Australia

State of the Environment

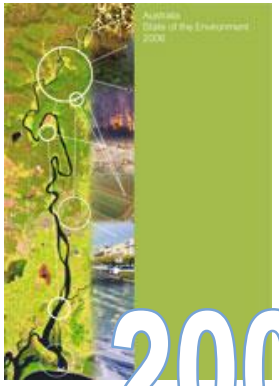
2011

State of the Environment reporting

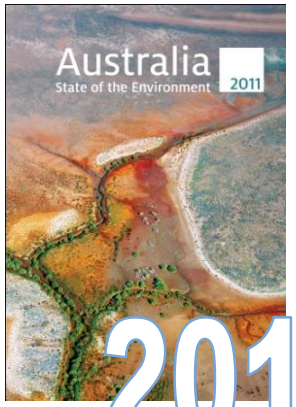
- A report must be tabled in Parliament every five years
- Definition of ‘environment’ is broad – includes heritage
- No current regulations regarding scope, content or process
- Lessons from previous reports and directives for 2011

1996

2001



2006



2011

Purpose of SoE 2011

Provide relevant and useful information on environmental issues to the public and decision-makers...

… to raise awareness and support more informed environmental management decisions …

… leading to more sustainable use and effective conservation of environmental assets.

SoE 2011 Products

- Full report
  - With summary and 17 headlines
  - Nine theme chapters – each with key findings
  - Chapter on future reporting
- In-Brief
- Online materials
  - Commissioned reports
  - Workshop reports
  - Additional tables and figures

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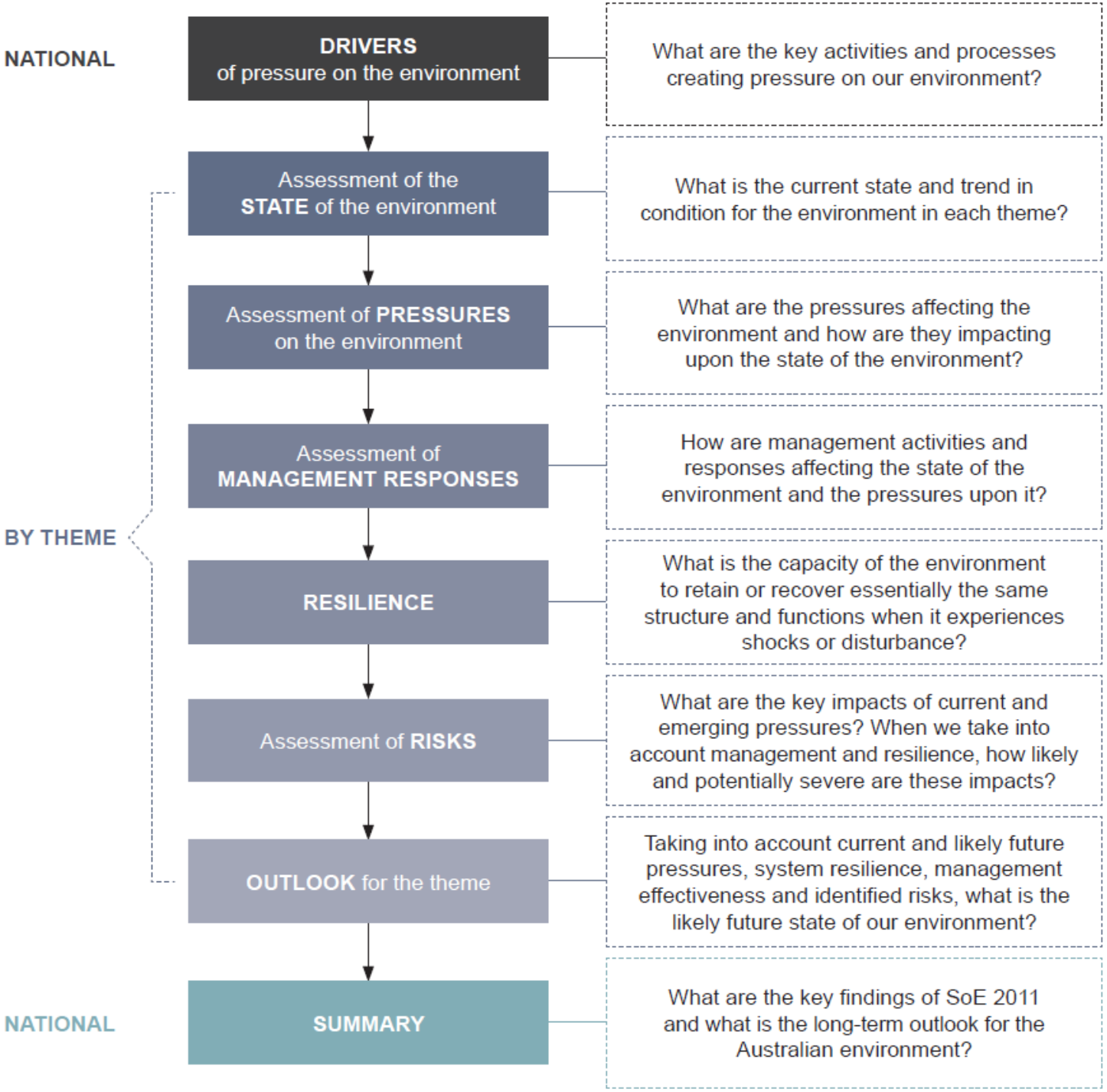
Approach to conducting assessments and presenting results

- DPSIR framework as basis
- + report cards for condition, pressures and management effectiveness
- + discussion of resilience
- + risk assessment
- + outlooks
- Presented in a thematic structure


NATIONAL
DRIVERS
of pressure on the environment
What are the key activities and processes creating pressure on our environment?
Assessment of the
STATE of the environment
What is the current state and trend in condition for the environment in each theme?
Assessment of PRESSURES
on the environment
What are the pressures affecting the environment and how are they impacting upon the state of the environment?
Assessment of
MANAGEMENT RESPONSES
How are management activities and responses affecting the state of the environment and the pressures upon it?
BY THEME
RESILIENCE
What is the capacity of the environment to retain or recover essentially the same structure and functions when it experiences shocks or disturbance?
Assessment of RISKS
What are the key impacts of current and emerging pressures? When we take into account management and resilience, how likely and potentially severe are these impacts?
OUTLOOK for the theme
Taking into account current and likely future pressures, system resilience, management effectiveness and identified risks, what is the likely future state of our environment?
NATIONAL
SUMMARY
What are the key findings of SoE 2011 and what is the long-term outlook for the Australian environment?

Assessment summaries in the report

Summary text explaining why grade was assigned and highlighting key issues

Assessed component—for example, an environmental asset or region

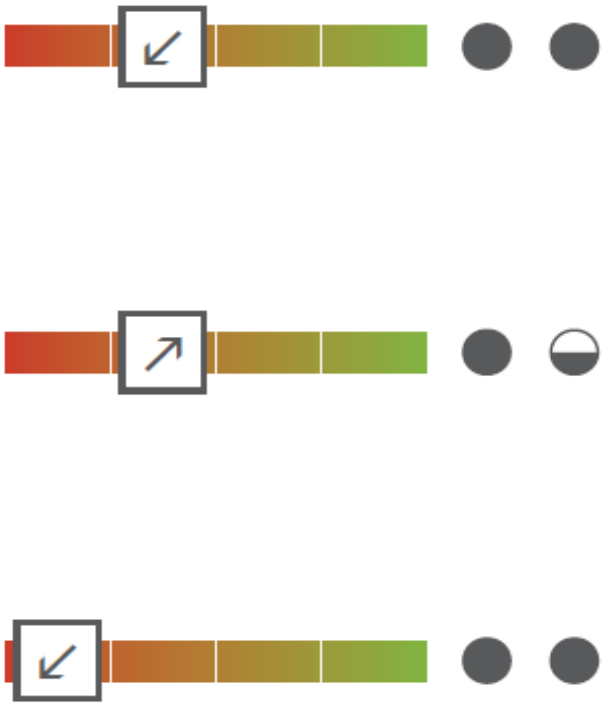
Explicit statements outlining the criteria for determining grade

Grade, including indication of trend

Indication of level of consensus and quality of evidence used in assigning grade

Pressures on Indigenous heritage

Loss of knowledge	Indigenous heritage has not been comprehensively surveyed and assessed, so knowledge of the resource is incomplete. The intangible values of Indigenous heritage places are directly degraded when the knowledge relating to associated belief and traditional practices is lost. Loss of traditional knowledge poses a major and continuing threat to Australia's Indigenous cultural heritage
Loss of traditional cultural practice and social connections	Indigenous communities in Australia continue to suffer disconnection from country or face significant challenges in pursuing traditional land and sea management or other cultural practices; however, some significant improvements have been made that both recognise and improve management arrangements for Indigenous heritage
Incremental destruction	A major pressure on Indigenous heritage is the continuing incremental destruction of sites through an accumulation of one-off decisions associated with particular developments. The pressure is created by a combination of inadequate inventory and consent processes that identify impacts, but seldom give primacy to Indigenous site conservation



Protection

Protection

Context: Statutory controls for Indigenous heritage places are generally understood, despite jurisdictional inconsistencies

Planning: Indigenous heritage is under-represented on statutory heritage lists and registers and is not effectively supported by statutes that claim to provide blanket protection, but also allow progressive site destruction

Inputs: Resources allocated for listing and protection of Indigenous heritage places are inadequate and often a post-event reaction to adverse impacts. Insufficient attention is paid to intangible values and places, and to effective means of providing protection in ways other than listing or reservation

Processes: Management systems for Indigenous heritage places within reserved lands identify conservation needs, involve traditional owners and make generally well-informed decisions about impact assessment and resource allocation. However, outside the reserved lands system, Indigenous heritage decisions are less consultative and often reactive to threats

Effectiveness of heritage management

Indigenous heritage

Identification

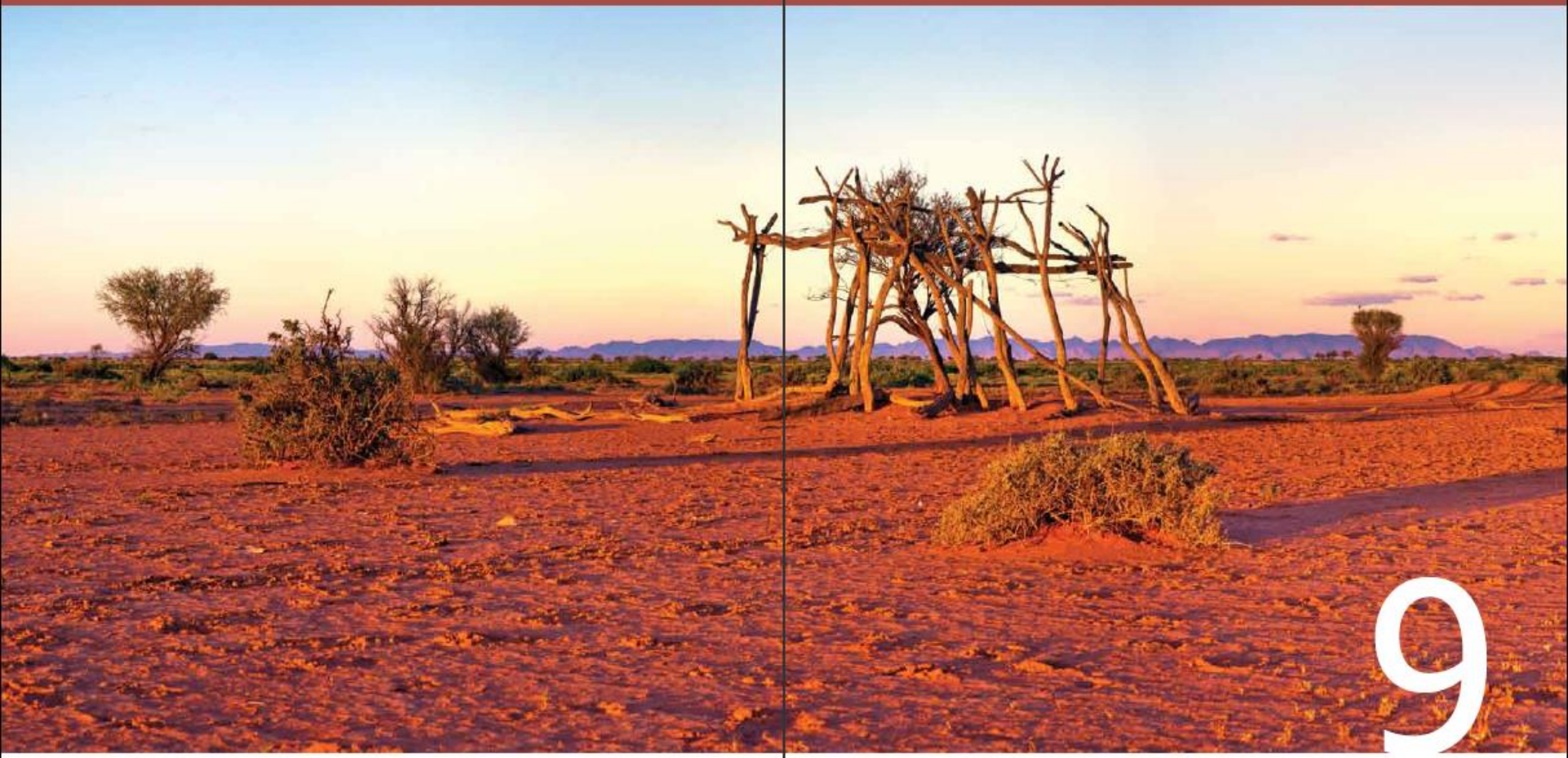
Context: Understanding of the nature and extent of Australia's Indigenous heritage, both tangible and intangible, is inadequate. Indigenous places are also typically seen as individual physical sites rather than part of the rich cultural landscape that is country

Planning: There is a clear need for nationally coordinated policies and programs that proactively document and assess Indigenous heritage, rather than reactively responding to threats

Inputs: Funding for survey and assessment of Indigenous heritage values is usually directly proportional to the threat posed by a particular development. Resources available for documenting intangible heritage and country are inadequate

Processes: The Australian Government provides little leadership or coordination in Indigenous heritage assessment. Most assessments occur at the state level in response to threats. Some state jurisdictions are significantly improving assessment processes

Heritage



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Old wurlie (dust storm shelter), near Lake Torrens, South Australia
Photo by Peter Ahrens

Key findings – Heritage

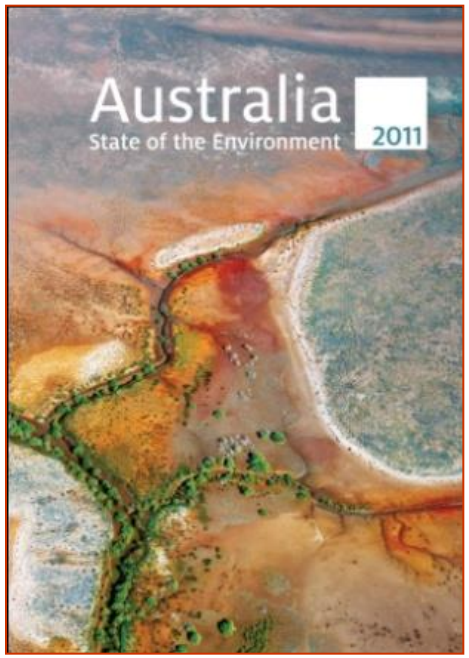
- Our extraordinary and diverse natural and cultural heritage generally remains in good condition.
- Australia is recognised internationally for leadership in heritage management.
- Our heritage is being threatened by natural and human processes and a lack of public sector resourcing that does not reflect the true value of heritage to the Australian community.
- Improvement will require change.

State and trends

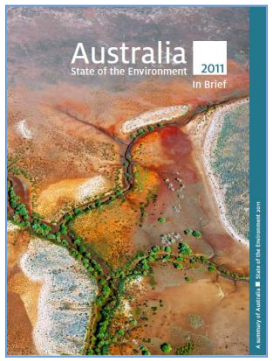
- More than half of Australia's bioregions have at least 10% of their area within reserved lands – but a larger percentage may be appropriate.
- Interest in Indigenous heritage and involvement of Indigenous people have increased, but incremental destruction continues.
- Historic heritage is generally in good condition, but listing processes are erratic.

SoE 2011 Products

Full Report



In Brief



Supplementary Products

www.environment.gov.au/soe

Australia

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