



# ACF

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20th December, 1982

Dear Friend of Conservation,

Yesterday in Melbourne, sixteen peak and national conservation groups met to discuss the federal Government's decision on South West Tasmania. A list of the decisions reached and the groups represented is attached.

The meeting agreed that the Government's decision not to intervene to save the South West, in spite of the strong national public support for the conservation of the area, was so environmentally irresponsible that the conservation movement should campaign against the Government at the next general election unless the Government takes immediate effective action to stop the dam.

The meeting set up a National South West Coalition which we now invite you to join. We believe that if we can show the electoral muscle of the conservation movement on this issue, governments in future will be less likely to make such environmentally-destructive decisions. By campaigning to save the South West we can also help secure other nationally important areas such as the Great Barrier Reef and the natural areas of Western Australia.

The campaign will be a national one with particular emphasis on marginal seats. Many volunteers and much money will be needed.

If your group can help with the massive organisation of this campaign it would be greatly appreciated.

ACF in Melbourne has set up a National South West Coalition Designated Activity Account and a central register of volunteers, so donations and offers of help should be sent to ACF. Please write back by mid-January.

Yesterday's meeting also called for support for the blockade of works in South West Tasmania. Please urge your members to participate in the blockade before the election campaign gets into full swing.

I look forward to your group joining the Coalition.

Yours sincerely,

J. G. Mosley  
Director

- For the National South-West Coalition

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DECISIONS OF SUMMIT MEETING ON SOUTH WEST TASMANIA, 19 DECEMBER, 1982

1. The meeting strongly condemns the Government's decision on South West Tasmania. With this decision the Government has forfeited any claim to environmental responsibility.
2. The meeting supports the blockade of HEC works and calls on all Australians to give active support to the blockade after it resumes on 4 January.
3. The meeting calls on Government Members to support the World Heritage Properties Protection Bill as carried by the Senate.
4. It is the intention of the conservation movement to make the question of the protection of South West Tasmania and other world heritage areas an issue in the next federal election, and will step up the establishment of organisations in federal electorates, especially in marginal seats, to further develop support for policies to protect World Heritage areas, especially the South West.
5. The meeting also decided that unless the Commonwealth Government takes immediate effective action to stop the Gordon-below-Franklin dam the conservation movement will actively campaign against the Government at the next federal election.
6. The meeting decided to set up a National South West Coalition.
7. It was decided to recommend to conservation groups that they consider withdrawing their support from the National Conservation Strategy. It was felt that the strategy did not address the issue of South West Tasmania and that the Government was likely to use the document to mislead voters into believing that it was sincerely interested in conservation of the national heritage.

ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED AT THE SUMMIT MEETING

Australian Conservation Foundation  
Tasmanian Wilderness Society (TAS)  
Tasmanian Wilderness Society (Melb)  
South West Tasmania Committee (Syd)  
Queensland Conservation Council  
Conservation Council of Victoria  
Conservation Council of South Australia  
Conservation Council of Western Australia  
Tasmanian Conservation Trust  
Australian National Parks Council  
National Parks Association of NSW  
Victorian National Parks Association  
Wildlife Preservation Society (Qld)  
Australian Speleological Federation  
Royal Australian Institute of Architects  
Royal Australian Institute of Landscape Architects



## CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

### A NATIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR AUSTRALIA Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development

#### PURPOSE

1. The purpose of the National Conservation Strategy for Australia (NCSA) is to ensure that the use of living resources on which development is based, can be sustained in perpetuity while enabling development to satisfy the reasonable needs and aspirations of society.
2. The Strategy focuses on the future management of Australia's living resources and provides guidance for government policy makers and their advisers, for those directly concerned with the use of living resources, and for those whose activities indirectly affect living resources.
3. The impetus for the Strategy in Australia came from the World Conservation Strategy. Released in 1980, it discussed world-wide problems from which Australia is not immune.

#### ELEMENTS

4. The essential elements of the National Conservation Strategy for Australia are:
  - (a) the **Definitions** of development and living resource conservation;
  - (b) the three main **Objectives** of living resource conservation;
  - (c) the four **Principles**: integrate conservation and development, retain options for future use, mix cure with prevention, focus on causes as well as symptoms; and
  - (d) a set of **Priority National Requirements and Actions**.

#### DEFINITIONS

5. The Strategy recognises that living resource conservation and sustainable development are interdependent. This interdependence is emphasised by the definitions of **conservation** and **development** explained in detail in the World Conservation Strategy. These definitions have been adopted for the National Conservation Strategy for Australia.
6. "Conservation is the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations. Thus conservation is positive, embracing preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilisation, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment. Living resource conservation is specifically concerned with plants, animals and micro-organisms, and with those non-living elements of the environment on which they depend. Living resources have two important properties the combination of which distinguishes them from non-



## CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

living resources: they are renewable if conserved; and they are destructible if not." (WCS).

7. "Development is the modification of the biosphere and the application of human, financial, living and non-living resources to satisfy human needs and improve the quality of human life. For development to be sustainable it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and non-living resource base; and of the long term as well as the short term advantages and disadvantages of alternative actions." (WCS).

8. Despite a number of apparent differences between conservation and development, they are fundamentally linked by their dependence on living resources. Conservation advocates an attitude of stewardship, especially towards those plants, animals and micro-organisms, and the non-living resources on which they depend, that could be destroyed if only short term human interests are pursued. Development provides for today's needs: conservation provides the stock of living resources for tomorrow.

### OBJECTIVES

9. The three main objectives of living resource conservation identified in the World Conservation Strategy have been adopted for the NCSA. They are:

- "(a) to maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems (such as soil regeneration and protection, the recycling of nutrients, and the cleansing of waters), on which human survival and development depend;
- (b) to preserve genetic diversity (the range of genetic material found in the world's organisms), on which depend the breeding programs necessary for the protection and improvement of cultivated plants and domesticated animals, as well as much scientific advance, technical innovation, and the security of the many industries that use living resources;
- (c) to ensure the sustainable utilisation of species and ecosystems (notably fish and other wildlife, forests and grazing land), which support millions of rural communities as well as major industries." (WCS).

### ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT

10. Consistent with the objectives of the Strategy, Australians should note the role of development in:

- (a) providing for the essential needs of human society;
- (b) generating economic wealth which enables the community to pursue educational, cultural and recreational interests; and



## CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

- (c) providing economic capacity which makes it possible for society to practice resource conservation and preserve the Australian heritage.

11. It follows that implementation of the Strategy must have regard to proper accounting of its costs and benefits to society; to the general economic climate, which has an important bearing upon the speed with which the Strategy can be implemented; and to the inability of Australia to isolate itself from the world economic system or from world-wide environmental effects. Australia's role as a major trading nation is of crucial importance. International trade affords an opportunity to encourage minimal disturbance of sensitive areas by providing for development to proceed on suitable sites in appropriate countries. Trade can also spread the benefit of resources and encourage global strategies for sustainable development.

### IMPORTANCE OF A NATIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGY

12. Already Australia has done much to achieve the objectives of the NCSA. A report by the Australian Environment Council and the Council of Nature Conservation Ministers, Australian Achievements in Environment Protection and Nature Conservation 1972-1982, indicates the breadth of progress. Many agencies and organisations have been established to address particular aspects of living resource conservation and development. Nevertheless, much remains to be done as a matter of urgency because:

- (a) the high standard of living enjoyed by most Australians places great demands on resources. Because Australia supplies commodities to other countries, this demand is significantly increased;
- (b) soil erosion, largely the result of poor land management, poses a major threat to the agricultural and pastoral industries. Many Australian soils are of relatively low quality and good agricultural land is scarce;
- (c) Australia is the driest inhabited continent and the quantity, quality and location of water influences how and where development may occur. Many river systems and underground water resources are severely degraded. Water and soil salinity are now widespread problems;
- (d) Australia has lost much of its former forest cover, particularly through clearing for agriculture and grazing. Certain types of native forest are now scarce and harvesting rates of some which remain appear to be above sustainable levels;
- (e) a number of native Australian plants and animals are endangered and some species have become extinct. The habitats of many species have either been destroyed or are severely affected by human activities;
- (f) some fish stocks are declining due to overharvesting;
- (g) estuarine and coastal environments which are highly productive nurseries for marine organisms are limited in Australia. Many areas are being either contaminated or reduced as a result of industrial, agricultural and urban pressures; and



CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

- (h) many coastal lands have already been extensively modified, while many of the remaining natural areas are being threatened by degradation from expansion of urban development and tourism, industry and agriculture.

**OBSTACLES**

13. Some obstacles to achieving NCSA objectives are:

- (a) the belief that Australia is so vast that it has an unlimited capacity to supply resources;
- (b) a lack of recognition that there is a limit to the ability of Australia's life support systems to withstand human impacts and to sustain society in the long term;
- (c) failure to apply, in a consistent way, guidelines designed to ensure that development is undertaken with minimum adverse environmental impact;
- (d) a lack of recognition that conservation applies to land uses and activities other than national parks and wildlife protection;
- (e) failure to understand that, in the long term, continuous growth in population and consumer demand is inconsistent with the maintenance of essential ecological processes and life support systems;
- (f) inadequate forward planning to integrate conservation and development for a sustainable future; and
- (g) insufficient basic information on the issues and too few appropriately trained personnel.

**STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES**

14. Achieving the NCSA objectives would be greatly assisted if the Australian community accepted four strategic principles.

- (a) **Integrate conservation and development** and emphasise their interdependence and common ground. This requires:
  - (i) acceptance of the interrelated definitions of conservation and development used in this Strategy;
  - (ii) better understanding of the relationship between development and conservation;
  - (iii) improved decision-making, which may involve changes to institutional and organisational arrangements (finance, organisations, legislation and planning);
  - (iv) recognition that conservation is relevant to all areas of living resources and not confined to a narrow range of activities;



**CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA**  
**FROM THE WORKING GROUP**

- (v) increased appreciation of the effects of one land use upon another and of the value of multidisciplinary planning; and
- (vi) greater weight to be given to long term factors.

**(b) Retain options for future use. This is necessary because:**

- (i) information on the productive capacities of ecosystems and their ability to absorb pollution and other impacts is frequently insufficient for resource managers to predict the future effects of their use;
- (ii) past errors may have consequences which are difficult to reverse and advances in technology, although they may be helpful, cannot always be guaranteed to counter or redress them; and
- (iii) management flexibility is required to respond to changing circumstances.

**(c) Mix cure and prevention. This is necessary because:**

- (i) problems with immediate economic or social costs attract most attention while chronic problems may be overlooked, although their effects may be very significant in the longer term; and
- (ii) it is more efficient to anticipate problems and take positive preventative action than merely to react to problems when they arise.

**(d) Focus on causes as well as symptoms. This is needed because:**

- (i) symptoms often only appear well after the damage has been done; and
- (ii) dealing with symptoms only is uneconomical and no more than a temporary solution.

**PRIORITY NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND ACTIONS**

15. **Priority National Requirements** identify the major goals of the Strategy and ways and means of implementing it.

**Major Goals**

1. Ensure that land management practices are consistent with long term productivity of living resources.
2. Ensure that productive agricultural and forestry systems are utilised on a sustainable yield basis.
3. Conserve Australia's ground and surface water resources; and restore and maintain water quality in rivers.



CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

4. Avoid further increases in, and where possible reduce salinity of soils and water.

5. Conserve native plant and animal communities and those introduced species which support plant and animal-based industries; and preserve their genetic diversity.

6. Minimise the impact of human development on the coastline, on marine resources, on the quality of coastal waters and on critical marine habitats such as estuaries, bays, and reefs.

**Ways and Means**

7. Promote a co-ordinated national approach to land use planning.

8. Encourage co-operation between governments, industry and the community to achieve the priority national requirements within Australia's constitutional, legislative and administrative framework.

9. Encourage timely, more broadly based and better informed public participation in the planning and decision-making process.

10. Encourage the development, publication and application of voluntary guidelines on the use of living resources.

11. Build support for the integration of conservation and development through education, extension and training programs.

12. Develop new technologies which may increase living resources or facilitate the re-establishment of natural areas.

13. Take an international perspective to ensure that Australia, recognising its role as a major trading nation, plays its part in the implementation of the World Conservation Strategy.

16. **Priority National Actions** identify more specific measures for achieving the three main objectives of the NCSA. In implementing them, governments and non-government bodies will be able to:

(a) utilise the large body of existing legislation, administrative arrangements and skills available at all levels of government and, where necessary, seek their harmonisation through consultative processes; and

(b) build upon the knowledge, expertise and public awareness and participatory processes available within the community.



## CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

### Improving the Capacity to Manage

#### Policy Planning and Co-ordination

1. Continue and where necessary improve co-ordination and co-operation between the Commonwealth and the States and between the States on living resource issues of national significance.
2. Establish machinery to improve communication and to promote co-operation between community groups, industry and governments.
3. Integrate environmental assessment and development planning, by encouraging a multidisciplinary approach, to ensure that conservation and development issues are not addressed in isolation.
4. Conduct thorough environmental assessments of significant development proposals and policies that affect living resources.
5. Consider the cumulative effects of conservation and development proposals and policies at local, regional and national levels.
6. Review the responsibilities of single purpose authorities with a view to widening their charters and, where appropriate, incorporate consideration of both conservation and development objectives.
7. Promote incentives and other financial arrangements such as tax deductions for activities and land uses which are consistent with sustainable development, and remove incentives or apply disincentives for inappropriate activities, subject to the careful assessment of the consequences for other national objectives.
8. Develop education programs to promote awareness throughout the community of the importance of living resource conservation for sustainable development and the interrelationships between elements of the life-support systems such as forests, soils and water.

#### Legislation and Regulations

9. Further develop and publish environmental standards, codes of practice and guidelines.
10. Work towards a nationally uniform approach to conservation and environment protection legislation through Commonwealth/State consultation to avoid unnecessary delays and duplication created by differing procedures.
11. Include statements of objectives in legislation, to show more clearly the intentions of Parliaments.



CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

**Research**

12. Foster research to improve knowledge and management of life support systems.
13. Increase the use of, and include comprehensive ecological research in, land and water use capability studies.
14. Assess the ecological effects of introducing plants, animals and micro-organisms into Australia and strengthen quarantine procedures.
15. Improve taxonomic and ecological knowledge of plant and animal species and their distribution.

**International**

16. Improve consultative arrangements between the Commonwealth and State Governments and non-government organisations concerning Australia's participation in international conservation agreements and programs.
17. Ensure Australia's participation in international trade and development fora is consistent with NCSA objectives.
18. Ensure Australia's aid policies and programs are consistent with NCSA objectives.

**Managing for Sustainable Yield  
While Protecting Life Support Systems**

**Reserves and Habitat Protection**

19. Assess and where necessary expand the conservation reserve system to ensure comprehensive representation of the genetic diversity of species.
20. Retain and manage representative samples of natural landscapes and habitats in developed areas.
21. Ensure parks and reserves are large enough to conserve species of flora and fauna under adverse conditions and in the longer term.
22. Identify and manage habitats of economically and culturally important species.
23. Promote the retention of native vegetation on all lands, including those used for agriculture, pastoralism, forestry, mining and transportation.
24. Establish tourism and recreation facilities outside areas of high conservation value.



## CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

25. Maintain self-perpetuating wild populations of native plants and animals over as wide a range as possible at levels consistent with overall conservation aims, through a combination of habitat preservation and management.
26. Eradicate, where possible, feral animals and weeds which are a hazard or threat to natural and managed ecosystems.

### Control of Pollution, Wastes and Hazardous Materials

27. Prevent the disposal of inadequately treated effluent and wastes on land, in watercourses and at sea.
28. Support the polluter pays principle, which advocates that people should pay for the full cost of their actions and for the resources they use. Modify the principle with economic and social policies where necessary to ensure equity in its application.
29. Minimise the release of pollutants into the atmosphere and conform to established air pollution standards.
30. Minimise the effects of wastes and pollution upon living resources by promoting the most efficient methods of extraction and use, and recycling of non-renewable resources.
31. Evaluate more fully the effects of hazardous materials released into the environment or used by society, with a view to their more appropriate control, treatment and disposal.

### Management and Use of Living Resources

32. Ensure that harvesting of terrestrial and aquatic living resources does not exceed sustainable levels, and publicise the basis on which harvesting rates are determined.
33. Monitor the habitats of harvested wild plants and animals and ensure that the condition of the habitat is a factor in setting harvesting rates.
34. Reduce reliance on introduced species where native plants and animals can be used on a sustainable basis.
35. Zone lands to conserve highly productive areas such as water catchments, prime agricultural land, and coastal and estuarine ecosystems.
36. Allocate for development those areas with economic or physical characteristics that make them particularly suitable for such purposes.
37. Maintain and improve soil fertility, structure and productivity through improved land management practices.



CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

38. Develop and encourage a wide range of measures including tree planting, to reduce the spread and ameliorate the effects of soil salinity.
39. Intensify soil conservation efforts, giving highest priority to restoring lands with the most productive potential.
40. Manage water impoundments to take account of the requirements of fish and other wildlife, and wetlands, estuarine and other ecosystems.
41. Provide sufficient good quality water to meet Australia's developmental, economic, social and conservation needs.
42. Manage water resources on a catchment basis.
43. Use groundwater on a sustained yield basis.
44. Adopt fisheries techniques that ensure the sustained yield of marine living resources and reduce incidental take.
45. Avoid further clearing of marginal lands, and encourage the re-establishment of trees on degraded lands where practicable.
46. Ensure that multiple use and sustainable yield are the basis of forestry management.
47. Retain the diversity of flora and fauna by suitable forest harvesting practices and extending rotations as far as possible.
48. Consider the substitution of plantation products for native forest products, recognising that plantation forestry can reduce pressure on native forests.
49. Avoid wherever possible the clearing of native forests for softwood plantations.
50. Consider including the majority of remaining rainforest in reserves free from logging and elsewhere scale down logging to removals only for specialty products at royalties reflecting market value and rarity of species.



## CONFERENCE DRAFT NCSA

### THE FUTURE OF THE STRATEGY

17. The success of the NCSA will depend upon continuing government and public support. The Strategy cannot stand alone. To be effective it will need to be complemented by strategies on subjects including energy, population, and national development.

18. The success of the NCSA will also depend upon establishing ways of evaluating its implementation, upon ensuring that it continues to be updated and upon involving industry and the Australian community in general in its further development. This requires actions to:

- (a) promote the objectives, principles and priority national requirements and actions of the Strategy;
- (b) gather and regularly disseminate to the community information on the state of Australia's living resources;
- (c) monitor, evaluate and develop the Strategy as appropriate in the light of changing conditions;
- (d) promote the development and implementation of conservation strategies for States, regions and specific sectors such as manufacturing, mining, forestry, agriculture and fisheries; and
- (e) obtain and disseminate information from around the world on actions consistent with the recommendations of the World Conservation Strategy.

19. A standing consultative group comprising representatives of government, industry and community interests should be established and provided with adequate funds to undertake these tasks.