

The Development of the 1999 Management Plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (Australia)

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Abstract—This paper describes the multi-stage public consultation process and other aspects of the development by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service of the second (1999) management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (Australia).

It describes the background to, and rationale for, the process used in developing the plan; it details the consultation process itself; and it critically examines the lessons learned in the course of developing the plan and considers how the effectiveness of such a process can be assessed.

Tasmania is one of the states of Australia. It is an island in the Southern Ocean, immediately south of mainland Australia. It has a cool, temperate, maritime climate, substantially different from most of mainland Australia.

Australia has 13 World Heritage Areas. The best known are Kakadu, Uluru (formerly known as Ayers Rock) and the Great Barrier Reef. The Tasmanian Wilderness is probably the best known of the rest. World Heritage probably has greater significance in Australia than in most other countries because land management is the responsibility of the states, and all Australian 'national parks' are actually proclaimed under state legislation. However, the World Heritage Convention is an international agreement, signed by the federal government. This gives the federal government a role, which it would not otherwise have, in the management of Australia's World Heritage Areas. Hence these areas, which are managed jointly by the state and federal governments, almost amount to a 'National' national park system. Management of the Tasmanian Wilderness is the responsibility of Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, with limited oversight by the federal government. The area's World Heritage status also results in Tasmania receiving considerable federal funding for management of the area.

Tasmania is approximately 300 kilometres (200 miles) north to south and 300 kilometres east to west, and about 300 kilometres south of mainland Australia. Around 30% of the state's land is reserved under some category of conservation land tenure. The Tasmanian Wilderness covers

approximately 20% of the state. It comprises Tasmania's four largest national parks and several smaller areas of various other conservation land tenures.

Tasmania has a population just under 500,000. It has the weakest economy of all the Australian states, and tourism is seen as one of the few economic growth areas. Tasmania's tourism marketing promotes ecotourism based on the state's natural values; particularly those of the Tasmanian Wilderness. This puts considerable environmental pressure on the Tasmanian Wilderness even though most tourist accommodation is outside the boundaries and most tourism occurs at a few well-developed sites near the periphery of the area.

The Tasmanian Wilderness is an extensive, wet, temperate, wilderness area covering much of southern and western Tasmania. It is approximately 200 kilometres north to south and averages 70 kilometres east to west (120 by 40 miles). Although the highest point is only 1,600 metres (5,000 feet) above sea level and there is no year-round snow cover, much of the area is very rugged and contains the only extensive, recently glaciated areas in Australia. The last glaciation ended 10,000 to 12,000 years ago (Smith and Banks 1993).

The area was used for millennia by Aboriginals, who have left their signature on the area in the form of an ecology strongly influenced by their burning practices, as well as physical remains including middens and artwork. No Aboriginals now live permanently in the area, but some places are of great significance to the present-day Tasmanian Aboriginal Community.

Historically, the area was extensively explored and prospected during the 19th century, but the only economic activity in the area has been small-scale mining and logging, a limited amount of trapping (for furs) and, in a limited area, grazing, which continued until very recently. The area also contains one large and several smaller hydroelectric schemes. Apart from the hydroelectric impoundments, none of these activities have left much lasting trace. Hence there are extensive areas where there is little evidence of twentieth century 'civilisation'; wilderness by most definitions of the term.

The Tasmanian Wilderness contains no permanent human habitation, apart from a small amount of accommodation near the periphery. Few roads penetrate the area. The predominant use of the area is for recreation; it offers excellent opportunities for wilderness bushwalking (trips up to several weeks duration, on or off tracks). It is widely regarded as the 'Mecca' of Australian bushwalkers and has a growing international reputation. There is also a highly regarded trout fishery (introduced northern hemisphere species) in the Central Plateau lakes. Unlike most of the rest of the Tasmanian Wilderness, the Central Plateau section has a long history of use by local people. As well as fishing, some

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hunting, horse riding, four-wheel-driving and associated hut use continues. These 'established' practices are seen by some groups to be at odds with achieving conservation outcomes.

The area was placed on the World Heritage List in two stages, in 1982 and 1989. The 1982 listing came in the midst of a political furore over the proposed construction of a major hydroelectric scheme (the 'Franklin Dam') within the area. Construction of the scheme did not proceed as a result of federal government intervention using authority obtained as a result of the World Heritage listing. The area was expanded in 1989 as a result of a decision to protect a major area of tall eucalypt forest from logging (the 'Helsham Inquiry'). Again, the area's World Heritage status gave the federal government the right to be involved, and reinforced the perception in some sections of the Tasmanian community that World Heritage listing was a ploy to give the federal government the right to intervene in land management issues which would otherwise be a matter for the state government alone.

There was also serious distrust of the Parks and Wildlife Service in some quarters, mostly dating back to when the Central Plateau was added to the Tasmanian Wilderness in 1989. Many established practitioners had been led to believe (not by the Parks and Wildlife Service) that all activities that had previously been permitted within the area would be allowed to continue after World Heritage listing. Soon after listing, some of their more environmentally unacceptable activities were restricted or banned to reflect the new status of the area (for example, several four-wheel-drive tracks into sensitive areas were closed).

This history resulted in a polarisation of strongly held views in the Tasmanian community on the future management of the area and, in some quarters, considerable antagonism towards the Parks and Wildlife Service. This legacy of ill-feeling was one of the obstacles to be overcome by the Parks and Wildlife Service in preparing plans for the area.

In 1990, planning for the area was still poorly coordinated. Only one of the four major national parks had a finalised management plan and, although plans were in varying stages of completion for several other parts of the Tasmanian Wilderness, the decision was made to prepare a single management plan for the entire area. Several stages of public comment, accompanied at times by considerable controversy in the local media, led to a very 'pro-wilderness' draft management plan. A series of last-minute alterations to the plan, following a change of state government and after the closure of public comment, diluted the 'pro-wilderness' nature of the plan and thereby antagonised the conservation lobby, but defused many of the strongly felt objections of 'established' users, some of whom had threatened civil disobedience in relation to some plan prescriptions. However, some of these stakeholders, particularly local communities adjacent to the area, felt that their input to the planning process had been ignored and remained fundamentally dissatisfied with aspects of the plan, which was finalised in September 1992.

Some aspects of the 1992 plan met with poor acceptance from 'established practitioners' from the start, and some other problems (such as the absence of a mechanism to assess new development proposals) became apparent as the plan was implemented. Nevertheless, it guided management of the area for the next seven years, two years longer

than its intended life. The Parks and Wildlife Service was determined to overcome a number of the ongoing issues from the 1992 plan so, in 1994, the decision was made to review the plan with the aim of having the new plan in place by September 1997. This deadline was not met for a variety of reasons, including state and federal elections that delayed key approval processes. The new plan took effect in March 1999.

The most controversial management issues dealt with in the development of the new plan were those related to tourism, 'established' practices and fire management; the key nature conservation question being whether land managers should actively use fire to maintain the diversity of the ecosystem.

Development of the new plan was the responsibility of the World Heritage Area Planning Team within the Policy and Planning Section of the Parks and Wildlife Service. The team was responsible for most of the policy development and drafting of the plan in consultation with various Parks and Wildlife Service specialists and field staff. Given the importance of the tourism industry to the Tasmanian economy and a push by successive Tasmanian governments to take a 'whole of government' approach to the promotion of tourism, we made a special effort to involve Tourism Tasmania (the state government tourism promotion agency) and the Tourism Council of Australia (the main industry lobby group) in the development of the plan. As well, there were discussions with all other relevant State Government agencies, who also got to comment on an early (pre-public-release) draft of the plan.

The decision to attempt a multistage public consultation process was made on pragmatic grounds. The planning team was very aware of the poor acceptance of some aspects of the 1992 Plan (as described above) and also of the major problems encountered with planning for two other Australian World Heritage sites. At Willandra Lakes a final draft plan of management was completed after ten years, but never adopted, due to a 'failure to account for local concerns' and a failure 'to engender, amongst local stakeholders, a sense of ownership for its strategies' (Corbett and Lane, 1997). In the case of the Wet Tropics the release of the management plan was delayed for several years, due largely to the failure of the planners to adopt a collaborative approach towards several key stakeholders both inside and outside of government (Lane, 1997).

The Tasmanian planning team was also aware of the general trend towards a transactive approach in both urban and natural area planning. They recognised that the public involvement in the development of the 1992 plan had not succeeded in gaining the support of some key stakeholders, despite having been done with the best intentions of consulting with and educating the public, and being a major advance over any similar process previously conducted by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service. They concluded that the only way to gain broad public acceptance of the new plan was to move beyond public consultation as an adjunct to rational planning to engage the critical stakeholder groups and create a consensus; the approach advocated by McCool and Stankey (1986).

Since this was the second plan for the area, the planners already had a very good idea of the key issues and stakeholders so they tailored the planning process to suit their

particular circumstances rather than follow the steps prescribed by any particular planning theory. For example, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum 'has all too often been applied as a recipe rather than a set of principles' (Hamilton-Smith, 1999).

This attempt to gain the involvement and support of all stakeholder groups by means of the multistage public consultation process is described below.

The Community Consultation Process

There were three formal stages of public consultation during the preparation of the 1999 Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan. Simultaneously, but independent of this broad public consultation and with more restricted public input, two projects looked at Aboriginal management of the Tasmanian Wilderness and non-Aboriginal established practices in the Tasmanian Wilderness. While all this was happening, there were numerous public meetings and meetings with interested groups, and the issues were considered in detail by the World Heritage Area Consultative Committee, the main stakeholder advisory group for the World Heritage Area.

Stage 1—Issues Stocktake

The 'Issues Stocktake' was a 'blank sheet' approach: Respondents were asked to tell us what they considered to be the issues, and how they would like to see them managed. Copies were sent to everyone on an extensive mailing list of people who had made submissions on the previous management plan or previously contacted us on World Heritage matters. In addition, the process was widely advertised.

The 'blank sheet' approach was adopted in the hope of ensuring that all issues were raised at the earliest possible stage of the plan review, to get a broad range of stakeholders involved at an early stage and to avoid accusations of 'leading' public comment, which had been made during the development of the 1992 management plan. The Issues Stocktake successfully achieved all of these objectives but the analysis of the unstructured responses was very time consuming, especially as many respondents ignored the instructions which were intended to give some consistent structure to their submissions.

Responses were received from all of the main interest groups (and many individuals) who had shown an interest in management of the Tasmanian Wilderness in the past. There were no surprises among the issues raised, but some changes in the strength of feeling on particular issues were evident when compared to the consultation on the 1992 plan five years previously.

Stage 2—Issues and Options

This stage of consultation was designed to obtain a more detailed and informed response on a narrower range of issues than the Issues Stocktake. A series of 'Issues and Options' papers were written (most were two or three pages in length) to give background information on ten topics. The subjects were selected from the topics which had aroused the

most interest in the Issues Stocktake, but with the condition that they were matters for which public feedback could be useful and influence final policy. Every effort was made to present a balanced view. The Issues and Options kit included a set of questions specific to each paper.

The topics were:

1. Management Objectives and Zoning
2. Fire Management
3. Visitor Facilities and Tourism Development
4. Central Plateau Conservation Area Issues
5. Walking Tracks
6. Fishing
7. Recreational Vehicle Use
8. Hunting
9. Horse Riding
10. Aircraft Overflights

The analysis of this data was much simpler than the analysis of the Issues Stocktake because the respondents answered specific questions. We also had an ulterior motive in this stage of the consultation; several of the papers were published as much for their educational role as for the usefulness of the feedback from them.

The Issues and Options process gave a useful insight into the range of opinions on these issues, who held them, and the strength with which they were held (refer to further discussion under 'Analysis of Results'). Little of the information was new or unexpected, but it served a very useful role in confirming the policy directions to be taken in the new management plan.

Stage 3—Formal Public Comment on the Draft Management Plan

The formal public comment period was double the minimum required by law (one month) to give the public every opportunity to comment.

Only one minor new issue came to our attention, and the comment period was uneventful. This was a great improvement on the 1992 plan, which was wracked with controversy at this stage.

The range of comments generally reflected those already received in previous stages of consultation, so only minor changes were made as a result.

Feedback to Contributors

The provision of feedback was seen as essential if participants were to know that their opinions were being taken seriously and that the consultation was not just 'window-dressing.' Publishing a summary of the public comment at each stage also filled the valuable educational role of making the public aware of the range of views which the Parks and Wildlife Service had to reconcile (this point is discussed further under 'Broader Issues ... Set the Context' below). The summary of the previous stage of consultation was mailed out to all contributors at the start of the following stage of the process and the final summary of comments on the draft plan was mailed out at the time of the launch of the final plan.

Volume and Continuity of Comment Across the Three Formal Stages of Consultation

A total of 1,062 individuals or groups made one or more submissions at one or more of the three stages, an impressive total for a small state (few submissions came from outside Tasmania) and one which illustrates the level of public interest in management of the Tasmanian Wilderness.

The Issues and Options papers attracted the greatest response (578 submissions), followed by the draft plan (390) and the Issues Stocktake (300). The popularity of the Issues and Options probably reflects their content; they asked respondents specific questions about their area(s) of interest, a less challenging task than defining the issues (Issues Stocktake) or critiquing the draft management plan. The relatively low response to the draft management plan hopefully reflected a general level of satisfaction with it, but one possible cause was 'respondent fatigue;' many government processes were calling for public comment on a range of issues during the same time frame, and it is usually the same few individuals who get involved in many of these. Other possible causes were a feeling of having already commented, via the earlier stages of the plan review, or a perception that little was likely to change, regardless of what comment was made at this stage. Another possible factor was the timing of the release of the draft plan. It was launched in mid-November, with comment closing in late January, so the end of the comment period coincided with the main Christmas-summer holiday season in Australia.

The three formal stages of consultation were designed on the assumption that it would be basically the same audience responding to each stage of the process, and their comments would be informed by the feedback from the previous stage. However, only 2% of total respondents made submissions to all three stages, and only 16% of respondents commenting on the draft plan had been involved in either of the previous stages. Still, the majority of submissions to the final plan appeared reasonably well-informed on the issues, suggesting that respondents had been exposed to some relevant information source such as public meetings or newsletters from organisations or clubs.

Aboriginal Consultancy

This was the main form of consultation with the Aboriginal community and led to a negotiated partnership between the Aboriginal community and the Parks and Wildlife Service to manage the Aboriginal values of the area. The work was done by a consultant from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council.

Established Practices Consultancy

Established Practices refers to long established-activities, primarily by people living adjacent to the area, such as horse riding, four-wheel-driving, hunting and maintenance of privately constructed huts. This consultancy was done by a social anthropologist from outside the Parks and Wildlife Service.

It resulted in considerable concessions for these activities, compared to the 1992 management plan, permitting them to

continue where they did not threaten the values of the area. This has reversed the attitudes of many of the local communities around the area from being vocal critics to actively supporting the new plan.

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Consultative Committee

The Consultative Committee meets quarterly, with each meeting lasting several days. Meetings usually include a field trip to inspect some environmental issue in the Tasmanian Wilderness.

It is a combined scientific and community committee, comprised of 14 influential members of the Australian and Tasmanian community who represent a very broad range of scientific and general interests. Half are nominated by the state government and half by the federal government. They spent a total of 20 days debating the new plan, reaching consensus on almost all issues.

The committee is an extremely useful sounding board for the Parks and Wildlife Service and an invaluable mechanism for getting information back to the stakeholder groups that its members represent. They are also influential; when such a broadly representative group, containing such a range of experience and expertise, reaches an informed consensus, it is very hard for either the Parks and Wildlife Service or politicians to ignore them.

When the final plan was released, the editorial writers in the two major Tasmanian newspapers rang several members of the Consultative Committee. When they got generally similar comments and support for the plan from all members, the writers concluded that it must be broadly supported, thereby ensuring a positive and low-key coverage in the media.

Public Meetings

As well as several formal public meetings, we undertook to meet with every group, however small, that requested a meeting. This stemmed partly from a general determination to be as open as possible in the consultation, and partly from the acknowledgement that consultation based on written submissions discriminates against the less well-educated, and it was particularly important to include the country people who live adjacent to the Tasmanian Wilderness.

These meetings generally served to confirm the feedback received in other aspects of the consultation process and also helped to break down the 'faceless bureaucrat' stereotype.

The Need to Involve All Stakeholders

There is a need to actively ensure that all major stakeholders are involved. Local communities and the Aboriginal community are key stakeholders whose involvement is essential for a successful outcome, yet they are reluctant to participate or likely to be overlooked in a broad consultation process and need to be contacted directly. Conservationists and bushwalkers are generally well-educated and well-organised; they can readily make their point in an 'academic' written consultation process. In contrast, local and Aboriginal communities are among the sections of the

population least likely to respond to such an approach and specific initiatives, such as the meetings and consultancies described above, need to be made to get them involved.

Types of Media

As described above, the various stages of consultation mainly relied on verbal communication and the distribution of printed material. Little use was made of the electronic mass media or newspapers, except for a few items publicising the consultation process.

The Issues and Options papers were made available on the Internet as well as on paper; provision was made for people to respond by completing on-line forms, but only 11 responses were received electronically (August 1996). Since that time, the number of potential respondents with Internet access has increased significantly, and the effort required to produce attractive and effective Web pages has decreased dramatically. We were probably too close to the cutting edge of new technology at this time and perhaps failed to adequately advertise this opportunity.

Both the draft and final management plans have been made available on the Parks and Wildlife Service Web Site (www.parks.tas.gov.au/wha/whahome.html), along with a lot of other background and planning related information. Over 1,600 downloads of the draft plan took place. The on-line availability of the plan (in Adobe Acrobat™ format) obviously enhances information interchange around the world and enables anyone to search the entire document for a particular text string, which can be very useful to ensure that you are aware of all references to a particular issue. However, the file size of the entire plan, including maps, is over five megabytes, so its usefulness for some users is limited by the time required to download such a large file.

What Could Have Been Done Better?

Consistency and Coordination Within the Parks and Wildlife Service—A separate document requiring public comment, a discussion paper on permits for overnight walking within the Tasmanian Wilderness, was released almost simultaneously with the Issues and Options papers from a different Branch of the Parks and Wildlife Service. This put an additional burden on the many people who wished to respond to both, and some claimed that there were inconsistencies between the two documents.

Overestimating Our Ability to Deliver With Limited Resources—This led to an inability to follow through on some commitments; most notably an open day which was planned to discuss Central Plateau management issues on site. It did eventually take place, but on a much smaller scale than originally planned. At a different order of magnitude, it was realised quite early in the plan development process that it would not be possible to assess the Recreation and Tourism potential of the World Heritage Area at the desired level of detail without seriously delaying completion of the plan. This led to a decision to treat parts of this key issue at a relatively general level in the plan while committing the Parks and Wildlife Service to completing a detailed Recreation and Tourism Strategy within 12 months of finalisation of the plan itself. This avoided a major delay to the plan, but

at the cost of devolving many significant decisions to a subsidiary document, the Recreation and Tourism Strategy.

Broader Issues Relating to Public Consultation

Set the Context (Both the Legal Framework and the Range of Stakeholders' Views)

A recurring criticism during consultation is: 'I have already told you what I wanted; why haven't you done it?' There are usually two main reasons 'why we have not done it.'

We Are Not Allowed to Do It—There is a clear need to set the context for what is possible in the plan, to explain to stakeholders the legal and policy constraints on the Parks and Wildlife Service, that there are some matters that are beyond the scope of the planning process, however important they may be (for example, the boundaries of the area in question). In addition, there are some policies that we cannot change, regardless of what they tell us (for example, legal requirements) and some where we are unlikely to be able to change (for example, where we are clearly directed by government policy). It is also useful if stakeholders recognise that there are some issues where we are unlikely to be prepared to change (for example, where the activity in question is demonstrably causing significant environmental damage).

We Cannot Please Everyone—If one group of stakeholders says 'yes' and another group says 'no,' it is obviously impossible to satisfy everyone. As discussed above, the Issues and Options papers served a valuable educational role in making stakeholders aware of the range of views put to the Parks and Wildlife Service and making stakeholders realise that the best possible outcome for their group did not necessarily equate with getting everything that they wanted. Getting all groups together in one forum can also be a really useful mechanism to make them aware that we have to manage for all users, not just them. For example, one public meeting early in the process was attended by both hunters and conservationists. At the start of the meeting, the hunters were criticising us for not giving them more concessions. By the end of the meeting, they had realised how passionately the conservationists opposed hunting and were thanking the Parks and Wildlife Service for its support of any continued hunting in the Tasmanian Wilderness.

Analysis of Comment

Analyses of public consultation must acknowledge the limitations of the data on which they are based. In particular, submissions do give a good indication of the range of views among members of particular groups, but they do not represent public opinion, and they do not give much indication of the level of support for particular proposals.

Range of Views—The submissions do give a good indication of the range of views present among those members of the public who are really interested in the management of the Tasmanian Wilderness, and the range of views present

among members of particular groups, such as fishermen or bushwalkers.

Public Opinion—Over 1,000 public submissions do not constitute a statistically valid public opinion poll because the respondents are self-selected. The respondents have a far greater interest in, and also greater knowledge of, the Tasmanian Wilderness than the ‘average’ member of the Tasmanian public. If you want public opinion, you need to run a properly conducted public opinion poll on randomly selected members of the public, with the questions set at an appropriate level of detail. The Parks and Wildlife Service is also well aware that there are some substantial user groups, such as the tourists who form the majority of visitors, who are hardly represented at all in these submissions. These tourists would also be missed in a public opinion poll because they are mostly from interstate or overseas, so it is necessary to use an entirely different process, such as a visitor survey, to gauge their opinions.

Number of Submissions (1)—The number of submissions for or against an issue does not give a reliable indication of the level of support for a particular proposal, either in the general public or in particular user groups, because the respondents are self-selected. People have a complex range of reasons for choosing to get involved in a public consultation process; there is no justification for assuming that the relatively small numbers who make submissions are a representative sample of any larger group. For example, it is likely that the actual number of submissions reflects the enthusiasm with which the leaders of the various lobby groups encourage their supporters to get involved in the process, especially when groups attempt to ‘stack’ the process by encouraging their supporters to complete large numbers of ‘proforma’ responses. In the report on the first stage of public consultation on the 1992 management plan, the Parks and Wildlife Service implied undue significance to the number of submissions by reporting the numbers for and against each suggestion. This resulted in some lobby groups treating the second stage of consultation as a ‘pseudo petition,’ (Rando, 1992), with the main aim being to get as many signatures as possible, a futile exercise which did nothing to enhance understanding of the issues or the credibility of the consultation process.

Number of Submissions (2)—Another reason for not attaching much significance to the number of submissions received for or against an issue is that some come from individuals, while others come from a wide range of groups and organisations. A simple count would imply equal weight to submissions from a private individual (who may or may not have real knowledge/interest in the issue), an organisation or club (which may represent a very small or a very large membership), a commercial operator, an industry body or another government agency.

Number of Submissions (3)—There is also the question of logic and supporting information in submissions; one well argued submission for a particular point of view should count for more than any number of unsupported statements opposing it!

Estimating the Degree of Polarization on Particular Issues—Many of the questions in the Issues and Options Comment Guide included Likert Scale (tick box) questions on a scale of ‘strongly approve,’ ‘approve,’ ‘neutral,’ ‘disapprove,’ ‘strongly disapprove.’ The manner in which these data were used can best be demonstrated by a simple fictitious example:

- Suppose that a proposition ‘scored’ 100 ‘strongly approve’ (all from established practitioners) and 200 ‘strongly disapprove’ (all from conservationists).
- If these were simply added together, it would give a clear majority for ‘strongly disapprove,’ but this would only prove that more conservationists completed the question than did established practitioners — this adds nothing to our understanding of opinions on the proposition.
- However, two useful conclusions can be drawn from these data:
 1. The proposition was strongly approved by established practitioners and strongly disapproved by conservationists, and;
 2. There was strong polarization in the WHA stakeholder community on this issue because all opinions were ‘strongly ...’; there were no ‘approve,’ ‘neutral’ or ‘disapprove.’

This gauging of the strength of feeling on particular issues is very useful for identifying ‘hot’ issues which may deserve further attention and for briefing senior decision-makers about where they can expect significant criticism or support.

Cost Effectiveness

This was the longest, most expensive consultation process ever undertaken by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service. Was it worth it?

Throughout the process, we were concerned that we were possibly spending a lot of money confirming the obvious, gathering a lot of information which we knew anyway or which could have been gathered from a less inclusive, less expensive process. There is an element of truth in this, in that only a minority of policies and prescriptions in the new plan changed as a result of this feedback. However, the formal consultation often served to confirm information that we had gleaned from other sources; the picture that you get from talking to several small groups and individuals can be very biased, but if it is confirmed from other source(s), such as several hundred written submissions, you can have a lot more faith in it.

The whole consultation process also had a major, but unquantifiable role in ‘selling’ the final plan. To be accepted, all planning decisions need to be transparent and accountable; stakeholders and the public need to understand how and why decisions were made, and the exposure received by most policies during the consultation process added greatly to their credibility.

There is also the need to not just consult, but to be seen to consult. After multiple stages of public consultation, far in excess of the minimum legal requirement, nobody could deny that consultation had occurred, and few could argue that it had not been done sincerely.

What Are the Criteria for Gauging the Success of Community Consultation?

Is this just an absence of controversy over the final plan or is it more than that?

The political reality is that the plan ultimately had to be approved by our state and federal ministers, and they would not endorse it without it being supported by the key stakeholders, particularly the tourist industry, the Aboriginal community and the local communities around the area. So we had to achieve consensus with all key groups. At the same time, it still had to be an effective plan; we did not want a 'lowest common denominator' plan, which everyone could agree with because it hardly said anything. This required something much better than a 'lowest common denominator' standard of community consultation. The reception of the final 1999 plan, which is supported by all major stakeholders, suggests that we achieved this.

But is this because we did it so much better than in 1992 or just because times have changed?

We Did Do It Better This Time—The consultation process was more inclusive and extensive, with some groups it included genuine negotiation rather than just consultation, and some participants could see changes as a result of their submissions. During this lengthy period of consultation, other Parks and Wildlife Service initiatives, including the way in which we implemented the 1992 Plan, also helped to restore the faith of the community in the Tasmanian Wilderness and its management. In hindsight, having so many stages of consultation was probably overkill, but the end result has been that many people who normally oppose any conservation measures actively support the new plan.

But We Also Need to Acknowledge That the World Has Changed—In 1992, the expanded Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area was still new and was either wonderful or threatening, depending on your point of view; now most stakeholders have accepted the new status quo. Also the broader political landscape has changed; it is less polarized. Few people still see World Heritage as a threat, and even our critics recognize the Tasmanian Wilderness as a major drawcard for the tourism industry. The 1992 plan has been accused of treating wilderness as the overriding value of the World Heritage Area to the exclusion of all other values. The 1999 plan is more acceptable to more people because it recognizes not only the wilderness, but also the Aboriginal, established practices and tourism values of the Tasmanian Wilderness. As such, it reflects changes in community attitudes and government policy during the intervening period.

Conclusions

Acceptance by stakeholders is a crucial aspect of making a plan work, but ultimately a plan is only a means to an end;

the ultimate rationale for undertaking a planning process is not to produce a plan but to produce on-ground outcomes that enhance the management of the area. The overall objective of the 1999 Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan is 'to identify, protect, conserve, present and, where appropriate, rehabilitate the world heritage and other natural and cultural values of the World Heritage Area, and to transmit that heritage to future generations in as good or better condition than at present.'

The process of developing the plan has already made some progress towards this objective. It has resolved a number of troublesome issues and enhanced all stakeholders' understanding of many other issues, but ultimately the success of the plan and all the effort that went into its development can only really be judged by the state of the Tasmanian Wilderness at the end of the plan's lifetime, and the plan specifies how we intend to assess that.

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