

Management planning for national parks, conservation parks and nature reserves in Western Australia: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Report prepared for the Conservation Commission of Western Australia

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Summary

Background

This report was prepared for the Conservation Commission of Western Australia. In Western Australia, the WA Department of Environment and Conservation prepares management plans for terrestrial conservation reserves for the Conservation Commission, who is responsible for their preparation and submission to the Minister for the Environment for approval (see *CALM Act 1984 (WA)* for details). This report is part of a broader review of management planning in WA commissioned by the Conservation Commission and undertaken by researchers at the School of Environmental Science, Murdoch University. The objective of this broader review was to:

1. Finalise the development of a framework for producing good quality management plans that relate to a regional planning area, are concise and can be implemented, and where the framework emphasises both the planning process and product.

This is the second of three reports prepared for the Conservation Commission of Western Australia. The first report reviewed management planning and plans in Australia, predominantly using web-accessible material, as well as providing detailed insights into planning practices and products in Queensland, NSW and Victoria obtained through interviews with planning staff in those States. The intention of the first report was to learn from practice elsewhere and provide a platform for the remainder of the review.

This, the second report, analyses in detail the strengths and weaknesses of *current approaches* to management planning, as well as exploring the opportunities and threats likely to be associated with the *changed approach* to management planning initiated late last year (2008) by the Conservation Commission. This changed approach requires plans that: (1) group reserves on a regional basis; (2) are concise; and (3) rely on precise, specific, achievable, realistic, time-related and measurable objectives and actions. The third report provides recommendations regarding management planning for terrestrial parks and reserves in Western Australia into the future.

Approach

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 36 staff from WA DEC from a wide range of areas involved in plan development and implementation. A SWOT analysis was used to describe these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strengths of the current approach to management planning and plans

Having provisions in the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 (WA)* that specify a requirement for management plans and a Conservation Commission that transmits plans to the Minister were noted as strengths of the policy environment. Public engagement was identified as a great strength of the planning process. Another strength was having a centralised planning group with a fairly uniform approach.

Strengths of the plan itself were having all the resource information about an area, plus the rationale supporting the management strategies, available in one document. Including key performance indicators was also noted as a strength.

Weaknesses of the current approach to management planning and plans

Weaknesses were noted as resting on unrealistic expectations regarding what plans were for and could deliver. In terms of the policy environment, comments were made that the *CALM Act 1984 (WA)* was cryptic regarding the management plan objectives, it takes too long for plans to move through the approval process, and processes for amending plans needed to be better developed. Many comments were made about the lack of integration between Government priorities, Departmental policies, management plans and operational planning (issues of vertical integration) and a similar lack of integration between management plans, Parks and Visitor Services planning and Regional Nature Conservation Strategies (issues of horizontal integration).

Comments also centred on issues being left for plans and planners to resolve and how best the Department and the Conservation Commission might deal with 'hard' issues. The difficulties faced by planners were emphasised, with planners expected to do everything: resolve issues, undertake data

analysis, determine visitor management settings, run public relations and stakeholder engagement, and have GIS expertise. The relative inexperience of planners was identified as problematic given the demands of planning. The activity of management planning was noted as not being highly regarded in the Department. Comments were also made about the lack of specific training, and the absence of an explicit planning process and of a project management approach with timeframes and milestones.

Lack of implementation of plans was flagged and linked to the absence of systems for including the strategies from plans in regional and district operational planning, plus lack of resources. The lack of accountability for implementation (or lack thereof) was also noted.

Regarding weaknesses of the plans themselves, a lack of publicly available up-to-date Departmental policy statements was raised. Various comments were made about the contents of management plans. Interest was expressed in plans being focused on key values. A request was made to ensure plans were flexible rather than prescriptive. Plans were critiqued for including too much background information and being an inventory rather than a management document. They were universally regarded as too large. Lastly, the objectives and key performance indicators in plans were noted as not measurable.

Opportunities associated with the changed approach

To changed approach requires plans that: (1) group reserves on a regional basis; (2) are concise; and (3) rely on precise, specific, achievable, realistic, time-related and measurable objectives and actions.

There was widespread support for management plans for groups of reserves. Shorter plans with 'better' writing were also supported, although there was some critique of using the term 'concise'. There was general support for having measurable actions, with limited support for having measurable objectives. Problems associated with being too prescriptive were again raised. Having measurable objectives was noted as important for adaptive management and garnering community support.

For the changed approach to work, staff ownership, better linkage of budgets to management plans and commitment by senior DEC staff were identified as crucial.

Threats associated with the changed approach

Concerns regarding grouping reserves coalesced around loss of community engagement and ownership through these greatly enlarged planning areas. Also of concern was 'getting the groupings right'. Suggestions were made that at least the following be considered, in addition to ecological aspects, when grouping reserves: social, political and economic attributes; shared issues; current DEC management; ensuring regional ownership through consulting with regional staff; and providing criteria and a framework for selecting groupings.

Widespread concerns were raised about having shorter plans (e.g. 30 pages). Part of this concern related to the perceived risk of the public being disgruntled by shorter plans, especially if the background information (which many value) was significantly reduced or left out. The concerns about shorter plans were linked to the requirement for specific and measurable objectives and actions, with comments made about the impossibility of achieving both, particularly for the much larger planning areas created by grouping reserves.

Some of the discussion around the measurable objectives and strategies centred on the need to clearly define these terms. These definitions were suggested as part of a strategic planning framework that would ensure commonality between all the plans being prepared by the Department, and address vertical and horizontal integration issues. Other comments indicated a general scepticism that regional plans could include measurable objectives. The lack of monitoring was highlighted as an issue; the comment was made that there is little point in writing plans with measurable objectives and strategies if the measuring is unlikely to occur.

Conclusions

There is great interest and concern within WA DEC regarding management planning and plan implementation. Although numerous weaknesses were raised, as evidenced above, many good ideas that can help deal with these weaknesses were also suggested by staff. Two stand-out challenges are ensuring ongoing public support for management planning while changes to the process and plans themselves are developed and implemented and re-invigorating support for management planning by staff throughout the Department.

1 Scope of this report

This report is part of a review of management planning in Western Australia commissioned by the Conservation Commission of Western Australia. In this State it is the function of the Conservation Commission to submit proposed management plans for national parks, conservation parks, nature reserves, State forest, timber reserves and other relevant land to the Minister for Environment.¹ The Conservation Commission is responsible for preparing these proposed management plans and reviewing existing management plans,² through the agency of the WA Department of Environment and Conservation (WA DEC). The Marine Parks and Reserves Authority has a similar function for marine reserves.³ Management planning has been a core activity of WA DEC since the Department's inception in 1985.

The objective of the review was to:

Finalise the development of a framework for producing good quality management plans that relate to a regional planning area, are concise and can be implemented, and where the framework emphasises both the planning process and product.

Appendix 1 provides the detailed questions associated with this objective.

This is the second of three reports prepared for the Conservation Commission of Western Australia. The first report reviewed management planning and plans in Australia, predominantly using web-accessible material, as well as providing detailed insights into planning practices and products in Queensland, NSW and Victoria obtained through interviews with planning staff in those States. The intention of the first report was to learn from practice elsewhere and provide a platform for the remainder of the review.

This, the second report, analyses in detail the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches to management planning, as well as exploring the opportunities and threats likely to accompany the Conservation Commission's new requirement for plans that group reserves on a regional basis, are concise and rely on achievable actions. The third report provides recommendations regarding management planning for terrestrial conservation reserves in Western Australia into the future.

2 Methods

This report is based on a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) analysis. Such an approach has been widely used in strategic planning to rapidly access and comprehensively describe a situation or project and help plan for success.

The analysis for this review focused on the strengths and weaknesses of *current approaches* to management planning (both the process and the plans themselves) and the opportunities and threats likely to be associated with the *changed approach* to management planning developed by the Conservation Commission and being rolled out across the Department at the same time this SWOT analysis was underway (July/August 2009). This changed approach, as circulated by the Conservation Commission, is detailed in Appendix 2.

Focus groups were conducted with WA DEC staff from the Mid-West, Warren and Albany Regions, Parks and Visitor Services Division, the Planning Unit, Community and Regional Parks Branch, and Marine Policy and Planning Branch. Marine planners were involved to gain insights from their planning processes. Interviews were conducted with staff from the Nature Conservation Division, Regional Services Division, and Science Division. Interviews were also conducted with staff from the Parks and Visitor Services Division and the Planning Unit. Figures 1 and 2 overview the structure of WA DEC as of October 2008. A total of 36 staff were involved in focus groups and interviews, which were recorded and analysed.

¹ Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 (WA) S19(1)(f)

² Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 (WA) S54(1)(3)

³ Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 (WA) S26B(1)(e)

Executive Team

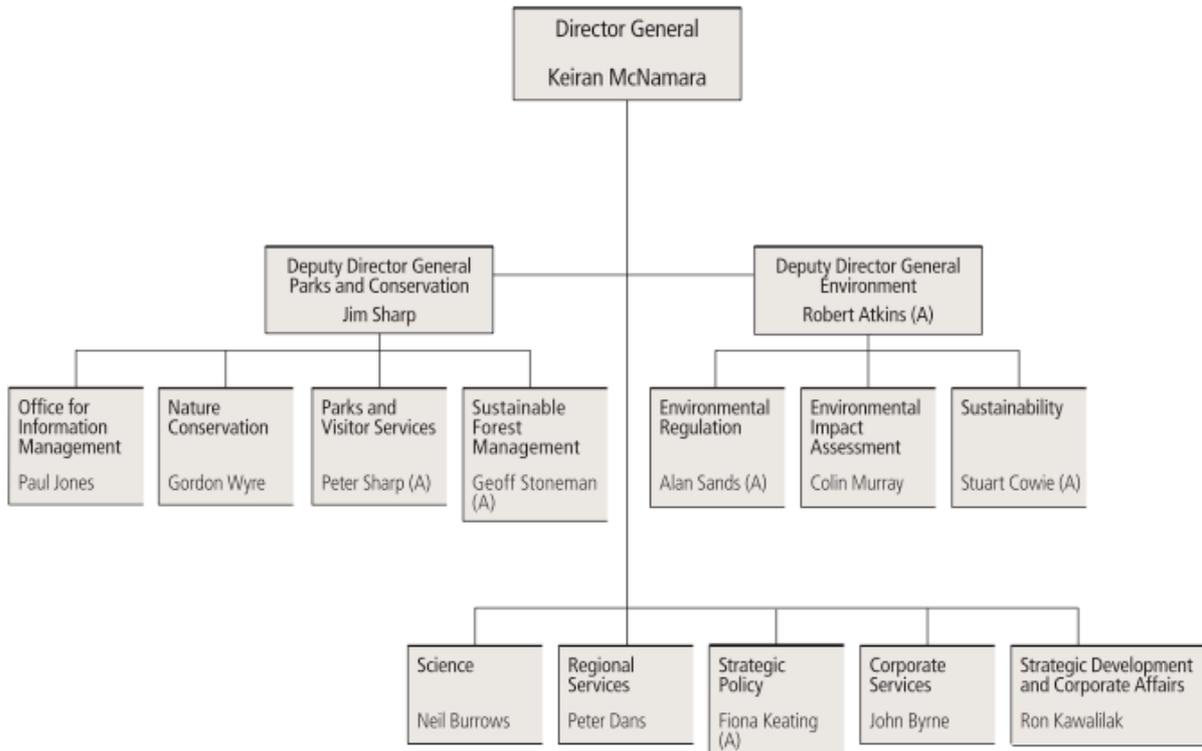


Figure 1. Executive structure of WA DEC (DEC Annual Report 2007-2008)

The same questions (App. 3) were used for the focus groups and interviews. For the opportunities and threats created by the changed approach, staff were referred to the three items in Box 1 (from the changed approach document, App. 2). All staff involved signed an informed consent form that guaranteed their anonymity and ensured that any questions they had about the research were fully answered (App. 4). Staff from the Conservation Commission were interviewed to obtain further background information on the requirements for this review and on the work they were undertaking (concurrently with this review) with WA DEC to modify the content of management plans. These results are not included here, rather they have informed the broader review.



Government of Western Australia
Conservation Commission



Conservation
Commission
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Changed Approach to Management Planning

1. Plans for groups of reserves
2. More concise plans
3. Precise, achievable, time-related and measurable objectives and actions

Box 1. Prompt card used in interviews and focus groups

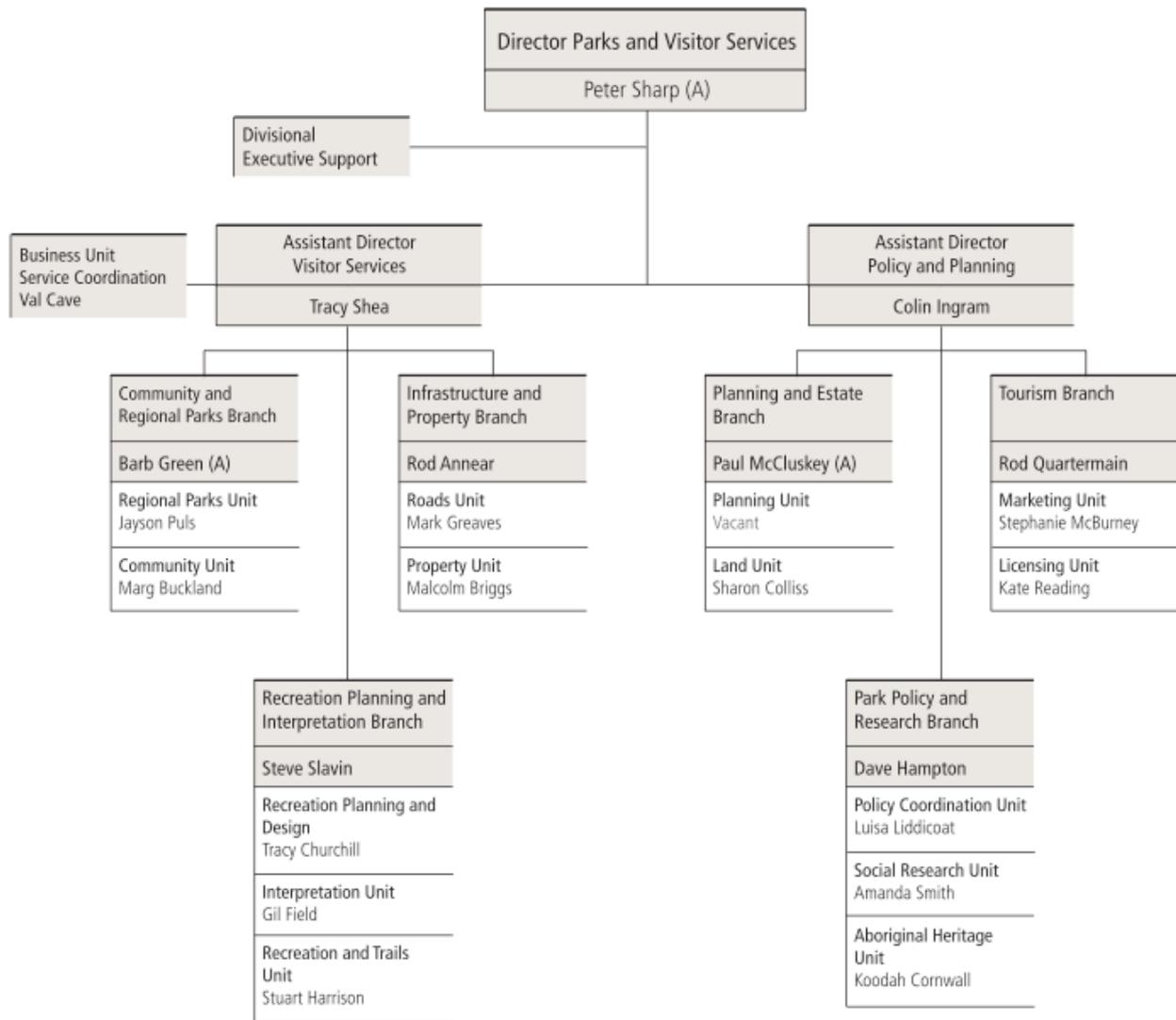


Figure 2. Structure of the Parks and Visitor Services Division (DEC Annual Report 2007-2008) within which most of the terrestrial reserve planning activities take place

Staff to be interviewed or involved in the focus groups were identified by Conservation Commission staff and the A/Manager, Planning Unit, WA DEC. The aim was to involve a cross-section of staff involved or likely to be involved in management planning, in particular those preparing plans, providing specialist input, and responsible for implementing plans. The interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed. NVivo, a qualitative data management and analysis software package, was used to sort the text from the transcribed interviews and focus groups into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

3 Overview of management planning in WA DEC

Draft and final management plans for terrestrial parks and reserves are prepared by planning officers from WA DEC's Planning Unit, located within the Division of Parks and Visitor Services. In preparing a plan these officers establish and coordinate a planning team of other staff from the Department. Regional and/or district staff are generally team members. WA DEC currently has 9 planning officers in the Planning Unit, with 2 of these located in regions (Warren and Mid-West). Two additional planning officers are located in Regional Services, one each in the South Coast and Goldfields Regions.

The process of plan preparation and approval involves the steps summarised in Appendix 5. It is guided more generally by a Departmental planning manual (Department of Environment and

Conservation (2009) *Management Planning Manual Version 3.1*. Department of Environment and Conservation, Kensington, May 2009). In addition, a comprehensive template has been used to guide the content of plans. To-date plans have been up to 300 pages in length and could take up to 5 years to move through the preparation and approvals processes. WA's management plans are regarded nationally and internationally as 'best practice' based on the comprehensiveness of their resource/background information and attention to monitoring.

Management plans are also prepared by the Community and Regional Parks Branch for approval by the Conservation Commission. These plans follow a similar process to that described above, although planning and implementation are more tightly linked because of the co-location of planners and managers within this group. There are 11 regional parks in WA, 7 have plans and planning is about to commence for the remaining 4. The Conservation Commission also has responsibility for the preparation of management plans for State forest and timber reserves, through the Chief Executive Officer of the Department, and in consultation with the Forest Products Commission.⁴

While this review focuses on terrestrial parks and conservation reserves, planning for marine parks is undertaken by the Marine Policy and Planning Branch, with quite different legislative requirements to those for terrestrial parks and reserves.⁵ Before a marine park can be gazetted an indicative draft management plan is required, including zoning. As mentioned in the introduction to this report, management plans for marine reserves are prepared for the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority (another statutory body under the *CALM Act 1984*) for submission to the Minister for the Environment. Approval by this Minister must be accompanied by the concurrence of the Ministers for Fisheries and Mines, before gazettal can proceed. Once approved a budget is allocated for plan implementation (such an allocation does not accompany the approval of management plans for terrestrial reserves).

4 Introduction to results

These results provide an overview of the ideas that were raised in interviews relevant to this review. There has been no selection or analysis of material to emphasise more frequently mentioned ideas. Rather, the intention has been to overview the breadth of views held within WA DEC regarding management planning and plans. Within the broad categories of 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' the results have been coded, organised and are presented in the following sections based on themes (issues) that emerged from the analysis (e.g. 'implementation', 'background information', 'content of plans') (Table 1). For the broad categories of 'opportunities' and 'threats' the results have been organised and are presented according to the three points given in Box 1. Several additional issues that emerged from the analysis are also included within the opportunities and threats sections (e.g. 'managing change') (Table 2).

Before moving into the results, several points warrant mention. The first is that staff in WA DEC strongly identified the need for change in how planning is done. This theme remains evident through much of the results. The following comments are illustrative:

'We're still in the mindset of saying because we've always done it like this and we've got our 30 steps or whatever, this is how we do it. I'm saying...let's shake it a little bit. Let's look at what our statutory requirements are, let's look at what the public really require. I think that even the stakeholder groups, who I said might be offended, I think they've evolved and matured as well, many of them.'

'The fact that we are stopping and looking and asking question and the study is being done is the first major positive. Although the interim has been pretty painful for people. Not knowing what direction they are going in but you can't get around that.'

The second is a set of comments that reflect the breadth of views held about management plans in the Department. They are provided here to give a backdrop and context to the remainder of the results:

'I would much rather have one [a plan] than not.'

⁴ Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 (WA) S54(1)(3)

⁵ Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 (WA) Division 3, S60

Table 1. Overview of the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches to planning

(Emergent) issues of interest	Planning strengths	Plan strengths	Planning weaknesses	Plan weaknesses
Expectations of plan			√	√
Policies and organisational structure				
Statutory features and approval process	√	√	√	√
Departmental policies				√
Policy/planning integration (vertical and horizontal)			√	
Hard issues, change and innovation	√	√	√	
Strategic planning framework			√	
Role of planners/Planning Unit	√		√	√
Organisational structure and culture			√	√
Planning process			√	
Plan content, structure and style				
Content of plans – general		√	√	√
Background information	√	√	√	√
Rationale for management	√	√		
Structure and style of plans		√	√	√
Information availability and management			√	√
Stakeholder engagement				
Community engagement	√		√	
Staff engagement in planning	√		√	
Staff engagement in implementation			√	
Implementation and performance reporting				
Implementation	√	√	√	
Performance effectiveness and reporting		√	√	√
Budget/resources			√	√

√ - Comments made

 Theme evident from three or more parts of the analysis

‘I use those plans a great deal, to pull them off the shelf if I want to know something about, how do we make a decision about something or other concerning Park A, you pull out the plan and can quickly come to grips with the way you’re supposed to be doing it, according to the plan. It’s often the best way, because there’s a whole lot of thinking and analysis went into deriving those plans.’

‘I found it a little bit difficult to answer this one [*the strengths questions*] because we at the moment are so focused on all the negatives. I could not think of anything.’

‘Planning, and having a long-term set of goals and a long-term set of recommendations and action that you are tied to has become, I believe, seen as something that’s not desirable.’

‘Even when we thought we knew where we were going you just didn’t know what the reaction was going to be from the Commission from one meeting to the next. It would just depend if they had time to read the document, who has certain interests in certain areas. So just to have everything out in the open and a fresh start and know exactly where we are going. So if you could start a plan with all of that sorted out it would be great!’

‘Interviewer: In an ideal world what would your management plan be?’

For starters it would not begin until all the issues are resolved...would save a lot of time and stress. The District would have staff available with enough time to meet with you when required. Planning was a priority within the Department. People would say, “ok this much of my time – half a day a week or whatever – would be spent on planning”...start off on the right foot. Not to start off with most of your time sorting out tenure proposals or dealing with local issues that you really shouldn’t be. Also for Regions to have relationships with local Aboriginal people already established so we are not doing it from Perth. The District sorts out all the issues, build up relations and then comes to us. Also, to know who our audience is. If it is the Department then that changes things quite significantly, cuts out a lot of the work because you can assume a certain level of knowledge. To know the direction that we are going with the Conservation Commission.’

Table 2. Overview of the opportunities and threats associated with the changed approach to planning

(Emergent) issues of interest	Opportunities	Threats
Plans for groups of reserves	√	√
More concise plans	√	√
Precise, achievable, time-related and measurable objectives and actions	√	√
Managing change	√	
Budget/resources		√
Reviewing management plan format and content in isolation		√

5 Strengths of the current approach to management planning

The following section summarises the strengths of management plans and the associated planning process, based on the interviews with WA DEC staff. As well as specific issues, general comments were also made about what has been achieved by management plans. For example:

‘We have to be careful though that we don’t run the risk of undervaluing what’s been achieved in those plans.’

5.1 Strengths of management planning

5.1.1 Policies and organisational structure

Statutory features

CALM Act 1984 (WA)

Having an Act (*CALM Act 1984*) that specifies management plans must provide policies and the operations that need to be implemented is one of the best features of planning in Western Australia.

Conservation Commission

It was noted that one of the most important functions of the Conservation Commission is the carriage of management plans to the Minister. Tensions between the Department and the Commission are not necessarily a bad thing in that they 'keep the Department honest'.

Implementing management plans for the Conservation Commission was noted as being only one of a number of tasks undertaken by regional and district staff.

Approvals process

The plans going through a fairly rigorous approval process was also regarded as a strength because it checks on quality and content.

Hard issues, change and innovation

The management planning process was valued for playing a central role in revealing issues, involving stakeholders in decision-making about issues of importance to them, and drawing all the issues and interest groups and people into one process. The following comment illustrates this point:

'They [management plans] provide us with a very good vehicle and it might be the only one that happens in a big way to engage with the local community on a lot of those issues that need to be thrashed out.'

Planning processes were also noted as providing the catalyst for change in dealing with hard issues that may have remained unresolved for years:

'We've had long standing situations and the catalyst has been the planning process to make a change.'

Planning processes can also provide new ideas:

'They can provide new ideas. It might be new things we had never considered before, geo-heritage being some idea that we've explored going through a management plan process, that's a new thing. So we grab these new ideas and pull them into the planning process.'

They are also a place where issues are solved:

'Quite often, some of the aspects that are more solvable in PVS,⁶ terrestrial plans and Regional Parks Unit's plans...you've got the capacity to deal with those and solve them or resolve them. So you do tend to resolve them within the management plan framework.'

Role of planners/Planning Unit

Having a centralised planning group with a fairly uniform/standardised approach was lauded while the potential problems with a decentralised un-coordinated approach were similarly noted:

'If every region was off doing its own management plan you'd end up with a "dog's breakfast".'

'I think in terms of producing a product that is the same quality and with the right level of information keeping everyone up-to-date, on the same page, centralized planning is the best.'

Having an individual within the Planning Unit designated as responsible for each plan, and planning teams, including district staff, were mentioned as strengths. Regional planning officers were also noted as a strength.

'It is very important to have a central planning function because you need that co-ordination, standards etc but you can't get away from having somebody at a regional level being involved in planning processes, driving them. Just because of the interaction that occurs in the regional office...being in tune with issues...There is a greater sense of ownership of the plan that you are doing and more consultation with regional and district staff. So much easier to initiate, continue or expand on issue because you can take [the] opportunity.'

⁶ Parks and Visitor Services

5.1.2 Plan content, structure and style

Background/resource information

Most management plans include comprehensive background information⁷ on the biophysical and socio-cultural values of the park or reserve of interest. The planning process was valued for ensuring that all the research about an area is collected in one place, and managers are forced to read it, as well as providing much needed resource inventory details for operational planning and priority setting. Staff also commented that regional staff and managers need the resource inventories (e.g. threatened species lists) in plans to help them undertake operational planning and set associated priorities:

‘That sense of knowledge of specifics, so they can form their annual works programs, 3-year action plan...how they’re going to bid for limited funding for resources to do those jobs. It helps them set priorities, their works programs and also helps them create strategies in how they’re going to make sure they have that long-term management of those values and the principles and the direction.’

Rationale for management

Most management plans also include the philosophy and rationale underpinning their management strategies. This rationale is useful in helping operational staff understand (and explain to others) the reasons for particular strategies.

5.1.3 Stakeholder engagement

Community engagement

Public consultation and engagement was identified as a great strength of the planning process with comments such as:

‘The fundamental approach to consultation is good.’

‘It is a pretty robust methodology in terms of community involvement and consultation...there is a strong commitment generally to community engagement...good involvement at all levels during the planning process.’

‘The planning teams are good at engaging and involving people...one of the other great strengths is that the planners endeavour to engage with all the appropriate District and Regional staff.’

‘Strengths would be – there is communication taking place between different aspects of the Department and...some of the units responsible for on-ground management.’

Lastly, comments were made about advisory committees. Advisory committees were noted as providing support for the Department over time as well as a forum where competing interests can be aired and the complexity of interactions between interested parties better understood.

Staff engagement in planning

Plans and the planning process bring together people with technical backgrounds, policy backgrounds and operational staff plus expertise from the community. They all get involved at some point in the planning process and this was identified as a great strength of the process.

5.1.4 Implementation and performance reporting

Implementation

Plans are used in regions and districts as the following comment illustrates:

‘I have always made sure that I am in tune with where we are with plans. I always used the plans in the region.’

⁷ Background information meant different things to different people but generally was spoken about as information on the natural and cultural values of an area. For some staff it also included policy background; we’ve tried to separate out the latter and include this type of comment in the following ‘rationale for management’ section.

5.2 Strengths of management plans

5.2.1 Policies and organisational structure

Statutory features

The management of the conservation estate is enhanced by having management plans, as statutory documents, supported by legislation. This was noted as a real strength.

Hard issues, change and innovation

Plans provide an opportunity to introduce new paradigms and information into operations, particularly because planners are able to engage scientists and other people who are at the forefront of their field. Plans create the opportunity to get these new ideas out into the field.

5.2.2 Plan content, structure and style

Content of plans - general

Staff liked having ‘all’ the information they need to manage a park or reserve in one document. They liked having: information on the area’s values; the management direction; a reference document for resource/background information; rationale for management (underpinning the strategies); and the strategies themselves.

‘A lot of people love the information that’s in there, they find it really helpful to have all that information in the document.’

‘Useful for a manager, whether it’s a park manager or a regional manager, to pick up the plan and find the management direction, the major values of that park or reserve. That’s extremely valuable. Because you can have a park manager, ranger comes in, he doesn’t know anything about the place. He just came from the Kimberley or something, and he’s got to quickly come to grips with what it is he’s supposed to be managing. Same with the regional office, new staff coming in or old staff who don’t happen to know a particular park. You’ve got to have something to refer to, to provide some consistency over time in management approach.’

Plans were also valued for providing broad guidance for decision-making:

‘It [the plan] does provide broad guidance to decision making on what we can and can’t do or what we should and should not do.’

Background information

A strength of management plans is them including the outstanding features or values that the Department is managing for. Having these nominated enables managers to determine the key things they need to do over the next 10 years.

Another strength, also identified for the planning process, was all the background information collated and available in management plans:

‘It’s a good collection, it’s a great inventory, it’s an information dump about everything that’s known and opinions.’

‘They are good as reference documents, in lieu of not having anything else, most of the time. That pulls together information about a place – so there’s very often a lot of information about in little nooks and crannies – which is pulled together as part of a plan, summarised and made useful and digestible. Even the number of times that I’ve used the reference list in a management plan to go and get other stuff.’

Background information was also noted as important for supporting the strategies given in the plan:

‘We write management plans for the public as well as district staff so we include a lot of information that’s for a wide audience. I find that background information is important to back up the strategies and the KPIs in the management plan. Without the background information, people may be confused as to what has driven that strategy or KPI.’

Others noted that the background information didn’t need to be in the plans:

‘I think the background information is really a good strength but I’m not convinced that it should be in the plan. I think it needs to be in an appendix. That provides a good focus point for people to get good information about that particular area.’

‘A lot of that background information is public information...Why wouldn’t you put it on the web?’

Including background information was identified as a strength in terms of public engagement, with community ownership linked to having this information in the document. Also working with background information helps planners understand the area they are working on.

Rationale for management

Plans were noted as particularly valuable in their provision of the rationale supporting management objectives and strategies. The following comments are illustrative:

‘The value in those plans, which some of the regional leaders have mentioned, is not necessarily the actions and prescribing the actions, but it’s in the information that was provided in the plan that allows them to make an informed decision.’

‘It [the plan] provides a thorough rationale for recommendations...you will always get people asking why.’

The summary boxes that include the key points were described as a strength of the plans. The boxes were noted as useful for staff new to the park or reserve and also as helping with public accountability and transparency regarding decisions.

Structure and style

Both the structure and language used were noted as strengths:

‘I think the plans are fairly well structured, they’re logical, they’ve got a nice flow to them.’

‘A good balance of background material and strategies, easy to understand the language – user friendly for both the parks and the sections [specialist sections within WA DEC]...follows the best practice ANZECC⁸ model.’

Maps were also noted as a strength with a plea for more photos and moving towards plans being web-based documents.

The usefulness of plans to managers was linked to the plan format, with brochure-style plans, as produced for Carnac Island and Forrestdale Lake, mentioned as stand-out examples.

5.2.3 Implementation and performance reporting

Implementation

Plans are used by managers for a variety of purposes including justifying the actions detailed in plans:

‘Often it [the plan] is used as a justification for doing particular things. So if the community says “why are you doing that?” you can say this is the direction we received through the management plan which the community had involvement with.’

They are also used to help assess new proposals:

‘The plans would be there with a million bloody tabs on them, thumbed over, I’d usually go through 2 or 3 by the time a cover got ripped off. Because you do, there’s always stuff happening that you need to go, ok, well someone wants a boat tour in the park, “well, what does the plan say”?’

And, they can provide the background on issues, such as the recently proposed road through Fitzgerald River National Park:

⁸ Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council

‘The Fitz plan is still very in-date...Having had to refer to it over the last few months, I’ve looked at it, pored over it, read it, it’s been a fantastic document to be able to quickly pick up what’s important and what’s not.’

Another use is as a check on a works program for a particular area. Helping new staff become acquainted with their new region or district (see earlier comment about being new in the Kimberley Region) is another role for plans.

Performance effectiveness and reporting

Including KPIs in plans was noted as a strength, irrespective of whether they were ‘good’ or ‘bad’ KPIs:

‘The modern plans, the area-based management plans have attempted listing KPIs or performance measures, which is an improvement. We didn’t use to do that, in fact we deliberately avoided doing that so as to not be held to account, not paint yourself into a corner. But we’re brave and we do that. Whether or not the KPIs are the right ones or written in the right way is another question, but at least we have them in there.’

Including KPIs was also regarded as a strength because having them in plans provides a formal way of reviewing and analysing management. Also their inclusion has given regions and districts greater ownership of plans and they now take them more seriously. It was commented that planners discuss KPIs with regional staff to make sure they are comfortable with them, part of their normal business and that they’re do-able, achievable and easily measurable.

6 Weaknesses of the current approach to management planning

The following section summarises the weaknesses of management plans and the associated planning process, based on the interviews with WA DEC staff. As well as specific issues, general comments were also made about weaknesses, such as:

‘Management plans – it’s a whole organisational structure and culture sort of issue that needs to be whacked around a bit there.’

6.1 Weaknesses of management planning

6.1.1 Expectations of plans

Plans and the process are accompanied by unclear, too-broad and unrealistic expectations:

‘We are trying to please everyone.’

‘That’s a weakness, is because we have many taskmasters and they all want something a bit different and there’s been this tendency to catch all and plans have become more and more detailed to satisfy those many different users.’

‘The management plan is not the be-all and end-all. It’s a very important document, but it doesn’t drive everything.’

6.1.2 Policies and organisational structure

Statutory features and approval process

CALM Act 1984 (WA)

The *CALM Act 1984* was regarded as unclear and dated:

‘The CALM Act was basically written in the 80s, a major review done in 91 but there is a lot of sections with regards to management plans that are not clear. For example, the consultation with other bodies is not clear, who actually implements and approves the draft or final plan, there’s the differences between the marine plans, reference to policies, newspaper advertising is old media.’

It was also suggested that the Act was cryptic in terms of its management plan objectives:

‘How to do a management plan for a national park, when there’s 7, 6 and a half lines, that’s all we’ve got to tell us what to do. We haven’t got anything in the Act to tell us what recreation is, no wonder we’ve got a [large] recreation policy.’

Conservation Commission

Confusion and uncertainty existed regarding the current process of change associated with management planning in the Department:

‘I think at the moment, because there’s some tension between the Commission wanting to go a certain way and some resistance I guess from some in the Planning Unit. Also, a certain lack of clarity from the Commission about what they do want. I think that’s just added to an already difficult process. I’m not saying to the Commission doesn’t have a role, it certainly does. I think there are some difficulties in the...process itself.’

‘I would just like to see it resolved very quickly so we’re not in a state of...I actually am now asking myself, what’s an objective, what’s an action, what a strategy? I don’t know what is required anymore. Makes it really hard to write plans now, it would be good to have some direction and decision soon.’

Approval process

The length of time taken for plans to move through the middle and upper levels of the Department and the Conservation Commission was discussed:

‘Regional staff, then the plan has to go to branch staff, then divisional staff then it goes to Corporate Executive...Then it goes back and forth from the Conservation Commission to management planning review process. Management planning review committee through draft plan, a number of times, and then the final plan has to go to the full Conservation Commission...where is value added to the plan in any of those stages, by anybody?...plans are fundamentally 90% right by the time the planner’s finished writing it...the process drags on and on and on, because you have to go through this torturous process of everyone ticking the boxes.’

‘It’s basically been 18 months to get it through the approvals process. Yet that time delay is seen as a fault or a deficiency of the Planning Unit and planning officers within that unit. It’s not.’

Amendments to management plans

The Act was noted as cumbersome and lengthy with respect to amending approved management plans, where amendments currently have the same requirements as the plan preparation process.

‘We haven’t adopted an approach that local government, town planning and other planning scenarios [have], they can amend the management plans more frequently. And they have the processes there, because it’s seen as the norm.’

Policy/planning integration

Management plans were identified as a place in the Department where integration occurs:

‘I suppose management plans are a place where PVS and nature conservation strategies come together and there would be decisions made in those management plans about which would have primacy or how they would be integrated. So it would be the place where the silos fall apart or integrate.’

The lack of integration between government policy, Departmental policy, management plans and operations in the field was noted. This covered vertical and horizontal linking.

Vertical integration

Comments regarding vertical linking included:

‘And there’s a total disconnect...rather than going from a management plan, from what our government priority is, Departmental priority is, we’ve got some stuff in the middle that’s not aligned...at all.’

‘It’s about cultural shift...It’s a long haul. I think we’re getting there though, there’s acknowledgement now that we really need to focus, clear hierarchy of government policy, government priorities and things, Departmental corporate plan and priorities. Down to service

priorities, budget statements, should all line up. So there's a clear hierarchy of goals and objectives and things. It's not hard to plug management plans strategies into that sort of framework, across all the reserves.'

'Need to recognise the other layers of planning that we do, that support the original management plan, that allows flexibility. The master plan, policy statements all those sort of things. That's why my view is don't see the management plans as the be-all and end-all. It's just one in a chain of processes that help us manage the land. That's probably my main issue.'

Horizontal integration

Comments were also made about horizontal linking:

'The planning that's happening in the Department is in a very disjointed way. Regional nature conservation strategies and priorities are set quite separately to what [management planning is] doing...there's perhaps some opportunities for linking [with] higher level planning that's happening across the Department a bit better.'

One of the issues with horizontal integration was the Department having three different groups preparing management plans:

'There's an issue about lack of alignment with marine and regional park plans. We've basically got three distinct groups in the Department doing plans differently.'

An alternative view was that different plans are necessary for marine and terrestrial reserves given their different legislative and procedural requirements.

The suggestion was made that if outcomes became a focus across the Department it could provide a way of enhancing integration:

'I don't think we've quite worked out as a Department how we want to tackle outcomes. I think that's part of the terminology and way of thinking in various Divisions that we haven't really grappled with. We're starting to and that's part of the Nat Conservation move more towards outcomes and filtering that down through the regions to the district level...Terminology [has been highlighted] as one of the key things with plans right across the world. If we looked at outcomes that may be a way of unifying planning through the Department.'

Strategic planning framework

The lack of a strategic planning framework was noted. Such a framework would ensure commonality between all the different plans being prepared by the Department:

'If you had the same strategic planning framework adopted as whole of agency, then we could make sure that our terrestrial reserve [plans] fit that agency-wide strategic planning framework and marine can do likewise. So could recovery plans, so could salinity plans, every other plan. As long as we have a common framework to work within. That's one way to get some commonality between those different types of plans.'

A related comment was about the need for the Department to adopt a business framework, with management at all levels linked to the agency's corporate plan and business planning by each unit:

'It's about building a broader strategic framework about how we plan, how we budget, not just seeing planning as a separate thing that you do to satisfy a set of figures. I get the feeling, that's why...even if we write more concise plans, I think they will still fail to become...an actual active, live document that everyone uses in their daily planning. I don't think they ever will be until we [as] an organisation build a business framework.'

Hard issues, change and innovation

Issues were noted as being left for plans whereas the policies may exist to address them *sans* plan.

'I think because the planning process has been so all-encompassing, regions and districts and the planning staff believe that they're going to solve the problems of that whole area through a plan. A lot of things get left – "we'll leave it until we do the plan" or "we can't

put a track there until we've got a plan". We can actually, because policies say that we can have a track without a plan.'

Leaving issues for plans places unrealistic expectations on the plans and planning process:

'We have this mindset that we need to resolve these things in the management plan. That's our throw away line – "these things will be resolved in the management plan". All that does, in my view, is disempower the manager of the estate from undertaking management decisions, making the best decisions at the time...Management plans can't resolve every issue.'

'We have a tendency...to solve all the issues rather than to set the management and decision-making process. So things are being held up because we want to resolve this particular complex issue, and it takes years to resolve and there's lots and lots of players. So that tendency to hold things up rather than...settle a framework to enable a decision to be made when the information's right and people are adequately appraised and involved.'

'In the last few years we [have] spent a lot of time getting involved in policy matters that are triggered by our plans. For instance, fire management, we've spend a load of time working with various people in the Department to clear that up so we can put that in our plans. Wilderness policy, that's been a real issue for some of our planners. Also developing procedures and things like apiary assessment, the management setting stuff. Management arrangements with Aboriginal people, that's all new ground that we've had to cover. Community advisory communities, we're getting caught up in policies and procedures associated with that, because a lot of the consultation that DEC does is done through the management planning process. So we've had to revise policies on community advisory committees and establish committees. So I think that's one of the key risks with this, is that it's meant to reduce the amount of time it takes to produce management plans. I think it's not really had a thorough analysis of the causes.'

The comment was also made that the public consultation process associated with management plans often brought up broader Departmental issues:

'The broader Department needs to take more responsibility for consultation...A lot of the planning process does trigger it, says you need to consult on the planning process, but I think we spend a lot of time as a vehicle, that people get a lot of their issues that they want to raise – not to do with that area specific plan, but to do with broader Departmental management issues. [The Planning Unit] gets caught up in a lot of that as well.'

Having inexperienced staff running planning processes can make it difficult to deal with tough issues:

'The other weakness with the approach is having inexperienced planners and I think this can be applied particularly to Kensington. Where you do get a turnover in staff and new and inexperienced planners are put in a hot seat of trying to write a management plan and liaising with regional and district managers. And that's really difficult on those new planners, because sometimes you're not about resolving issues, you're actually trying to develop processes which in themselves can be very complex. If you're trying to get an inexperienced person to do that, you're not going to achieve anything.'

Moving to concise plans was discussed with concern if this meant that 'hard' issues were not addressed (and preferably resolved) in the associated planning process:

'If we go to the more piecemeal or more compact...there seems to be more or less reluctance to deal with some of those hard issues, given we've gone through such a comprehensive process. We've gone through all this, here's all the public opinion, the reasons for and against, and this is the decision we've made which is a compromise often between this and this, and when people have to sign off on it, they say, ok I can see there's been a process to come to this point. Whereas if we leave a lot of those big issues out, and just say, here's the general direction we want to go in...they become those single issue things around which there's a whole lot of lobbying and no-one wants to make a decision about. It's politically too difficult to close that or change that, do whatever.'

‘There is risk that you end of with a plan that doesn’t actually deal with issues that just says that you will deal with them...we will be speeding up the area covered by management plans but the real task of managing still won’t be done. Of planning and managing.’

Role of planners/Planning Unit

Various comments were made about what the role of planners should and shouldn’t be. For ease of reading they have all been placed under this section although a number were not given as weaknesses, but more as ideas for consideration. Planners are expected to do everything, including resolving tenure issues, data analysis, determining visitor management settings, running public relations and stakeholder engagement, and having GIS expertise. They also need to be able to collate data and determine what is important for the planning process.

Another comment noted the main role of planners as running the planning process (doing project management):

‘The planner is somebody who creates that knowledge, think tank, guides the process of information gathering and analysis, deriving the desired outcomes... Ideally the planner should say, “this is the process we’re following, how are we going to get there?”’

Planners may also take on roles outside their responsibility:

‘Planners take on [issues] outside their responsibility because there is no one else to do it and then this affects the plan’s progress.’

‘Instead of going to specialist branches for help we just do it ourselves. It is a huge process. Takes a long time.’

‘We tend to be too accommodating. Trying to keep everyone happy.’

The following comments also relate to hard issues (covered in detail in an earlier section):

‘It comes down to basically, anything required to be put in a management plan ends up being the management planner’s responsibility to resolve, so they can move onto the management plan. Often, it’s not our role to be undertaking those duties, those tasks, it’s other peoples.’

‘One major one is that plans start before the key issues are resolved, for example tenure proposals. If we say OK before the plan starts this is what we expect. Or these issues need to be resolved or at least have some kind of thought as to how they could be progressed during the drafting stage but it all tends to fall to us to resolve issues like tenure proposals. They really shouldn’t be a part of our job.’

Another comment was that other experts on stakeholder engagement and community involvement exist in the Department and that such activities are not the planner’s job.

Planners were noted as being removed from the regions and associated parks:

‘I was going to talk about planners a bit too removed because they sit up here, they do may 1 trip every 6 months to their park. Especially if it’s a remote park.’

‘Planners...are sometimes not aware of local issues or interests, and there are still times when we put our foot in it.’

The limited experience of some planners and lack of specific training for new planners were explored:

‘We tend to pick our most inexperienced people to become our planners. It’s, if you come to PVS, there’s a good likelihood that you’ll be put through the Planning Unit to get your first year or two...We do tend to get a lot of graduate recruits for our Planning Unit and many of them have come straight out of uni, not spent a great deal of time in the Department. Then they’re thrown into, with very little induction I would think, a system where they’re given what looks like standard management plan which might be that big and told to just make a start...Perhaps we have a great expectation of these inexperienced young graduates and that tends to be, we’ve lost many of our middle level planners and between Paul and his graduate

recruits, who might be 1, 2, 3 or maybe 4 years out, there's not a lot in between in terms of experience.'

'There's a middle management missing in the whole agency, not just their Branch [Planning Unit], it's the whole agency. There's a tier of management seems to be missing. So you've got very senior people, senior people been here very long time, 20-30 years whatever, and then there's a gulf, just drops all the way down to, to this junior, very junior level.'

'Some of the planners have good experience in on-ground delivery/implementation of the plan...But perhaps less so some of the current cohort of planners, have come out of graduate recruits and things and into a central branch and not really been in a front-end delivery part of the organisation.'

'A lot of our management planning authors, facilitators, are young and inexperienced. Now and in the last 10-15 years that's been the case. And when you are new in your career, you tend to think need to write everything down and get it all together and that you are writing the bible for the rest of the world.'

'You get this fairly high turnover of staff as well, which I don't think helps.'

'There is no professional development support for planners to develop their knowledge of their interest area, craft etc. There's very little support.'

A role for 'science brokers' was discussed, with the idea raised by the interviewer (Moore). Such brokers locate, synthesise and write about scientific information in ways that make it accessible and useful to managers and the public. Several related comments follow:

'There is a need for science brokers or people who are technically-savvy that can compile, do the reading, do the literature reviewing, can access the unpublished literature and bring it together. So the knowledge we've got is put to best use. It's pretty hard for a planner to know that.'

'There's potentially a role for a science broker to take the science that's been done in DEC Science and put it into a form that's useful for...these management plans.'

'I think it's an excellent idea, having a science advocate...have one in the Nature Conservation Division...They're people who are aligned with planners, who understand planning, they understand the science...we've got our list of 10 plans to do over the next couple of years...they've got a list of 10 plans they need to go get the science information for, feed that to the planners.'

Organisational structure and culture

Location of Planning Unit

A change in the location of the Planning Unit was suggested given that plans cover much more than visitor management (given that the Planning Unit is currently located within the Parks and Visitor Services Division; Fig.s 1 and 2):

'I think the place the planning starts from, in terms of the organisational structure, is probably wrong. I think it needs to be brought into a self-defined unit or a branch that's directly reportable to the Deputy Director-General...it's buried in one of the Divisions at the moment. It's in PVS Division and I'm not sure that's appropriate, given that most of the plans that we develop, the major emphasis is on biodiversity conservation.'

'Historically the process and product has been seen primarily as PVS endeavour with people in other divisions not necessarily embracing the product or process.'

Alternative views were that the location of the planning group wasn't critical, more important was 're-invigorating' planning and improving the communication between specialist, Perth-based staff and operations staff in regions. Both these views seem to express cultural as much as structural issues:

'I suspect that it wouldn't matter where the planning lay, whether it was in PVS or Nature Conservation, Sustainable Forests, or whether you popped it into Regional Services [Fig. 1].

Until there's a change in how we describe the product, and re-invigorate how we're going to deliver it, and get that mechanism agreed and shared across all levels of the organisation from district to regional level to head office and specialist branch level, then we'll have these delays and problems.'

'I'm not sure that the planning unit needs to sit in Regional Services, but...we hear it quite a bit. Is that there are varying degrees of engagement between the centralised policy and planning units, in all three Divisions – Nature Conservation, PVS and Sustainable Forest Management, and in environmental regulation as well. The people that are delivering on the ground, some bits do really well, and some bits don't do it at all and are completely disconnected from the on-ground delivery. I think it's more an organisational change, cultural change...to make that link between on-ground delivery and the development of policy and plans and things, at a Divisional level. We're breaking down there, most definitely. The biggest gripe from Regional Managers is, these guys are telling us what to do, they've got no...idea what the issues are. They're trying to tell us what to do, what's a priority, they've got no idea. They've got no links.'

Cultural perceptions

Planning was noted as not being highly regarded in the Department:

'Planning as a profession in the agency doesn't have a lot of status, profile.'

'There's no value placed on planning at the moment, it's seen as a hindrance often.'

The process of producing plans and the plans themselves were similarly mentioned as not valued:

'It is not "oh, management plans, that is going to help us". It is "oh, management plans, you know that is a waste of time". It is the process itself. I just think people aren't that keen in being involved.'

There was also comment that plans might be a hindrance:

'Some regions still see planning as a legacy that prevents them from doing what they want.'

There was a perception that the Nature Conservation Division was not committed to management planning:

'The sense I get from particularly the nature conservation area, is that a number of the people in the nature conservation area don't value the management plans as being a useful tool. In many ways, they are part of the problem, why it's so hard to get the things, because they don't invest the effort and give the feedback to the planning staff and the direction.'

Planning process

Comments were made about the lack of an explicit planning process, with timeframes and milestones. A project management approach was suggested as part of the solution. The following comments are illustrative:

'There isn't actually a process, it's left to individual planners to write a plan...And while the content document, that 170-page template that they've created, is good as an instructional tool, I don't believe it should be used as your template. It shouldn't be a template on "this is our plan", because what you're missing there is context. There is no process there.'

'I don't think it [the management plan] focuses on management objectives, I don't see it achieving that corporate policy at all. It's very ad hoc, there's no systematic approach to doing it that you can follow...project management...there should at least be a system...there's no...timeframes set or milestones.'

'More concise plans, yes I agree but not some arbitrary page number. What's missing there is the process that you follow.'

6.1.3 Plan content, structure and style

Content of plans - general

Not everything that is in plans needs to or should be in there. Mention was made that tenure information doesn't need to and shouldn't be in plans. Similarly, plans should not be too prescriptive:

'We've almost blatantly not looked at what Section 56 of the CALM Act for the management plan objectives says. We consistently put stuff in the plans that we don't have to put in, tenure for example. Some of the plans, the south coast plan, is almost a tenure plan. We've been told by the State solicitors not to do that, we've also been told not to be prescriptive, we've been told that years ago. But we continue to do so.'

The absence of zoning from plans was lamented, because of the clear guidance it gives to managers.

Background information

The time taken to access and collate background information was a significant concern:

'We try to do too much with too little. And because of the process we have designed, which requires a lot of knowledge about the places we're planning for, that's another thing that leads to the length of time, because we want, not perfect, but sometimes perfect knowledge before we're prepared to make a decision.'

The need for more accessible information management systems was part of this concern.

A suggested way of rapidly obtaining background information (that has been used previously) is regional 1-day workshops:

'One of the best things we did, we introduced a couple of workshops right at the start of the process with regional staff and other experts to get all the stuff in their heads about what they saw the values and issues here.'

Structure and style of plans

Comment was made about plans being 'old style' and not fitting with today's society.

Information availability and management

Information availability and management was mentioned as an issue:

'So information management systems are below par, and I know a lot of effort goes into pulling together a management plan...getting the information from fragmented bits and pieces all over the agency. There's no single, one stop shop for information.'

6.1.4 Stakeholder engagement

Community engagement

Comments were made that the current planning process still only connects with 'a relatively small proportion of the community who are prepared to put in the time'. Associated concerns were community groups who don't get engaged in processes and membership of advisory committees that don't necessarily pick up narrow self-interests (tending instead to get individuals with broader perspectives).

Other comments referred to public consultation receiving too much effort, with the need for issues papers and advisory committees for all plans questioned.

Staff engagement in planning

Having very large plans makes it difficult to obtain comments from other specialist staff. Added to this is plans being sent to specialist staff, for whom the first point of consultation is complete draft plans, and the staff having very little time to comment on the plan. Also if specialist staff provide input there is no feedback on how that input has been used (or not used). The following comment illustrates this point:

‘You get given stuff to comment on and often you’re not sure where it is in the process, you’re given some big documents...to try to trawl through and in very short time...but you never get any feedback thereafter about how your comments have been included or not included. So that’s an issue.’

A way to engage specialist staff is to establish planning teams to work on the plan and follow it through to completion:

‘Once we know what we’re developing a plan for or about, we need to go through a process of engagement with specialist branches and divisions such as mine and others, identify a core group of people who have expertise that could form a planning team and follow the plan through.’

Also, because regional and district staff are so busy (and plans have a low priority?) they may not contribute as much as others consider they need to and most (all) of the work falls on the planner’s shoulders.

Staff engagement in implementation

Getting the ‘right’ membership of planning teams was discussed. One comment was that a whole range of operations staff need to be on planning teams to make sure implementation occurs, with the proviso that every region and district is different:

‘So how, if you actually produce a management plan when you haven’t really engaged with the park managers, how are they going to adopt it in terms of the work that they’re doing on the ground. So the whole membership of the planning team is very critical in terms of actually having engaged people from park manager all the way up to the regional manager. Each region and district is different.’

Regional ownership of plans and priority setting was noted as important but lacking:

‘There needs to be more regional ownership of the plans, any management plan needs to find its place with a regional context. So that the region can work out the priorities for it. Generally, that doesn’t happen.’

Also, having a planning process that enables on-ground managers to quickly identify key strategies and priorities was noted as important:

‘For an end-user, the Reserves Officer who’s got to implement, trying to develop a works program, it’s a big task. It’s a laborious task to pull out the key strategies and the priorities and things. Everyone’s got very, very full works programs, they’re [management plans] just cumbersome.’

6.1.5 Implementation and performance reporting

Implementation

A significant concern regarding management plans was the perceived lack of implementation:

‘The whole process of implementing; that doesn’t exist. It’s just like, here’s your document, put it on the shelf.’

‘I think it’s the implementation that lets things down.’

Lack of implementation was linked to the absence of a system or mechanism to include strategies from plans in regional and district planning and operations. Several comments follow as examples:

‘Missing is putting the management plans into a regional setting. Plans have been developed, written, there they are, bang, all these objectives...but there’s no process for fitting that into the regional setting. So there’s no regional priorities given to it, you can’t derive what we will do this year for that particular park or reserve. That process is missing. These plans just sit out there by themselves.’

‘The plan is produced, might be push from the Planning Branch, might have regional input, there’s the plan, it looks good, got information in it, gives us some management guidance. But all the actions in there, there’s no process to pick those up in any way and work out, we’ll go and do these and these this year, these ones will be done longer term. There’s no process by

which it happens. By and large, our management plans don't get, some of them get partly implemented in ways, but it's in an almost *ad hoc* way.'

'I think that is one of our downfalls with our management plans is they are separate to all of the works plans, the plans that the districts use on a daily basis. Management plans need to slot into that.'

The comment was made that implementation would be helped by plans that are more than 'wish lists'. They should list actions, associated responsibilities and budget.

Implementation plans were suggested to bridge this gap:

'I really do think we need to roll out an implementation plan. We haven't gone down that road for a while and I guess it is a resource issue really but...the south coast...had an implementation plan for each management plan...But if we go to the model where the management plan isn't as prescriptive you need to take the next step to get your operations done, rolled out properly.'

Developing an implementation spreadsheet at regional level was suggested as a way of progressing implementation:

'It is really the process of drawing out from the management plan those things that you are going to tackle within a certain time frame. It is a financial year planning tool so it is really a matter of having, the simplest way you can do it is have a spreadsheet...where you extract all your actions out of your plan and then just a matter of time tabling. In some years you might only do 1 or 2 things. Other years you might do a lot depending on budget allocation and other resources.'

Performance effectiveness and reporting

A lack of accountability at a regional level for implementing plans (or otherwise) was noted. Also, a lack of annual reporting means that every time a plan is revised all the information has to be collected again, from the date when the original plan was completed. And, the lack in accountability may have broader consequences. The following comments demonstrate this point:

'Rarely do we go back and assess ourselves against what we said we would do in the plans.'

'We are never going to get the support we need within the Treasury and the Cabinet unless we can demonstrate value for money that our work is doing, is delivering for the State of Western Australia.'

6.1.6 Budget/resources

Comments addressed the lack of a dedicated budget to plan implementation:

'There is no process within our budget that takes account of a new area management plan. So once the plan sets out what the priorities are then you have got to use the funding stream available within the agency to pick off those priorities.'

'The plan comes out and there is an expectation that we will deliver on those items in the plan but if it is not resourced then it doesn't happen.'

Also noted was that there would never be enough resources to implement plans in full, therefore it is important not to be too ambitious:

'We're never going to have enough resources so I don't think the whole idea about a plan basically trying to identify the resources required is going to help. We're never going to get it anyway. Having said that, we need to...ensure that we don't over-commit the types of work we're proposing in a management plan. It's so easy...to take the wish list from the regions and put that straight into a plan. What we need to say is, "hang on, this is too many, you're not going to get this done in 10 years. What are your priorities?" And we only put those ones in the plan. If other ones are done, fine.'

Time taken

The length of time taken to prepare and complete plans was identified as a weakness:

‘The process takes too long. The weaknesses of the current approach is that it takes too long, it holds up reserve developments in some cases, facility developments, access for commercial operations.’

An important concern was that plans take so long that by the time they have been approved they are out-of-date. Finding and collating the background information was noted as time-consuming. Length of time was often out of the control of planners:

‘Some of them [timeframes] are dependent upon other people and it is out of Planning Unit’s control but ultimately it still falls to us to complete the plan in a timely manner.’

Comment was made that project management would help, with a specified time period for each part of the planning process to be completed, for example a set, specified time for the analysis of public submissions to be completed. However, the comment was also made that it ‘still takes a long time to prepare [management plans] regardless of how much content goes into the final product’.

Also identified as an issue was the time that operations staff needed to commit to planning (e.g. the time commitment that accompanied preparation of the Walpole Wilderness plan), especially community consultation, including going to meetings.

6.2 Weaknesses of management plans

6.2.1 Expectations of plans

Plans are expected to be everything to everyone:

‘The management plan used to try and be everything to everybody. So it was an information document, a strategic document, a focus action document, an auditing review document. It was trying to be everything to everybody.’

‘So you’ve got that variability in opinion, and that’s what we’ve always struggled with, to try and make plans suitable for all people for all purposes. Everyone wants to add things, no one’s ever said we should take things out of the plan. And people from the Conservation Commission all the way through to field staff. That’s basically why our plans have grown to the size they have. Is because people want to add things.’

There was a lack of clarity regarding the audience for management plans, with this lack linked to issues around succinctness of plans (i.e., if you don’t know your audience then you don’t know what to include in or leave out of plans). Having a broad audience for management plans, including the Minister, Conservation Commission, Department and the public, makes it difficult to know what to include in a plan and at what level of detail. Multiple audiences of plans were noted including those who are only interested in the Executive Summary, others who need to use the main part of the plan, and others again who like the species lists and details in the plan appendices (where included). All these were noted as valid uses.

6.2.2 Policies and organisational structure

Statutory features

CALM Act 1984 (WA)

Plans were noted as extending well beyond the requirements of the Act, primarily through including comprehensive background information and becoming *de facto* reference documents.

Conservation Commission

A comment was made that it is the job of the Commission to establish strategic directions and for the Department to manage to achieve those directions:

‘There is a role for the Conservation Commission and the management plan to set up strategic directions...but it’s actually the job of the Department to manage, that’s what our job is. Therefore, if you get too prescriptive in the management plan then you get a body or document that is driving the management functions of the Department. When in fact the Department’s management functions are driven by a whole range of actions, politics, by a whole range of government policy.’

Planning horizon

A 10-year life for plans was noted as too long. Reasons included:

‘There’s certain things that don’t change, the values of the place, that doesn’t change in 10 years. But the pressures on a place and population and access trends and visitation trends, technology and stuff that changes in 10 years, can make your plan redundant quite quickly. Also because of the length of time that they’re for, in the political cycles, they become seen as somebody else’s agenda. So they are then not supported. So a plan written under Labour about protecting our old-growth forest is now seen as an anathema to the current government, so they don’t want to know about it or release it or support some of the recommendations in it. Because we’re doing these longer terms plans and they are sometimes quite specific, they then become sort of a negative for that place.’

Also, many district projects are externally funded and these opportunities can’t be identified in a 10-year management plan. Such external opportunities may change the focus of management and with it, which KPIs are important:

‘You can write a KPI to say, look after the black cockatoos, but in that 10-year timeframe something else might become more fashionable and money will be thrown at it and the cockatoo project will be dropped and something else will be picked up. So they fail the KPI because there’s no money going towards that, there’s money going towards something that’s not even included in the management plan. That’s a weakness.’

A suggestion for how a 10-year plan might be kept usable was by making it less prescriptive, while having a 3-year operation plan containing the detail. A 15-year plan horizon was also suggested, including a framework for setting targets and aspirational goals. This 15-year plan would be supported and implemented through 3-year operations plans with targets. (‘The target setting isn’t going to be any good for a 15 yr period.’) These 3-year plans would much better match election cycles.

The large amount of background information also means that once a plan has been written it’s out-of-date.

Amendments to management plans

The generally-held perception that it’s difficult to make amendments to plans was noted.

Departmental policies

A lack of finalised Departmental policies was identified as a weakness, as was the lack of availability of completed policies to the public. Not being up-to-date was also identified as a weakness. The associated problems for planning were described as follows:

‘At the moment we spend a lot of time with some plans dealing with policy-related stuff only because the policy framework is weak. If your policy framework was up-to-date you would only need to reference it.’

‘Why can’t we say in the management plan “refer to policy number such and such”? I know the Conservation Commission has some policies we aren’t that familiar with. FOI effectively makes these policies publicly available now.’

‘So you could reduce [the plans] in size, if those policies were made public, the public could view them. We wouldn’t have to include that information in our management plans.’

‘I see this as a key role for the Conservation Commission, trying to ensure that policies are current. They should be taking those Divisions, or those Directors responsible for policy and basically say, you need to bring them up-to-date. Because you’re impacting on our ability to produce management plans. That’s not happening. I think policy should be treated the same way as management plans, they should be prepared for 5 years, get reviewed in 10 years time, get re-written. There’s no review process put in place for policies.’

‘Because our policy statements aren’t up-to-date, people rely on the management plans to...resolve those issues. And it’s unfair. It’s unfair on the management planning staff to have to write documents particularly in areas in nature conservation or weed management, whatever, where we haven’t got our own policies up-to-date.’

Role of planners/Planning Unit

In interviews planners made it clear that they were not familiar with operational budget processes. This disconnect is unlikely to enhance implementation of plans and their ‘mainstreaming’ in Departmental activities.

Organisational structure and culture

The lack of a policy group or a single point of responsibility for policy was noted:

‘It’s a real deficiency within the agency, we don’t have a system or process in place for developing current policies and maintaining their currency. We are stuck with basically trying to fix other people’s problems.’

6.2.3 Plan content, structure and style

Content of plans - general

Repetition between management plans was noted, with statutory and policy material targeted in particular.

The lack of clarity in management plans regarding an area’s values was mentioned: ‘I don’t think it’s [the values part] written as well as it should be, maybe there’s a set of criteria that needs to be accompanying the values’. The key values need to be distilled from the background/resource information. This related to other comments made, that plans should have an explicit values (or asset) focus:

‘So, one of the things I think probably needs improving is that description of the asset you’re managing; a particular ecosystem, and the various sort of pressures or uses on that ecosystem, and how you’re dealing with those.’

‘So look after your values first...rather than write the standard management plan that has the same list of headings all the way through, if it wasn’t a value that needed to be addressed, then [leave it out]. [For example:] We only care about geology if it supports a unique vegetation community, which we have to manage. But we don’t really manage the rock, so [leave it out].’

A concern was also expressed that management plans tend to focus more on nature conservation, whereas there should be more attention paid to people:

‘I think there is a very poor understanding of demographics, and again, this is part of the problem, there tends to be a weighting towards the nature conservation and biology of parks and how they’re going to be managed, and little in the management plans, little identification of, usually one of the major forces of change in the park, which is people.’

Prescriptive vs flexible plans

Comments were made that plans are wanted that are less prescriptive and more flexible:

‘I think the weakness, particularly everything that has been done up until a few years ago, is that they are far too prescriptive.’

‘I think they’re too prescriptive, too detailed. They’re locking us into particular approaches that give us too much direction yet I don’t think they’re informed with enough serious consideration.’

‘We need to be less specific and less detailed, so that we have more flexibility.’

The need for a balance between flexibility and agreed priorities was noted:

‘If you are too prescriptive you do limit yourself when you might have opportunities. It is finding the balance between a free approach to doing things, which some guys in the field like doing new things all the time, but you have got to find the balance between the things

that need to be done as a priority that suit the criteria as opposed to being able to utilise an opportunity to meet an outcome that you want to achieve.’

Being too prescriptive also devalues the skills of managers in the field:

‘It also tends to de-value the skills and influence and ability of people who have to manage the place on the ground. Because they have to feel like there’s a part of them in that process.’

Several examples of problems created by too prescriptive details in management plans were given:

‘I’ve had situations in plans where they’ve been so specific they’ve said it has to be this type of licence, it should be a restricted license. Well that should be left up to a process of evaluation once the licences are ready to be done. So I’ve got a situation with some...nature reserves, where I have to go through an EOI⁹ knowing I’m probably only going to get one response because the management plan says I have to do it and we have to comply with the management plan.’

‘There can be community influences as well. An example you can have a lot of pressure at a certain point in time to put in a horse trail and then the people who’ve pushed for that in the planning process, and therefore it became part of the plan, move on and no one wants to do it. But if you want to do something else you can’t do it.’

Background information

By trying to please everyone (the public and staff) plans include too much background information:

‘The amount of background information you need for a member of the public and the amount you need for the Department are very different. So therefore you just go over and above. Trying to please everyone. It is time consuming to collate and distil large volumes of information. You go to the nth degree finding every little paper about every little thing ever written about the area. Then try and compress and condense it down is really time consuming and just goes over the top.’

Plans were critiqued for being an inventory and paying insufficient attention to management, as well as containing numerous references:

‘We need to get clear in our minds who is going to read these documents. If we want the public to read them, if I read a document and there’s a reference after each point I go “for Christ’s sake”. I’m backwards and forwards. If Joe Blow gets it and tries to read it...’

The point was made that much of the background information should be used to inform planner’s thinking but doesn’t need to appear in the plan.

Structure and style of plans

Comment was made that plans include un-necessary levels of detail and complexity for the public. Short sentences and paragraphs were recommended.

Size/length of plans

Plans were universally regarded as being large:

‘They’re too large to read, I challenge anyone to say they’ve read a management plan. Apart from going to one section and just looking up sections that you need.’

‘I don’t think they’re user friendly, I don’t think they get used very much.’

Their size was noted as making them impractical for managers and daunting for the public (combined with the technical/scientific terminology).

Plans were noted as too big because they include background information and 70% of the content is generic (with the suggestion that this generic material could all go in a single, separate document and be cross-referenced from individual plans).

⁹ Expression of Interest process

Information availability and management

‘There’s no consolidated information management system...We did an audit recently, Regional Services I think 750 (or something like that) separate datasets or databases. Science...they’ve got about 500.’

6.2.4 Implementation and performance reporting

Performance effectiveness and reporting

Objectives and KPIs were noted as not measurable:

‘In many cases, they [plans] don’t give clear objectives, they’re quite often somewhat vague and hard to measure, so they’re often not SMART¹⁰ objectives...Even though I said that strength of them was the KPIs, it’s also true that the KPIs in many cases are not really measurable or reportable on.’

‘In many cases, they don’t give clear objectives, they’re quite often somewhat vague and hard to measure, so they’re often not SMART objectives in that sense.’

Actions were noted as not being measurable, and also as lacking clarity. Comment was also made about the lack of clarity around targets, with information needed on what needs to be done, where and by whom. If targets haven’t been set, auditing is a ‘nightmare in terms of trying to really tease out what has been achieved in the time frame’. A further suggestion was that, even if information is lacking, staff can still attempt measurement to determine the impacts or otherwise of their management/investment.

The lack of reporting systems in regions was noted:

‘Basically, regions and districts are not required to make an annual report to their managers. Plans are in the same boat, because last year the Commission sent a request to the agency to do a report on KPIs for 4 management plans...It was very obvious...that a lot of the regions and regional parks didn’t actually have a system in place to be able to be readily report on those KPIs. They did have some things in place, but a lot...didn’t have those systems in place.’

6.2.5 Budget/resources

Comments addressed the lack of a budget dedicated to plan implementation:

‘You could draw up an implementation plan, but if there really aren’t resources there to implement it, what’s the point of that? You can produce a plan, if you costed all those actions out it would be millions and millions of dollars over, even 5 or 10 years. There’s no additional resource comes into a region just because a management plan has been completed.’

Staff also referred to regions managing from one crisis to the next and not having time to do the prioritising needed to begin implementing a management plan:

‘A great deal of them [parks and reserves are] operating just from one crisis to the next. So the concept that they’re organised enough or have the ability to be planning and logically working through what are the highest priorities in an area, is just a fantasy at the moment. Because they’re so poorly resourced that they’re just going from whatever the next crisis that they’re trying to deal with to another...I don’t think there’s a great appreciation of that, I think there’s this idea that, “oh we’ll just get it done. I don’t want to hear your whinging, just go off and do it”. So we keep trying to do everything, and we never scale back and say, “within the resources, it’s probably not realistic”.’

7 Opportunities associated with the changed approach

7.1 Plans for groups of reserves

There was widespread support for plans for groups of reserves: ‘I think the group is a great way to go’. Benefits included:

¹⁰ S – simple, M – measurable, A – accurate, R – reliable, T- timely.

- Similar issues dealt with at one time, in one plan.
- Resource decisions can be made across landscapes.
- More efficient planning process, saving time, resources and effort.
- Getting more plans done (and implemented?).
- Achieving coverage of the conservation estate with valid statutory management plans.
- Can take a more strategic approach but only if the grouping is based on meaningful criteria.
- Providing an overarching bio-regional framework within which management priorities could be set.
- Helping with covering new pastoral properties by management plans.
- Only need key management issues and broad directions for many of the Department's small reserves and such group plans can do this.
- Potentially can cover new reserves added to the estate after the plan has been completed.
- Potentially change community input to a more strategic approach.
- Create linkages with communities, districts and regions that don't exist now.
- Improve understanding by the planning team of both statutory and local level needs.
- Looking for and providing broad range of recreation opportunities across the group of reserves.
- An effective network providing for recreation, commercial uses and conservation.
- Setting priorities across the landscape.
- 'An enabling process rather than a prescriptive plan of action 'this is what we should be moving towards'.

Much of this sentiment is summarised by the following comment:

'Planning for a bigger group can be more strategic, can better set priorities across a landscape rather than an individual reserve and so...the plans will be much more adaptable rather than focusing in on a small reserve [they will link] common themes across a number of reserves.'

The importance of the basis for grouping (e.g. similar issues, geographic proximity) was emphasised: 'meaningful criteria for them having been grouped in the first place'. In some places grouping might be based on geology or biology, and in other places on visitor user patterns, the types of visitors and why they're accessing an area. The choice of grouping should remain flexible and be what's best for managing the areas.

Comment was made that grouping shouldn't be the only approach and that higher priority reserves could be planned for individually if necessary.

7.2 More concise plans

'Love the idea of concise documents, that would be brave.'

'We need more concise plans. There is no doubt about that.'

'If brief means concise and sharp, yep that's a positive.'

Shorter plans were noted as being more likely to be read.

Shorter plans were also equated with flexibility: 'You're not being locked down by being too prescriptive'.

There were comments around the length of plans. A plan of 50 pages was suggested as suitable with some online appendices or supporting background document. Shorter was suggested as being too superficial and generic.

Comment was also made that the plans were fine as is:

'I don't see them as something you want to read, they're more a reference document. You don't read a dictionary, you look up the bit you want to look at. So the size is really irrelevant.'

Size doesn't matter. It's more about what the document's for...So if you going to strip out all of the stuff and make them really small, then they lose...some of their value as reference documents because they haven't captured all that information you otherwise won't get.'

'Better' writing was mentioned:

'An explicit statement of what we're actually going to do. So when people read it, they know what we're going to do. They don't have to second guess it because the language is so vague and airy-fairy.'

'I just think it's better writing and sometimes I think we use a lot more words than we have to, we could say things a lot more concisely. That makes it more accessible to a whole range of people, more people are likely to pick it up and read it and it will be more useful. I still think, there's a skill in being able to still provide good management direction but do it in a concise way, concise format.'

Maps were also suggested.

Other content-related comments included:

'Planners being accountable, making sure the information in the plan is relevant and concise...there should only ever be enough information in the plan to make your objectives and strategies, to give it some context.'

'When you get to the final plan, really, the final plan should almost just be the actions and the objectives, and that's it.'

7.3 Precise, achievable, time-related and measurable objectives and actions

Comments were made about the importance of the results of actions being measurable. The importance of being achievable was also noted. Some staff wanted a timeframe put on the actions while others were less stringent and suggested milestones. There was a general warning that being too prescriptive would be foolish given uncertainty about resources and about future issues that might arise and need attention.

There was a focus on KPIs and generally staff commented on the benefit of being able to measure if outcomes were being achieved:

'Maybe the first 2 or 3 years of plans what we produce in the revised model might be a bit underdone in the KPIs (or whatever you're going to call them). They might be able to get a bit more sophisticated as we learn how, and if we set up more monitoring, more standard practices...We might have to be a little bit dumbed down at the beginning and just see how we go with them. They'll all be good worthwhile checks to do, but we don't want to go too sophisticated too quickly I think.'

'That was one of the things about that values-based approach and the threats to the values, was that not everything needed to have a KPI. So it picked the ones that would be good surrogates for other things as well. So you know, if we get this one right, then therefore all these other things should fall into place as well.'

Having measurable objectives was noted as important for adaptive management:

'If we can develop better objectives that we can measure, I think that will give us a greater understanding of what and why we're managing. It will also give us an ability to measure how we're doing with the management...have a go at trying to make quite clear statements at different levels – landscape scales, community, right down to species...then go to an adaptive management model.'

And for political and community support:

'The opportunities would be that [we] would be able to identify what we need to measure to assess our effectiveness, in terms of outcome or impact as opposed to inputs. Then if we could demonstrate our effectiveness we could then...win broader community and political support.'

Developing measurable objectives was noted as requiring time, work and thought:

‘Haven’t marine parks planners demonstrated that measurable objectives are to some degree achievable but they require a fair bit of work in determining exactly what you are measuring?’

‘If the objectives and strategies are well written – not just kind of stuck together or just using what ever someone else has already written...would be a lot more achievable if a lot more thought has gone into it. The performance indicators will come out of it easier.’

Retaining some flexibility was also emphasised:

‘I think that’s the tricky bit, because while you do want to do a management by objective plan, you also want to, from an adaptive management perspective, is leave it broad enough that managers can make informed decisions without being boxed in. So a decision that’s made now that can only be implemented in 5 years time, isn’t restricted to the point that there’s no flexibility allowed, that takes into consideration changing conditions. Maybe you can word that, accomplish that by how you phrase your objectives.’

7.4 Managing change

For a changed approach to management planning to succeed, getting staff ownership was identified as critically important. Developing both a process and structure to achieve ownership was suggested. Tying budgets to management plans was another suggestion. Commitment by senior DEC staff was also noted as critical, especially if the public are to be supportive of the changes.

A cautiousness within DEC regarding change and cultural change was noted, especially with regard to performance reporting and management:

‘Your performance in managing a reserve or implementing the plan is going to be assessed on an annual or bi-annual basis or something, you are open to some scrutiny. I think there’s perhaps not resistance, but cautiousness.’

Using technology

Suggestions were made that plans should be available as pdf documents on the web so they are electronically searchable and include web links to policies and other relevant information.

8 Threats associated with the changed approach

‘It’s alright to say we’re going to have all our plans done promptly, but they’ve actually got to mean something to the people who read them and the people who implement them on the ground.’

8.1 Plans for groups of reserves

Concerns coalesced around stakeholder engagement and losing detail and specificity in the plans. Loss of community ownership and engagement was noted as a potential threat. Illustrative comments follow:

‘Covering a broader area as opposed to the management plans we do now, which are more specific areas, you’re likely to lose a lot of involvement and interest from a wider stakeholder group. Also, with the specific area plans, the strategies will be more specific to an area so it gives...operational staff in regions and districts more direction. Broader, I wonder how that will go on-ground. Unless the detail is put into a regional strategy or something like that.’

‘The other is that, communities are very different...There may be very different views and differences of opinion within those different communities about what’s appropriate or not appropriate, and what is more important. In one area it might be conservation, another area it’s going to be driving a 4WD to the beach. I think that could make it more difficult.’

‘One of the weaknesses though, particularly if you’re still trying to produce a slim management plan that is now covering 1,500km of coast, and 6 or 10 or 12 reserves, the appropriate level of detail...whether you’re trying to provide an appropriate level of detail and reflecting quite marked differences between those reserves. The objectives and the KPIs and current condition and pressures on those different reserves would be vastly different across that broader scale. So you’re introducing another challenge into the management plan about how do you adequately process and cater for those things.’

'If we wanted to write 40 very slim documents we could probably do that, but if they're going to be meaningful documents for those areas, we're going to struggle.'

Getting the groupings and boundaries right was raised as an issue:

'The threat is that if you don't get the grouping right you'll end up making inferences or applying management that's inappropriate. So getting the grouping right is critical and that may not be as simple as it sounds. Because it's not just about, I guess, ecological similarity, there's a whole range. There's context in which these reserves might sit, there might be special values, threatened taxa or social values. Bits of land have a whole range of different characteristics that are not just ecological, they could be social and political and economic. So someone needs to do a fair bit of pretty clever thinking to make sure if 're going to group reserves up, we do it properly. Set some criteria, a framework for doing that that's logical and sensible.'

'Not getting your boundaries right is a concern to me. If you don't get your boundaries right then you miss out on the social and other implications.'

'Some of them are [enormous]. I know there is a bit of worry because the regions put forward 45 different areas and then the Conservation Comm cut it down to 35 and haven't actually gone back to the regions to consult whether that is appropriate.'

'I am not very happy with it. It didn't make much sense to me from the point of view the geographical boundaries didn't match very effectively with some of the social and management things...I think that is too big for a number of reasons, biogeographically there are some significant differences as you go north-south. Geologically it changes and also socially you have got one area that responds effectively to Town X as an industry centre and one area that effectively relates to Town Y and those things line up with other agencies. And others that we might have shared issues with. I think geographically the scale of it is just really big too.'

Having different 'regional' plans with different boundaries was raised as a concern. For example, a regional nature conservation strategy would relate to the DEC administrative region boundary while the regional management plan might relate to another boundary. This difference could make it difficult to work across plans and achieve integrated implementation. 'The logic would be that you have them all the same.'

Comment was made about the need for regional plans to have common issues ('If they don't have common issues, then you may as well not bother.') but tempered by the comment that if too many issues are covered the plan may become too 'broad and meaningless'.

Plans crossing regional boundaries was a related issue:

'The plans may cross 2 or 3 regions in some cases, DEC regions. The regions won't be able to cope with that. I don't really see that that would provide a difficulty for the regions, but that has been raised as something that the regions may not have an interest in. I have seen it happen, where a region won't have any interest in anything that's half a kilometre outside its boundaries.'

Comment was made that the regional plans couldn't replace area management plans:

'I don't think it can replace the need for an area management plan...you just can't get around the fact that some areas will need area management plans just because of the level of detail.'

8.2 More concise plans

The suggestion was made that we should be talking about briefer (not concise) plans given the 30-page length currently being promulgated.

Widespread concerns were expressed about having shorter plans (~30 pages):

'If you produce a 30-page management plan, therefore all this other stuff's been taken out, all that contextual information, the background information, and there's no subsidiary product like a 5-year plan to actually help with the implementation of it, I think it's a high risk strategy.'

‘If you’re going to reduce the size of your plan to say 30 pages...something has to give. No-one’s actually looked at what has to give...you have to cut sections out of the plan, you have to combine sections within the plan, and also you have to look at your strategies and make them more generic.’

‘It’s difficult to make the plan more broad and at the same time more specific and keep them to a shorter document. It seems like demanding a bit too much here. You’ve either got to put in the detail to explain why the strategy is so good or you’ve got to get rid of the detail on the strategy. I can’t see them working together, it’s just not possible.’

Also of concern was public perceptions regarding shorter plans:

‘[There is] a risk from the public perceptions perspective because you’re going from a 200-page management plan to a 30-page management plan. What’s the public going to say? What’s their response going to be to that? That’s a high-risk strategy which I don’t think people are actually really thinking through. Like the Conservation Commission thinking through.’

‘Another potential threat is...the amount of trust which may be lost with the community...If the management plan does come back to be a very strategic document with a lack of detail, and decisions are being made on the ground and the community can’t see the link and can’t see how decisions and why decisions are being made, then that lack of trust, or potential lack of trust...is going to appear.’

And the public may no longer be able to comment on the background information that has been included in management plans, if a separate non-public background information/resource document is produced as part of the changed planning process:

‘The public aren’t actually going to get an opportunity to comment on the resource document, they’re only going to be able to comment on the statutory management plan. They may get their noses out of joint, because this demonstrates a lack of consultation.’

Concerns were also expressed about shorter plans losing relevance and the loss of important background information from the plans. The potential loss of background information was emphasised:

‘I find it difficult to work out how we get down to the briefness without losing the relevance. That’s probably the challenge of where we need to go, what that balance is.’

‘I fear if we don’t have some of the background information, we could make incremental change over time that affects the underlying key values of an area without ever recognising it...So you then have a succession of people going through an area, making decisions incrementally, independent of ever having, potentially, ever having a really good appreciation of what’s special about the place.’

Comments were made about the fallacy of thinking a shorter plan will save time:

‘I think it would be a fallacy to think that having resource document and a smaller management plan will save time.’

‘Perhaps one of the weaknesses is that it won’t necessarily reduce the amount of time required to produce a plan. Because you still need to spend the time to research, still need to prepare the resource document, so really where you’re saving time is in preparation of the final plan.’

If the background material is removed to another place then operational staff will need to spend more time finding and accessing this information. Also, if plans are shorter, there is the risk that you might gloss over something that is important and associated decision-making opportunities.

8.3 Precise, achievable, time-related and measurable objectives and actions

There was a lot of confusion regarding the intent of the Conservation Commission:

‘They’re looking for more strategic and perhaps longer-term plans, yet they’re asking for more concise strategies. We find that quite contrary.’

‘Only if you have worked out where those objectives lie in the organisation, where’s the responsibility, accountability, where’s the budget? Unless you’re prepared to address those factors, you can write the prettiest objectives that you like, but they are just never going to happen. If it’s not jelling with organisational structure, if there’s no level of reporting accountability and commitment.’

Clarification of terms was suggested, with the comment made that the objectives in plans are actually goals:

‘The so-called objectives in our management plans are not objectives, my interpretation of objectives is that they have to be SMART. Those are more goals. There’s a whole thing about definitions...we’ve all got different interpretations of those terms.’

‘When someone talks about an objective, there’s not a common understanding about what that means. That applies to aims, goals, strategies whatever. We need to have that discussion to make sure we’re all talking about the same thing.’

There was general skepticism that regional plans could include measurable objectives. Illustrative comments follow:

‘At a sub-regional level, those objectives are going to have to be quite broad.’

‘If you are just going to have policy guidelines...just give people general guidance on how things are going to operate in that place, then how are you going to be really specific about reporting on those? If you say, “we’re going to have 5 campgrounds and 25km of walk trail and protect all of these plants and increase the numbers of this animal to this amount”, then you can write something about that. Specific to those recommendations and tie me down to report on it.’

‘I think when you get down to that level, you’re actually talking about management programs. You’re not talking about management plans *per se*, you’re actually talking about programs.’

The role for science in determining objectives was mentioned:

‘The other important issue here in terms of setting these objectives, and then being able to monitor effectiveness against those, it really requires you to have a pretty good understanding of the biota and the interactions and the processes. Hence the need for a...really strong and productive science capacity. If you don’t have science-based knowledge, you’re not even going to begin to do this stuff.’

And it was noted that if you can’t get your objectives right, then how can management effectiveness be measured. However, providing achievable time related measurable objectives and actions, with regard to biodiversity conservation, was identified as difficult.

The lack of monitoring and information was highlighted:

‘I’d be very surprised if we had enough data and information being collected to be able to accurately report on whether we were protecting particular values or not, for the most part. That would be my concern.’

‘If science was really looking for something to do, I would think that a core function for them to do, put in place a monitoring framework to gather the information they need, to act as an independent reflection on implementation.’

‘This is a major impediment or weakness... we’ve got gaps in certain areas, one of which would be evaluation (ecological monitoring). The Science Division has got 160, 170 FTE’s...most work on single species, mostly but not always. But what the plans expose was, if we actually want to do this, particularly do landscape approach to stuff, ecosystem management, we need to have more disciplines – landscape ecology [and] people with expertise in ecological monitoring and disturbance ecology... And it also needs to be built at the regional scale too, so the ecologists or conservation officers need to be driving adaptive management approaches.’

‘Then we’ve got to change a whole lot of other things about what we do. Because if you want me to report on how we’re going protecting particular values, then we need to put in place

mechanisms to be able to measure that. And at the current time, to expect the managers who are implementing the actions required to manage the place, to do the measurement of those things as well, without providing the resources or the specific means to do it, whether its process or assisting them, whatever. It's just not going to happen. If you want to say "these are the values we want to protect", then you've got to work out, well how are we going to say how we've protected those, how are we going to do it, who's going to do it. Whereas we don't do that at the moment, for the most part.'

8.4 Lack of resources

Comment was made that there are not enough resources to prepare plans for all parks and reserves, implement these plans and then review management performance:

'There is no process within our budget that takes account of a new area management plan. So once the plan sets out what the priorities are then you have got to use the funding stream available within the agency to pick off those priorities. Anything to do with PVS program you have got a capital works program, you have got other sources within that that contribute to plan outcomes. Nature conservation has always been much more problematic.'

Suggestions were made about the absolute importance of attaching resources to management plans. Illustrative comments follow:

'They need to bring resources into the management plan process.'

'There's no additional resource comes into a region just because a management plan has been completed.'

'That is where it breaks down. You can have KPIs and you can have plans and the whole thing but if the resources aren't provided or the outcome of an audit doesn't give them a strong enough case to go off and get the resources then you have wasted the whole exercise.'

8.5 Reviewing management plan format and content in isolation

The comment was made that focusing on the content of plans in isolation would not improve planning:

'The biggest threat is trying to look at reviewing management planning documents in isolation. We've already touched on that, about doing the review and looking at the overall framework of where the management plans sit and also getting a really clear understanding as to who the audience for the management plans will be. If that audience is regional managers, what do they want from the document? The minimum requirements for what they need to use the documents... We'll go on from there... rather than looking at them [the plans] in isolation.'

The suggestion was also made that the Conservation Commission consult with its stakeholders regarding the changes to management plans it is driving:

'I was wondering whether the Conservation Commission is going to go to these groups or make publically available what they're doing. Because they are looking at a significant change to how we go about doing business, so they probably want to engage and get some support from the community.'

Acknowledgments

The time, effort and expertise contributed to the SWOT analysis by staff from WA DEC are gratefully acknowledged, as are the contributions of staff from the Conservation Commission of Western Australia. The research underpinning this report was funded by the Conservation Commission of Western Australia.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Guiding questions for the management planning review provided by the Conservation Commission (February 2009)

The Conservation Commission is most interested in:

1. What good quality (best/good practice) subregional, concise, non-aspirational plans might look like
2. How resource inventory information might be separated from the core management plan.
3. How special issue / area plans might be 'nested' within wider plans.
4. How management plans and related policies (e.g. regional conservation strategies and PVS master plans) might be integrated across the Department.
5. How the transition to the new framework might be efficiently and effectively achieved.
6. How plans might be designed so that management effectiveness can be readily determined.

Appendix 2. Changed approach to management planning prescribed by the Conservation Commission of Western Australia (June 2009)



SUBJECT: MANAGEMENT PLANNING – CHANGED APPROACH

The Conservation Commission of Western Australia is seeking changes in respect to the structure and approach adopted in the development and presentation of management plans for lands vested in the Conservation Commission.¹¹ This document sets out the rationale behind the change in broad terms, decisions that have been taken on key principles, studies that are underway and some items under consideration.

BACKGROUND

A large percentage of the vested terrestrial conservation estate is not covered by a management plan. This is a problem at a statutory level along with the need to show that the lands held on behalf of the public are being managed appropriately. It is to everyone's benefit that the manner in which the estate is being managed is clearly understood across the State.

It is recognised that the amount of information contained within management plans has increased over time and this produces very wordy documents containing a large amount of material that, whilst interesting, might not be directly applicable to the specifics of management strategies. This demand contributes, for example, to the time taken for plan preparation and the time taken to process the public verification of contents.

The level of 'uptake' of management plans is variable. It is acknowledged that competing resource demands and management issues contribute to this variability. Plans must be effective and useful guides for managers, key stakeholders and the public.

Concerns have been expressed over the length of time being taken to prepare individual reserve plans. This has impact on resources, the credibility of the process as context changes and the ability to show a response to changing circumstances. The Conservation Commission is very mindful of the issue of staff and fund availability, and increasing constraints on these.

Planning processes should deliver in such a way as to be cost effective in their preparation, be produced in a timely manner, maximise coverage, clearly define the main values and opportunities, threats and management responses, and be readily accountable.

ACTIONS

The Conservation Commission has undertaken two major actions.

Firstly the Commission has adopted three overall principles to be applied to management plans. This was considered at the Conservation Commission's meeting of 8 December 2008 and the principles that guide a new planning framework are:

A regional approach

Planning areas relate to a suite of reserves in geographical area rather than individual reserves. Broad mapping has been developed for the State which can be used as a guide in determining final planning region boundaries. The regions developed include biogeographical parameters along with existing administrative boundaries established by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC).

More concise documents

Plans are focused on relevant site specific values, threats and management responses. For example, background information, including detailed site descriptions and generic

¹¹ Statutory functions of the Conservation Commission are given in the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*. For example in relation to management planning *S19(1)(f)(g)*, *S54* apply.

information, including policy, which relates to all reserves, is kept in a separate reference or resource document, or is kept on a web accessible data storage site. The latter would be more effective due to not having to cover drafting and publication costs.

Meaningful objectives:

Plan objectives and strategies are precise, specific, achievable, realistic, time-related and measurable. This has been referred to as the need to have less ‘aspirational’ documents but this was misconstrued to infer that plans should have no higher level aspirations or would constrain the taking up of opportunities that might arise during the planning period. Plans should relate to higher level commitments at the State, national and international levels. An effort to be achievable and realistic does not mean aspirations are forgone per se, indeed it is important to write objectives in a way that retains openness to new opportunities as they arise.

In discussions held with senior staff of DEC the adoption of these principles has been supported.

Secondly the Conservation Commission established a research project, undertaken by Murdoch University, to investigate current thinking on best management practices for the preparation and presentation of management plans, with a focus on how the plans might best serve people who wish to use them or are required to comply with them.

The research project is broadly comprised of three components:

Stage 1. Undertake a review of best practice through a literature review and interaction with planning practitioners at a national level.

Stage 2. Consult with a range of stakeholders, primarily those people responsible for the implementation of management plans, to assess expectations of plans and means of improving plans.

Stage 3. Prepare a report for the Conservation Commission.

Consultation with a range of staff within DEC will occur as a requirement of the research project and it is intended to conduct a series of workshops with DEC on the outcomes of both the research project and the Conservation Commission framework to clearly identify expected outcomes.

The original intention of the Commission was that the definition and adoption of key principles would occur following the research project. At the request of the consultant, and in recognition of the expertise of the consultant, the Commission agreed to a one year delay in starting the project. Over the course of the delay, the Commission was presented with a number of plans, which highlighted the need for action sooner, rather than later. A major implication for the consultancy project is that the Conservation Commission is especially interested in examples of best practice in management plans and processes that relate to the three broad principles

It is to be noted that the research project is one of a number of areas of work that will provide guidance to the Commission.

CONSULTATION

The Conservation Commission is concerned with ensuring that the new management planning framework is appropriate in the West Australian context, and in identifying an efficient and effective process for implementing the new framework. There are a range of interwoven actions needed to bring about the establishment of the required change. All aspects of plan preparation should eventually be investigated. For example, it will be necessary to ensure that the legislative requirements of the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* continue to be met.

A further example is the establishment of appropriate objectives and the linked identification of performance indicators. In a number of cases it has been identified that the factors designed to indicate whether the objectives (desired outcomes) are being met do not facilitate an effective assessment. The problem could relate to an inappropriate objective or the relationship between the objective and the means for measuring progress.

The Conservation Commission is certain that the required change to the approach to management planning is achievable and will be of great assistance across a wide range of levels (plan preparation, coverage, costs and resources, implementation, success assessment, etc.). To that end it is important to

ensure that a variety of communication measures are in place for the constructive exchange of ideas and information. If anyone wishes to seek clarification on the contents of this document, provide their views on the varied aspects of management planning or be kept up-to-date with progress, please contact the Commission either via email, phone or in person. The contact person for the project is Carol Lacroix (9387 1766; caroll@conservation.wa.gov.au)

MAY 2009

Review Date: September 2009

Appendix 3. SWOT analysis questions

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT PLAN FORMAT

Interviews/Focus Groups

This research project has been commissioned by the Conservation Commission to assist them in developing good quality management plans in partnership with the Department of Environment and Conservation. We are interviewing and running focus groups with key staff to gain insights into current management planning and through these insights help the Commission implement and continue to develop a *changed approach* to management planning. This changed approach will produce concise plans for groups of reserves ('regional' plans) that have practical, achievable and measurable management actions. *If possible, please read and consider the following questions before we meet.*

Current management planning process and plans: strengths and weaknesses

Questions 1-4 background. Management planning in Western Australia has a history spanning several decades at least. In the following questions we are interested in your views about what does and doesn't work with current approaches, and what are the challenges to efficient and effective management planning.

1. What are the strengths of the current approach to management planning?
2. What are the weaknesses of the current approach to management planning?
3. What are the strengths of the current management plans (as documents)?
4. What are the weaknesses of the current management plans (as documents)?

The changed approach to management planning process and plans: opportunities and threats

Questions 5-6 background. The changed approach to management planning (see Attachment. Management Planning – Changed Approach. Conservation Commission Western Australia. May 2009) as described above and in this attachment creates a number of opportunities that also may be accompanied by 'threats'. The following questions address these two areas.

5. What are the opportunities created by the changed approach to management planning (both the process and for the document)?
6. What threats are likely to accompany the changed approach to management planning (both the process and for the document)?

Dr Sue Moore
Associate Professor of Environmental
Policy

Dr Kate Rodger
Postdoctoral Research Fellow

Appendix 4. Informed consent form (as provided and approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee)

**Research Project
Developing Good Quality Management Plans in Western Australia 2009**

Project information

The purposes of this project are to provide advice on developing good quality management plans for protected areas in Western Australia and to assist the Conservation Commission of Western Australia in progressing new approaches. These plans are prepared for submission by the Conservation Commission to the Minister for the Environment (CALM Act 1984 WA).

The research is being conducted by Drs Sue Moore and Kate Rodger, School of Environmental Science, Murdoch University. Dr Moore, the project manager, can be contacted on (08) 9360 6484 or S.Moore@murdoch.edu.au.

If you are willing to participate, could you please complete the details below. We are happy to discuss with you how this study is being conducted. If you wish to talk to an independent person about this research you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on (08) 9360 6677 or email ethics@murdoch.edu.au

Copies of the report from this project will be available in late 2009.

Consent

1. I agree voluntarily to take part in this study.
2. I agree to have my comments recorded.
3. I have read the above information and been given a full explanation of the purpose of this study, of what is involved and what is expected of me. The researcher has answered all my questions.
4. I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to give any reason.
5. I understand I will not be identified in any publication arising out of this study.
6. I understand that my name and identity will be stored separately from the data, and these are accessible only to the investigators. All data provided by me will be analysed anonymously using code numbers.
7. I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Name of Participant: _____

Title of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:/...../2009

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date:/...../2009

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee
(Approval No. 2009/061)

Appendix 5. Generalised timeframe for the preparation of a management plan (Source: Department of Environment and Conservation (2009) *Management Planning Manual Version 3.1. Department of Environment and Conservation, Kensington, May 2009*)

MAJOR TASKS	
1	Determine Planning Team
	Undertake audit assessment of existing management plan with District (where appropriate)
2	Field trips and resource data collection, meet with planning team, discuss with regional/district staff
3	Identify issues with Region/District staff and external agencies if appropriate. Prepare issues paper
4	Determine Public Participation Strategy with Planning Team
5	Advise Native Title claimants and relevant aboriginal groups
6	Submit Issues Paper, Audit Assessment and Public Participation Strategy (PPS) to Corp Ex
7	Submit Issues Paper, Audit Assessment and Public Participation Strategy to Cons Comm via the MPRC
8	Call for EOI for Advisory Committee (as determined by PPS). Print "Have Your Say" brochure and distribute, load on to the DEC website
9	Undertake Values/Threats analysis with Region/District staff
9	Advisory Committee meeting No.1- key issues and objectives
10	Stakeholder and public meetings (as the PPS)
11	Prepare draft management plan - objectives, key issues, preliminary actions and options where necessary
12	Planning team review draft management plan
13	Circulate draft plan to Advisory Committee. Meeting 2 - discuss key/contentious points
14	Seek comments from specialist branches, external experts
15	Incorporate comments into draft management plan
16	Planning team review draft management plan
17	Submit draft plan to Corp Ex, and amend accordingly
18	Submit draft plan to Conservation Commission, and finalise
20	Print Draft Plan, notify Minister
21	Release the draft plan
22	Publicise & distribute the Draft Plan, post on DEC website, and provide notification: Govt Gazette, 2 issues of daily newspaper circulating State, 2 issues local newspaper, 4 copies Battye Library
23	Two months public submission period
24	Acknowledge submissions

MAJOR TASKS

- 25 Submit to Ministers for Water Resources, Tourism and Forestry (where relevant), and Fisheries and Mines for marine parks and marine management areas
 - 26 Ministers agree to reservation & reclassification of statutory 'zones' (marine).
 - 27 Copy submissions to Planning Team members, and prepare analysis of public submissions
 - 28 Planning Team and Advisory Committee meetings to discuss submissions
 - 29 Revise the Draft Plan on the basis of the public submissions
 - 30 Planning team review draft of amended management plan
 - 31 Seek input of specialist branches and other relevant govt agencies where appropriate
 - 32 Incorporate comments into final management plan
 - 33 Send revised plan to Advisory Committee
 - 34 Planning Team and Advisory Committee review final management plan (Advisory Committee meeting 3)
 - 35 Submit final Plan & Analysis of Public Submissions to Corp Ex
 - 36 Submit final plan & Analysis of Public Submissions to MPRC and Conservation Commission
 - 37 Submit final plan & APS to relevant LGAs and Ministers for Water Resources, Fisheries & Mines (for marine parks and marine management areas), Forestry (for State forest or timber reserves), Tourism (if not undertaken previously)
 - 38 Obtain ministerial concurrence for the classified area notice zones (for marine parks and marine management areas)
 - 39 Obtain Ministerial approval for the final plan
 - 40 Print the plan, arrange distribution and post on the DEC website as above
-
- 41 Ministerial release of the final plan**
-