Strategy for Protected and Conserved Land Areas in South Australia

Government of South Australia

National Parks and Wildlife Service SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Contents

Acknowledgment of Country ii
Minister's foreword 1
Strategy on a page 2
Introduction 4
What does this strategy do? 5
How will the strategy operate? 6
What are protected and conserved areas? 7
Why are protected and conserved areas important 11
Status of South Australia's protection 12
CARRS 13
Climate Change 16
Wilderness value 17
Modified Landscapes with Natural Habitat Values 18
Goals and strategic priorities 19
Enabling actions 23
Glossary of terms 24
Appendix 1 26
Appendix 2 - Maps 28

Acknowledgment of Country

The South Australian Government respects the First Peoples of South Australia and recognises the cultural authority of all Traditional Owners.

We acknowledge that caring for Country is a cultural obligation and that First Nations peoples have been stewards of the environment for many generations.

We acknowledge the enduring impact of colonisation on First Nations peoples, families, communities, cultures, knowledges and languages, and the impact on their Country.

We recognise the need for more respectful engagement with First Nations peoples, the need to empower First Nations peoples to continue to work with the government in caring for Country and enhancing protected areas, and the need to work together for better outcomes for Country and people.

First Nations peoples is used throughout this document in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the sovereign people of this land. It recognises various language groups as separate and unique sovereign nations. DEW respectfully acknowledges this term is not universally used by all First Nations peoples in South Australia.

The Department thanks the Parks and Wilderness Council for their partnership and contribution to the development of this strategy. Their insight and ongoing collaboration have been instrumental throughout the process.

We also thank the many stakeholders who participated in workshops over the past few years. Their time, knowledge and expertise have played a vital role in shaping the direction and content of this strategy.

Minister's foreword

Establishing dedicated areas in which species, ecosystems and ecological functions are protected from threatening processes has long formed the foundation of nature conservation across the world. South Australia was an early mover in this endeavour, with our first national park - Belair National Park - dedicated in 1891.

South Australia's protected area system includes some of our most biologically and culturally rich landscapes, and forms the core of our commitment to protecting nature. These areas safeguard vital ecosystem services and underpin our cultural, social, physical, and economic wellbeing. They also strengthen the resilience of surrounding landscapes, as their benefits extend beyond their boundaries.

Our protected area system is world class in its extent and in the diversity of ecosystems that it protects. Nevertheless, it is not complete – there are still gaps in the protection of our ecosystems and we must use flexibility and innovation in protected area planning in the face of climate change and the pursuit of protecting 30% of Australia's land by 2030. Conserved areas, an emerging area-based classification that supports conservation outcomes on land that cannot be designated as a protected area, will play an increasingly important role in our commitment to protecting biodiversity.

The purpose of this strategy is to drive the strategic expansion and enhancement of South Australia's protected and conserved areas, to enable biodiversity to thrive and to protect places of special value. By setting a clear vision, this strategy will help guide collaboration between all levels of government and conservation partners, including First Nations groups, industry, landholders and environmental organisations, to focus on agreed priorities and shared outcomes.

Hon. Lucy Hood
Minister for Climate, Environment & Water

Strategy for Protected and C in South Australia

Strategy on a page

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To build a system of protected and conserved areas that enables South

Purp

To drive the strategic expansion an protected and c

Guiding principles

- Prioritise areas that protect significant biodiversity and conservation values
- Increase comprehensiveness, adequacy, and representativeness
- Incorporate First Nations' knowledge, expertise and aspirations for Country
- Enable species and ecosystems to persist, adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing climate

Goals

GOAL 1 — **Build a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system that safeguards and enhances biodiversity**

GOAL 2 — **Develop a protected area system that enables biodiversity to persist, adapt and thrive despite climate change**

Strategic Priorities

Increase protection of underrepresented IBRA bioregions and subregions

Increase protection of land with priority conservation and wilderness values

Increase protection of land that enhances climate resilience

Increase protection of biodiversity at risk to the impacts of climate change

Continue refining our response to climate change by drawing on Traditional Knowledge and modern science

Enabling actions

- **Seek to better understand First Nations social, economic, and cultural aspirations for Country**, and work with communities to support capacity and identify locations of cultural significance that require protection.
- **Develop and implement an investment framework** to guide how government works with conservation and investment partners to fund the expansion and enhancement of the protected and conserved area system.
- **Complete an audit of Crown land** identified for inclusion in the protected and conserved area system, and identify priorities for the addition of these areas based on the values outlined in this strategy.
- Following the prioritisation of Crown land, **provide annual updates on progress** to convert lands to the protected and conserved area system.

Conserved Land Areas

on:

n Australia's biodiversity to thrive and protects places of special value.

pose:

d enhancement of South Australia's onserved areas.

- Contribute to the achievement of the national target to protect and conserve 30% of Australia's landmass by 2030
- Improve ecological integrity, connectivity and resilience
- Safeguard places that are important to people
- Include land for restoration that can support biodiversity at risk

GOAL 3 Protect places that are important to people

Protect areas, objects and landscape features that are significant to First Nations peoples

Protect places with significant heritage and geological values

Protect places with significant recreational and landscape values

GOAL 4 Work with landholders and conservation partners to build a robust protected and conserved area system

Grow the private land contribution to our protected and conserved areas

- **Convene a biennial forum** with relevant stakeholders (including private land conservation partners, landholders, the philanthropy sector and Landscape Boards) to discuss priority areas and coordinate action.
- **Update spatial prioritisation** using the 'outcomes assessment' and 'wilderness assessment' to support data-driven acquisitions, identify priority restoration opportunities, and support the adaptation of key ecosystems to climate change.
- **Develop and implement a long-term communications strategy** to showcase the value of protected areas and better understand community aspirations for the protected and conserved area system.
- **Develop options for an expanded suite of private land covenants** for improving conservation outcomes.
- Work with the Australian Government to **implement trials** that test and align frameworks, policy settings and site assessment tools in support of **Conserved Areas** in South Australia.

Introduction

South Australia is made up of a tapestry of diverse landscapes - from deserts and salt lakes in the north, to Mallee scrub and temperate forests in the south. These landscapes are home to significant biodiversity and cultural heritage, which have been cared for by First Nations peoples for more than 65,000 years.

South Australia's network of protected areas helps to protect these values. By conserving habitats and ecosystems, they provide essential habitat for threatened species and promote ecological resilience. They also safeguard cultural values, and are places for South Australians to enjoy, providing the community with opportunities for recreation and connection with nature.

Despite this, South Australia's biodiversity is under threat, with 12 per cent of native animals and more than 800 native plants threatened with extinction. Key pressures leading to, and exacerbating this biodiversity loss include invasive species, land clearing, degradation, climate change, altered fire and water regimes, and unsustainable use of resources.

Recognising the imminent threat of biodiversity loss, the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) has set the ambitious target to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030 – the "30 by 30" target – and Australia is committed to meeting this goal.

To support the delivery of the 30 by 30 target, the **National 30 by 30 Roadmap** and the **National Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures Framework** were developed jointly with the Australian government and all state and territory governments, and agreed by all environment ministers.

South Australia's *Strategy for Protected and Conserved Land Areas* sets out how we will grow and strengthen our system of protected and conserved areas for the next 10 years – working with communities, First Nations peoples, private land conservationists, and other key partners – to help achieve 30 by 30 and beyond.

International framework - 30 by 30 target

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which includes:

Target 3

"*Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.*"

What does this strategy do?

Purpose: to drive the strategic expansion and enhancement of South Australia's protected and conserved areas.

Vision: to build a system of protected and conserved areas that enables South Australia's biodiversity to thrive and protects places of special value.

The Department for Environment and Water (the department) and the Parks and Wilderness Council (the Council) have developed this strategy to drive meaningful action in expanding and enhancing our protected and conserved areas until 2035.

- **Expansion:** Growing South Australia's protected and conserved area estate by increasing the amount of land it includes.
- **Enhancement:** Improving the quality and effectiveness of protected and conserved areas by adding land with important conservation or cultural heritage values, or land that strengthens the function and resilience of the existing estate.

By setting a clear vision and direction, this strategy will help the department to act with precision and use resources strategically; and will guide collaboration between all levels of government and conservation partners, including First Nations groups, landholders, environmental organisations and philanthropic organisations, to focus on agreed priorities and shared outcomes.

This strategy focuses on land-based areas, including inland waterways, rivers, lakes, estuaries and some intertidal locations.

It does not cover marine parks, which are guided by different legislative and management arrangements, or the day-to-day management of protected and conserved areas. These responsibilities remain with park management plans and partnerships with regional and local stakeholders.

The Department recognises the importance of marine parks and effective park management in achieving broader conservation outcomes. The implementation of this strategy will therefore consider connections across land and sea, and the need for adequate resourcing to support effective park management and conservation outcomes.

How will the strategy operate?

The department will lead the delivery of the strategy, working closely with the Council and conservation partners to achieve its vision. The roles and responsibilities of each group are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Roles and responsibilities

The Department	Parks and Wilderness Council	Partners
• Owner of the strategy • Makes key decisions • Drives strategy delivery • Reports to the Council • Delivers relevant enabling actions	• Reports to the Minister on progress • Provides ongoing advice • Supports relevant enabling actions	• Supports relevant enabling actions

The department will report annually to the Council on progress to ensure accountability and transparency. The department will formally review the actions at the 5-year mark, and this may be informed by broader reviews of Australia's progress toward the 30 by 30 target, both nationally and internationally.

Implementation will be guided by the best available scientific knowledge, and First Nations' knowledge, expertise, and connections with Country. Delivery will require collaborative partnerships, recognition of community aspirations, and flexibility and responsiveness.

The outcomes of the strategy will be influenced by, and seek to achieve, community aspirations and intergenerational equity, but its highest priority is to protect, conserve, and where possible, improve biodiversity.

What are protected and conserved areas?

Protected areas

In South Australia, protected areas describe land managed primarily for conservation, that can also protect important cultural heritage and provide recreation opportunities for the community to enjoy.

Protected areas can occur on public or private land, and land owned by First Nations peoples. Depending on the tenure, a protected area may be solely or jointly managed by government, First Nations peoples or organisations, or landholders who recognise and want to protect important conservation values on their land.

The different types of protected areas in South Australia are listed in Table 2 (and Appendix 1).

International framework – IUCN definition

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a protected area as:

"A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values."

These areas are categorised into 6 IUCN management categories, ranging from strict nature reserves and wilderness areas, through to protected areas with sustainable use of natural resources.

By incorporating land owned and managed by different groups, South Australia's network of protected areas harnesses diverse expertise (illustrated in Case Study 1), while enhancing the ability to connect landscapes (illustrated in Case Study 2).

Case Study 1: Protecting Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies at Hiltaba Nature Reserve

Hiltaba Nature Reserve, owned and managed by Nature Foundation, spans 78,000 hectares on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula and borders the Gawler Ranges. The reserve aims to conserve native fauna and flora, including the state and nationally significant threatened Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby.

Since acquiring Hiltaba in 2012, Nature Foundation has implemented numerous evidence-based conservation efforts, including the removal of domestic stock and most goats, and controlling feral predators like foxes and cats.

The Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby has particularly benefited from intensive goat and fox control, leading to a remarkable increase in the wallaby population from just 17 in 2006 to 206 in 2023 - a population increase of over 1000%.

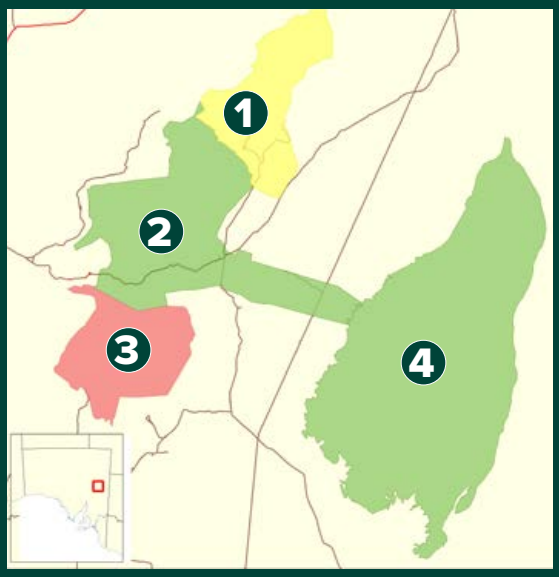
This example demonstrates the vital role that environmental organisations play in applying innovative conservation approaches that complement and strengthen public protected areas.

Table 2: South Australia's protected areas and associated legislation

Type of land	Protected Area	Legislation
Public land	• Conservation Parks including co-managed parks • Game Reserves • National Parks including co-managed parks • Recreation Parks • Regional Reserves	*National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*
	Crown Land Reserve	*Crown Lands Management Act 2009*
	Native Forest Reserve	*Forestry Act 1950*
	Wilderness Protection Areas including co-managed Areas	*Wilderness Protection Act 1992*
Public or private land	IPAs	Through voluntary agreement with the Australian Government
Private land	Private Conservation Reserves	Through voluntary, legally binding conservation covenants, or agreement with the South Australian Government
	Arkaroola Protection Area	*Arkaroola Protection Act 2012*
	Native Vegetation Heritage Agreements	*Native Vegetation Act 1991*
	Biodiversity Agreements	*Biodiversity Act 2025*

Case Study 2: Private and public protected areas combine to protect a landscape

North Flinders Ranges is home to a variety of diverse wildlife, rich cultural heritage, and impressive geological features. In the northeastern corner there are 4 contiguous protected areas, spanning approximately 109 km north to south, and 106 km east to west. These protected areas, which exist on both public and private lands, combine to achieve landscape-scale conservation and cultural heritage outcomes.



1 Arkaroola Protection Area

Private protected area on a pastoral lease, managed by the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary.

2 Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park

Public protected area on public land, co-managed by the Adnyamathanha people and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

3 Nantawarrina IPA

IPA on private land, managed by the Nipapanha Community.

4 Lake Frome National Park

Public protected area on public land, managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Conserved areas

Conserved areas are an emerging area-based classification that support conservation outcomes on land that cannot be designated as a protected area.

Unlike protected areas, their primary management objective does not need to be conservation, but they must still achieve a conservation outcome. For instance, a water catchment area that's primary purpose is to protect and manage the catchment and quality of water, but also preserves biodiversity.

Given their complementary role to protected areas, they are expected to become an important part of South Australia's conservation approach and will help contribute to achieving 30 by 30.

To aid their implementation nationally, the National Other Effective area-based Conservation Measure (OECM) Framework has been developed to identify principles to guide conserved area recognition.

According to the National OECM Framework, conserved area recognition should be considered for areas that do not meet the protected area definition, for example where formal protected area designation is not possible, appropriate, or supported.

Additionally, conserved areas will be secured through legal or other effective means, and their long-term management arrangements should ideally be in-perpetuity, but if this is not possible, then the minimum should be at least 99 years.

As conserved areas become recognised and implemented across Australia, it will be important to ensure that definitions are consistent with national and international guidance, to support transparent reporting and delivering lasting outcomes for biodiversity.

International framework – IUCN definition

The concept of conserved areas comes from the IUCN's Other Effective Area based Conservation Measures (OECMs), which they define as:

"A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values."

Why are protected and conserved areas important?

Protected areas

Protected areas are a critical tool for South Australia's nature conservation. By protecting important landscapes and ecosystems, our protected areas provide essential habitat for threatened species and promote ecological resilience in the face of growing threats.

While nature conservation is their primary purpose, South Australia's protected areas have important social and cultural benefits, including:

- **Connection to Country:** Protected areas provide opportunities to recognise First Nations' aspirations and connection to Country. They help protect important cultural landscapes and provide opportunities for cultural engagement through the co-management, or cultural leadership through the IPA program.
- **Social wellbeing:** Protected areas are essential for the social and cultural wellbeing of South Australian communities. They offer spaces for recreation, relaxation, and connection with nature, and help foster social cohesion and provide opportunities for education and stewardship, allowing individuals and groups to engage with their environment and contribute to its preservation.

Conserved areas

Although the role of conserved areas in South Australia is still taking shape, they are expected to be important in supporting conservation outcomes, especially where formal protection is not possible, appropriate, or supported. By complementing protected areas, conserved areas can strengthen landscape-scale protection by creating opportunities for connectivity.

Status of South Australia's protection

South Australia's protected area system includes some of our most biologically rich and iconic landscapes, and currently covers 28,281,153 ha or 28.8% per cent of the state's land. This includes 23,269,672 ha of public land and 5,011,481 ha of private land (see Map 1 in Appendix 2).

To understand how well our land is protected, and where we should focus future efforts, the department has considered four conservation measures:

- Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System (CARRS)
- Climate change
- Wilderness value
- Modified landscapes with natural habitat values

The department has assessed each of these measures using the best available science and datasets to ensure they remain relevant and repeatable into the future.

The following section provides a summary of the method, findings, and application of these assessments, with a series of maps (see Appendix 2) that identify the resulting priorities.

These assessments are designed to guide, not determine, decisions about protected and conserved area expansion. While they help identify priority areas according to biodiversity values, they do not account for feasibility, cultural and land use considerations, and therefore should be used as general guidance only.

Want to find out more about these assessments?

For the CARRS, Climate Change and Natural Habitat assessments:

- The detailed methodology is captured in the **Strategy Technical Report**
- The datasets are available on **DataSA** (including a **MetaData file**)
- The map layers are available in **NatureMaps** under the Protected & Conserved Area Strategy - CARRS Assessment layer.

For the wilderness assessment:

- The detailed methodology is captured in the **Human Industrial Footprint and Intactness Assessment Technical Report**
- The datasets are available on **DataSA** (including a **MetaData file**)
- The map layers are available in **NatureMaps** under the Wilderness Inventory layer.

CARRS

Over the past 30 years, protected area planning in Australia has been guided by the goal of building a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System (CARRS). This framework helps to determine how well the protected area system encompasses different aspects of biodiversity, as well as identifying priorities where coverage could be improved.

Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA)

CARRS is underpinned by the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA), which divides Australia's landscapes into:

- 89 bioregions - regional-scale ecosystems with common climate, geology, landform, native vegetation and species.
- 419 subregions - smaller, more uniform ecological areas nested within the bioregions.

In the context of South Australia, our state is divided into 17 bioregions and 66 subregions.

The CARRS principles of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness aim to support the protection of the full range of ecosystems and their variability, with sufficient protection to ensure ecological viability.

As part of the development of this strategy, the department has updated its approach to assessing CARRS, using an 'outcomes approach' alongside the traditional 'geographic approach', to ensure protected area planning contributes to improving biodiversity outcomes.

Method

Geographic approach

The traditional approach to assessing CARRS focusses on:

- Comprehensiveness: the inclusion of all regional-scale ecosystems (IBRA bioregions) in the protected area network to help ensure the full diversity of South Australia's natural environment is protected.
- Adequacy: the amount of each ecosystem that is protected as a guide to whether they have enough area to remain healthy and viable in the long term.
- Representativeness: the inclusion of all subregional-scale ecosystems (IBRA subregions) to ensure local variations of ecosystems are protected.

Bioregions and subregions with less than 10% protection are identified as priorities for additional protection.

While straightforward and widely used, this method may miss critical biodiversity and conservation values, or prioritise areas where there is not much left to protect.

The outcomes approach – *using the best available science to achieve better conservation outcomes*

The department has developed an updated way of assessing CARRS through the outcomes approach. This assessment will help guide more strategic and targeted additions to our protected areas, helping us achieve stronger biodiversity and conservation outcomes.

The data, methods and results of this assessment are publicly available, enabling environmental organisations and others across the sector to use this information to inform their own projects and decision-making.

Outcomes approach

To address these limitations, a new outcomes approach identifies **bioregions and subregions containing irreplaceable and unprotected habitat essential for species survival.**

This approach gives a more direct measure of how protected areas contribute to biodiversity outcomes, and aligns with the criteria in the 30 by 30 National Roadmap for identifying priority areas, by:

- identifying areas with significant importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services
- identifying areas that will enhance ecological comprehensiveness and representativeness.

Due to limited data availability, this assessment is currently only available within the state's agricultural zone. The department plans to make this assessment available for the whole state by 2028, as we work to improve data availability across the state.

Table 3: Priority areas identified by the CARRS assessment

Bioregion	%*	Subregion	%*	Geographic approach	Outcomes approach
Broken Hill Complex**	4.7	Barrier Range**	2.8	High Priority	Not assessed
		Barrier Range Outwash**	0.8	High Priority	Not assessed
		Bimbowrie	25.7	Mid priority	Not assessed
		Curnamona	0.1	High Priority	Not assessed
Channel Country**	11.0	Sturt Stony Desert**	6.6	Mid priority	Not assessed
		Diamantina-Eyre**	0.0	Mid priority	Not assessed
		Cooper-Diamantina Plains**	5.3	Mid priority	Not assessed
Eyre Yorke Block	15.4	Southern Yorke	8.5	Mid priority	Mid priority
		St Vincent	1.3	Mid priority	Low priority
		Talia	20.3	Low priority	Mid priority
Finke**	4.6	Tieyon**	0.4	High Priority	Not assessed
		Pedirka	0.0	High Priority	Not assessed
Flinders Lofty Block	9.2	Mount Lofty Ranges	5.8	High Priority	High priority
		Broughton	0.5	High Priority	High priority
		Olary Spur	1.0	High Priority	Not assessed
		Southern Flinders	4.7	High Priority	Not assessed
		Northern Flinders	22.6	Mid priority	Not assessed
		Central Flinders	11.9	Mid priority	Not assessed
Gawler	15.0	Arcoona Plateau	0.1	Mid priority	Not assessed
		Kingoonya	6.9	Mid priority	Not assessed
		Roxby	0.2	Mid priority	Not assessed
		Commonwealth Hill	0.9	Mid priority	Not assessed
Kanmantoo	20.6	Fleurieu	4.0	Mid priority	High Priority
Murray Darling Depression**	19.4	Wimmera**	2.3	Mid priority	Low priority
		Braemer**	0.3	Mid priority	Not assessed
		Murray Mallee	14.1	Low priority	Mid priority

Bioregion	%*	Subregion	%*	Geographic approach	Outcomes approach
Naracoorte Coastal Plain**	9.8	Bridgewater**	11.3	Mid priority	High priority
		Glenelg Plain**	12.7	Mid priority	Mid priority
		Lucindale	4.2	High priority	Mid priority
		Tintinara	12.3	Mid priority	Low priority
Stony Plains**	6.8	Breakaways**	5.5	High priority	Not assessed
		Oodnadatta	2.8	High Priority	Not assessed
		Murnpeowie	2.2	High Priority	Not assessed
		Peake-Dennison Inlier	0.0	High Priority	Not assessed
		Macumba	3.3	High Priority	Not assessed
		Baltana	1.7	High Priority	Not assessed
Southern Volcanic Plain**	2.2	Mount Gambier	3.0	High Priority	Mid priority

* % protected

** Bioregions and subregions not wholly contained in SA

Findings

These assessments classify South Australia's bioregions and subregions as high, mid or low priorities, noting that the outcomes assessment is available for the agricultural zone only.

These findings are visualised in Maps 2 and 3 (see Appendix 2) and summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that:

- 35 of the 66 subregions are a mid or high priority, according to the geographic approach
- 10 of the 19 subregions in the agricultural zone are a mid or high priority, according to the outcomes approach.

Because these approaches assess CARRS differently, they can generate different results. For instance, the subregion of Talia is only considered a priority according to the outcomes assessment. This is because Talia contains substantial unprotected habitat for biodiversity values that are not well protected within the existing protected area network.

Application

These findings can help guide where the department targets additions into the protected area estate.

The outcomes approach provides the most ecologically meaningful guidance, so where it is available, it should supersede the results from the geographic approach.

The geographic approach should be used in instances where the outcomes approach is not yet available.

Climate change

Climate change poses a significant threat to South Australia's biodiversity, and protected area planning can help our ecosystems to adapt.

Strategies for building resilience and increasing the effectiveness of protected areas under climate change include protecting:

- large areas at risk of fragmentation or degradation
- refuges from disturbance, especially associated with climatic extremes, and from the changing climate
- areas that allow ecosystems and species to expand, retreat and disperse
- areas with high functional connectivity
- areas that reduce the largest gaps between existing protected areas
- areas that support large-scale processes, including hydrological processes.

As part of the development of this strategy, the department identified where additional protection will be most important to increase climate change resilience for biodiversity. This involved using the CARRS outcomes approach to assess climate sensitivity and priorities for restoration. Due to limited data availability, these assessments are currently available within the state's agricultural zone.

Method

Climate sensitivity

The department has **identified subregions with a high proportion of species sensitive to climate change.** This highlights areas where increasing ecological resilience will be a critical component of successful long-term conservation.

Restoration priority

Recognising that increasing ecological resilience will require the protection and reconstruction of habitat, climate refugia and population viability, the department has also identified **subregions that are a priority for restoration, based on their importance for long-term species conservation**.

Findings

The findings from this assessment are presented in Map 4 (see Appendix 2), which classifies subregions in the agricultural zone as high, mid or low priorities. Table 4 provides a summary of these findings, and shows that:

- 7 of the 19 subregions in the agricultural zone are a mid or high priority, according to the climate sensitivity assessment
- 13 of the 19 subregions in the agricultural zone are a mid or high priority, according to the restoration potential assessment.

Application

This information can help identify additional needs and opportunities to improve resilience and adaptive capacity under future climates in the agricultural zone.

Table 4: Priority areas identified by the climate change assessment

Bioregion	Subregion	Climate sensitivity	Restoration potential
Eyre Yorke Block	Talia	Low priority	High priority
Flinders Lofty Block	Mount Lofty Ranges	High priority	Mid priority
	Broughton	Low priority	High priority
Kanmantoo	Kangaroo Island	High priority	Mid priority
	Fleurieu	High priority	High priority
Murray Darling Depression	Murray Lakes and Coorong	Low priority	High priority
	Lowan Mallee	Low priority	Mid priority
	Wimmera	Mid priority	High priority
Naracoorte Coastal Plain	Bridgewater	Low priority	High priority
	Glenelg Plain	High priority	High priority
	Lucindale	High priority	High Priority
	Tintinara	Low priority	High priority
Southern Volcanic Plain	Mount Gambier	High priority	High Priority

Wilderness value

Protecting wilderness areas is another priority of protected area planning in South Australia. Under the *Wilderness Protection Act 1992*, areas with high wilderness quality are those largely unaffected by exotic organisms or modern technology, or capable of being restored to a pre-European condition.

Method

In 2023, the department partnered with the University of Queensland to assess the state's wilderness quality by producing a new wilderness inventory. This project updated previous assessments using modern methods and current data, and uses the Human Industrial Footprint Index to identify **areas with minimal industrial or technological disturbance.**

Findings

The findings from the wilderness assessment are visualised in Map 5 (see Appendix 2), which shows the varying levels of wilderness quality across South Australia. Although many of these areas are already protected, there are some that are not formally protected under legislation but are managed for cultural conservation outcomes.

Application

The wilderness inventory helps identify areas to be made, or existing protected areas to be reclassified, as Wilderness Protected Areas.

Modified landscapes with natural habitat values

The department recognises that not all critical habitats are found in undeveloped areas. Some species depend on landscapes that have been altered by people but keep important habitat features, and the way these modified areas are used can actually help maintain their value for wildlife. In these instances, conserved areas will play an important role in recognising and supporting land management for multiple outcomes.

Method

Using the data generated through the outcome assessment, the department identified modified landscapes, primarily used for other purposes, that retain habitat features critical to biodiversity conservation. This helped identify **subregions with a high proportion of modified landscapes retaining natural habitat values**. These areas often support biodiversity not found elsewhere and are usually found in low-input primary production systems where continued land management supports species persistence.

As with other CARRS values and outcomes assessments, this analysis is currently limited to the agricultural zone.

Findings

The findings from this assessment are presented in Map 6 (see Appendix 2) which classified subregions as high, mid or low priorities. Table 5 provides a summary of these findings, and shows 7 subregions considered priorities according to this assessment.

Application

These findings can be used to help identify potential locations for conserved areas where formal protection is not possible, appropriate, or supported.

Table 5: Priority areas identified by the modified landscapes with natural habitat character assessment

Bioregion	Subregion	Modified landscapes with natural habitat values
Eyre Yorke Block	St Vincent	High priority
Flinders Lofty Block	Mount Lofty Ranges	Mid priority
	Broughton	High priority
Kanmantoo	Fleurieu	High priority
Murray Darling Depression	Murray Lakes and Coorong	Mid priority
	Wimmera	High priority
Naracoorte Coastal Plain	Lucindale	Mid priority

Goals and strategic priorities

To help achieve the vision, the strategy contains 4 goals and 9 supporting strategic priorities that are outlined below.

GOAL 1 Build a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system that safeguards and enhances biodiversity

To ensure the protection of key species and ecosystems, our network of protected areas needs to deliver comprehensive, adequate and representative protection. This will support biodiversity through a data-driven approach and provide alignment with national and international best practice.

Strategic Priority 1.1 Increase protection of underrepresented IBRA bioregions and subregions

South Australia's protected areas help conserve the full diversity of our ecosystems. Some IBRA bioregions and subregions remain underrepresented, as shown in Map 2. These areas are priorities for future additions to the protected areas estate.

Strategic Priority 1.2 Increase protection of land with priority conservation and wilderness values

Our protected areas support healthy ecosystems by maintaining natural processes and connecting landscapes. They also safeguard large, intact landscapes, that have been cared for by First Nations peoples over generations. Areas that best reflect these conservation and wilderness values, guided by Maps 3 and 5, will be considered for future protection.

GOAL 2 Develop a protected area system that enables biodiversity to persist, adapt and thrive despite climate change

Climate change is a fundamental risk to the values that protected area system seeks to conserve. Our protected area system needs to enable biodiversity to persist and thrive, despite the pressures climate change will exacerbate.

Strategic Priority 2.1 Increase protection of land that enhances climate resilience

Our protected areas are central to maintaining healthy and resilient ecological systems that can cope with changes in climate. Guided by Map 4, we will focus on strengthening the reserve system by restoring habitat, improving connectivity, and protecting areas critical for long-term resilience.

Strategic Priority 2.2 Increase protection of biodiversity at risk to the impacts of climate change

Our protected areas play an important role in conserving species at risk to the impacts of climate change. For some threatened species, we will prioritise key sites identified in Map 4, especially those with significant populations, essential resources, and fewer threats.

Strategic Priority 2.3 Continue refining our response to climate change by drawing on Traditional Knowledge and modern science

Our protected areas must be managed with flexibility in the face of growing climate uncertainty. By combining Traditional Knowledge with the latest science, we will continue to adapt our understanding and decision-making to ensure resilience throughout the life of this strategy.

GOAL 3

Protect places that are important to people

Additional to protecting key biodiversity values, our protected areas should also protect places that are important to people.

Strategic Priority 3.1 Protect areas, objects and landscape features that are significant to First Nations peoples

Our protected areas provide opportunities to conserve places and features that have cultural and spiritual importance to First Nations peoples. Identification, planning and protection of these places will only occur in collaboration with, and with the free and prior informed consent of, First Nations peoples, and align with our Reconciliation Action Plan.

Strategic Priority 3.2 Protect places with significant heritage and geological values

Our protected areas provide opportunities to protect South Australia's historic places, and sites that reflect our rich geological and evolutionary origins. Opportunities will be sought to add land that supports these values where compatible with conservation objectives.

Strategic Priority 3.3 Protect places with significant recreational and landscape values

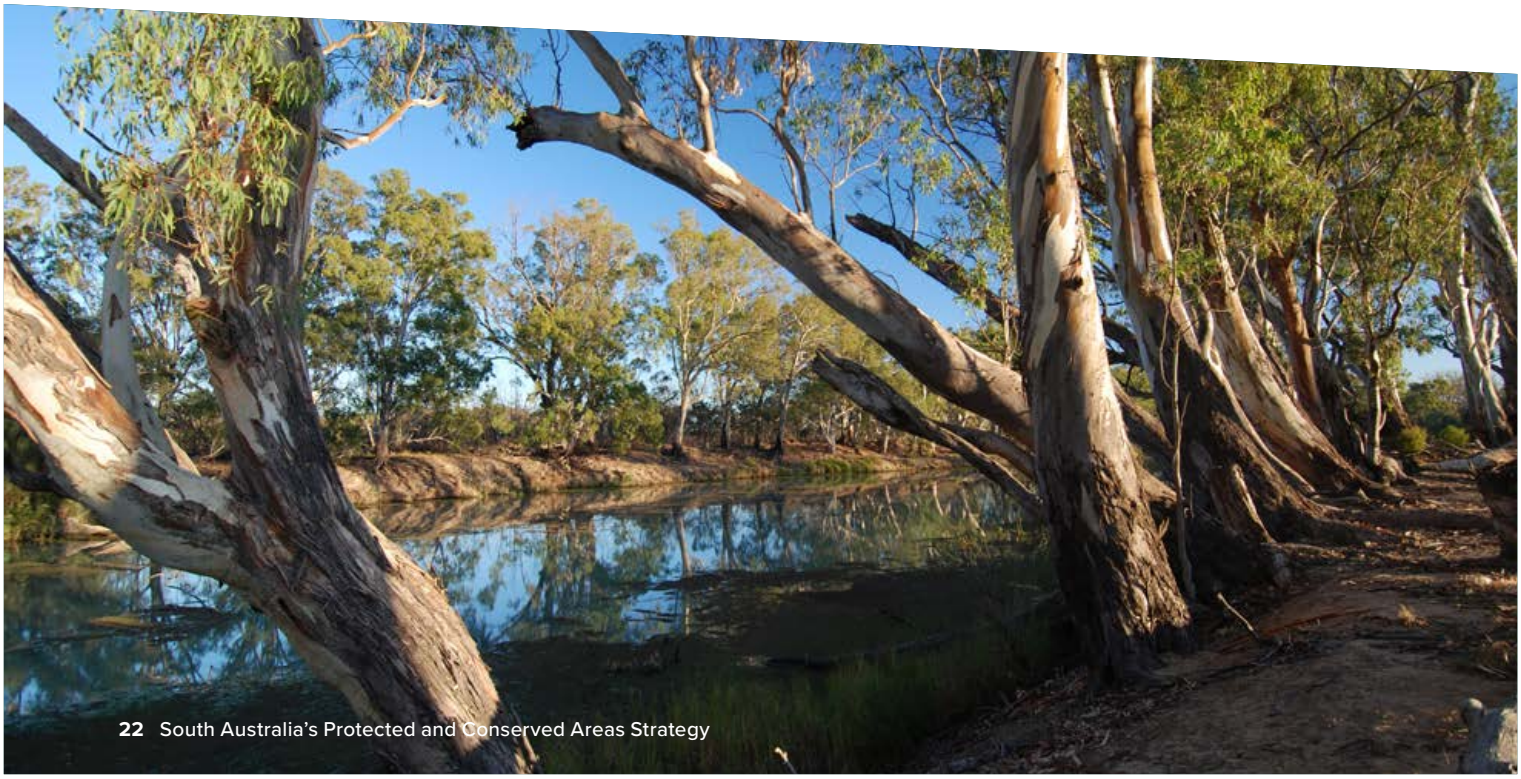
Our protected areas provide a multitude of opportunities for nature-based recreation - from picnics and events, cycling and hiking, organised tourism, to adventure experiences in landscapes that are wild and remote. We'll look to add places that support recreation and wellbeing, while ensuring conservation remains the core objective.

GOAL 4 Work with landholders and conservation partners to build a robust protected and conserved area system

This strategy recognises that a public protected area system alone will not be able to meet the demands that will be placed on it. To achieve the above goals, a diverse range of landholders, private partners and covenants will need to be involved.

Strategic Priority 4.1 Support the efforts of private landholders to contribute to the protected and conserved area network

Private land is playing an increasingly important role in conserving biodiversity and maintaining landscape values across South Australia. Through the delivery of this strategy, the department will work closely with conservation partners and private landholders to explore and clarify this role, and identify where additional support is needed. Through these partnerships, we aim to expand protections across a range of land tenures that align with IUCN definitions.



Enabling actions

To drive the delivery of this strategy, we have developed a series of tangible actions.

Enabling action	Relevant goal	Timing
Seek to better understand First Nations social, economic, and cultural aspirations for Country, and work with communities to support capacity and identify locations of cultural significance that require protection.	1 3 4	Ongoing
Develop and implement an investment framework to guide how government works with conservation and investment partners to fund the expansion and enhancement of the protected and conserved area system.	1 2 3 4	October 2026
Complete an audit of Crown land identified for inclusion in the protected and conserved area system, and identify priorities for the addition of these areas based on the values outlined in this strategy.	1 2 3 4	June 2026
Following the prioritisation of Crown land, **provide annual updates on progress** to convert lands to the protected and conserved area system.	1 2 3 4	Annually
Convene a biennial forum with relevant stakeholders (including private land conservation partners, landholders, the philanthropy sector and Landscape Boards) to discuss priority areas and coordinate action.	1 2 3 4	Biennial *(every 2 years)*
Update spatial prioritisation using the 'outcomes assessment' and 'wilderness assessment' to support data-driven acquisitions, identify priority restoration opportunities, and support the adaptation of key ecosystems to climate change.	1 2	As data is available, and then biennial *(every 2 years)*
Develop and implement a long-term communications strategy to showcase the value of protected areas and better understand community aspirations for the protected and conserved area system.	3	Ongoing
Develop options for an expanded suite of private land covenants for improving conservation outcomes.	4	Ongoing
Work with the Australian Government to **implement trials** that test and align frameworks, policy settings and site assessment tools in support of **Conserved Areas** in South Australia.	4	December 2026

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
30 by 30	The goal to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030 (derived from Target 3 of the GFB)
Co-management	Co-management is a formal arrangement between the state government and First Nations groups to help manage national parks, conservation parks, and wilderness protection areas, that combines Traditional Knowledge with contemporary park management. Co-management is achieved through co-management boards and advisory committees. Co-management boards replace the Director of National Parks and Wildlife as the management authority for a park, and advisory committees advise the Director of National Parks and Wildlife as the management authority for a park.
Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System (CARRS)	The objective of CARRS is to develop a 'comprehensive, adequate and representative' system of protected areas to ensure that all ecosystems are protected within the reserve system.
Conserved areas	Land that delivers in-situ conservation regardless of the primary management objective. They are secured through legal or other effective means, and their long-term management arrangements should ideally be in-perpetuity, but if this is not possible, then the minimum should be at least 99 years.
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	The CBD is an international treaty whose goals include the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. It came into effect in 1993.
Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA)	IBRA divides Australia's landscapes into 89 bioregions (regional-scale ecosystems with common climate, geology, landform, native vegetation and species) and 419 subregions (smaller, more uniform ecological areas nested within the bioregions) to support planning and decision-making.
Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs)	IPAs are areas of land and sea Country managed by First Nations groups to deliver biodiversity conservation outcomes while supporting cultural connection and First Nations land management practices. They are formed through voluntary agreement with the Australian Government.
International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	An international organisation whose work focuses on nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.
Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)	The GBF is made up of 4 global 2050 goals, and 23 global 2030 targets. These targets relate to different aspects of biodiversity conservation and restoration, including commitments to nature's contribution to people, access and benefit sharing, and tools and solutions for mainstreaming and implementation.

Term	Definition
Land-based protected and conserved areas	This includes all protected and conserved areas on inland waterways, rivers, lakes, estuaries and some intertidal areas. It does not include marine parks.
Other Effective Area based Conservation Measures (OECMs)	Land that achieves long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas.
Private land	Land that is held under a Certificate of Title, or Crown land with a Crown lease.
Protected areas	Land that is protected through legal means. Their primary management objective is conservation, but they can also protect cultural values and provide recreation opportunities.
Protected Area Management Categories	Six categories developed by the IUCN to set global standards for the planning, establishment and management of protected areas.
Public land	Unalienated Crown land that is owned and managed by the government.
National Reserve System (NRS)	Australia's network of protected areas.

Appendix 1 - Types of Protected Areas

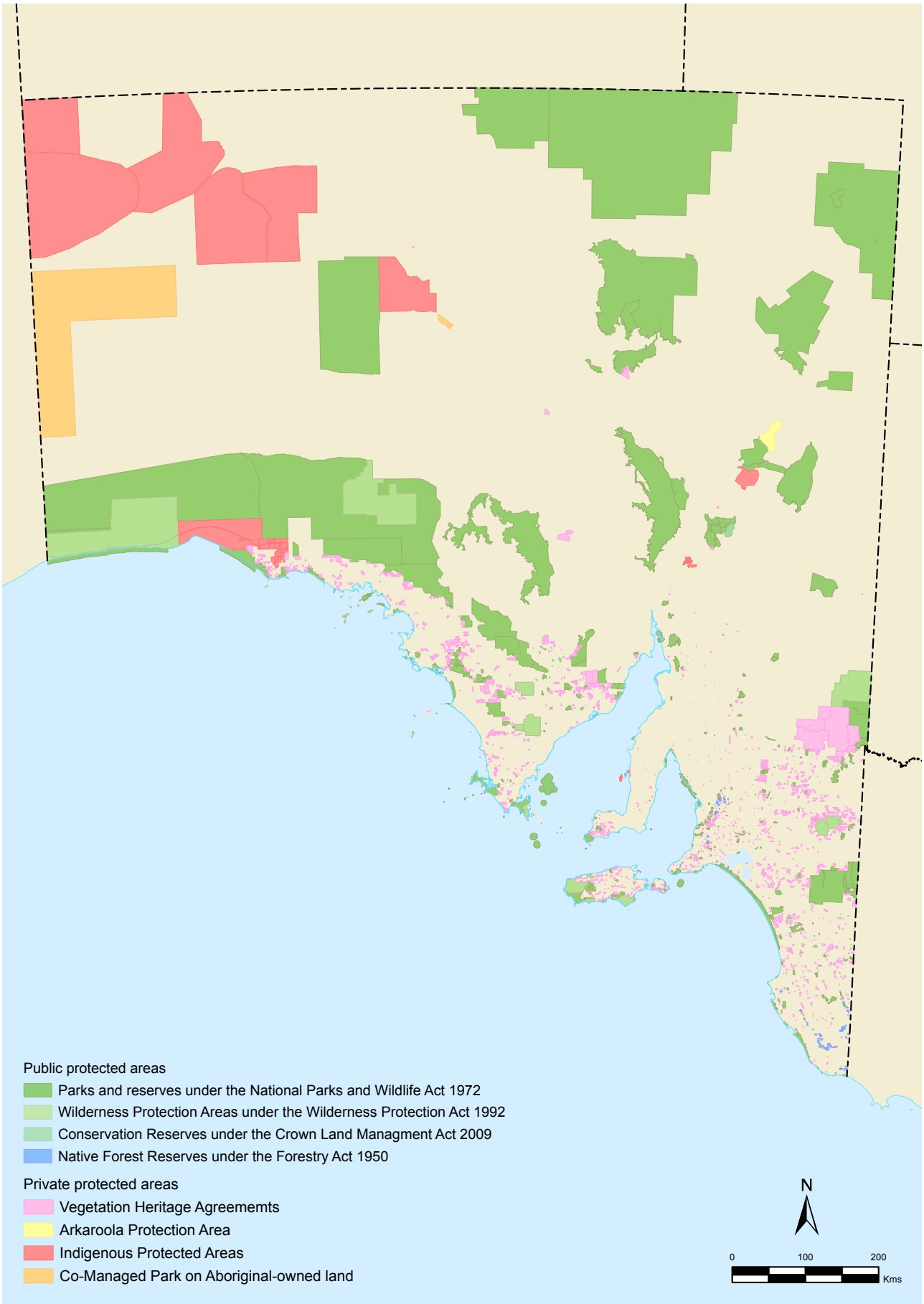
Table 4 Types of Protected Areas in South Australia

	Protected Area	Underpinning framework
Public Land	**Conservation Parks including co-managed parks**	Reserves that protect biodiversity and support recreation and visitation. Mining is not permitted unless specifically proclaimed to allow mining access.
	Game Reserves	Reserves that protect biodiversity and support recreation and visitation, including hunting in open seasons. Mining is not permitted unless specifically proclaimed to allow mining access.
	National Parks including co-managed parks	Reserves that protect biodiversity and large-scale ecological processes, and support recreation and visitation. Mining is not permitted unless specifically proclaimed to allow mining access.
	Recreation Parks	Similar to conservation parks but they permit more recreation and visitor opportunities. Mining is not permitted unless specifically proclaimed to allow mining access.
	Regional Reserves	Multi-use reserves that jointly protect biodiversity and the use of natural resources. Mining is permitted.
	Crown Land Reserve	Reserves that protect biodiversity but are not always actively managed. Available for mining application.
	Native Forest Reserve	Reserves generally adjacent plantation forests that protect biodiversity, support recreation and visitation, and support plantation forest operations.
	Wilderness Protection Areas including co-managed Areas	Reserves that contain large and unmodified areas that retain their natural character. Mining is never permitted.
	Indigenous Protected Areas	Areas of land and sea Country managed by First Nations groups for biodiversity conservation in accordance with Traditional Owners' objectives.
Private Land	**Arkaroola Protection Area**	A portion of the Arkaroola station supports large-scale ecological processes, protects biodiversity, and supports recreation and visitation. Mining is never permitted.
	Private conservation reserves	Private land managed by landholders for biodiversity conservation purposes.
	Native Vegetation Heritage Agreement	Conservation areas ordinarily on private land that protect and/or restore biodiversity.
	Biodiversity Agreements	Conservation areas on private land that conserve, restore and/or enhance biodiversity.

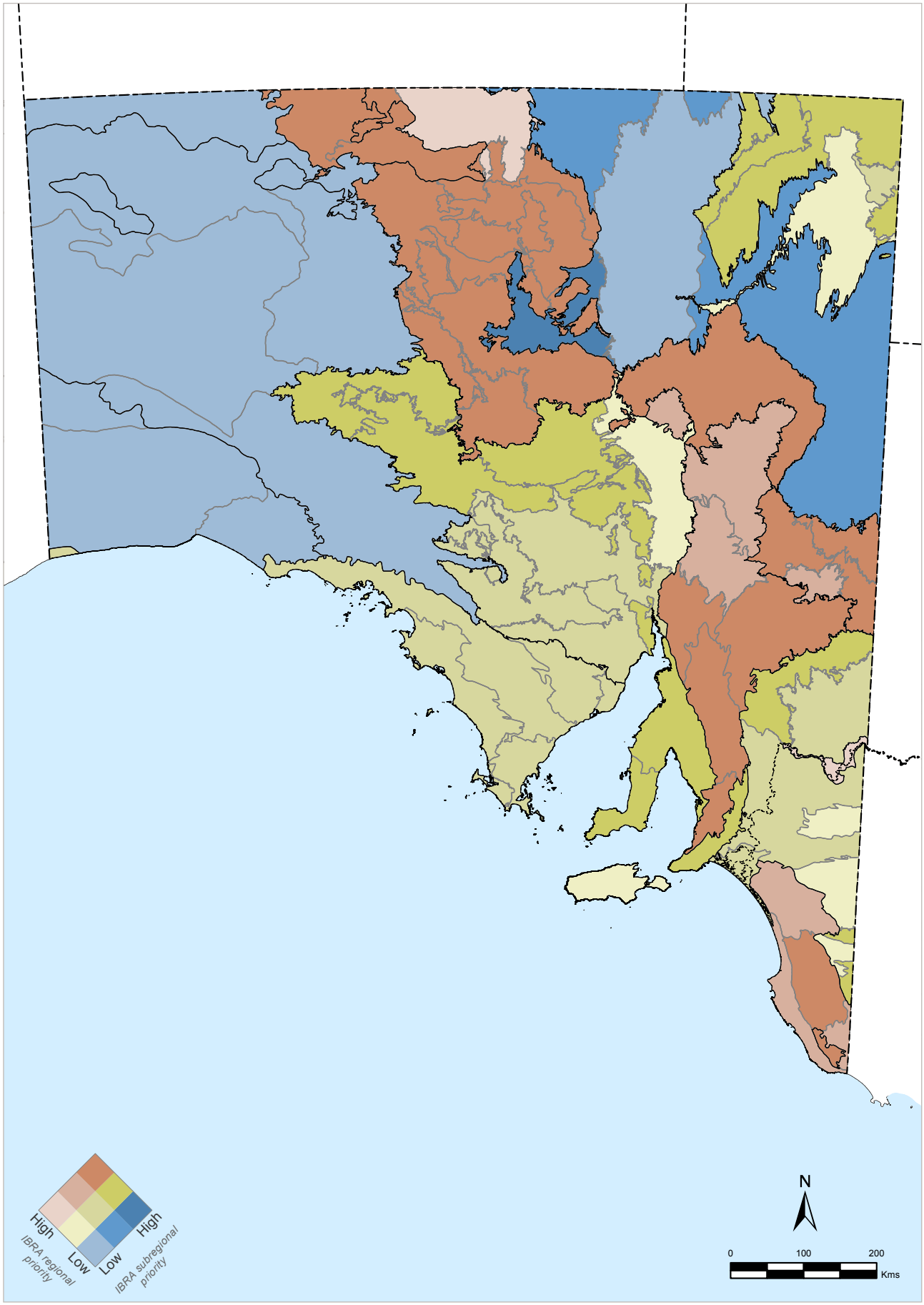
IUCN Category		Legislation
Primary	Secondary	
III. Natural Monument or Feature	VI. Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources Ia. Strict Nature Reserve V. Protected Landscape or Seascape	*National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*
VI. Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources	NA	
II. National Park	VI. Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources Ia. Strict Nature Reserve	
III. Natural Monument or Feature	IV. Habitat or species management area VI. Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources	
VI. Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources	NA	
VI. Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources	NA	*Crown Lands Management Act 2009*
IV. Habitat or species management area	NA	*Forestry Act 1950*
Ib. Wilderness Area	NA	*Wilderness Protection Act 1992*
VI. Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources	II. National Park	Through agreement with the Australian Government
II. National Park	NA	*Arkaroola Protection Act 2012*
IV. Habitat/species management area	NA	Through agreement with the Australian Government
III. Natural Monument or Feature	NA	*Native Vegetation Act 1991*
TBC	NA	*Biodiversity Act 2025*

Appendix 2 - Maps

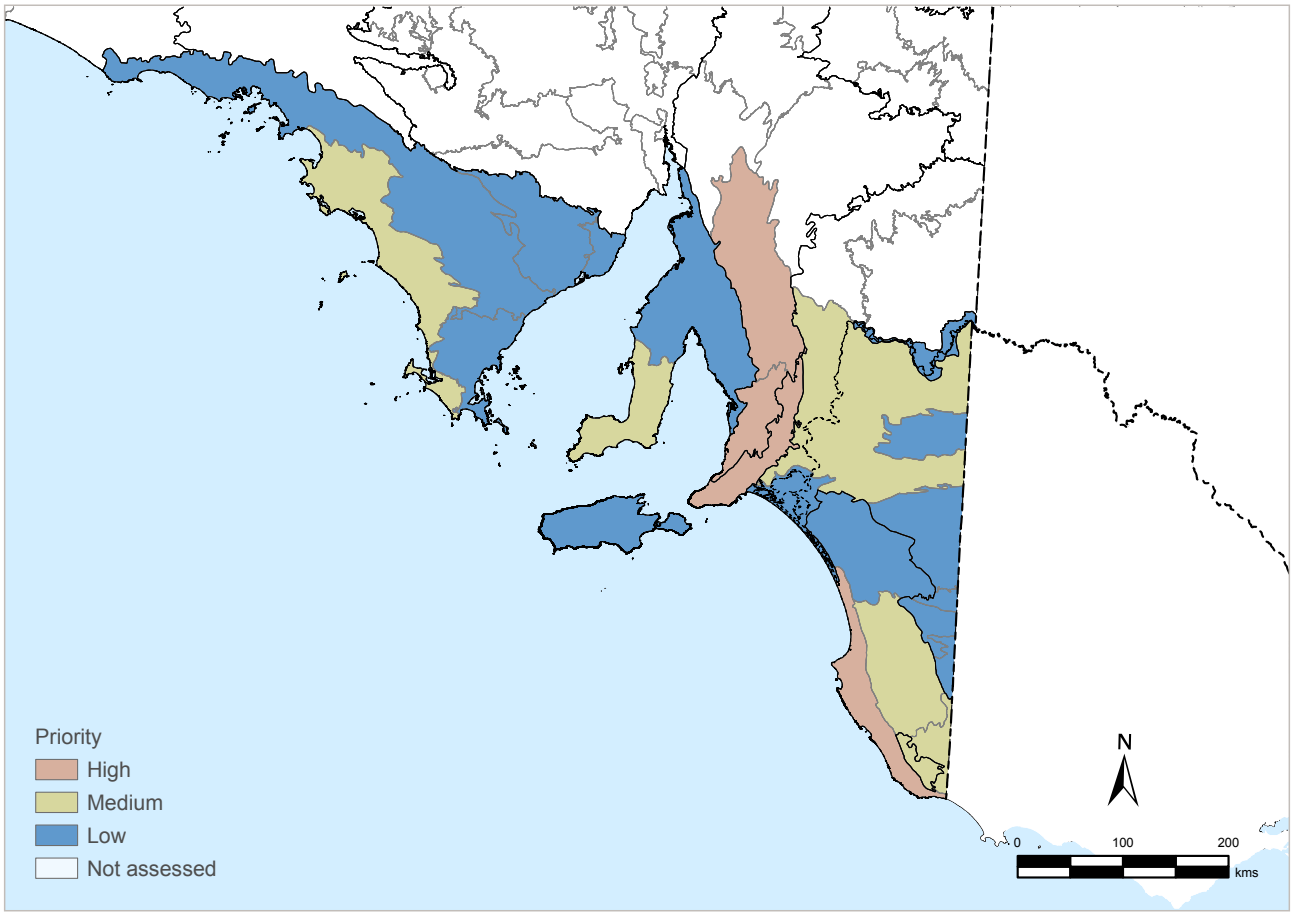
Map 1: SA Protected Area System



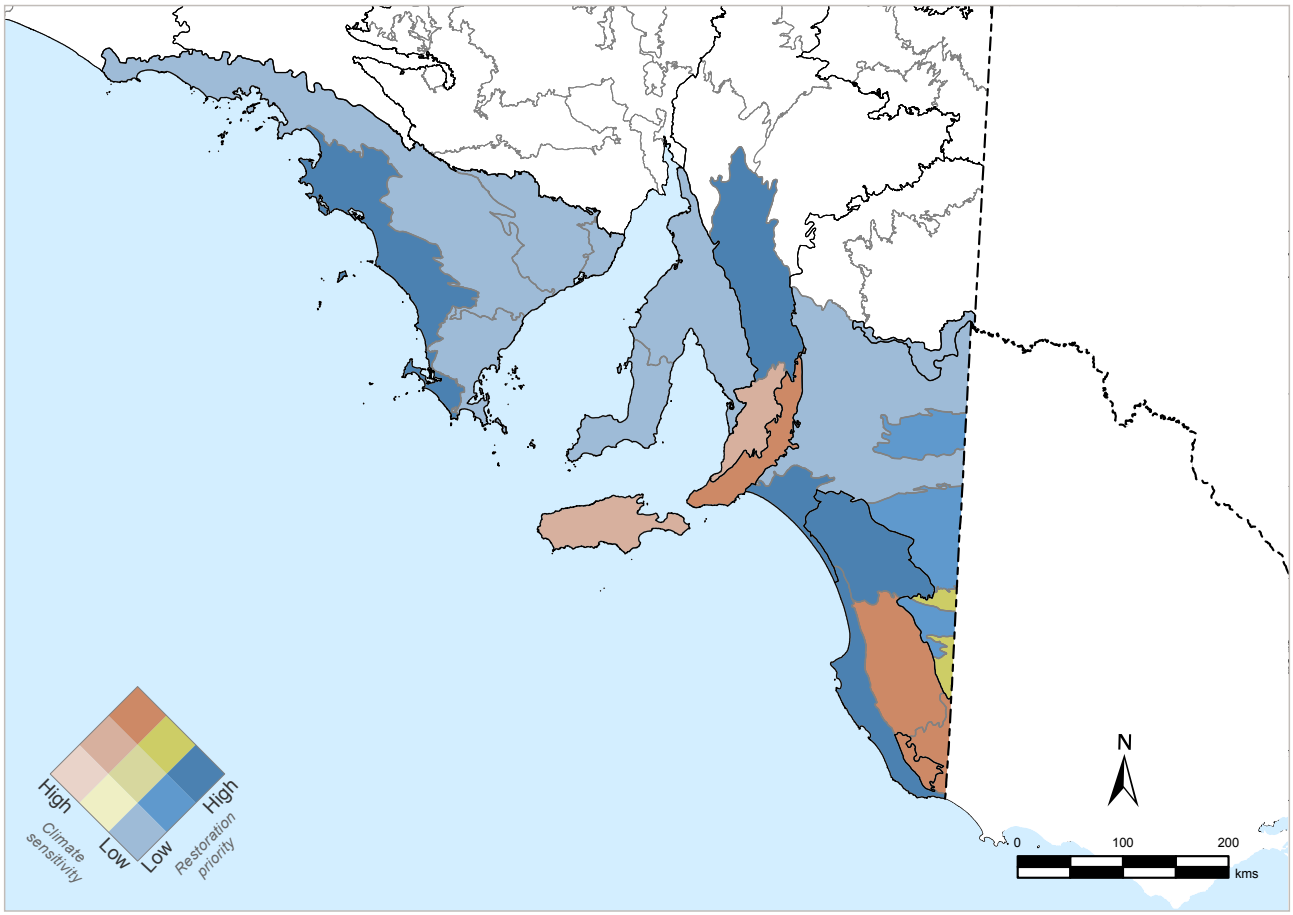
Map 2: Geographic CARRS assessment



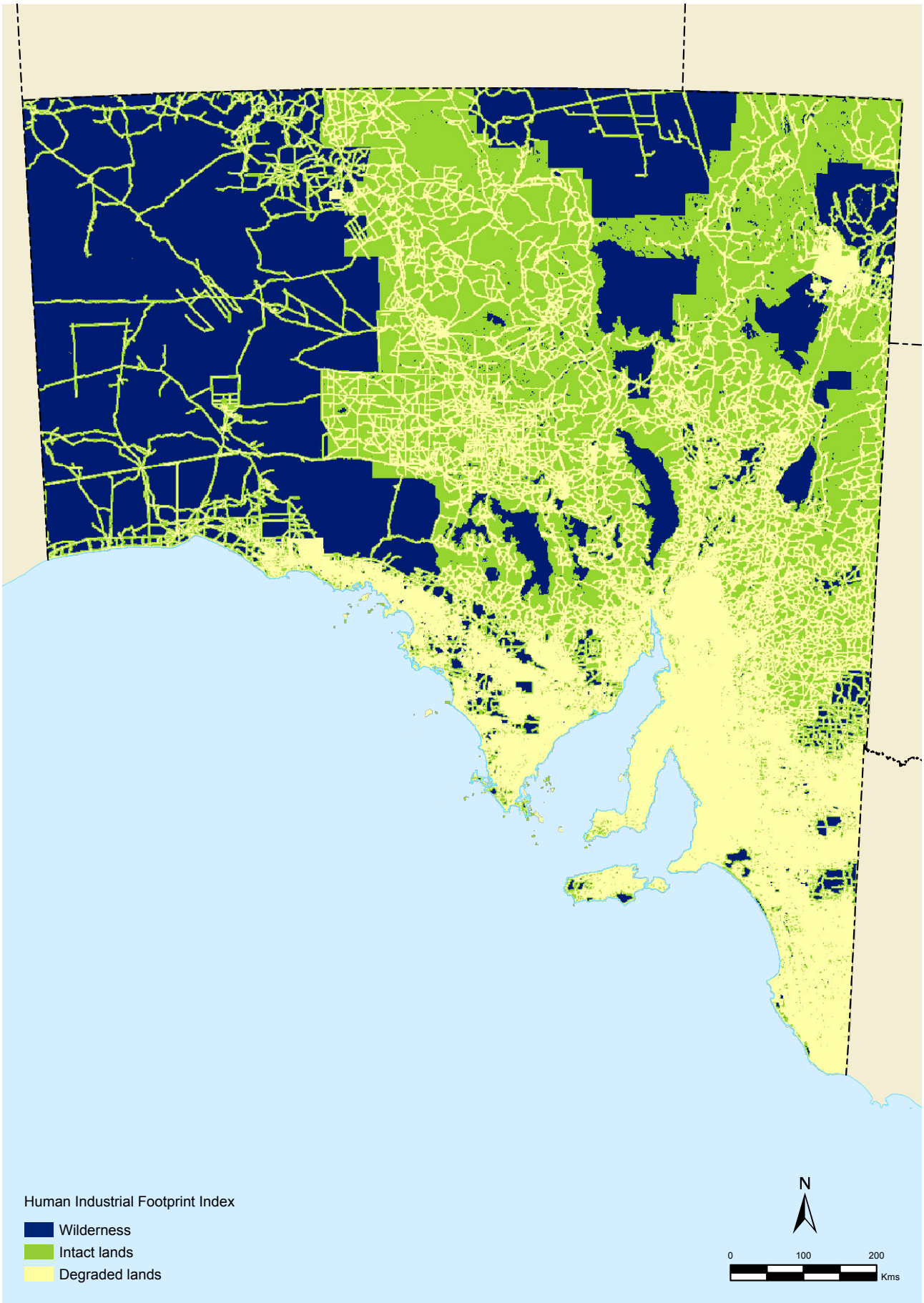
Map 3: Outcomes CARRS assessment



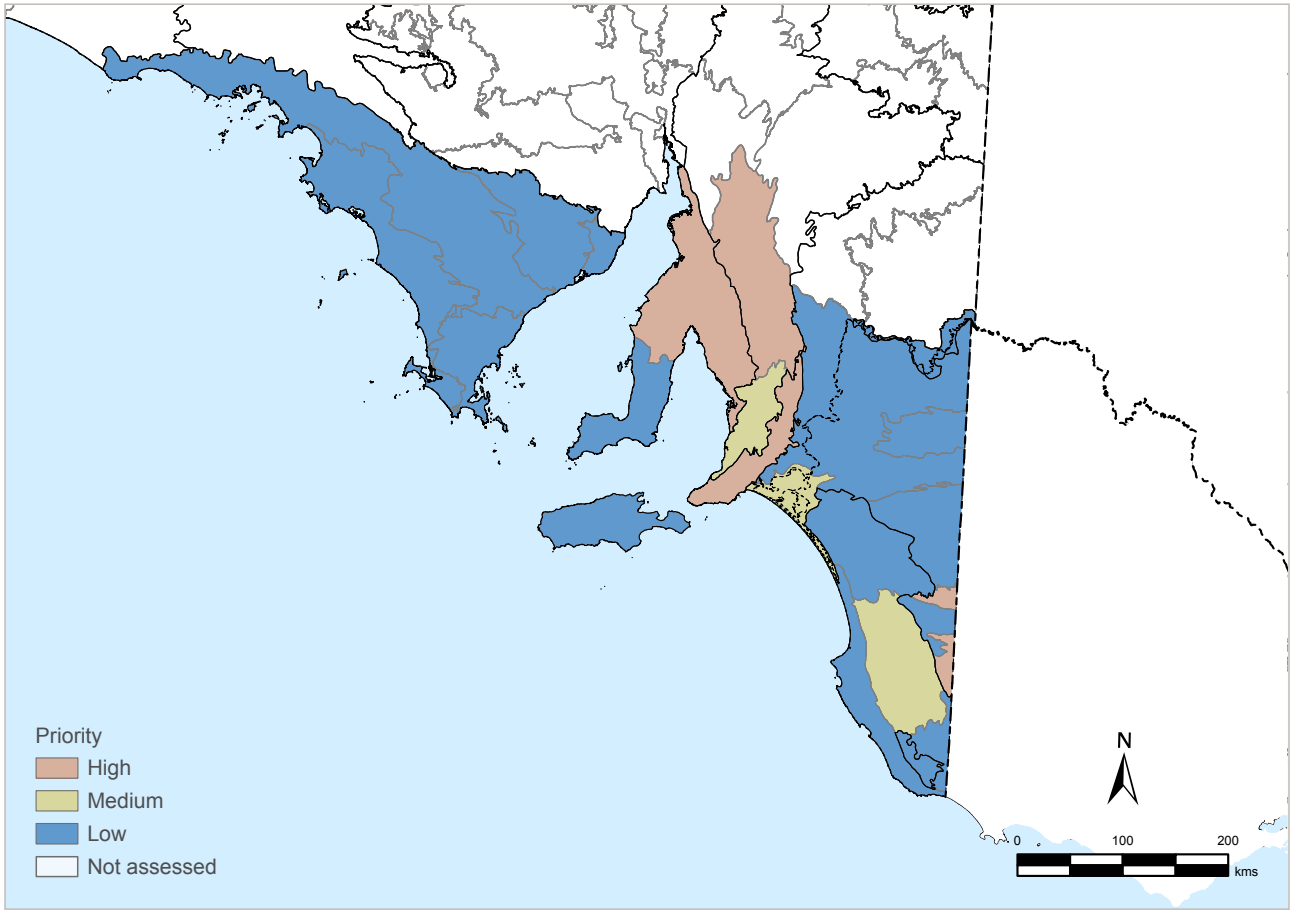
Map 4: Climate change assessment



Map 5: Human Industrial Footprint



Map 6: Modified landscapes assessment



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