

Wilderness in South Australia

Protecting Habitat, Preserving Landscapes



Government
of South Australia



Foreword

Conserving the natural world is a crucial part of living sustainably on our planet. In a time when we are faced with a changing climate, natural wilderness areas allow for adaptation and evolution. They provide resilience and they store carbon. They are the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation and help us in our efforts to preserve and maintain our functioning natural ecosystems.

South Australia is fortunate to have substantial areas of internationally significant wilderness, with over 743,000 hectares protected by the *Wilderness Protection Act*; the highest protection offered.

While the State Government can provide direction and support for environmental conservation and management, we can't do it alone. And we are lucky in South Australia that we've never had to.

South Australia is filled with passionate and dedicated people who provide environmental leadership in our rural and regional areas.

Our wilderness areas are a crucial part of natural resource management in our State and this 'whole of landscape' approach to nature conservation is the way forward.

Jay Weatherill

The Hon. Jay Weatherill, MP
Minister for Environment and Conservation



“The need for action against the widespread effects of global warming on the natural world is real and urgent. Protection of large wilderness areas linked by biologically connected landscapes is essential.”

Eric Bills, Presiding Member, Wilderness Advisory Committee.

Scientific evidence shows that our climate is changing. The biological implications are profound and include increased risk of species extinction, more bush fires and spread of pests and weeds.

In the past, many species have dealt with climate change by slowly migrating to areas with more hospitable environments. The rate of global warming projected for the next century is high and the time for movement is short. This calls for a new approach to conserving the natural environment, which allows species to survive, adapt and evolve.

This approach underpins the State Government's *NatureLinks* project – a target in *South Australia's Strategic Plan*. *NatureLinks* is a conservation initiative, working to protect and connect core habitat areas and preserve ecological flows across land and sea. Five biodiversity corridors linking public and private lands across the State will be established by 2010. Wilderness protection helps preserve core habitat areas for *NatureLinks*.

This brochure explains the significance of wilderness in South Australia – what it is, where it is and why it should be protected.

What is Wilderness?

South Australia's wilderness areas are life-giving places of natural and cultural significance. They vary from vast arid deserts and rugged ranges to coastal cliffs and mallee plains. They include spectacular salt lakes, rocky outcrops, shrub lands and sandy beaches.

For land to be considered 'wilderness,' it must be relatively free from the effects of modern technology and not seriously affected by exotic animals, plants or organisms.

The **Wilderness Protection Act 1992** defines wilderness criteria for South Australia. The Act provides the highest level of protection for land under State legislation.

Above left: The Nullarbor Bearded Dragon, *Pogona nullarbor* is considered rare at a state level. It is one of 60 reptile species recorded in the Nullarbor region (photo by Peter Canty).

Above right: Sandhill Dunnart, *Sminthopsis psammophila* – a species endangered at both a state and national level. In the Yellabinna region it lives in sand plains or dunes with at least 20% spinifex hummocks vegetation (photo by Steve Doyle).

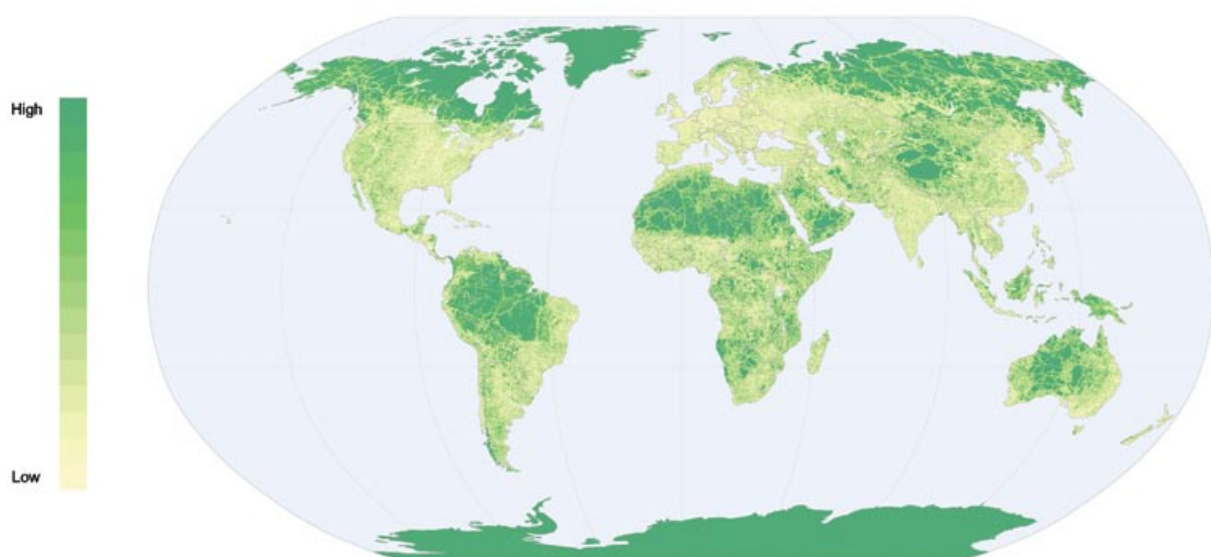


Where is Wilderness?

Fortunately, South Australia still has substantial areas of wilderness, particularly in the state's north and west regions, as seen on the following maps.

Many wilderness areas extend beyond state borders and a number have been assessed as being of potential national significance. Collectively, Australia's wilderness areas are of international importance, along with areas including the Sahara, the Amazon and Antarctica.

Global Wilderness Quality

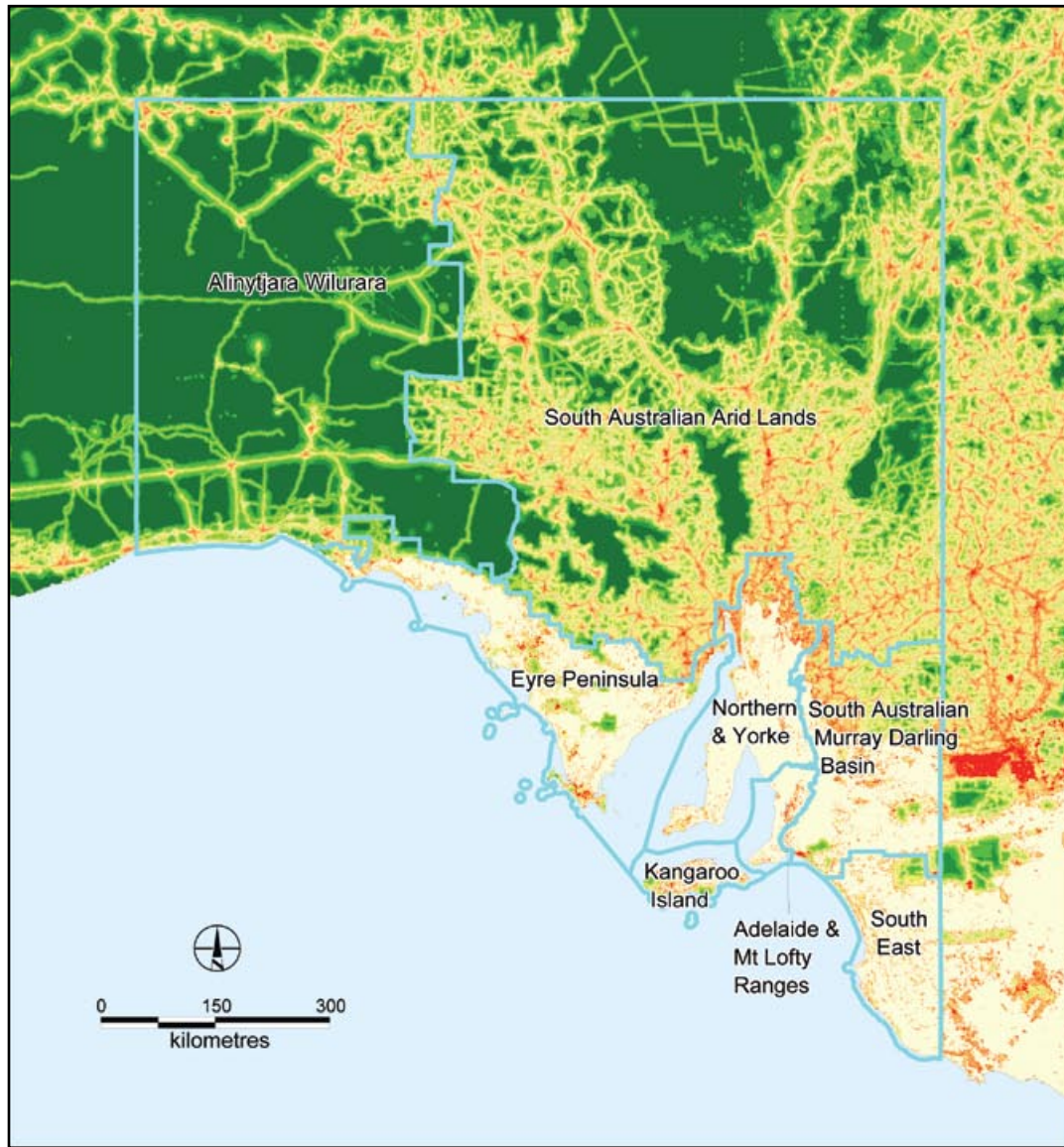


Wildflowers in the Simpson Desert. The Simpson Desert Regional Reserve and Simpson Desert Conservation Park cover 3,607,100ha, 80% of which is considered high quality wilderness (photo by Dylan Koerner).

Global Wilderness Quality Map: Lesslie, R.G. (2000) Terrestrial Wilderness (map). In Groombridge, B. and Jenkins, M.D. Global Biodiversity: Earth's Living Resources in the 21st Century. World Conservation Monitoring Centre. World Conservation Press. Cambridge UK. p.61



Wilderness quality in South Australia



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 Natural Resource Management Board Region Boundaries

National Wilderness Inventory
(Lesslie and Masien 1995)

■ 20 - High
■ 15
■ 10
■ 5
■ 1 - Low
■ below threshold

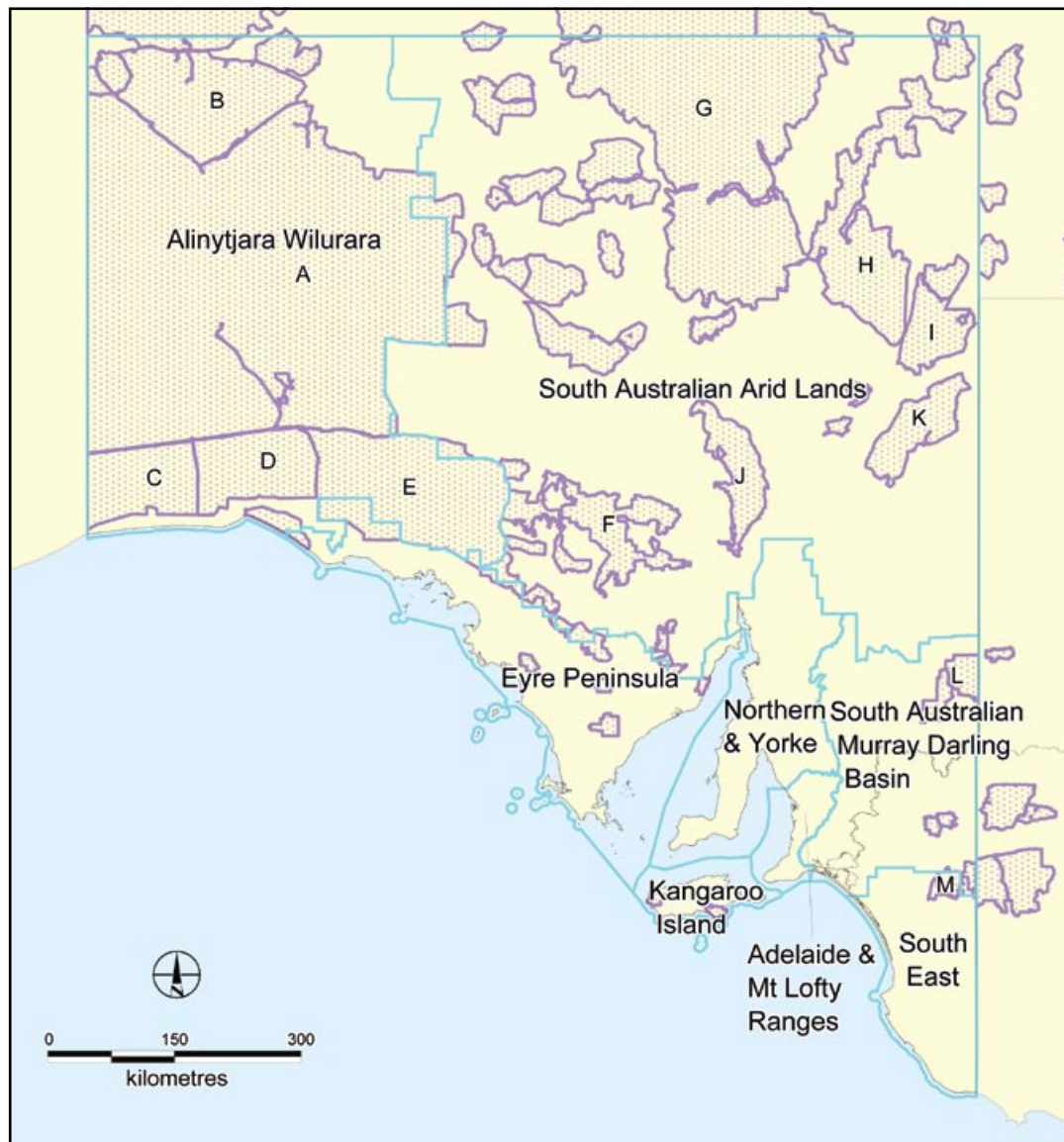
Note: analysis based on a range of primary data compiled prior to 1995

Wilderness quality in South Australia

Map designed and created using PAMS
Projection: MGA Zone 53 (GDA 94)
Date: February 2006



Wilderness areas of potential national significance in South Australia



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- Natural Resource Management Board Region Boundaries
- Wilderness areas of potential national significance (A-M below)

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| A Great Victoria | H Strzelecki/Cooper |
| B Great Victoria North | I Strzelecki South-east |
| C Nullarbor West | J Torrens |
| D Nullarbor East | K Frome |
| E Yellabinna | L Bookmark North |
| F Gairdner | M Ngarkat West |
| G Simpson/Eyre | |

Wilderness areas of potential national significance in South Australia

Map designed and created using PAMS
 Projection: MGA Zone 53 (GDA 94)
 April 2006

Wilderness areas of potential national significance derived from Environmental Research and Assessment Pty Ltd, 1999

The Fleshy Groundsel (*Othonna gregorii*) at Lake Eyre flowers from late winter to early spring. Found on deep sandy red earths, Fleshy Groundsel is abundant in years of good winter rainfall (photo by Denise McCourt).



Why Protect Wilderness?

Protecting wilderness means future generations can see, experience and learn from unspoilt landscapes and safeguards the following values:

Biological Value

Wilderness areas provide the best possible circumstances for species to flourish and evolve. Ecosystems in large wilderness areas have a greater capacity to cope with large scale disturbances such as climate change and bush fires.

Scientific Value

Wilderness areas are valuable for research into ecological and physical processes, evolutionary development and long term climatic trends. They also provide a genetic 'library' which can contribute to improvements in medicine and agriculture.

Recreational Value

The special recreational opportunities in wilderness areas have become significant as the pressures of urban living increase. Wilderness areas are an important resource for regional tourism.

Cultural Value

Wilderness areas allow Indigenous people to maintain traditional cultural practices and linkages with the land. Wilderness areas are also of historic interest as they provide examples of South Australian landscapes before agriculture, industry and urbanisation.

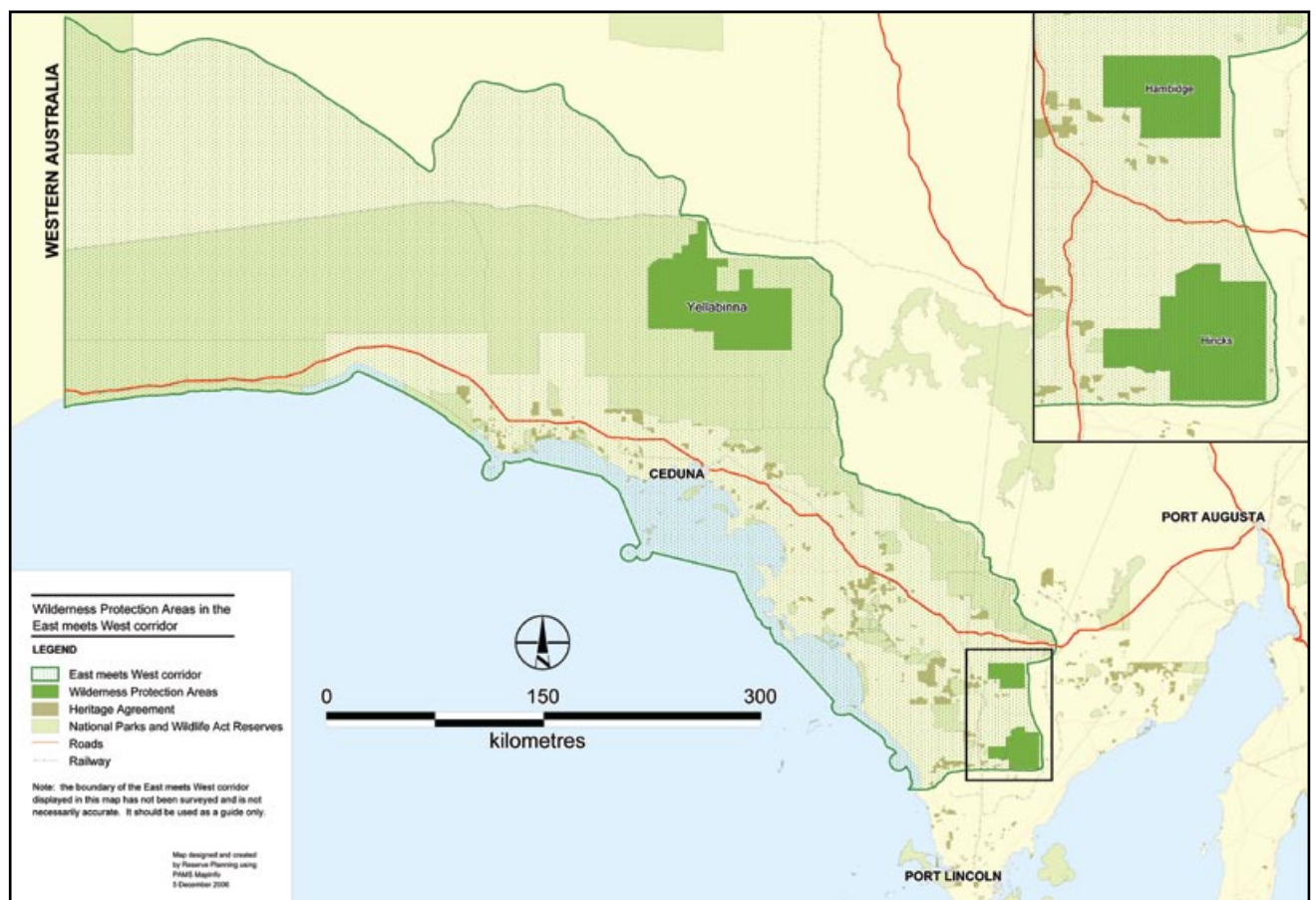
Left: A Greater Stick-nest Rat *Leporillus conditor* on West Franklin Island, in the Nuyts Archipelago off north-western Eyre Peninsula. This species is considered vulnerable at both a state and national level (photo by Tony Robinson). Right: View of Mt Finke in Yellabinna Wilderness Protection Area (photo by Brett Dalzell).



Wilderness protection contributes to many nature conservation initiatives in South Australia including the National Reserve System Program and *No Species Loss: A Nature Conservation Strategy for South Australia 2007-2017*.

The *NatureLinks* program is establishing areas of connected habitat, to form a system of core protected areas, linked by lands managed for conservation. The first of these, the *NatureLinks* East meets West corridor, contains the Hincks, Hambidge and Yellabinna Wilderness Protection Areas. These high-quality tracts of wilderness provide valuable cores for *NatureLinks*.

Wilderness Protection Areas in the East Meets West Corridor





How is Wilderness Protected?

Wilderness protection involves protecting existing areas and restoring land to its condition prior to European settlement, to maintain habitat and conserve threatened species.

The Wilderness Advisory Committee has the job of assessing all land in South Australia for wilderness quality and advising the Government on wilderness protection and management.

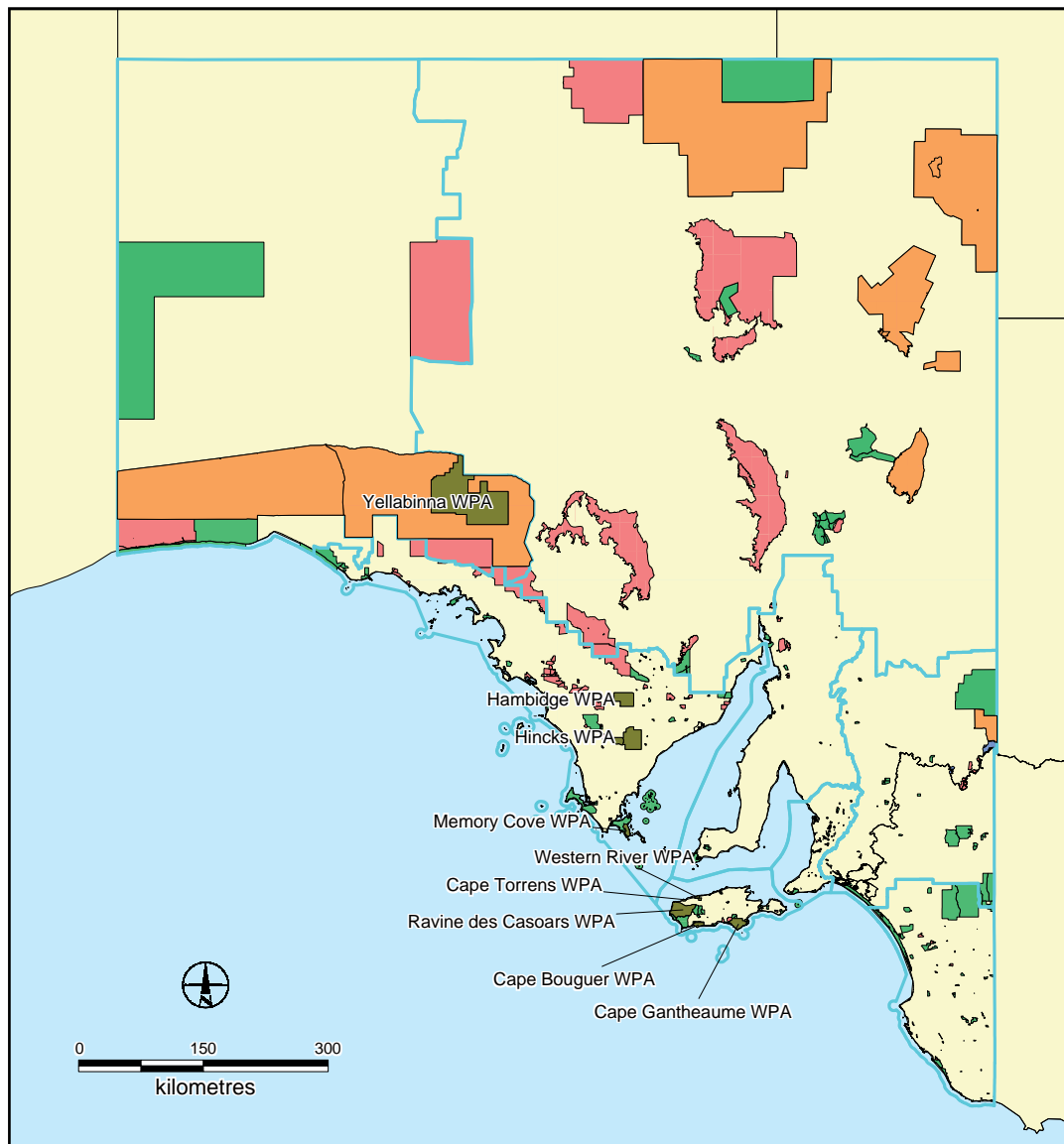
Wilderness areas on land and sea can be protected under the **Wilderness Protection Act 1992**. The Act has two categories of protection – Wilderness Protection Areas receive the highest level of protection and Wilderness Protection Zones provide a management framework that permits exploration and mining.

Both categories are managed under the **Wilderness Code of Management**, available from: www.parks.sa.gov.au/parks/management/wilderness.html



The Code is designed to maximise wilderness quality and prescribes principles for protecting habitat and managing visitors, scientific research and fire. It allows public use and enjoyment where compatible with conservation and promotes a 'tread lightly' ethic to visitors. The Code is also a useful resource for 'off reserve' managers and landholders.



Protected Areas and NRM boundaries in South Australia



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| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
|  | Wilderness Protection Areas (WPAs) |  | Natural Resource Management Board Region Boundaries |
|  | Protected areas without Mining and Pastoral Access |  | Protected areas with Mining and Pastoral Access |
|  | Protected areas with Mining Access | | |

Protected Areas and NRM boundaries in South Australia

Map designed and created using PAMS
 Projection: MGA Zone 53 (GDA 94)
 January 2007

The above map shows the current system of Wilderness Protected Areas in South Australia. Wilderness of potential national significance can also be found in many areas of national parks and conservation parks.



Challenges

Some areas of high quality wilderness are protected within South Australia's reserve system. Other areas are on private land, Aboriginal land and land under pastoral lease.

Management projects which encourage landholders to protect wilderness and rehabilitate areas of fragmented native vegetation on their own land help protect this precious natural resource for the future. Partnerships between members of the community, conservation groups, landholders, Natural Resources Management Boards and State and Local Governments should be supported and will be the key to achieving tangible, long-term biodiversity conservation.

Future Directions

South Australia is well placed to take on the challenge of developing a reserve system suited to species protection in a rapidly changing environment. The state has large intact wilderness areas, effective wilderness protection legislation, strong public support for wilderness protection and innovative policy drivers such as *NatureLinks*.

If plants and animals are to survive the stresses of global climate change, they must be given every opportunity to adapt and evolve.

The 'whole of landscape' approach to nature conservation prescribed in *NatureLinks* is a step towards environmental sustainability. Action is urgent.

To find out more about wilderness in South Australia visit:
www.parks.sa.gov.au/parks/management/wilderness.html

For further information please contact:

Department for Environment and Heritage

Telephone: (08) 8124 4721

Website: www.parks.sa.gov.au/parks/parks/wilderness_protection

Front Cover: Left: Cape Torrens, on the northern coast of the isolated western end of Kangaroo Island, one of five Wilderness Protection Areas on Kangaroo Island (photo by Rob Ellis). Right: Wildflowers in the Simpson Desert. The Simpson Desert Regional Reserve and Simpson Desert Conservation Park cover 3,607,100ha, 80% of which is considered high quality wilderness (photo by Dylan Koerner).

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