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Joint Management of National Parks Session.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation of Joint Management of Parks and Reserves in the Northern Territory**

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### **Introduction**

Considerable attention has been given to the role of local and traditional knowledge in conservation (Berkes and Turner 2005) and yet Indigenous people are still struggling to find a role in Protected Area (PA) decision-making processes and management actions (Jaireth and Smyth 2003) and in effectively managing their country together with the PA management agencies. For Aboriginal owners, Joint management (JM) is a process associated with community development where the aim of control over their lands is mainly driven by the need for a stronger cultural identity and self-determination; whilst from the Government perspective, JM is primarily a means to achieve conservation goals (Lawrence 2000). Rarely however have the shared objectives within these different perspectives been identified and agreed by the partners or been followed by an assessment of their achievement.

Over the last two decades, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of management effectiveness of protected areas has been increasingly applied at sites around the world. However, to date, research on and application of protected area management evaluation has not been considered for those with joint management arrangements. This is particularly the case in Australia where JM ventures have been in place for around 30 years (Bauman & Smyth 2007). In addition M&E of parks have tended to focus on *what* the management wants to achieve (outcomes) rather than *how* the management arrangements work (Bellamy et al 2001) and whether the institutional arrangements themselves are functioning effectively (processes) (Ross et al 2004).

In the Northern Territory (NT), JM arrangements exist as a legal instrument under the *Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2005*, where roles and responsibilities for JM of the NT government Parks Service, Traditional Owners and Land Councils are clearly set out. The Act provides a framework for joint actions towards conservation of biodiversity and recognition of cultural practices on Aboriginal land in 27 parks and reserves.

### **Methodology and Approach**

Since 2007, the NT Government through the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sports (NRETAS), the Northern and Central Land Councils (NLC and CLC) and Charles Darwin University (CDU), together with Traditional Owners of four areas in the Northern Territory have been working on a participatory action research project to build and apply a

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<sup>1</sup> This brief draws on summary project results currently in preparation by project team (see references).

participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) framework for assessing progress towards joint management of selected parks and reserves. The project has received funding from the partners and the Australian Research Council (2008-2010).

The parks in traditional countries where we are working are:

- *Adelaide River Parks* within *Wulna country* (Fogg Dam Nature Reserve; Lambells Lagoon Conservation Reserve; Black Jungle Conservation Reserve; Harrison Dam Conservation Area; Melacca Swamp Conservation Area);
- *Flora River Nature Park* within *Wardaman country*;
- *East MacDonnells* within *Arrernte country* east of Alice Springs (Trepina Gorge Nature Park; N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park; Corroborie Rock Conservation Reserve)
- *Watarrka National Park* within *Anangu country*

Following a participatory action research approach (Greenwood et al 1993; Kemmis & McTaggart 2005), and applying concepts of adaptive management (learning by doing), good governance, management effectiveness of protected areas (Hockings et al 2006), and collaborative management (joint management), we have facilitated participatory workshops and meetings with PWS, NCL and CLC and Traditional Owners to produce and apply criteria and indicators to monitor and evaluate joint management.

We held meetings (on country, at PWS and at Land Council offices) with partners to identify the indicators, the methods for indicator assessment, the analysis of the information collected about indicators and the method for evaluation for joint management. We also trained TOs and partner staff from each area on methods for data collection.

A four coloured assessment scale was agreed and used (see figure 1) to assess the status of each of the indicators. The results were then considered by the partners as part of the first annual evaluation of joint management at each of the 4 parks. An example of some indicators and their ratings from Flora River park is provided at figure 2.

Figure 1: Scale used by partners to assess the status of each indicator for joint management.

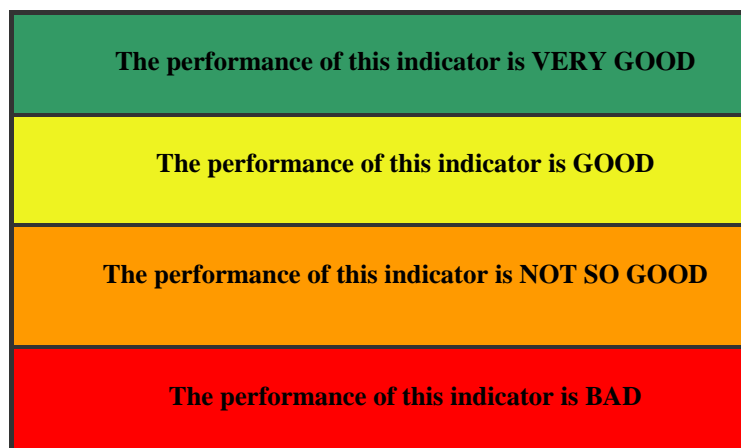


Figure 2: Examples of criteria and indicators from Flora River Nature Park identified by Traditional Owners and Parks staff and ratings (after Izurieta & Stacey 2009).

| Criteria   | Example of Indicator  | Rating                        |
|--|---|-------------------------------|
| Participation of Wardaman in meetings on country                   | Number of meetings held each year   |                               |
| Good management of the park so that country is healthy             | Good biodiversity outcomes from the operational plan on fire, weeds, and feral animals            |                               |
| Wardaman get jobs from the Joint Management arrangements           | Level of employment of Wardaman in meaningful jobs in the Park                                    |                               |
| Good communication among partners over Joint Management            | Wardaman satisfied that their concerns are addressed during planning                              |                               |
| Strong tourism   | Partners are satisfied that messages and images of the Park are consistent with the Park's values |                               |
| Effective participation by Wardaman in decision making in the park | Good attendance and participation in meetings by Wardaman   | Yet to be valued by partners. |

### Findings: Indicators for assessing Joint Management

After two years of the project (2009-2010), we've found 11 common indicators identified by PWS and Traditional Owners from the 4 jointly managed Parks and Reserves that address all aspects of joint management of parks. These are:

1. Protection of sites of cultural significance
2. Protection of 'country' (biodiversity, weeds, feral plants and animals)
3. Opportunities to transfer traditional knowledge to young Aboriginal people
4. Communication: between partners; amongst partners and with other stakeholders
5. Satisfaction with representation on the Decision Making Body (Board, Committee)
6. Satisfaction with Decision Making processes (working with clear rules).
7. Ongoing training and skill building opportunities for Aboriginal Traditional Owners
8. Employment opportunities for Aboriginal Traditional Owners in park management
9. Engagement of Traditional Owners in park business opportunities
10. Good infrastructure and equipment to carry out joint management
11. Satisfaction with information provided to visitors/users (Izurieta & Stacey 2010)

We are also documenting lessons and challenges learned as the project continues throughout 2010. A summary of findings on the PME framework applied, participation and capacity building and some of the challenges to date is provided below.

*The PME Framework:*

- The results from the first round of monitoring and evaluation activities have demonstrated similarities across parks in indicators identified by partners to measure joint management. This finding is coincident with the importance of getting management processes working appropriately in the implementation stages of programs and or projects.
- Indicators still need improvement in the way they are written that is comfortable to both partners.
- A coloured assessment scale using four colours has shown to be culturally appropriate.
- The methods and timeliness of data collection still needs improvement.
- There is potential for applying the PM&E Framework in all Parks (particularly those with Plans of Management).

*Participation and capacity building:*

- The PME process has provided a rich opportunity for Parks, TOs and Land Councils to interact and share information / culture.
- Training in M&E and being directly involved in the evaluation of joint management has generated confidence in understanding JM.
- There are clear limitations among both partners to carry out M&E (staff, skills, communication).

Some of the challenges of this approach include:

- Providing a participatory M&E framework that is simple and effective.
- Generating baselines in a timely manner.
- Ongoing support to partners in data collection and analysis.
- Building skills and generating improvement.
- Internalising the participatory M&E processes.
- Finding a cost-effective way of carrying out PME.

We conclude that a PME has made a valuable contribution to joint management of parks by providing partners with a structured and agreed framework within which partners could talk and learn about how they can improve working together. Our experiences to date suggest that a PME approach which involves partners in identification of indicators as well as other stages of the M&E process provides an opportunity to seek objectivity and ownership of participatory evaluation and strengthen joint management relationships.

**Project partners and acknowledgements**

- Traditional Owners from all pilot areas of Adelaide River Parks and Reserves, Flora River Nature Park, East MacDonnell Parks and Reserves and Watarrka National Park
- Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service
- Northern Land Council
- Central Land Council
- Charles Darwin University
- Australian Research Council

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For more information visit:

<http://www.cdu.edu.au/ser/MandEofJointManagement.htm>

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