

Experience in outcomes-based evaluation of management for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, Australia

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Introduction

The purpose of management is to achieve objectives, and the extent to which management objectives are achieved should be the principal measure used in assessing management performance. This is the premise that prompted the development of an outcomes-based approach to evaluating management performance for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

This case study describes the management context, the early steps taken to introduce an evaluative approach to management; how evaluation was integrated into the management plan for the area; how practical monitoring programmes were developed and are being implemented; how performance data are being gathered and presented; and how the findings of evaluation are being reported.

Tasmania's experience in developing and implementing a process of evaluating management performance for the Tasmanian Wilderness provides a ready example that demonstrates the application of 'outcome evaluation' such as described in IUCN's Framework for Evaluating Management of Protected Areas.

Management context

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is part of the natural and cultural heritage of the world community and was first inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1982 on the basis of all 4 natural criteria and 3 cultural criteria. Covering approximately 1.4 million hectares (3.46 million acres), the Tasmanian Wilderness is one of the largest conservation reserves in Australia and protects vast tracts of high quality temperate wilderness.

The Tasmanian Wilderness is managed under joint commonwealth and state government arrangements on an annual budget of currently approximately \$AU8 million (approximately \$US5 million), comprising about \$5 million from the Australian federal government, and \$3.4 million from the Tasmanian state government. The level of funding is negotiated between the state and commonwealth governments based on the estimated requirements to adequately implement the jointly approved management plan for the area. The majority of the land within the World Heritage Area is protected under the Tasmanian *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1970* and primary responsibility for managing the area is with the Tasmanian government department responsible for administering the Act³.

Early steps in introducing an evaluative approach to management

Approval of the first management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness in 1992 (Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage) marked a significant step in the protection and conservation of the south-west region of Tasmania. However, it was recognised at the time that in order to determine whether management under the plan was achieving its objectives, a complementary

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³ Currently, this is the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment. Over recent years the department has undergone several structural and corresponding name changes including: the Department of Environment and Land Management (1992–1998); the Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage (1989–1992); the Department of Lands, Parks and Wildlife (1987–1989); and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (1972–1987).

system of monitoring and evaluation would be required to provide evidence about the results or outcomes. Consequently, one of the prescribed actions under the first management plan was to develop a framework for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of management.

A consultant with professional expertise in evaluation, Dr Helen Hocking (now Helen Dunn) was employed to work with departmental staff to strengthen the capacity of the agency to monitor, evaluate and report on progress in management of the Tasmanian Wilderness. The following elements were undertaken as part of that project (Hocking, 1993).

- *A review of evaluation in the management of natural areas* highlighted the paucity of material and examples available on evaluation of natural areas. It also noted the virtual absence of evaluation of management for cultural sites, or evaluation of areas managed for diverse objectives. The review also drew attention to the increasing demands for public accountability and high quality in public sector management.
- *An analysis of staff concerns and issues* related to implementation of the management plan and evaluation of achievement of the plan's objectives. This identified the need to assist staff to improve management practices (and the desire from staff for this to happen) and the need for long-term monitoring of the achievement of objectives (including the condition of World Heritage values).
- *The development of an overall evaluation framework for the 1992 management plan* which provided a basis for evaluating the extent of achievement of the plan's objectives. The evaluation framework took as its starting point the objectives of management stated in the management plan, and 'unpacked' these objectives to derive specific outcomes which would provide the criteria for evaluation. Possible evidence or indicators of performance were proposed against each outcome.
- *Two small-scale evaluations* were conducted to demonstrate the application of evaluative processes to specific and immediate management issues.
- *A market research survey was designed and administered* to gauge Tasmanian community knowledge and attitudes to the World Heritage Area. This filled a significant information gap, and demonstrated another approach to data collection for evaluation.

Incorporating evaluation into the revised (1999) management plan

By the time the first management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness was due for revision, the agency was well positioned to incorporate a structured approach to evaluating management performance into the management plan (see Jones (2000) for details of the methodology for incorporating outcomes-based evaluation into a management plan). The 1999 management plan (Parks and Wildlife Service, 1999) includes the following elements related to monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement in management performance:

- Management objectives;
- Statements of key desired outcomes derived from the objectives of management (these serve as the criteria against which management performance will be judged);
- Prescriptions for management actions aimed at achieving the objectives;
- Prescriptions for monitoring selected performance indicators to inform the evaluation of management performance;
- Requirements for reporting on the performance of management (i.e. the findings of evaluation);
- Requirements for the periodic review of the management plan.

Evaluation framework for the 1999 management plan—the basis for the monitoring program

A tabular evaluation framework for the 1999 management plan provides the basis for developing and coordinating a targeted monitoring program to support evaluation of management performance. The framework presents the key desired outcomes of management (derived from the management objectives) together with a range of performance areas and indicators that could potentially provide evidence about the extent to which each desired outcome has been achieved. It also identifies who could provide the required information about each performance area or indicator (see example below).

Example from the evaluation framework for the 1999 management plan

Objective 5 of the 1999 management plan: *To present the World Heritage Area in ways that foster community understanding and appreciation of its World Heritage and other natural and cultural values, and that maximise support for the area's conservation.*

Key desired outcomes	Potential performance areas and indicators	Monitoring responsibility or capacity
<i>5.1 Widespread community familiarity with, appreciation of, and support for the World Heritage Area, the protection and conservation of its natural and cultural values and the management of the conservation issues the area faces.</i>	Community awareness/ support for the World Heritage Area: results of public surveys, especially evidence of changes, trends etc; assessment by World Heritage Area Consultative Committee.	Planning/evaluation staff (through public phone survey by market research company)
	Community awareness of, & attitudes to, management issues: results of public and visitor surveys.	Planning/evaluation staff (through public and visitor surveys)
	Media coverage: level, nature and prominence of media messages related to the World Heritage Area and management issues.	Media staff, volunteer or student research project
	Support groups: changes in membership levels of support groups e.g. Wildcare; 'Friends of...' groups; level of volunteer support etc.	Community partnerships staff

The evaluation framework is not a static document but continues to evolve over time as performance indicators are added, refined or deleted through experience and/or management objectives are refined over successive management plans.

Developing and implementing a practical monitoring program

While the evaluation framework identifies potential indicators across the full range of management responsibilities, the selection and development of monitoring programs to be implemented is in practice guided by the importance of the information in relation to the objectives of management, its usefulness in informing management decisions, and the practicality of its collection.

A coordinator for monitoring and evaluation (working within the agency's planning section) has overall responsibility for ensuring that the agency has a co-ordinated and targeted monitoring programme. However, to the extent possible, monitoring programmes are developed in conjunction with those with responsibility for a particular aspect of management, and the monitoring programme is usually integrated into their active management programme. This approach allows those with specialised or in-depth knowledge about particular areas to assist in identifying meaningful performance indicators and to develop practical monitoring programmes. It also fosters cross-agency ownership of the evaluation process. Of course, it is essential that evaluation methodologies and data are scientifically valid and stand up to external scrutiny.

Where no active management programme aligns well with the needs for performance information, monitoring programmes are developed and managed by the co-ordinator for evaluation.

Reporting on the performance of management

Reporting on the performance of management for World Heritage sites is an obligation of management under the World Heritage Convention. It also provides essential feedback about management performance to managers, funding bodies, stakeholders and the public.

In Tasmania, '*State of the Tasmanian Wilderness*' reports are being prepared every 5 years, with an interim update every 2.5 years (Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (in prep.)). These reports aim to allow a wide readership to gain an immediate 'handle' on the management situation and the changes that have occurred in the state of conservation of the area e.g. what the key management issues are; what improvement or deterioration in results has occurred; where impediments to effective management lie; and what needs to be done to improve management performance. Supplementary reports provide information about the extent to which the management plan's prescriptions have been implemented, and about the financial resources and expenditure over the management period.

Data gathering and presentation

While the principal focus of evaluation for the Tasmanian Wilderness is on outcomes or results, the approach also recognises the importance of management inputs and processes, as well as external factors in influencing management performance. Three main types of performance data are being used to inform evaluation for the Tasmanian Wilderness:

1. Scientific and other measured data on performance indicators (especially in relation to the World Heritage objectives of conservation and protection);
2. The views of visitors and the general public (especially in relation to the World Heritage objectives of presenting the World Heritage)
3. Assessment and critical comment about management performance from internal and external stakeholders closely involved with management (especially staff members and the World Heritage Area Consultative Committee).

Data input for the report is gathered largely via questionnaires designed and specifically targeted to those who can provide the required data, information, assessment or critical comment about each performance area. Depending on the audience, the questionnaire is administered either orally or in writing.

Assessments of management performance and critical comment are sought from those with management responsibility and/or a legitimate evaluative role for each management responsibility. Two types of assessments are usually conducted:

- an assessment of relative performance, to indicate whether the results are better or worse than at the commencement of the management period; and
- an assessment of absolute performance, to indicate how satisfactory or unsatisfactory the current situation is.

This approach recognises that while management performance may have improved over the management period, it may not yet be satisfactory. See example 1 below.

Critical comment about management performance provides qualitative information about performance in each area of management responsibility, and for example identifies outstanding positive and negative initiatives or changes that have occurred over the management period, and key factors that have contributed to, or hindered, management performance. See example 2 below.

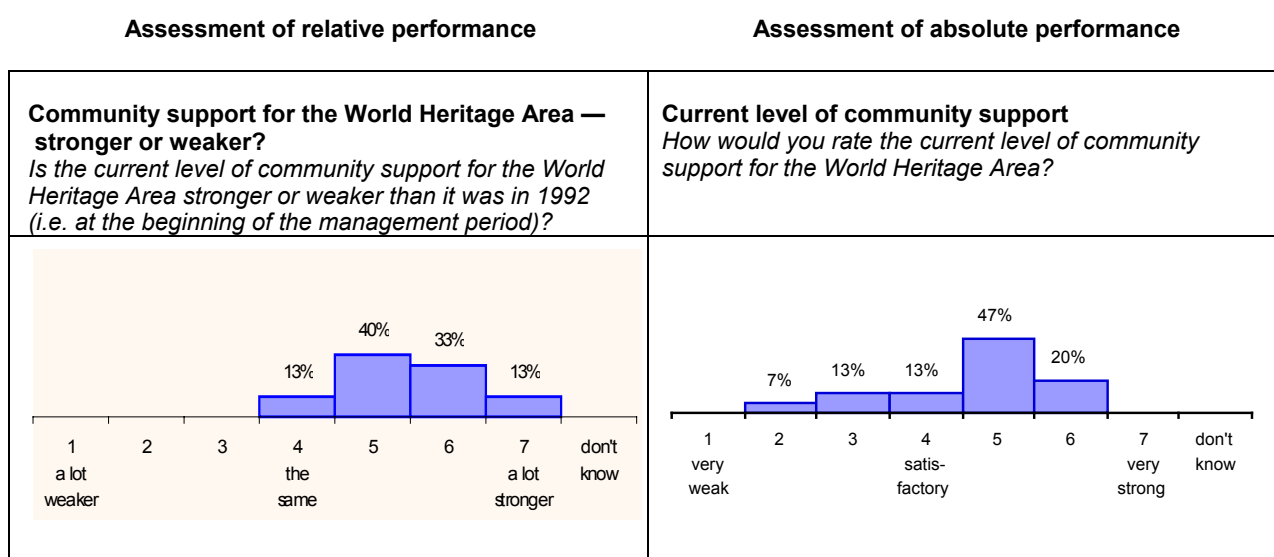
Detailed evidence (usually from scientific monitoring programmes) is presented about any changes that have been detected in the condition of significant conservation values together with information about factors responsible for the change (where known). See example 3 below. Note that in some cases, evidence of change in significant values may reveal restoration or rehabilitation of values. Information is also presented about additional perceived threats or risks to values where impact has not yet occurred or where inadequate data about the condition of values are available.

Examples of data presentation

Example 1: Assessments of management performance

Performance Area: Community support for the Tasmanian Wilderness

Assessment by: Tasmanian World Heritage Area Consultative Committee (an external management advisory committee of community representatives)



Example 2 : Critical comment on management performance

Performance Area: Community engagement

Critical Comment by: Tasmanian World Heritage Consultative Committee

Positive and negative changes in community engagement

Positive changes/ initiatives	Negative changes / areas of management inaction or failure	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A major shift towards talking — from both sides; managers have started to talk to groups and establish processes leading to an improved response to community views; Aboriginal engagement/ partnerships; Established practices — programs such as huts partnerships; Tourism in Natural Areas Group — better internal consultation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slowness of some agency staff to engage with communities; Community consultation has been inappropriate in some areas — walking clubs feel the consultation for the Walking Track Management Strategy was not serious or respectful. Co-operation between Departments was not always good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The fire has gone out of the debate (people have learned that the World Heritage Area is nothing to fear) but we still have a lot of work to do to make the World Heritage concept welcomed rather than merely accepted. There needs to be more proactive consultation — not reactive consultation with disaffected communities.

Example 3: Evidence of change in the condition of significant conservation values

Evidence of change in the condition of significant natural and cultural values is presented in detail in a tabular format (which is too complex to reproduce in a paper of this type). Information is presented under the following themes:

1. **Management issue/topic** (including topic; cause of change in condition of values (where known); nature and significance of the key values affected; and historical context/ background information).
2. **Report on the condition of values** (including condition indicators and monitoring methodology; evidence of change in the condition of values over the management period; and targets for condition indicators).
3. **Report on the pressures on values** (including indicators for pressures and monitoring methodology; evidence of change in the extent, level or severity of pressures over the management period; and targets for pressure indicators).
4. **Management actions and commentary** (including management actions and significant events calendar; key factors contributing to management performance; key factors limiting or threatening management performance; and management needs).
5. **Further information** (including source of information presented; contact officer details; and references to more detailed information, databases etc).

Lessons learnt***To encourage agency adoption of an evaluative approach to management***

- 'Sell' the advantages of evaluation, for example as a means of reducing community conflicts, increasing transparency and providing a mechanism for public accountability; improving on-ground conservation results etc.
- Encourage agency adoption of an evaluative approach through the influence of appropriate stakeholders, advisory forums etc.
- Foster agency and key stakeholders' learning and understanding about evaluation through demonstration and involvement.
- Develop agency ownership of the evaluation approach and process through working collaboratively with a range of levels of staff.
- Undertake small-scale evaluations to demonstrate the evaluative process and how it works in specific immediate cases.
- Work with staff who are receptive to new ideas and who can take the lead in establishing monitoring programmes and provide role models for others to follow.
- Consider the skills and experience required to introduce and gain acceptance for evaluation, and whether this role can best be achieved through internal and/or external sources (e.g. to enable effective communication with senior managers, scientists, field staff, key stakeholders etc).

In developing an evaluation framework for a management plan

- Ask 'how would we know if management was working well?' and just as importantly 'how would we know if management was failing?' The answers to these questions often suggest the types of indicators that should be monitored for evidence of performance.
- Use the in-depth knowledge of those with management responsibility and/or expertise in a particular field to assist in identifying appropriate and practical performance indicators and monitoring methodologies.

Consider priorities, practicalities and balance when setting up monitoring programs

- Funding levels are rarely sufficient to support a full and comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of management. It is therefore essential to prioritise monitoring and evaluation needs so that they will compete realistically alongside other demands on the total management budget.
- Priority should be given to monitoring programmes that provide:
 - information about the extent to which key management objectives are being achieved (or are failing to be achieved);

- information about the condition of the most significant conservation values, (especially those that are perceived as being at risk), or of other values considered to be good indicators of change;
 - information about the level or extent of perceived threats, pressures or risks to significant or vulnerable values;
 - information that can help resolve important, complex or controversial management issues (including social issues);
 - information that can be particularly useful in guiding ongoing decision-making (especially management direction and priorities);
 - information that can provide feedback about the outcomes of big expenditure management items or programmes.
- Start simply; keep the programme manageable. Start with a basic monitoring programme for core indicators and expand the programme as appropriate, taking account of experience.
 - Get baseline information early. Ensure that monitoring or measuring programmes for performance indicators are undertaken early in the management period so that changes in conditions over the management period can be detected.
 - Where possible, integrate monitoring programmes for performance indicators into the active management programs for the relevant field of management.
 - Be alert to opportunities for gathering information about performance indicators through 'piggybacking' monitoring programmes onto other projects, visitor surveys etc.

Consider issues of data input, reliability and credibility

- Identify all sources of data.
- Ensure that data used in the evaluation are scientifically valid and/or from reliable sources.
- A cost-effective way of acquiring performance information across a broad range of input, process and external factors that may have affected management performance is to ask those with management responsibility and/or a legitimate evaluative role to identify key factors that have helped or hindered management performance.
- The inclusion of external participants in assessments (e.g. experts in particular management issues, or park advisory groups etc) can enhance the objectivity and/or credibility of the assessment and in some circumstances provide important additional information and insights that may not readily be sourced from within the management agency.

Improving ongoing management performance

To be successful, an evaluation programme must deliver results that are both useful and used. Reports on the performance of management should include recommendations both for improving ongoing management performance and for addressing identified gaps or weaknesses in the evaluation. These recommendations then need to feed back into, and influence, decision-making processes so as to improve ongoing management performance. Evaluative management is a continually evolving process.

In Tasmania, work still needs to be done to strengthen and coordinate the linkage between the findings of evaluation and budget planning/allocation cycles so as to more strongly influence the setting of priorities and the allocation of financial and staff resources. This will allow the full benefits of evaluation to be realised by facilitating optimal adaptive management and continuous improvement in conservation management performance. Already, the adoption of an explicit performance evaluation process for management of the Tasmanian Wilderness has demonstrated tangible benefits to management, and the approach is attracting growing interest and strong support for its further development and application.

References

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