

DRAFT

SOCIAL RESEARCH STRATEGY

*Research into social, environmental and economic
aspects of tourism and recreation
in Western Australia's protected areas.*

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION
CONSERVATION AND PARKS DIVISION

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SOCIAL RESEARCH STRATEGY

1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) manages in excess of 25 million hectares of the State's public conservation estate on behalf of the people of Western Australia and the statutory bodies in which the lands and waters are vested. These natural areas contain significant natural and cultural values and provide important recreation and tourism resources that make significant social and economic contributions to Western Australia. The Parks and Conservation Division (PCD) of the Department primarily provide the delivery of land management services.

Social science is the study of people and communities. Research on this subject can help DEC understand the social environment within which the Department operates and the expectations people within that environment have of it. Social science can be used to manage existing situations, predict future consequences of present actions, and plan ahead for future desired outcomes [1]. Social science research has the potential to improve DEC's understanding of its relationship and effect on visitors and communities and lead to better management outcomes.

The complexity of the social environment in which DEC operates is increasing, as are community expectations of DEC's responsibilities as land and environmental managers. DEC cannot expect to rely solely on the resources of Government, and its effectiveness to a large degree will depend on the way it engages with and relates to the community and its visitors. Understanding the relationship between people, the environment and protected areas is critical for protecting and gaining support for conservation and protection of the environment.

DEC field staff, policy officers, managers and directors regularly make decisions that affect people, including visitors, commercial tour operators, staff, local communities, neighbours and local businesses, stakeholders, local authorities and others. The social sciences provide a means to better understand the needs and expectations of community and park users. Important government and departmental programs such as the Substantive Equality, the Diversity Management Plan, the implementation of the Good Neighbour Policy, the marine reserves program, timber-harvesting plans, prescribed fire plans and tourism developments all have social and economic implications for the community and visitors. Social research can assist in better understanding the issues related to these programs, enhance decision-making and improve the effective and timely delivery of such programs.

For the purposes of this strategy social research is defined as **"research that improves our understanding of the relationship between people, the environment and protected areas, that is critical to protecting the natural and cultural values that contribute to public appreciation, enjoyment and acceptance of these values."**

In relation to the areas it manages and the activities pursued, and consistent with the functions and responsibilities defined in the *Conservation and Land Management Act (1984)*, the Department's vision is:

"A natural environment in Western Australia that retains its biodiversity and enriches people's lives." [2].

This vision implies the provision of opportunities for people to use and enjoy protected areas in a sustainable manner. This includes understanding recreational needs, use patterns, satisfaction levels, attitudes and environmental impacts of people on the natural and cultural resources of a particular area.

The former Department of Conservation and Land Management's (CALM) Corporate Plan 2002-2005 until superseded is still current for DEC and the Parks and Conservation Division. The Plan places a strong emphasis on people and the community. Its mission and objectives include such positive statements as "developing partnerships with the community", "developing community awareness", "being responsive to community" and "providing enriched visitor experiences". These statements highlight the importance PCD places on the social aspects of its operations. It correctly implies that working with and understanding how park visitors and communities think and behave towards conservation and park management is extremely important.

This strategy is being developed at a time when there is a growing demand for information to assist managers to meet visitor management and community expectations. The absence of a corporate policy on Research has not aided in the development and integration of a social research within the organisation. DEC's Science Division represents the agency's major investment in research and is focused primarily on biological research and survey. However, the resources historically available for social research within the Department have been limited. Through the management and development of sustainable recreation and tourism activities the PVS Service has recognised the importance of social research in achieving the Department's objectives.

While the social sciences have and can be applied across the agency, DEC would benefit from a more integrated approach. While this Strategy will focus on a strategic and planned approach for social research in the Parks and Visitor Services Service (PVS Service) (as an important part of achieving the Department's corporate objectives), it will also create the impetus for a more holistic approach to research within the Department in the future.

Social research is an important and necessary function of DEC's management of the conservation estate. Through this strategy DEC's social research effort will provide knowledge to allow managers to make better and informed decisions about the sustainable management of public land, water and wildlife. It also provides a basis on which informed decisions could be made and the basis for these decisions demonstrated to the community. This strategy sets a clear direction for social research in DEC.

2. LEGISLATIVE BASIS

The *Conservation and Land Management Act, 1984* (CALM Act) provides for the conduct of research into areas related to the Department's functions [3]. Section 33 (1)(e) of the Act (Functions of Department) allows DEC:

- (e) to carry out or cause to be carried out such study or research of or into –
 - i. the management of land to which this Act applies;
 - ii. the conservation and protections of flora and fauna;

- iii. the taxonomy of flora and introduced plants; and
- iv. any other matter related to the functions of the Department

This broad function provides authority and scope for the conduct of research undertaken by or facilitated by the PVS Output.

3. CORPORATE CONTEXT

The CALM's Corporate Plan 2002 - 2005 identifies four strategic directions that will assist in meeting its statutory obligations and policies, namely:

- Conserving biodiversity;
- Creating sustainable community benefits;
- Maintaining community involvement and support;
- Improving the way we do business.

Of most relevance to the provision of world-class recreation and tourism opportunities, services and facilities are “**Creating sustainable community benefits**” and “**Maintaining community involvement and support**”. The objectives and strategies for these two goals are as follows:

Creating sustainable community benefits

Objective: To generate social, cultural and economic benefits through the provision of a range of services that is valued by the community and is consistent with the principles of ecological sustainability.

Strategies relevant to PVS research are:

- Plan, develop and manage all parks, recreation areas, facilities and services so as to maintain in perpetuity the values of natural areas managed by the Department.
 - Encourage people to enjoy nature and natural areas.
 - Provide and sustain a range of safe nature-based recreation opportunities, facilities and visitor services that are compatible with conservation and recreation requirements.
 - Establish innovative and ecologically sustainable visitor facilities and services and nature-based recreation opportunities.
 - Redevelop and maintain recreation areas on the basis of strategic importance.
 - Identify and assess natural and other risks to visitors and ensure appropriate visitor information and other management controls are put in place.
- Provide enriched visitor experiences through quality information, memorable interpretive activity programs and innovative visitor facilities and services.
 - Develop partnerships to provide recreational facilities, services and programs.

Maintaining community involvement and support

Objective: To develop community awareness and appreciation of the State's rich diversity of native plants, animals and natural ecosystems, and its unique landscapes, and promote community involvement in and support for their protection, conservation and restoration.

Strategies relevant to PVS research are:

- Increase opportunities for youth to learn about and gain hands-on experience with conservation issues.
- Develop effective school and experience-based education programs.
- Be responsive to the community.
 - Develop and implement appropriate public participation and involvement programs that are part of core business activity of the Department.
 - Plan for people with disabilities so that everyone in the community can gain access to use and enjoy the facilities, services and programs of the Department.
 - Develop a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community.
- Increase involvement of traditional owners in managing conservation lands and waters.
 - Provide opportunities for joint management, employment and other meaningful involvement of indigenous people in the management of natural areas and wildlife and in the protection of areas and features of cultural value.
 - Partner with other agencies and groups with similar interests.
 - Establish strategic alliances with key stakeholders in the conservation, natural resources and recreational sectors.
- Work to increase resources available for conservation and management.
 - Promote a customer focus.
 - Continually improve the Department's customer focus policies and procedures.

An analysis of the above objectives and strategies indicates that the delivery of the PVS Service requires consideration of environmental, social and economic factors. It is clear that all tourism and recreation activity will contain all three of these dimensions to differing degrees and any research strategy will need to incorporate and accommodate these three main disciplines.

4. VISION

The proposed Vision for the Recreation and Tourism Research program is:-

To recognise and promote within and outside the Department, social research as a means of creating essential new knowledge for the sustainable management of DEC lands, water and biodiversity and to ensure ongoing community support for the Department's activities and services.

5. PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Because of its limited capacity to undertake such research The PVS Service has developed strategic alliances with other research organisations to pool knowledge and resources to achieve mutual benefits.

The PVS Division is working with some of Australia's leading research institutions to improve its knowledge about parks and people. This is being achieved through several initiatives:

- Establishing the Recreation and Tourism Research Reference Group (RTRRG)
- Becoming a member of the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC)
- Becoming involved in other partnerships, such as the Centre of Excellence (CoE) program, the Western Australian Marine Science Institute (WAMSI) and with the Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre (CSTC).

Recreation and Tourism Research Reference Group (RTRRG)

The PCD's Recreation and Tourism Research Reference Group (RTRRG) was established in 2000 with participation from all five Western Australian universities to offer students opportunities to become involved in research on nature-based recreation and tourism research. The research focuses on short-duration, locally relevant projects at Honours, Masters and PhD level. Projects are usually nominated by park, region and divisional staff and prioritised by the Reference Group. University representatives in rotation chair the group.

Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC)

The Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) is established under the Australian Government's Cooperative Centre Research Program. DEC's predecessor CALM joined the STCRC in 2001/02 as a means of achieving nationally relevant research outcomes through the research capacity of tertiary institutions and the funding pool created through the CRC model. The STCRC has a budget of \$28m over seven years to fund research into three main Program areas: Sustainable Destinations, Sustainable Enterprises and Sustainable Resources.

Centre of Excellence (CoE) Program

The Centres of Excellence in Science and Innovation Program (COE) is an initiative of the Office of Science and Innovation (OSI) within the Western Australian Government's Department of the Premier and Cabinet. It aims to encourage, catalyse or create opportunities to expand and enhance Western Australia's science and innovation capability and performance. Funding of around \$10 million a year is provided to Centres of Excellence to support and facilitate existing and proposed science and innovation related centres, with a significant base in Western Australia. Through this program the member partners of the STCRC in Western Australia have received over \$300,000 a year for the next three years to support the operation and development of the WA Network of the STCRC. These funds support the employment of three Research Fellows operating largely in fields of research aligned to the three STCRC research programs.

Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre (CSTC)

The Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre is an independent research body within the Curtin University of Technology that specialises in tourism research. The PCD has collaborated with the CSTC on a number of research projects and is represented on the Board of the Centre.

Western Australian Marine Science Institute

The State Government has committed \$5m over four years to a broad and integrated research program that will assist in managing and protecting Ningaloo Marine Park. The Office of Science and Innovation (OSI) has developed a research program to be coordinated by the Western Australian Marine Science Institute (WAMSI) in consultation with DEC, Department of Fisheries, Department of Environment, WA Museum, Department of Industry and Resources, CSIRO, the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and the Gascoyne Development Commission (GDC). SRFME will work with Commonwealth agencies, universities and other bodies to identify opportunities to leverage and jointly fund projects.

Through these partnerships and programs the agency has been involved either directly or indirectly in over 50 research projects. Since 1998, 37 RTRRG projects have been completed; eleven are in progress and an additional eight approved to begin. Over half of the RTRRG projects relate to human usage studies, and around a quarter relate to how people and wildlife interact.

6. FRAMEWORK FOR RECREATION AND TOURISM RESEARCH

DEC's social research strategy will rely largely on garnering the support and resources of other research bodies to undertake research of mutual benefit. The Strategy seeks to harness the agency's research needs, aspirations and opportunities, partner with supportive research institutions and channel these into achieving outcomes for the Department.

The framework set out in Figure 1 illustrates DEC's Social Research Framework and is based on the New Zealand Tourism Research Council's Research Framework [4].

The research framework recognises the need for key steps in acquiring knowledge, including:

- **the collection of fundamental or baseline data** - to provide a point of measurement and basic understanding of systems and processes;
- **research to inform decision making and management** – to allow informed and intelligent decision-making, which implies the need for practical and applied research;
- **the monitoring of outcomes** – to verify the effect and outcomes of research and to provide feedback on the direction for future research.

The strategy also recognizes the need to undertake research in three key areas to ensure that the research can contribute to overall sustainability of recreation and tourism on DEC estate:

- **Understanding the visitor** – the number of visitors, their values, behaviour, expectations, satisfaction and preferences. This area includes visitor expenditure and the economic and social values of parks.
- **Understanding the resource** – the natural, cultural and economic resource on which the recreation and tourism industry relies and is built upon. This includes areas such as the environment, heritage and culture and their economic potential.
- **Understanding the community** – the needs, aspirations and politics of communities and how the area's management can affect them. This includes indigenous ethnic, local and regional communities and the Department's responsibilities in meeting government policies relating to equity of access and use.

The Strategy also needs to consider the recreation and tourism **context**. This includes the national and international environment in which recreation and tourism operates. PCD will work closely with Tourism Western Australia (TWA) to ensure a consistent and complementary approach to social (tourism) research.

The framework will undertake research in **research themes** that cut across the three research areas listed above. This recognises that each research area cannot operate in isolation and that

research needs to be conducted with an understanding of the inter-relationships between research disciplines. (refer to Figure 1).

There is also a need to develop, maintain and have access to sets of **core data** both within and outside the Department, to support subsequent research and analysis. Agreement and cooperation is required to ensure data is accessible and available to primary research agents.

The Framework also considers the perspective of recreation and tourism in terms of overall (economic, social and environmental) sustainability perspective, i.e. the need to **synthesise research** and develop findings in order to prioritise work and consider sustainability requirements and reporting.

7. KEY RESEARCH THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

The research themes for this strategy seek to meet key elements of the current Corporate Plan and provide a broad framework for research for managing recreation and tourism.

Visitors

Understanding visitors and their use of protected areas is fundamental to meeting visitors' needs by providing appropriate facilities and services and to monitoring and managing of visitor use and impacts.

Research areas include measurement and predicting the following

- the numbers of visitors and how they use the area;
- the age, sex, origin and ethnic background of visitors;
- family and other groupings of visitors;
- the attitudes and perceptions of user groups to park management;
- how well visitors respond to education and interpretation;
- the levels of visitor satisfaction, and
- how to manage visitor risk.

Research outcomes are specifically designed to guide policy, planning, management and design.

PCD has developed a sophisticated system for capturing, recording and storing data on visitor use in most of its parks and forest areas. This system, known as VISTAT, relies on traffic counters to estimate visitation. VISTAT forms part of a multi-function database (RATIS) of related recreation and tourism information, including road assets, built assets, leased assets, and licensed tourism operations.

The Department also undertakes Visitor Satisfaction Surveys (VSS) to gain a better understanding of the needs of its client base and as part of its performance reporting requirements. While this survey meets corporate and performance reporting requirements (Annual Report), its sample size at the park level is too small to be of value to management. Larger more regular survey samples taken at strategic visitor locations will provide valuable information to assist and improve management. Surveys at less strategic locations should be conducted more intensely at regular intervals to achieve more efficient use of limited resources.

Objective: To develop an improved understanding of visitors, visitor demographics, use levels and patterns of use, perceptions, satisfaction levels, preferences and behaviour, as a means to maintain and enhance visitor needs and assess responses to management decisions and actions. Visitor research also contributes to an understanding of the economic impacts of visitor expenditure in and around protected areas.

Primary research agent: PVS Division, Marine Policy and Planning Branch

Secondary Research agents: Tourism Western Australia, Universities.

Priority Research Areas:

- Levels of visitor use
- Visitor satisfaction surveys
- What is important to visitors (values and expectations) and to what extent they are satisfied
- Visitors' motivations, attitudes and perceptions
- Spatial data: visitor use and activity
- Social issues relating to over-crowding
- Visitor communication strategies and techniques

Strategies:

- Undertake a review of VISTAT with a view to :-
 - Improving the quality of data derived from the VSS.
 - Undertaking expanded VSS at strategic visitor locations annually and at less strategic sites as required.
 - Providing improved information products from VISTAT and VSS to field staff.
- Improve the quality and quantity of logbook data from commercial tour operators.

The Environment

Protecting and sustaining the condition of the natural resources on which recreation and tourism is based is a critical role of the Department. Decisions to allow tourism operations, tourism development, access for recreation and the conditions that might apply to such use should have a strong scientific base. Environmental research is needed to better understand the potential effects of tourism use on natural and cultural resources.

Many of these questions are common to managers of protected areas, nationally and internationally. The STCRC and other research institutions are addressing some of these questions at a national level.

There are four key areas of research:

- Biological and ecological research into those species, communities and ecosystems that are the focus of significant tourism and recreation activity.
- Direct impacts of tourism on the biophysical environment - including species, activity and impacts at specific localities. Related to this is the issue of biophysical "carrying capacity". It is essential to understand the resilience and capacity of the resource to accommodate people/transport and or to accommodate site hardening or facilities (environmental thresholds).
- The indirect but ecologically significant impacts of tourism and recreation on the natural environment including cumulative impacts (impact creep).

- Monitoring - developing indicators and measures to allow routine cost effective and efficient monitoring of recreation and tourism activity. Effective monitoring frameworks or models need to be established for the range of activities that are allowed in protected areas including how best to involve the community and tour operators in the process. Monitoring is required for formal and informal environmental reporting and to provide feedback that will direct ongoing biological and ecological research.

Objective: To improve the agency's understanding of the potential and actual impacts of activities on landforms, wildlife and ecological systems and the systems, models and techniques necessary to predict, measure and monitor the impacts of tourism and recreation and to develop techniques and methods for ameliorating visitor impacts.

Primary research agents: DEC Science Division, STCRC, WAMSI, AIMS,

Secondary Research agents: Universities, CRC Research Fellows.

Priority Research Areas:

- Biology and behaviour of wildlife species of importance to tourism;
- Tourism and recreation impacts, both direct and indirect;
- Impacts of high impact recreational activities;
- Threatened communities targeted or affected by tourism;
- Environmental indicators for tourism;
- Tourism destination modelling;
- Visitor communication as means of mitigating impacts and enriching experiences;
- Monitoring the activity (spatial and temporal distribution) of visitors and operators.

Strategies:

- Involve Science Division in research into species, communities and landscapes that may be at risk from recreation and tourism activity;
- Involve Science Division in research into the development and implementation of environmental monitoring systems;
- Collaborate with other research organisations to address research priorities.

The Community

DEC's wide and diverse sphere of operation exposes it to a diversity of communities, cultures, expectations and values. There is a need to respond to community and business expectations to meet corporate, government and community expectations. Issues such as ethics, communication, accountability, local engagement, social and economic development and community impacts are real considerations and can pose new and somewhat intangible risks to DEC, its image, and its operations. Social research can assist in better understanding the complex inter-relationships between communities, visitors and parks and in providing services that are cognizant of and sensitive to community needs.

Research at the community level recognises that recreation and tourism take place in communities across the State. Many of these communities live near national parks, marine parks or other reserves managed by DEC. The parks system has the potential to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits and dis-benefits to those communities. These include aiding physical and mental health, providing employment and attracting visitor expenditure to local economies. The way in which parks are managed and promoted can also adversely affect local communities.

More effective engagement with communities is crucial to meeting community needs and developing community and political support for conservation, biodiversity and recreation. At the broader community level, it is also important to understand why people use parks infrequently or not at all, and what can be done to encourage greater appreciation, use and enjoyment.

Objective: To improve DEC's understanding of community attitudes, values and perceptions of parks, the social impacts (positive and negative) of tourism and recreation in protected areas, and the factors affecting successful partnering between DEC, the community and tourism stakeholders.

Primary research agents: CRC Research Fellows, STCRC, SRFME, Tourism WA

Secondary Research agents: Universities, DEC, ABS

Priority Research Areas:

- Community profiles - Baseline data when an area is reserved, or when major planning decisions occur that may impact on adjacent communities;
- Attitudes to conservation, park management and tourism
 - Community stakeholders, local businesses, operators and non-users ;
- Effectiveness of management planning and communication in meeting community expectations;
- Community attitudes, values, perceptions of specific ethnic, cultural, special interest and user groups.

Strategies

- Initiate baseline data collection for selected parks and locations where appropriate;
- Undertake research into community perceptions, values and attitudes in strategic locations.

Indigenous Community and Culture

In 2004 the Government of Western Australia released a policy discussion paper on the future Aboriginal ownership and joint management of national parks and other protected areas. The paper proposed two models for vesting and ownership of land reserved primarily for conservation in Aboriginal organisations. The Department has already established Aboriginal Park Councils in a number of northern parks as an initial joint management initiative. Other demonstration Park Councils are will follow in the south west of the State. Traditional custodians and native title applicants will be seeking to develop partnerships with DEC and the tourism industry to meet their aspirations for training, employment, and business opportunities.

Almost no research has been undertaken in Western Australia on the indigenous community's attitudes towards or perceptions of park management practices in respect to tourism and recreation; their role as joint custodians and managers of protected areas; the management of tourism; or their views on the delivery of cultural interpretation programs in park settings by DEC and tourism operators.

Objective: To improve the agency's understanding of the Aboriginal community's attitudes and perceptions of parks and the management of tourism and recreation and the social impacts (positive and negative) of tourism and recreation in protected areas on Aboriginal communities. Understanding spiritual and traditional land management practices and how these relate to park management are high priorities for research.

Primary research agent: STCRC, CRC Research Fellows.

Secondary Research agents: Universities, Department of Indigenous Affairs,

Priority Research Areas:

- Indigenous access to and use of protected areas
- Attitudes to conservation, park management and tourism within Aboriginal communities with a connection to particular protected areas;
- The factors affecting successful partnering between DEC, Aboriginal communities and tourism stakeholders;
- Social and economic aspirations of traditional owners connected to particular protected areas;
- Family and land connections (as required);
- Understanding spiritual and traditional land management practices;
- Effectiveness of interpretation in communicating cultural values.

Strategies:

- Seek additional government funding for indigenous protected area research;
- Collaborate with other research organisations to address research priorities.

Heritage

Western Australia's cultural heritage evokes strong feeling and support within the community. That support translates into expectations for management, protection and interpretation of those values.

It is estimated that DEC managed lands and waters contain thousands of cultural heritage sites, many of which remain unrecorded or have not been assessed for significance. DEC recognises that it has a legal, moral and corporate obligation to manage these resources effectively. Recently the Department placed a greater priority on this responsibility by developing a draft policy and guidelines for managing and protecting (non-indigenous) cultural heritage. A recent internal review indicated that the level of management of cultural resources was low and there was little or no research occurring in this area.

The value of these resources to tourism and recreation has been recognised by the recent STCRC research project that will assess the tourism and recreation values of (non-indigenous) cultural heritage assets on pastoral properties acquired by DEC in the Gascoyne-Murchison Region.

Objective: To improve the DEC's understanding of the extent of heritage values that the agency manages, their value to the community and the opportunities that may exist to allow for their efficient management.

Primary research agents: STCRC, CRC Research Fellows.

Secondary Research agents: Universities, Heritage Council of WA

Priority Research Areas:

- Inventory and assessment of non-indigenous heritage assets;
- Economic and social value of key heritage assets;
- Use and value of heritage trails;
- Community attitudes to the use and management of indigenous and non-indigenous cultural assets;
- Effectiveness of interpretation in communicating heritage values;

Strategies:

- Seek capital funds to undertake an inventory and assessment of heritage assets on DEC managed lands.

Economics

Recreation and tourism within national parks, marine parks and areas of State forests make a significant contribution to local and regional economies and provide a range of social and economic benefits. Recent research indicates that tourism in the forests of southwest WA contributes \$62m annually to the local economy and that tourism in the Ningaloo/Cape Range area contributes around \$127m annually to the Gascoyne economy [5]. This research is important in arguing that national parks are assets that must be maintained like any other asset, and that committing resources to maintaining them and adding value to them through new services and products aids in achieving sustainability. An expansion of this type of research to other protected areas would be valuable.

DEC also provides a range of opportunities for businesses to operate on its lands and waters. Most large proposals require economic assessment prior to release to the market. Most of the economic studies are conducted through private consultants.

DEC also operates a number of business functions including the application of user fees and charges. Research into the various aspects of cost recovery, visitor acceptance and visitor and business compliance are necessary to develop effective policy. There are also issues of resource rent. Licence and lease fees and terms also have the potential to affect the economic viability of tourism businesses. Ongoing research into acceptable fee levels is also necessary to develop effective policy.

Objective: To develop an understanding of the economic value of tourism in protected areas, the economic impact of policy and regulatory decisions on DEC operations (including fees and charges) and the economic viability of management proposals and activities in protected areas.

Primary research agent: CRC Research Fellows, STCRC

Secondary Research agents: Universities, DEC, private consultants

Priority Research Areas:

- Studies on economic impact in selected areas or species– e.g., World Heritage, major icon sites;
- Overall economic impact of protected areas on the Western Australian economy;
- Application of the economic assessment tool-kit in parks and State forest areas;
- Feasibility studies (as needed).

Strategies:

- Develop priorities for future economic assessment projects in protected areas;
- Incorporate economic questions into Visitor Satisfaction Surveys at selected locations.

Synthesis

This recognises that the broad areas of research need to be drawn together to express wider understandings (sustainability) and develop strategic approaches for developing, prioritising, and administering and managing research.

Priority setting for social research is based on the following hierarchy.

from

- Highest risk (environmental, social, economic and political), highest intensity of use, and least knowledge,

to

- Lowest risk, lowest intensity, and most knowledge

The management planning process provides a potential opportunity to synthesise relevant DEC's research effort. However resources for undertaking research that would support the management planning process have not been available to date. A process that involves the Science Division and the PVS Service in identifying and prioritising research needs for the planning process would assist in integrating social and environmental research.

Primary agent: PVS Division

Secondary agent: CRC Research Fellows

Strategies:

- Develop internal processes for the efficient and effective delivery of social research (consultation, prioritisation and project coordination)
- Develop a process for identifying social research that contributes to the management planning process and or aids in the implementation of management plans;
- Coordinate external research providers to address DEC's needs for social research in the short, medium and long-term;
- Improve the integration of PVS Service social research activity with other Science Division activity;
- Work cooperatively with other research bodies to incorporate social research within their research programs;
- Provide the infrastructure and protocols to collect, manage and apply data on social research within the PVS Service.

8. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The following initiatives are proposed as a means of progressing the implementation of the Strategy.

Leadership

A more comprehensive and integrated approach to agency research is required to meet DEC's corporate objectives. Government imperatives for agencies meet sustainability outcomes means that social and economic considerations now need to be considered along with those of ecological. An agency wide policy on research will assist in setting directions to achieve this outcome and determining priority for allocating resources across the spectrum of research need. This strategy proposes that DEC's three major services incorporate social research requirements into their operations where applicable. Initially the PVS Service will provide the resources and expertise available for social research. This will allow other Services to concentrate on core research but still have access to social science resources.

The work of the Recreation and Tourism Research Reference Group (RTRRG) has been recognised as an important means of achieving cooperative research at the park or local level. The substantial growth in social research relevant to and involving DEC needs greater coordination,

including between existing research partners and the different areas of social research that are occurring. An advisory body structured or empowered to consider the breadth and depth of social research requirements within the Department would deliver a more coordinated and strategic approach to social research.

Strategies:

- Prepare a draft Research Policy (in conjunction with the Science Division) that incorporates social research requirements;
- Establish a Social Science Unit within the PVS Service's Research and Information Management Unit, that would coordinate and undertake marine and terrestrial social research relevant to DEC's functions;
- Expand the role of the RTRRG to include advice on all social research involving DEC managed lands and waters and its off-reserve responsibilities;
- Develop awareness for the importance of social research within the agency;.

Resources

The low level of funding provided by the Department for social research is a significant impediment to implementing the Strategy. The Department's involvement with external research organisations such as the CSIRO, AIMS and the STCRC has expanded significantly over the past two years. Major research projects are now occurring that has significant social research components. The development and coordination of input to project proposals, the monitoring of research projects and the review of draft research papers has placed a considerable burden on the PVS Division. The PVS Division has 1.5 FTEs dedicated to coordinating social (visitor) research and no capacity to undertake actual research. Enhancements in research capacity can only occur through a corporate commitment to funding an expanded social research program within DEC, and developing and expanding partnerships, coordinating research efforts and being active participants in STCRC and other research programs.

The scope of the task outlined in this plan is beyond the current level of funding. In addition the increasing engagement with research bodies such as WAMSI, AIMS, CSIRO and the STCRC requires additional resources. In parallel with such engagement, DEC needs to allocate increased resources into establishing an institutional capacity to conduct social research to directly meet the agency's operational needs. Significant gaps in research capacity exist between the research provided by the STCRC and other external research agencies and the work done through the Recreation and Tourism Research Reference Group (RTRRG). The Sustainable Tourism CRC and COE Research Fellows are funded through to 2007. Much of the research undertaken by the Research Fellows relates directly to protected areas. Over the next two DEC has the opportunity to transition an operational social research capacity from the COE to the DEC. At the same time it will continue to work cooperatively with other research bodies.

Strategies:

Two areas need to be addressed: -

- Greater agency capacity is necessary to coordinate and undertake social research that complements external capacities and programs;
- The importance of continuing to build the Department's involvement and partnerships with external research agencies.

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