



# Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey 2013



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## Executive Summary

Benchmarking has become an important element of park management, as park managers increasingly use the resultant information to guide their activities and assist in the strategic allocation of diminishing management resources. It is also important in providing accountability and transparency for stakeholders who continue to be interested in the management activities and outcomes from park agencies. Benchmarking, when undertaken over time, allows the performance of an organisation or suite of organisations to be evaluated and the information used to extend best practice and improve poorly performing areas. The strategic use of information is a critical part of the 'solution' for park management across the entire sector. Such solutions will underpin the considerations of the IUCN World Parks Congress in November 2014 with its theme of *Parks, People, Planet: Inspiring Solutions*.

This report outlines the performance of park agencies in Australia and New Zealand as part of the ongoing *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey*, initially developed by Parks Forum in 2007. Of the 43 full members of Parks Forum, 25 local government, government department, park agencies and regional bodies completed the 2013 survey (58% of Parks Forum members). This is the third benchmark survey, and the second survey since the methodology was refined for the 2010 survey. Included in this report are results from the three surveys, allowing for the identification of general trends over the period 2007 to 2013. The sources of information agencies used to answer the benchmark questions expanded in the 2013 survey to encompass planning documents, research and specialist opinion as well as staff experience, which predominantly informed earlier surveys.

For the majority of benchmark measures, agencies had consistent results between the 2010 and 2013 survey periods including those relating to natural resources, biodiversity, visitor information, values of parks, organisational management, risk management, and training and professional development. Park managers have also committed to knowing more about visitors to their parks. Two benchmark measures showed improvement (difference in scores by 12% or more, indicating change in three or more agencies) between the two survey periods – regular independent surveys of visitor satisfaction and regular surveys of the demographics of park users. Additionally, a number of the areas where agencies were performing well (judged as having 90% or more agencies responding 'yes') in the 2010 survey are still above the 90% threshold. These included natural resources, visitor information, risk management and occupational health and safety. Three additional areas identified as performing well from the 2013 survey include organisational management aspects relating to linking management plans and annual operations, a management resources measure pertaining to budget allocation processes, and an assets and infrastructure measure relating to implementation of scheduled maintenance programs.

Agencies are continuing to struggle with economic benchmarks, particularly measuring economic benefits to local communities and maintaining effective engagement with tourism operators to enhance the visitor experience and park values. While not falling under the threshold of areas needing improvement (judged as having 60% or less of agencies responding 'yes'), one of the largest differences between the 2010 and 2013 surveys were noted for a measure pertaining to pest animals. Comments provided by agencies indicate that this is not an area of proactive management, but its importance to sustainable park management should not be underestimated. Additional areas identified from the 2013 survey as needing improvement included measures on tree management for amenity, guidelines and target programs to reduce an agency's ecological footprint, measuring community satisfaction and existence of fire management plans.

A key aspect for this benchmarking survey into the future is increasing the response rates of agencies beyond the rate of 58% in the 2013 survey. Additionally, to date, no Aboriginal corporation has responded. Improving the response rate will allow for more in-depth analysis of results, potentially allowing for comparison within groups of similar agencies, for example, national park agencies. This may have a further positive effect by encouraging agencies to continue to respond as the results presented become more meaningful.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

There are approximately 200,000 protected areas in the world, which provide a range of environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits to people and community. In November 2014, the global forum on protected areas, the IUCN World Parks Congress, will be held in Sydney. The theme for the Congress is *Parks, People, Planet: Inspiring Solutions* with a focus addressing the gap between conservation and sustainable development. The theme of the Congress aims to articulate the role of protected areas in conserving biodiversity and provision of ecosystem services, acknowledge the importance of parks for people in terms of economics and community well-being, and how parks, protected areas and nature-based solutions could be used to address global-scale challenges of climate change, health and support for human life.

To reflect the Congress' overall theme, a number of program streams have been developed and include:

- Reaching conservation goals;
- Responding to climate change;
- Improving health and well-being;
- Supporting human life;
- Reconciling development challenges;
- Enhancing the diversity and quality of governance;
- Respecting Indigenous and traditional knowledge and culture; and
- Inspiring a new generation.

Several of the measures in Parks Forum's *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey 2013* are reflected in these program streams. For example, benchmark measures relate to the management of threats to biodiversity, including involving local Indigenous groups in planning discussions, and organisational and risk management.

This report outlines the results of the third *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey*, with previous surveys conducted in 2010 and the initial survey in 2007. The purpose of these surveys and reports is to present data and information on management effectiveness of member agencies of Parks Forum. This is not only for agencies to evaluate their performance, but given three surveys have now been conducted, general trends are able to be determined showing areas of good performance and areas where improvement is needed. This highlights how benchmarking offers agencies a way to compare performance (Wober, 2002).

As of June 2013, there were 43 full member agencies of Parks Forum (Table 1). These included local governments, park agencies and Aboriginal corporations with responsibilities that range from vast landscapes with a variety of natural and cultural values to smaller community parks with a different range of values. Measuring and examining management effectiveness via benchmarking is an important consideration for the variety of Parks Forum agencies. By being open and accountable with how they and their parks and protected areas are performing, agencies can raise awareness about the importance of parks and the ecosystem services they provide.

Public support is necessary given that parks are often managed by public agencies that have to compete for funding with schools, hospitals and other public infrastructure. Data have shown that visitor numbers are declining on a per capita basis in Australia and other western countries. This may potentially result in a decline in public support, making it harder for park agencies to obtain funding (Moore, Weiler, Moyle & Eagles, 2013). Maintaining biodiversity and creating experiences

for visitors is a delicate balancing act, as reflected in the results for the benchmarking measures presented here and the program themes scheduled for the upcoming World Parks Congress.

**Table 1: Membership of Parks Forum as of June 2013**

Agency Type	Count
Local government	14
Government department	9
Park agency	10
Regional body	6
Aboriginal corporation	3
Associate members	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>

**1.2 Methods**

This report provides a summary, comparison and analysis of the results from the 2013, 2010 and 2007 surveys. All three surveys were completed by member agencies of the Parks Forum. In the most recent survey, 43 member agencies were invited to complete an online survey,<sup>1</sup> which was open from 12 June to 8 August 2013. As per 2010, the survey was administered and data compiled by Data Analysis Australia. The results from the 2010 surveyed have been analysed and published as Tonge and Moore (2011) and the 2007 survey as Carter (2008).

Questions in the surveys covered environmental, economic, social, cultural and management performance. Performance was considered in the broadest sense, covering design and process issues as well as the more usual output and outcome concerns. This broader approach was to ensure that performance in all stages of the management cycle was reported. Such an approach gives managers a multi-dimensional view of their agency’s management effectiveness. Examples of the performance (benchmarking) measures are given in Box 1. The guidelines for allocating a response to ‘yes’, ‘no’ and the other categories used in the survey (see Box 1) are given in the Appendix.

**Box 1. Format of benchmarking measures – examples**

<p>Implementation of the policy to inventory, protect and restore cultural heritage sites is <b>regularly measured</b> (&lt;every 5 years).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unable to Estimate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p>	<p>A policy (&lt;10 years old) to encourage public input into park management decisions via public consultation programs <b>exists</b>.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unable to Estimate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p>	<p>A public consultation program to provide input into park management decisions is <b>actively implemented</b>.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mostly Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mostly No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unable to Estimate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable (for parks estates that are not required to engage actively with the community)</p>
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The survey also included questions about the sources of information used in answering the questions (i.e. staff experience, research, planning documents, specialist opinion) and the role of the agency (i.e. type of population served, major role – e.g. predominantly protected area manager). Respondents could also add their written comments to any of the tick box answers.

<sup>1</sup> Copy of the online survey is available from Ingrid Seiler, Program Manager, Parks Forum. Email: info@parksforum.org.

Although there are some differences in questions between the 2007, 2010 and 2013 surveys, comparison between results for the survey periods was possible for most measures.

### 1.3 Analysis and Presentation of Results

Most of the results are presented in tables as the 'yes' percentage response or combined percentage for 'yes' and 'mostly yes' for each measure (see questions in Box 1 above). The raw count data for all questions from the 2013 survey are provided in a series of tables in the Appendix. The 'not applicable' data for the 2013 survey although included in the tables in the Appendix, are not included in the following results tables as its inclusion adds little to understanding the extent of 'yes' responses for each measure. Alternatively, 'unable to estimate', labelled as 'UE' in the tables, has been included in these tables. Its inclusion aims to show where agencies can improve their collection of performance information.

The responses for 2013, 2010 and 2007 are presented next to each other in the tables for ease of comparison. Conducting benchmarking across space *and* time allows the identification of general trends and these are also discussed. There are, however, a number of gaps in the results tables where a question was asked in 2013 and/or 2010 but not the 2007 survey. Where similar (but not the same) questions were asked in the 2007 survey, they have also been included in the results tables to enable another avenue of comparison between the survey periods. The tables are followed by a series of graphs illustrating the sources of information agencies used to obtain their responses to the 2013 and 2010 survey questions.

Due to the small sample sizes in both surveys, only descriptive statistics are presented. This small sample size also means that comparisons with sections (e.g., within local government) cannot be reasonably or wisely made. Scores that differ by 12% or more between survey periods are treated in this report as indicating a change as this means that three or more agencies responded differently between the 2010 and 2013 survey periods. These have been italicised in the results tables.

### 1.4 Overview of Surveyed Agencies

The benchmark survey was sent to 43 member agencies of the Parks Forum, with 25 responding. Responses per type of membership agency for all surveys are given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Survey responses by type of membership agency (count)**

Agency Type	2013	No. of members	2010	No. of members	2007	No. of members
Local government	10	14	9	10	4	11
Government department	8	9	8	14	7	7
Park agency	4	10	4	9	3	6
Regional body	3	6	3	4	3	4
Aboriginal corporation	0	3	0	2	–	–
Associate member	0	1	2	2	–	–
TOTAL	25	43	26	41	17	28

The surveyed agencies collectively serve a wide range of visitor populations – including city, regional, state and national visitors (Table 3). The major role of these agencies was evenly split between protected areas and urban parks (Table 4). This information was not obtained in the 2007 survey and as such no comparison is provided.



**Table 3: Visitor populations served by the member agencies from 2013 and 2010 survey**

Type of Population Served	2013 Count	2010 Count
City	11	9
Regional	5	6
State	7	7
National	2	4
TOTAL	25	26

**Table 4: Major role of the member agencies from 2013 and 2010 survey**

Major Role	2013 Count	2010 Count
Protected area manager	10	10
Urban park manager	10	11
Other	5	5
TOTAL	25	26

## 2. Environmental Benchmarks

Environmental benchmarks included natural resources, biodiversity, threats to these, and an agency's ecological footprint (Table 5).

**Table 5: Environmental benchmarks with 'yes' responses from 2007, 2010 and 2013 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	UE*
<b>Natural Resources</b>				
Sufficient information exists to support operational decision making	–	96	96	–
Sufficient information exists to support most or all of the areas of decision making	100	–	–	–
Existing information is used to allocate resources for operational decision making	–	92	96	–
<b>Biodiversity</b>				
Existence of policies to guide planning and management	81	92	84	–
Active implementation of policy(ies)	–	95	95	–
Policy contributes to improvement of condition/integrity	–	95	90	5
Biodiversity values are being maintained in excellent condition	69	75	72	8
<b>Tree management for amenity</b>				
<i>Existence of policy to maintain amenity or heritage significance</i>	67	70	56	–
Active implementation of policy(ies)	–	87	86	–
Policy is effective in maintaining health of trees and replacing aged, diseased or damaged trees	–	80	86	7
<b>Threats – Pest Plants</b>				
Existence of planned approach for weed management	–	88	84	12
Active implementation of planned approach	–	100	100	–
Planned approach is effective in reducing impacts	–	82	85	15
Planned approach to weed management is being implemented resulting in stabilisation/reduction of negative impacts	73	–	–	–
<b>Threats – Pest Animals</b>				
<i>Existence of planned approach for pest animal management</i>	–	84	64	12
Active implementation of planned approach	–	50	44	–
Planned approach is effective in reducing impacts	–	77	73	20
Planned approach to pest animal management is being implemented resulting in stabilisation/reduction of negative impacts	67	–	–	–
<b>Ecological Footprint</b>				
Existence of policy to reduce agency's ecological footprint	47	73	76	8
Sufficient information exists to develop and implement targeted program to reduce footprint	–	73	80	8
Guidelines and target program to reduce footprint exists	–	65	56	4
Measurement and reporting against footprint targets carried out annually	–	76	77	8

\* UE = Unable to estimate from the 2013 survey.

Measures in *italics* indicate a change in response between the reporting periods where 12% or more (or 3 or more agencies) have responded differently between these periods.

### 2.1 Natural Resources

The responses to the natural resources benchmarks were fairly similar in the 2010 and 2013 surveys.

### 2.2 Biodiversity

None of the decreases in the percentage of "yes" responses for three out of the four biodiversity benchmarks were large enough to suggest a change between the reporting periods. All of the

measures remained high, with scores around the 80-90% ranges. For example, “the existence of policies to guide planning and management” had 92% of agencies respond ‘yes’ in 2010, with 84% responding ‘yes’ in 2013 (and 81% in 2007). “Active implementation” of policies remained uniformly high in both 2010 and 2013 with 95% of agencies responding ‘yes’ in both survey periods.

### **2.3 Tree Management for Amenity**

The percentage of responding agencies with a policy to maintain trees for amenity or heritage significance decreased from 70% to 56% between 2010 and 2013 (Table 5). Upon further examination of the responses, 20% of responding agencies indicated that this benchmark was not applicable to them (Appendix). Active implementation of the policy remained similar in 2010 and 2013 (87%, 86%) as did the effectiveness of the policy (80% in 2010, 86% in 2013).

### **2.4 Threats – Pest Plants**

Agency responses to the benchmarks pertaining to the threat of pest plants were very similar in 2010 to 2013. Existence of planned approach to weed management was 88% in 2010 and 84% in 2013, with the active implementation of these approaches benchmarked at 100% in both reporting periods. Effectiveness of the planned approach was slightly lower but similar in both reporting periods (82% in 2010 and 85% in 2013), with 15% of agencies unable to estimate a response to this benchmark in 2013.

### **2.5 Threats – Pest Animals**

For pest animals, there was a 20% decrease in the percentage of responding agencies that had a planned approach for pest animal management from 84% in 2010 to 64% in 2013 (with 12% of responding agencies unable to provide a response to this benchmark). The percentage of responding agencies actively implementing their planned approach was low in both survey periods (50% in 2010, 44% in 2013).

### **2.6 Ecological Footprint**

Regarding an agency’s ecological footprint benchmarks, 76% of responding agencies in 2013 indicated that a policy existed to reduce their ecological footprint, with 80% indicating that they had sufficient information to develop and implement the targeted program. These results are similar to the 2010 survey with this pattern also evident for measurement and reporting against targets being carried out annually and having target programs to reduce their footprint.

As per the 2010 survey, agencies were again asked to provide five key actions that were planned over the next two years to reduce their agency’s footprint. Responses were similar to 2010 including reducing waste, water and energy use through recycling and the installation of solar panels or wind power technologies, as well as the continued impetus to move towards more energy efficient car fleets. In 2013, a number of agencies commented on actively managing and reducing paper usage and waste as well as ensuring new buildings were more environmentally sustainable and “green” in both design and materials used.

### 3. Economic Benchmarks

Economic measures cover the performance of tourism operators and the economic benefits of parks to local communities (Table 6). Tourism operators provide interpretation, information, education, recreational and tourism opportunities but for the purposes of this survey did not include food and beverage concessions. Economic benefits to local communities relate to employing local people, locally operated commercial tours, and using local contractors.

**Table 6: Economic benchmarks with 'yes' responses from 2007, 2010 and 2013 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	UE* (%)
<b>Tourism Operators</b>				
Effective engagement with wider tourism industry demonstrated through their participation in planning and management processes	–	–	40	20
<i>Policy for engaging with tourism operators exists</i>	53	61	46	4
<i>Active implementation of policy</i>	–	100	92	8
Effective tourism operator - protected area manager cooperation to enhance visitor experience	–	78	68	5
Effective tourism operator – protected area manager cooperation to protect park values	–	82	77	9
Effective tourism operator – protected area manager cooperation to enhance visitor experiences and protection of park system values	50	–	–	–
<b>Economic Benefit to Local Communities</b>				
Economic benefits flow from the existence of parks to local communities	53	–	–	–
<i>Policy to facilitate flow of economic benefits from parks to local communities exists</i>	–	21	20	16
<i>Active implementation of policy</i>	–	80	66	17
<i>Capacity to quantify economic benefits of parks to community</i>	–	36	20	20
<i>Direct benefits of parks to community has been quantified</i>	29	12	25	0

\* UE = Unable to estimate.

Measures in *italics* indicate a change in response between the reporting periods where 12% or more (or 3 or more agencies) have responded differently between these periods.

#### 3.1 Tourism Operators

A new benchmark measure was included in the 2013 survey pertaining to effective engagement with the wider tourism industry demonstrated through their participation in planning and management processes. Of the responding agencies, 40% indicated that this was occurring and another 20% were unable to estimate a response to this new benchmark. For the tourism operators' benchmark measures the only one to change, and off a low base to being with, was having a policy for engaging with tourism operators, changing from 53% in 2007 up to 61% in 2010 and down again to 46% in 2013. All other measures remained largely unchanged.

#### 3.2 Economic Benefit to Local Communities

Determining the economic benefits of parks to local communities is still an aspect that responding agencies have difficulty implementing. The percentage of agencies that had a policy to facilitate the flow of economic benefits from parks to local communities was similar in the 2010 (21%) and 2013 (20%) surveys; however both implementation of the policy and having the capacity to quantify the economic benefits to the community decreased between 2010 and 2013. In a positive trend, 25% of responding agencies indicated that in 2013 they had quantified the direct economic benefits to parks to the community contrasted with only 12% in 2010.

## 4. Social Benchmarks

Information relating to visitors, measurements of satisfaction (both visitor and community) and engagement of volunteers encompass the social measures in the *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey* (Table 7).

**Table 7: Social benchmarks with 'yes' responses from 2007, 2010 and 2013 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	UE* (%)
<b>Visitor Information</b>				
Sufficient information exists to inform planning and management of visitor use	–	87	88	–
On-going park visitor information programme to support planning and decision making on managing visitor use	65	–	–	–
Visitor facilities are being maintained to mandated standards	–	91	92	–
Visitor facilities and services are excellent for current levels of visitation	76	–	–	–
Sufficient management ensuring visitor use does not negatively impact on park values	–	91	96	4
Visitor impact management is being implemented and negative visitor impacts on park values are essentially no longer a problem	75	–	–	–
<b>Measuring Satisfaction</b>				
<i>Regular independent surveys of visitor satisfaction undertaken</i>	–	64	76	–
Program in place to measure visitor satisfaction	94	–	–	–
Regular independent surveys of community satisfaction undertaken	–	61	58	4
Program in place to measure community satisfaction	81	–	–	–
<b>Volunteers</b>				
Existence of effective volunteer-in-parks program to make parks meaningful to community	–	75	72	4
Existence and implementation of an organised volunteer policy	82	–	–	–

\* UE = Unable to estimate.

Measures in *italics* indicate a change in response between the reporting periods where 12% or more (or 3 or more agencies) have responded differently between these periods.

### 4.1 Visitor Information

The percentages of “yes” responses to the three benchmark measures relating to visitor information were similar between the 2010 and 2013 surveys.

### 4.2 Measuring Satisfaction

In terms of measuring satisfaction, there was a 12% increase from 2010 to 2013 in the number of responding agencies that were undertaking regular independent surveys of visitor satisfaction (Table 7). There was no change in the percentage of agencies that were undertaking independent surveys of community satisfaction.

Agencies were again asked to provide their most recent visitor satisfaction rating for their entire park system as well as the highest and lowest satisfaction ratings recorded for individual parks. This was also asked for the community satisfaction surveys. Of agencies that responded (Table 8), 8% indicated that the result of their recent overall visitor satisfaction rating for the entire park system was 60-69%, with 75% indicating that they had received a visitor satisfaction rating between 80-100%. In comparison to the 2010 survey, the lowest overall visitor satisfaction rating was 70-79%, with 70% of responding agencies in the 80-100% range.

**Table 8: Result of recent overall visitor satisfaction rating for the entire park system**

Visitor satisfaction	2010 (%)	2013 (%)
60 - 69%	—	8
70 - 79%	20	17
80 - 89%	40	33
90 - 100%	30	42
Not Applicable	10	—
Total number of agencies	10	12

The lowest satisfaction rating for an individual park (Table 9) from responding agencies in 2013 was 40-49%, compared to 50-59% in 2010. Additionally, in 2010 nearly half of responding agencies indicated that their lowest overall satisfaction rating was between 80-100%, compared to 30% of agencies from this 2013 survey. Conversely, 100% of responding agencies had their highest overall satisfaction rating in the 80-100% range, compared to 70% in this same range in 2010.

**Table 9: Lowest and highest overall visitor satisfaction ratings for individual parks**

Lowest overall satisfaction	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	Highest overall satisfaction	2010 (%)	2013 (%)
40 - 49%	—	10	40-49%	—	—
50 - 59%	15	10	50 - 59%	—	—
60 - 69%	—	20	60 - 69%	—	—
70 - 79%	15	30	70 - 79%	15	—
80 - 89%	23	20	80 - 89%	31	40
90 - 100%	23	10	90 - 100%	39	60
Not Applicable	23	—	Not Applicable	15	—
Total number of agencies	13	10	Total number of agencies	13	10

For overall community satisfaction with the entire park system (Table 10), in total 58% of agencies recorded satisfaction ratings above 80%, a similar result to 2010 (53%).

**Table 10: Result of recent overall community satisfaction rating for the entire park system**

Community satisfaction	2010 (%)	2013 (%)
50 - 59%	—	—
60 - 69%	7	7
70 - 79%	20	35
80 - 89%	33	29
90 - 100%	20	29
Not Applicable	20	—
Total number of agencies	15	14

Only one agency responded regarding the lowest community satisfaction rating (Table 11), with two agencies providing a response regarding the highest community satisfaction rating. As such, little comparison can be garnered from these results and the 2010 survey.

**Table 11: Lowest and highest community satisfaction ratings for individual parks**

Lowest overall satisfaction	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	Highest overall satisfaction	2010 (%)	2013 (%)
50 - 59%	25	—	50 - 59%	—	—
60 - 69%	—	100	60 - 69%	—	—
70 - 79%	25	—	70 - 79%	50	—
80 - 89%	25	—	80 - 89%	—	100
90 - 100%	—	—	90 - 100%	25	—
Not Applicable	25	—	Not Applicable	25	—
Total number of agencies	4	1	Total number of agencies	4	2

### 4.3 Volunteers

The existence of effective volunteer-in-parks programs remained similar between 2010 (75%) to 2013 (72%) (Table 7). In addition, agencies with a volunteer program were then asked to indicate the number of volunteer hours that were attributed to environmental, heritage and park projects (Table 12). Although a similar pattern in the number of volunteer hours for environmental projects is evident when examining the data from 2013 and 2010, the number of agencies that recorded volunteer hours for heritage projects dropped from eleven agencies to five. Heritage projects received the least amount of volunteer hours across the three categories. The number of hours spent on park projects increased in 2013, with six agencies recording between 10,000 to 50,000 hours and one agency recording more than 200,000 hours.

**Table 12: Total number of volunteer hours committed during the 2011/2012 financial year (count) and reported in the 2010 survey (count)**

Volunteer Hours	Type of volunteer project					
	Environment 2010	2013	Heritage 2010	2013	Park 2010	2013
0 to 10,000 hours	5	5	9	9	6	3
10,000 to 50,000 hours	3	3	2	2	4	6
50,000 to 100,000 hours	1	2	—	—	1	2
100,000 to 200,000 hours	2	1	—	—	2	2
More than 200,000 hours	1	1	—	—	—	1
Missing/Not Applicable	14	13	15	15	13	11
Total number of agencies	26	25	26	26	26	25

## 5. Cultural Benchmarks

The cultural measures included the value of parks, cultural inventories, community consultation, Indigenous consultation and the demographic profile of park users (Table 13). The results across these benchmarks vary with agencies continuing to ensure community consultation, however they were much weaker in cultural inventory.

**Table 13: Cultural benchmarks with 'yes' responses from 2007, 2010 and 2013 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	UE* (%)
<b>Value of Parks</b>				
Existence of program to promote park values	—	72	76	8
Implementation of a programme to encourage use of parks to increase public understanding of contribution of parks to society	76	—	—	—
<b>Cultural Inventory</b>				
<i>Existence of policy to inventory, protect and restore cultural heritage sites</i>	87	86	68	8
<i>Active implementation of policy</i>	80	95	76	—
<i>Policy implementation is regularly measured</i>	—	55	35	6
<b>Community Consultation</b>				
Existence of policy to encourage public input via consultation programs	—	88	88	—
Active implementation of public consultation program	—	92	92	—
Regular process of community consultation and input into decision making that covers all aspects of park management	88	—	—	—
<b>Indigenous Consultation</b>				
<i>Active Indigenous community consultation program for input into park management decisions (where identifiable Indigenous group exists)</i>	—	90	76	4
Regular process of Indigenous consultation and input into decision making that covers all aspects of park management	88	—	—	—
<b>Demographics of park users</b>				
<i>Regular surveys of demographic characteristics (including ethnicity and age of park users) are conducted</i>	—	50	68	8
Collection and use of data on demographic profile of parks users	73	—	—	—
Existence of programs to cater for current demographic profile of park users	—	52	60	20
Existence of multicultural policy and implementation through organised programme	41	—	—	—

\* UE = Unable to estimate.

Measures in *italics* indicate a change in response between the reporting periods where 12% or more (or 3 or more agencies) have responded differently between these periods.

### 5.1 Value of Parks

The percentage of agencies with a program to promote park values remained similar across the 2010 and 2013 benchmarking periods (Table 13).

### 5.2 Cultural Inventory

All three cultural inventory benchmarks decreased nearly 20% from 2010 to 2013. For example, only 68% of responding agencies to the 2013 survey indicated that there was a policy to inventory, protect and restore cultural heritage sites compared to 86% in 2010, and only 35% of responding agencies indicating that the implementation of this policy was regularly measured compared to 55% in 2010.

### 5.3 Community and Indigenous Consultation

While the community consultation benchmark measures recorded the same percentages for 2010 and 2013, the percentage of responding agencies that had an active Indigenous



community consultation program for input into park management decisions decreased from 90% to 76%.

#### **5.4 Demographics of park users**

There was an 18% increase in the percentage of agencies that were conducting regular surveys of demographic characteristics of park users.

## 6. Management Benchmarks

The management benchmarks are presented here according to their level: either organisational or park (Tables 14 and 15 respectively). At the organisational level are organisational management, risk management, management resources, training and professional development, and operational health and safety. Park level issues include park management plans, fire management, and infrastructure and its maintenance.

**Table 14: Management benchmarks (organisational level) with 'yes' responses from 2007, 2010 and 2013 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	UE (%)
<b>Organisational Management</b>				
Existence of systems and processes to develop culture of engagement and support of leadership behaviours	–	96	96	–
Existence of link between strategic and management plans and annual operations	–	88	96	–
Existence of systems and processes to share data and knowledge across organisation and integrate it into management	–	88	96	–
Existence of documented standards of management performance across all aspects of park management	–	56	60	8
Existence of systems and processes to assess management performance against standards	–	93	100	–
Monitoring of quadruple bottom line sustainability and encouragement of actions to increase this	–	64	60	8
<b>Risk Management</b>				
Organisation regularly identifies, measures and monitors operation and business risks	–	100	96	4
<b>Management Resources</b>				
Existence of standards for assessment of short/long term resourcing needs for delivering target levels of <i>visitor services</i>	–	52	56	8
Existence of standards for assessment of short/long term resourcing needs for delivering target levels of protection of natural and cultural values	–	52	60	8
Existence of effective, efficient and transparent budget allocation process	–	84	92	–
Effective process for developing and allocating annual budgets	100	–	–	–
<b>Training and Professional Development</b>				
Existence of active staff training program to learn from experience of park management	–	82	72	–
Existence of active staff training program to maximise staff performance and professional growth	–	92	92	–
<b>Operational Health and Safety</b>				
Existence of system to ensure compliance with all mandatory OH&S requirements	–	100	100	–
Compliance with health and safety requirements	94	–	–	–
Auditing of compliance	–	100	92	4

\* UE = Unable to estimate.

Measures in *italics* indicate a change in response between the reporting periods where 12% or more (or 3 or more agencies) have responded differently between these periods.

### 6.1 Organisational Management

In terms of organisational management, the responses were relatively unchanged between the 2010 and 2013 benchmarking surveys (Table 14). For systems and processes, performance was uniformly high across both periods, with 'yes' responses in the high 80-90% ranges. The percentage of 'yes' responses for having documented standards was lower, at 56% and 60% (in 2010 and 2013 respectively). Bottom line sustainability was also lower, but consistent across the two reporting periods (Table 14).

## 6.2 Risk Management

Regularly identifying, measuring and monitoring operation and business risks were similar in 2010 and 2013.

## 6.3 Management Resources

For all measures in this category, performance was similar in the two reporting periods.

## 6.4 Training and Professional Development

Similarly, for all measures in this category, performance was similar in the two reporting periods.

## 6.5 Operational Health and Safety

All responding agencies indicated that there was a system to ensure compliance with all mandatory OH&S requirements. Auditing of this compliance remained relatively unchanged with 100% 'yes' responses in 2010 and 92% in 2013.

**Table 15: Management benchmarks (parks level) with 'yes' responses from 2007, 2010 and 2013 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	2013 (%)	UE (%)
<b>Park Management Plans</b>				
Existence of a plan of management with clear directions for management for each park (or group of biogeographically similar parks)	–	84	86	–
<b>Fire Management</b>				
<i>Existence of policy and/or code of practice underpins delivery of fire management program</i>	–	80	68	4
Most parks/park systems have approved and current fire management plans	69	–	–	–
Application of strategies to address priority management areas	–	70	68	16
Existence of fire risk assessment process (for identifying priorities for mitigation/prevention)	–	74	76	12
<i>Existence of fire management plans with objectives for protecting social, economic, cultural and natural values</i>	–	74	60	4
Active implementation of these fire management plans	–	93	82	6
Implementation of fire management programme which substantially meets all objectives for parks/system	69	–	–	–
<b>Assets and Infrastructure</b>				
Existence of asset management plan to inform and sustain asset development, renewal and maintenance	–	–	68	4
Existence of scheduled maintenance program based on set standards of service	–	82	84	8
Full implementation of scheduled maintenance program	–	89	95	–
Built infrastructure and assets fully maintained in accordance with planned programme	81	–	–	–
<i>Existence of planned asset renewal program</i>	–	84	72	12
Implementation of planned asset renewal program	–	100	100	–
<i>Existence of system to ensure delivery of planned capital works program</i>	–	100	88	4
System in place to measure successful delivery of capital works programme	87	–	–	–

\* UE = Unable to estimate.

Measures in *italics* indicate a change in response between the reporting periods where 12% or more (or 3 or more agencies) have responded differently between these periods.

## 6.6 Park Management Plans

Most agencies continue to have plans of management with clear directions for management of each park or group of parks within their agency (Table 15).

## **6.7 Fire Management**

A decreasing trend for the fire management benchmark measures from 2010 to 2013 was evident. This was pronounced for the existence of policy or code of practice underpinning the delivery of a fire management program (from 80% to 68%) and for the existence of fire management plans that had objectives to protect key values (74% to 60%). For both of these benchmark measures, 28% of responding agencies indicated that these were not applicable to their agency.

## **6.8 Assets and Infrastructure**

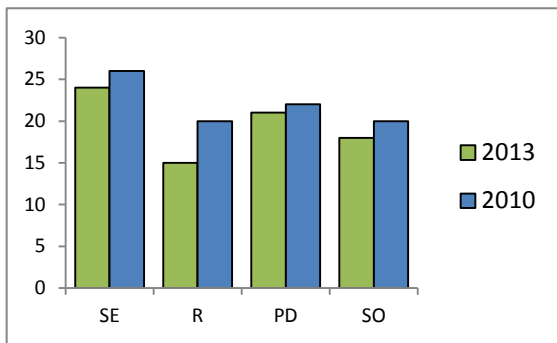
A new benchmark measure in the 2013 survey related to the existence of an asset management plan to inform and sustain asset development, renewal and maintenance, with 68% of responding agencies answering 'yes' to this question. The existence of a planned asset renewal program decreased from 84% to 72%, however, where one did exist, it was being fully implemented. The existence of systems to ensure delivery of planned capital works programs decreased from 100% to 88%.

## 7. Sources of Information

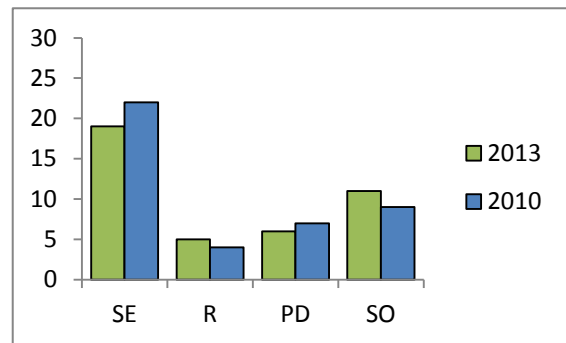
Agencies were asked about the information they used to help answer the benchmarking measures (Figs 1–5). As agencies could indicate all that were applicable, the responses are presented as counts rather than percentages. The count is the vertical ‘y’ axis and the horizontal ‘x’ axis is comprised of four categories (from left to right) including staff experience (SE), research (R), planning documents (PD) and specialist opinion (SO). Similar to 2010 (blue bars), the overwhelming result for all measures in 2013 (green bars) continued to be a high reliance on staff experience, however for some measures, sources of information are diversifying.

### 7.1 Environmental Benchmarks

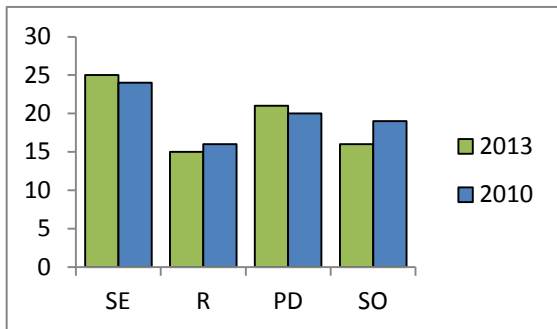
The principal source of information for the environmental benchmarks in the 2013 survey was staff experience (Fig. 1) which was similar to the results from the 2010 survey. However, there is growing use of specialist opinions for information on pest plants and ecological footprint. In 2013, planning documents were a particularly useful source for benchmarking associated with natural values.



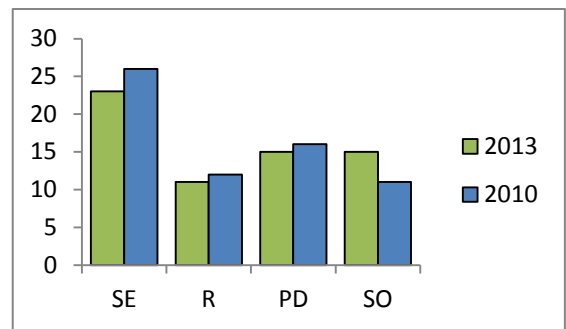
Natural resources



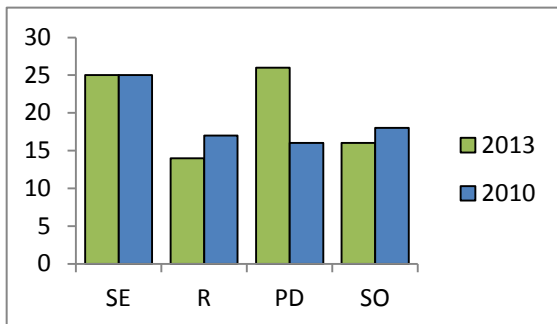
Tree management for amenity



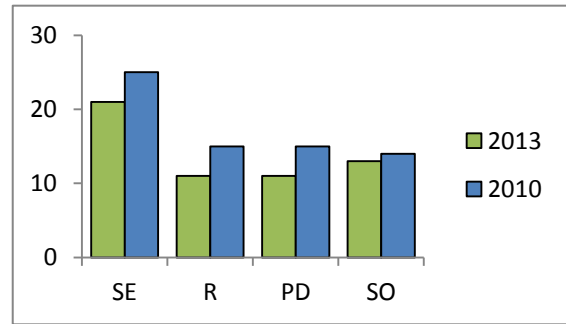
Biodiversity



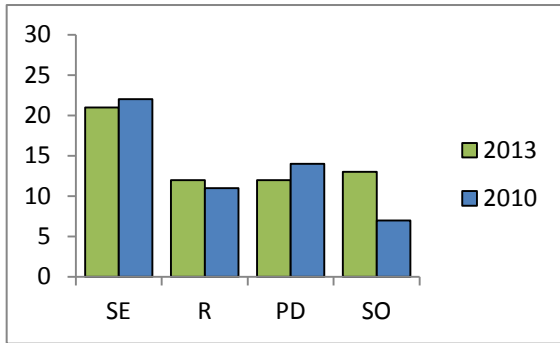
Pest plants



Natural values



Pest animals

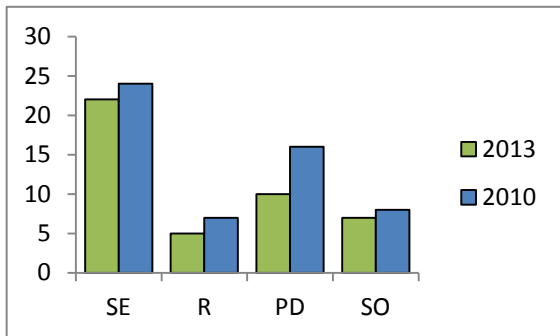


Ecological footprint

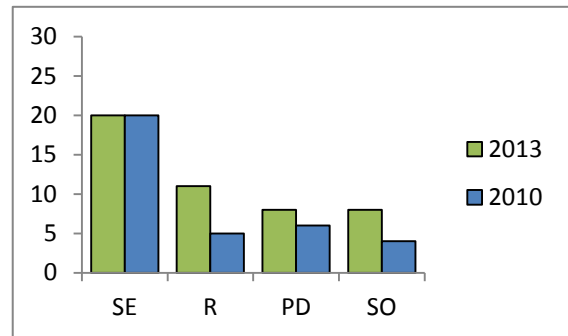
**Figure 1: Sources of information for environmental benchmarks** (SE = staff experience; R = research; PD = planning documents; SO = specialist opinion)

## 7.2 Economic Benchmarks

For the economic benchmarks, staff experience was also an important source of information for both 2010 and 2013 surveys (Fig. 2).



Tourism operators

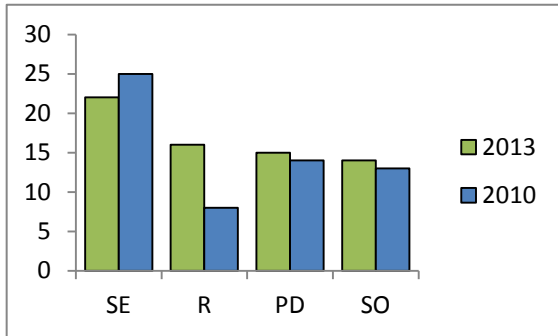


Economic benefit to local communities

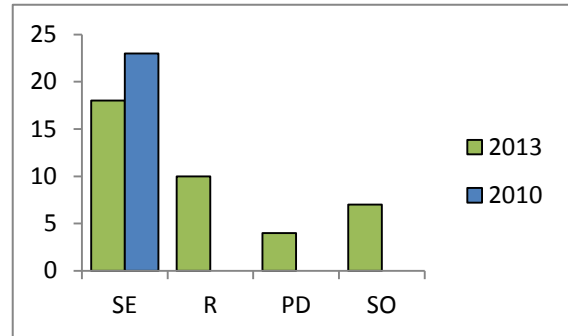
**Figure 2: Sources of information for economic benchmarks** (SE = staff experience; R = research; PD = planning documents; SO = specialist opinion)

### 7.3 Social Benchmarks

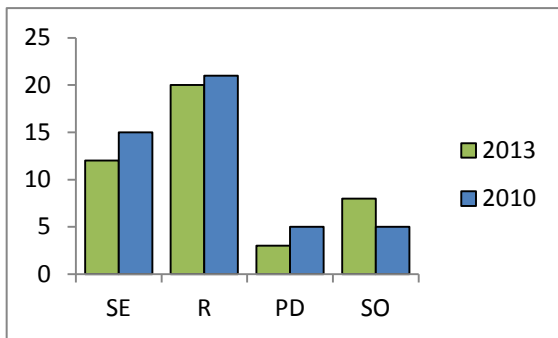
Staff experience was again the main sources of information for both visitor information and satisfaction, although research contributed to benchmarking the measurement of visitor satisfaction (Fig. 3). The most apparent difference between 2010 and 2013 was for information sources for volunteers which have expanded from staff experience only in 2010 to include research, planning documents and specialist opinion.



Visitor information



Volunteers

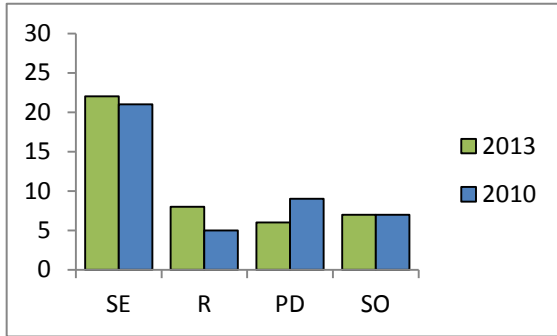


Measuring satisfaction

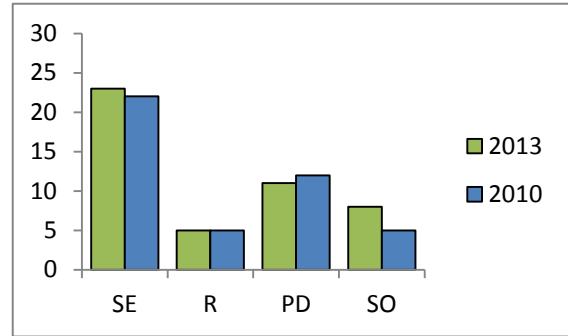
**Figure 3: Sources of information for social benchmarks** (SE = staff experience; R = research; PD = planning documents; SO = specialist opinion)

## 7.4 Cultural Benchmarks

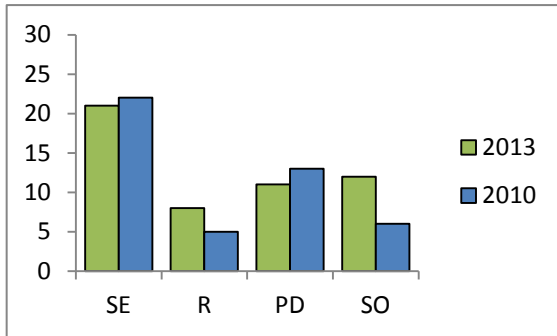
Again, the dominant source of information for responding to the cultural measures was staff experience, with planning documents proving useful for benchmarking both Indigenous and community consultation (Fig 4). Specialist opinion made an increased contribution to benchmarking cultural inventory and demographics in the 2013 survey relative to the 2010 exercise.



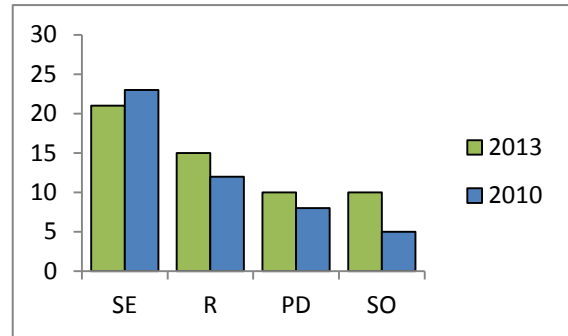
Value of parks



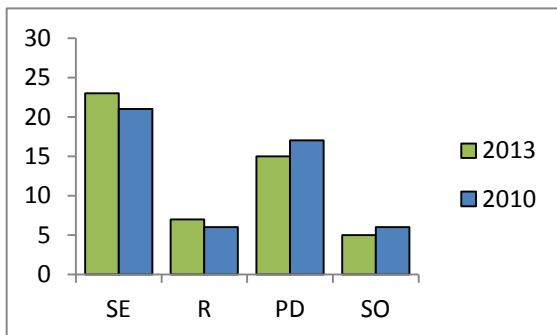
Indigenous consultation



Cultural inventory



Demographics



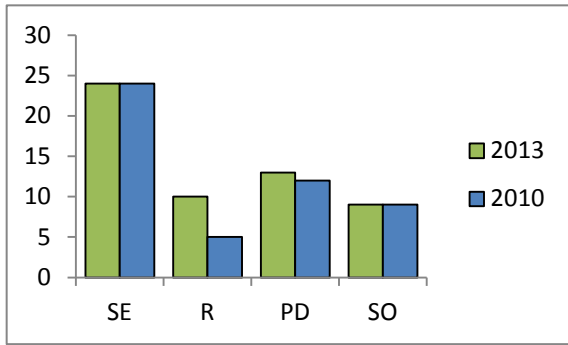
Community consultation

**Figure 4: Sources of information for cultural benchmarks** (SE = staff experience; R = research; PD = planning documents; SO = specialist opinion)

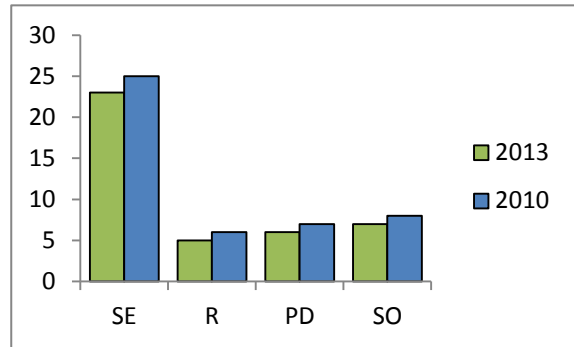
## 7.5 Management Benchmarks

Very similar sources of information were used for the management benchmarks in 2010 and 2013 (Fig 5). There was a continued strong reliance on staff experience and planning documents.

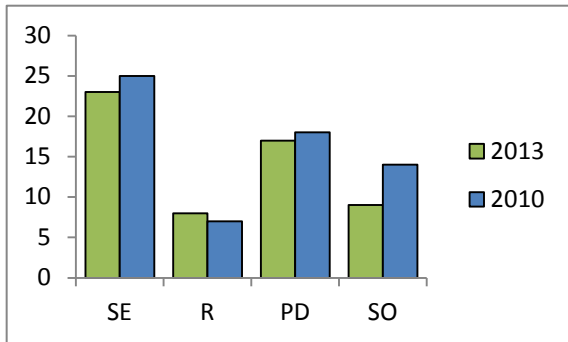




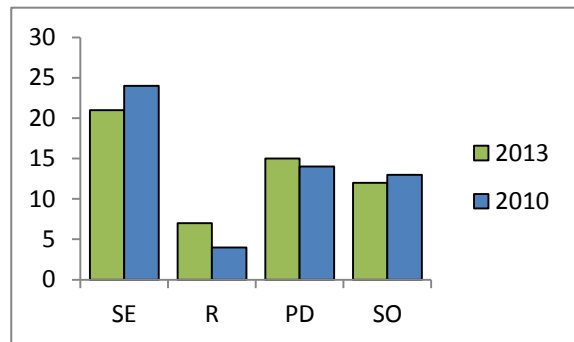
Organisation management



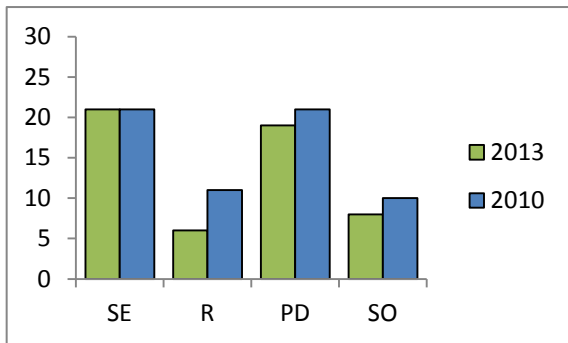
Training and professional development



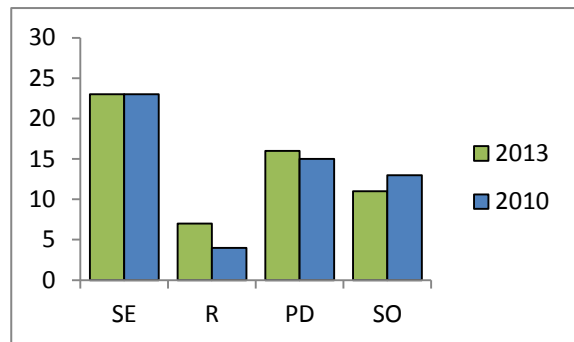
Risk management



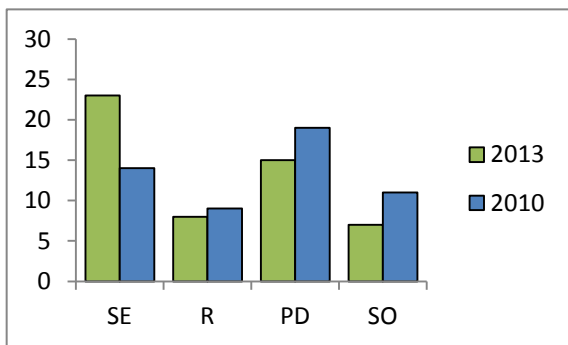
Assets and infrastructure



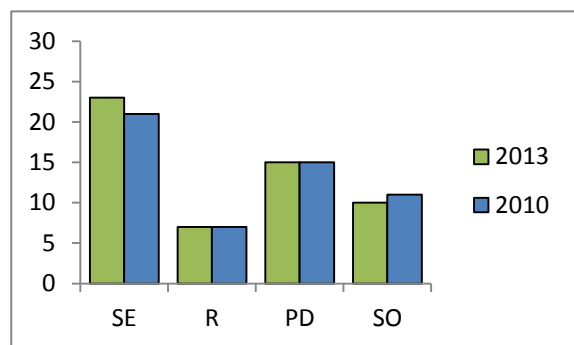
Park management plans



Asset renewal program



Management resources



Fire management

**Figure 5: Information sources for management benchmarks** (SE = staff experience; R = research; PD = planning documents; SO = specialist opinion)

## 8. Highlights, Lessons Learned, Trends and Thoughts for the Future

In this section the more important results obtained for each benchmark category are further examined and discussed to highlight some of the continuing or new issues that have been raised in this survey. Where possible, case studies incorporating relevant research for each benchmark are provided. Through a comparison of performance from 2010 to 2013 emergent trends are identified and thoughts for the future provided.

### 8.1 Highlights and Lessons Learned

#### *Environmental Benchmarks*

Identical to 2010, 96% of responding agencies in the 2013 survey reported that they had sufficient information on natural resources to support operational decision making (Table 5). Managers continue to rely upon staff experience as the principal source of information for the environmental benchmarks (Fig. 1). There is, however, growing use of specialist opinions on pest plants and managing an agency's ecological footprint. Planning documents were a particularly useful information source in 2013 for benchmarking associated with natural values.

While there was an upward trend in the measurement of agencies' ecological footprint, there were still challenges apparent in creating guidelines and target programs to reduce their impact. Again, similarly to the responses from the 2010 survey, agencies indicated that often there was no dedicated program to deal with their ecological footprint, rather it was part of a larger, more generalised environmental program.

Apparent from the 2013 and 2010 survey is that pest animals continue to be a challenge for management agencies. Not only was there a reduction in the existence of planned approaches to deal with this threat, in the 2013 survey less than half of responding agencies indicated that existing approaches were being implemented. It is concerning that pest animals receive less attention and lower levels of implementation than pest plants. The environmental impact of pest animals includes numerous mammal and bird extinctions and continuing impacts on threatened species, as well as pest animals acting as a major barrier to native animals' efforts to adapt to climate change. Comments provided by the agencies may shed some light on this. Some agencies indicated that pest animals were dealt with under a wider landscape approach, while others indicated that response to pest animals was largely complaint driven, rather than an area of proactive management by agencies.

Case Study 1 below overviews the long, difficult but important process required to eradicate feral animals from a highly controlled and managed site. Pest animal eradication is expensive, requires financial commitment and specialised resources. If agencies are to ensure the long-term viability of many of our endangered endemic species, however, then this process is a necessity.

#### **Case Study 1: The Return to 1616 – eradication of pest animals**

An ecological restoration project is currently taking place on Dirk Hartog Island in Western Australia with the aim of rehabilitating the island to a more natural state. This 63,000-hectare island has a varied history of European settlement and from the 1860s through to the early 2000s was predominantly used by pastoralists to run sheep. In 2009 the island became a national park providing the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW formerly known as Department of Environment and Conservation) with the opportunity to restore the natural environment. An important component of this project is the eradication of feral animals from the island to allow for the reintroduction of up to 12 endangered native species.

DPaW commenced work in 2009/10 to remove all feral goats, sheep and cats. Aerial surveys in 2010 revealed there were up to 3,600 sheep and goats on the island. All the sheep are now considered to have been removed and significant progress has been made on the feral goat population.

For the feral cat eradication, DPaW is using its experience and expertise from other projects in an attempt to eliminate them. The Department constructed a temporary 10 km cat barrier fence across the island to divide it into two sections to allow cat control to be concentrated in one section at a time. Currently they are undertaking intensive baiting and trapping. The eradication of feral cats is critical if the native animals to be reintroduced at some future date are to survive.

Key reference: Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) (2012). *Return to 161: Dirk Hartog Island National Park ecological restoration project*. Department of Environment and Conservation, Perth, WA.

### **Economic Benchmarks**

Responding agencies are still struggling to address the economic benchmarks used in the surveys. While agencies show improvement in quantifying the direct economic benefits of parks to the community, their capacity to quantify economic benefits of parks to the community has declined between the two survey periods (Table 6). Recognition of this capacity issue by the Parks Forum contributed to their commitment in developing the guiding document *The Economic Value of Parks*. It outlines the results of interviews with senior park managers across Australia and New Zealand regarding how they use economic information, what is the most useful information to collect and areas where information is needed. Most agencies indicated that the target audience for economic information was Ministers and Councillors, Treasury, local communities, conservation groups, the media, the private sector and internal staff. The document also outlines the top five areas where managers felt economic information was needed: cost/benefit analysis on specific programs; projects or initiatives; tourism and visitors; the full range of economic benefits; and the avoided health care costs of visiting parks. Consistency and comparability in information obtained were flagged as most important.

Comparing the results from the 2010 and 2013 survey shows a decline, from an already low base, in the existence of a policy for the engagement with tourism operators (Table 6). Partnerships between agencies and tour operators can result in improved visitor activities and experiences, along with better interpretation and education. In Case Study 2, Wegner and colleagues (2010) highlight the requirements for a successful tourism industry partnership with park managers.

### **Case Study 2: “Ingredients” for successful tourism industry partnerships with park management**

Partnerships between tourism operators and park managers can have a multitude of benefits including enhanced capacity of agencies for problem solving by using a holistic approach, building support for management objectives and as an instrument for achieving sustainable tourism. Wegner, Lee and Weiler (2010) interviewed tourism operators, agency and park staff to determine actions that would help develop, foster and improve tourism industry – park manager partnerships. The resultant recommendations were:

1. Open communication between partners;
2. Understanding of view points and values of others;
3. Including all partners in processes, decisions and actions;

4. Need for adequate processes relating to business decision making and planning;
5. Shared direction which includes the partnership's focus and purpose;
6. Clarification of the relevant legislation, regulations and agreements for partnerships; and
7. Sufficient resourcing of partnerships.

Ultimately, the ability of agencies and tourism partners to work together will strongly influence the quality of the visitor experience, their satisfaction and the protection of the natural resource base on which the tourism relies.

Key reference: Wegner, A., Lee, D., & Weiler, B. (2010). Important "ingredients" for successful tourism/protected area partnerships: partner's policy recommendations. *The Services Industries Journal*, 30(10), 1643-1650.

### **Social Benchmarks**

Agencies continue to do well in gathering and utilising visitor information with the three measures around the 90% mark (88-96% in 2013 survey, Table 7). Agencies continued to report sufficient information exists to inform planning and management of visitor use, and visitor facilities are being maintained to mandated standards. Similar to the 2010 survey, staff experience continues to be the main source of information for both visitor information and measuring satisfaction.

A notable difference between 2010 and 2013 was how information was sourced for the volunteers benchmarks which has expanded from staff experience only to now include research, planning documents and specialist opinion. There was also a major decrease in the number of agencies that recorded volunteer hours for heritage projects (eleven agencies to five). This could be due to the change in sourcing of information or as indicated in the comments by some agencies that the volunteer hours are now aggregated rather than allocated to particular projects.

Regarding visitor satisfaction it is encouraging that the percentage of agencies undertaking regular independent surveys of visitor satisfaction has increased over the period from 2010 to 2013. An important goal for parks and protected area agencies is ensuring they provide recreational activities from which users can derive satisfaction whilst still protecting the environment. The ultimate aim is a symbiotic people-park relationship where visitors are considered to be an asset rather than a liability. This is because the future sustainability of protected areas requires ongoing societal support. While it is important to continue to monitor visitor and community satisfaction as an indication of the outcomes of management, measuring the loyalty of visitors can provide managers with an indication of societal support and potential park revenue. Visitors who intend to revisit also indicate to managers whether they are enjoying their experiences.

Case Study 3 discusses a review of visitor satisfaction and loyalty undertaken by Moore and colleagues (2013). The review concludes by recommending an increased focus on measuring and enhancing visitor loyalty and reduced attention to measuring satisfaction.

#### **Case Study 3: Adding loyalty to measures of the visitor experience**

With declining budgets and increased pressures on parks to accommodate more resource-oriented uses such as grazing and hunting, positive support from visitors and increased and innovative funding streams associated with these visitors and other park supporters are becoming increasingly important. As a result, a shift in focus from satisfied visitors to loyal visitors as a better indicator of both agency performance and societal support is essential. Loyal visitors are a valuable source of operating revenue and they may be more amenable to volunteering or assisting with management of parks,

as well as advocating for parks in political forums and elsewhere.

In simple terms, loyalty can be defined as commitment to a destination. The most common measures of loyalty are intention to revisit and recommending a park to others. Overall satisfaction is still an important measure in its own right as it provides managers with an indicator of the quality of park management. As such, measurement of both satisfaction and loyalty can provide valuable information to park managers as to the quality and performance of their actions and ultimately the experience that visitors have.

Key reference: Moore, S. A., Rodger, K., & Taplin, R. (2013). Moving beyond visitor satisfaction to loyalty in nature-based tourism: a review and research agenda. *Current Issues in Tourism*, DOI: 10.1080/13683500.2013.970346.

### **Cultural Benchmarks**

Park management organisations continue to recognise the importance of promoting the values of their estate. Building societal and political support is crucial to parks as in turn it can result in increased visitors and in turn public funding. If the larger community appreciates the value of parks then there will be an increased effort to ensure their long-term sustainable management.

In terms of cultural inventory benchmarks, park organisations can make some improvements. The responding agencies indicated a noticeable decrease for all three cultural inventory benchmarks including: the existence of a policy to inventory, protect and restore cultural heritage sites; active implementation of policy; and regularly measuring policy implementation. Policy is a vital tool to ensure the long-term sustainability of cultural heritage sites. Rigorous listing procedures and inventory of heritage sites can ensure the protection required. With a large decrease in the number of surveyed organisations reporting on the existence of policy, it is not surprising to see low reports of policy implementation for this benchmark.

The number of agencies reported as having an active Indigenous community consultation program for input into park management decisions has decreased between 2010 and 2013. For a number of reasons Indigenous engagement in natural resource management continues to test park managers. Case Study 4 discusses the different attributes that are required to ensure there is good indigenous involvement in natural resource management as highlighted by Smyth and colleagues in 2004.

### **Case Study 4: Indigenous engagement in natural resource management**

In 2004, Smyth, Szabo and George reviewed numerous case studies of Indigenous engagement in natural resource management. They developed a list of attributes of good Indigenous involvement in natural resource management consultation processes. These included:

- Time and timing – enabling Indigenous people to set their own timeframes;
- Dedicating resources that include funding and dedicated staff;
- Supporting Indigenous processes rather than simply inviting them to join pre-determined processes;
- Having effective leadership;
- Recognising their relationship to country;
- Allowing for capacity building of the Indigenous groups;
- Recognising the diversity of and between Indigenous groups;

- Recognising Indigenous groups can only talk about their own country; and
- Developing and maintaining effective and on-going communication.

The authors noted that government agencies are often restricted by time, therefore discussions with Indigenous groups should not be confined to single projects or as another stakeholder to be consulted as often this will not be achieved within the required timeframes. Rather, there should be on-going dialogue between agencies and Indigenous groups covering all aspects of natural resource management to allow for all parties to benefit from such exchanges.

Key reference: Smyth, D., Szabo, S., & George, M. (2004). *Case studies in Indigenous engagement in natural resource management in Australia*: Report prepared for the Australian Department of Environment and Heritage.

### **Management Benchmarks**

Overall the responding agencies had continued good corporate procedures, with processes for managing risk, operational health and safety and having asset management systems (Table 14).

Regarding park level management, there was a decreasing trend between 2010 and 2013 for fire management benchmark measures (Table 15). With climate change leading to increasing temperatures and natural disasters, fire management is crucial to the sustainable management of parks. One benchmark, the existence of policy to underpin the delivery of fire management programs, decreased from 80% in 2010 to 68% in 2013. Of which, 28% of responding agencies indicated that this measure was not applicable to them. This is very concerning given that especially in the Australian climate, all land managers face real risks from fires, making a planned, strategic approach to fire management essential. As such, this measure is applicable to all park agencies. These results may highlight fire policy being perceived as another organisation's responsibility given that fire management today often involves numerous government agencies across a suite of landscapes. Case Study 5 highlights the Code of Practice signed by the government agencies responsible for bushfire management on public land in South Australia.

### **Case Study 5: Fire management on public lands**

Often, there are multiple agencies responsible for fire management on public lands in Australia and New Zealand. Coordination of these multiple agencies can often be challenging as a result of jurisdictional boundaries. The South Australian Government has developed a Code of Practice for fire management on public lands which outlines overarching fire management principles, performance measures and desired outcomes for fire management. This Code has been signed and adopted by the agencies responsible for fire management on public lands – Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, ForestrySA and SAWater. The natural role of fire and its positive and negative consequences are reflected in the dual purpose of the Code which is to protect life and property while promoting environmentally sustainable management of public lands.

There are six key principles outlined in the plan that relate to all signatory agencies:

1. Prevention – risk based management plans that include strategic fuel management;
2. Preparedness – relating to necessary agency training and equipment;
3. Response – needs to be rapid, adequate, coordinated, effective and safe;
4. Recovery – after-incident reviews are conducted and learnings integrated into management;

5. Research – effect data management and sharing as well as integration of latest research; and
6. Stakeholder and community engagement – public awareness and information campaigns.

These principles also complement the State Bushfire Management Plan to facilitate bushfire management across South Australia.

Key reference: Government of South Australia (2012). *Code of Practice for fire management on Public Land in South Australia: 2012-2016*. Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, Country Fire Service, SA Water, Forestry SA, Adelaide, SA.

Although most of the assets and infrastructure measures remained fairly consistent between the 2010 and 2013 surveys, there were two measures that did decrease by 12%. These were the existence of a planned asset renewal program, and the existence of a system to ensure the delivery of planned capital works program. With funds to park agencies becoming increasingly limited, monies need to be spent wisely and in an accountable manner. This may lead to greater prioritisation of asset and infrastructure renewal planning by more agencies into the future. Funding may also need to be sourced from other areas such as donations, or from loyal visitors, as discussed in Case Study 3.

### **Sources of Information**













It is positive to see that agencies that responded to the 2013 survey have somewhat broadened the sources of information used to address the benchmarking questions. While there is still a heavy reliance on staff experience for all benchmark categories, growth was apparent in the use of planning documents and specialist opinion. Most apparent was the shift from staff experience only to all forms of information sources for the volunteers benchmark measures.




## **8.2 Trends**

Having two sets of results for the same measures from the 2013 and 2010 surveys allowed comparisons to be made. An important feature of benchmarking is comparing agency performance to highlight areas of continuing best practice as well as those requiring improvement (Moore & Taplin, In press). The 2007 data were not included in this discussion of trends as many of the questions were different or worded another way from those included in the 2013 and 2010 surveys.

In the 2010 survey report, areas where agencies were performing “well” (judged as having 90% or more of agencies responding ‘yes’) and where they could improve (judged as having 60% or less of agencies responding ‘yes’) were identified and listed. Broad areas where agencies did perform well in the 2010 survey included natural resources, biodiversity, visitor information, organisational and risk management, and assets and infrastructure. These well-performing measures have been listed in Table 16 with an indication as to how they have fared in the 2013 survey. In the table, green indicates those measures still above the 90% threshold and red indicates those measures that have decreased below the 90% threshold. Measures are considered to have remained static if there is a less than 12% difference from the 2010 percentage. This 12% figure reflects a change of three agencies from the 2010 percentage, strongly suggesting that a real change has occurred.

**Table 16: Areas where agencies performed well (90% or more of agencies responded 'yes' to measure) from 2010 survey and status in 2013 survey**

Benchmark category	Broad area	Measure	Status in 2013
Environmental	Natural resources	• Sufficient information exists to support operational natural resource management decision making and it is used to allocate resources	
	Biodiversity	• Biodiversity policies exist to guide planning and management	
Social	Visitor information	• Visitor facilities are being maintained to mandated standards	
		• Sufficient management to ensure visitor use does not negatively impact on park values	
Cultural	Indigenous consultation	• Active Indigenous community consultation program for input into park management decisions	
Organisational management	Organisational management	• Existence of systems and processes to develop culture of engagement and support of leadership behaviours	
		• Existence of systems and processes to assess management performance against standards	
	Risk management	• Organisation regularly identifies, measures and monitors operation and business risks	
	Training and professional development	• Existence of active staff training program to maximise staff performance and professional growth	
	Operational health and safety	• Existence of system to ensure compliance with all mandatory OH&S requirements	
• Auditing of compliance			
Park level management	Assets and infrastructure	• Existence of system to ensure delivery of planned capital works program	

Explanation of symbols:  = <12% difference from 2010 percentage;  = 12% or more increase from 2010 percentage;  = 12% or more decrease from 2010 percentage.

From Table 16, most measures have similar values to the 2010 survey including natural resources, visitor information and a number of organisational management measures. Three measures are now at least 12% below the 90% threshold in the 2013 results: existence of biodiversity policies to guide planning and management which contribute to improvements in condition; active Indigenous consultation programs for input into park management decisions; and existence of systems to ensure delivery of planned capital works programs.

Additionally, from the results of the 2013 survey three new measures pertaining to organisational management, management resources, and assets and infrastructure are above the 90% threshold and considered to be performing well (Table 17).



**Table 17: Additional areas where agencies performed well (90% or more of agencies responded 'yes' to measure) from 2013 survey compared to 2010 survey.**

Benchmark category	Broad area	Measure
Organisational management	Organisational management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of a link between strategic and management plans and annual operations</li> <li>• Existence of systems and processes to share data and knowledge across organisation and integrate it into management</li> </ul>
Park level management	Management resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of effective, efficient and transparent budget allocation process</li> </ul>
	Assets and infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full implementation of scheduled maintenance program</li> </ul>

Also identified in the 2010 survey were areas for improvement, measures where less than 60% of agencies responded 'yes'. Included were aspects of economic benefits to local communities, cultural inventory, surveying visitor demographics, and standards related to organisational management and management resources (Table 18). In this table, green indicates that the measure is now above the 60% threshold, orange indicates the measures that are static or have improved but are still 60% or below and red are those measures that have decreased from their 2010 percentage. Similarly to Table 17, in Table 18 a measure is identified as static if there is less than 12% difference (considered to be three agencies) between the 2010 and 2013 result.

In comparing the results from the two surveys, one measure has increased, while two have decreased. In the 2013 survey, the demographic measure pertaining to conducting regular surveys of demographic characteristics is now above the 60% threshold value. The other demographic measures flagged as needing improvement in the 2010 survey also had an increase in the 'yes' percentage but are still under 60%, similar to the management of resources measure. Evident from Table 18 below is agencies still need improvement in measures relating to the capacity to quantify economic benefits to local communities, with a slight improvement in actually quantifying these effects but still below the 60% threshold. There was also a decline in the measurement of policy implementation for the cultural inventory measure.

**Table 18: Areas identified for improvement (60% or less of agencies responded 'yes' to measure) in 2010 survey and status in 2013 survey**

Benchmark category	Broad Area	Area(s) for improvement	Status in 2013
Economic	Economic benefit to local communities	• Policy for economic benefits from parks to flow to local communities exists	
		• Capacity to quantify economic benefits of parks to community	
		• Direct economic benefits of parks to community has been quantified	
Cultural	Cultural inventory	• Policy implementation is regularly measured	
	Demographic	• Regular surveys of demographic characteristics (including ethnicity and age of park users) are conducted	
		• Existence of programs to cater for current demographic profile of park users	
Organisational management	Organisational management	• Existence of documented standards of management performance across all aspects of park management	
	Management resources	• Existence of standards for assessing short/long term resourcing needs for delivering target levels of visitor services and natural and cultural values	

Explanation of symbols: = <12% difference from 2010 percentage; = 12% or more increase from 2010 percentage; = 12% or more decrease from 2010 percentage.

Additionally, measures that now fall in the 60% or below range in the 2013 survey were also identified (Table 19). Key measures needing improvement relate to tree management for amenity, tourism operators, measuring community satisfaction and fire management.

**Table 19: Additional areas identified for improvement (60% or less of agencies responded 'yes' to measure) from 2013 survey compared to the 2010 survey.**

Benchmark category	Broad Area	Area(s) for improvement
Environmental	Tree management for amenity	• Existence of policy to maintain amenity or heritage significance
	Ecological footprint	• Guidelines and target program to reduce footprint exists
Economic	Tourism operators	• Effective engagement with wider tourism industry demonstrated through participation in planning and management processes (new) • Policy for engaging with tourism operators exists
Social	Measuring satisfaction	• Regular independent surveys of community satisfaction undertaken
Park level management	Fire management	• Existence of fire management plans with objectives for protecting social, economic, cultural and social values

### 8.3 Thoughts for the Future

The response rates from the three benchmarking surveys undertaken ranges from 58-63% of Parks Forum member agencies with the types of responding agencies remaining fairly consistent across the three surveys. By increasing the number and type of agencies responding, more nuanced results could be presented by splitting or discussing the data by type of agency. This would make the report more relevant to all agencies. Local government authorities and government departments are consistently the highest responders, with Aboriginal corporations the least responsive of agencies with no participation in the surveys to-date.

To increase the response rate, thought and consideration needs to be given as to why agencies have not responded to-date. Feedback could initially be sought from those agencies who did not respond to ascertain the reasons why. Possible reasons for non-participation could include survey fatigue, perceived lack of relevance to some agencies and lack of time to undertake the task. While the survey could be altered to address the first two aspects, the third is likely to be beyond the control of Parks Forum, although stressing the importance and the usefulness of the survey may improve willingness to undertake the survey. Establishing a contact person for survey distribution and coordination, coupled with follow-up phone calls, has proved successful in similar, related surveying work with park agencies.

Another possibility could be the format of the survey. Having a web-based survey certainly increases the ability to disseminate and collate information from multiple sources across Australia and New Zealand; however, it may not be accessible to more remote or regional centres where internet connections may be a little slower or the technical expertise to undertake the survey may not be available. Continuing to provide and promote the existence of a paper-based survey form may increase the response rates of organisations with these particular issues.

The continuation of this benchmarking survey over three cycles has allowed the identification and discussion of trends, alerting agencies to where they have performed well and where more focus is needed. Globally, parks and protected areas are facing a changing future with decreasing government funding, declines in visitation rates and increased accountability for funding used and outcomes achieved. Reports such as these can provide agencies with the necessary information to renew their focus on particular aspects and add weight to proposals in the political arena. As indicated by the major theme of the 2014 World Parks Congress – *Parks, People, Planet: Inspiring solutions*, parks are still an important part of solutions to many global problems.

## 9. Key References

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## 10. Appendix: Raw Count Data for all Benchmark Survey Questions from the 2013 Survey<sup>2</sup>

Response levels for the percentage rating questions are explained in the following table:

Response	Explanation
Yes	The statement is true for >85% of the area you manage or your agency's performance
Mostly yes	The statement is true for 50 - 85% of the area you manage or your agency's performance
Mostly no	The statement is true for 15 - 49% of the area you manage or your agency's performance
No	The statement is only true for a maximum of 15% of the area you manage or your agency's performance
UE (Unable to estimate)	Your agency does not collect data relating to this question or the data cannot be converted to respond to the statement
NA (Not applicable)	The statement does not apply to your agency because of the type of management undertaken by your agency

### Environmental benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly yes	Mostly no	No	UE	NA	N
<i>Natural Resources</i>							
Sufficient information exists to support operational decision making	5	19	1	0	0	0	25
Existing information used to allocate resources for operational decision making	8	16	1	0	0	0	25
<i>Biodiversity</i>							
Existence of policies to guide planning and management	21	-	-	4	0	0	25
Active implementation of policy(ies)	19	-	-	0	1	-	20
Policy contributes to improvement of condition/integrity	5	12	1	0	1	0	19
Biodiversity values are being maintained in excellent condition	0	18	5	0	2	0	25
<i>Tree management for amenity</i>							
Existence of policy to maintain amenity or heritage significance	16	-	-	6	0	5	25
Active implementation of policy(ies)	7	5	1	0	0	1	14
Policy is effective in maintaining health of trees and replacing aged, diseased or damaged trees	3	9	0	0	1	1	14
<i>Threats – Pest Plants</i>							
Existence of planned approach for weed management	21	-	-	1	3	0	25
Active implementation of planned approach	9	11	0	0	0	0	20
Planned approach is effective in reducing impacts	2	15	0	0	3	0	20
<i>Threats – Pest Animals</i>							
Existence of planned approach for pest animal management	16	-	-	6	3	0	25
Active implementation of planned approach	7	-	-	8	0	1	16
Planned approach is effective in reducing impacts	1	10	1	0	3	0	15
<i>Ecological Footprint</i>							
Existence of policy to reduce agency's ecological footprint	19	-	-	4	2	0	25
Sufficient information exists to develop and implement targeted program to reduce footprint	7	13	0	3	2	0	25

<sup>2</sup> The contribution of Data Analysis Australia Pty Ltd in collating and displaying the data on which these tables are based is gratefully acknowledged.

Guidelines and target program to reduce footprint exists	14	-	-	10	1	0	25
Measurement and reporting against footprint targets carried out annually	10	-	-	2	1	0	13

### Economic benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	UE	NA	N
<i>Tourism Operators</i>							
Effective engagement with wider tourism industry demonstrated through their participation in planning and management processes	10	-	-	6	5	4	25
Policy for engaging with tourism operators exists	11	-	-	10	1	2	24
Active implementation of policy	5	6	0	1	0	0	12
Effective tourism operator - protected area manager cooperation to enhance visitor experience	5	10	5	0	1	1	22
Effective tourism operator – protected area manager cooperation to protect park values	6	11	2	0	2	1	22
<i>Economic Benefit to Local Communities</i>							
Policy to facilitate flow of economic benefits from parks to local communities exists	5	-	-	16	4	0	25
Active implementation of policy	2	2	0	1	1	0	6
Capacity to quantify economic benefits of parks to community	5	-	-	15	5	0	25
Direct economic benefits of parks to community has been quantified	3	3	8	10	0	0	24

### Social benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	UE	NA	N
<i>Visitor Information</i>							
Sufficient information exists to inform planning and management of visitor use	5	17	2	1	0	0	25
Visitor facilities are being maintained to mandated standards	14	9	2	0	0	0	25
Sufficient management ensuring visitor use does not negatively impact on park values	9	15	0	0	1	0	25
<i>Measuring Satisfaction</i>							
Regular independent surveys of visitor satisfaction undertaken	17	2	3	3	0	0	25
Regular independent surveys of community satisfaction undertaken	12	2	2	7	1	0	24
<i>Volunteers</i>							
Existence of effective volunteer-in-parks program to make parks meaningful to community	12	6	4	2	1	0	25

## Cultural Benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	UE	NA	N
<i>Value of Parks</i>							
Existence of program to promote park values	19	-	-	4	2	0	25
<i>Cultural Inventory</i>							
Existence of policy to inventory, protect and restore cultural heritage sites	17	-	-	6	2	0	25
Active implementation of policy	6	7	3	1	0	0	17
Policy implementation is regularly measured	6	-	-	10	1	0	17
<i>Community Consultation</i>							
Existence of policy to encourage public input via consultation programs	22	-	-	3	0	0	25
Active implementation of public consultation program	16	7	2	0	0	0	25
<i>Indigenous Consultation</i>							
Active Indigenous community consultation program for input into park management decisions (where identifiable Indigenous group exists)	14	5	2	0	1	3	25
<i>Demographic</i>							
Regular surveys of demographic characteristics (including ethnicity and age of park users) are conducted	17	-	-	6	2	0	25
Existence of programs to cater for current demographic profile of park users	3	12	3	5	2	0	25

## Management Benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	UE	NA	N
<i>Organisational Management</i>							
Existence of systems and processes to develop culture of engagement and support of leadership behaviours	14	10	1	0	0	0	25
Existence of link between strategic and management plans and annual operations	15	9	1	0	0	0	25
Existence of systems and processes to share data and knowledge across organisation and integrate it into management	12	12	1	0	0	0	25
Existence of documented standards of management performance across all aspects of park management	15	-	-	8	2	0	25
Existence of systems and processes to assess management performance against standards	8	7	0	0	0	0	15
Monitoring of quadruple bottom line sustainability and encouragement of actions to increase this	8	7	4	4	2	0	25
<i>Risk Management</i>							
Organisation regularly identifies, measures and monitors operation and business risks	16	8	0	0	1	0	25
<i>Park Management Plans</i>							
Plan of management with clear directions for management exists for each park (or group of biogeographically similar parks)	5	15	4	1	0	0	25
<i>Management Resources</i>							
Existence of standards for assessment of short/long term resourcing needs for delivering target levels of <u>visitors service</u>	4	10	5	4	2	0	25
Existence of standards for assessment of short/long term resourcing needs for delivering target levels of protection of <u>natural and cultural values</u>	5	10	5	3	2	0	25

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	UE	NA	N
Existence of effective, efficient and transparent budget allocation process	13	10	1	1	0	0	25
<i>Training and Professional Development</i>							
Existence of active staff training program to learn from experience of park management	8	11	5	1	0	0	25
Existence of active staff training program to maximise staff performance and professional growth	13	10	2	0	0	0	25
<i>Asset and Infrastructure</i>							
Existence of asset management plan to inform and sustain asset development, renewal and maintenance	17	-	-	7	1	0	25
Existence of scheduled maintenance program based on set standards of service	21	-	-	2	2	0	25
Full implementation of scheduled maintenance program	3	18	1	0	0	0	22
Existence of planned asset renewal program	18	-	-	4	3	0	25
Implementation of planned asset renewal program	6	11	0	0	0	0	17
Existence of system to ensure delivery of planned capital works program	20	2	1	0	1	1	25
<i>Operational Health and Safety</i>							
Existence of system to ensure compliance with all mandatory OH&S requirements	25	-	-	0	0	0	25
Auditing of compliance	23	-	-	1	1	0	25
<i>Fire Management</i>							
Existence of policy and/or code of practice underpins delivery of fire management program	17	-	-	0	1	7	25
Existence of fire risk assessment process (for identifying priorities for mitigation/prevention)	19	-	-	3	3	0	25
Application of strategies to address priority management areas	10	7	1	3	4	0	25
Existence of fire management plans with objectives for protecting social, economic, cultural and natural values	11	4	2	0	1	7	25
Active implementation of these fire management plans	11	4	1	1	1	0	18