

## **Proving our biggest and best idea**

One of the world's most ambitious and visionary conservation plans — to establish a conservation corridor spanning 2,800 km of the Great Eastern Ranges — has been shown to be critical for the long term health of the nation in a major study by leading Australian researchers.

*"Connectivity Conservation and the Great Eastern Ranges Corridor"* was commissioned by the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) to establish the scientific basis and evidence for a conservation corridor that helps protect the native species and natural ecosystems of the ranges and buffer them against the changes expected from climate change.

The report by Professor Brendan Mackey, Dr James Watson and Dr Graeme Worboys of ANU Enterprise, examines the scientific evidence for a continental scale, "conservation corridor" focused on the Great Eastern Ranges which runs the length of the eastern seaboard from the Australian Alps in Victoria as far north as the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland.

"The ranges are one of Australia's richest biodiversity assets and the NSW section of the corridor includes more than 59% of the State's vulnerable and endangered fauna species and 64 % of its endangered and vulnerable flora" says Professor Mackey.

"Furthermore, the mountainous and upland areas of the ranges contain headwaters that capture the most reliable rainfall in eastern Australia which means the ongoing quality and supply in these catchments is fundamental to the human health and economic development of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and all coastal towns and cities between Eden and Cairns," says Mackey.

According to Professor Mackey, the concept of **connectivity conservation**, which brings science and communities together to address conservation on a very large scale, provides a fresh look at land use and the long-term needs of biodiversity conservation.

"Connectivity conservation breaks free of minimalist thinking that risks locking protected areas into unconnected islands and an ever-tightening extinction vortex.

"To halt and reverse the biodiversity extinction crisis, we must counter the threats and reverse the trends. This means reconnecting habitat so native ecosystems don't end up becoming isolated "islands", buffering protected areas and protecting and restoring habitat on other land tenures.

"Three years ago the Great Eastern Ranges corridor was proposed as a response to the increasing pressures on our biodiversity. This study provides clear evidence that the corridor initiative is not only do-able, it's absolutely critical," Professor Mackey concluded.

According to Professor Mackey, the authors of the report hope that the Great Eastern Ranges corridor's bold scope will inspire all landowners and managers to contribute to conservation efforts in a coordinated way and help build a broader base of public support for biodiversity conservation by linking landscapes as part of a "natural defence" strategy.

The NSW Government has already spent \$6 million from the Environmental Trust over the past three years to develop the private and public sector partnerships that will turn the concept of a conservation corridor along the Great Eastern Ranges into a reality.

**NSW is fortunate to have consolidated sections of the corridor with a chain of connected national parks and reserves along large parts of the Great Eastern Ranges. Future work in NSW will focus on five key target areas linking the alps with the western slopes and the south coast around Bredbo, the Southern Highlands between Morton and Nattai National Parks, the Hunter Valley between Wollemi and Barrington Tops national parks, and in the Border Ranges area on the NSW-Queensland border.**

**Editors note....photos available here <http://www.flickr.com/photos/gerinitiative/sets/72157605965460572/>**

**Media contact...Stuart Cohen...02 62297126 or 0429 771601**

Great Eastern Ranges Initiative

PO Box 733, Queanbeyan NSW 2620 Level 1, 11 Farrer Place, Queanbeyan Tel: (02) 6229 7063 Fax: (02) 6229 7011

