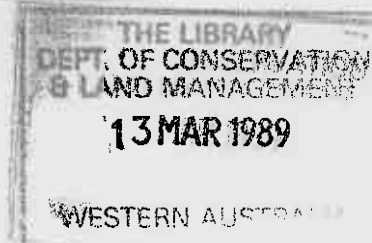


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A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE PARK MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESSES IN AUSTRALIA

BY PETER SANDELL
PLANNING BRANCH



INTRODUCTION

This review is the outcome of a Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) workshop on the subject of park management planning in Western Australia. At the workshop it was recommended that a comparative study be conducted of management planning practice as described in the literature (Albone, 1988). This concept was broadened to include a telephone survey of park services in other States of Australia (Appendix 1). The primary objective of the review is to identify techniques or strategies that may overcome the discrepancy between the rate of plan production and the requirements of park managers.

Management planning for the purposes of this review is defined as planning that concerns itself with implementation as well as control. The following discussion refers only to park (or unit) management plans as distinct from other products of the management planning process. Park management plans may or may not be complemented by action plans that address specific issues.

The production of management plans is a universal activity of Australian park services, although it is only clearly defined as a statutory requirement for parks administered by N.S.W., S.A., W.A., N.T., and A.N.P.W.S. (Lipscombe, 1987). In Qld., management plans do not assume a formal status. It is generally agreed that the management planning process (i.e. the steps taken in preparing a plan) is as important as the final plan produced. The preparation of plans is seen as one component of a greater planning process (CONCOM, 1986).

The key basic requirements of planning are the availability of an adequate information base and the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach to the identification of issues and management alternatives (Schweitzer, 1987). The requirements of the organization

seeking the plan and legislative constraints are two factors that will also determine the plan's scope and detail. The complexity of any particular plan can be related to the scope of its objectives e.g. the extent to which tradeoffs are required between commodity production and resource protection. In the national park context, the choices are usually between visitor use and resource protection (Randolph, 1987). Increased demands from users have brought with them an increased complexity of management issues (CONCOM, 1986).

INITIAL FORMULATION OF PLANS

Most Australian park services adopt a project team approach to the initial formulation of plans. Team membership is usually drawn from within the service and generally includes a regional representative. One major perceived advantage of regional involvement in the early stages of planning is that it increases local ownership of the final product. In N.S.W., Qld and S.A. the planning process is fully decentralized and responsibility for plan production rests with district managers. In Victoria the process commences in the districts but is completed by centralized staff. The N.T. has not adopted a team approach although they intend to do so in the future. ANPWS seeks representation of both the biological and social sciences in plan formulation. In W.A., project teams are co-ordinated by planning staff with district, regional, and specialist branch membership.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Organisations responsible for the management of public land are becoming increasingly accountable to the public. Public participation in park management planning has become an essential part of the process. It is universally practiced although not a statutory obligation in three states (Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria). Other government agencies or specific interest groups are generally consulted as part of the overall process.

Lipscombe (1987) suggests that the public be consulted at two stages during the preparation of a plan, and on a continuing basis once the plan has been approved. In practice the extent of public consultation is dependent upon the likely extent of public interest. This, in turn, is generally related to the complexity of issues in relation to a particular park. The release of a draft plan (proposed plan in Victoria) for a period of public comment is routine practice in all States except Qld and N.S.W. The N.S.W. Service has more flexibility than most others in its approach to public participation and may not release a plan for comment if issues are clearcut. Post-plan consultation is not widely formalised and is generally perceived as a weakness of the current process. In Western Australia the formulation of management advisory committees partly addresses this problem.

Similar procedures for public involvement have evolved in all States with some variations. ANPWS, CALM, and the Tasmanian and Victorian services generally call for expressions of interest as a routine pre-planning measure. This method is

also employed in other States where it is considered that it is likely to identify groups with specific interests in relation to a park. Subsequent public participation may take the form of workshops (selected participants), circulation of issue statements (N.S.W., and S.A.), comment books (ANPWS), and the circulation of draft documents (all services). It is generally agreed that large public meetings are not a good method of resolving park issues. In order to be productive, meetings need to be representative of the full spectrum of interests. Most methods of public involvement have the disadvantage that specific interests tend to be disproportionately represented relative to the views of the general visiting public. One method of avoiding this situation is to informally survey visitors in the park (Lipscombe, 1987). This method, however, is time consuming and the results are dependent to a large extent upon the personality of the interviewer.

LEVELS OF PLANS

As a means of improving the rate of plan production it has been suggested (CONCOM, 1986) that plans be developed at three levels. The sophistication of the plan would be dependent upon the complexity of management issues and likely public use. The plans would still need to conform with legislative requirements. Such a system would necessitate the classification of parks perhaps using IUCN criteria. The classification system recommended by the IUCN has not been widely adopted in Australia (CONCOM, 1986). The basic plans could undergo a less rigorous approval process depending again upon legislative requirements.

In the N.T. a system of pre-plan documentation has been developed. These documents (area statements) are intended to fill the vacuum pending the approval of a management plan. However because area statements are subject to a similar approval process to that for a management plan, their rate of production has also been slow. In W.A. interim management guidelines are prepared pending the development of a full plan. Other states have similar planning documents designed to satisfy legislative constraints on management. In Queensland management guidelines may be prepared as an alternative to a full management plan.

CONTENTS OF PLANS

In most States the format of plans is not fixed and refinements continue to be made. The format of plans tends to evolve in response to changed circumstances or to the philosophy of the co-ordinating planner. In N.S.W. and S.A. plans follow a fixed format designed to ensure that all nominated areas of management are addressed.

Management plans in most States contain:

- an introduction;
- resource description;
- statement of values (policies) and objectives;
- zoning proposals; and
- management prescriptions.

The descriptive part of the plan serves to validate the objects of management and give the context in which the prescriptions can be applied (Lipsombe, 1987). Most services include only information which has direct management implications. In Victoria a separate resources inventory is released preparatory to the prescriptive management plan. The general thinking is that a comprehensive information base distracts the reader from management prescriptions. The Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS) may delete the information base altogether from future plan revisions.

The prescriptive section of plans may be conceptual or specific depending largely on the requirement of the commissioning authority. Prescriptions that are overly specific can limit management discretion. Specific issues such as fire management are often addressed in subsequent action plans. Management plans generally have a budgetary function only to the extent that they determine capital works priorities for a given park. The influence of plans upon capital works scheduling is probably greatest in N.S.W.

The importance placed upon the visual presentation of a plan depends largely on whether the plan is intended for use solely as a management tool, or whether it also serves a public relations function. In any event, plan prescriptions should be concise and readily accessible. Maps are the most commonly used graphic aid. Only in Victoria are photographs occasionally employed, along with two colour line drawings. Some use is being made of matrices to display alternative strategies and highlight potential use conflicts.

PLAN PRODUCTION

Most park services are experiencing difficulty in producing plans rapidly enough to satisfy the needs of management. Appendix 2 gives an approximate guide to the numbers of parks for which plans have been approved or drafted.

All CONCOM land management agencies are either unable or unprepared to commit sufficient resources for the completion of plans for all reserves even in cases where it is a legislative requirement (CONCOM, 1986). The CONCOM Working Group on Management of National Parks (1986) has identified a number of possible reasons for the planning backlog. These include:

- over-emphasis on accumulation of resource information;
- insufficient priority given to plan preparation;
- a reluctance to "close off" future options; and
- lack of a planning perspective amongst senior agency managers.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Planning which does not shape the pattern of management is a waste of time and money (Lipscombe, 1987). In order to achieve implementation it is important that the park managers and users are generally committed to the objectives of the plan. This commitment will come from a sense of ownership developed during the planning process. The long term value of a plan will be measured by its ability to provide guidance to future managers. A plan is often the most enduring reference upon which continuing park management relies (Speirs, 1985). In order that a plan remain relevant there should be a willingness on the part of the planners to facilitate amendments as the need arises.

The monitoring of measurable objectives in a plan is not widely practiced (Lipscombe, 1987). This is a critical step which should determine the future revision of a particular plan and the general relevance of all plans. Rational evaluation of a plan pre-supposes measurable objectives and the availability of field data.

POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR CALM

Whilst CALM park management planning practice is generally progressive, as evidenced by this brief review, improvements may be achieved by considering the following options:

- streamlining of the public participation process or tailoring the process to suit individual circumstances;
- adoption of CONCOM recommendations concerning three levels of plans;
- adoption of stricter guidelines in relation to plan format; and
- development of mechanisms for the evaluation of plans in co-operation with park management.

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APPENDIX 1

List of standard questions concerning management planning put to representatives of park services.

Q.1 Do you use a project team approach to management plan preparation, and to what extent is the process decentralized?

Q.2 At what stages in the process do you seek public participation?

- (a) plan objectives
- (b) draft plan
- (c) post plan

Q.3 What procedures are followed in the public participation process?

- (a) calls for expressions of interest
- (b) questionnaires/issue statements
- (c) public meetings
- (d) workshops
- (e) circulation of documents
- (f) other

Q.4 Are your plans structured to a fixed format?

Q.5 Is the information base included?

- (a) in draft only
- (b) in both draft and final plan

Q.6 Are graphics commonly used?

- (a) maps
- (b) line drawings
- (c) photographs

Q.7 How many plans have been produced relative to total number envisaged?

- (a) No. of national parks/reserves
- (b) No. draft plans
- (c) No. approved plans

Q.8 Do you have a formal mechanism for the monitoring of plan implementation?

APPENDIX 2

Approximate status of plan production for surveyed park services as at July 1988.

PARK SERVICE	NO. OF NATIONAL PARKS	NO. OF NATIONAL PARK PLANS APPROVED (A) OR DRAFTED (D)	NO. OF OTHER RESERVES	NO. OF PLANS PREPARED FOR OTHER RESERVES
A.N.P.W.S.	9	4 A		
Conservation Commission N.T.	65	3 D 4 A		
N.S.W. National Parks & Wildlife	66	12 D 18 A		
S.A. National Parks & Wildlife	223 (Includes other reserves)	60 D 60 A		
Tasmanian Nat. Parks & Wildlife	Approx 200 (includes other reserves)	15 D 15 A		
Victoria Conservation Forests & Lands	33	4 D 2 A	61	3 D 7 A
W.A. Conservation & Land Management	58	4 D 2 A	Approx. 1000	1 D 8 A
Qld. Dept. of Environmental & Conservation	Preparation of management plans not formalized			

NOTE: Direct comparisons cannot be made between States because of differences in the system of reservation and the responsibilities of respective agencies