

Synthesis and overview

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Introduction

Much has happened in the Australian environment and policies and practices in environmental management in the 5 years since the first edition of this book. There have been some moves forward, some reversals (Chapter 3), but also much dithering (Chapter 18). Examples of good things include the expansion of marine reserve systems (Chapter 8), the expansion of Indigenous protected areas (Chapter 22), and increased areas of natural regeneration and planting in temperate woodland zones (Chapter 3).

Unfortunately, there have also been some steps backward; examples include the loss of effective organisations such as Land and Water Australia, significant dis-investment in natural resource management (Chapter 3), plans to log and graze in national parks (Chapters 19 and 21), and the instigation of new rounds of land clearing (Chapter 3), with the latter two actions being counter to overwhelming bodies of scientific evidence and management experience indicating that these are detrimental actions.

In this final chapter, we focus neither on positive nor negative outcomes over the 5 years since the first edition. We also have elected not to attempt to produce a 'report card' with a 'score' on environmental performance in Australia – because levels of performance are very much specific to a particular sector or topic. Rather, among the many topics that could have been tackled, we have decided to touch on a small subset of emergent themes from this new iteration of *10 Commitments*. These are: the need for policies on the impacts of human populations, climate change, better targeted management of invasive species, development in northern Australia, long-termism in environmental management and policy, and environmental accounting.

Population increase

The elephant in the environmental management 'room' is the level of resource consumption by the human population. The human population is a key driver of major environmental issues in Australia. This is touched on by many chapters and examined further in Chapter 28. A reliance on constant high levels of economic growth based on high throughputs of materials and energy does not constitute a sustainable model and may even cost the