

Australian Alps in urgent need of protection

The importance of caring for Australia's alpine region to improve its resilience in the face of a changing climate has been highlighted in new report released by the Australian Government.



Credit: CSIRO

The report, 'Caring for our Australian Alps Catchments: Summary Report for Policy Makers', examines the vulnerability of this iconic region and its significant water catchments to the impacts of climate change.

The scientific report draws on research and data collection going back more than 60 years. It is the second assessment of the condition of the Alps catchments; the first was published in 1957.

Greg Combet, the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, said the Alps were a landscape with unique biodiversity that needed protection.

'Water from the Alps catchments are of national economic importance as they provide around 30 per cent of the annual inflows to the Murray Darling Basin and this water is valued at about \$9.6 billion a year.

'The report shows that 60 per cent of the 235 Alps catchments are in poor to moderate condition and most are declining.

'Scientific advice indicates that, even with a moderate degree of warming in the coming decades, there are serious risks to Australia's Alps catchments, with consequences for water yields, biodiversity and soil erosion.

'The report points to less precipitation, reduced snow cover, more droughts, more frequent severe fire events and more severe storms. These changes increase the challenge of managing catchments that are already under pressure.'

Recommendations to alleviate environmental pressures on the catchments of the Australian Alps and prepare their ecosystems for future impacts of climate change while optimising water yields are included in the report.

The study was commissioned by the Australian Alps Liaison Committee and the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency.

Source: Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

From **ECOS** online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC11075>