

# **Senate Inquiry into the Funding and Resources Available to Meet the Objectives of Australia's National Parks, Other Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas**

**A Private Submission by Glenys Jones**

## **About the author of this submission**

Glenys Jones holds a first class honours degree in science (University of NSW) and has over 30 years of professional experience in the fields of scientific research, management planning and effectiveness evaluation for National Parks and World Heritage Areas.

Glenys was part of the small team of Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service planning staff who prepared the first (1992) and second (1999) management plans for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The 1999 management plan was awarded the Planning Institute of Australia's state and national Award of Excellence in the category for Environmental Planning or Conservation. In addition, the plan received the federal Planning Minister's Award for overall winner across all categories of the 2003 national awards for planning excellence.

Glenys pioneered the management evaluation system for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and coordinated preparation of the first '*State of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Report - an evaluation of management effectiveness*'. This report, together with its underlying management evaluation system, has been acclaimed internationally for setting a new global benchmark for informed, effective, and transparent management of protected areas.

Glenys' work in evaluation of management effectiveness for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area has been recognised through the Australasian Evaluation Society's 2005 Caulley Tulloch Prize for best publication in evaluation, and through selection as a finalist in the 2006 Banksia Awards for environmental excellence (Category 4: Land & Biodiversity). Tasmania's adaptive management approach is attracting significant international interest and uptake.

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## Addressing the Terms of Reference

### Introduction

Australia's National Reserve System could be the envy of the world. With appropriate management arrangements to support informed, effective and transparent management of its reserve system, Australia could consolidate and build upon its emerging international profile for leadership and excellence in National Park and World Heritage management.

A basic requirement for informed, effective and transparent management is that managers and stakeholders know whether management is achieving its objectives. Currently, few National Parks or Reserves are being systematically monitored and evaluated to reveal whether management is actually achieving its objectives. Too often, claims of sound management are based on anecdotal narrative rather than measured evidence of management success.

In the absence of objective evidence about what is being achieved, it is difficult for anyone to know with certainty whether the level of resources being provided for management of Australia's reserves is either adequate or inadequate.

In Tasmania, a management evaluation system has been developed which enables answers to be given to the fundamental question: 'Is management achieving its objectives?' (see Jones 2005, available on the website [http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/case\\_study/summary.html](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/case_study/summary.html)).

The following submission draws upon the experience and findings of the first comprehensive evaluation of management effectiveness for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (Parks & Wildlife Service, 2004, available on the website [http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/state\\_of\\_WHA/summary.html](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/state_of_WHA/summary.html)).

## **1 The values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas**

### **1.1 The need for clarity in management objectives and intent**

#### *The issue:*

Without clarity and agreement on what National Parks and Reserves are being managed to achieve, management of Australia's protected areas will remain at risk of being confused and contentious. To date, little attention has been given to setting out clear expectations of management outcomes for Australia's National Parks and Reserves.

#### *Suggested response:*

Two responses are proposed for addressing this issue – the first applies at the site level; the second at the national level. Both would assist in providing clarity of management intent, guidance in relation to management directions and priorities, and a consistent framework for evaluating and reporting on management effectiveness for Australia's National Reserve System.

- Management plans for National Parks and Reserves should include clear statements of management intent, such as statements of ‘key desired outcomes’ against each management objective. ‘Key Desired Outcomes’ are statements of the on-ground results that would be expected if the management objective were fully realised. For example, see the Key Desired Outcomes in the *1999 Management Plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area*<sup>1</sup> (Parks & Wildlife Service 1999; also available on the website <<http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/whaplan/summary.html>>).
- National standards for management of protected area categories should be developed, especially for areas of national or international significance. These standards should clearly establish the expected management outcomes to be achieved. For example, a basic standard of management might be:
  - Natural heritage values are identified and protected to maintain or enhance their condition now and for future generations.

## **2 Whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements**

### **2.1A case study of effective management**

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area in southwest Tasmania is a vast and globally significant reserve which comprises approximately 1.38 million hectares or 20% of the state of Tasmania. A comprehensive evaluation of management effectiveness for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (PWS 2004) revealed the following points of interest to this inquiry.

- Management of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area under the term of the first management plan (1992-1999) delivered major achievements, and sound progress was made against all the management objectives. Put simply, management was demonstrated to be effective.
- Joint federal and state funding and management arrangements for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area over this period underpinned the delivery of this effective management.
- The level of funding for management of the Tasmanian Wilderness over the 1992-1999 period was approximately \$8.4 million per annum. Direct federal funding for World Heritage Area management progressively decreased over the period (from about \$6.5 million to about \$5 million per annum) while the level of state funding for management of the area correspondingly increased over the period (from about \$2 to 3.5 million per annum). Refer to Figure A2-1 ‘History of World Heritage funding for management’, Appendix 2, *State of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area—an evaluation of management effectiveness* (Parks & Wildlife Service, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> This management plan received the federal Planning Minister’s Award as overall winner across all categories of the 2003 Planning Institute of Australia’s National Awards for Planning Excellence.

- Key stakeholders closely associated with management of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area<sup>2</sup> identified the level of funding provided for management was both the most important factor that had contributed positively to management performance and the most important factor that had limited or threatened management performance.

Inadequate resources for management and the uncertainty surrounding future funding were identified as key factors limiting or threatening overall management performance for the World Heritage Area. For example, there were insufficient funds to allow for full implementation of the statutory 1992 management plan during its term, and the uncertainty surrounding future funding levels raised concerns regarding the continuity of many management programs for the area. In addition, the short-term nature of some project-based funds resulted in the discontinuous provision of funds for some important long-term programs, such as the eradication program for feral goats. More recent changes in federal and state funding arrangements for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area have also increased uncertainties regarding ongoing funding levels for management of this important World Heritage Site.

## **2.2 Key factors affecting management performance**

The identification of key factors affecting management performance for National Parks and Reserves provides an important basis for guiding ongoing management to continue support for the positive factors, and to actively address the negative factors. This simple (and cheap) feedback loop is a basic tool for improving overall management performance.

The key factors that stakeholders identified as having contributed positively to management performance for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area over the 1992-1999 period were (in descending order of frequency of mention by stakeholders):

1. The level of Federal–State funding for management;
2. Public support and cooperation for management;
3. Good staff;
4. An effective Consultative Committee;
5. A good management plan and key management strategies;
6. Good science;
7. No major wildfires over the period.

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<sup>2</sup> The stakeholders comprised: the World Heritage Area Consultative Committee (an external advisory committee of scientific and community representatives); Department of the Environment and Heritage (the federal agency with responsibilities for World Heritage management); staff of the then managing agency (including specialists with professional expertise in natural and cultural heritage); and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council (the representative organisation of the Aboriginal community).

The key factors stakeholders identified as having limited or threatened overall management performance for the area were:

1. Inadequate resources and uncertainty of future funding;
2. Inadequate community engagement and support;
3. Political decisions were not always consistent with World Heritage management objectives;
4. Slow response/low priority for managing impacts and threats to values;
5. Inadequacy of fire management.

These factors may also be affecting management performance for other Australian National Parks and Reserves, and warrant consideration by this Inquiry.

### **2.3 The need for adequate secure funding for effective management**

#### *The issue:*

Effective management of Australia's National Reserve System relies on the provision of adequate resources to support long-term strategic programs to achieve the management objectives. Inadequate funding levels and/or short-term funding arrangements place significant pressure on managers not to undertake long-term strategic programs and/or to find alternative sources of revenue.

#### *Suggested response:*

- Federal and state governments together need to commit to providing adequate, secure, ongoing funding to support informed, effective and transparent management of Australia's National Reserve System. Provision of such resources should be linked to forward programs with requirements for 5-10 year demonstration of the adequacy of management outcomes. Formal requirements for regular evidence-based evaluations and 'State of the Parks Reports' could be one way of implementing this.
- Clear guidelines need to be developed for the appropriate use of complementary sources of funding for management of National Parks and Reserves e.g. for partnership arrangements, private sector support and endowments, and cost recovery arrangements from operations that derive a commercial or utility benefit from protected areas. In particular, such complementary funding arrangements must not introduce conflicts of interest with the primary management objective for conserving the natural and/or cultural heritage values.

## **3 Any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas**

### **3.1 The need for high priority for management of threats and impacts**

#### *The issue:*

A key factor identified by stakeholders as limiting or threatening management performance for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area was the slow response and/or low priority given to managing impacts and threats to sensitive areas

and values. (See page 192, *State of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Report*)

In addition, staff of the managing agency identified a significant limitation to the implementation of prescribed actions in the management plan was a lack of funding or insufficient time – both of which generally stemmed from the action being considered a low priority, either by those allocating funds to the project (within the managing agency or externally) or by those allocating staff time and effort to implement the action. (Refer to page 247, *State of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Report*)

Suggested response:

- A fundamental principle of management for the National Reserves System should be that the highest priority and commitment of management is to protect the natural and/or cultural heritage from degradation.
- From this it follows that management plans, budget allocations, and day-to-day management of the National Reserve System should give highest priority to addressing identified impacts and threats to the natural and/or cultural heritage.
- Protection of the natural and/or cultural heritage of the National Reserve System should include identifying and taking appropriate actions to avert and actively manage emerging threats and risks.
- Significant resources need to be made available to support preventive programs to avert potentially serious emerging threats and risks to the natural and/or cultural heritage of the National Reserve System, e.g. to prevent the establishment of introduced species or diseases; or to manage the risk of uncontrollable wildfires.

### **3.2 Design of major conservation programs to include evaluation**

The issue:

It is often not possible to determine whether major conservation management programs are being effective in delivering their intended results. This situation generally arises simply because relevant time-series measured performance data have not been collected which would allow the effectiveness of the program to be determined.

Suggested response:

- Effectiveness monitoring and evaluation needs to be incorporated into the design of major conservation programs to enable their effectiveness to be determined and, as appropriate, reported.
- Where evaluation demonstrates that the management program is not delivering the desired outcomes, managers (or those with ultimate management responsibility) need to take account of the findings to review and adjust the

management strategies, actions and/or overall management arrangements, including funding.

- Evaluations of management effectiveness for management plans or other major management programs should identify the key factors that are contributing positively to management effectiveness, and the key factors that are limiting or threatening management effectiveness. Positive factors should continue to be supported, while negative factors should be actively addressed by those with management responsibility for the National Reserve System.
- From time to time, external (third party) reviews of the standard of management for selected National Parks and Reserves should be undertaken to assist in ensuring high standards of practice and performance are achieved, maintained and as appropriate recognised.

#### **4 The responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans**

##### **4.1 The need for evaluation and an adaptive management approach**

###### *The issue:*

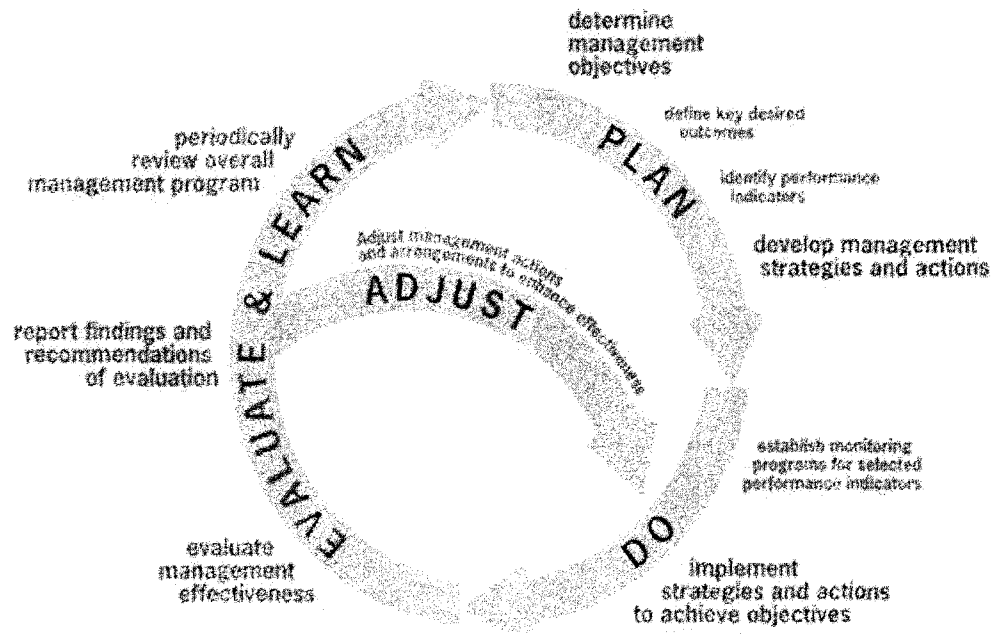
For sound management of National Parks and Reserves, managers, funders and other stakeholders need to know whether management is achieving its objectives. Effectiveness monitoring, evaluation and reporting provides a transparent basis for understanding the extent to which the responsibilities of management for Australia's National Parks and Reserves are being met.

###### *Suggested response:*

- Effectiveness monitoring, evaluation and reporting need to be firmly established as essential components of the management system for Australia's National Reserve System. Only then will managers, funders and other stakeholders know with certainty that Australia's National Parks and Reserves are being well managed.
- National adoption of an adaptive management approach, such as illustrated below, would support the delivery of informed, effective and transparent management of Australia's National Parks and Reserves.



## The adaptive management cycle



Source: Jones, G (2005) 'Is the management plan achieving its objectives?' In Worboys G, Lockwood M & De Lacy T, *Protected Area Management: Principles and Practice*, Second edition, Oxford University Press. Article and related material are available on the Parks and Wildlife Service website at: [www.parks.tas.gov.au](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au).

**Figure 1.** The integration of effectiveness monitoring, evaluation and reporting into the cycle of management for a protected area generates informed feedback that enables managers to learn from and improve on past management approaches and so progressively improve management. This adaptive management cycle, which is operating in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, is supported by two key documents: the management plan for the area; and the State of the Park Report which evaluates the effectiveness of management under the plan. This system is simple and flexible, and can be scaled up or down in complexity to suit a broad range of management contexts and applications.

### 4.2 Need for designated funds for effectiveness evaluation & reporting

The issue: Worldwide experience demonstrates that even where adaptive management is supported in principle, too often in practice monitoring and evaluation programs are allowed to be displaced by other more urgent (though often less important) day-to-day management activities.

Suggested response:

- Monitoring, evaluation and regular reporting on the effectiveness of management need to be required components of management for National Parks and Reserves e.g. through legislative requirements and/or long-term funding arrangements.
- Designated funds—or a proportion of funds for management—need to be directed to support effectiveness monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

## **5 The record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas**

### **5.1 The need for stable, supportive governance arrangements**

#### *The issue:*

The prerequisites for sound and effective management of National Parks and Reserves include:

- clear and relatively stable management objectives for National Parks and Reserves;
- management strategies focussed on the achievement of objectives and associated long term desired outcomes;
- adequate, secure, ongoing funding to support informed, effective and transparent management;
- enabling legislation and institutional arrangements to support effective management;
- hardworking committed staff with appropriate expertise, working together in a supportive and rewarding work environment.

Where any of these prerequisites is not met, the challenge and complexity of successfully undertaking long-term strategic programs to achieve real results for National Parks and Reserves is considerably increased. Where several of these factors co-exist, effective management for National Parks and Reserves is—to say the least—‘an uphill battle’.

As an example, institutional instability has been an ongoing issue for National Parks management in Tasmania. Originally a department in its own right, the Parks & Wildlife Service has been variously restructured to a different department on average every three years for the past 25 years. These broader departments have other responsibilities and priorities, and this gives rise to an ongoing succession of abrupt changes in management directions and priorities for National Parks management. In one recent restructure, the majority of staff with professional expertise in natural heritage and conservation science were excised from the managing agency for National Parks. These changes raise real concerns regarding the management capacity of the managing agency to meet its legislative mandates. In addition to the above major institutional changes, there have been innumerable internal restructures and associated staff changes. This degree of institutional instability consumes much staff time, effort and resources. The gains in terms of on-ground outcomes for National Parks are uncertain.

#### *Suggested response:*

- Governance arrangements for Australia’s National Reserve System need to provide a stable and supportive platform that nurtures the critical success factors for sound and effective management. These include:
  - clear and relatively stable management objectives and standards for protected area categories;
  - enabling legislation to support the objectives;

- management arrangements that support long-term strategic programs to achieve the objectives and associated desired outcomes;
- adequate, secure, ongoing funding to support demonstrated effective management;
- transparency and accountability in management through effectiveness monitoring, evaluation and reporting;
- an adaptive management approach which fosters continuous improvement;
- appropriate staff with relevant expertise;
- a supportive and rewarding work environment;
- periodic external (third party) review of the standards of management for selected National Parks and Reserves.

## Conclusion

Australia is well positioned to consolidate and build on its emerging global profile for leadership and excellence in National Parks and World Heritage management.

The provision of adequate, secure funding and appropriate management arrangements to support informed, effective and transparent management of Australia's National Reserve System is a sound investment in the future of Australia's unique wilderness and wildlife, and the opportunities that build on Australia being recognised as 'a nation living in harmony with nature'.

## References

Jones, Glenys (2005) Is the management plan achieving its objectives? *In* Worboyr, G, Lockwood, M & De Lacy, T, 2005, Protected Area Management. Principles and Practice. Second edition, Oxford University Press. Available on the website

<[http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/case\\_study/summary.html](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/case_study/summary.html)>.

NOTE: This brief article outlines the adaptive management system operating in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The approach is simple and flexible and can be scaled up or down in complexity to suit a broad range of management contexts and purposes.

Parks and Wildlife Service, 1999, *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999*, Hobart Tasmania. Available on the Parks and Wildlife Service website at:

<<http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/techrep.html#>>.

NOTE: This statutory management plan demonstrates the integration of a framework for evaluating management effectiveness through the use of statements of Key Desired Outcomes against the management objectives.

Parks and Wildlife Service, 2005, *State of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area—an evaluation of management effectiveness*, Report No. 1, Department of Tourism Parks Heritage and the Arts, Hobart, Tasmania. Available on the Parks and Wildlife Service website at:

[http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/state\\_of\\_WIIA/summary.html](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/publications/tech/state_of_WIIA/summary.html).

NOTE: This first comprehensive evaluation of management effectiveness for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area has been acclaimed internationally as setting a new global benchmark for informed, effective, and transparent management of protected areas.