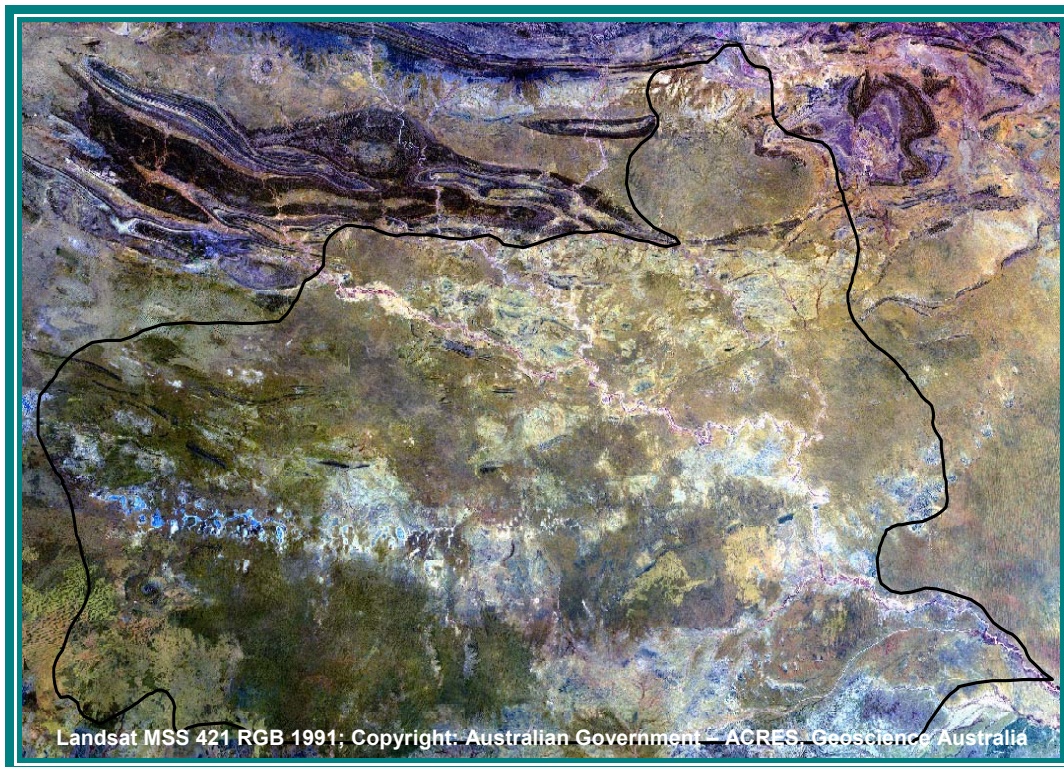

A RESOURCE ASSESSMENT TOWARDS A CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR THE FINKE BIOREGION, NT



**Conservation & Natural Resources
Department of Infrastructure,
Planning and Environment**



NHT Project No. 990006



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This resource assessment report aims to ensure that the species, ecosystems and ecological processes present in the Finke Bioregion are adequately conserved. The principal land use in the bioregion is pastoralism. The priority for this report is to broaden our understanding of the biodiversity and other values of the Finke Bioregion and ensure that existing and new knowledge is made available to land managers in the bioregion, and is integrated with sustainable land management practices across the bioregion and with any future development that may occur in the region. Recommendations made in this report are not Government policy, but will be considered in the development of an integrated Northern Territory Natural Resource Management (NRM) plan, and in a comprehensive Parks and Conservation Masterplan for the Northern Territory being developed by the Northern Territory Government in conjunction with key stakeholders. The intent of the Masterplan is to establish a 15 to 20 year vision for parks and conservation (including off-reserve conservation) in the Northern Territory, arrived at through consultation with Aboriginal traditional owners, the pastoral, tourism and mining industries, conservationists, other landholders, and the community at large.

This is one of a series of resource assessment reports that have, or will, contribute to the development of conservation strategies or plans for bioregions of the Northern Territory. This report is structured to provide a concise overview of the important issues and recommendations arising from a Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and Northern Territory Government funded project titled 'A Conservation Strategy for the Finke Bioregion, NT' (Project Number 990006). Supporting detail for all aspects of the project are given in appendices 1 to 10.

The Finke Bioregion covers an area of 54,292 square kilometres in the Northern Territory, and a further 19,505 square kilometres in northern South Australia. The bioregion is broadly characterised by small mountain ranges, well-wooded rivers and creeks, salt lakes, and plains of calcareous tussock grassland, *Spinifex* and *Acacia* shrubland. Sandy plains and dunefields border the bioregion to the east and west with prominent mountain ranges occurring in the north and extensive gibber plains to the south.

Existing data and information on the biodiversity and social values of the Northern Territory portion of the Finke Bioregion were collated and a wildlife survey was conducted during 2001 to broaden our understanding of the biodiversity of the bioregion. The data were analysed to identify species and communities and other values with specific conservation requirements, in order to develop recommendations on how best to conserve these values in a practical and sustainable manner in consultation with landholders.

Threatening processes are already operating in the landscape while others may have the potential to impact on conservation values now and in the future if land management practices change. This report considers several existing and potential threats to wildlife and other conservation values, along with the effects of land uses such as pastoralism, mining and proposed military exercises on the wildlife and ecosystems of the Finke Bioregion.

A major recommendation arising from the results of the wildlife survey and the overview of threatening processes is that emphasis move away from conservation of single species, to that which considers impacts of threatening processes on ecosystem functioning and wildlife assemblages across the landscape.

Several key habitats have been identified which are in need of conservation action, including the Todd River Floodplain, Stony Lowlands, Sandy Southern Plains, Dunefields and Sandplain, and Salt Lakes. There are also a number of other habitats of conservation value in the Finke Bioregion such as important wetlands, sites of botanical significance, and areas that have been termed fauna 'hotspots' (i.e. areas containing a concentration of species of conservation significance). Vegetation assemblages of

conservation value are those that are species rich and/or are limited to, or are a feature of, the Finke Bioregion: Oat Grass, Bluebush & Myall Sandy Plains & Rises, Chenopod-rich Sandy Plains & Rises, Shrublands (Mulga & Witchetty Bush), Low Shrublands (Cottonbush Flats), Wooded (Coolabah) Claypans, Spinifex & Shrubby Non-Spinifex Dunefields, Chenopod-rich Breakaways, Mt. Olga Wattle Igneous Tors, Samphire or Inland Teatree Saltpan Margins, Chenopod-rich Gibber Plains, Shrubby Mesa Slopes, and Wooded (Ironwood) / Shrubby sandy floodplains. A number of fauna assemblages are typical of the Finke Bioregion and while they are not closely associated with particular landforms (unlike the flora), there is a need to conserve representative examples of these assemblages where possible. The report has also identified a number of threatened and near threatened species that could benefit from innovative off-reserve conservation management. These species include the Australian Bustard *Ardeotis australis*, Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae*, Southern Marsupial Mole *Notoryctes typhlops*, Slater's Skink *Egernia slateri slateri*, Peter Latz Wattle *Acacia latzii*, Rainbow Valley Fuchsia Bush *Eremophila* A48866 Rainbow Valley, Mt. Conner Wattle *Acacia ammobia* and Bluebush Daisy *Cratystylis centralis*.