

Performance assessment policy:

Guidelines for assessing the management of conservation reserves, forest management plans and biodiversity in Western Australia



September 2012



Conservation Commission
of Western Australia



Preface

This document provides policy information on the Conservation Commission's performance assessment responsibility. Conservation Commission performance assessments are undertaken primarily to fulfil the functions described in section 19(1)(g) of the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*. That is to "assess and audit the performance of the Department and the Forest Products Commission in carrying out and complying with the management plans".

Performance assessments will also help inform the Conservation Commission's policy development function and its responsibility to advise the Minister on conservation and management of biodiversity components throughout the state. It should also be noted that this function is one that has multiple objectives including that of improving transparency so that public trust in the management of the conservation reserve system is improved. This document is made available to better inform the public of the performance assessment process and objectives.

More information on the functions of the Conservation Commission can be found at www.conservation.wa.gov.au.

This policy will be subject to periodic review.

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Introduction

Assessment and audit functions (performance assessment – PA) are a well-established part of sound management systems and are recognised as an essential part of environmental management systems. The results of performance assessments serve many uses including:

- promoting adaptive management
- improving management planning
- promoting accountability and public support for management actions.

It is likely that the uses of performance assessment will vary across the range of parties directly involved or otherwise interested in the management of lands vested in the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission regards its performance assessment function as much more than a compliance tool. The Conservation Commission believes that the greatest value of performance assessments is that they will:

- assist land managers in their work
- improve management planning practice and management outcomes
- help inform policy decisions that will benefit the environmental management of the lands vested in the Conservation Commission.

The overall premise of the performance assessment process should be to find facts and not faults; and to help and not hinder. This policy will be implemented by the staff servicing the Conservation Commission.

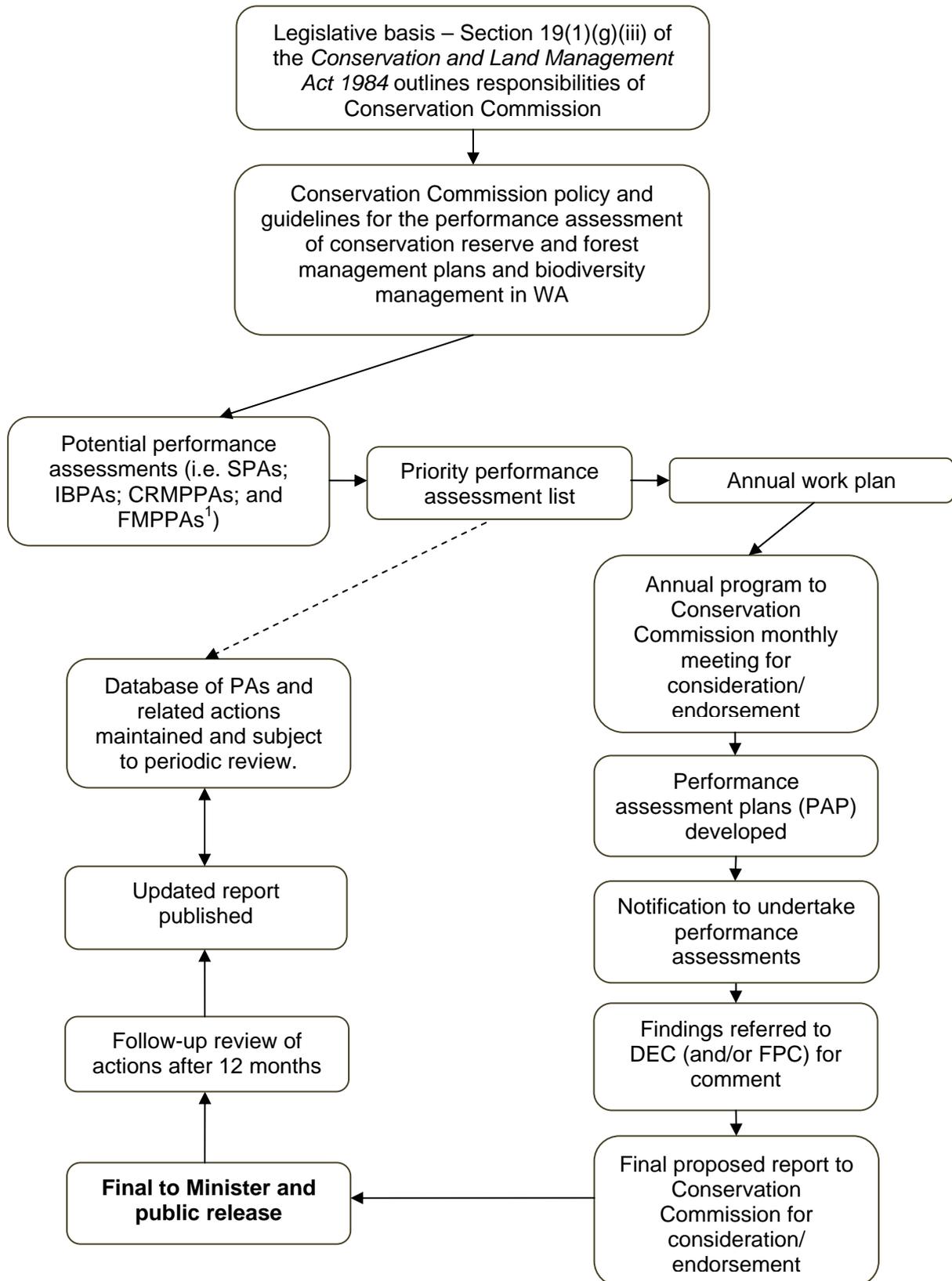
Objective

This policy and associated guidelines provide a detailed description of:

- the rationale and framework for performance assessments to be undertaken as part of the Conservation Commission's statutory functions as described in section 19 of the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act)
- the types of performance assessments that will be implemented under this framework
- the approaches to be taken in implementing and reporting on such assessments.

The policy has been prepared to guide Conservation Commission staff, and for the information of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the Forest Products Commission (FPC). Both DEC and FPC will be subject to performance assessments and so will be responsible for providing the Conservation Commission access to data, records and other information as necessary. The policy will also be distributed to key stakeholders for their information and be published via the Conservation Commission's website for any other interested members of the public. An overview of the performance assessment process described in detail in this document is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Flow of performance assessment process



¹ status performance assessments (SPAs); issue-based performance assessments (IBPAs); conservation reserve management plan performance assessments (CRMPPAs); and forest management plan performance assessments (FMPPAs)

Background

Section 19(1)(g) of the CALM Act establishes that it is the function of the Conservation Commission of Western Australia:

“in relation to management plans for land vested in or under the care, control and management of the Conservation Commission, whether solely or jointly with an associated body —

- (i) to develop guidelines for monitoring; and
 - (ii) to set performance criteria for evaluating; and
 - (iii) to conduct periodic assessments of,
- the implementation of the management plans by those responsible for implementing them, including the CEO and, if the land is State forest or a timber reserve, the Forest Products Commission”.

This policy aims to satisfy the first of these related functions. The second—“to set performance criteria for evaluating”—will be provided by the development of guidelines for setting key performance indicators (KPIs) in management plans. The third function will be satisfied by conducting performance assessments.

Purpose of performance assessments

The overarching purpose of the CALM Act, as stated in its long title, is to make “better provision for the use, protection and management of certain public lands and waters and the flora and fauna thereof”. Within this overarching purpose, section 56(1)(c) & (d) of the Act describes required objectives for conservation reserves:

- national parks and conservation parks: “to fulfil so much of the demand for recreation by members of the public as is consistent with the proper maintenance and restoration of the natural environment, the protection of indigenous flora and fauna and the preservation of any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest”
- nature reserves: “to maintain and restore the natural environment, and to protect, care for, and promote the study of, indigenous flora and fauna, and to preserve any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest”.

In respect of management objectives for indigenous State forests and timber reserves, the Act requires that management plans are designed to achieve the purpose, or combination of purposes, described under section 55(1a). These being: conservation; recreation; timber production on a sustained yield basis; water catchment protection; and other purposes being a purpose prescribed by the Conservation and Land Management Regulations (2002). DEC also has other functional responsibilities under section 33 of the Act which may not be directly related to lands vested in the Conservation Commission. For example, DEC’s role in flora and fauna conservation throughout the state.

In the *Forest management plan 2004–2013*, all areas of indigenous State forest and timber reserves within the Swan, South West and Warren regions—other than those identified to be reclassified as conservation reserve—are reserved for the purposes of conservation, recreation, timber production on a sustained yield basis, water catchment protection and other purposes being a purpose prescribed by the regulations. The only additional reservation purposes which are prescribed in regulations for State forest and timber reserves relate to water storage.

The Conservation Commission performance assessments provide a systematic, documented, periodic and objective process that will support the overarching purpose of the Act and other relevant activities provided for under the Act, through:

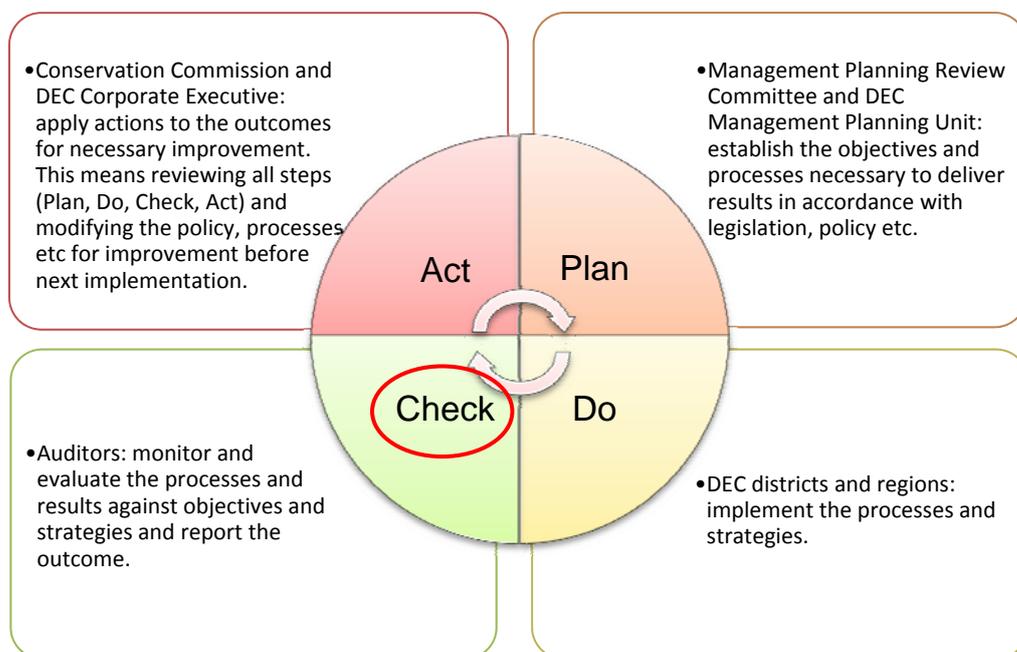
- promoting good environmental management

- assessing compliance with relevant statutory and internal requirements
- facilitating management control of environmental practices
- raising staff awareness and enhancing the commitment to sound environmental management
- generating public understanding and support for good management
- exploring opportunities for improved management strategies and actions
- establishing performance baselines to enable long-term monitoring and demonstration of improvement.

In this policy the term ‘performance assessment’ is used broadly to encompass the actions described in the functions above (i.e. monitor, assess and audit) and other terms commonly used in this context such as evaluation and review.

The performance assessment process forms one part of an overall process of continuous improvement in management planning. This process can be summarised with the aid of the following figure, which illustrates a continuous improvement cycle for the development of conservation reserve management plans.

Figure 2 A continuous improvement cycle in management planning and implementation



Performance assessment criteria

The performance assessment criteria will be determined by the Conservation Commission and can be anything related to the lands vested in the Conservation Commission. The assessment criteria will normally be associated with a documented procedure, system or plan. For instance the assessment of the implementation of a reserve management plan or an individual management system used to implement strategies in a range of management plans or activities.

Performance assessment methodology

The performance assessment process will seek to find objective evidence to determine the standards of implementation. Objective evidence will be derived from the following areas:

- records
- documents
- interviews
- observations.

Where possible, the assessment team will endeavour to verify documents and records with observations and interviews, and vice versa.

This detailed information will be drawn from one or a combination of the following sources:

- details gathered through the performance assessment on site
- details gathered prior to the site assessment from a preliminary district-based self-assessment questionnaire of the implementation of the plan's strategies (for older plans)
- case studies focused on themes derived from a trend analysis of the self-assessment questionnaire (for older plans)
- details compiled over the tenure of the plan from the KPI reporting requirements (for the more recent plans that have KPIs).

Performance assessment framework

It is important to have a consistent approach to the performance assessment of management. This guideline provides a framework that can be applied to the assessment of management plans and other reserve management issues that will ensure the same elements related to management are considered and reported on as appropriate for each assessment undertaken.

Performance assessment requires a broad suite of tools to ensure that all stages of the management cycle are assessed. Ideally, systems for performance assessment for conservation reserves will consider each of the framework elements outlined below. The framework follows that developed by the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) for evaluating effectiveness of management of conservation reserves (and which is equally applicable to State forests and timber reserves) which identifies six stages (framework elements) of the management cycle for assessment:

- **Context** – is knowledge adequate for sound decision making?
- **Planning** – is the plan/policy adequate?
- **Inputs** – were inputs applied as required?
- **Management systems** – are management systems adequate?
- **Outputs** – what were the results?
- **Outcomes** – what were the achievements?

In preparing and structuring its performance assessment reports, the Conservation Commission will have regard to the WCPA framework. Changes to the management planning process have necessitated changes in the manner in which conservation reserves are assessed. This modified approach is outlined in [Appendix 4 – Parks of the Albany Parks – pilot study](#).

Performance assessment details can be further documented in the final report as either a 'Finding' or a 'Key finding'. Where a 'Key finding' has been identified it will be accompanied by a management response that is developed following provision of the draft to DEC and consideration of the response by the Conservation Commission.

Prioritising assessments

The Conservation Commission will define and maintain a list of potentially assessable performance assessments in order to systematically undertake its duties. This list is categorised by assessment type:

- status performance assessments (SPAs)
- issue-based performance assessments (IBPAs)
- conservation reserve management plan performance assessments (CRMPPAs)
- forest management plan performance assessments (FMPPAs).

The allocation of resources to each of these categories of performance assessment will be determined annually.

From this list a performance assessment program will be developed for subsequent endorsement by the Conservation Commission. The development of priorities for inclusion on the performance assessment program will be guided by the following criteria:

Status performance assessments:

- geographic regions or management themes of significance identified by the Conservation Commission or identified within key strategic documents (e.g. State of the Environment reports, proposed Biodiversity Conservation Strategy)
- matters of significance requested for assessment by the Minister or DEC
- from those identified above a prioritisation based on the significance, threats and vulnerability of the region or theme to be assessed including consideration of the level of community interest. Coverage to be determined within the constraints of the Commission's assessment capacity, or as required with the provision of additional resources.

Issue-based performance assessments:

- matters of significance and of common importance with a regional plan or a number of individual reserve management plans identified by the Conservation Commission or identified within key strategic documents (e.g. proposed Biodiversity Conservation Strategy)
- matters of significance requested for assessment by the Minister or DEC
- from those identified above a prioritisation based on the significance, threats and vulnerability of issue to be assessed including consideration of the level of community interest. Coverage to be determined within the constraints of the Commission's assessment capacity, or as required with the provision of additional resources.

Conservation reserve management plan performance assessments:

- those at their mid-term review stage or prior to their revision after ten years
- management plans that specify timing of Commission assessments that differ from that above
- reserves that are the subject of contention or significant community interest
- matters of significance requested for assessment by the Minister or DEC
- significantly changed circumstances relating to the management of the reserve such that it is likely to require revision of the management plan
- from those identified above a prioritisation based on significance, threats and vulnerability of the reserve to be assessed including consideration of the level of community interest. Coverage to be determined within the constraints of the Commission's assessment capacity or as required with the provision of additional resources.

Forest management plan performance assessments:

- in accordance with timing requirements as specified in the current FMP
- significantly changed circumstances relating to aspects of management guided by the FMP such that it is likely to require revision
- matters of significance requested for assessment by the Minister, DEC or FPC
- from those identified above a prioritisation based on the significance, threats and vulnerability of issue to be assessed including consideration of the level of community interest. Coverage to be determined within the constraints of the Commission's assessment capacity, or as required with the provision of additional resources. It will also be necessary to coordinate annual assessment plans with DEC and FPC in relation to FMPPAs as is required in the FMP.

Performance assessment plans

For each assessment a performance assessment plan (PAP) will be developed to guide the conduct of the assessment. Although primarily for use by those undertaking the assessment it will also contain any necessary information for those subject to the assessment. The PAP needs to be flexible in order to permit changes in emphasis based on information gathered during the assessment, and to permit effective use of resources.

The PAP will identify objectives:

- scope
- criteria
- compliance expectations
- details of how the assessment will be conducted
- the process for correcting any matters requiring urgent attention to avoid ongoing environmental harm identified in the course of the assessment
- how unresolved issues will be managed
- how the assessment will be reported and finalised.

The PAP will be provided to DEC and FPC at least 40 working days before the date assessment will commence. This will allow them to make necessary arrangements, including the provision of data. A memorandum of understanding between the Conservation Commission and DEC and FPC will allow ready and timely access to all information sources necessary for the Conservation Commission to undertake performance assessments. This memorandum of understanding will detail required response timelines for the provision of information. It will also identify any necessary restrictions on the Commission's use of the information that may arise due to commercial or other contractual obligations.

Performance assessment reports

For each assessment a report will be produced in the format shown in Appendix 3.

The Director of the Conservation Commission Service Unit will consider and endorse draft reports which will then be provided to the DEC Director General (and/or the FPC General Manager as necessary) for comment with a response required within 40 working days. Performance assessment details will normally be documented in the final report as either a 'Finding' or a 'Key finding'. Where a 'Finding' or 'Key finding' has been identified a management response will be requested that is developed following provision of the draft to DEC or FPC. This response is expected to provide comment on matters that will allow clarification or corrections of matters of fact and indications of future management options to resolve identified issues.

The final assessment report as amended to correct any errors of fact identified by DEC or the FPC following comment will be presented to the Conservation Commission for endorsement

before forwarding to Minister for Environment and public release. The final assessment report will also be forwarded to the Director General of DEC (and the General Manager of FPC as necessary).

Summaries of assessments undertaken in the course of the financial year will be noted in the Conservation Commission's annual report. As appropriate, information gathered in the course of assessments will be included in other public reporting such as State of the Environment reports.

Performance assessment responses and review

Performance assessment recommendations will generally identify the need for a response or action to be taken by those subject to assessment (that is, DEC or FPC) and in some instances from the Conservation Commission itself (for example, in the case of management plan revisions that may be recommended). The performance assessment report will specify indicative time frames for the provision of responses and expectations of completion timelines for any required actions.

The review of progress on recommendations will normally be undertaken 12 months after the completion of the performance assessment report or at a time that allows DEC or FPC to implement change. Performance assessment reviews will be published on the Conservation Commission website once complete.

Appendix 1 – Examples of indicators to support prioritisation of performance assessments

Risk category	Description	Examples of indicators
Biological significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> biological values environmental services uniqueness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listing on relevant international, national or state registers (e.g. RAMSAR, EPBC Act) presence of listed species (endangered etc) strategically important at region, state or national level as representative, unique, wildlife refuge area etc importance identified in the Biodiversity Audit of WA.
Social significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cultural economic aesthetic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> visibility, proximity to population centre local profile and 'ownership' levels of visitation (local, state, national and international) importance as a clean water production catchment.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inappropriate general resource policy external threats (e.g. pollution) internal impacts (e.g. ferals, visitors) resource extraction (logging/mining) extent and nature of use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> biological or social values threatened by salinity, dieback, wildfire or inappropriate fire regimes, climate change, feral animals, weeds, proposals for mining, urban or infrastructure development as documented in the Biodiversity Audit of WA.
Vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> legal status boundary demarcation fragility susceptibility and resilience to environmental impacts (e.g. natural disasters, climate change) current resource condition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> less secure land category ecosystem of poor resilience existing ecosystem in poor condition multiple/cumulative threats as documented in the Biodiversity Audit of WA identified within the proposed Biodiversity Conservation Strategy inadequate management resources.

Risk-assessment systems will often quantify risk using a process of scoring 'likelihood x consequence' to prioritise areas where action to respond to the risk is required. Because of the range of performance assessments to be undertaken and the complexity of indicators to be considered in determining priorities, a scoring system is not practicable. In this instance a qualitative judgement will be made by Conservation Commission audit staff based on the information gathered on the example indicators above and others as deemed relevant.

Appendix 2 – Performance assessment operational guidelines and performance assessment plan (PAP)

Assessment implementation

Responsibilities

The leader for all performance assessments will be either the Audit Manager or the Environmental Auditor. Other Commission staff, Commission members or externally engaged persons with suitable qualifications may participate in assessments. Details of those participating in an assessment will be included in the PAP.

Timing

Indicative timing of the conduct of the performance assessment will be defined in the PAP. It may be influenced by such factors as seasonal influences on key issues to be assessed, the availability of management staff, or accessibility of areas to be assessed.

Process

The process to be used in the conduct of the assessment will be defined in the PAP.

Expected data sources include:

- self-assessment questionnaire
- file records
- budget reports
- aerial or satellite images
- externally generated reports
- case studies
- interviews with DEC, FPC and/or stakeholders
- field inspections.

It is anticipated that for CRMPPAs an implementation progress report will be sought from the Regional Manager responsible prior to assessment. For SPAs and IBPAs detailed document review and analysis may be required. Copies of relevant records will be taken and photographic records will be made to support findings or provide context. For field visits maps will be generated to record the location of any specific observations or findings.

Identifying external stakeholders

During the PAP development process, the Conservation Commission will identify stakeholders external to the agency being assessed (i.e. DEC or FPC) that may be interviewed in the course of the assessment. This may include members of advisory committees and the local community, adjoining property holders, local Aboriginal groups, industry representatives (e.g. tourism, timber), local government and other relevant agency representatives.

Assessment tools

As there will be a diverse mix of data used for assessments, a variety of assessment tools will be necessary to help make judgements about the level of performance. Thus it is anticipated that both quantitative and qualitative judgement will be made. As there may be little or highly variable monitoring data available it will be necessary to look for multiple sources of information in order to generate a level of confidence in findings. Older style management plans, policies or guidelines may lack clear or priority performance measures where quantitative assessment may not be feasible. In these instances it may only be practicable to report on performance based on inputs, management systems and outputs against specific strategies or actions where these are detailed in the management plan or policy. For CRMPPA a trend analysis of information gained through the self-assessment questionnaire process will guide the focus of case studies.

Indicative information sources for performance assessments

Element	Information sources
Context	Documentation review (internal, national and international) Seek views of key stakeholders (e.g. advisory committee)
Planning	Review of management plan or other planning documentation
Inputs	Review district/regional budgets, staff skills and numbers, annual work plans and office records. Interviews with staff Self-assessment questionnaire Case studies
Management systems	Assessment of management processes, staff structure, staff experience Guidelines in place for management Field observation of implementation standards Self-assessment questionnaire Case studies
Outputs	Field observations Interviews with staff Office records Self-assessment questionnaire Case studies
Outcomes	Results of monitoring or research programs Interviews with staff, experts and stakeholders Field observations Self-assessment questionnaire Case studies

Conservation Commission – Performance assessment plan (PAP) template

Title: Short title description of assessment

Date prepared	Date PAP finalised	PA no.	Assessment type/year/number for the year
Directors/managers responsible	Primary director and managers responsible for assessment target within DEC or FPC.		
Assessor	Conservation Commission auditor or contracted party acting on behalf of the Conservation Commission.		
Assessment criteria	Can be anything related to the lands vested in the Conservation Commission. The assessment criteria will normally be associated with a documented procedure, system or plan. For instance, the assessment of the implementation of a reserve management plan, or an individual management system used to implement strategies in a range of management plans or activities.		
Assessment objective	Provide a systematic, documented, periodic and objective process that will support the overarching purpose and specific objectives of the assessment target.		
Assessment scope	The extent and boundaries of an assessment (full or limited). Typically this would include descriptions of locations, organisational units, activities and processes as well as the time period covered.		
Assessment depth	The level of detail which the assessment will go to (full or limited).		
Assessment method	The performance assessment process will seek to find objective evidence to determine the standards of implementation. Objective evidence will be derived from the following areas: records; documents; interviews; observations. Where possible, the assessment team will endeavour to verify documents and records with a self-assessment questionnaire, a trend analysis of the self-assessment questionnaire, case studies, observations and interviews; and vice versa.		
Background	Summary details of significance, threats, vulnerability of or general issues of the area to be assessed.		
Criteria in detail	For example, more recent plans include Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), while earlier plans lack these, and therefore an assessment of the implementation of the plan's strategies is required.		

Information needs	For example, documents required during the assessment or, in some instances, before the date of the field component – detail as specifically as possible; access to databases or other computer systems; personnel to be available for interview; external stakeholders to be interviewed.
Timing (season) of the PA	Indication of assessment timeframes
Reporting arrangements	As per guidelines unless otherwise required

Appendix 3 – Performance assessment report template

Inside cover	Provides general information about the Commission, its role, and about the assessment process and refers to where other documents such as Commission performance assessment policy and guidelines can be found (i.e. website links).
Introduction	General brief introduction to the assessment and how it was done.
Overview of key findings against performance assessment objectives	Overview of key findings against the overall objectives set for the performance assessment in the PAP. Include the responses to key findings from the managing agency under assessment.
Detailed performance assessment findings	Details of findings and recommendations under each of the assessment framework headings
Appendices	
Assessment process	Timing, how done, areas visited, who was spoken to, what documentation was reviewed, general information gathered etc.
Maps	General location map and others specific to any findings as necessary.
Supporting documentation	Copies of, or links to, relevant reports or documentation that support the findings.
Performance assessment plan	As developed before the assessment.

Appendix 4 – Parks of the Albany Coast – pilot study

The scope of the Albany Parks Performance Assessment pilot study varies from previous Conservation Commission assessments primarily due to the shift in management planning from individual reserve planning to planning for multiple reserves. The methodology for the Albany Parks Pilot Study involved a three-stage process. Firstly, a self-assessment questionnaire was developed by Conservation Commission audit staff through consultation with DEC regional staff. The self assessment was designed to return broad information on the management of reserves across the Albany parks management region and provide the Conservation Commission with areas to focus more detailed case studies. The focus of the questionnaire was on identifying reserve values, threats to those values, and identifying trends.

The second stage of the pilot study involved an analysis of the trends and results from the self-assessment questionnaire. Results from the qualitative analysis questionnaire were tabulated for trend analysis using a Geographic Information System to allow spatial representation of the information gathered. Through this process case studies were identified as: (1) Threatened species – Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve and; (2) Visitor access – West Cape Howe National Park.

The third stage of the pilot study process involved interviews with DEC regional staff, records checking and site visits to the parks to allow for evidence-based reporting against strategies and actions of the relevant management plans. A general discussion of the process undertaken through this pilot study is provided as an attachment to this report (*Attachment 1– Pilot study process and results*). This attachment also includes the results tables from the questionnaire, plus associated maps which depict the questionnaire responses. A copy of the questionnaire form is also included.

The main report presents the general values of (and threats to) the Albany parks reserves, with a more detailed analysis of selected themes through the case studies. Details and results of management implementation are included where these were available with an emphasis on evidence-based reporting. Where a response from the managing agency is required, a finding has been included in the relevant section of the report.

A copy of the [Albany Parks Performance Assessment](#), the pilot study, can be found on the Conservation Commission's website (www.conservation.wa.gov.au) by navigating to the 'Performance Assessments' section. This methodology has also been applied to the Parks of the Perth Hills Performance Assessment scheduled for publication in 2012.