

Introduction to the papers

The reasons for reviewing *Western Shield* and the process that was adopted for the review are described in the Foreword and the Review Panel's report, elsewhere in this special volume of *Conservation Science Western Australia*. Nevertheless, understanding the nature of the papers published here requires some understanding of the circumstances under which they have been written.

To provide the Review Panel with comprehensive background information and expose its members to airing of that information in both public and in-house environments, the Executive Director commissioned twelve papers that were chosen to embrace all aspects of *Western Shield*. Each author was provided with specific terms of reference for his/her paper to ensure adequate coverage of topics, relevance to the review process and to avoid replication (Appendix 2 In Possingham *et al.* this issue). Authors were also required to comment on strengths, shortcomings and opportunities for improvements to aspects of the program that they implemented. This volume contains the papers that were originally presented to the Review Workshops and Review Panel members (but subject to minor revisions in the light of the workshop discussions and referee comments).

Collective publication of the papers is important because the set provides a snap-shot of *Western Shield* in 2003 that will become the historical benchmark against which progress is measured in future¹. A special volume of *Conservation Science Western Australia* is an appropriate publication vehicle because its content format allows all the papers, despite their wide array of subject matter, to be published in a stand-alone volume of a journal that requires all manuscripts to be subject to the rigour of external (to CALM) refereeing. Moreover, in order to ensure important material that is pertinent to conservation and natural area management is publicly available, the journal accommodates papers that are too parochial or unacceptably long for mainstream journals. However, publication here has presented several challenges to scientist and non-scientist authors alike.

Scientist authors writing papers for publication in refereed scientific journals are usually able to choose their subject parameters and follow more or less conventional formats. However, addressing an imposed set of tightly-defined terms of reference while, nevertheless, presenting scientifically rigorous information that will be subject to external refereeing, requires departure from the comfort zone of normal scientific writing.

Similarly, non-scientist authors are exposed, often for the first time, to the concept of refereeing and to being required to revise their papers to accommodate the (sometimes anonymous) referees' comments. In many cases, formatting papers to the journal's editorial prescriptions is also a new experience. Thus, they too have departed from the comfort zone of more familiar creative or administrative writing styles.

Finally, but (under the circumstances) understandably, many referees were faced with new or unfamiliar requests. For example, some scientists who were invited to referee papers with scientific content were critical of unconventional formats that were sometimes dictated by the terms of reference given to author(s). Similarly, it was necessary to invite people who were familiar with a paper's subject matter, but not necessarily with the process of refereeing, to referee papers dealing with non-scientific subjects such as public relations and administration.

The labours of referees and authors, alike, in coming to grips with the processes has been commendable and has resulted in substantial improvements to the papers without compromise to the underlying information that was presented at the workshops and to the Review Panel. In the light of the unusual circumstances outlined above, as editors of this special volume, we accept full responsibility for interpretation of some referee comments and author responses and we take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work, tolerance and willingness to work through issues that both referees and authors have afforded us.

TONY START AND PETER MAWSON
8 OCTOBER 2004

¹ To preserve the integrity of the papers as a benchmark, they have not been updated to reflect developments between February 2003 and publication, except to provide full references to papers that were 'in press' at that time.