

## Tightening the belt . . . or strangling research?

GOVERNMENTS in Australia and elsewhere are entering a period of financial austerity. Some view this as a long overdue correction in levels of government spending; others see it as a threat to their livelihoods and aspirations. Whatever the perspective, there should be concern for the impact on our ability to understand and manage biodiversity.

Budgets will contract for government departments and other institutions dependent on government funding, e.g., universities and research organizations. In this atmosphere, a common target for savings is research, especially that which has long-term, strategic goals rather than immediate applications. Conservation Biology is essentially an applied science, but one which also requires fundamental research to test the relevance of ecological and genetic principles to threatened populations. It is probable that conservation research with clear and immediate application to management will survive the impending financial crunch. It is also likely that carefully designed and implemented management-oriented research can continue to contribute to conservation science. However, this will not replace basic research that addresses the amount, distribution and maintenance of biodiversity. Without this knowledge and its translation to management principles, the establishment of nature reserves and "ecologically sustainable development" are unlikely to be effective.

Obviously, both the scientists and users of the information should be agitating to protect funding for the research and training necessary to provide

for the future. I do not believe that it is enough for governments to rely on increasingly under-resourced universities to maintain the momentum, or on industry to support conservation related research, although both will undoubtedly contribute. Now, more than ever, it is important for interested parties, including industry, NGOs, government agencies, research organizations and universities, to develop a co-ordinated approach to supporting strategic as well as applied conservation research.

When times get tough there are two options: take a defensive stance and attempt to minimize the damage, or take the opportunity to reassess priorities and maximize the opportunities that remain. I hope we get smart and do the latter.

### Submission of new manuscripts

As I indicated in the last issue, the new editor of Pacific Conservation Biology is Prof. Harry Recher. Enquiries and new manuscripts should be addressed to him as follows:

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### ON FRONT COVER

The Ghost Bat, *Macroderma gigas*, in full flight. Priorities for conservation research on bats are discussed in an essay by Lunney *et al.* in this issue. (Photo: Jeff Simmons, University of Queensland.)