











## Foreword

The 2003 fire emergency, post fire recovery works and subsequent unprecedented demand on staff time, have resulted in the Australian Alps Liaison Committee (AALC) taking the unusual decision to combine two financial years into this one report covering the period 2001-2003.

However during this reporting period we have made substantial progress in achieving the mission and terms of agreement defined in the Memorandum of Understanding which drives the Australian Alps cooperative management plan.

The report sets out numerous significant achievements across the Key Result Areas in the Strategic Plan. These reflect the considerable success of the Australian Alps cooperative management program, and indicate its relevance to land managers, stakeholders and the wider community. The outcomes demonstrate the high value placed on the continuing role and activities of the AALC in fostering innovation, and providing a forum for staff networking and coordination across the Australian Alps national parks.

On the one hand, this period has been one of the most rewarding periods in the history of the cooperative management program, while on the other hand it has been one of the most challenging, as we have joined together to celebrate the mountains and their unique values, and shortly after to protect them from extensive bush fires.

Hence much of the reporting is dominated by our celebration of the International Year of Mountains in November 2002 (IYM2002) and by the subsequent January 2003 wildfires.

In relation to the former, we appreciate the support of TransGrid, the CRC for Sustainable Tourism and Perisher Blue for providing financial assistance to the celebrations for IYM2002. Their contributions provide tangible evidence of the growing profile and relevance of the program.

I also wish to pay tribute to the many agencies and organisations who were involved in controlling the January 2003 wildfires across the Australian Alps region, and in the massive clean-up and assessment efforts which have followed.

Beyond these events, it has been gratifying to receive a renewed commitment to the MOU from the Alps Ministers and agencies, and to extend the Australian Alps national parks to include Baw Baw National Park in Victoria and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve in the ACT.

Finally, at the close of this reporting period, I would like to acknowledge and thank the members of working groups and the Australian Alps Liaison Committee for their outstanding collective efforts, and the many agency staff who have given their time in addition to normal duties to make the Australian Alps cooperative management program such a success.



Dave Darlington  
Convener  
Australian Alps Liaison Committee

## Glossary and Abbreviations

<b>AALC</b>	is the Australian Alps Liaison Committee, established by the <i>MOU</i> .
<b>AAWT</b>	is the Australian Alps Walking Track.
<b>annual cooperative works program</b>	is the group of activities and projects undertaken each year under AALC funding and cooperative arrangements.
<b>AUSRIVAS</b>	is the Australian Rivers Assessment System, first developed under the National River Health Program.
<b>Australia ICOMOS</b>	is the Australian national committee of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), a non-government professional organisation that promotes expertise in the conservation of cultural heritage.
<b>Australian Alps national parks</b>	means those protected areas included in Schedule 1 of the <i>MOU</i> .
<b>Australian Alps national parks cooperative program</b>	is the ongoing activities, projects, works and administration undertaken to implement the <i>MOU</i> .
<b>Australian Alps national parks heads of agencies</b>	means the Heads of <i>participating agencies</i> .
<b>CHWG</b>	means the Cultural Heritage Working Group.
<b>CRWG</b>	means the Community Relations Working Group.
<b>cooperative management</b>	means fostering a culture of goodwill, involving activities, projects, and complementary and supportive relationships, and adding value to those relationships through associated economies of scale, going beyond line management and individual agency constraints to ensure consistency across borders.
<b>CRC</b>	means Cooperative Research Centre.
<b>CRES</b>	means the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University, Canberra.
<b>IYM2002</b>	means the International Year of Mountains (2002) declared by the United Nations.
<b>MOU</b>	is the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to Cooperative Management of the Australian Alps national parks (as amended from time to time).
<b>NHWG</b>	means the Natural Heritage Working Group.
<b>participating agencies</b>	means parties to the <i>MOU</i> .
<b>protected area</b>	means an area of land managed for protection and maintenance of biodiversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources.
<b>RTWG</b>	means the Recreation and Tourism Working Group.
<b>Strategic Plan</b>	means the three-year plan prepared by the AALC (for this reporting period the ' <i>Strategic Plan 2000-2003</i> ') to guide the <i>annual cooperative works program</i> .

## Australian Alps cooperative management program

Eleven national parks and other reserves are collectively referred to as the Australian Alps national parks. They extend from the Brindabella Range in NSW/ACT, through the Snowy Mountains of NSW and along the Great Dividing Range in Victoria, comprising more than 1.6 million hectares of protected areas. These include:

- in the ACT - Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve
- in NSW - Kosciuszko and Brindabella National Parks, and Bimberi and Scabby Range Nature Reserves
- in Victoria - Alpine, Mount Buffalo, Snowy River and Baw Baw National Parks, and the Avon wilderness.

As a mountainous region in a predominantly dry and flat continent, the Australian Alps national parks are of great significance for all Australians, present and future. They contain:

- mainland Australia's highest peaks and most spectacular mountain scenery
- flora and fauna, ecological processes and communities which are unique to Australian alpine and sub-alpine environments
- a range of sites, places and landscapes which are valued by the community, including those with a rich and diverse cultural heritage belonging to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
- a significant outdoor recreation and tourism resource for Australians and international visitors; and
- the headwaters of major river systems which supply snowmelt waters vital for the maintenance of ecological processes and communities, domestic use, industry, irrigation and hydro-electric production in New South Wales, Victoria, the ACT and South Australia.

The significance of the region has been recognised by governments in extensive reservation of national parks and other protected areas. However, coordinated management, protection and conservation of the valuable resources of the high country for the benefit of all Australians require a joint commitment extending across State and Territory boundaries.

A cooperative management program was formally initiated in July 1986 with the signing of the first Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the Cooperative Management of the Australian Alps (the MOU).

The MOU has been amended and re-signed several times, responding to the introduction of self-government in the ACT and the addition of new protected areas to the schedule. The most recent re-signing in May 2003 reaffirmed the commitment of the NSW, ACT, Victorian and Australian governments to cooperative management, and strengthened the terms of reference of the agreement.

Responsibility for day to day management of the Australian Alps national parks listed in Schedule 1 of the MOU remains vested with the respective participating agency. The majority of works undertaken within the region are undertaken by agencies in accordance with statutory management plans and approved strategies within their jurisdictions.

Other conservation areas and resorts with alpine and subalpine environments on the mainland and in Tasmania benefit from regular contact and from information developed through the cooperative management approach to the Australian Alps national parks.

## Vision

To achieve best practice in cooperative management of the Australian Alps national parks

## Mission

Through the MOU, participating agencies agree to the following objectives:

- To pursue the growth and enhancement of inter-governmental cooperative management to protect the important natural and cultural values of the Australian Alps national parks.
- To cooperate in the determination and implementation of best-practice management of the Australian Alps national parks to achieve the:
  - protection of the unique mountain landscapes
  - protection of the natural and cultural values specific to the Australian Alps
  - provision of outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities that encourage the enjoyment and understanding alpine and sub-alpine environments; and
  - protection of mountain catchments.

## Terms of Agreement

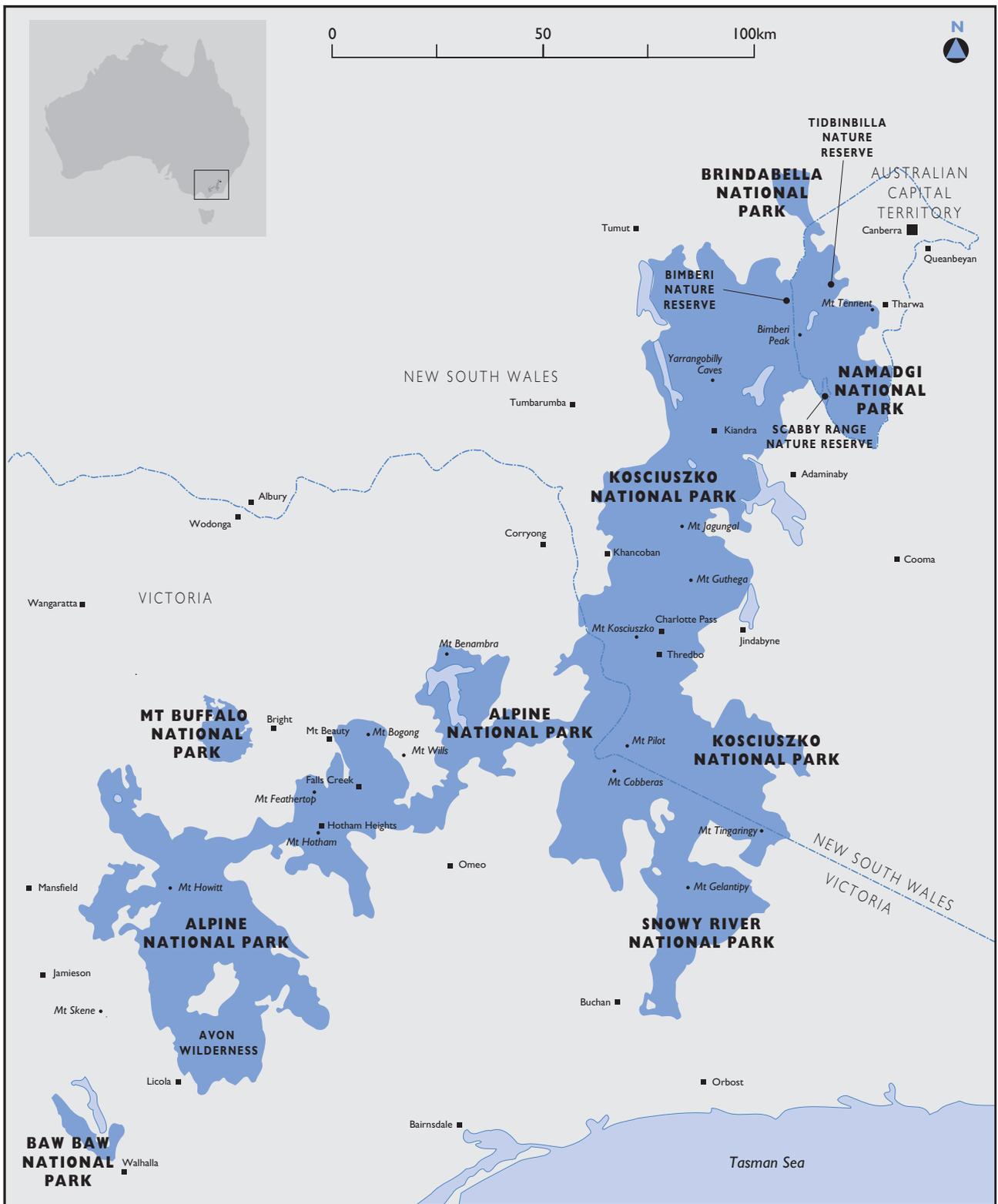
The working arrangements agreed to under the MOU require participating agencies to:

- consult on management plans and policies, aiming for complementary management practices throughout the Australian Alps national parks
- consult on formulation and enforcement of regulations for management of the Australian Alps national parks
- collaborate in research, including resource data collection, and undertake joint actions and operations for coordinated management, conservation and protection
- exchange information, ideas and expertise, and cooperate in the training of staff
- cooperate to establish and implement processes for consultation with Aboriginal people and to foster their participation in management of Australian Alps national parks
- cooperate to provide opportunities for community education, interpretation and awareness of the values of the Australian Alps national parks, and opportunities for public participation in the management of the parks
- strive for complementary recreation management policies and where appropriate provide facilities and services to enable visitors to use adjacent areas
- cooperate in monitoring of use and public awareness; and
- strive to identify opportunities for the recognition of the regional, national and international significance of the Australian Alps national parks.

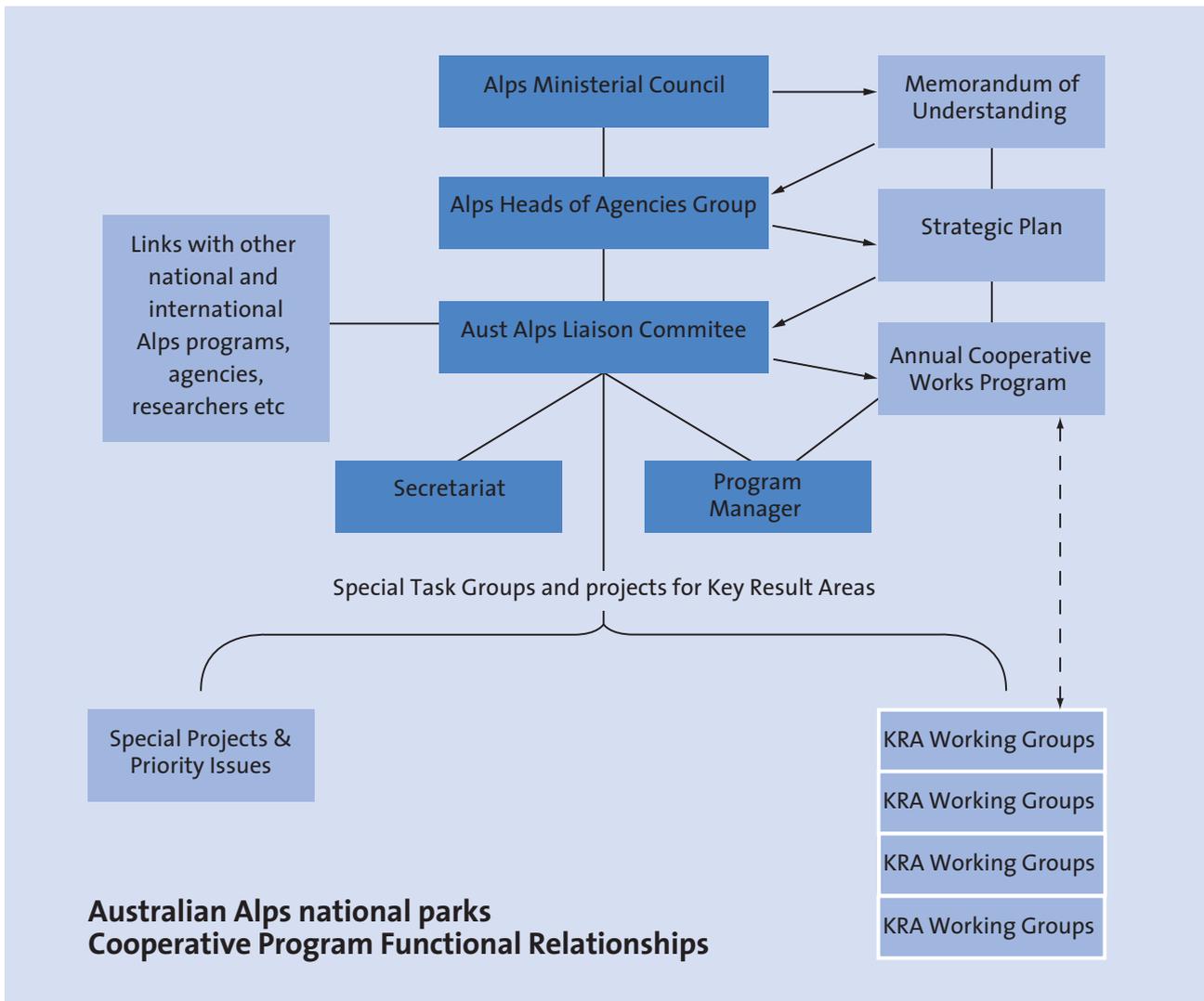
## Lands listed as Australian Alps national parks

Area	Size (ha)	Responsible Agency
<b>Victoria</b>		
Alpine National Park	647 700	Parks Victoria
Snowy River National Park	98 100	
Avon Wilderness	39 650	
Mount Buffalo National Park	31 000	
Baw Baw National Park	13 300	
<b>New South Wales</b>		
Kosciuszko National Park	690 411	NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service
Brindabella National Park	18 472	
Scabby Range Nature Reserve	4 982	
Bimberi Nature Reserve	10 886	
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>		
Namadgi National Park	105 900	Environment ACT
Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve	5 450	

(Schedule 1 of the MOU at end 2002-2003)



## Organisational Structure



The following entities have functional roles in the Australian Alps cooperative management program under the MOU:

### **Alps Ministerial Council**

The Ministers responsible for participating agencies which are in turn responsible for high-level inter-government relationships and the MOU.

### **Australian Alps national parks Heads of Agencies group**

The Heads of participating agencies meet annually to consider strategic issues, approve the Strategic Plan, advise AALC on policy, priority areas and emerging issues, review progress, receive the annual report, and negotiate funds or in-kind contributions from the agencies.

### **Australian Alps Liaison Committee**

The MOU provides for the Australian Alps Liaison Committee (AALC) to facilitate the development, coordination and implementation of the cooperative management program. Its members include a senior officer from each of the participating agencies in NSW, Victoria, ACT and Australian government departments.

The AALC members generally have direct responsibility for implementing the projects and outcomes of the cooperative management program within their respective agencies, and are able to ensure the involvement of field staff in programs, training and projects.

In managing projects under the approved works program, an agency may oversee the implementation of a particular project and act on behalf of other agencies in the execution of legal contracts and similar arrangements. Similarly, agencies may enter into cost-sharing arrangements.

The AALC may also engage with managers of other alpine and sub-alpine parks or relevant government or non-government bodies in specific cooperative programs which may benefit management of the Australian Alps national parks.

### **Working Groups**

A number of working groups are established to advise the AALC on specific matters, and to assist with the implementation of the cooperative management program by:

- developing new projects in key result areas outlined in the Strategic Plan
- recommending priority projects for AALC funding; and
- ensuring that projects are delivered on time and within budget.

During the reporting period, four working groups operated under the Australian Alps national parks cooperative program. They include:

- Natural Heritage Working Group
- Cultural Heritage Working Group
- Recreation and Tourism Working Group; and
- Community Relations Working Group.

The terms of reference for each Working Group are set out in the Strategic Plan, and are closely aligned to the Key Result Areas in that Plan.

Refer to program structure, Attachment 1

## Program Budget

To assist in achieving the objectives of the MOU, a financial contribution is made by participating agencies. The responsibility for financial management is rotated around the State and territory agencies on a three-year basis and is generally vested with the agency which is providing the Alps Program Coordinator position. During the current reporting period, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service provided financial management support for the program.

An annual budget of \$280,000 was provided from participating agencies, with Victoria and NSW each contributing \$120,000, and the ACT providing \$40,000. The Australian Government provides secretarial and website services as in-kind contributions.

During 2001-2002 the budget was boosted by \$20,000 with contributions of \$10,000 from each of the CRC for Sustainable Tourism and TransGrid to support celebration of the International Year of Mountains.

The AALC allocate funding to the Australian Alps annual cooperative works program, which is developed through submission of project proposals addressing the goals and strategies of the Strategic Plan.

Working groups consider the merits of projects submitted and make recommendations to the AALC for funding. Project management is undertaken by officers who represent their agency on the relevant working groups or by identified project officers who oversee and manage the projects.

The AALC may enter into cost-sharing arrangements with other participating agencies for projects within the annual cooperative works program.

The 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 annual works program budgets are presented in Attachments 2 and 3 respectively.

## Annual Reporting of performance

The Strategic Plan requires the Annual Report to:

- evaluate the success of the MOU, the Australian Alps national parks cooperative program and the annual cooperative works program
- detail the outputs of these programs and their benefits to Australian Alps national parks; and
- communicate this information to the Australian Alps national parks Heads of Agencies group, relevant Ministers, and other interested parties.



January bushfires

## Special Report: January 2003 wildfires in the Australian Alps

On 8 January 2003 a major dry lightning storm passed over south-eastern Australia. The storm ignited close to 100 fires across the Australian Alps national parks and adjacent lands. These fires were the largest to occur in the region in more than 60 years. By the time the last fires were extinguished, more than two months later, they had burned nearly 1.9 million hectares, including more than two-thirds of the Australian Alps national parks area, in a mosaic of varying severity.

Fire is a natural and recurring factor shaping the environment of the Australian Alps, and fire management is one of the most challenging tasks facing conservation managers in the region. All jurisdictions have in place comprehensive fire management policies and procedures, consistent with their particular legislative requirements. However, participating agencies are committed to working together for continuous improvement. To this end, the Australian Alps national parks cooperative management program provided the framework to initiate and implement important post-fire initiatives across the Alps.

During the latter part of the reporting period, the AALC commenced work on a number of projects to enhance understanding of fire in the Alps and to increase community awareness. A comprehensive *Fire History report* was collated using historical records and anecdotal accounts.

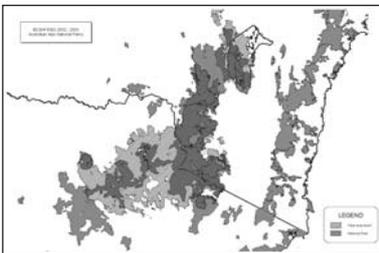
Responding to increased community interest in fire management in the region following the 2003 fires, the Alps Ministerial Council reiterated key common principles of fire management in the Australian Alps national parks.

A combined scientific review began to examine the responses of participating agencies to management of impacts of the fires. The review is being undertaken by an expert scientific panel made up of leading ecologists, scientists and heritage experts. It is anticipated that a final report, including recommendations, will be completed in 2004.

During management of the fires it was evident that many agency staff across the region had previously come to know each other well through joint activities, and this assisted in cross-border cooperation, particularly at the incident management team level.

After the fires, the AALC have been able to work on joint responses to a number of issues, benefiting from past work undertaken within the program on fire monitoring reference plots, rehabilitation techniques and monitoring, pest plant and animal control, waste management, and communication and interpretation.

In their extent and dramatic impact, the 2003 wildfires have ironically proven to be one of the greatest demonstrations of the strength of the Australian Alps cooperative management program and the robust relationships which have developed from it.



Map of the total area burnt by the January bushfires



Regrowth

## Key Result Area: Community Awareness

### Desired Outcome

Key audiences are aware of the unique natural and cultural values of the Australian Alps national parks as a single biogeographical entity, the management actions that are necessary to protect these intrinsic values, and the cross-border management program and its achievements.

### Strategies

- Identify key community audiences, and benchmark their knowledge of, as well as satisfaction and involvement with, the Australian Alps national parks cooperative management program
- Develop appropriate awareness programs and increased promotion of the values, programs and opportunities of the Australian Alps national parks to target audiences
- Utilise the important opportunity that the International Year of Mountains 2002 provides for promoting conservation and appreciation of mountain regions within the context of the Alps MOU
- Actively market and distribute saleable and free information, materials and products on the Australian Alps national parks, to retail and other appropriate outlets
- Use multi-media technologies to further promote the value of the program; and
- Ensure that best practice achievements are recorded and communicated.

### Australian Alps Education Kit evaluation and review

The Australian Alps Education Kit was first produced in 1992 by the Victorian Department of Conservation & Natural Resources on behalf of the AALC. The kit consisted of information sheets, a bibliography and set of 48 slides with notes (with later addition of an activity guide '*Cool ideas for the Alps*'), and was well received by teachers, students and conservation agency staff.

During the reporting period, the AALC recognised the need for extensive revision of both the format and content of the Education Kit. The Alps Community Relations Working Group engaged a consultant to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing kit and to develop a framework for the best content and format for a revised kit. This review involved extensive consultation with users, agencies, and education professionals.

The Working Group are currently considering additional content pertaining to Aboriginal connections to country, and contemporary management issues in the Australian Alps, consistent with management plans and policies of participating agencies.

### World Wide Web site

The Australian Alps national parks Web site, hosted by the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, continued to be a valuable resource for enquiries about recreation and tourism in the Australian Alps national parks and about the Australian Alps cooperative management program.

The Web site includes information about reference material, publications, updated media releases and reports, and links to more than 60 organisations and interest groups.

The Media and Community Projects Officer managed the Web site and responded to numerous email enquiries during the reporting period.

The Australian Alps national parks home page is: [www.australialps.deh.gov.au](http://www.australialps.deh.gov.au)

## Regional Tourism Award

The Australian Alps community awareness program was recognised for its outstanding contribution to the tourism industry through an award received at the Canberra Region Tourism Awards 2001 in the category of 'General Tourism Services'.

As a recipient of a regional award the Australian Alps community awareness program joined other regional and state winners at the Australian Tourism Awards in Hobart in November.

This national event provided a showcase for development and distribution of Australian Alps products including brochures, books, maps, video, travelling displays, the Web site, and community service announcements, as well as workshops and the marketing strategy. Together these highlighted promotion of the Australian Alps as a premier tourist destination, as well as raising awareness of the Australian Alps cooperative management program.

## International Year of Mountains 2002

A more coordinated approach was stimulated by the United Nations declaration that 2002 was to be the International Year of Mountains (IYM2002), to increase awareness of the importance of protecting mountains, and promoting peace and stability in mountain regions around the world.

Mountains play a very important role in the quality of life for all Australians. Not only are they a major resource for water supply, hydro-electric energy, biodiversity and recreation; their cultural and heritage values are outstanding, and considered comparable with many World Heritage properties. The aesthetic appeal and spirituality of mountains has also inspired our modern human culture.

IYM2002 was celebrated around Australia by both government and community organisations. The AALC coordinated and delivered a program of events to raise awareness, engage communities, showcase natural and cultural heritage values, promote conservation, and advance sustainable recreation and tourism in the Australian Alps.

## 'Celebrating Mountains' Conference

The AALC, in partnership with Australia ICOMOS and the CRC for Sustainable Tourism, organised a conference 'Celebrating Mountains' on 25-28 November 2002. The conference was financially supported by the CRC for Sustainable Tourism and TransGrid. A broad audience of more than 250 people attended, including field staff and managers of Australian Alps national parks, members of Australia ICOMOS, the recreation and tourism industry, scientists, researchers, the Aboriginal community, local government, user groups and international participants.

The conference provided a forum to:

- showcase natural and cultural heritage of the mountains
- increase the understanding of Indigenous values
- present scientific knowledge of mountains as a basis for environmental sustainability
- present examples of best practice management from around the world
- celebrate achievements
- promote sustainability; and
- engage regional mountain communities.

The conference covered three main themes and the linkages between them:

- 'Mountains for the Future' - conservation and restoration of mountain landscapes
- 'Mountains for Tourism' - sustainable mountain tourism and recreation; and
- 'Mountains of Meaning' - cultural heritage.

The four-day conference included field visits into Kosciuszko National Park, plenary sessions, concurrent sessions, and an industry trade exhibition and poster display. The conference was considered to be an outstanding success, with a significant

level of international participation, and with highly valued input from Canadian First Nations and Maori people, as well as Aboriginal people from around Australia. The integration of natural and cultural values of mountains, and the networking between all interest groups, were particular achievements.

### **Indigenous Gathering & 'Kaju'**

Preceding the conference, on the weekend of 23-24 November 2002 the AALC staged an Indigenous gathering at The Station Resort, Jindabyne. Aboriginal people from south eastern Australia who have connections to the Australian Alps were invited to come together over the weekend to celebrate mountains. This was probably the biggest gathering of Aboriginal people in the mountains for more than 100 years. The AALC and Perisher Blue jointly sponsored community members to attend this important celebration.

About 1,000 Snowy Mountains locals and visitors from far afield joined the Aboriginal community on the shores of Lake Jindabyne on Sunday 24 November for 'Kaju', a family picnic day and welcome ceremony. Participants browsed stalls selling a wide variety of arts and crafts with a fine display of Indigenous art. A variety of entertainers captivated the crowds with music, games and performance. 'Kaju' was a very special collaboration of contemporary and traditional Aboriginal ceremony of welcome to the land.

### **Australian Alps Newspaper inserts**

The IYM2002 celebrations were ushered in by the production and distribution of 280,000 newspaper inserts that were included in all the regional newspapers in the ACT, NSW and Victoria. In addition a large number of 'run-on' copies were provided to park and tourism visitor centres by the AALC for free distribution. Supported by sanctioned advertising, the full colour newspaper insert featured articles about the Australian Alps national parks and promoted the International Year of Mountains 2002.

An Alps education insert was also published, free of charge, in the *Canberra Times* on 26 March 2002. The insert was compiled by the Community Relations Working Group following an approach by the paper, as a result of winning a Regional Tourism Award. The twelve-page colour insert, aimed at children in Years 5 to 8, featured a range of student activities and topics, including plants and animals, feral animals, cultural heritage, water, and the Australian Alps cooperative management program.

### **Community Service Announcement for IYM2002**

Australian Alps Community Service announcements continued to receive extensive airtime during the reporting period. The announcements were first developed two years earlier but were redesigned during this period. The new 30 and 60-second announcements, depicting spectacular images of the Alps, included additional cultural heritage images and a voiceover promoting the International Year of Mountains 2002.

The announcements continue to inform the public about the unique aspects of the Australian Alps as a single biogeographical region which crosses State and Territory borders, and the role played by the participating agencies in working together to manage and protect this region.

### **Media and Community Projects Officer**

A part-time Media and Community Projects Officer worked closely with the AALC to develop community awareness strategies and materials to promote the Australian Alps cooperative management program to a broad audience.

The Officer coordinated launches to promote Australian Alps national parks products and activities, arranged media releases and interviews, managed the Web site, responded to email enquiries and, in collaboration with the working groups, developed extension material and managed projects.

IYM2002 provided a particular focus for the Media and Community Projects Officer, who developed and implemented a comprehensive media and communications strategy and maintained a network of communication with other agencies across the globe. Highlights included a successful launch in Canberra of the 'Celebrating Mountains' conference and extensive coverage of events by regional and national radio and television networks and in both local and major metropolitan newspapers.

## Key Result Area: Natural Heritage Conservation

### Desired Outcome

An improved understanding and enhanced management of the natural ecosystems of the Australian Alps national parks.

### Strategies

- Identify threats to nationally significant values of the Australian Alps national parks and using a region-wide (bioregional) approach, develop appropriate threat abatement strategies
- Develop principles and criteria to focus research and management action on priority species/habitats/communities and natural features of the Australian Alps
- Investigate the response of alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems to threatening processes or activities and develop appropriate management strategies
- Develop indicators to monitor the health, condition and trend of alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems and catchments
- Involve interested stakeholders and encourage strategic partnerships in the activities of the Natural Heritage Working Group and its projects. Disseminate information and recommendations resulting from projects undertaken.

### Population Ecology of Feral Horses in the Australian Alps

During the reporting period, Ph.D. student Michelle Walter completed her three-year study on *'Population ecology of wild horses in the Australian Alps'*. The work was partly funded over three years by the AALC, and undertaken through the University of Canberra (Applied Ecology Research Group).

The study, the first of its kind in the Australian Alps, focused on four areas: distribution of wild horses, estimation of abundance and density, population dynamics, and the influence of brumby-running on population numbers.

The distribution of horses in the Australian Alps is patchy, with five major discrete populations in NSW and Victoria, and the northernmost population bordering the ACT.

Helicopter surveys were undertaken across the five mapped areas to estimate abundance and density. This located a population of between 4,000 and 5,000, equating to a density of about 1.8 horses per square kilometre over the area surveyed (2,789km<sup>2</sup>).

The population dynamics and demography of wild horses were estimated at three sites every spring and autumn over the three-year period. The sites were spread widely across the Alps, with the aim of obtaining a broad understanding of population dynamics.

The thesis provides a sound scientific basis for the further development of best practice management strategies for wild horses across the Australian Alps. It has also helped to identify areas for future research and monitoring.

The aerial survey work was repeated in 2003 by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Parks Victoria to determine post-fire population estimates.

## Effect of cattle exclusion on the condition and recovery of sub-alpine streams

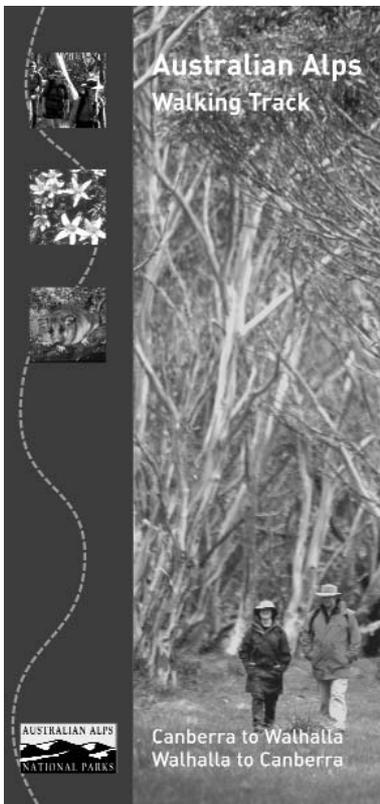
The grazing of cattle within the Australian Alps has been subject to scientific investigation from as early as the 1940's, primarily focusing on vegetation and soil impacts. This has not been previously complemented by investigations into the effects of different land uses upon water resources in the Australian Alps national parks, except within resort areas.

The AALC has begun to plug this gap in knowledge by funding Lisa Simpson, an Honours student with the CRC for Freshwater Ecology, to undertake research into the impact of cattle grazing on mountain streams, using the Alps AUSRIVAS model developed during 2000.

The Australian Rivers Assessment Scheme (AUSRIVAS) uses biological rather than chemical methods for assessing water quality to provide a standardised, easy to use and rapid method for assessing the relative health of streams. Measurement of macro-invertebrate fauna and a wide range of habitat features allows identification of reference (minimally impacted) sites which are used to provide baseline conditions against which tested sites can be compared and assessed.

The thesis on *'Assessment of the effect of cattle exclusion on the condition and recovery of sub-alpine streams'* compared ungrazed streams in the Kosciuszko and Alpine National Parks with streams in grazed lease areas of the Bogong High Plains and Davies Plains. The study concluded that small-scale channel features, including water quality and macro-invertebrate communities all showed positive responses to the removal of grazing. However, larger scale features such as stream morphology and bank stability are likely to require more than 100 years to recover.





## Key Result Area: Recreation and Tourism Management

### Desired Outcome

Implementation of contemporary approaches to visitor and tourism management, through supporting best-practice, sustainable use and minimal impact philosophy and principles.

### Strategies

- Provide a strategic framework to enable the development of complementary visitor facilities and information that promotes the Australian Alps for recreation and tourism, based on their natural and cultural values
- Develop strategies to monitor visitor impacts within identified and acceptable ecological and social limits, using methodologies which identify and monitor visitor needs, satisfaction and expectations
- Foster and facilitate contemporary visitor management techniques through the provision of 'best practice workshops' to agency staff and interested stakeholders; and
- Foster and establish effective partnerships between park management agencies and the tourism sector to assist in supporting a sustainable tourism industry within the Australian Alps national parks.

### Strategic Project Plan for Recreation and Tourism Working Group

The Australian Alps cooperative management program aims to provide a strategic framework to enable the development of complementary visitor facilities and information to promote the region for recreation and tourism, based on their natural and cultural values. The program also aims to foster strong awareness within the recreation and tourism industry, and involvement in its outcomes, such as promotion of the Australian Alps national parks as a premier tourist destination.

During the reporting period the Alps Recreation and Tourism Working Group (RTWG) engaged a consultant to develop a work program based on analysis of past, existing and proposed projects and outcomes, identification of what is currently being done to address recreation and tourism issues by participating agencies and other stakeholders, and identification of new and emerging needs, issues and opportunities to be addressed in the group's future work program.

The result is a 3-year plan with clear goals, direction and strategies, to enable a more focused and strategic approach to the work of the group and to facilitate greater engagement with external stakeholders, including the recreation and tourism industry.

## Minimal Impact Messages

In the early 1990's, in line with the Alpine National Park Plans of Management and the success of the Tasmanian Minimal Impact Bushwalking campaign, the AALC released a series of Minimal Impact Code leaflets for different recreational pursuits in the Australian Alps. In 1998-99, a research-based review, involving extensive consultation with stakeholders, found that the effectiveness of the codes was being limited by both design and distribution.

In 2001 the AALC set out to redevelop its Minimal Impact messages, aiming for more effective interpretation that would apply to all Alps visitors across a variety of settings and media. The Recreation and Tourism Working Group and a consultant engaged with a range of community groups and individuals, and adopted the internationally recognised 'Leave No Trace' environmental ethics program as the basis for the messages.

To enhance delivery of the key messages, pictorial icons and three levels of information were used in a generic brochure and as an inclusion in other brochures, an 'Avant Card' (free postcard), bookmark, and water bottle. The consultant also devised a program to evaluate effectiveness of the messages and delivery methods in the future.

## Australian Alps Walking Track

The Australian Alps Walking Track extends for 650 kilometres from Walhalla in the south to Canberra in the north, and symbolises the cooperation achieved across the Australian Alps region. It has extended the Victorian Alpine Walking Trail, which dates from the 1970's, through Kosciuszko in NSW and Namadgi in the ACT, to form a 'tri-state trail'.

The trail continues to be a major attraction to avid bushwalkers from around the world. The remoteness of the experience and the unique nature of the Australian Alps environment make it an appealing challenge to both domestic and international visitors.

Franz Koller, a 60 year old from Germany walked the track twice over consecutive years during the reporting period. His repeat trip in 2002 was his personal way of celebrating the International Year of Mountains.

A new brochure was produced to promote the track and the Australian Alps cooperative management program. The new 'Leave No Trace' messages were included in the brochure, along with important safety information.

The latter stages of the reporting period saw the track significantly affected by wildfires. This also led to postponement of an Australian Alps Walking Track stakeholder meeting which had been planned for early in 2003.



Photo: Esther Beaton

## Key Result Area: Cultural Heritage Conservation

### Desired Outcome

An improved understanding of the unique Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage values of the Australian Alps national parks which is incorporated into effective protection and management programs.

### Strategies

- Identify threats to the nationally significant cultural values of the Australian Alps national parks and develop appropriate threat abatement strategies
- Engender a sense of value and ownership within the agencies and community, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage of the Australian Alps national parks
- Identify and address gaps in current knowledge of cultural heritage values within the Australian Alps national parks
- Provide tools and processes that will assist agencies and relevant community groups to undertake cultural heritage projects within the Australian Alps national parks; and
- Identify opportunities for the involvement of indigenous people in the management of the Australian Alps national parks.

### Aboriginal Liaison and Direction Study

During 2000 the Cultural Heritage Working Group completed a review of cultural heritage research and implementation. This report identified significant gaps in knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal heritage values of the Australian Alps. The distinctive topography of the Australian Alps landscape, comprising dramatic mountain ranges, plateaus and valleys, has influenced the way Aboriginal people have interacted with the region. At the same time, Aboriginal people have made their own impressions on the landscape through pathways, and material traces of occupation, ceremony and art.

During the reporting period consultants commenced the process of engaging with Aboriginal communities on behalf of the AALC, to seek direction on cultural heritage processes and projects that would best contribute to protection of Aboriginal heritage values across the Australian Alps.

The project provided an opportunity for Aboriginal people with ties to the region to express the depth of their attachments to the alpine landscape and to communicate these attachments to the AALC. The study also identified some of the views of Aboriginal people about strategies for managing heritage values and aspirations for future research.

The completed report, *'Aboriginal Community Directions for Heritage Management in the Australian Alps'*, has grouped the comments and issues raised by the communities under themes. This provides a starting point for an Alps Aboriginal Heritage program and a basis for involving Aboriginal communities in future cultural heritage management.

This work also helped facilitate discussions with the communities on the proposed Aboriginal gathering as part of the IYM2002 celebrations.

### Cross-cultural Awareness Training Course

Another successful workshop on *'Communicating Across Cultures'* was delivered during the reporting period, providing staff from all four participating agencies with a valuable insight into Aboriginal culture, society and contemporary issues.

The course proved to be mentally, spiritually and emotionally challenging to all those who attended, and at the same time provided an enlightening and rewarding insight into Australia's Indigenous communities. It challenged perceptions and explored the barriers to communication from an Aboriginal perspective.

The workshop also provided valuable skills to assist participants in the development of more effective working relationships with Aboriginal people who have an interest in the Australian Alps national parks. This has been particularly evident in the ACT, where significant advances have been made with the completion of a major interpretive signage project, along with a cross-culture discovery walking track.

## Scientific Sites Interpretation Strategy

For decades scientists have been inspired to undertake research on Australia's unique alpine environment because it is so different to the rest of the continent. The affinities with alpine environments in other continents were also striking, and of great interest to both local and overseas scientists, who pursued their studies under remote and trying conditions.

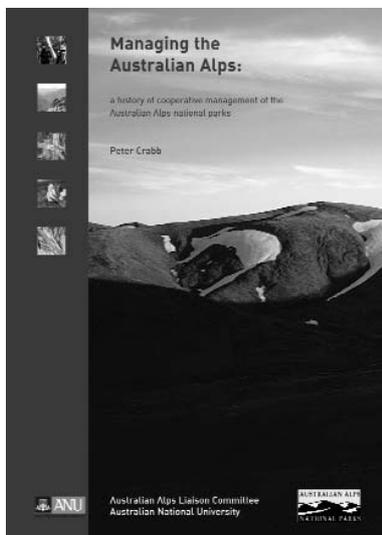
The great wave of scientific research that occurred during the 1900's has long been acknowledged as a significant contribution to the sound management of the Australian Alps national parks. However a further legacy of this early work is a suite of research sites, scattered throughout the Alps, and now considered part of the cultural landscape.

In 1994, the AALC commissioned consultants to assess the cultural heritage value of the scientific research sites in the Alps. They identified 48 sites to be of outstanding cultural significance. The cultural heritage research and implementation report commissioned by the Cultural Heritage Working Group identified the need to develop a strategy for protection and interpretation of the cultural heritage values of these sites.

During the reporting period Trish Macdonald and Joss Haiblen, on secondment from Environment ACT, developed a thematic interpretation strategy for the scientific sites of cultural significance in the Australian Alps national parks. This builds on the scientific database developed by the AALC and provides an effective tool to help land managers raise public awareness of the value of these sites and ensure their long-term protection.

## Mining Heritage Study

The reporting period saw completion of Stage 2 of the Mining Heritage Conservation and Presentation Strategy, which also marked 2001 as the 150th anniversary of the discovery of gold in Australia. The first stage identified information sources, developed a database, and summarised the history of mining in the Australian Alps. The second stage provides a comparative analysis of historic mining sites, landscapes and associated infrastructure in the region. The final report provides guidance in management of the mining heritage of the Australian Alps, identifies links with existing and proposed tourism programs and recommends a staged program for developing a representative group of sites for visitor use.



## Key Result Area: Program Development

### Desired Outcome

To ensure that the Australian Alps national park program is well managed, maintains its effectiveness and operates within the relevant policy context of each participating agency.

### Strategies

- Sustain the program and approve the annual works program
- Monitor the performance of the program and the output of the Working Groups
- Develop and promote the Australian Alps cooperative management program as a centre of excellence in mountain protected area management
- Quantify, document and communicate the economic benefits of the Australian Alps national parks; and
- Develop strategic partnership alliances with IUCN, ANZECC, national and international protected area management agencies and other relevant government and non-government stakeholders.

### Program Development Workshop

An annual field workshop, held in November 2001 at Walwa in Victoria, and attended by more than 40 agency staff, discussed the future direction of the Australian Alps cooperative management program, with the theme of 'program development'.

The workshop explored past, present and future strategies aimed at achieving the desired outcomes of the MOU. It also provided an opportunity for networking and learning about key projects underway across the Australian Alps national parks.

### A History of Cooperative Management

Dr Peter Crabb, a Visiting Fellow with the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES) at the Australian National University, has completed a research report, *'A History of the evolution of the Memorandum of Understanding and the Alps Cooperative Management Program'*, which was jointly funded by the AALC and CRES.

It provides a valuable record of the history of the program by examining the origins of cooperative management of the Australian Alps national parks. It also analyses the benefits and effectiveness of the program through a desktop search of materials produced by the program since its inception, supplemented by interviews with past and present participants.

# Key Result Area: Management Expertise

## Desired Outcome

Staff, volunteers and other park-based workers are knowledgeable about the values of the Australian Alps, and are skilled in the best-practice techniques for managing the natural environment, cultural resources, visitors and threats to the Australian Alps national parks.

## Strategies

- Foster common goals and training, and encourage staff to share expertise and specialist skills in best-practice management of the natural and cultural resources of the Australian Alps national parks;
- Encourage communication between agency staff and other cooperative management programs
- Encourage and support volunteer and other agency involvement in research, management and monitoring; and
- Encourage staff to refine their expertise through appropriate short-term exchange or placement with other agencies, either within or outside the Alps program.

## Australian Alps Newsletter

Regular communication with staff throughout the Australian Alps national parks, and with others interested in the management of the Australian Alps, is seen as vital to their continued support, cooperation and involvement.

The newsletter, *'News from the Australian Alps'*, is the major vehicle for keeping staff and other interested stakeholders in touch with projects and activities of other Australian Alps national parks agencies. It is also a valuable method of raising and maintaining community awareness of the Australian Alps national parks, and the benefits arising from the cooperative management program.

During the reporting period three newsletters were produced. These were distributed widely both in Australia and overseas, to Australian Alps national parks staff, the recreation and tourism industry, tour operators, external organisations, educational institutions, and user groups, with a circulation of over 800 copies.

## Training and development

Staff in participating agencies benefited from a number of training and development opportunities during the reporting period. The conference *'Celebrating Mountains'* in November 2002 was a major focus for that year, while the cross-cultural awareness workshop *'Communicating Across Cultures'* included staff from all participating agencies.

The program sponsored two agency staff to attend the annual Alpine Ecology course conducted by La Trobe University on the Bogong High Plains in January 2002.



'Kaju' Opening Ceremony



'The view from here' perform the mountain song.

Photos Andrew Christie



## Agency Implementation of the MOU

Responsibility for day to day management of the Australian Alps national parks remains vested with each participating agency.

The AALC seeks to provide land managers with appropriate technical tools and sound scientific advice in management reports and strategies, to assist in achieving the objectives of the MOU in delivering best practice land management across the region. All participating agencies have been active contributors to the AALC and working groups.

The benefits of previous coordination and sharing of knowledge include:

### **Broom Management Strategy**

The 2003 wildfires burned many of the areas where Broom and other weed species are considered to be a problem. This will present a unique opportunity to implement proactive control programs. The strategy prepared by the Australian Alps cooperative management program will be the lynchpin in the control strategies developed following the fires.

### **Spotted-tailed Quoll Study**

The results of the Spotted-tailed Quoll Study into the impacts of aerial 1080 poisoning have been taken another step further by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. One of the aims of this research was to see if quolls consumed meat baits and whether 1080 poisoned baits impacted on quolls. Before this research was completed, the study site was significantly impacted by a very high intensity fire during January 2003.

### **Fire monitoring and rehabilitation**

The fire monitoring (impact of fire on vegetation) project was undertaken by the Australian Alps national parks cooperative program in 1995. A high percentage of these reference plots were burnt during the fires, and most of the plots have since been surveyed.

The Alpine Bog Rehabilitation Project piloted in NSW has now been extended to the ACT. This project aims to assist Sphagnum bogs in their recovery, through the placement of water diversion barriers. This technique maintains a moist environment in which the Sphagnum can recover.

### **Australian Alps Walking Track**

The Australian Alps national parks Web site and the respective agency Web sites were used to convey information about the status of the track after the 2003 fires while assessments and repairs were being undertaken.

### **Human Waste Management**

The outcomes of the 1999 Human Waste Management Workshop continued to be applied in NSW and Victoria during the reporting period with the installation of new toilet facilities in Kosciuszko and the Victorian Alps.

### **Cross Cultural Awareness**

Implementation of insights gained from the Cross-Cultural Awareness Workshop, particularly in the ACT.

## Inter-Agency Liaison

### Ministerial Council

The Alps Ministerial Council met for the first time in six years, in Melbourne in May 2003, where the State and Territory Ministers, along with the Australian Government Minister, discussed post-fire responses and cooperative initiatives.

The Ministers endorsed a set of agreed fire principles reiterating the existing management policies and strategies in each of the participating agencies, and agreed to establish an Expert Scientific Panel through the Australian Alps cooperative management program to comment on post-fire rehabilitation and monitoring by agencies.

The Ministers also agreed to the continued pursuit of National Heritage Listing for the Australian Alps national parks, under new heritage amendments to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act (1999).

### Heads of Agencies Meeting

This annual meeting provides an important opportunity for Directors and Heads of Agencies of participating agencies to come together, review progress and discuss future directions and projects for the cooperative management of the Australian Alps national parks.

A meeting was hosted by Parks Victoria in Melbourne in early 2002 to address a range of issues including the Strategic Plan, program budget, current works program, and the Aboriginal Liaison and Directions study. Discussions also centred on the International Year of Mountains 2002 celebrations.

The extent of common challenges presented by the 2003 fires sparked the need for an additional Heads of Agencies meeting in April 2003. The main focus of this meeting, hosted by Australia Government Department of the Environment and Heritage in Canberra, was to discuss joint post-fire responses and agree on areas of common concern for future work. The meeting also drafted a set of joint fire management principles, which was later endorsed by the Ministerial Council.

### Integrated Management Planning workshop

Key senior managers, planning staff and some members of the Namadgi Board of Management participated in a workshop to explore practical ways to integrate planning across the Australian Alps national parks, in the context of revised management plans being developed for Namadgi, Kosciuszko and Alpine National Parks.

These plans will continue to reflect the diversity of management approaches but will strive to complement one another in a broader biogeographical context. This underlines the significance of the MOU, under which participating agencies have agreed to work closely together to ensure, where possible, common approaches in planning and resource management issues, with particular emphasis on border areas.

Discussions included plan content, strategies and planning processes. It is envisaged that a set of shared heritage values will be incorporated into each plan, as well as the adoption of some common terminology and similar presentation styles, wherever possible. This will be an evolving process as the plans are developed.

## External Agency Liaison

Several external organisations made significant contributions to the Australian Alps cooperative management program during the reporting period, with the International Year of Mountains 2002 providing a significant focus.

**Australia ICOMOS** is the Australian national committee of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), a non-government professional organisation that promotes expertise in the conservation of cultural heritage. Australia ICOMOS assisted organisation of the 'Mountains of Meaning' components of the *'Celebrating Mountains'* Conference in November 2002.

The **Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Sustainable Tourism** is a Australian government-funded organisation which promotes research in environmental, social and economic sustainability in Australia. CRC members include government tourism organisations such as the Tourism Council of Australia, Tourism New South Wales and Tourism Victoria, and universities including La Trobe, Griffith and Canberra.

The CRC also financially supported the IYM2002 conference, and to mark the same international event produced, in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Alpine Studies, a publication *'Research on Australia's High Country 1999-2001'* by Catherine Pickering, Ken Green and Kerry Bridle.

The **Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES)** at the Australian National University, jointly funded with the AALC the report by Dr Peter Crabb on the history of the Australian Alps national parks cooperative management program.

**TransGrid** is a statutory government owned corporation responsible for the management and development of the NSW high voltage electricity network. During the reporting period TransGrid provided financial support for the IYM2002 conference.

**Perisher Blue** Ski Resort is located within Kosciuszko National Park. As part of their contribution to IYM2002, Perisher Blue provided sponsorship to Aboriginal communities to attend the Indigenous gathering at Jindabyne in November 2002.

The contributions of these organisations provide further evidence of the growing profile, strength, and relevance of the Australian Alps national parks cooperative program.

## Attachment 1: Program Structure as of 30 June 2003

Agencies	Australian Government	New South Wales	Australian Capital Territory	Victoria
Conservation Agencies Involved	Department of the Environment and Heritage	NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	Environment ACT	Parks Victoria
Responsible Minister	The Hon. Dr David Kemp, MP Minister for the Environment and Heritage	The Hon. Bob Debus, MP Minister for the Environment	Mr Jon Stanhope, MLA Minister for the Environment & Heritage	The Hon. John Thwaites, MP Minister for Environment
Head of Agencies	Bruce Leaver First Assistant Secretary Heritage Division Department of the Environment and Heritage	Dr Tony Fleming Deputy Director General NSW National Parks & Wildlife Division Dept of Environment & Conservation	Dr Maxine Cooper Executive Director Environment ACT	Mark Stone Chief Executive Parks Victoria
AALC	Meg Switzer Director Heritage and Tourism	Dave Darlington Regional Manager Snowy Mountains Region	Brett McNamara District Manager Parks and Conservation	Chris Rose Chief Ranger Alpine District
AALC Secretariat	Tracie Brauer Department of Environment and Heritage			
Program Manager	Virginia Logan Environment ACT			
Community Relations Working Group	Rodney Atkins (Convener)	Pat Darlington  Liz Wren	Odile Arman  Sharon Lane	Gill Anderson  Bart Smith
Natural Heritage Working Group		Rob Hunt  Genevieve Wright	Murray Evans (Convener)  Amanda Carey	Craig Hore  Andrew Markwick
Recreation and Tourism Working Group	Gillian Lee  Frances Murray	Simon Allender  Steve Redden	Stephen Alegria  Karen Civil (Convener)	Felicity Brooke  Fiona Colquhoun
Cultural Heritage Working Group	Juliet Ramsay	Pam O'Brien  Dean Freeman  Christian Hampson	Debbie Argue  Simon Tozer	Dave Foster  Ray Supple (Convener)

## Attachment 2: Financial Report Year Ending 30 June 2002

Financial Report Year Ending 30 June 2002			
Opening Balance	\$77,450	Expenditures	\$321,252.37
Revenue (Contributions/ Grants)	\$300,000	Committed Carryover (02/03)	\$31,000
Revenue (Programs /publications)	\$12,420	Uncommitted Carryover (02/03)	\$33,617.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$385,870</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$385,870</b>
Project Title	Budget Allocation \$	Expenditure \$ To 30 June	Committed \$ Carried over 02/03
<b>Program Coordination</b>			
Program Coordinator	63,000	58,633	0
Program Administration & Support	29,000	24,404.86	0
Aust Alps newsletter	11,000	10,760	0
Publication & reference material reprint	2,000	2,412.86	0
Annual Report 00/01	5,000	4,577	0
<b>Management Expertise &amp; Program Effectiveness</b>			
IYM2002 Conference & Events	40,000	43,460.58	0
Alps Data Base management	20,000	0	0
Media & Community Projects Officer	24,000	24,000	0
History & Evolution of the Alps research report	4,000	0	4,000
<b>Program Development</b>			
Program Development Workshop	8,000	\$6,527	0
<b>Natural Heritage Conservation</b>			
Population Ecology of feral Horses	18,200	18,200	0
Assessment of Impact of Cattle on Alpine streams	5,000	5,000	0
Vegetation fire response plots review	5,000	0	0
<b>Cultural Heritage Conservation</b>			
Aboriginal liaison & Direction Study	20,000 (Plus \$10,000 AHC)	24,000	6,000
Communicating across cultures workshop	7,500	6,319.82	0
Management & Interpretation Strategy for scientific sites	18,000	18,000	0
<b>Community Awareness</b>			
IYM2002 Newspaper insert	13,000	46,280.57	0
Website development & maintenance	5,000	2,334.50	0
Education Kit - Evaluation & revision	30,000	9,000	21,000
Community Service announcements IYM2002	8,000	7,763	0
<b>Recreation &amp; Tourism</b>			
Minimal Impact Codes Review & Development	13,000	8,580	0
AAWT Stakeholder meetings & information	3,000	1,000	0
<b>Total Funded Sources 01/02</b>		<b>\$321,252.37</b>	<b>\$31,000</b>

## Attachment 3: Financial Report Year Ending 30 June 2003

### Financial Report Year Ending 30 June 2003

Opening Balance	\$64,617.73	Expenditures	\$231,375.23
Revenue (Contributions/Grants)	\$280,000.00	Committed Carryover (03/04)	\$93,838.08
Revenue (Programs/Publications)	\$3,483.00	Uncommitted Carryover (03/04)	\$23,627.42

**Total \$348,100.73      Total \$348,100.73**

Project Title	Budget Allocation \$	Expenditure \$ To 30 June	Committed \$ Carried over 03/04
<b>Program Coordination</b>			
Program Coordinator	60,000	0	0
Program Admin & support	25,000	64,450.09	0
Aust Alps newsletter	10,000	21,408.15	5,000
Resource & Product development	0	4730.71	0
Annual Report	5,000	6912.86	5,000
<b>Management Expertise &amp; Program Effectiveness</b>			
IYM2002 - Conference & Events	60,000	64,450.09	0
Website Development & Maintenance	5,000	0	0
Media & Community Education Officer	25,500	17,083.31	4,098.08
Integrated Management Planning Workshop	8,000	0	8,000
History & Evolution of the Alps Program	4,000	2,000	2,000
<b>Natural Heritage Conservation</b>			
Wildhorse Management Workshop	8,000	0	0
Report on Horse Pop - management implications	2,000	0	0
<b>Cultural Heritage Conservation</b>			
Aboriginal Liaison & Direction Study	30,000 (Plus \$6,000 - 01/02)	6,036.40	30,000
IYM2002 Indigenous Gathering	15,000	13,245.93	0
<b>Community Awareness</b>			
Education Kit	10,000 (Plus \$21,000 - 01/02)	0	31,000
Development of Fire recovery presentation	5,000	0	5,000
Alps Tourism Award submission	5,000	0	0
Merchandising	5,000	3,209.09	0
Alps Presentation Kit	4,000	0	4,000
<b>Recreation &amp; Tourism</b>			
RTWG Strategic Plan	13,000	13,200	0
AAWT stakeholder Meeting	5,000	2,335 (Walking trail brochure)	0
MI Code Project	4,500	7,165	0
<b>Total Funded Sources 02/03</b>		<b>\$231,375.23</b>	<b>\$94,098.08</b>

Cover photos by Andrew Tatnell