27 April 2000

ANZECC WORKING GROUP ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

REPORT ON AUDIT OF UPTAKE OF BEST PRACTICE REPORTS IN ANZECC ORGANISATIONS

Background

1. The ANZECC working group on National Parks and Protected Area Management has been in place for a number of years. The group has been confident that part of its value has been its best practice programme. The group has produced or is producing the following best practice reports:

    Completed Best Practice Reports

    Best Practice in User Pays Revenue Generation
    Best Practice in National Data Standards on Protected Area Visitation
    Best Practice in Asset Management
    Best Practice in Stakeholder Management (Neighbour Relations)
    Best Practice in Staff Training
    Best Practice in Natural Resource Monitoring and Performance Standards
    Best Practice in Commercial Management
    Best Practice in Risk Management and Public Liability
    Best Practice in Interpretation and Education

    Best Practice Reports in Preparation

    Best Practice in Use of Fire for Ecological Purposes
    Best Practice in Management Planning
    Best Practice in Historic Place Management
    Best Practice in Weeds Management

2. Part of the value of undertaking these best practice exercises and producing reports is the involvement of practitioners from each of the ten member organisations with their counterparts in the other organisations. However, there is a question mark over how useful each report has been to each member organisation, other than the value of networking. Discussion on this within the working group led to this audit of the uptake of best practice reports.

3. The objectives of the audit were agreed as:

   (a) to assess whether best practice reports have been useful and have lead to beneficial change or improvements in national park and protected area planning and management;

   (b) to assess staff awareness of the existence of best practice reports within their agency;

   (c) to describe processes used by agencies to assess and disseminate the best practice reports;

   (d) to identify processes used by agencies to make decisions about adopting changed practices.

Method

4. A questionnaire was used to draw information to fulfil the brief for the audit. The brief is attached as Appendix A. The responses to the questionnaire were summarised into a table to enable easy comparison of responses. The questionnaire and summary of responses are attached as Appendix B. A summary of processes used to introduce reports to member organisations is attached as Appendix C. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales was the only member not to respond to the questionnaire. A draft report was prepared and circulated amongst members for comment. The final draft report was discussed and signed off at the working groups meeting in March 2000.

Comment on Responses

5. Each member organisation stated that they considered the best practice reports to be very worthwhile, both for the networking value during preparation and for the opportunity created to review their own practice. Some organisations indicated that the best practice reports had led to significant changes in their own practice, at least in some areas of work. All indicated that some reports were of more value to them than others.

6. All organisations considered that reports prepared in house by one of the member organisations, rather than by consultants, were of more value. This is because of the emphasis on networking during the process of researching and preparing the report. Reports including information drawn from organisations outside the working group were also viewed as very useful. US and Canadian conservation organisations are often consulted during the research phase of developing a best practice model.

7. Each member organisation has its own process for dealing with the best practice reports. These range from formal to ad hoc. Those with more formal processes indicated that their processes satisfied the needs of their organisation, but some commented that follow-up within the procedures could be undertaken better or that aspects of the process could be improved.

8. All but one member organisation indicated, irrespective of whether their process was formal or informal, that they could improve. Not all members who have informal processes considered they should move to a formal process. SA DEHAA and Environment ACT, both have informal processes but are satisfied they meet the needs of their organisations.

9. All but one member organisation commented that managers were generally aware of the best practice programme. The Department of Conservation was the exception, where only approx. 40% of managers were aware of the programme.

Key Points By Objective

Objective (a) of the Brief

10. All member organisations consider the best practice reports to be worthwhile, in some instances leading to significant changes in polices and procedures. It is clear that the reports are most useful when the organisation is ready to review that particular area of work. In part, this is why some reports are of more use than others.

Objective (b) of the Brief

11. Staff awareness of the best practice programme, at least at management level, is very high with only one member organisation indicating that it needed to significantly improve awareness. The presence of a formal or informal process for introducing a best practice report to an organisation had no effect on whether managers in an organisation were aware of the best practice programme.

Objectives (c) and (d) of the Brief

12. It is understandable that each member organisation will have a different administrative process for dealing with best practice reports. However, looking across the information collected and after discussing it further with the working group, it is clear there are a number of factors that make for a successful process. This is irrespective of whether the process is formal or informal. Key points in a process to introduce best practice reports into an organisation are:

- Point of delivery of a best practice report should be the working group member. This gives the working group member the accountability for ensuring the report enters the formal or informal process operated by the organisation.
- The report should be brought to the attention of the senior management team. Senior management teams often have a high level focus on continuous improvement and will want to be aware of any benchmarking exercises across Australian and NZ public sector conservation organisations.
- The report should be given to manager(s) responsible for the area of work covered by the report to use as a benchmark to review own practice. This is where the benchmarking exercise is undertaken in detail. The responsible manager should monitor the benchmarking work, taking action to ensure work completed within a reasonable time period.
- Any possible changes in practice should identified, along with a cost benefit analysis and implementation plan. This will allow management to make a considered decision on possible changes, including changes to policy, operating procedures, operational plans and potential budgetary changes/bids.

Other Points Raised

13. The answers received to the questions raised a number of peripheral points that need consideration. These were:

-   The working group should look again at marketing the best practice reports outside of the member organisations. Currently the reports are made available on the Internet, but there may be other opportunities such as, through the Ranger Magazine, and tertiary and other courses.
-   There is no process of measuring usefulness of the reports. The working group may need to look at establishing a feedback loop of some sort.
-   ANZECC is well know in Australian State and Commonwealth conservation organisations, but not well know within New Zealand conservation organisations. In New Zealand senior staff are aware of ANZECC, but not so much aware of the working groups and their work programmes. The Department of Conservation needs to consider a general communication strategy about ANZECC.

Conclusion

14. The processes being looked at in this audit are administrative and vary from organisation to organisation. This is entirely appropriate. Each organisation has a process it follows in introducing best practice reports to relevant staff. Most organisations say they could improve upon their formal or informal process. It is now up to member organisations to use the information contained in this report to review their own processes.

15. The working group should look at the other issues raised, in particular at expanding the marketing of the best practice reports and at the possibility of developing a feedback loop to gather information on the usefulness of each report. Some organisations, in particular, the Department of Conservation may need to look at developing a general communication strategy to raise the awareness of managers and staff to the work of ANZECC, its working groups and task forces.

Recommendations

16. It is recommended that:

a) each member organisation use this report to review its own process of introducing best practice reports into its organisation;
b) each member organisation consider whether it needs to improve its internal communication about ANZECC, its working groups and task forces, and the best practice reports;
c) the working group review its marketing of best practice reports with a view to broadening distribution and improving usefulness;
d) the working group develop a feedback loop to assess the process of researching and developing each report and its usefulness after distribution;

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BEST PRACTICE PROJECT BRIEF

THE UPTAKE AND USE OF BEST PRACTICE REPORTS

Background

1. The ANZECC Working Group on National Park and Protected Area Management has been existence for a number of years. The Terms of Reference for the Working Group are:

   To identify issues and report on matters relating to the selection, planning and management of national parks and protected areas and the development of staff involved in their management.

2. Over the period of its existence the Working Group has considered a number of issues important to the management of national parks and protected areas. However, the main focus of the Working Party has been on identifying best practice in national park and protected area management.

3. The Working Party set a best practice work programme and has been diligent in undertaking that programme. The work programme and current status of best practice investigations is as follows:

   Completed Best Practice Reports

   Best Practice in User Pays Revenue Generation
   Best Practice in National Data Standards on Protected Area Visitation
   Best Practice in Asset Management
   Best Practice in Stakeholder Management (Neighbour Relations)
   Best Practice in Staff Training
   Best Practice in Natural Resource Monitoring and Performance Standards

   Best Practice Reports in Preparation

   Best Practice in Use of Fire for Ecological Purposes
   Best Practice in Commercial Management
   Best Practice in Risk Management and Public Liability
   Best Practice in Interpretation and Education
   Best Practice in Management Planning
   Best Practice in Walking Tracks (being completed by Australian Standards)

   Best Practice Reports to be Commenced

   Best Practice in Historic Place Management
   Best Practice in Weeds Management
   Best Practice in The Uptake and Use of Best Practice Reports

4. Each completed best practice report is given to member agencies to use, as they consider appropriate. The Working Group, however, has no information on whether the reports are actually used or how useful they are to member agencies. It may be that some member agencies have management processes in place to ensure that the information is assessed and procedures/standards reviewed. It may also be that some member agencies do not use the information effectively and could learn from the organisations that do.

5. This project is designed essentially as an audit of how each member agency uses the best practice reports.

Objective of Project

6   The objectives of the project are:

(a) to assess whether best practice reports have been useful and have lead to beneficial change or improvements in national park and protected area planning and management;

(b) to assess staff awareness of the existence of best practice reports within their agency;

(c) to describe processes used by agencies to assess and disseminate the best practice reports;

(d) to identify processes used by agencies to make decisions about adopting changed practices.

Scope of Project

7. The project will provide for a check with member agencies to:

(a) determine whether each agency is disseminating the best practice reports to appropriate staff;

(b) measure staff awareness of best practice reports;

(c) identify what management processes are in place to review current practices as a result of receiving best practice reports;

(d) analyse the various management processes and identify any common aspects;

(e) assess the usefulness of the reports.

Methodology

8. It is expected that each member organisation will nominate a project team member to input data to the project and be available for discussions (Email, telephone, meeting only if found essential). A draft report will be prepared and circulated for comment prior to submission to the Working Group for approval.

Project Management

9. The Department of Conservation, New Zealand, will manage this project in consultation with representatives of each member organisation. Keith Lewis will be the project co-ordinator. Working Group members will be responsible for nominating representatives and ensuring appropriate commitment to the project.

Brief Project Plan

10. The following is an outline project plan with timeline:

End Feb 99   sign off of scope by Working Group;

Early March 99   organisation representatives identified and briefed on project;

End April 99   design questionnaire and collect required data;

End May 99   prepare draft report and circulate to representatives for comment;

May 99 onwards   consult as appropriate in preparing the final draft report and submit to Working Group for approval.

11. Each agency will carry its own costs of participation. Department of Conservation to fund printing and dissemination of reports.

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ANZECC BEST PRACTICE AUDIT: SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

The Questions

1. Are the level 2 and 3 managers in your organisation aware of the existence of the Working Group on National Park and Protected Area Management, and the best practice reports?

a)   Yes. (strike out if does not apply)
b)   No. (strike out if does not apply)

Comments: _____

2. Who in your organisation receives the Working Group best practice reports?

a)   Working Group member.
b)   Project co-ordinator for specific best practice projects.
c)   Both.
d)   Somebody else.

Comments: _____

3. Does your organisation have an established procedure for considering the content of best practice reports? This may be a continuous improvement process/procedure.

a)   Yes. (strike out if does not apply)
b)   No. (strike out if does not apply)

4. If the answer to question 3 is yes, describe the procedure, including final sign off of any action to be taken as a result of reviewing a best practice report.

Description: _____

5. If the answer to question 3 is no, describe what action, if any, the receiver of the best practice reports takes?

Description: _____

6. If the answer to question 3 was yes, do you consider your procedure meets the needs of your organisation?

a) Yes. (strike out if does not apply)
b) No. (strike out if does not apply)

Comment: _____

7. If the answer to question 3 is no, do you consider the informal arrangements meet the needs of your organisation, and if so why?

a) Yes. (strike out if does not apply)
b) No. (strike out if does not apply)

If yes, why?   _____

8. Have the best practice reports been useful for your organisation? In what circumstances have the reports been used?

Comments: _____

Summary of answers to questions

ORGANISATION	QUESTION ONE	QUESTION TWO	QUESTION THREE	QUESTION FOUR	QUESTION FIVE	QUESTION SIX	QUESTION SEVEN	QUESTION EIGHT
Environ. Australia	YES Level 2&3 branch heads and park managers	WG Member All 2&3 managers Project co-ord Library Web site	NO	N/A	Distributed as in question two. No assessment undertaken. Take up variable.	N/A	NO Small disparate parks under various mgt. Formal process would be good	Some reports used for specific purposes. Propose distribute through ranger mag and at tertiary and other courses.

DEHAA (SA)	YES Distributed to appropriate functional mger	WG member Project Co-ord Functional manager	NO	N/A	Receiver reviews report Discusses with mger. Summary to Executive recommending actions Working group may be formed to implement.	N/A	YES Functional mgers need to drive reform and have buy in.	YES particularly Asset mgt
DPIWE (TAS)	YES Reasonable awareness	WG member Project Co-ord. Relevant staff. Library. PWS Executive.	YES	Considered by Executive. Responsible Officer reviews looking for improvements to practice. No formal link back to executive	N/A	YES But clearer formal review process and continuous review process would be an improvement	N/A	YES Protected Areas Visitation report Neighbour Relations Report Draft Management Planning
PWC (NT)	YES In general level 2 and 3 managers well informed. Also staff involved with specific projects.	WG member who provides them to the Management Committee for wider distribution.	YES	WG member provides report to Mgt Cttee. Mgt Cttee requests report on relevance to Parks and Wildlife work and on actions to take up best practice. Mgt Ctee then takes budgetary or other steps to implement agreed actions.	N/A	YES Works well but needs more rigorous follow up of person delegated to report to Mgt Ctee.	N/A	YES. Some reports have resulted in significant change to practice, others have resulted in a review of current practice and different levels of change.

NPWS (NSW)	No Response							
DNRE (VIC) (PARKS VICTORIA)	YES (generally) Mtg reports go to level one mgers and distributed as they see fit. Level 2 +3 mgers ware through past and present involvement	WG member. Project co-ord. Relevant line mgers.	NO. Not previously at organisational level. Cont. Improvement Unit established. Logical Unit should motivate change in future. Provided list of current use status of each report.	N/A	Left to accountable manager to consider what changes , if any , to introduce.	N/A	YES. Recent changes Cont. Improvement Unit) provide more robust approach, ensuring review and reporting on each report.	Provided list of current use status of each report. Earlier reports of limited use to Parks Vic. Incestuous nature of WG does not provide for wider input from other public or private orgs. Each report takes too long to complete, undermining credibility and continued relevance.
QPWS (Qld)	YES Provided to HO level 2&3mgers. Level 3 Regional Mgers get 2 copies and disk.	WG member Project Co-ord. Each Regional mger and Director and HO staff with resp. Also other staff with an interest.	NO	N/A	Depends on officers receiving report. Sometimes reviewed and polices/procedur es changed	N/A	N/A	All useful, some more than others. No process for measuring usefulness. Preparation process useful in itself and can lead to changes.

Environ. (ACT)	YES	WG Member Project Co-ord. Park Mgers. Bus Unit Mgers.	NO	N/A	Distributed as per question two. Reports reviewed as prompted by business requirements	N/A	YES Because when Processes are being reviewed, have access to reports.	YES On specific reviews and in assessing consultant perf. for interp strategy.
DOC (NZ)	NO About 40% of level 2 and 3 mgers ware of BP programme.	WG member Project Co-ord. Sometimes to other staff with an interest, but not organised in any way.	NO	N/A	WG member ensure project Cord has copy. What project coordinator does with report is up to him/her.	N/A	NO A formal process would improve potential uptake of better practice.	YES Process of researching and report writing very useful. Reports provide potential for improvement in practice.
CALM (WA)	YES	WG Member Project Co-ord. Staff with responsibility	NO	N/A	Copies to relevant staff.. Advice on existence of report sent to senior managers. Copies to individuals on request. Assistance given to staff wishing to access WEB site.	N/A	NO No champion appointed to monitor implementation or drive any change. Danger in not taking positive steps to improve performance. Change left up to individuals.	YES Aspects of most reports used. A reference point. Opportunity. to compare practices. New source of ideas and approaches.

SUMMARY OF PROCESSES USED BY MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

Member Organisation	Working Group Member	All 2nd and 3rd tier managers	Senior Mgt Cmtee	Project Co-ord	Functional and/or Other Managers	Other Relevant Staff	Library Website
Env. Australia	√	√		√			√
DEHAA (SA)	√			√	√		
DPIWE (TAS)	√		√	√	√	√	√
PWC (NT)	√		√ distributes report				
DNRE (VIC)	√			√	√		
QPWS (Qld)	√			√	√	√	
Env. ACT	√			√	√		
DOC (NZ)	√			√	√	√	
CALM (WA)	√			√	√	√	