



# **Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey 2010**



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## Acknowledgements

This report is based on two surveys of members of the Parks Forum: a 2010 survey undertaken by Data Analysis Australia Pty Ltd and a 2007 survey managed by Parks Forum with the resultant report prepared by Bill Carter. The contribution of responding members of the Parks Forum to both surveys is gratefully acknowledged.



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## Executive Summary

Ever since parks have been established, managers have sought to achieve their effective management through the development of a professional approach. Part of this professionalism is being able to evaluate the extent to which their parks protect natural and cultural values and deliver benefits to the community. Another part is demonstrating accountability and transparency in park management. Both require the systematic collection of information and reporting on performance.

Parks Forum, the peak body for park management agencies, has established a benchmarking survey for use by its members to systematically collect information on their management performance. The *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey* was initially developed, tested and implemented in 2007, with the benchmarks covering environmental, economic, social, cultural and management performance. The widely-used IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas management effectiveness evaluation approach, which assesses the context, planning, inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of park management, guided development of the benchmarking measures.

In 2010 a total of 26 member agencies, representing agencies serving city, regional, state and national populations, completed the online *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey*. Provided in this report are analyses of the results of both the 2010 and 2007 surveys, with an emphasis on the results from the most recent survey. Key results from 2010 for each of the benchmark categories are presented in the table below. Broad areas where agencies performed well (90% or more of agencies responded yes) and areas for improvement (60% or fewer agencies responded yes) are listed.

Benchmark category	Areas performing well	Areas for improvement
Environmental	Natural resources – sufficient information & used for resource allocation Biodiversity – policies exist & contribute to improved biodiversity	
Economic		Economic benefit to local communities – policy exists, benefit quantified
Social	Visitor information – visitor facilities maintained	
Cultural	Indigenous consultation - active	Cultural inventory – policy implementation measured Demographics – known for visitors, catered for in management
Management	Organisational management – systems & processes exist Risk management Training & professional development – staff training exists Operational health & safety – compliance systems exist Assets & infrastructure – capital works programming system exists	Organisational management – documented performance standards Management resources – existence of standards

Agencies are performing particularly well in natural resource and biodiversity management, managing visitor facilities, having processes for Indigenous consultation, and organisational matters such as risk management and having operational health and safety procedures. It is paradoxical that agencies identify there is sufficient information on natural resources to support

decision making and yet the inadequacy of such information has been emphasised by managers and scientists alike for decades. A challenge for the future is to work with park staff to identify what they do not know but need for decision making, and then where and how to get this information.

Areas for improvement include determining economic benefits to local communities, understanding visitor demographics, and the existence of standards. The *Parks Forum Industry Agenda* emphasises the importance of ongoing and sustainable relationships between parks and the wider community. Understanding visitor demographics is central to these relationships.

Parks Forum aims to regularly repeat this benchmarking survey. Its continuation is essential, with ongoing consistency in questions, so performance over time can be measured and evaluated. The survey will help identify areas where there have been improvements over time and where further improvements are required.

In later iterations the survey could be improved by developing and applying (a) standards and (b) headline indicators. Standards provide agencies with a level to work towards or compare themselves against with respect to best practice. Given the very different types of member agencies within the Parks Forum, different standards will be needed. For example, protected area managers with large parks, often with high biodiversity values, are likely to have different standards, for at least some of the measures, to urban park managers.

Headline indicators provide for greater scrutiny and management attention to a smaller core set of measures. These could be individual indicators or a composite of a number of key indicators. Similarly to standards, these are best developed in consultation with member agencies of the Parks Forum.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Evaluating management effectiveness is becoming integral to good practice in park management worldwide. Such evaluations provide managers with information to understand where they are performing well and where more effort and attention are needed. Making these evaluations publicly available is becoming more common as park managers strive to achieve public accountability and transparency. Currently, such evaluations generally examine the context, planning, inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of park management. The most widely used approach is that developed by Dr Marc Hockings and colleagues in Australia and internationally, through the auspices of the IUCN WCPA (International Union for Conservation of Nature World Commission on Protected Areas).

Critical to management effectiveness evaluation is establishing benchmarks. Benchmarks are 'measurements of the quality of an organisation's policies, products, programs and strategies, and their comparison with standard measurements, or similar measurements of their peers'.<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term is used to refer to measures of performance (i.e. management effectiveness). Over time, such measures provide valuable information on trends enabling managers to identify the ongoing effectiveness of their management. Such measures can also be compared against a standard to assess performance.

This report and the associated surveys were designed and commissioned by Parks Forum, the peak body for park management agencies with members from Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Canada. The thirty-nine full member agencies, as of June 2011, include city and regional councils, government departments, park authorities, and Aboriginal corporations (Table 1). The responsibilities of these member agencies range from local community parks through to vast landscapes with an array of biodiversity, recreation and cultural values.

**Table 1: Membership of Parks Forum as of June 2011**

Agency Type	Count
Local government	11
Government department	12
Park agency	10
Regional body	3
Aboriginal corporation	3
Associate members	2
TOTAL	41

The Forum's vision is to create a strong and vibrant park industry which is recognised and supported by the whole community. It aims to achieve this by promoting best practice and innovation in park management, building partnerships with aligned agencies and sectors, and promoting the acquisition of new knowledge through benchmarking evaluation and research. As part of progressing best practice, in 2006 the Parks Forum developed a *Parks Industry Performance Framework* to identify the benefits of parks and to measure the performance of the park's industry in contributing towards these (see [www.parksforum.org](http://www.parksforum.org)).

Benchmarking, as part of the *Parks Industry Performance Framework*, is an excellent way of enhancing agency performance and changing practices. Accountability is demanded across all sectors of society, including park agencies. Public reporting of management effectiveness can assist this. Also, by being open and accountable regarding the pressures and condition of the park system, agencies can raise public awareness about the importance of parks and reserves as well as the challenges they face. Benchmarking can also provide essential information to

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/benchmarking.html> accessed 9 June 2011.

managers to drive improvements by demonstrating the links between good practice in park management and resulting beneficial outcomes. The *Parks Forum Industry Agenda* commits this organisation to coordinating the development of benchmarking, standards and accreditation across park agencies.

Two sets of data are collected as part of the *Parks Industry Performance Framework*. The first set, and the subject of this report, is measures of the environmental, economic, social, cultural and management performance of the member agencies of Parks Forum. These data are collected regularly (and ideally biennially) through the *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey*. The second set is information on the human and financial resources (e.g. number of employees, annual budget) of the member agencies. This is collected annually through *The Parks Forum Agency Statistics Survey*.

The measures comprising the *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey* were developed by Parks Forum with assistance from Associate Professor Bill Carter, University of the Sunshine Coast. Using the management effectiveness evaluation approach of the IUCN WCPA, the survey questions seek answers about agency-level performance for measures reporting on the six elements of the IUCN WCPA evaluation, as given in Table 2.

**Table 2: IUCN WCPA Management effectiveness evaluation framework elements and criteria (Hockings and colleagues, 2006, 2009)**

Elements of evaluation	Explanation	Criteria for assessment
Context	What is the current situation? Assessment of values, significance, threats and stakeholder environment	Values and significance Threats Stakeholder issues
Planning	Are plans in place and are planning systems adequate?	Management planning Other planning and direction setting processes and influences
Inputs	Are resources for management adequate?	Resourcing of site management (staff time and funds)
Processes	How is management carried out and does it meet relevant standards?	Suitability and standards of management for key management issues and processes
Outputs	Assessment of the implementation of management programs and actions What has been achieved?	Extent of implementation of plans and work programs
Outcomes	Assessment of outcomes – the extent to which values are maintained and objectives achieved	Maintenance of key reserve values Control of threats Achievement of management objectives

The first benchmarking survey was conducted in 2007. The survey presented an opportunity to test, review and revise the survey questions (i.e., the measures), as well as providing the first set of performance measures. The resultant report included performance data as well as recommendations for improving the measures (i.e., the questions in the survey) (Carter, 2008). The second benchmarking survey, conducted in 2010, used a refined set of measures based on the recommendations from the 2008 report.

## 1.2 Methods

This report provides a summary, comparison and analysis of the results from the 2010 and 2007 surveys. Both surveys were completed by member agencies of the Parks Forum. In the most recent survey, 41 member agencies were invited to complete an online survey,<sup>2</sup> which was open 19 April 2010 to 25 June 2010. The survey was administered and data compiled by Data Analysis Australia. The results from the 2007 survey have been analysed and published as Carter (2008).

Questions in both surveys covered environmental, economic, social, cultural and management performance. Performance was considered in the broadest sense, covering design and process

<sup>2</sup> Copy of the online survey is available from Ingrid Seiler, Program Manager, Parks Forum. Email: info@parksforum.org.



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) questions 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 at the start of the Appendix.

**Box 1. Format of benchmarking questions – 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>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>3</sup> Although there are some differences in questions between the 2007 and 2010 surveys, comparison between results for the two 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 2010 are provided in a series of tables in the Appendix. The responses for 2007 and 2010 are presented next to each other in this report for ease of comparison (e.g., see Table 6). Having two data collection times makes examination of trends possible. A series of graphs are presented to illustrate the sources of information agencies used to obtain the responses to the 2010 survey questions.

It should be noted that the percentage figures for each measure did not include the 'not applicable' category, as its inclusion added nothing to understanding the extent of 'yes' responses for each measure. On the other hand, 'unable to estimate', labelled as 'UE' in the tables, was included in the total percentage for each measure. This response was included in the percentage figures as it indicates where agencies could improve their collection of performance information.

Because of the small sample size in both surveys, only descriptive statistics are presented. This small sample size also means that comparisons between sectors (e.g. between local government and government departments) cannot be reasonably or wisely made.

There are gaps in the results tables where a question was asked in the 2010 survey but not the 2007 one. Where similar (but not the same) questions were asked in the 2007 survey these have been included in the results (e.g., see Table 6).

<sup>3</sup> Copy of the responses available from Ingrid Sieler, Program Manager, The Parks Forum. Email: info@parksforum.org.

## 1.4 Overview of Surveyed Agencies

The benchmark survey was sent to 41 member agencies of the Parks Forum, with 26 responding. Responses per type of membership agency for both surveys are given in Table 3.

**Table 3: Survey responses by type of membership agency (count)**

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

The surveyed agencies collectively serve a wide range of visitor populations – including city, regional, state and national visitors (Table 4). The major role of these agencies was evenly split between protected areas and urban parks (Table 5). This information was not obtained in the 2007 survey and as such no comparison is provided.

**Table 4: Visitor populations served by the member agencies from 2010 survey**

Type of Population Served	Count
City	9
Regional	6
State	7
National	4
Total	26

**Table 5: Major role of the member agencies from 2010 survey**

Major Role	Count
Protected area manager	10
Urban park manager	11
Other	5
Total	26

## 2. Environmental Benchmarks

Environmental benchmarks included the condition of biodiversity and natural resources, threats to these, and an agency's ecological footprint (Table 6).

**Table 6: Environmental benchmarks with 'yes' responses from 2007 and 2010 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	UE* (%)
<b>Natural Resources</b>			
Sufficient information exists to support operational decision making	--	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	--
<b>Biodiversity</b>			
Existence of policies to guide planning and management	81	92	--
Active implementation of policy(ies)	--	95	--
Policy contributes to improvement of condition/integrity	--	95	--
Biodiversity values are being maintained in excellent condition	69	75	8
<b>Tree management for amenity</b>			
Existence of policy to maintain amenity or heritage significance	67	70	--
Active implementation of policy(ies)	--	87	6
Policy is effective in maintaining health of trees and replacing aged, diseased or damaged trees	--	80	7
<b>Threats – Pest Plants</b>			
Existence of planned approach for weed management	--	88	4
Active implementation of planned approach	--	100	--
Planned approach is effective in reducing impacts	--	82	4
Planned approach to weed management is being implemented resulting in stabilisation/reduction of negative impacts	73	--	--
<b>Threats – Pest Animals</b>			
Existence of planned approach for pest animal management	--	84	8
Actively implementation of planned approach	--	50	--
Planned approach is effective in reducing impacts	--	77	4
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	8
Sufficient information exists to develop and implement targeted program to reduce footprint	--	73	8
Guidelines and target program to reduce footprint exists	--	65	8
Measurement and reporting against footprint targets carried out annually	--	76	17

\* UE = Unable to estimate from the 2010 survey

### 2.1 Natural Resources

The natural resources measures concerned whether agencies considered they had sufficient information to support decision making and its use in resource allocation. Over 90% of agencies considered they had sufficient information. No agencies were unable to provide a response to this question.

### 2.2 Biodiversity

There was an 11% increase in the percentage of agencies that had policies to guide planning and management of biodiversity from 2007 to 2010. A similar but smaller increase was seen in the maintenance of biodiversity values in an excellent condition (2007 = 69%, 2010 = 75%). However 8% of agencies were unable to estimate a response for this measure. Implementation of

policies and whether they contributed to improvement had percentages of 95% in the 2010 survey.

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

About two-thirds of the agencies in the two survey periods had an existing policy to maintain trees for amenity or heritage significance. Of the 70% of agencies that had a policy in 2010, 87% indicated the policies were being implemented and 80% responded that these policies were having an effect.

### **2.4 Threats – Pest Plants**

Nearly 90% of agencies had a planned approach for weed management, all of which were being actively implemented. They were also achieving considerable success, with 82% considered effective in reducing impacts. An increase in effectiveness can be seen from the responses to the 2007 question; with 73% indicating then that their planned approach to weed management was resulting in stabilisation and reduction of negative impacts.

### **2.5 Threats – Pest Animals**

For all aspects – existence of policies, and their implementation and effectiveness – pest animals received attention from a smaller number of agencies than did pest plants. This difference was considerable for implementation with 100% of policies being implemented for pest plants and only 50% for pest animals. This difference was also evident in the percentage of agencies unable to estimate a response. Twice as many agencies were unable to estimate a response for the existence of a planned approach to pest animal management compared to pest plants (Table 6). The *Parks Forum Industry Agenda* affords both pest animals and plants high priority.

### **2.6 Ecological Footprint**

There was a large increase in the percentage of agencies that had a policy to reduce their agency's ecological footprint, up from 47% in 2007 to 73% in 2010. A similar percentage (73%) of agencies indicated that they had sufficient information to develop and implement a targeted approach to reducing their footprint. However, this percentage reduced to 65% when asked whether these targeted programs existed. Although 76% of agencies indicated that measurement and reporting against the footprint targets was being carried out annually, a further 17% were unable to estimate whether this occurred.

As an extension to this set of measures, agencies were asked to provide five key actions that were planned over the next two years to reduce their agency's ecological footprint. Their responses included reducing waste, water and energy use through recycling, stormwater harvesting, and installation of solar power or energy saving devices. A number of actions also related to reducing vehicle fleet numbers and the promotion of fuel efficient vehicles and driving practices. Some agencies extended these practices to potential employees with the inclusion of 'willingness to adopt sustainable business practices' in all job descriptions. For potential tenders, environmental performance outcomes were used as evaluation criteria.

### 3. Economic Benchmarks

These measures cover the performance of tourism operators and the economic benefits of parks to local communities (Table 7). 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. For nearly all of the measures, over 10% of agencies were unable to provide responses, with this being the only benchmark where this occurs.

**Table 7: Economic benchmarks with ‘yes’ responses from 2007 and 2010 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	UE* (%)
<b>Tourism Operators</b>			
Policy for engaging with tourism operators exists	53	61	4
Active implementation of policy	--	100	--
Effective tourism operator - protected area manager cooperation to enhance visitor experience		78	13
Effective tourism operator – protected area manager cooperation to protect park values		82	14
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	--	--
Policy for economic benefits from parks to flow to local communities exists	--	21	12.5
Active implementation of policy	--	80	20
Capacity to quantify economic benefits of parks to community	--	36	20
Direct economic benefits of parks to community has been quantified	29	12	12.5

\* UE = Unable to estimate

#### 3.1 Tourism Operators

There was a small increase in the percentage of agencies that had a policy for engaging with tourism operators from 2007 to 2010. There was a large increase in the percentage of agencies that had effective cooperation between protected area managers and tourism operators (50% in 2007; 78% and 82% in 2010).

#### 3.2 Economic Benefit to Local Communities

Low numbers of agencies responded affirmatively to these measures. Less than a quarter had a policy for economic benefits from parks to flow to local communities, with slightly more than a third indicating they had the capacity to quantify the economic benefits of parks to the community. Interestingly, of the agencies that said a policy existed, 80% were being implemented with the remaining 20% unable to estimate a response. Compared to 2007, there was a reduction in the percentage of agencies that were quantifying the economic benefits to the community (29% down to 12%).

## 4. Social Benchmarks

Visitor information, measuring satisfaction (both visitor and community) and engagement of volunteers comprise the social measures in the *Great Parks Network Benchmark Survey* (Table 8).

**Table 8: Social benchmarks with 'yes' responses from 2007 and 2010 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	UE*
<b>Visitor Information</b>			
Sufficient information exists to inform planning and management of visitor use	--	87	--
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	--
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	9
Visitor impact management is being implemented and negative visitor impacts on park values are essentially no longer a problem	75	--	--
<b>Measuring Satisfaction</b>			
Regular independent surveys of visitor satisfaction undertaken	--	64	4
Program in place to measure visitor satisfaction	94	--	--
Regular independent surveys of community satisfaction undertaken	--	61	9
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	4
Existence and implementation of an organised volunteer policy	82	--	--

\* UE = Unable to estimate

### 4.1 Visitor Information

The park agencies are performing well in relation to visitor information with all three measures above 86%. This is an improvement from the questions asked in 2007, however, it should be noted that the questions differ slightly.

### 4.2 Measuring Satisfaction

Only 64% of agencies conduct regular, independent surveys of visitor satisfaction. The percentage undertaking independent surveys of community satisfaction was slightly lower again. The remaining agencies may be undertaking satisfaction monitoring, however, this it may be in-house rather than using independent means. This seems a plausible explanation given that 94% and 81% of agencies reported they had a program in place to measure visitor and community satisfaction in the 2007 survey.

Agencies were 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 and to provide the same with respect to community satisfaction surveys. A total of 70% of agencies recorded visitor satisfaction ratings for their entire park system of above 80% (Table 9). About 50% of agencies had their lowest satisfaction percentages in the 80-100% brackets and 70% recorded their highest satisfaction percentages in the 80-100% brackets (Table 10). This suggests a narrow reporting range for visitor satisfaction (between 80 and 100%) for many of the surveyed agencies.

**Table 9: Result of recent overall visitor satisfaction rating for the entire park system**

Visitor satisfaction	Percentage
70 - 79%	20
80 - 89%	40
90 - 100%	30
Not Applicable	10

**Table 10: Lowest and highest overall visitor satisfaction ratings for individual parks**

Lowest overall satisfaction	Percentage	Highest overall satisfaction	Percentage
50 - 59%	15	50 - 59%	0
60 - 69%	0	60 - 69%	0
70 - 79%	15	70 - 79%	15
80 - 89%	23	80 - 89%	31
90 - 100%	23	90 - 100%	39
Not Applicable	23	Not Applicable	15

For overall community satisfaction with the entire park system, 53% of agencies recorded satisfaction ratings above 80% (Table 11). A total of 50% of agencies had their lowest satisfaction percentages in the 50-79% brackets and only 25% recorded their highest satisfaction percentages in the 80-100% brackets (Table 12). Compared to visitor satisfaction, the community satisfaction ratings collectively covered a much wider range. These results should be treated with caution, however, as only four agencies responded to the questions on community satisfaction.

**Table 11: Result of recent overall community satisfaction rating for the entire park system**

Community satisfaction	Percentage
50 - 59%	0
60 - 69%	7
70 - 79%	20
80 - 89%	33
90 - 100%	20
Not Applicable	20

**Table 12: Lowest and highest community satisfaction ratings for individual parks**

Lowest overall satisfaction	Percentage	Highest overall satisfaction	Percentage
50 - 59%	25	50 - 59%	0
60 - 69%	0	60 - 69%	0
70 - 79%	25	70 - 79%	50
80 - 89%	25	80 - 89%	0
90 - 100%	0	90 - 100%	25
Not Applicable	25	Not Applicable	25

### 4.3 Volunteers

Three-quarters of participating agencies have an effective volunteer-in-parks program (Table 8). Agencies with a volunteer program were asked to indicate the number of volunteer hours dedicated to environmental, cultural and park projects (Tables 13, 14 & 15). For volunteer hours relating to environmental or natural heritage projects (Table 13), just over half of the responding

agencies indicated that this information was missing or not applicable. Five agencies indicated that volunteers committed less than 10,000 hours, while at the other end of the spectrum one agency noted volunteers contributing more than 200,000 hours. Protected area managers demonstrated the heaviest usage in terms of hours contributed by these environmental volunteers (Table 13, column 2).

Although the 2007 survey asked for volunteer hours, they were collected and analysed using a different format. As such, they have not been included here.

**Table 13: Total number of volunteer hours committed to environmental (natural heritage) projects during the 2008/2009 financial year (count)**

Volunteer Hours	Major Role				Total
	Predominantly protected area manager	Predominantly urban park manager	Predominantly Indigenous protected area manager	Other	
0 to 10,000 hours	0	5	0	0	5
10,000 to 50,000 hours	0	1	0	2	3
50,000 to 100,000 hours	1	0	0	0	1
100,000 to 200,000 hours	2	0	0	0	2
More than 200,000 hours	1	0	0	0	1
Missing/Not Applicable	6	5	0	3	14
Total	10	11	0	5	26

For cultural heritage projects, eleven agencies indicated volunteer involvement, with these volunteers contributing up to 50,000 hours (Table 14). The remainder of agencies (more than half) indicated that information on volunteer hours spent on cultural heritage projects was missing or not applicable. Urban park managers appeared to be the heaviest users of these cultural heritage volunteers.

**Table 14: Total number of volunteer hours committed to cultural heritage projects during the 2008/2009 financial year (count)**

Volunteer Hours	Major Role				Total
	Predominantly protected area manager	Predominantly urban park manager	Predominantly Indigenous protected area manager	Other	
0 to 10,000 hours	1	6	0	2	9
10,000 to 50,000 hours	2	0	0	0	2
50,000 to 100,000 hours	0	0	0	0	0
100,000 to 200,000 hours	0	0	0	0	0
More than 200,000 hours	0	0	0	0	0
Missing/Not Applicable	7	5	0	3	15
Total	10	11	0	5	26

For park related projects, the amount of volunteer hours was more variable, with ten agencies recording less than 50,000 volunteer hours and three agencies over 50,000 volunteer hours (Table 15). For all the categories of volunteer hours, urban park managers were highest for



volunteers contributing less than 10,000 hours and protected area managers were higher for volunteers contributing 100,000 to 200,000 hours.

**Table 15: Total number of volunteer hours committed to park projects during the 2008/2009 financial year (count)**

Volunteer Hours	Major Role				Total
	Predominantly protected area manager	Predominantly urban park manager	Predominantly Indigenous protected area manager	Other	
0 to 10,000 hours	0	6	0	0	6
10,000 to 50,000 hours	1	1	0	2	4
50,000 to 100,000 hours	0	0	0	1	1
100,000 to 200,000 hours	2	0	0	0	2
More than 200,000 hours	0	0	0	0	0
Missing/Not Applicable	7	4	0	2	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>

## 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 16). The results from these benchmarks varied according to the aspect measured, for example agencies were good at consultation with communities, including Indigenous communities, but weaker in obtaining demographic profiles of visitors.

**Table 16: Cultural benchmarks with 'yes' responses from 2007 and 2010 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	UE* (%)
<b>Value of Parks</b>			
Existence of program to promote park values	--	72	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>			
Existence of policy to inventory, protect and restore cultural heritage sites	87	86	9
Active implementation of policy	80	95	5
Policy implementation is regularly measured	--	55	22
<b>Community Consultation</b>			
Existence of policy to encourage public input via consultation programs	--	88	4
Active implementation of public consultation program	--	92	8
Regular process of community consultation and input into decision making that covers all aspects of park management	88	--	--
<b>Indigenous Consultation</b>			
Active Indigenous community consultation program for input into park management decisions (where identifiable Indigenous group exists)	--	90	5
Regular process of Indigenous consultation and input into decision making that covers all aspects of park management	88	--	--
<b>Demographic</b>			
Regular surveys of demographic characteristics (including ethnicity and age of park users) are conducted	--	50	4
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	4
Existence of multicultural policy and implementation through organised programme	41	--	--

\* UE = Unable to estimate

### 5.1 Value of Parks

Almost three-quarters of the responding agencies had a program to promote park values.

### 5.2 Cultural Inventory

Over 85% of agencies had a policy to inventory, protect and restore cultural heritage sites in both the 2007 and 2010 surveys, with implementation of these policies increasing by 15% between the two surveys. Just over half of the responding agencies indicated that the implementation of these policies was regularly measured. Surprisingly, 22% of agencies were unable to estimate whether their policy implementation was regularly measured.

### 5.3 Community and Indigenous Consultation

Agencies were performing well with regard to community consultation, with 88% of agencies having a policy for encouraging public input. Of these, 92% noted active implementation. A similar percentage of agencies (90%) had an active Indigenous consultation program for input into park management decisions. The *Parks Forum Industry Agenda* encourages Indigenous recognition and engagement, which most agencies are currently achieving.

#### **5.4 Demographic**

Only 50% of agencies conducted regular surveys of the demographic characteristics of visitors and only 52% indicated the existence of programs to cater for the current demographic profile of park users.

## 6. Management Benchmarks

The management benchmarks are presented here according to their level: either organisational or park (Tables 17 and 18 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 17: Management benchmarks (organisational level) with ‘yes’ responses from 2007 and 2010 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	UE (%)
<b>Organisational Management</b>			
Existence of systems and processes to develop culture of engagement and support of leadership behaviours	--	96	--
Existence of link between strategic and management plans and annual operations	--	88	4
Existence of systems and processes to share data and knowledge across organisation and integrate it into management	--	88	--
Existence of documented standards of management performance across all aspects of park management	--	56	20
Existence of systems and processes to assess management performance against standards	--	93	--
Monitoring of quadruple bottom line sustainability and encouragement of actions to increase this	--	64	8
<b>Risk Management</b>			
Organisation regularly identifies, measures and monitors operation and business risks	--	100	--
<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	8
Existence of standards for assessment of short/long term resourcing needs for delivering target levels of protection of <i>natural and cultural values</i>	--	52	4
Existence of effective, efficient and transparent budget allocation process	--	84	--
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	4
Existence of active staff training program to maximise staff performance and professional growth	--	92	--
<b>Operational Health and Safety</b>			
Existence of system to ensure compliance with all mandatory OH&S requirements	--	100	--
Compliance with health and safety requirements	94	--	--
Auditing of compliance	--	100	--

### 6.1 Organisational Management

Agencies performed well on most benchmarks relating to organisational management except for the existence of documented standards of management performance across all aspects of park management (56%) and monitoring of quadruple bottom line sustainability and encouragement of actions to increase this (64%). These measures also had the highest percentage of agencies unable to estimate responses for these benchmarks (20%, 8%). On the positive side, over 90% of agencies had systems and processes to develop cultures of engagement and support of leadership behaviours, and to assess management performance against standards.

## 6.2 Risk Management

All agencies responding to this measure indicated that their organisation regularly identified, measured and monitored operational and business risks. All are part of today's standard business practices.

## 6.3 Management Resources

Just over 50% of responding agencies had standards for assessing the resourcing needs for delivering target levels of visitor services, and natural and cultural values. Conversely, 84% of agencies had an effective, efficient and transparent budget allocation process.

## 6.4 Training and Professional Development

Responding agencies also performed well in relation to staff training and professional development. Just over 80% indicated that they had an active staff training program to enable staff to learn from the experience of park management, while 92% of responding agencies indicated that staff training programs existed to maximise staff performance and professional growth.

## 6.5 Operational Health and Safety

All responding agencies indicated that they had a system to ensure compliance with all mandatory operational health and safety requirements and compliance was being audited.

**Table 18: Management benchmarks (parks level) with 'yes' responses from 2007 and 2010 surveys**

Benchmark	2007 (%)	2010 (%)	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	4
<b>Fire Management</b>			
Existence of policy and/or code of practice underpins delivery of fire management program	--	80	5
Most parks/park systems have approved and current fire management plans	69	--	--
Application of strategies to address priority management areas	--	70	26
Existence of fire risk assessment process (for identifying priorities for mitigation/prevention)	--	74	13
Existence of fire management plans with objectives for protecting social, economic, cultural and natural values	--	74	--
Active implementation of these fire management plans	--	93	7
Implementation of fire management programme which substantially meets all objectives for parks/system	69	--	--
<b>Assets and Infrastructure</b>			
Existence of scheduled maintenance program based on set standards of service	--	82	8
Full implementation of scheduled maintenance program	--	89	5
Built infrastructure and assets fully maintained in accordance with planned programme	81	--	--
Existence of planned asset renewal program	--	84	4
Implementation of planned asset renewal program	--	100	--
Existence of system to ensure delivery of planned capital works program	--	100	--
System in place to measure successful delivery of capital works programme	87	--	--

## **6.6 Park Management Plans**

Over 80% of agencies indicated the existence of a plan of management containing clear directions for management for each park, or group of biogeographically similar parks.

## **6.7 Fire Management**

Agencies also performed well in relation to fire management, with each result in this category for 2010 over 70%. The majority of responding agencies had a policy or code of conduct that underpinned the delivery of fire management programs. Of the 74% of agencies that had a fire management plan, 93% of these the plans were being actively implemented. Surprisingly, although 70% of agencies indicated they were applying strategies to address priority management areas, 26% of agencies were unable to estimate a response to this benchmark. This was the highest 'unable to estimate' percentage for all the measures in the 2010 survey.

## **6.8 Assets and Infrastructure**

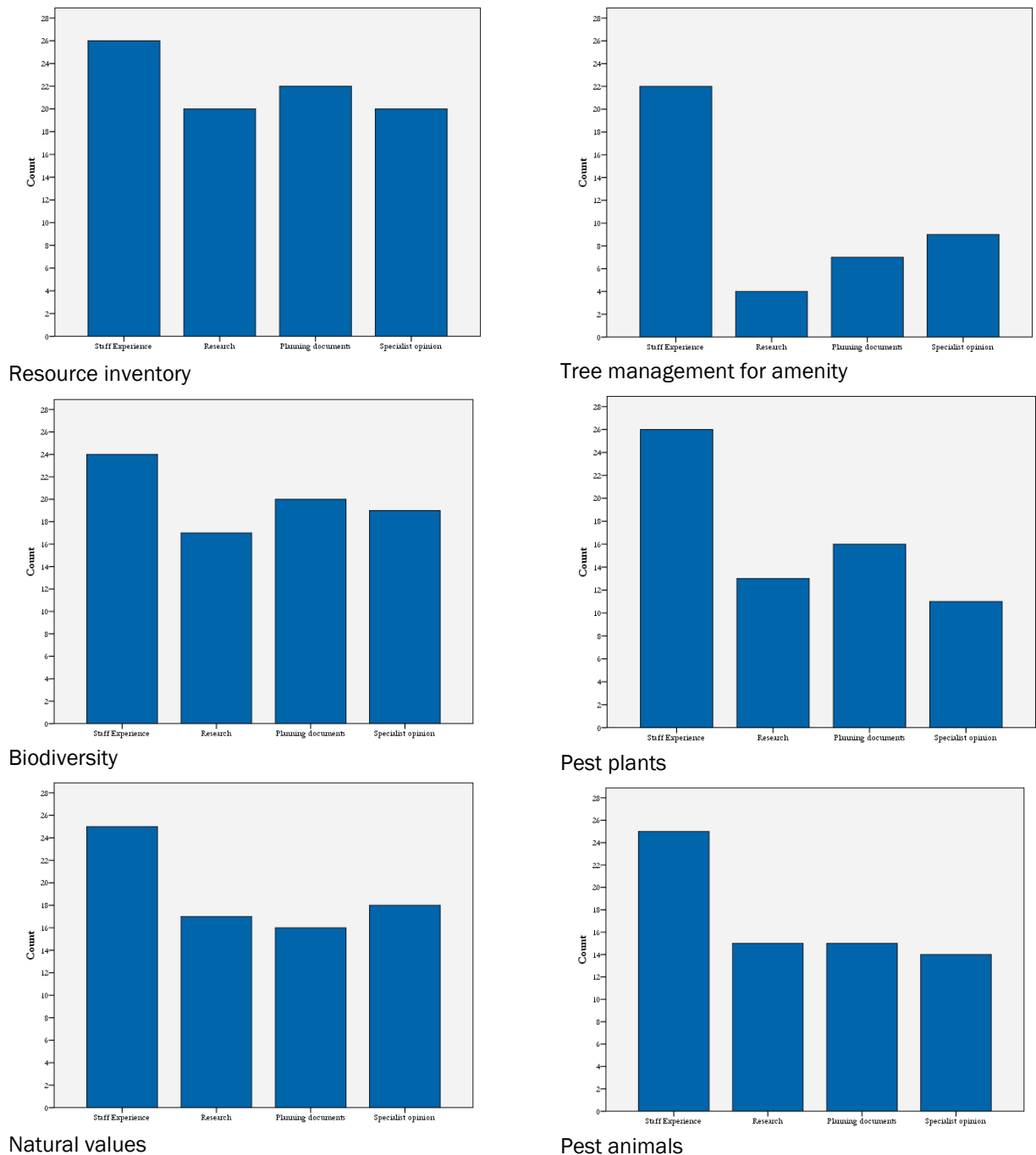
Again, agencies performed well in relation to assets and infrastructure, with 82% indicating that they had a scheduled maintenance program, and 89% indicating that this program was being fully implemented. Over 80% of agencies also had a planned asset renewal program, all of which were being implemented. All responding agencies indicated that they had a system in place to ensure the delivery of planned capital works programs.

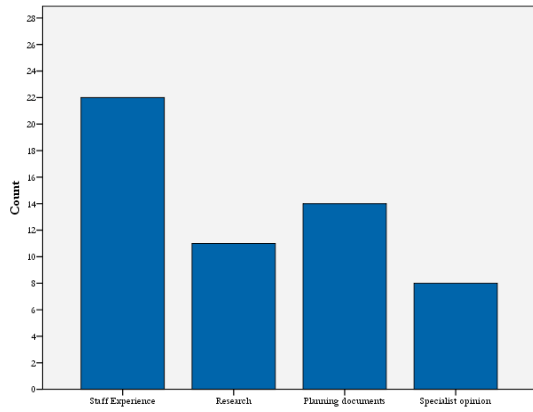
## 7. Sources of Information

Agencies were asked about the information they used to help them answer the benchmarking questions (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) staff experience, research, planning documents and specialist opinion. The overwhelming result for all measures is the high reliance on staff experience.

### 7.1 Environmental Benchmarks

The principal source of information for the environmental benchmarks was staff experience (Fig. 1). Planning documents and specialist opinion were also important.



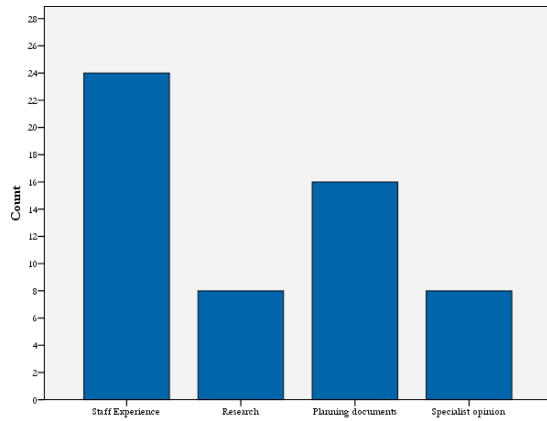


Ecological footprint

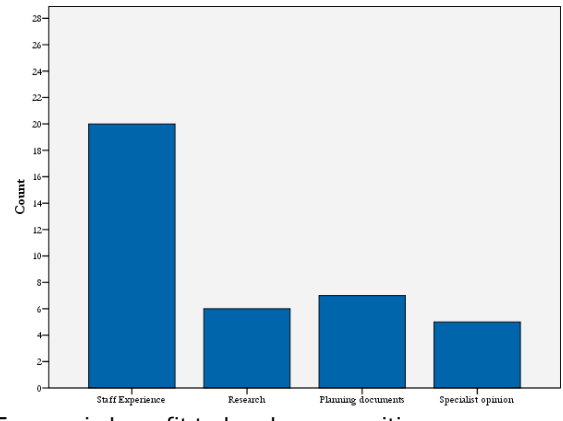
**Figure 1: Sources of information for environmental benchmarks**

### 7.2 Economic Benchmarks

For the economic benchmarks, staff experience was also an important source of information, with planning documents used for obtaining information on tourism operators (Fig. 2).



Tourism operators



Economic benefit to local communities

**Figure 2: Sources of information for economic benchmarks**



### 7.3 Social Benchmarks

Although the main source of information for the social measures was staff experience, which was the only source for volunteers, research was the predominant source for measuring satisfaction (Fig. 3).

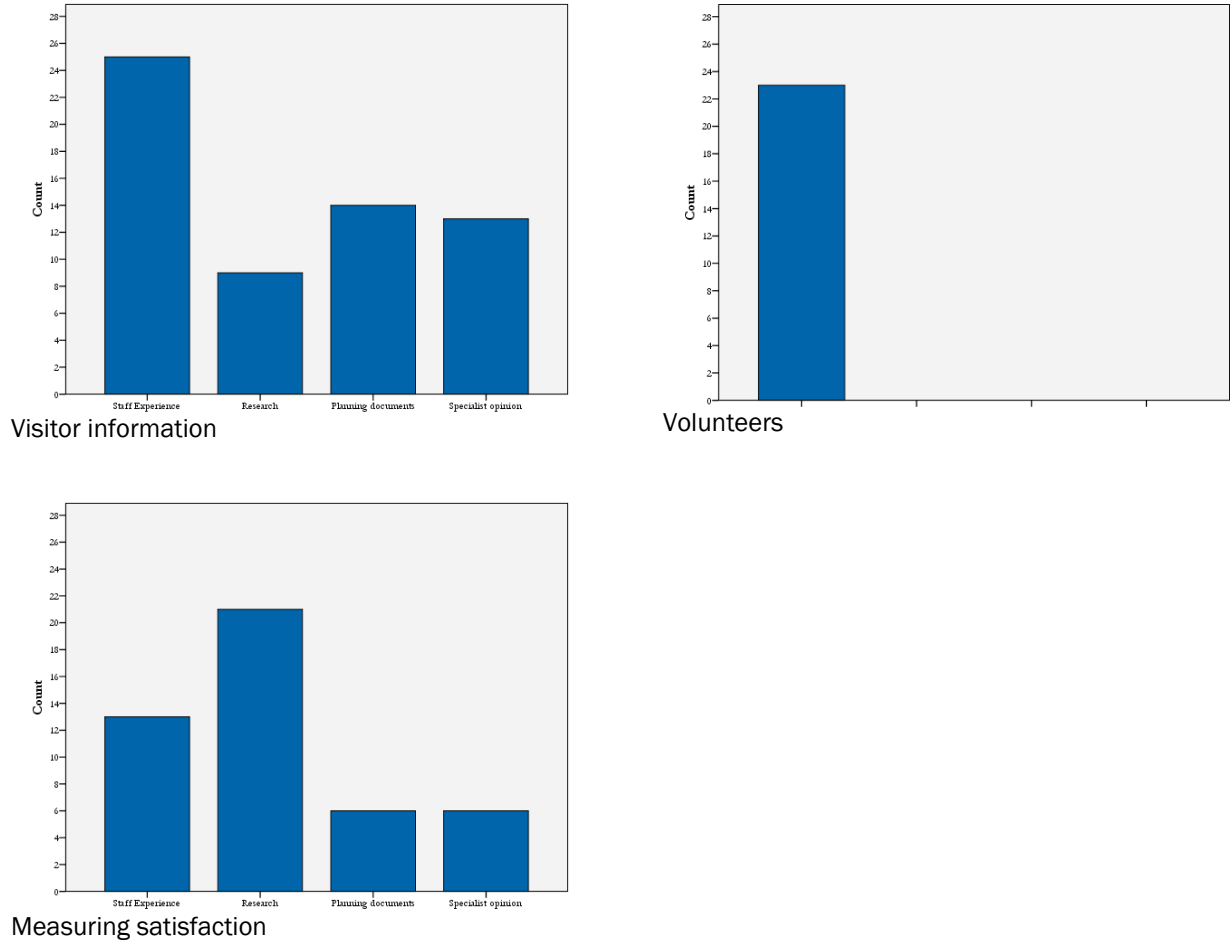


Figure 3: Sources of information for social benchmarks

## 7.4 Cultural Benchmarks

Again, the dominant source of information for responding to the cultural measures was staff experience supported by planning documents. Research was also important for demographic information (Fig. 4).

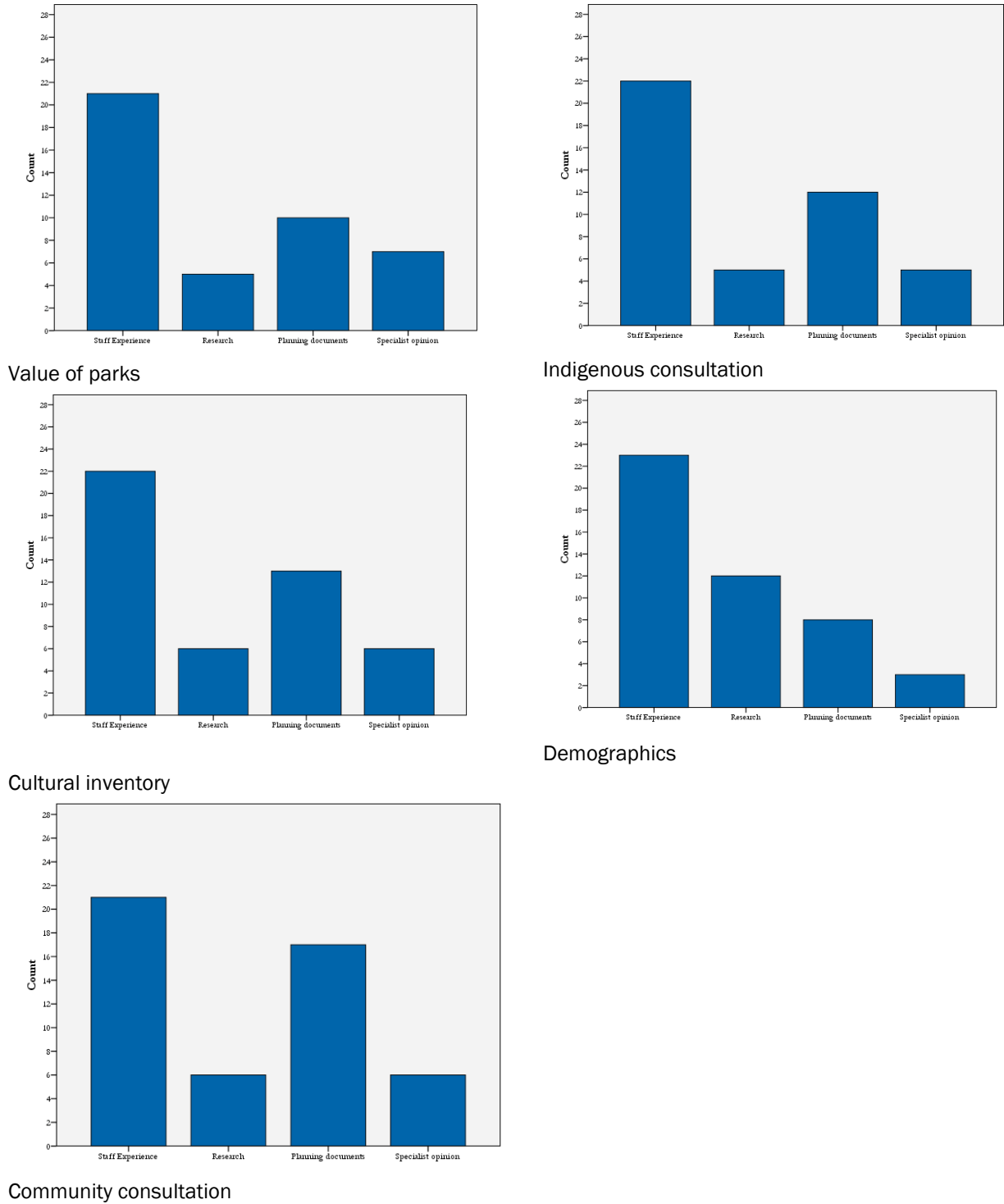
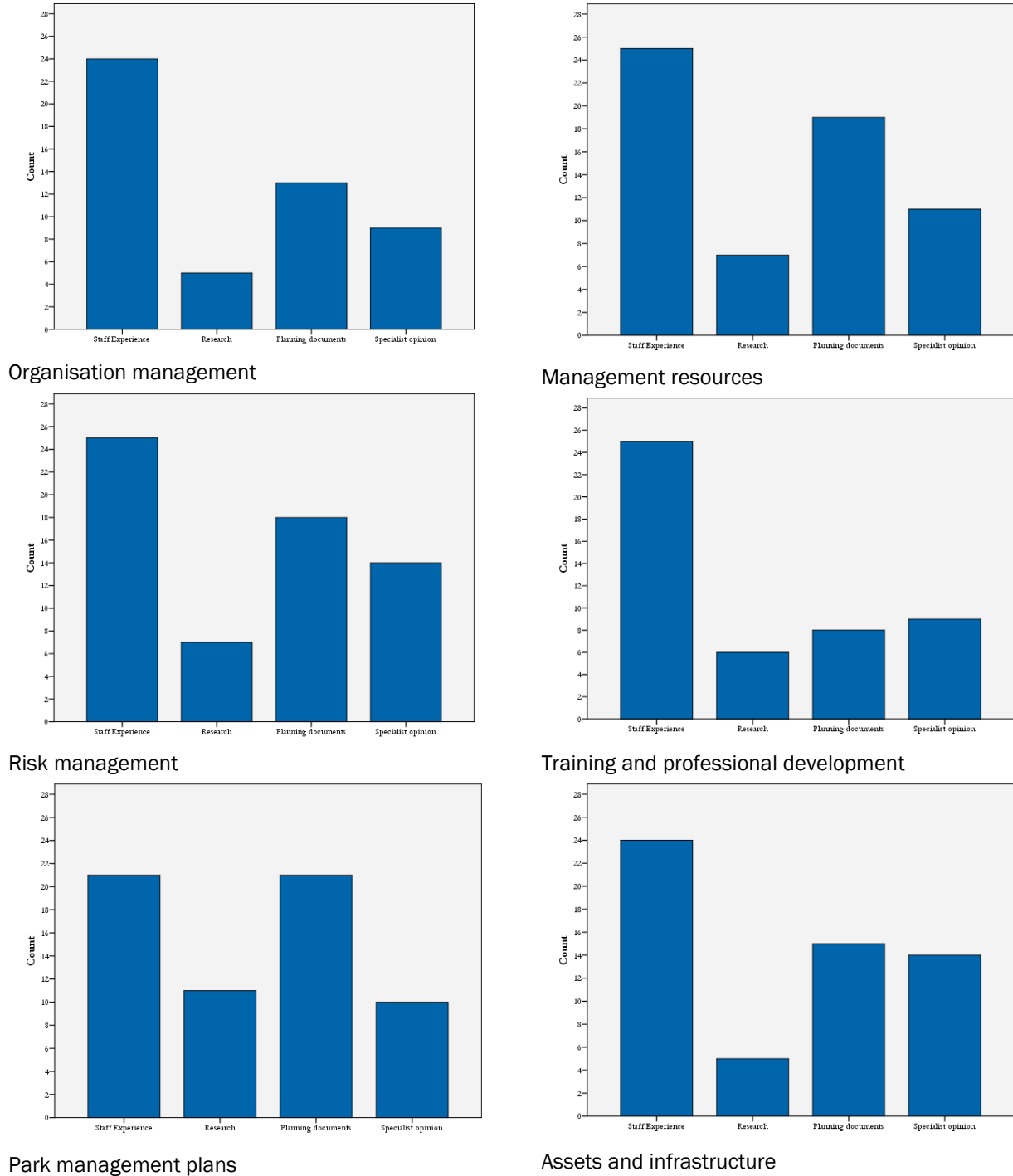
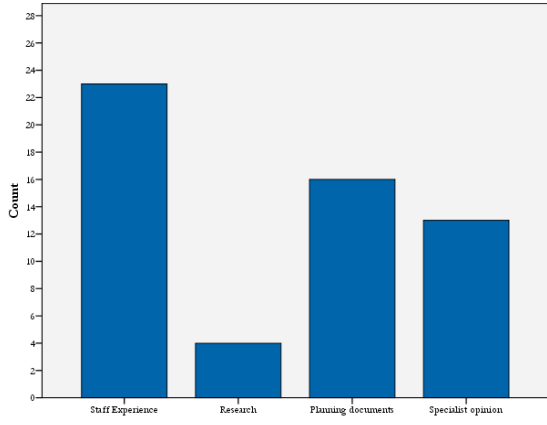


Figure 4: Sources of information for cultural benchmarks

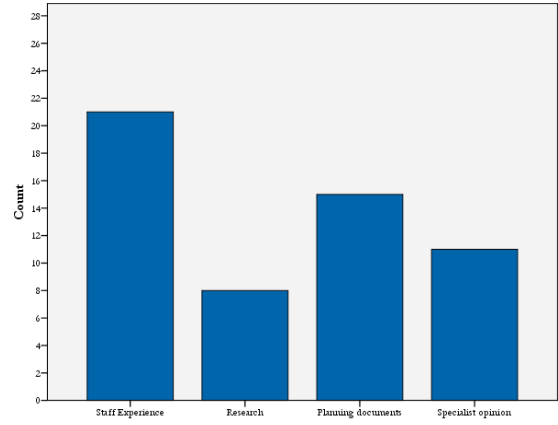
## 7.5 Management Benchmarks

Staff experience was also the most common source of information for assessing the management benchmarks (Fig. 5). For organisation management, risk management, park management and management resources, planning documents were also a popular source of information.





Asset renewal program



Fire management

Figure 5: Information sources for management benchmarks

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

The following section explores the more important results obtained for each benchmark category. The discussion draws on recent research on park management and the authors' experience in this area. The intention is to highlight the successes, issues, concerns and challenges raised by this benchmarking exercise. Case studies highlighting recent relevant research are provided, where appropriate. Concluding this section are thoughts regarding how this important benchmarking survey can continue to improve and ensure its relevance to managers and their management environments.

### 8.1 Highlights and Lessons Learned

#### ***Environmental Benchmarks***

It was a surprising result that 96% of responding agencies had sufficient information on natural resources to support operational decision making (Table 6) given the ongoing and grave concerns expressed by park managers and researchers about the lack of information to guide park management. This acknowledged lack of data includes information on species distribution and status; how species, ecosystems and landscapes are likely to respond to climate change; and lack of information on fire behaviour and ecological and social responses to fire. Perhaps there is an unrecognised gap between what information managers currently have and what information they need to make decisions in complex, uncertain and rapidly changing environments.

Managers are relying heavily on staff experience to respond to the benchmarking questions in this survey (e.g., Fig. 1). The wording of the question related to 'sufficient' information on natural resources encourages them to draw on this experience. Sufficient was defined for survey respondents as 'enough information based on operational experience or scientific literature to support planning and decision making'. Responding agencies may feel they have sufficient information to justify their decisions, but is it sufficient and even more importantly, are they subsequently making the 'best possible' decisions? The challenge for the future is to liaise with park agency staff to identify what information do they not have but need for decision making, followed by where and how to get this information.

Pest animal management receives less attention and lower levels of implementation than pest plant management. There are several possible reasons. Pest animal eradication is expensive and requires specialised resources (e.g. testing and development of fox baits, goat trapping and shooting). It is often politically sensitive, with community concerns about culling animals and the associated ethical dilemmas. Nevertheless, pest species, both plants and animals, continue to be a high priority in Australia given our island status and high degree of native species' endemism.

Agencies are taking on the challenge of reducing their ecological footprint, with a doubling in the number of agencies with a policy for this aspect. This, plus their suggestions on how they are reducing their ecological footprint, is encouraging. A reduction in ecological footprint is central to the *Parks Forum Sustainability Charter*. The *Charter* emphasises reducing the use of natural resources such as energy, fuel and water, and including sustainability principles in all procurement and operating arrangements. Particularly notable from the 2010 survey was agencies including sustainability requirements in tender documents and selection processes.

A total of 17% of agencies do not know if they are reporting against footprint targets suggesting work is still required with a number of organisations to increase their awareness regarding ecological footprints and how organisations might develop indicators and report against them. Case Study 1 below overviews the environmental management indicators used by Ecotourism Australia in their eco-certification program that can be used to assist in measuring ecological footprint

## Case Study 1: Indicators for monitoring an organisation's ecological footprint

Ecotourism Australia has developed a certification program called *ECO Certification* to assist travellers choose an experience that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. It was developed to address the need to identify genuine nature-based and ecotourism operators. The ECO Certification is product specific and has three levels of achievement – Nature Tourism, Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism. There are 10 sections with a number of key criteria, and include Business Management and Operational Planning, Business Ethics, Responsible Marketing, Customer Satisfaction, Natural Area and/or Cultural Focus, Environmental Management, Interpretation and Education, Contribution to Conservation, Working with Local Communities, and Cultural Respect and Sensitivity.

Under Environmental Management, there are a number of key criteria relating to ecologically sustainable practices that may be of relevance to park managers. These include:

- Construction methods and materials, maximising use of renewable or recycled materials
- Drainage, soil and water management, reflecting natural site topography
- Visual impact, whereby operations are not visibly dominant
- Water supply and conservation, minimal use of ecologically sustainable water supply
- Waste water, minimised and has no significant environmental impact
- Waste minimisation and management, with a policy to reduce, reuse and recycle
- Energy use and minimisation, in both buildings and transport options
- Minimal impact of key activities and experiences.

Ref: [http://www.ecotourism.org.au/eco\\_certification.asp](http://www.ecotourism.org.au/eco_certification.asp)

### **Economic Benchmarks**

Managers are increasingly recognising the importance of having policies for engaging with tour operators, with an increase from 53% to 61% in organisations having such a policy. By forming partnerships with tour operators, managers can obtain assistance in delivering visitor activities and experiences, interpretation and education, and in some cases monitoring. These partnerships can also provide important sources of revenue and help protect the natural environment through direct actions, such as restoration projects, or through interpretation by ensuring visitors 'tread lightly'.

It has become essential politically to justify the place of parks in state and national budgets as they compete with other portfolios, such as health, education or defence, for funding. These park management organisations still have limited and apparently declining abilities to quantify the direct economic benefits of parks to the community (Table 7). Securing sustainable funding is a key item in the *Parks Forum Industry Agenda*, and depends, in part, on being able to show the economic value of parks to society.

There have been extended and extensive arguments over how to best measure the economic value of parks. A research project commissioned by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre is summarised in Case Study 2 in which Wood and colleagues (2006) developed a simple method for calculating the economic value of parks, which was then field-tested in Western Australia.

## Case Study 2: Determining the economic value of parks

Many studies have evaluated the contribution of park tourism to the local surrounding communities. However, the collection and use of these data remains an issue as a result of limited financial and personnel resources. Parks often supply the most important part of a nature-based tourism experience, but they usually capture the lowest amount of the economic benefit. Political processes are largely focused on economic and monetary returns, and it is important that managers exploit the demonstrable economic benefits of parks to argue for better resourcing.

As such, Wood and colleagues (2006) developed a 'toolkit' to enable managers to collect these important economic data in a simple way. They identified the direct expenditure from tourism as the most appropriate measure for the contribution of park-based tourism to the local community. Direct expenditure included the amount spent by visitors on travel, accommodation, food and drinks, activities, equipment and other expenditures. They also collected information on key variables related to the visitor themselves: their origin, accommodation type, activities participated in, household income, and age.

Their 'toolkit' provides an overview of how to establish and conduct an assessment of the economical value of parks. Central to this is a survey with a list of 'core' questions to help collect the above information. They also provide a 'supplementary' list of questions to collect some additional information that may be useful to park managers from time to time.

Ref: Wood, D.; Galsson, J.; Carlsen, J. and Hopkins, D. (2006) *Economic evaluation of tourism for natural areas: development of a toolkit approach*. Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism: Gold Coast, Australia.

### **Social Benchmarks**

As per the environmental benchmarks, it is perplexing that 87% of responding agencies indicated that they had sufficient information to inform planning and management of visitor use. A heavy reliance on staff expertise helps explain this response. A recent report by Griffin and colleagues (2010) documented the widespread view held by managers that visitor management decisions were being made without supporting data. These researchers also noted that a significant amount of visitor data was being collected on an ad-hoc basis without any strategic or systematic framework guiding its collection, storage and subsequent use. Once collected, it was rarely analysed beyond its original purpose or integrated into other management information systems. Again, is there too heavy a reliance on staff experience? Are agencies making do with the information they have?

As a related comment, park managers worldwide express ongoing concerns about a lack of resources to protect nature conservation values and to adequately maintain visitor facilities such as toilet and picnic facilities, walk trails and roads. Research through visitor surveys similarly identifies public concerns regarding the maintenance and cleanliness of toilets and other visitor facilities. These concerns do not obviously align with the results from this survey where 91% of organisations responded that facilities are being maintained to a mandated standard (Table 8, Visitor Information section). Several thoughts are relevant here – perhaps the mandated standards are lower than both managers and visitors regard as acceptable or respondents did not want to suggest that they were unable to adequately manage their visitor facilities.

The undertaking of visitor satisfaction surveys is widespread but an independent approach is less common. Irrespective of who conducts the surveys, it is important that they are well designed so that comparisons over time can be made and accurate generalisations made to the population of all visitors. These same requirements apply to community based surveys. Fewer agencies had ratings of 80% or over for community satisfaction (53% of agencies) compared to visitor satisfaction (70% of agencies). This

suggests greater attention is needed to the difference between these two areas of satisfaction and the reasons why.

The approaches taken by Parks Victoria to both visitor and community satisfaction surveys provide a model potentially suitable for park managers elsewhere. Details are given in Case Study 3.

### **Case Study 3: Measuring visitor and community satisfaction**

This case study overviews the approach taken by Parks Victoria to regularly and systematically surveying park visitors and the community. A recent technical report on visitor data collection and use by Griffin and colleagues (2010) for the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, recommended that the survey-based approach taken by Parks Victoria be used to estimate annual aggregate visitation levels. Visitor numbers was identified in this technical report as the most important core visitor data for park managers. Parks Victoria is responsible for managing 17% of the state of Victoria (Australia) with its national, state and urban parks receiving 45.3 million visits per year. They run three monitors: visitor number, visitor satisfaction, and community perception.

*Visitor Number Monitor* is run biennially via a telephone survey of Victorians and interstate visitors and face to face interviews with international visitors. In 2006/2007 Parks Victoria, through a polling company, conducted telephone interviews with a total of 11,200 people from Melbourne, regional Victoria, NSW and SA, and face to face with 800 international visitors (in airport departure lounges). Information collected includes places visited in last 4 weeks (or 8 weeks in the case of interstate visitors), reasons for visit, and demographics.

The NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, who are using a similar visitor monitor approach to Parks Victoria, telephone survey residents of NSW and adjacent states, but not other interstate or international visitors. This Department concluded from pilot survey work in 2009 that limiting their survey in this way still captured around 93% of all visits to their parks and avoided the high costs of conducting face to face interviews.

*Visitor Satisfaction Monitor* is run biennially by Parks Victoria for their parks with high 'levels of service' and piers (part of this agency's management responsibilities). In 2008 this involved 3,769 face-to-face interviews with visitors, undertaken by independent research consultants. Visitors are asked about their overall level of satisfaction, their performance ratings of facilities and services, reasons for visiting, activities undertaken, and demographics.

*Community Perception Monitor* is also run biennially via a telephone survey by independent research consultants. In 2008 this involved 1,000 respondents from Melbourne and regional Victoria. Information is obtained on the community's perceptions of parks and of Parks Victoria, the adequacy of recreational opportunities, and the demographics of visitors (and non-visitors).

Ref: Griffin, T.; Moore, S.; Crilley, G.; Darcy, S. and Schweinsberg, S. (2010) *Protected area management: collection and use of visitor data. Volume 1: Summary and recommendations*. Cooperative Tourism Research Centre: Gold Coast, Australia.

Roy Morgan Research (2009) *Annual visits to PWG managed parks in NSW – final report*. Report prepared for the NSW Department Environment and Climate Change. <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research/NSWparkspopularity.htm>.

Zanon D.; Hall, J.; and Shaw, S. (2008) Long term benefits of visitor monitoring – an Australian experience. *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Monitoring and Management of Visitor Flows in Recreation and Protected Areas*. Montecatini Terme, Italy. Pp. 148-152. <http://www.deakin.edu.au/dro/view/DU:30018248>. [Abstract only]



## Cultural Benchmarks

Park management organisations have clearly recognised the importance of promoting the values of their estate. Such promotion builds political support and in turn public funding. It also attracts visitors who provide revenue through entry fees or purchasing goods and services. Widespread appreciation of park values is essential as the community becomes more engaged in park planning and management. Understanding and sharing a common understanding of these values contributes to effective and efficient planning where the public are involved. Promoting these values first requires their identification (a critical first step) and then a broad understanding and appreciation of these values by those involved in planning and evaluation activities.

The Parks Forum has described these values that parks provide to the community through *The Value of Parks* brochure. These have been summarised in the case study below (Case Study 4).

### Case Study 4: The value of parks

In 2008, Parks Forum released *The Value of Parks*. This brochure aims to provide a better understanding of the importance of park values to those not immediately acquainted with the parks industry. Parks are 'a store of the past and an avenue for the future'. Four key values are outlined:

Protecting our natural world – through conserving outstanding features and processes

Building healthy communities – through enhancing general and social well-being

Contributing to our economy – by underpinning and supporting tourism and recreational opportunities

Reflecting our culture – by inspiring our hearts and souls.

Copies of *The Value of Parks* document are available at:

<http://www.parksforum.org/cms/pages/The-Value-of-Parks.html>

The important question of whether policy implementation is regularly measured is only asked as part of measuring actions associated with cultural inventory (Table 16) and finds that only half of the surveyed organisations are doing so. Policy implementation is an important aspect of any management effectiveness evaluation. However, adding a similar question to other areas of the survey would increase its length considerably. Policy analysis, including determining whether policies have been implemented or not, is a neglected area for most public organisations, and parks agencies are not alone in this regard.

In terms of public consultation, these park organisations were performing well, with active implementation of public consultation programs and strong Indigenous consultation. By now, most park agencies have had several decades of experience and public consultation has become part of their core business.

The demographic characteristics of visitors are poorly known and yet agencies have a strong interest in them. Demographics of visitors are usually taken to include age, place of origin, ethnicity and sometimes level of education and mobility. There is increasing interest in the ethnicity of visitors as a park managers aim to ensure they being equitable and offering all members of society suitable, accessible recreational opportunities in their parks. Case Study 5 describes the components of visitor and visit profiling of most interest to park managers, as identified in a recently completed project with protected area managers in Australia by Griffin and colleagues (2010).

## Case Study 5: Visitor characteristics of interest to park managers

Griffin and colleagues (2010), in their recent review of the collection and use of visitor data by park agencies in Australia, noted a perception among park managers that visitor-related decisions are often made without supporting data. They attributed this to a number of technical and cultural issues including poor staff training and capacity; lack of coordination regarding the best way to collect, analyse, manage and distribute data; and inter and intra agency communication problems.

As a result of their study, they developed a list of core and supplementary visitor data variables. Core variables are to be collected on an annual or other regular basis using nationally consistent and standardised methodology. The most important core variable was visit/visitor counts, with other core variables being demographic profile of visitors; visitor satisfaction with park experiences and specific park attributes, facilities and services; community attitudes, values and perceptions relating to parks and their management agencies; and the economic value of parks.

Supplementary variables are important for management and/or performance reporting in specific contexts, and collected as required in response to a specific need. These included, but are not limited to: number of visitors at a park level; commercial tour activity; problems/complaints about services and facilities; and visitor safety.

Ref: Griffin, T.; Moore, S.; Crilley, G.; Darcy, S. and Schweinsberg, S. (2010) *Protected area management: collection and use of visitor data. Volume 1: Summary and recommendations*. Cooperative Tourism Research Centre: Gold Coast, Australia.

Moore, S.; Crilley, G.; Darcy, S.; Griffin, T.; Taplin, R.; Tonge, J.; Wegner, A. and Smith, A. (2009) *Designing and testing a park-based visitor survey*. Cooperative Tourism Research Centre: Gold Coast, Australia.

### **Management Benchmarks**

The responding agencies generally had very good corporate procedures, with processes for managing risk, operational health and safety, providing staff training and having asset management systems and transparent budget processes. Setting and measuring against standards was the problematic area at the organisational level (Table 16). Setting standards can be politically fraught if the standards are exceeded (i.e., accepted level of impact exceeded) or not met (i.e., a minimum performance standard such as 85% of visitors to a park are satisfied with their experience). Often there is not the information needed to set standards nor the resources to monitor to it. And, there may not be the resources to take action if the standard is exceeded or not met.

Most agencies had a plan of management with clear directions for management. In their global study of management effectiveness, Leverington and colleagues (2010) found that having a management plan was strongly linked with good overall management effectiveness.

Given the attention and budget afforded to fire management it is intriguing that only 70% of agencies were applying strategies to address priority management areas, and 26% of agencies were unable to provide an estimated response to this measure. Perhaps this is because the managers who completed the online survey had less familiarity with fire management than other aspects of their agency's activities and so gave these responses. Often there are a number of government departments and agencies responsible for fire management on public lands, so responding agencies may not have had this information available to them. Or, there may have been confusion over the wording and content of the series of questions related to fire management, which included policies, code of conducts, assessment processes, strategies and management plans.

## Sources of Information

Staff experience accompanied by a reliance on planning documents were the predominant information sources used by park organisations to respond to the survey questions. Also important, but not so widely relied on, were specialist input and research. Research was important in providing information on demographics and visitor satisfaction. Research had less of a presence in providing information on environmental and economic matters. Those working in management effectiveness evaluation emphasise that staff experience is a satisfactory source of information for tracking performance (Hockings et al., 2009).

## 8.2 Thoughts for the Future

### Thoughts for Park Agencies

When examining the survey results as a whole, there are a number of areas where agencies have performed well, with values for measures of 90% and over. These are in the broad areas of natural resources, biodiversity, visitor information, Indigenous consultation, organisational and risk management, training and professional development, operational health and safety, and assets and infrastructure (Table 19). Measures with a value of 90% and over, where they refer to implementation of a plan and less than <90% of agencies reported having produced a plan, are not included in this list. Also identified were areas for improvement, where the values were 60% and below. Included were aspects of economic benefits to local communities, cultural inventory, surveying visitor demographics, and standards related to organisational management and management resources (Table 20). These percentages (90% and over, 60% and under) have been used and applied for illustrative purposes, to identify and present the 'top end' and 'bottom end' performers.

**Table 19: Areas where agencies have performed well (90% or more of agencies responded 'yes' to measure)**

Benchmark category	Broad area	Measure
Environmental	Natural resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient information exists to support operational natural resource management decision making and it is used to allocate resources</li> </ul>
	Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biodiversity policies exist to guide planning and management and they contribute to improvements in condition</li> </ul>
Social	Visitor information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor facilities are being maintained to mandated standards</li> </ul>
Cultural	Indigenous consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient management to ensure visitor use does not negatively impact on park values</li> <li>• Active Indigenous community consultation program for input into park management decisions</li> </ul>
Organisational management	Organisational management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of systems and processes to develop culture of engagement and support of leadership behaviours</li> </ul>
	Risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of systems and processes to assess management performance against standards</li> <li>• Organisation regularly identifies, measures and monitors operation and business risks</li> </ul>
	Training and professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisation regularly identifies, measures and monitors operation and business risks</li> <li>• Existence of active staff training program to maximise staff performance and professional growth</li> </ul>
Park-level management	Operational health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of system to ensure compliance with all mandatory OH&amp;S requirements</li> <li>Auditing of compliance</li> </ul>
	Assets and infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of system to ensure delivery of planned capital works program</li> </ul>

All of the areas suggested for improvement in Table 20 have been discussed in some detail in the previous section. Suggested reasons for the measures obtained have been included to provide a potential basis for future action.

**Table 20: Areas where agencies can improve (60% or less of agencies responded 'yes' to measure)**

Benchmark category	Broad Area	Area(s) for improvement
Economic	Economic benefit to local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy for economic benefits from parks to flow to local communities exists</li> <li>• Capacity to quantify economic benefits of parks to community</li> <li>• Direct economic benefits of parks to community has been quantified</li> </ul>
Cultural	Cultural inventory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy implementation is regularly measured</li> <li>• Regular surveys of demographic characteristics (including ethnicity and age of park users) are conducted</li> </ul>
	Demographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of programs to cater for current demographic profile of park users</li> </ul>
Organisational management	Organisational management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of documented standards of management performance across all aspects of park management</li> </ul>
	Management resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of standards for assessing short/long term resourcing needs for delivering target levels of visitor services and <i>natural and cultural values</i></li> </ul>

### **Thoughts for the Next Benchmarking Survey**

#### 1. Importance of the next survey

This benchmarking survey is an excellent initiative by the Parks Forum to document and report on the performance of their member agencies in all aspects of park management. Not only does it include environmental, economic, social, cultural and management measures, all stages of the management cycle (i.e., context, planning, inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes) are considered. By regularly repeating this survey (every 2-3 years), data can be compared and contrasted over time, as initiated in this report, to identify areas where agencies and the parks industry have improved or where further work is needed. Agencies can potentially use this information in their own management reporting and to add weight to resource proposals and budgetary allocations. Using line graphs showing changes over time is suggested for the next report.

#### 2. Developing and applying standards

Devising standards is a potential next step in adding value to these benchmarking surveys. Standards provide agencies with a level to work towards or compare themselves against with respect to best practice. Given the very different types of member agencies within the Parks Forum, different standards will be needed. For example, protected area managers with large parks, often with high biodiversity values, are likely to have different standards, for at least some of the measures, to urban park managers. Also a possibility is having two standards: one for 'good' practice and another higher one for 'best' practice. Consultation with the member agencies will be essential in any determination of these standards for use in subsequent surveys and associated reporting of results.

#### 3. Exploring headline indicators

With ten years of experience in management effectiveness evaluation for parks and protected areas, it is now possible to develop 'headline' indicators or measures. A set of headline indicators or measures that can be subject to greater scrutiny and management attention could be developed for this benchmark survey. These indicators could be either individual measures (e.g., involvement of communities and stakeholders in park

management) or a composite of several measures (e.g., extent and severity of threats). Leverington and colleagues (2010), as a basis for their global study of management effectiveness for protected areas, developed a set of 34 headline indicators. Their indicators cover all aspects of the management cycle. Any headline indicators applied through the Parks Forum benchmarking survey should be developed in consultation with member agencies.

#### 4. 'Not applicable' response

Thought should be given as to whether 'not applicable' is an appropriate response category for all of the benchmarking questions. There are some questions where 'not applicable' should not be an available option, particularly those relating to biodiversity, natural values, value of parks and organisational management, which are of universal concern in park management. Its complete removal from the survey is not advocated either given there are some questions which are irrelevant to some agencies (e.g., tree amenity, tourism operators). Additionally, it may not be meaningful to include member organisations that do not have on-the-ground responsibilities in this particular survey as many of the survey questions are irrelevant to their activities.

## 9. Key References

Carter, R.W. (2008) *Great Parks Network Benchmarks 2007: an analysis of membership management performance*, unpublished report to Parks Forum Ltd, Fitzroy, Victoria.

Griffin, T.; Moore, S.; Crilley, G.; Darcy, S. and Schweinsberg, S. (2010) *Protected area management: Collection and use of visitor data. Volume 1: Summary and recommendations*. Cooperative Tourism Research Centre: Gold Coast, Australia.

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Hockings, M.; Cook, C.N., Carter, R.W. and James, R. (2009) 'Accountability, reporting or management improvement? Development of a State of the Parks assessment system in New South Wales, Australia' *Environmental Management*, 43(6), pg 1013-1025.

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Moore, S.; Crilley, G.; Darcy, S.; Griffin, T.; Taplin, R.; Tonge, J.; Wegner, A. and Smith, A. (2009) *Designing and testing a park-based visitor survey*. Cooperative Tourism Research Centre: Gold Coast, Australia.

Wood, D.; Galsson, J.; Carlsen, J. and Hopkins, D. (2006) *Economic evaluation of tourism for natural areas: development of a toolkit approach*. Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism: Gold Coast, Australia.

## 10. Appendix: Raw Count Data for all Benchmark Survey Questions from the 2010 Survey<sup>4</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
Unable to estimate	Your agency does not collect data relating to this question or the data cannot be converted to respond to the statement
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	U E	NA	N
<b>Natural Resources</b>							
Sufficient information exists to support operational decision making	5	19	1			1	26
Existing information used to allocate resources for operational decision making	7	17	2				26
<b>Biodiversity</b>							
Existence of policies to guide planning and management	22			2		2	26
Active implementation of policy(ies)	21			1		4	26
Policy contributes to improvement of condition/integrity	7	13	1				21
Biodiversity values are being maintained in excellent condition	3	15	3	1	2	2	26
<b>Tree management for amenity</b>							
Existence of policy to maintain amenity or heritage significance	14			6		6	26
Active implementation of policy(ies)	9	5		1	1		16
Policy is effective in maintaining health of trees and replacing aged, diseased or damaged trees	5	7	1	1	1		15
<b>Threats - Pest Plants</b>							
Existence of planned approach for weed management	22			2	1	1	26
Active implementation of planned approach	11	11					22
Planned approach is effective in reducing impacts	6	12	3		1		22
<b>Threats - Pest Animals</b>							
Existence of planned approach for pest animal management	21			2	2	1	26
Active implementation of planned approach	11			11			22
Planned approach is effective in reducing impacts	5	12	4		1		22
<b>Ecological Footprint</b>							
Existence of policy to reduce agency's ecological footprint	19			5	2		26
Sufficient information exists to develop and implement targeted program to reduce footprint	4	15	3	2	2		26

<sup>4</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	17			7	2		26
Measurement and reporting against footprint targets carried out annually	13			1	3		17

### Economic benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	U E	NA	N
<b><i>Tourism Operators</i></b>							
Policy for engaging with tourism operators exists	14			7	1	3	25
Active implementation of policy	9	5					14
Effective tourism operator - protected area manager cooperation to enhance visitor experience	5	13	1	1	3		23
Effective tourism operator - protected area manager cooperation to protect park values	9	9		1	3		22
<b><i>Economic Benefit to Local Communities</i></b>							
Policy for economic benefits from parks to flow to local communities exists	5			16	3		24
Active implementation of policy	2	2			1		5
Capacity to quantify economic benefits of parks to community	9			11	5		25
Direct economic benefits of parks to community has been quantified	2	1	10	8	3		24

### Social benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	U E	NA	N
<b><i>Visitor Information</i></b>							
Sufficient information exists to inform planning and management of visitor use	8	12	3			1	24
Visitor facilities are being maintained to mandated standards	8	13	1	1			23
Sufficient management ensuring visitor use does not negatively impact on park values	10	11			2		23
<b><i>Measuring Satisfaction</i></b>							
Regular independent surveys of visitor satisfaction undertaken	16		4	4	1		25
<b><i>Volunteers</i></b>							
Existence of effective volunteer-in-parks program to make parks meaningful to community	14	4	3	2	1	1	25

## Cultural Benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	U E	NA	N
<b>Value of Parks</b>							
Existence of program to promote park values	18			5	2		25
<b>Cultural Inventory</b>							
Existence of policy to inventory, protect and restore cultural heritage sites	19			1	2	2	24
Active implementation of policy	11	8			1		20
Policy implementation is regularly measured	10			4	4		18
<b>Community Consultation</b>							
Existence of policy to encourage public input via consultation programs	22			2	1		25
Active implementation of public consultation program	16	7			2		25
<b>Indigenous Consultation</b>							
Active Indigenous community consultation program for input into park management decisions (where identifiable Indigenous group exists)	11	8		1	1	4	25
<b>Demographic</b>							
Regular surveys of demographic characteristics (including ethnicity and age of park users) are conducted	12			11	1	1	25
Existence of programs to cater for current demographic profile of park users	4	8	8	2	1		23

## Management Benchmarks

Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	U E	NA	N
<b>Organisational Management</b>							
Existence of systems and processes to develop culture of engagement and support of leadership behaviours	13	11	1				25
Existence of link between strategic and management plans and annual operations	12	10	2		1		25
Existence of systems and processes to share data and knowledge across organisation and integrate it into management	10	12	3				25
Existence of documented standards of management performance across all aspects of park management	14			6	5		25
Existence of systems and processes to assess management performance against standards	8	5	1				14
Monitoring of quadruple bottom line sustainability and encouragement of actions to increase this	4	12	6	1	2		25
<b>Risk Management</b>							
Organisation regularly identifies, measures and monitors operation and business risks	17	8					25
<b>Park Management Plans</b>							
Plan of management with clear directions for management exists for each park (or group of biogeographically similar parks)	9	12	2	1	1		25
<b>Management Resources</b>							
Existence of standards for assessment of short/long term resourcing needs for delivering target levels of <u>visitors service</u>	5	8	8	2	2		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>	4	9	8	3	1		25



Benchmark	Yes	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	No	U E	NA	N
Existence of effective, efficient and transparent budget allocation process	11	12	2				25
<b>Training and Professional Development</b>							
Existence of active staff training program to learn from experience of park management	18			5	2		25
Existence of active staff training program to maximise staff performance and professional growth	8	9	1		1		19
<b>Asset and Infrastructure</b>							
Existence of scheduled maintenance program based on set standards of service	18			5	2		25
Full implementation of scheduled maintenance program	8	9	1		1		19
Existence of planned asset renewal program	21			3	1		25
Implementation of planned asset renewal program	9	12					21
Existence of system to ensure delivery of planned capital works program	18	5				1	24
<b>Operational Health and Safety</b>							
Existence of system to ensure compliance with all mandatory OH&S requirements	25						25
Auditing of compliance	25						25
<b>Fire Management</b>							
Existence of policy and/or code of practice underpins delivery of fire management program	16			3	1	4	24
Existence of fire risk assessment process (for identifying priorities for mitigation/prevention)	17			3	3		23
Application of strategies to address priority management areas	12	4		1	6		23
Existence of fire management plans with objectives for protecting social, economic, cultural and natural values	12	2	1	1	2	5	23
Active implementation of these fire management plans	11	3			1		15