important values that contribute to the social and economic well-being of NSW or the region.'

#### **Local or park significance criteria**

The criteria used by the ISC were derived from local dependencies, expert opinion or other knowledge. Sites of essentially local or park significance are likely to:

- be relatively small;
- relate to core values that are well represented or better protected in other larger protected areas within the country; or
- other attributes that contribute to the social and economic well-being of the park and its local communities.

#### **Interaction with the Community Forum**

The interaction between the ISC and Community Forum was recognised by the committee as critical in the success of the plan of management review process. A series of 'envoys' and a joint meeting facilitated information transfers between the two groups. A member of the ISC has attended each Community Forum meeting in order to facilitate this information transfer. The chair of the Community Forum and representatives preparing the Alpine Resorts Plan were also invited to ISC workshops and meetings. The ISC made itself available to receive and respond to referrals for information from the Community Forum. In addition, the ISC requested data sources and information on the values of the park from the Community Forum in order to consolidate the collective knowledge of the two groups.

## The Submission Process

The Independent Scientific Committee (ISC) produced an 'Interim Report' in December 2002 and invited interested individuals and organisations to comment. Public comment on the ISC report was sought to improve the quality of information in the report, educate and inform the public on the significance of the park and ensure transparency in this process. This 'Interim Report' was initially open for public comment for two months, however was extended following a number of requests due to the January 2003 fires in Kosciuszko National Park. A total of seventy-nine (79) submissions were received by the ISC from a range of geographic locations and sectors, with the majority being from Sydney.

Submissions were discussed in detail at an ISC meeting in March 2003 with individual authors responsible for incorporating relevant changes into their chapter. The majority of submissions and comments supported the information present on the values assessed by the ISC and the knowledge gaps, findings and recommendations. The ISC's approach of evaluating all values within the Park, ie: natural, cultural, social, recreational and economic, was also strongly supported. Critical comments related to:

the perception that the ISC believed summer activities were more popular than winter or snow sport activities,

the assessment of values associated with alpine resorts; or

provided a number of additional references, minor corrections and additions.

These issues have been addressed in this final report. It is also important to note that some comments referred to matters outside the ISC's Terms of Reference and were referred back to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for consideration within the Plan of Management planning process. The ISC have requested NPWS consider these comments in the formulation of the draft Plan of Management.

The Independent Scientific Committee would like to extend thanks all those who took the time to read and comment on the 'Interim Report'. Numerous comments obviously involved a serious dedication of time and effort for which the Independent Scientific Committee members are grateful. The description of values for Kosciuszko National Park has without doubt been enhanced by these important contributions.