

Developing Priorities for the Use of Scarce Resources

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INTRODUCTION

Resources were regarded as consisting essentially of personnel and financial allocations, with the latter governing the availability of equipment and access to islands. The workshop accepted, as a basis for discussion, that:

- 1) Islands are of crucial importance for nature conservation;
- 2) Resource requirements are high, particularly because of the costs of access to and surveillance of islands using boats and aircraft, and the correspondingly high costs associated with any resident staff and operational bases;
- 3) Resources are inadequate to carry out the range of activities on islands which would be desirable, or even essential, for nature conservation purposes, and are likely to remain so;
- 4) It is therefore necessary to develop priorities for the use of those scarce resources.

The situation is also changing rapidly, for example in terms of increasing visitation to islands by people with more leisure time and boats, an increasing focus on islands by tourism and extractive industries, and changing ownership of some islands.

The workshop then addressed its topic under four headings as follows.

Priorities Between The Mainland And Islands

It was recognised that while nature conservation problems and responsibilities on islands are significant, so are those on the mainland. It is therefore impossible to consider islands entirely separately from the remainder of the nature conservation estate. The roles of government agencies and the political process in ultimately setting priorities for the allocation of resources were noted.

The proposition was put that nature conservation authorities are aware of the importance of islands and

their resource allocation to islands has been reasonable, with some notable exceptions, in relation to known problems and threats and the total resources available. Responses to this varied. In some cases the statement was considered accurate, even to the extent that in New Zealand there has been criticism that too little attention is being paid to mainland problems. On the other hand it was pointed out that in other places islands have been totally ignored, or almost so. A "rule of thumb" that a set percentage of resources be allocated to islands was suggested, but the figure would have to vary according to the circumstances of each nature conservation agency.

Priorities Between One Island And Another

The workshop then turned to priorities between one island and another, although much of the discussion was equally pertinent to the issue of priorities between the mainland and islands. It was noted that resource allocation has varied widely between islands, from very high in a few instances (eg. several New Zealand examples, Lord Howe Island, Christmas Island) to nil in many cases.

Reference was made to Western Australia where priorities for management have been developed using stated criteria, resulting in the most critical islands, out of a total of 3 400, being identified (Burbidge, this publication). Those criteria were based on mammals in the critical weight range, endemic species, important seabirds, seals, turtles, current or impending disturbance, need for rehabilitation (including eradication of exotic plants and animals), and potential for the reintroduction or introduction of endangered species. There was some discussion of the apparent emphasis on vertebrates in these criteria. This reflects the fact that comparable information on other biota is generally lacking and it was also said that many vertebrates, because of their appeal to people, can help attract public support for island conservation priorities.

It was generally agreed that agencies with responsibility for nature conservation on islands

should identify priorities based on a systematic examination of available information and using criteria relevant to their own regions and circumstances. Some factors other than those used for Western Australia which might need to be taken into account are island size, access, political and socio-economic factors (eg. relating to the tourism, fishing and the oil and mining industries), proximity to population centres, and the traditional and/or legal rights of island residents, owners and visitors. It was also noted that a priority-setting process of this type might be more applicable to relatively similar continental islands, the values of which are more likely to be replicated, than to oceanic islands, each of which is likely to be of very high value. Priorities should remain flexible, as they may need to be changed as more information becomes available.

In summary it was noted that the greater problem is the total allocation of resources for nature conservation, rather than allocations between the mainland and islands or between one island and another. It was also suggested that each agency with responsibility for nature conservation on islands should establish a specialist islands unit, recognising that islands present different problems to the mainland and that they require significant resource allocation. One task of such units would be to develop and review priorities.

What Purposes Should Resources Be Used For?

The purposes for which resources could be used were listed as:

- survey/inventory of island resources;
- research;
- management planning;
- management (including the options of no intervention, minimal intervention and active manipulation);
- monitoring;
- surveillance and enforcement;
- public education, information and interpretation;
- lobbying for public, agency and political support for increased resources.

Some emphasis was put on the need for priority to be given to the allocation of resources to management and monitoring, particularly for those islands where good inventory and research information is already available. However the workshop took the view that

there is no universal answer to this question, as circumstances vary widely from one case to another. There was recognition of the need for an integrated approach to island nature conservation responsibilities, with all of the listed activities being carried out simultaneously to the greatest extent practicable. Opportunistic visits to islands, for example with defence force or lighthouse maintenance vessels, often assist in the carrying out of these activities at relatively little cost.

Several participants pointed out that public demands and expectations will have a significant influence on the use to which resources are put. This is likely to be particularly evident in relation to recreational and interpretive needs. The view was put that most resources in the future will be allocated to management of environments which have been, are being or are about to be used or disturbed by human activity. The need for planning, for example to avoid the mistakes made on many islands, was also emphasised.

Most importantly, it was noted that there needs to be an ongoing commitment to the provision of resources for management.

How Do We Get Increased Resources?

The workshop briefly discussed some means of increasing the resources available for island work, noting that islands have to compete with other demands on limited resources. As well as the usual means of educating and informing the general public about the values and importance of islands so that there is community support for their conservation, and the lobbying of government agencies and politicians, some time was spent discussing:

- the use of volunteers, honorary wardens or wildlife officers, amateur naturalists and lighthouse-keepers, with proper direction;
- the valuable information which can be obtained from Aborigines where they inhabit or visit islands;
- the need to make more use of corporate and private sources of funds.

Clearly there is a need for increased resources to be allocated to nature conservation on islands, and consequently there is a need to put more effort into achieving that objective.

REFERENCE

Burbidge, A.A. This publication.