



Tasmanian
Audit Office



**Report of the Auditor-General
No. 5 of 2016-17**

Park management

November 2016

Strive · Lead · Excel | To Make a Difference

For the full report go to:

<http://www.audit.tas.gov.au/publications/reports-to-parliament/>

INTRODUCTION

Tasmania's 19 national parks cover 1.5 million hectares and are renowned worldwide for their spectacular landscapes and diversity of unspoiled habitats and ecosystems. They attract over 800 000 visitors annually with this number expected to further increase in the future. The parks contain iconic attractions such as Wineglass Bay, the Overland track and Cradle Mountain. Tasmania's tourism strategy recognises the value of these natural assets as fundamental to the tourism industry and a core appeal for visitors from interstate and overseas.

The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) — a division of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) — manages Tasmania's reserves. Reserves are declared under the Nature Conservation Act 2002 that sets out the values and purposes of each reserve class and managed under the National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002.

To achieve this, PWS undertakes a range of activities, including:

- track and hut construction and maintenance
- management of fire, pests, weeds and diseases (PWDs)
- visitor services.

To guide these activities PWS prepares both statutory plans (e.g. park management plans) and non-statutory plans (e.g. business plans, development plans and site plans).

The objective of the audit was to form an opinion on how effectively PWS manages the state's national parks by reference to the adequacy of:

- planning processes
- plan implementation.

The audit assessed performance of PWS, a division of DPIPWE, over the period 2010–15.

The audit scope included national parks, but largely excluded other parks and reserves. Categories of parks and reserves are outlined in Appendix 1.

Where audit testing was performed, it was limited to the following sample of national parks:

- Ben Lomond
- Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair
- Freycinet
- Maria Island
- Mount Field
- Southwest
- Savage River
- Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers.

AUDIT CONCLUSIONS

These audit conclusions are based on criteria that we developed to support the audit's objective.

Was there logical allocation of funding and resources?

PWS had developed and implemented a logical process to guide allocation of recurrent funding to parks. On the other hand, only a small percentage of priorities in regional business plans related to pest, weed and disease control, with most being allocated for infrastructure work and visitor services. We were not persuaded that sufficient priority was being given to pest, weed and disease control.

Despite an initial decline in appropriation per hectare following the transfer to PWS of the Forestry Tasmania (FT) reserves, pre-transfer levels had been restored by 2014–15. Nonetheless, 2014–15 appropriation per hectare continued to be low compared to other jurisdictions or funding of PWS in previous years.

Was PWS effectively managing its high-value assets?

PWS had identified high-value assets and had processes to ensure they were taken into account when considering new processes and proposals. However, park management plans (PMPs) were outdated,

which made it unlikely that identified assets were a significant element of current management and monitoring.

PWS was carrying out some actions relevant to protection of high-value assets, including actions to reduce the impact of visitors. However, there was no systematic process by which identified high-value assets or threats to them were routinely monitored or managed.

Was PWS effectively managing threats?

We concluded that PWS was effectively managing bushfires as fire management plans existed across all national parks. Objectives and related strategies to address bushfire risks were identified and a bushfire risk assessment model had been implemented.

PWS had identified and documented pests, weeds and disease (PWD) threats, but the documents were in some cases more than ten years out-of-date. There was little evidence of strategies or actions to control threats and no routine monitoring process.

Threats from human impact were generally well managed using the Reserves Standards Framework and reserve activity assessments (RAAs). However, we were not persuaded that there was an effective system for monitoring identified risks.

Was PWS effectively managing infrastructure and visitor safety?

PWS had generally effective processes to manage infrastructure and visitor safety, in that it:

- had adequately defined high-level objectives and safety requirements
- had outlined infrastructure objectives and priorities
- was effectively maintaining highly-used infrastructure
- had an extensive inspection regime.

However, we had concerns that the safety statistic of incidents per 100 000 visitors had trended sharply upward from 2010 to 2014.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Report contains the following recommendations:

REC	WE RECOMMEND THAT ...
1	... PWS review whether regional business plans are giving sufficient priority to pest, weed and disease control.
2	...the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DIPIPWE) review whether it requires additional funding to meet government objectives in national parks, and, if so, to submit a case to the government.
3	... PWS: - update its park management plans (PMPs) and revise every five years - use the PMPs as a basis for regular monitoring of high-value assets and threats.
4	... when updating PMPs, PWS considers the measurability of goals.
5	... PWS place greater emphasis on monitoring PWD threats and planning strategies and actions to control them.
6	... PWS further develop and implement environmental management system (EMS) to ensure greater monitoring of threats.
7	... risks identified in RAAs are transferred to a risks register and regularly monitored.
8	... a more structured approach be developed that ensures all infrastructure is adequately maintained and kept safe at a level commensurate with use and PWS capability.
9	... PWS investigate whether the upward trend in incidents per 100 000 from 2010 to 2014 is an indicator of falling safety standards.
10	... PWS liaise with emergency services to ensure it is provided with information of rescues performed by them.

Notes:



Tasmanian Audit Office

Phone (03) 6173 0900
Fax (03) 6173 0999
email admin@audit.tas.gov.au
Web www.audit.tas.gov.au

Launceston Office
Phone (03) 6173 0971

Address Level 8
144 Macquarie Street, Hobart
Postal Address GPO Box 851, Hobart 7001
Office Hours 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday

Address 2nd Floor, Henty House
1 Civic Square, Launceston