Wilderness protection in South Australia

Protecting natural ecosystems and unspoilt landscapes for future generations to see, experience and learn
Wilderness Protection Areas in South Australia

**Kangaroo Island**
- Cape Bouguer Wilderness Protection Area
- Cape Gantheaume Wilderness Protection Area
- Cape Torrens Wilderness Protection Area
- Ravine des Casoars Wilderness Protection Area
- Western River Wilderness Protection Area

**Murraylands**
- Billiatt Wilderness Protection Area
- Danggali Wilderness Protection Area

**Eyre Peninsula Mallee**
- Hambidge Wilderness Protection Area
- Hincks Wilderness Protection Area

**Eyre Peninsula Marine & Coastal**
- Investigator Group Wilderness Protection Area
- Memory Cove Wilderness Protection Area
- Nuyts Archipelago Wilderness Protection Area

**Far West Dune & Karst**
- Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area
- Yellabinna Wilderness Protection Area
Minister’s Foreword

Wilderness areas in South Australia 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.

South Australia is fortunate to have substantial areas of internationally significant wilderness, with over 1,843,454 hectares protected by the Wilderness Protection Act 1992 - the highest level of protection for land under South Australian legislation.

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

Hon Ian Hunter MLC
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
What is wilderness?

South Australia’s wilderness areas are life-giving places of natural and cultural significance.

Our wilderness areas are a crucial part of natural resource management in our State. They protect biodiversity, assist with landscape-scale natural resource management, and provide valuable ecological, evolutionary and climatic reference and research areas for the future. They offer insight into Australia’s pre-European condition, hold significant cultural connections for Aboriginal people, and provide opportunities for future generations to experience and enjoy untouched natural landscapes.

The *Wilderness Protection Act 1992* defines wilderness criteria for South Australia. 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.
Identifying areas of wilderness quality

Most of the wilderness remaining in the settled regions of the State has already been protected as Wilderness Protection Areas.

Other significant lands of high wilderness value are located in the State’s arid regions. Some of these areas of high quality wilderness are protected within the national parks, conservation parks and regional reserves of South Australia’s protected area system. Other areas of high wilderness value are on private land, Aboriginal land and land under pastoral lease.

Under the *Wilderness Protection Act 1992*, the Parks and Wilderness Council has the job of assessing all land in South Australia for wilderness quality, advising the government on wilderness protection and management, commissioning research, and increasing understanding in the community of the significance of wilderness.
How is wilderness protected?

Wilderness Protection Areas receive the highest level of protection offered in South Australia under the *Wilderness Protection Act 1992.*

Wilderness Protection Areas are managed under the Wilderness Code of Management. The Code is designed to maximise wilderness quality, prescribing 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 for how they might manage wilderness on their land.
Why is protecting Wilderness important?

The following pages explore why protecting wilderness is important, and showcase some of South Australia’s much loved Wilderness Protection Areas.
Protecting biodiversity

Wilderness areas provide the best possible circumstances for plant and animal species to persist. Protecting landscape scale systems allows species to adapt and respond to large-scale disturbances, such as wildfires and climate change, as well as maintaining natural ecosystem processes.

The biological implications of climate change are profound and include increased risk of species extinction, more frequent wildfires and spread of pest animals and weeds. The protection of intact natural ecosystems helps ensure not only species survival but also the maintenance of ecosystem services, such as climate regulation and water resources, on which humans and animals depend.

Ravine des Casoars Wilderness Protection Area

The Ravine des Casoars Wilderness Protection Area, proclaimed in 1993, covers an area of 41,360 hectares located at the north-western end of Kangaroo Island. It protects pristine, extensive woodlands and forests, and contains several complete natural drainage systems, from watershed to their discharge at sea. This land has never been cleared, and contains ancient evidence of Aboriginal occupation.
Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area

Known as the treeless plain (Null – no; arbor – tree), this seemingly barren landscape is the largest limestone karst environment in the world, and hides many secrets including dolines, sinkholes, underground streams, caves, and blowholes. Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area contains around 390 species of plants and 160 species of animals, including rare species such as the Slender-billed Thornbill, Australian Bustard and the Nullarbor Daisy. The coastal boundary protects the longest stretch of uninterrupted cliffs in Australia, the Bunda Cliffs. During the winter months, visitors to the Nullarbor can stand atop the Bunda Cliffs and spot Southern Right Whales in the waters below. The Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area contributes to the largest continuous protected area in South Australia, enabling a coordinated management approach across this valuable landscape.

The Nullarbor is the Country of the Mirning People. The Mirning People play a central role in guiding the management of the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area through the Nullarbor Parks Advisory Committee, a co-management partnership with the South Australian government.

Contributing to landscape scale natural resource management

Wilderness areas are a vital part of the mosaic of land and water resources. Their protection, coupled with projects which better conserve the land between protected areas, is integral to whole-of-landscape management and is consistent with Goal 3 of the State Natural Resources Management Plan ‘Improved condition and resilience of the environment’. Furthermore, the cost of protection of intact wilderness areas is very much lower than the cost of rehabilitation of modified landscapes.

Partnerships between members of the community, conservation groups, landholders, Natural Resource Management boards and state and local governments are critical to achieving tangible, long-term biodiversity conservation, helping to protect these precious natural landscapes for the future.
Furthering scientific understanding of our natural world

Wilderness areas provide us with a genetic ‘library’ which can contribute to improvements in medicine and agriculture. They are of significant value for research into ecological and physical processes, evolutionary development, and long-term climatic trends. Wilderness areas provide a scientific benchmark with which modified environments can be compared, and from which appropriate management and rehabilitation strategies for modified environments can be derived.

**Nuyts Archipelago Wilderness Protection Area**

Nuyts Archipelago Wilderness Protection Area is located off the west coast of South Australia, around 10 to 75 kilometres south-west of Ceduna. It comprises Purdie Islands, Lound Island, Goat Island, Lacy Islands, Evans Island, Lilliput Island, Franklin Islands, Blefuscu Island, Egg Island, Freeling Island, Smooth Island, Dog Island, West Island, St Francis Island, Masillon Island, Fenelon Island and Hart Island. The islands’ remoteness from the mainland provides an important and secure refuge for vulnerable wildlife and small mammals free from introduced predators. To protect these critical island habitats from disturbance, all are protected to the low water mark, and unauthorised access is not permitted.

Nuyts Archipelago Wilderness Protection Area provides important island habitat for species such as the Australian sea lion, mutton bird, carpet python, and the Nuyts Archipelago subspecies of the southern brown bandicoot. Nuyts Archipelago Wilderness Protection Area is also helping to ensure the long term survival of the vulnerable Stick-Nest Rat and Brush-Tailed Bettong, through the implementation of successful re-introduction programs.
Nuyts Archipelago Wilderness Protection Area
Maintaining cultural ties

Wilderness areas provide Aboriginal people with the opportunity to maintain traditional cultural practices and linkages with the land. The untouched areas of natural landscape enable traditional owners to hunt and gather bush foods and animals, maintain connections with cultural sites, and conduct burials to return those that have passed to their Country. Through co-management partnerships with the South Australian government, Aboriginal traditional owners are also able to meaningfully participate in management of their lands, from setting management direction, to conducting on-park management activities such as weed and pest control.

Yellabinna Wilderness Protection Area

The Yellabinna Wilderness Protection Area is located approximately 100 kilometres north of Ceduna. Comprising approximately 500,700 hectares, it protects one of the largest and most intact natural areas in South Australia. Yellabinna Wilderness Protection Area is particularly important for the conservation of significant natural vegetation communities, as well as culturally significant sites such as Mount Finke. A number of Aboriginal groups across the area have come together to manage their traditional lands. The traditional owners of the Far West Coast have a central role in setting directions for the management of parks on their traditional lands, which include Yellabinna Wilderness Protection Area and Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area, through co-management partnerships with the South Australian government.
A window into the past, a doorway to future opportunities

Wilderness areas provide close approximations of South Australia’s landscape in the age before agriculture, industry and urbanisation. As the pressures of urban living increase, the special recreational opportunities in wilderness areas are becoming increasingly more significant. Wilderness areas are also an important resource for regional tourism, providing opportunities for unique nature-based experiences.

**Cape Bouguer Wilderness Protection Area**

Cape Bouguer Wilderness Protection Area, created in 1993, covers an area of 5,300 hectares on the southern coast of Kangaroo Island. The area is significant for its expanse of intact native vegetation, and for its biological diversity. The coastal landscape is scenically outstanding with its unspoilt sweeping bays, making Cape Bouguer Wilderness Protection Area the ideal site to host a large portion of one of Australia’s best walks – the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail. Opened in 2016, the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail is a multi-day walk that traverses 60 kilometres of South Australia’s most remarkable coastline and provides visitors with access to remote and previously unseen areas of pristine wilderness as walkers traverse the Cape Bouguer Wilderness Protection Area. The trail is set to become a world class attraction, enhancing the international profile of Kangaroo Island and bringing significant flow-on benefits to the State’s economy.
Memory Cove Wilderness Protection Area

Memory Cove Wilderness Protection Area, created in 2004, is located on the Eyre Peninsula, approximately 25 kilometres south of Port Lincoln. The 8,940 hectare area extends to low water mark and includes Little Island, Lewis Island, Hopkins Island, Smith Island and Williams Island.

Over 210 species of native flora have been recorded within Memory Cove Wilderness Protection Area, including seven species of conservation significance. Prior to European settlement, two Aboriginal groups - the Barngarla and the Nauo people - occupied the area, and the lands and waters are still of profound cultural significance today. Fish traps made from stone arrangements, stone working sites and middens are still present today, and local Aboriginal people often make use of the wide variety of fish, inland mammals, reptiles and plants. The area also has significant European history. In 1802, Matthew Flinders sailed the coast in the Investigator. During this expedition seven of his crew and the ship’s Master, John Thistle, drowned when their cutter capsized during a search for fresh water. The nearby islands were named after the eight lost men, and Memory Cove was named to commemorate this tragedy.

Memory Cove Wilderness Protection Area provides opportunities for a unique nature-based tourism experience, with the provision for camping and recreational fishing. Yachts and boats can often be seen anchored in the sheltered waters at Memory Cove and Williams Island.
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