Planning for the provision of leisure and recreation in Australia

Dr Ken Marriot

HM Leisure and Planning Pty Ltd

and Sport and Recreation Tasmania

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Sport and Recreation Tasmania
Department of Economic Development, Tourism and the Arts

Tasmania
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Introduction

Recreation planning describes a desired and acceptable future and the best route to it. It also establishes what recreation opportunities are desired by the community, what opportunities presently exist and what action is necessary to bring about the level of recreation sought by the community.

The goal of successful recreation planning is to maximise the outcomes or benefits from recreation participation and provision.

Recreation planning is also important as it can reflect principles that integrate a range of policy agendas and provide a framework for consistent decision making.

Recreation planning is increasingly necessary in our rapidly changing society as we deal with complex social issues such as rising health care costs, cultural diversity, crime and vandalism, dysfunctional families, environmental protection and future economic sustainability.

Such issues present the need to rethink traditional approaches to the provision of community services. This is especially relevant in considering the recreation needs of growing and changing communities and the settings that should be provided to support and encourage participation.

This resource has been developed to inform and guide the recreation planning process and is particularly targeted at officers within local government with responsibilities for the development and management of community sport and recreation. The resource will be helpful though to anyone wishing to engage in recreation planning.

The resource is not intended as a prescriptive template. Rather it represents a framework with key elements which need to be carefully considered in the development of any recreation planning to ensure successful outcomes are obtained.

It is desirable that this resource continually evolves to remain relevant. As such, contributions that contribute to the currency and value of the resource will be most welcome.

Contributions or comments can be emailed to <srt@development.tas.gov.au>

The core objectives of this planning guide and the related materials are to:

> provide guidance and resources to help a range of agencies better understand the importance and scope of leisure and recreation planning at the strategic level

> provide a detailed explanation of the steps involved in the preparation of leisure and recreation plans so that when planning is carried out, it is undertaken in a way which achieves the most effective outcomes and achieves optimal benefits for all sectors of the community.

1 Leisure and recreation in Australia

At one time or another throughout the year, all but a small minority of Australians will go swimming, walking, travelling or read a book. Others will play a sport, do some gardening, write a poem, go hang gliding, or visit a theatre, museum, library, or a national park. Some people choose to dine out, visit wineries, go sailing, paint a picture, fix up an old car, collect bottles, play and 'chat' on their computers, watch television, or simply sit and contemplate life, seemingly doing nothing. All of these examples are leisure and recreation activities. Leisure, recreation and a broad range of cultural pursuits have always been a major part of Australian life. They are a core element of our way of living, our culture and the way we express ourselves.

Recently, research has shown that recreational, cultural and leisure activities have a major positive influence on personal health and community wellbeing. Improving the health of the community, overcoming obesity, reducing heart disease and, more recently, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, has seen planners and researchers from all walks of life turn to recreation and leisure as a major solution. More recently still, involvement in leisure and recreation pursuits have been found to contribute to community strengthening and to the development of social capital, two community development concepts which are considered more in the later section on the definitions of recreation planning. Hence, leisure and recreation are increasingly being seen as central not only to our personal happiness and enjoyment, but also to our personal, community, social and national health and wellbeing.

Not surprisingly, recreational, leisure and cultural activity and involvement do not happen by accident. Individuals, families and groups plan, even if haphazardly, what they are going to do in their leisure time. Councils and governments carefully assess what types of leisure, recreation and cultural opportunities they might provide in the best interests of the community. Commercial providers calculate how they can create viable, attractive businesses and a multitude of other attractions which people will enjoy during their leisure time. Increasingly too, governments, town planners and transport providers are focusing on how they can provide attractive, accessible residential estates and community activity hubs which offer a mix of educational, retail, social, recreational and cultural environments. All of these activities entail planning in one form or another.

Planning covering all aspects of recreation is important in Australia because sport and elite achievements in sporting events, has the capacity to impact on decision-making that is often detrimental to other recreational endeavours. Hence, planning can help promote other leisure and cultural endeavours and can ensure reasonable resources are allocated from a democratic and community rights perspective.

The present set of resource planning materials provides a guide to the processes of recreation and leisure planning. The materials are accompanied by a range of case materials to illustrate the processes to be used by planners and to answer questions on common problems and issues.

There is no mandatory or legislated approach to the planning of recreation facilities, activities, programs and services in Australia; although most states have legislative processes to guide the acquisition of open space to be used for recreation purposes. A number of states have guidelines to assist in the development of recreation infrastructure and facilities. For example, NSW has long had a section of the *Local Government Act (Section 94)* which requires councils to assess the extent to which residents moving into new developments will increase the demand for community services. In light of these assessments, councils have been required to determine the financial contribution which the property developers will be required to pay to cover the cost of a range of additional community services, including recreation.

Given the lack of a firm legislative framework the methods outlined in this resource kit are not necessarily the only methods to plan for leisure, recreation or cultural opportunities. Other

methods are available and a number of these are briefly reviewed in Section 4 which provides a review of alternate recreation and leisure planning approaches. The methods detailed in this section have been tested in various settings over the past 20 or 30 years and have been found to be sound and defensible.

The order in which the various planning tasks are tackled, and the extent of attention given to each is frequently adjusted depending on the particular circumstances at hand and this is discussed further in the following sections.
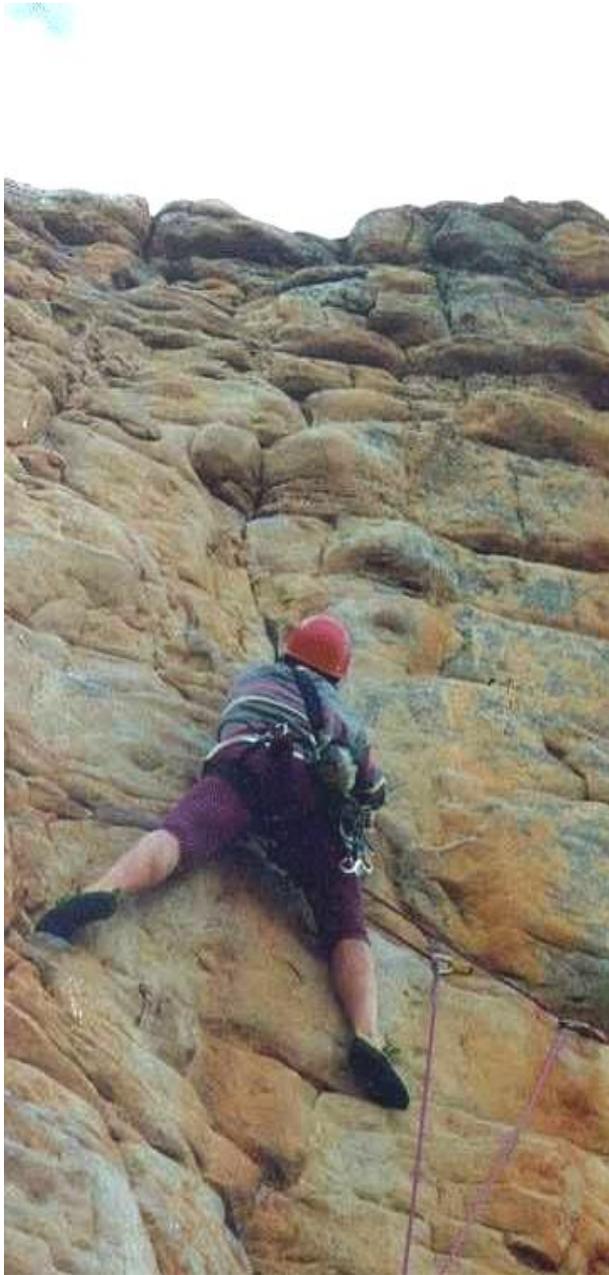
2   What is Planning?

2.1   *Introduction*

Planning is a process of research and evaluation which is used to allocate physical, human and financial resources to most effectively and efficiently deliver positive outcomes for the community. Ideally, the resource allocation process should reflect the goals and aspirations of the community for which the planning is undertaken. The planning process guides the types and amount of resources needed, where and how they are distributed, and the timing of the allocations.

Here are some definitions of planning from well-known overseas and Australian researchers and planners from the past 50 years. Planning is:

> *"…orderly development.." (Byer 1957)*

> *"The self-conscious attempt by man to order his environment so as to realise common goals and values." (Weaver 1963)*

> *"…a means for systematically anticipating and achieving adjustment in the physical environment of a city consistent with social and economic trends and sound principles of civic design." (Chaplin 1965)*

> *"…the systematic collection, analysis, organisation and processing of technical information to facilitate decision-making." (Driver 1973)*

> *"…a commitment to bring into being a state of affairs which does not presently exist and which is not expected to occur naturally within the desired time." (Sandercock 1973)*

> *"…the idea of strategic planning (as compared with management planning or other planning ideas) is that it is concerned with preparing an organisation to respond positively to changes in the social, political and economic environment. This means it must be on-going, simply because social, economic and political change is continuous… rather than going from step to step in a linear way, with a clearly defined beginning and end to the planning process, strategic planning proceeds in a more or less circular way."[1]*

The first four definitions see planning as a fairly straight forward set of steps which lead to a number of logical outcomes and action. By comparison, Sandercock's definition is somewhat more complex: it implies that a planner and society has definable values and opinions about where they are at presently and where they want to get to. It also implies that commitment to change may be just as important as technical information, systematic assessment and potentially, imposed change.

Hamilton-Smith11 makes a strong distinction between short term managerial (or operational) plans which focus on 'means' and strategic plans which focus on long term outcomes. He argues that strategic planning should reject a step-by-step linear collection of information to create a one-off planning process and instead, use the skills of an organisation to continually adjust to change. This is achieved by starting a planning process at any point and continually revisiting, reassessing and revising the responses which are made. Hamilton-Smith argues that this approach builds stronger, more adaptive organisations, and focuses on long term goals and 'ends' rather than short term managerial (or operational) 'means'. Hamilton-Smith also argues that strategic planning should be 'transactive' in that it "uses processes which involve people, not to gain some sort of superficial appearance of consensus, but rather to negotiate or transact with each other in sorting out how to accommodate the various viewpoints which are inherent in community-level planning".

In a modern society such as Australia's, planning is undertaken on a daily basis by a wide range of organisations in relation to transport, urban development, the provision of schools and educational services, manufacturing, retail services, health services, water and power… and recreation.

Planning is an 'interventionist' process as it is action which is consciously taken in order to hasten the achievement of the desired outcomes, or to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved (as they might not otherwise be achieved at all), or to avoid undesirable outcomes. Over recent years, however, planning has tended to become less interventionist in deference to the role of market forces and planners have put a greater focus on facilitating and assisting others in the development of resources. This change has also paralleled the growth of provision partnerships between a range of agencies. At one extreme along this continuum is the concept of public-private partnerships wherein governments set the broad parameters of various projects which are deemed to be needed and private companies own and operate these for the government. Depending on the partnership agreement, the assets may remain private or they may be handed back to the government after say 30 or 40 years.

Planning can be:

- remedial, where it seeks to overcome problems caused by a lack of or inappropriate planning in the past

- reactive, where it has a focus on 'fixing up' and improving existing conditions

- proactive, where the process is used to create a new, different and better future for the target groups or assets for which it is undertaken.

Remedial and reactive planning are quite conservative in that they essentially seek to maintain and strengthen the status quo. However, taking a proactive approach to planning is more difficult and can be far more contentious. As a consequence, those initiating a planning process need to consider whether they are more likely to achieve success by taking a reactive approach and if they are too proactive, whether they will gain the essential support of senior officers and elected members, and whether there is a danger of the whole process failing in the face of community opposition to what might be a radical change.

2.2 *What is recreation planning?*

In keeping with the above discussion of planning in general, recreation planning can be defined as a process through which information, attitudes, values and needs are reviewed and evaluated by and with the community in an on-going fashion. This is done to identify a range of actions which, if implemented, will achieve better recreation outcomes for the community than would otherwise have been achieved if things had been left to take their natural course. Further, effective recreation planning will provide a range of personal, social, economic and environmental benefits to the community with these being delivered in a sustainable manner.

2.3 *Planning for recreation facilities, activities, programs and services*

Recreation planning (or as it is frequently referred to, leisure planning, or leisure and recreation planning) can cover a wide range of topics. For instance, it can be concerned with the planning of:

- recreation facilities

- recreation activities or programs

- recreation support services.

Recreation facilities

Recreation facilities are the physical assets which accommodate recreation activities. They can be natural or built assets which are specifically provided and managed for recreational purposes or they may be assets which fulfil some other primary role and which are occasionally used for recreation. Often, facilities are designed to fulfil several roles. Here is a list of examples of recreation facilities: a review of the list indicates that while some are solely or predominantly recreational, others serve quite different purposes as well as a recreational role:

- sports halls

- school halls

- football ovals

- bushland reserves

- playgrounds

- libraries

- trails

- wetlands

- lakes

- neighbourhood houses

- galleries.

While the planning of facilities is an important part of recreation planning, it is critical to recognise that they are only physical entities used for recreational activities. They are one of the means to a

recreational outcome, and should not be seen as an outcome in themselves. The actual facilities which are considered for provision are likely to be very wide-ranging and should include facilities which are traditionally used for other purposes as well e.g. schools, health centres, bushland reserves and churches.

In many areas, the focus of recreation planning is on changing and enhancing an existing provision rather than providing totally new facilities. This is particularly the case in existing urban areas where there is little or no land to acquire to provide new facilities. As a result, the outcomes of the planning process often focus on identifying:

- how existing facilities can be renewed, enhanced or, in NSW terminology, 'embellished', so they better serve the community. This might mean providing new play equipment; redesigning and enlarging existing halls; providing internal toilets, kitchens and updated electronic services; installing walking tracks and safety lighting in association with sports grounds and along creeks and drainage lines; installing access ramps to buildings; providing shade and shelter; and renewing or revising garden plantings

- how existing facilities can be turned over to totally new uses, such as redeveloping a former playground in an area with an ageing population into a community garden with quiet seating and shade areas; or converting single, under-sized sports ovals into informal parkland or into two or more soccer grounds, or using a former small reserve as the site for a community house, an arts workshop or a men's shed

- how existing programs may be upgraded and modernised, or replaced by new programs targeted at new and different groups in the community

- new ways by which venues can be managed and scheduled so that a wider range of groups and individuals can gain access to them

- service improvements which ensure that individuals and groups that have missed out on recreation opportunities in the past can begin to access them and reap the benefits and enjoyment of participation. These might include community transport; community contact, liaison and support staff; signposting to destinations around the council; a grants scheme; and a Mayoral awards scheme.

Such changes can radically change the mix, attractiveness and accessibility of the recreation opportunities available to the community although care must be taken to ensure that the traditional strengths of a community are not lost and that longer term residents are not disenfranchised.

At the same time when the reorientation of the existing provision is occurring, the planning process may continue to seek new venue provision opportunities. These might include former industrial land which can be cleared and used for new recreation venues or perhaps, gutted and turned into art studios, community centres or indoor sports facilities. Increasingly, councils are turning to local schools and state government agencies with local land holdings to seek new opportunities for sharing and joint development. Underdeveloped school playing fields, drainage lines, pipeline and highway easements, former rail yards, industrial buffer zones, cemeteries and flood basins can all offer invaluable recreation opportunities if developed and managed effectively.

Recreation activities and programs

Comparing with facilities, recreation activities or programs are the pursuits people take part in to gain the leisure benefits they are seeking. Recreation activities and programs can be highly structured in terms of their timing as well as:

- duration and location – such as a football match

- organised for people – such as watching a movie or going to a concert

- being flexible and 'self-programmed' – such as people going for a walk, doing gardening or travelling overseas.

The provision of opportunities for the community to take part in a wide mix of recreation activities and programs should be a central goal of good recreation planning. In fact, in many instances the provision of opportunities for people to take part in activities and programs should be given priority ahead of the provision of facilities – unless there are simply no venues of any form available. Increasingly, government-generated recreation planning and provision is focusing on the provision of activities and programs which have a health and wellbeing focus and which focus on groups with targeted needs within the community (e.g. the aged, obese, disadvantaged, and cultural groups) as well as the more traditional provision of informal parklands and sporting opportunities.

Recreation services

Finally, recreation services help people find information about recreation activities as well as how to get to and take part in these activities. Recreation services include:

- information–brochures, websites, signposts, newsletters, and maps

- transport–whether private services, public and community buses

- recreation leadership –including management, planning officers, programmers, leaders, and trainers

- support services –such as club grants, discounted fees, and leadership training.

Research has shown that the absence of recreation services can mean that many people in the community do not take part the recreational facilities and programs they would otherwise use. As a result, the assessment of recreation service needs should be an integral part of any recreation planning process.

2.4 *The scale of recreation plans*

The planning of recreation facilities, programs and support services can be undertaken at a variety of scales. For example, recreation plans can be prepared for:

- individual parks or buildings through to broader districts, whole municipalities, regions or the whole state

- sets of particular types of recreation opportunities (e.g. indoor sports facilities, indoor community facilities, libraries, racetracks, all forms of open space)

- particular types of recreation activities such as team sports (which might cover establishing competition leagues, competition schedules and the development of suitable venues), walking or conservation studies

- natural areas or particular types of natural areas

- facilities, programs and services targeted at particular groups in the community (e.g. older residents, youth, people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and sports people).

The scope of the recreation planning processes which are applied to all these themes and at all these scales are essentially the same.

Finally, it is important to highlight the fact that recreation planning can cover planning which is designed to:

- improve or add to the recreation opportunities available in an existing community

- establish a set of recreation opportunities for people moving into a new community.

2.5 *Recreation plans and recreation feasibility studies*

Recreation planning studies and recreation feasibility studies are very similar. As the term implies, feasibility studies go beyond a planning study as they set out to determine whether a specific initiative or group of initiatives is feasible: that is, whether it will be viable from a financial, operational and use point of view.   Quite often, recreation planning studies will recommend that more detailed feasibility studies should be carried out on some of recommendations.

Feasibility studies generally involve adding a few steps to the planning process. These additional steps are:

- determining the scale and nature of the specific markets which a particular initiative will meet

- determining the optimal mix of facilities, programs and services which ought to be provided to meet the market needs which have been identified

- if the planning outcome demonstrates that something needs to be built, preparing a series of conceptual designs

- determining the capital, staffing, programming and operational costs of implementing the plans or particular parts of them

- identifying funding sources and strategies

- analysing the projected financial performance of the initiative

- recommending the scope, staging and timing of actions

- recommending how the proposed provision should be managed and marketed

- recommending how the performance of the provision can be monitored and evaluated.

2.6 *Why is recreation planning needed?*

As indicated in the introduction to this manual, recreation is an important part of the lives of the Australian community. State and national governments, local councils, commercial recreation providers and members of the community spend billions of dollars each year buying, maintaining or pursuing recreation activities.

To achieve the most efficient, effective, equitable and beneficial outcomes from this expenditure, every agency and every person plans to some extent. If someone is just going for a swim or to see a movie, they think about where they will go, what time will best suit them, what type of experience they are looking for, what they can afford, how they will get there and how much time they have available. The greater the time or monetary expenditure, generally the greater and more detailed the associated planning process is.

Government agencies and businesses which spend taxes, rates, shareholder monies or bank borrowings, are required by law to account for how they spend the money. To ensure they spend it in the best way, they usually undertake a planning process before they spend. In many government instances in fact, planning and feasibility studies are mandatory before funding will be allocated.

Planning is also often needed to ensure that new government or agency policies achieve the desired outcomes; to ensure that principles and objectives will be effectively addressed and to ensure that where past failures and mistakes are being rectified, the most appropriate new set of initiatives is pursued.

Ultimately, recreation planning is undertaken as a means of identifying the most effective, efficient, equitable path of action to take to meet the long term recreation needs and interests of the community and target groups through the provision of facilities, and/or programs, and/or services.

Looked at from another perspective, recreation planning is important because of the far-reaching benefits which recreational involvement provides to the community. There is now extensive research to demonstrate that while recreation participation is a valid end in its own right, it also creates benefits which reach beyond the individual activities being pursued.[i] These include:

- improved personal and community health and wellbeing

- social and community cohesion

- economic wellbeing and development

- environmental protection and enhancement.[2] [3] [4] [5] [6]

Recreation and leisure are recognised by the United Nations as human rights and there is extensive evidence to show that societies which have limited or poor access to recreation opportunities suffer as a consequence. A recent Australian book by Gaté and Moodie, Recipes for a Great Life[5], is an excellent introduction to some light-hearted and serious ideas on recreation benefits. It combines healthy food recipes and tips for healthy eating, with practical steps for getting more out of life (by improving your relationships, being physically active, being intellectually curious, culturally active, seeking spiritual enrichment and being happy in your workplace).

Another major benefit of recreation planning is that it builds social capital. Social capital can be defined as the value of social networks in a community as opposed to physical capital and human capital. A good overview of the concept can be found at the Wikipedia website: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital>.

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[i] For a broad review of the benefits of recreation see the following texts listed in the reference: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001; Canadian Parks/Recreation Association, 1997; Driver, B.L, Brown, Perry J., Peterson, George L., 1991; Gate, G and Moodie, R., 2008, and Parks and Leisure Australia and Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2002.

Research shows that participating in recreation activities, and in particular being a member of a recreation group, builds social capital. Social capital builds things such as trust, reciprocity, acceptance, good behaviour, tolerance, responsibility, trust of others, personal capacities, diversion from negative activities, empowerment, new abilities, community understanding, community health and wellbeing, an entry to participation, skills, friendships, belonging, career development, fun, fitness, purposeful use of time, sociability, commonality of interest, cohesion, learning, self-efficacy, and optimisation of performance. As such, the planning and provision of recreation opportunities is a major tool in enhancing the quality of life of a community.

In initiating a recreation planning process, it is critical that those promoting the process are clear as to why it is needed and being undertaken. If there is no clarity on this issue – and widespread support for it - in most instances the process will fail and the desired outcomes will not be achieved and will almost always take longer to achieve.

2.7 *The quality of recreation planning in Australia*

Although some form of recreation planning has been carried out in Australia for many years, and particularly over the past 30 years, the processes which have been used have a number of significant weaknesses, some of these include:

- a lack of professional consensus as to what recreation planning means, why it is undertaken, what the process encompasses and what the desired outcomes are. As a result, what is often referred to as recreation planning does not address many of the issues covered by the present text and thus suffers from shortcomings which mean that the optimal benefits are not delivered to the community

- a lack of government consensus as to the role of recreation planning. As a consequence, the approaches to planning and provision vary substantially between the federal government and the states, between the states and between local government authorities. Various state governments around the country have legislative processes to guide certain aspects of recreation provision, or the acquisition of funds or physical resources to be used for the provision of recreation opportunities. Some states have more than one legislative process, a situation which only serves to confuse the situation more

- many of the approaches to recreation planning are very simplistic and outdated. Several of the worst in this context are open space standards and developer contributions. Open space standards have no clear or valid research basis – or if they did, it is now very outdated. They make the assumption that by acquiring and developing a specified amount of land for every 1 000 residents, the recreational needs of the community will be met. Developer contribution schemes take the form of land or financial contributions. The land allocation process makes the assumption that by a developer giving a local council say 5, 7 or 10 per cent (depending on what state you are in) of a residential subdivision (and sometimes, industrial subdivisions as well), the land which is acquired will be sufficient to meet the recreation needs of the community in the area regardless of the shape, location, size or other characteristics of the land or the cultural background, education, age distribution or other attributes of the community. Financial contribution schemes are based on a hypothetical assessment of the cost of providing new or upgraded recreation infrastructure for new residents. This cost is then distributed across the projected number of new residents on a pro rata basis or on occasions, on the basis of the number of new bedrooms being created! In both instances, the contribution assessment process is based on tenuous links between the provision of physical facilities and the creation of recreation opportunities and experiences and often, on a total lack of assessment of the nature and needs of the community to be served

- sport is viewed in an unquestioning way as being 'good' for the community. As a consequence, there is an overemphasis on sports provision. While such provision is not necessarily bad, some sports actually generate significant disbenefits. Further, excessive provision for sport can be to the detriment of other more often beneficial recreation pursuits or provision for individuals and groups who cannot play sport, cannot play the particular types of sport for which provision is made or who do not want to play sport

- recreation and leisure, while recognised as key elements of the national economy, are not viewed 'seriously' by politicians or policy makers. As a consequence, they have not been given the attention they deserve and recreation planning is not given the resources needed to ensure that the processes pursued are appropriate and effective

- there is a continuing and excessive focus on the planning and provision of physical resources to the detriment of what are considered to be the 'soft' areas of programming and servicing. Yet, physical resources are simply the means to a recreational outcome, and should not be seen as the outcome themselves

- there are deficiencies in the professional training and skills of many recreation planners. Many of those charged with preparing recreation plans have limited training or professional experience in planning or do not have qualifications which give them the breadth of understanding needed to prepare comprehensive plans

- there is a strong view that recreation planning is different from, for example, social, community, health, youth, aged, tourism, open space, transport, urban or disability services planning. This appears to stem, at least partially, from the very different academic and educational origins of sport and recreation professionals when compared to social planners, town planners and the like. As a consequence, recreation planning is frequently treated quite separately from planning on these topics rather than all being seen as an integral part of them.

2.8 *Conclusions*

Recreation and leisure are central to Australian culture and some form of recreational activity is pursued by most Australians on a regular basis. The importance of sport to Australian culture has long been recognised and emphasised. However, recent years have seen a far greater recognition of arts and cultural pursuits, non-competitive social and recreational activities and most importantly, the critical contribution which leisure and recreation make to the health and wellbeing in the community. In light of this, improvements to the processes and outcomes of recreation planning can only benefit the community further. This provides a strong justification for all levels of government and all agencies concerned with community health and wellbeing to accept a greater leadership role in leisure and recreation planning and to be more committed, supportive and proactive in their approach. This will ensure that the slow, ad hoc and quite often discriminatory approaches of the past which led to the neglect of key groups in the community are avoided.

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3 The scope of recreation planning

3.1 *Introduction*

The recreation planning process can be divided into three components. These are:

Pre-planning   Defining the planning context and process and establishing goals, objectives and principles. This is often referred to as 'scoping', 'scene-setting' or 'pre-planning'.
Recreation planning research   Undertaking research into a wide range of recreation-related issues e.g. demographics, existing recreation opportunities, community activities, community needs, and leisure trends.
Preparing the plan   Evaluating the findings of the first two components, determining the implications to the future provision of recreation opportunities and preparing a set of recommendations for action. The recommendations are often provided with timeframes, budgets, action responsibilities and performance monitoring strategies. They are also frequently set within the context of the mission statements, development principles, objectives and goals of the organisation for which the planning has been carried out.

The third of the above components results in the recreation plan while the first two are the mechanisms used to determine what should go into the plan.

The scope of each of these components is explained in more detail in the following paragraphs. Note that while the components are set out as a series of steps, the sequencing of these can be changed quite extensively, depending on needs, existing information, and the time and resources which are available. If Hamilton-Smith's[1] earlier definition of strategic recreation planning is adopted – that is "..it (planning) must be on-going, simply because social, economic and political change is continuous… rather than going from step to step in a linear way, with a clearly defined beginning and end…" - then the process becomes one of a continuous cycle, with the collection, evaluation and updating of information occurring in an on-going manner.

3.2 *Pre-planning*

This first component of the recreation planning process, defining the planning context and process, is critical to the success of the whole program. The following issues need to be addressed and resolved at this point.

Why the planning is being undertaken

Recreation plans are a key part of the process of improving the leisure opportunities available in the community and through this, the health and wellbeing of the community. Planning is undertaken to help ensure that action occurs in an efficient and timely manner and to ensure that the optimal benefits are delivered to the community.

Improving the quality of people's leisure opportunities improves their quality of life, their health, and through this, the social and economic wellbeing of a community.

There is now extensive research which demonstrates the beneficial outcomes which flow from participation in recreation activities. These can be categorised into personal benefits, social and community benefits, environmental benefits and economic benefits. Further details on these benefits are provided in Appendix 13.1 (see also Beverley L. Driver and Donald H. Bruns, 1999)[7]. A number of planning agencies have recently begun to use the benefits listing as a basis for the planning objectives they want to achieve.

Unfortunately, some recreation plans are consciously or unconsciously commissioned because someone has thought that "it would be a good idea to have one" or, as discussed in the next Section, for even more dubious reasons. There are however, important reasons for preparing a recreation plan. They include:

- overcoming provision and use problems which have resulted from a lack of or inadequate planning

- addressing issues and needs which have emerged as a result of demographic, urban growth, social and economic changes

- taking the community in a new direction.

Setting goals, objectives and principles

Draft goals, objectives and principles should be established at an early stage so they can be used to guide the scope and direction of the planning process, to test the relevance and appropriateness of the research findings, and to guide decisions on what the key priorities for action ought to be.

The recreation **goal** ('aims', 'vision' or 'mission') is essentially a statement of what the planning agency aspires to achieve through the planning process. It is a statement of the desired long term outcomes. In some instances, goal statements may exist from previous studies and these may be usefully reviewed and revised in the light of changed conditions and circumstances. In other instances, there may be no such statements and they will have to be developed from 'scratch'. They can often be developed by putting a recreational interpretation on the goals or mission of the wider organisation.

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By comparison with goals, **objectives** are more specific statements which detail the types of actions to be taken in order to achieve the goal, mission or vision. Later in the planning process, each objective will have a number of strategic actions attached to it, these being the specific initiatives which are to be taken.

Principles are a statement of the value systems, the philosophical aspirations and the ideals of the organisation commissioning the planning and the 'community' it represents. These are particularly important in that they provide an understanding of what an organisation will and will not do and is important in guiding decisions about the specific actions which are to be taken.

Most often recreation plans are prepared without the preparation of goals, objectives and principles as part of the pre-planning process. Rather, these are seen as one of the outcomes of the planning process. Although this is understandable, it is unfortunate in that it implies a lack of thought as to the philosophical stance of the planning organisation, the desired outcomes and the underlying principles and values of the commissioning organisation. In leaving the task to the planner (and especially, an external, commissioned planner), it opens the door for the planner's views and philosophies to determine where the client agency heads, rather than those of the agency itself.

As such, it would be beneficial for an agency commissioning a recreation plan to run a workshop with senior officers and appropriate elected members to review and discuss the following questions and agree on a set of summary statements for each:

- what are the major outcomes the plan should achieve?

- how should the corporate goals/vision/mission, objectives and value systems be reflected in the outcomes?

- are there priority outcomes which are sought?

The workshop could be run by the recreation planner commissioned by the agency at a very early stage of the process.

This process will lead to a set of agreed outcomes (i.e. draft goals/vision/mission; objectives, and principles/values) which then constitute a draft recreation plan policy framework. This framework can then be reviewed and refined as the rest of the planning process proceeds.

As an illustration of a recreation plan policy framework, the author of this manual along with colleagues prepared a recreation plan for the Ballarat City Council in 2003[8]. In the study, the Council's Municipal Strategic Statement, which outlined the strategic direction for all aspects of the Council's work (except recreation), contained the following vision statement:

By 2022 Ballarat will be a Municipality where:

- lifelong learning, improved community health and cultural enrichment creates well-being

- the natural environment is valued and managed for current and future generations

- cultural heritage and character are enhanced through conservation and innovative design

- quality infrastructure and a skilled workforce enables a prosperous economy creating

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meaningful jobs

- community infrastructure meets changing community needs with high quality accessible social services for all stages of life.

This vision statement was used as the basis for a recreation vision. This was:

> *"Sustainable and life-long participation in recreation on the part of all members of the Ballarat community so as to deliver the optimum array of personal, social, economic and environmental benefits and the optimal level of community building and social capital development." (Ballarat City Council: Recreation Study and Strategy, 2003: Part 3: The Recreation Strategy, p. 9)*[8]

Just as there was no recreation vision, there were no formal recreation objectives in the existing Ballarat City Council documents. As a result, the following objectives were devised:

to build operational structures and capacities in council

to build operational processes and policies in council and in the wider community.

to maintain, upgrade and redevelop existing recreation facilities

to maintain and upgrading existing programs and develop new recreation programs

to upgrade the existing services and develop new recreation services

to develop new recreation facilities.

Objectives 1 and 2 focused on developing the capacity of the council to address recreation issues in a directed, comprehensive and integrated manner; objectives 3, 4 and 5 focused on maintaining, enhancing and optimising the use of and the benefits delivered by existing recreation opportunities in the city, while the focus of objective 6 was the provision of new recreation resources for the community. Although objectives 1 and 2 were not specifically about a plan of action designed to enhance the wellbeing of the community, the council had sought recommendations on these issues as the view had been formed that without action, it would not have the capacity to address the issues identified under objectives 3 – 6.

Combined, the six objectives were invaluable in guiding various aspects of the planning research and eventually, in ensuring a balanced mix of recommendations.

In the final recreation strategy prepared for the City of Ballarat, indicative action strategies were listed for each objective in the policy section of the plan with concrete research-based

recommendations for each action also provided.

As with the recreation vision and objectives, Ballarat City Council had no philosophical framework to guide recreation development and provision decisions. As a consequence, the following set of principles was developed. As with the objectives, these were critical in guiding decisions as to what initiatives should or should not be supported and in ensuring that the outcomes of the planning study achieved a balance of actions which would ultimately improve the quality of life for all residents in the city.

1. Access for all
Council will take action to ensure equitable access to sport, leisure and recreation opportunities - regardless of the age, gender, sexual preference, mobility, ethnicity or economic capacity of the community.

2. Fairness, equality and balance
Council will seek to ensure that there is fairness, equality and balance in the provision of recreation facilities, programs and services.

3. Beneficial outcomes
Council will give preference to supporting the facilities, programs and services which deliver the widest range of beneficial outcomes to the widest cross-section of the community. Council will also measure the benefits of the outcomes achieved and use this to evaluate the extent of success in the recreation opportunities provided.

4. Quality and safety
Council will seek to ensure that the Ballarat community has access to a high standard of recreation opportunities which are provided in accordance with contemporary standards and practices for health, risk management and public safety.

5. Continual Improvement
Council will commit the resources needed to continually upgrade its provision of recreational facilities, programs and services; to improve its operational capacity to provide these, and to facilitate initiatives in the community and commercial sectors which improve recreation opportunities.

6. Sustainability
Council will work to ensure the sustainability of recreation opportunities.

7. Multi-use and efficiency
Council will work towards multi-use and efficiency in all recreation opportunities provided. Efficiency is measured in terms of the costs incurred in the running of programs,

maintenance, improvement or the replacement of facilities against the benefits to the whole community in terms of recreation opportunity.

8. Community building and social capital

Council will use recreation as a way of strengthening the community and to develop social capital in Ballarat. These measures can then be used to evaluate the extent of success in the provision of recreation opportunities.

9. Community health

Council will pro-actively pursue opportunities which support the objectives of the Municipal Health Plan and which enhance the health and well-being of residents and visitors to the city. Measures of community health and well-being will be used to evaluate the extent of success in the provision of recreation opportunities.

10. Partnerships and shared responsibility

Council will actively pursue opportunities for the joint development of facilities, programs and services with other providers.

11. Organisational capacity

Council will develop its organisational and financial capacities to actively plan, manage and assist with the delivery of facilities, programs and services which enhance opportunities for all members of the Ballarat community to benefit from pursuing recreation activities.

In summary, the 'policy framework' developed for the Ballarat City Council Recreation Strategy and Plan consisted of a vision statement, a set of objectives and a set of principles or value statements. A summary of past recreation planning decisions which were still in force added a fourth element, described in the Plan as 'policy positions'. Together, these provided guidance as to the scope of the final recommendations for action.

Understanding the political context

The political context is perhaps the single most important element which will affect the success or failure of a planning study. Both 'office politics' and the political position of elected members, Board or committee members and stakeholders need to be understood. A good argument is that if there is not major support for a planning study across these groups, then it should not proceed.

There are numerous instances where junior officers have pursued a project to an advanced stage or even through to its completion only to have no action taken on it because it had insufficient political support or momentum.

A useful technique for helping to address this problem is to conduct informal interviews with elected members and other key decision makers to:

- 'test the waters' regarding support or opposition to a proposal to carry out a planning project

- evaluate their responses to potential solutions to key issues

- identify issues and topics they would like to see addressed by a study if it were to proceed

- identify the principles and values they would want to see incorporated into the study if it was to gain their support.

Such a process helps to identify supporters and opponents, helps to clarify what the study might need to cover to gain approval, identifies the value systems of the decision makers, helps to educate decision makers on issues they may not have previously given much thought to, and can help build support amongst them.

In another context, it should be recognised that on occasion, recreation (and other) planning studies are commissioned for reasons which have nothing to do with planning, these include:

- a desire on the part of senior officers or politicians to put off making a decision on a major project – so a planning study is commissioned to 'assess the needs'

- a desire to 'kill off' a proposal by bringing into question its cost and viability through a planning study

- buying off a pressure group

- promoting a politician's 'pet' project.

As a consequence, the originals of a planning proposal, the scope of what is to be covered, and the expected outcomes and outputs must be identified and evaluated before a project is started. It might even be appropriate to seek a commitment from the (private or government) body which is supporting the planning process to provide funding for both the implementation of the study outcomes and the staff needed to carry out the project.

Finally, it is important that action is taken to keep key stakeholders, senior officers, bureaucrats and elected members informed about the progress of a planning study and about the research findings as they emerge. Efforts should be made to ensure that these people are happy with the processes being used, that they are regularly briefed on the progressive outcomes, that there are no surprises that will 'pop up to bite them', that decision-making is shared, that ideas and solutions are tested before they are committed to and ideally, that the key stakeholders feel they own and can endorse the findings. Achieving this is likely to require regular briefings and meetings and a willingness to change tack if the emerging findings warrant it.

The scope of the planning to be carried out:

In the light of decisions on the purpose of undertaking a planning study and the objectives to be achieved, decisions need to be made on the scope of the work. These include for instance, whether the planning is to cover:

- a whole state

- a region

- a council, or part of a council

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- particular types of facilities, programs or services (or activities)

- a particular section of the community, as defined for example, by age, gender, locality, cultural background, socio-economic status.

Agreement should be reached at this stage on the definitions of leisure and recreation and what this means to the issues to be researched and the amount of attention which any particular issue can be given. For many municipal councils and some state agencies, recreation is synonymous with sport, and leisure is 'non-sports'. In other situations, leisure and recreation are seen as being quite distinct from culture, the arts and tourism. Similarly, many forms of 'open space' have no obvious link to recreation, yet 'open space' planning is often seen as planning for the recreational use of open space.

Each of the above sub-sets of recreation has different features, problems and solutions. Yet all can be researched using a similar set of skills and planning tools. Hence, the definition of the scope of a study must consider what is 'in' and what is 'out' and why, and whether leaving some things out will produce an artificial outcome.

In the City of Ballarat's planning study mentioned earlier8, recreation was defined as:

Any activity which is pursued without compulsion by an individual, group or community, which delivers net beneficial outcomes in one or more of the personal, social, economic and environmental contexts, and which does not impact unduly on other people or the environment.

The following explanatory text was then provided:

> *"For the purpose of the present text, recreation and leisure are taken as being synonymous. Recreation includes playing sport; active non-competitive pursuits such as walking and swimming; intellectual activities including reading, writing, painting and the like; family outings and picnics, and tourist activities.*
>
> *In terms of the above definition, 'activity' is defined as a passive or active pursuit; a pursuit which is sporting or non-sporting in nature and a pursuit which may be but does not need to be governed by rules or regulations.*
>
> *… the words 'which does not impact unduly on people or the environment' indicates that activities which are considered by the community or persons in a position of authority or responsibility to be unduly detrimental in their impacts will not be supported and may, in fact, have sanctions imposed on them."*

The research methods to be used:

Decisions have to be made on what research needs to be carried out to effectively complete the planning process and on how detailed the research needs to be to resolve the issue or issues under review.

To a degree, these decisions need to be made in with reference to factors such as the available budget, the groups or individuals in the community being covered by the study, the desired timelines

for the study and staff capacities. To illustrate, if a particular age group is being covered, conducting an analysis of the demographics of the whole community may be unnecessary. If the budget is very limited or the study area is small, the scope and methods used in the consultations program can be reduced; and if a particular type of recreation venue is being planned, the assessment of existing provision might be restricted to other similar facilities.

Who will do the planning?

An assessment needs to be made as to whether there are staff in the organisation with the necessary skills and time to carry out a recreation planning program; whether external advice and guidance can be tapped - such as from the state department of sport and recreation and/or other agencies- or whether consultant planners who have the expertise which is needed should be appointed.

If a decision is made to seek the services of external planners, it will still be essential to have someone in the organisation that is able to work with, supervise and monitor the work of these people. In some instances, where there is no one in the organisation with the available skills, external project managers should be appointed.

Overseeing the planning process

In addition to a project manager, many agencies establish officer committees (made up of officers from the planning body and, as appropriate, representatives from other planning bodies and state government), and/or advisory committees/reference groups with members from key stakeholders and the community. The latter committees are sometimes known as reference groups. Quite frequently officer committees and advisory committees/reference groups are established and elected members may sit on both.

Officer/steering committees generally run a planning project and seek to ensure that the skills and knowledge of different areas of the agency commissioning the planning and other relevant bodies are tapped and considered and that important information is not overlooked. They have often been given some or total authority to direct the planning process and scope of a study and to influence the outcomes.

By comparison, a reference group is more of a sounding board and is often used as a means of keeping a community informed and on-side during the planning process. Quite a few planning agencies no longer establish steering groups as they can force through recommendations which are contrary to wider planning needs and objectives or they can seek to take over the authority of elected members.

The available budget

Conducting a recreation planning study is not a cheap task. The fees for external planners can range from $10 000 to $15 000 for very local projects such as a master-plan for a small park, through to hundreds of thousands of dollars for major studies.

A municipal recreation plan will generally cost $50 000 to $100 000 at 2008 prices - depending on the scope of research desired - while state wide plans can cost upward of $250 000. In-house staff need time to support external planners which can vary from one to two days a month to as much as four days a week, again depending on the scale of the project. Making contact with other similar agencies is often a good way to determine what level of funds might be needed for a particular planning study. Alternatively, recreation planners can be contacted and asked to provide an estimate as a guide.

Undertaking a recreation planning study in-house may seem cheaper than employing external

planners, but the true cost in terms of staff time and on-costs is unlikely to be very different. If the process is interrupted because an in-house person has other commitments, the cost can be substantially more from a dollar perspective while continuity and public acceptance of the process can be lost.

Given the scale of the above costs, it is wise to ensure that there is a sufficient budget available before a study is commissioned or that there is a willingness to modify the scale of the project if insufficient funds are available.

In the interest of achieving good planning, some state governments award grants to not-for-profit organisations and local government bodies to pay for planning studies.

In general, consulting planners prefer to know what budget is available so they can tailor their work programs to that amount. This also means that when assessing several proposals, officers are able to compare what they will get for the budget which is available. Where no budgets are stated, it is often very difficult for an applicant to determine what degree of detail is desired and it is even more difficult to compare the proposals from different planners.

The desired time line

The time needed to complete a recreation planning study varies according to the scope and detail required.

Even the smallest study will take several months if clubs, residents and other specialists are to be consulted, if the demographics of the community are to be evaluated and if draft ideas are to be put forward for review and comment. Setting up and running public meetings can take six weeks as letters have to be designed, approved and posted; monthly club meetings have to be given the time to decide who will attend; venues have to be booked, and the findings have to be collated and evaluated.

Large planning studies may need to be spread over as much as six months or a year and in these cases, additional time may need to be allowed because of Easter and Christmas holidays.

The project brief

Once the scope of a planning study, the budget and the timelines have been determined, a brief should be prepared. This should provide:

- background information on the study area or topic

- who is going to manage the study and how and whether there will be for instance, steering and/or reference groups

- the aims and objectives of the planning study

- the suggested scope of the research work to be undertaken - including details on any specific issues which need to be addressed, people to be contacted, past reports to be reviewed, venues to be visited, problems to be resolved - and most importantly, the desired outputs

- the budget which is available

- the desired timelines for the study

- the desired reporting formats.

Even if a project is to be managed in-house, a brief should be prepared to ensure that all the appropriate issues have been addressed and accounted for.

If the brief is being issued to external applicants it should also request information on:

- who will be undertaking the work, their qualifications and their experience with similar work

- details of the stages of work to be undertaken and the allocation of time and budgets for each work component. Budgets should include details on any disbursements such as travel and accommodation

- referees from past projects

- details of insurances

- contact details for questions

- the closing date for submissions.

The brief should indicate to applicants how submissions will be assessed.

Many agencies issuing briefs list the assessment criteria (which may include past experience, personnel skills, methodology, value for money, ability to adhere to timelines, overall budget, new ideas etc). They then indicate the weighting which will be given to each assessment criteria.

If a planning agency has no one who can prepare a brief it may decide to seek the help of other agencies which have done similar studies and can use their brief as a template.

Alternatively, if the planning agency has worked with a particular recreation planner before, it may work with the planner to prepare a brief. This could be paid for on a fee for service basis or it might be provided at no cost on the understanding that the planner will be commissioned to undertake the work if it is funded.

Briefs are generally advertised in the relevant section of the local, regional, state or national newspaper, or through professional associations which have journals or websites. Most website briefs can be downloaded, although some agencies impose a fee, an action which is generally poorly regarded as fees are not paid to those who go to the trouble of preparing submissions.

In some states, local government bodies are required by law to advertise briefs which are over a certain value (e.g. $50 000). Some agencies issuing a brief often do not want to have to assess say, a dozen or more submissions so they use a selective tender whereby known consulting companies or companies recommended from a state government list are invited to tender. Usually, at least three tenders are sought.

Once submissions have been received, they are reviewed and evaluated by the individual or group managing the planning study. A decision can then be made to directly appoint a particular individual or firm to undertake the work; it might be decided that several or all of the applicants should be interviewed, or if the tenders are found to be inadequate, it might be decided to readvertise or to invite other responses.

Interviews with applicants allow questions to be asked from both sides and issues to be clarified. They also give the managing team the opportunity to assess the personalities of the applicants and to decide if they would enjoy working with them.

3.3 *Recreation planning research*

The second phase of the recreation planning process is the research phase. A range of issues need to be researched if an effective, valid and useful plan is to be achieved. Those which are generally considered by recreation planners, and which are the subject of much of the remainder of this manual are:

> preparing a review of a range of previous studies and reports to identify and evaluate their findings and recommendations and the implications to future provision initiatives and priorities

> assessing the determinants of leisure and recreation in the area under study and in the wider context; reviewing and evaluating trends in these determinants, and determining the implications to future need and provision

> evaluating the existing provision of recreation facilities, programs and services to identify opportunities for improvement and upgrading, for expanding the provision or developing totally new opportunities

> reviewing current and projected participation data and assessing the possible implications to future need

> determining the leisure and recreation interests of the general community or a specific target group and the priorities for upgraded, additional or new provision

> identifying the most appropriate actions to take in light of 1 – 5 and the priority which should be given to them.

A recreation plan may also address a number of additional issues including:

> how an inventory of recreation provision might be created and kept up-to-date (some planning briefs specify the establishment of inventories)

> the pricing of the use of recreation facilities

> a review of and development of strategies for improving the management of recreation facilities, programs and services

> which organisations might be the most appropriate to implement the various elements of the plan

> how the plan will be paid for and the funding opportunities available

> how the organisation might need to be changed, restructured or augmented from the staffing and operational perspectives so the recommendations can be acted on

> whether particular sections of the recommendations should proceed to a feasibility study

> how the outcomes of any new provision might be evaluated

> a review methodology and timeframe.

Any agency preparing a recreation plan should use the above as a checklist and to assess whether research component needs to be addressed and how, and if not, why not.

The means by which each of the issues is researched is detailed in Sections 4 –11. Section 12 discusses how the information collected is used to prepare a recreation plan.

3.4   *Preparing the plan*

This is the third and final element of the preparation of a recreation plan. At this stage of the work, the planner must evaluate the research findings, determine the implications to the future provision of recreation opportunities and prepare a set of recommendations for action.

The recommendations should give direction as to how they will be implemented. They should be framed within the recreational and wider policies and objectives of the agency commissioning the planning and where appropriate, should provide budgets and implementation responsibilities.

The priorities and the associated budgets should reflect the financial commitments and capacities of the agency or groups who will implement the plan. This allows the responsible agency to integrate the recommendations with wider policies, development programs and budget cycles. A plan which is beyond the financial resources of the relevant agency or group is rarely able to be implemented in full and can be subject to 'cherry picking' by elected members, individuals, senior officers or special interest groups in the community, wherein the most attractive, least controversial or cheapest initiatives are implemented and what are often the more important elements are overlooked.

Experience suggests that the longer the list of recommendations, the less likely they are to be implemented in a consistent, logical fashion. A long list is also likely to be prone to 'cherry picking'.

Recreation plans should be concise and separate from the research findings document. The research findings document is used as a backup resource to justify and support the recommendations of the plan. The plan should be succinct and to the point and written and presented in a style which can be read and understood by all members of the community.

It is particularly useful for the recommendations of a recreation plan to provide timeframes, budgets, action responsibilities and performance monitoring strategies.

3.5   *What skills does a recreation planner need?*

Recreation planners need a variety of skills to successfully carry out their responsibilities. Most important amongst these are:

- the ability to listen to people, to encourage them to express their views, and to accurately record these without making judgements about the people or the views. In this context, an external consultant planner has an advantage as they are not part of the planning body and have 'no axes to grind' on its behalf or on behalf of strong interest groups in the community

- the ability to identify good, practical solutions to resolve the issues which are identified

- the ability to 'stand back' from the issues under review and to use one's professional skills while withholding personal opinions and preferences

- the ability to work with elected members at all levels of government

- the ability to work with other professionals such as architects, landscape architects, social workers and planners, youth workers, aged services support staff and planners, health planners, cultural groups and their support agencies, police, educators, engineers, and quantity surveyors to help determine the best course of action and provision of recreation opportunities for the whole community or targeted groups within it. Increasingly, it is being

recognised that the critical links between recreation, health and wellbeing mean that recreation planners cannot work in isolation and must tap into the skills, knowledge and development and provision priorities of other professions if their work is to be effective

- the ability to review, evaluate and assess determinants of recreation behaviour, of trends in recreation activities and the implications of both to future needs

- the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of what has been provided in the past and recommend appropriate changes

- a good knowledge of recreation activities and trends

- a good knowledge of how to conduct interviews, prepare inventories, undertake surveys, conduct demographic reviews, and assess existing provision

- the ability to prepare recreation policies which reflect current political, social and cultural conditions

- the ability to clearly understand, explain and advocate the views of the community and key stakeholders in writing and other media. Some guidelines for report writing are provided in Appendix 13.2.

A final invaluable skill for a recreation planner is the ability to 'read' or interpret how a community is thinking and how it will react to an idea or proposal, rather than basing recommendations on the planner's own preferences and conclusions. Recreation planners should be the professional advocate for the interests and needs of the community, with the skill to evaluate ideas and educate the community and planning authorities as to the best and most effective course of action to take to enhance the quality of life of all residents. 'Advocacy planning' in fact, was the name given to a particular approach to recreation planning in the 1960s and 1970s: planners acted directly on behalf of the community and as with an advocate on a tribunal or court of law, took the side of the community and put a forceful case in support of their needs. Unfortunately, few communities have the resources to employ their own advocates and government agencies should play this role on behalf of the residents whose taxes and rates are paying their salaries.

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4 Alternate Planning Approaches

4.1 *Introduction*

The recreation planning methodologies detailed in this manual are those which have been used extensively over the years by the author and many other recreation planners. Yet, they are not the only methods which are available or are used. A number of other planning strategies exist which at least warrants a review: perhaps to demonstrate why they should not be used or why they might be considered as a useful addition to or alternative to the methods outlined in detail in this volume.

4.2 *Standards*

Provision standards have been used for many years as a recreation planning strategy. The most widely used standards for open space , grew out of the 1920s efforts by North American and British agencies to provide recreation opportunities for children in poorer residential areas. From an initial estimate that every child should have an area of 8-10 square yards to enable him or her to exercise, a calculation of 7.5 acres - three hectares per 1 000 residents emerged. Revision reviews in the 1940s, 60s and 70s raised the three hectares to four hectares on the basis that modern recreation activities and needs were greater than those of the past.

Despite being based on questionable research, the standard of four hectares - or variations on it as low as two hectares and as high as 10 – was widely adopted throughout the English-speaking world. Many Australian local government authorities adopted it as a basis for their recreation provision programs and established goals of continuing to acquire land until they had reached the agreed standard.

Some of the key failings of the standards approach to recreation 'planning' are[ii] [9] [10] [11]:

[ii] See Marriott, 1980a for a full assessment of standards and other traditional recreation planning approaches. Doctoral research by Marriott in 1979 provided clear evidence that recreation provision in keeping with open space standards failed to meet the recreational needs of the community. See Marriott 1979. See, also Veal, A. J. (2008). This is a fascinating exploration of how standards came into use in Australian recreation planning.

- they do not constitute planned provision at all: rather, they constitute the acquisition of a fixed amount of land regardless of the nature and needs of the community

- they ignore the nature of the land resources, local and regional climates, the nature of the communities to be served and any changes occurring in those communities

- they ignore indoor provision

- it is unclear as to whether the standards are a minimum provision need, a guide to the amount of land needed, or the maximum amount needed. Most users apply them as both a minimum and maximum simultaneously

- they ignore the opportunities provided by all commercial or private recreation provision

- they assume uniformity of need across political boundaries regardless of where it is applied. To illustrate, Victorian councils have commonly used four hectares per 1 000 residents regardless of where in the state they were; NSW has used 2.83 hectares, and SA has used as much as 10 hectares

- the standards generally run contrary to the findings of extensive research into the recreation needs and interests of different communities and different types of communities.

Despite these weaknesses, many planners and agencies responsible for recreation planning still use a standards approach. This is partially because they have been embodied into various state government planning acts or provision guidelines and have been upheld by planning appeals tribunals. They have also been used by some who claim there is a need for 'a starting point' in terms of provision. The point is that they are such a bad and misleading starting point, they should not be used. Past research has shown that a provision rate of four hectares per 1 000 residents is probably in excessive of community needs - but this will vary depending on the culture, location, recreational interests, climate, history of provision and many other factors. A wide variety of anecdotal evidence also suggests that where other types of recreation opportunities are available - libraries, theatres, restaurants, neighbourhood houses and indoor aquatic and leisure centres - less use is made of open space and less open space is needed. Finally, there is also a wide range of anecdotal evidence to indicate that people adjust their recreational activities to what is available within their area and if there is insufficient open space, they go elsewhere or take up other types of activities.

Thus, rather than using open space standards to guide provision, a far more effective starting point is to undertake all areas of research as outlined in this manual. This has been strongly endorsed by recent internal research undertaken by several state government sport and recreation and planning departments in Australia.

A different set of standards emerged in the 1970s, 80s and 90s when social planners sought to extend the open space standards concept to other forms of community provision. For instance, a report prepared for the Municipal Association of Victoria in 1989 detailed the recommended levels of provision for eight different types of services, these being family and children, young people, older people, people with disabilities, libraries, community information, health and leisure. The 'standards' were developed for five levels of population size across the state, ranging from 'local' areas with up to 5-6 000 people to 'supra-regions' with 300 000 plus residents. For each service category the report detailed the specific services to be provided, the goals they would meet, any existing standards, the community population sizes for which they would be provided and the related population ratios, the targeted age range and the catchment distances to be served.

While these guidelines may have been useful to local councils, their danger lies in the adoption of the key word in the report title – 'standards' - and the assumption that achieving the suggested levels of

provision will meet community needs at an acceptable and documented level. For this reason, they have not been reproduced here. Yet, the report itself notes that:

> "…standards should always be thought of as guides and reflections of a particular social, economic and political environment. Standards will not be useful if they become entrenched, inflexible and unchangeable. The appropriateness of particular standards should be constantly monitored and evaluated to ensure that they are influencing positive outcomes … and are not …acting as obstacles to innovation and the development of locally appropriate, cost effective and efficient services and facilities." (McVicar and Reynolds, 1989, p. 17)[12]

Given this warning, it could well be argued that the report would have been more useful had it presented a methodology for developing what might be usefully described as 'community specific standards' or 'community specific provision goals', rather than detailing a set of standards which were then considered to be appropriate across the state.

More recently, the December 2005 edition of Urbecon, published by the planning and consulting firm, SGS Economics and Planning, contained an article, 'Establishing desired standards of service - the role of benchmarking'. The article noted that there was wide use of benchmarks (or 'standards') but acknowledged that "there is no universally agreed set of benchmarks for the provision of community facilities and services…"

The SGS Economics and Planning report proceeded to state that:

> "…appropriately considered benchmarks are often the best indicator for assessing comparative needs…" and that "benchmarks are even more effective where adapted to local circumstances, or where consultation is undertaken with a range of government agencies to determine the level at which facilities are currently or desirably provided. Coupling benchmarks with empirical evidence of needs not being met, or over supplied, is essential to ensure the level of provision of facilities and services is adequate This 'local' knowledge' is one of the most reliable sources of information about current and likely future needs and service standards."

The emphasis on the need for detailed local research and the assertion that such knowledge is both 'essential' and the 'most reliable' negates the need for the use of any benchmarks or standards.

The SGS Economics and Planning article presented a list of benchmarks to guide provision. However, it did not provide a researched basis for them, stating only that they "are considered the best and most recent guide to social infrastructure provision". As the report argued an effective case against the need for standards or benchmarks, they are not reported here.

4.3 *Ad hoc planning*

The Macquarie Dictionary defines *ad hoc* as the Latin of "for this special purpose", "impromptu" and "with respect to this subject". *Adhockery* is defined as "behaviour influenced by prevailing exigencies without regard for effects over a longer term". From a planning perspective, ad hoc planning is a process which is followed to resolve a particular problem, without concerning oneself with the broader and longer term issues or consequences.

Ad hoc planning or ad hoc action is occasionally necessary in any organisation when a situation arises for which there is no precedent and which needs to be resolved. As a result, ad hoc action is taken and the issue or problem is addressed. However, many agencies use this as their usual approach rather than having an action framework in place as a means of guiding a planning review process when emergency or unforeseen needs arise.

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The problems associated with an ad hoc planning approach include:

- many of the assessment processes recommended in this manual are overlooked and as a result, decisions are made on the basis of incomplete information

- issues or fads of the moment take precedence over potentially more important longer term issues and needs

- groups which are able to demand action can attract attention whereas potentially more important and needy groups are overlooked: the squeaky wheel gets the oil

- resources can readily be misdirected

- frequent changes of direction in terms of provision processes and policies as different elected members, officers or favoured groups gain the upper hand

- a neglect of the wider context, related issues and, as the dictionary definitions indicate, of the longer term consequences of the actions which are taken.

The ad hoc approach to planning should be avoided wherever possible as it does not achieve effective and efficient provision outcomes. Communities which have had years of ad hoc planning frequently suffer from the duplication of provision for the most 'popular' sports; under-provision of cultural and special needs group opportunities; generally lower than average provision quality; facilities which have become outdated; a lack of recreation programs and services (or, worse still, a belief that it is up to sporting and recreation groups to organise these), and high levels of community need, especially amongst non-mainstream residents and groups.

The application of even some of the research methods detailed in the present report will ensure something better than ad hoc outcomes can be achieved from a recreation planning process. The application of the overall 'package' of processes will mean that ad hoc planning can become a thing of the past.

4.4 *Developer contribution schemes*

As noted previously, developer contribution schemes operate in a number of states and provide for the transfer of either or both land and money to a state or local government body. These resources can then be used for the provision of recreation opportunities. In reality, a developer contribution does not constitute planning at all but many of those receiving the contributions see these as the extent of their capacity to provide for recreation in the community. As such, they are seen as a major, if not the resourcing, input.

The philosophical and planning basis of most developer contribution schemes is weak as they generally bear no relationship to the nature of the community or communities being planned for and as such, they make major assumptions about what needs are to be met through the use of the contributions. As an example, the NSW Section 94 scheme (of the *Local Government Act*) which determines the impact of new residents on recreation (and several other services) demands and charges them accordingly, has no information about who the new residents are –although it does have estimates of how many there will be; it assumes a linear relationship between population size and demand; it assumes that the new residents come from outside the local area or the municipality - when this is often not the case - and it makes gross assumptions about what the needs of the new residents will be and what the cost of meeting those needs will be.

Developer contribution schemes which require the transfer of land resources are no better than the standards approach as they assume that the land acquired will meet the needs of the communities in

the area. Rarely do authorities which have received the land allocations go out and acquire additional land or other recreation resources. Often however, they are left with inappropriately sized, poorly located and excess resources.

As with standards, the argument has been put that developer contributions give the planning and/or provision authority 'something to start with'. The weakness of this argument is the same as with standards: it is all too often the wrong starting point. If a provision authority carried out a detailed planning process it would know what and how much it needed to start with. It could then apply a meaningful contribution scheme to all residents and ratepayers and it would have the evidence to justify the demands it made.

It can be expected, however, that so long as developer contributions are endorsed by legislation and various planning appeals decisions they will go on being sought. Changes to legislation are needed to overcome these shortcomings. Even if these changes do not occur, planning authorities still have the capacity to carry out proper planning studies. They will then know how to most effectively use the resources they acquire through the flawed contributions process.

4.5 *Benchmarking*

Benchmarking has emerged over recent years as a means of assisting the planning process by reviewing what other agencies are providing for their clients. Amounts and types of provision are compared as are the quality and staffing of the provision. Some benchmarking goes as far as to determine provision ratios e.g. number of halls or athletics tracks or swimming pools per 100 000 residents. In this form they are similar to provision standards. Some government agencies have used benchmark data as a guide to when new schools, hospitals and other community services can be viably supported.

Some of the jargon associated with recent benchmarking exercises includes 'best practice' and even 'world's best practice'. Best practice is really a management rather than a planning issue while aspiring to world's best practice can set performance levels which are unrealistic, unnecessary and unachievable. One has to question how any organisation which claims it operates, plans or provides in keeping with world's best practice can actually measure what world's best practice is and how its services match up.

Further, it needs to be noted that while the 'best' examples of provision might be able to be identified, they may in fact be quite poor when considered against an as-yet unachieved ideal. To illustrate, several years back a Victorian council required a recreation planning study to benchmark its services against those of other similar-sized councils in the state. A review of those councils quickly found that their recreation provision standards were quite poor. As a result, the initiating council's standards could have been deemed to be quite good, even though they were actually also poor. Fortunately, the initiating council accepted that there were no good examples against which it could benchmark itself and it went on to develop its own performance measures.

A more useful initial approach to benchmarking is to benchmark against the best practice or best quality provision which has been achieved by the same provision agency elsewhere within its area of jurisdiction. This ensures that the benchmark being used is something which can be achieved by the provision agency and possibly, something which reflects the standards and expectations of the community. Once other provision begins to achieve this benchmark then higher standards can be aspired to.

Benchmarking can be an informative exercise as it gives an idea of what other communities have had made available to them and what the standards of provision are. However, it is not a planning method *per se*, but rather, one tool which can assist the planning and decision-making process. It needs to be used with caution too, as what is appropriate to one community may not be appropriate to another: differences of climate, location, socio-economics, settlement history and politics can all

impact on what a community wants and needs.

4.6 *Advocacy planning*

Advocacy planning is not so much a different approach to planning as a different application of sound planning processes. As briefly noted at the end of the previous section, advocacy planning first emerged in the US in the late 1960 and 1970s. Using much the same model as community legal services or pro bono (or more correctly, pro bono publico) legal services, planners were paid no fees or low fees to act directly on behalf of communities seeking equity of opportunity or enhanced levels of recreation and other community services provision. The planners took the side of the community, conducted detailed research on their behalf and often, in the face of outdated and ineffectual planning by the provision agency, were able to put a forceful case in support of the community's needs.

There has been very limited advocacy planning in Australia because few communities have the resources to employ their own advocates. However, the actions of many conservation groups are very similar to advocacy planning as the groups are able to draw on a range of specialist skills from amongst their own ranks. Further, some planners have indicated that on occasion they have assisted community groups to develop a case against particular provision proposals so that some sense of equity is achieved.

Many planning and provision agencies do not like an advocacy planning approach as it is seen as threatening or usurping their authority. However, the approach warrants consideration because providing good research is undertaken; it almost invariably leads to better outcomes. This is because different views and perspectives are canvassed and provision proposals and decisions have to be more effectively justified.

Advocacy planning also has the benefits of putting some distance between the planning authority and the planning process and outcomes, of being able to ensure a greater independence of the processes and of having the advocate educate the client community or communities as to what is and what is not appropriate or achievable.

4.7 *Charrettes and searching*

Charrettes and 'searching' have a number of similarities in that they involve intense short-term programs of well-resourced workshopping and planning activity. Charrettes generally involve experts in the field who make prognostications regarding future needs and priorities. Both seek representation from the main 'players' or stakeholders: planners, elected members, experts and residents.

Charrettes and 'searching' generally use many of the same planning resources outlined elsewhere in this manual (demographic data, existing provision reviews etc), but these are used as an information input to intense, small group think tank sessions which report back on their findings and conclusions. Extensive debate between participants regarding different solutions to the issues and problems which have been identified is common in both approaches.

A strength of the two processes is that they can be carried out in a very short time frame, although a lot of 'homework' may be needed in the preparation of background materials. There is a certainty in the mix of participants and there is certainty in the sense that differing views and strategies are debated and put under scrutiny. There is uncertainty at times, however, because the process seems to happen quickly and because there can be questions about who was involved and about the fact that the vast majority of the community is not given the opportunity to be involved.

In the vast majority of instances, both charrettes and searching produce well-informed and well-

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considered outcomes. They can be used as a total planning process or as a key input to the wider, longer term processes outlined in this book. Both warrant serious consideration as planning tools and have been used in a number of recreation planning projects in Australia in the past.

4.8 *Delphi planning*

Delphi planning draws its name from the oracles of Delphi in ancient Greek who foretold the future. In its modern planning form, the approach was developed by the RAND Corporation during the Cold War years to help predict the development of warfare technologies.

The approach uses a panel of experts to identify a range of key trends and projected futures. These are then independently reviewed and evaluated by the same experts who make an assessment of when the trends and/or events are likely to occur, what may inhibit them and what actions might be needed to achieve them – or avoid them. These views are summarised, circulated, reviewed and revised through a series of rounds until a consensus is reached.

The Delphi method has strengths and weaknesses. Amongst the strengths is the focusing on complex issues by a panel of experts working both independently and eventually, as a team. The weaknesses include the exclusion of the general public – which may better know what its needs, interests and priorities are – the critical role of the facilitator of the process in ensuring that the expert panel has sufficient information on which to base its assessments, the fact that the complexity of social processes may defy easy evaluation, and the fact that in the social sciences, multiple influences can generate outcomes which are quite different to those which are predicted.

There has been very little use of the Delphi method in recreation planning in Australia. Yet, it can be a useful tool for adding to or testing the outcomes of other recreation planning processes. It therefore should be considered as an alternate way of identifying critical issues and future strategies for action.

4.9 *Conclusion*

It is evident that recreation planners have used a variety of approaches which are somewhat different to those detailed in this manual.

As indicated in the review, several of the methods – such as Charrettes and the Delphi method - can be useful additions to the methods provided in this manual. However, care should be taken in using them alone as they do have some weaknesses and they tend to exclude significant groups in the community and to rely rather heavily on one set of research strategies rather than a mix of methods. The same comment applies to benchmarking: it is a useful comparative tool but should not be used as a definitive provision guide.

Several of the other alternate planning approaches should be avoided whenever possible and in particular, standards and developer contributions. In regards to the definition of planning introduced at the beginning of this manual, they are not really planning approaches at all as they do not involve a sound process of data collection, review and evaluation along the way to draw conclusions as to needs and priorities for action. Rather, they are somewhat mechanistic processes for reaching a solution in a straightforward manner which is most probably worse than the outcome which would have been achieved had matters been left to evolve in a way which reflected the nature and needs of the community.

Some aspects of developer contributions cannot be avoided at present because, as was noted, they have a degree of legislative endorsement. However, there is a movement in several states to provide a better basis for future recreation planning processes. The use of more soundly based, more effective and productive strategies by recreation and other community planners will help to

achieve this change.

5   Report reviews: scope and purpose

5.1   *The value of a review*

A review of background reports and previous recreation planning studies is an invaluable element in the recreation planning process. Such a review:

- ensures that the findings of past planning studies for the same agency are evaluated and any recommendations which have been overlooked and which are still relevant can be carried forward in the new plan

- allows longer term trends to be identified and current day findings to be put into a broader time context. As a consequence, the influence of 'hot' or 'fad' issues is reduced

- allows the inclusion of new and exciting ideas from other agencies, from academic and planning research, or from research carried out in other parts of the country or overseas to be identified and tested

- allows the final planning report to reflect a wider time span of need than that which might otherwise be identified during the six to12 month period of the planning study.

The review of other reports does not need to be confined to issues or topics specific to the agency, area or topic for which the recreation planning is being carried out. In fact, reports, studies, articles and books which tackle different topics in related ways may be just as useful if not more so as they can generate new thinking, new ideas and new solutions.

5.2   *The types of reports to review*

The types of reports and studies which are most commonly reviewed and evaluated are:

- policy documents prepared by the agency for whom the recreation planning is being carried out. These frequently establish the philosophical framework for a recreation plan

- past planning studies by the same council or adjoining councils. These might cover recreation, open space, recreation facility feasibility studies, economic development, transport, and urban planning issues and strategies

- academic studies and reports on a wide range of relevant topics

- government enquiries and research reports, also covering a wide range of relevant topics

- government policy statements on recreation, health, community wellbeing and so forth. These can be particularly important in that they may establish new provision models and directions and create funding opportunities for new provision initiatives

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports. The ABS regularly publishes a range of data and written reviews on recreation topics. The annual report, Australian Social Trends (ABS Catalogue No. 4102.0)[13], frequently has feature articles on recreation and related topics.

Further, the ABS has a National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics which researches and publishes data on a variety of recreation topics and which can be contacted for special advice: <nccrs@abs.gov.au> or GPO Box 2272, Adelaide, SA 5001 or (08) 8237 7555

- professional review papers and reports. Professional state-of-the-art reviews can be particularly useful in providing clarity of direction on an issue or in providing professional support for a new course of action. A recent publication by World Leisure, an international association of leisure professionals, is listed in the references under Jackson[14].

The first from the above list of documents should be given priority attention in the preparation of a recreation plan. Many agencies such as councils, state and federal governments, private providers and investment bodies have a range of policies which detail their organisational vision or mission statement, their values and principles, their organisational objectives and their priorities for action. These may cover recreation, health, community wellbeing, economic development, transport and the like. Many larger sporting and recreation associations have similar documents.

These documents should be given some priority for attention as they should, at least theoretically, provide a philosophical framework for the planning study. They may well also provide a structural framework into which the recreation plan conclusions can be slotted. Ideally, the findings and recommendations of a recreation planning study should seek to further the recreational wellbeing of a community but also positive outcomes in other areas of endeavour of the sponsoring agency or group.

5.3   *Using the findings of a reports review*

The information to be gleaned from past reports will vary depending on their nature and source. In general however, in using the material, planners should:

prepare a brief written review of the report methodology and scope, and if appropriate, identify any gaps in coverage

prepare a list of any new provision or activity ideas, provision or participation trends, or other issues, conclusions and recommendations which may be of value to the planning study being undertaken. The list could then be reviewed with officers of the organisation for which the planning is being conducted and with steering and reference groups to determine which items might be relevant to the present study. The list could also be taken to meetings with community members and other relevant bodies as a means of checking their wider relevance.

Where the past reports have been prepared for the organisation which has commissioned the planning study, similar lists would be prepared and the officer review process might seek to identify:

a)   the recommendations which were implemented and whether they effectively achieved the desired outcome, and if not, what alternate action might be appropriate

b)   the recommendations which were not implemented, why they were not implemented, whether they are considered to still be relevant to the organisation and its community and if so, how actioning them could be advanced in the present study.

Again, the lists might be taken to public meetings to assess whether there is continuing public support for them.

Once the ideas and issues identified through the review process have been reviewed and assessed and found to be of continuing value, they can be carried forward into the final report stages and as

deemed appropriate, into the recommendations for action.

6 Assessing the existing provision of recreation facilities, programs and services

6.1 *The scope of existing provision*

The existing mix of recreation opportunities in any community or region can often be quite extensive. It will generally include:

- recreation facilities

- recreation programs

- recreation support services –such as information services, community transport, program support staff, development grants, management processes

- indoor and outdoor facilities and programs

- sporting and non–sports opportunities - these being as wide-ranging as cultural, educational, casual/informal, and bushland/forest opportunities

- commercial and public resources

- play opportunities[15]

- club and community venues and programs.

The distinction between recreation facilities, programs and services is important: programs and services are often overlooked with an almost sole emphasis being placed on facilities. Facilities are simply the physical resources used for recreation activities - and many activities need little by way of facilities. By comparison, programs are the structured or self-created recreational activities which people do. It is programs which deliver recreation benefits. Finally, services are important because without them, many recreation activities could not be accessed: services include information about what is available, where, when and for how much; community transport which ensures people can reach recreation venues; disability services, so people can get to or get into venues; subsidies and grants, so people and clubs can afford to pursue the activities they desire; equipment pools; program leaders; venue managers; and recreation planners. Without these services many recreation activities would not occur and many people in the community would be disadvantaged in terms of access to recreation. It is the lack of services and programs which leaves many facilities locked up and under-

used.

Understanding and evaluating the effectiveness of the mix of existing provision is a very important element of any recreation plan. It informs planners as to what is already available (and how useful it is), it helps to identify gaps, and it guides decisions about new or additional provision.

All too often, new provision is made when the opportunities offered by what already exists have not been fully exploited. This is frequently because strategies for overcoming barriers to the wider use of what exists are not pursued which results in duplication and under-use.

The existing provision of recreation opportunities needs to be assessed in terms of:

- the types of opportunities that exist

- how much provision there is for each opportunity

- the size of the resources

- where the opportunities are geographically

- who the opportunities serve… and do not serve

- what standards of use are supported

- what the condition of the opportunity is

- how the opportunities can be improved.

Depending on the nature of the planning study being carried out, the scope of existing recreation facilities, programs, services review can vary significantly. For instance, if a regional or municipal recreation plan is being prepared; all existing opportunities might need to be assessed – although even then, questions might need to be asked as to whether, for instance, commercial opportunities are included or whether restaurants and motels are included. By comparison, if a recreation plan for aged residents, youth, a particular suburb, or a particular type of activity is being prepared, only facilities, programs and services which are or might be relevant to those groups or topics would be assessed.

The assessment of existing recreation provision is often referred to as a 'gap analysis'. However, it must be noted that provision gaps can really only be identified if the review findings are looked at in the context of the characteristics of the population, the assessed needs of the community being planned for and the objectives of the planning study. What might otherwise appear to be a gap may in fact, not be a deficiency at all. Further, it warrants highlighting that people participate in recreation activities because of the beneficial outcomes they gain and enjoy. Many different types of recreational activities can give similar – and often identical – benefits. As such, no individual or specific activity is actually essential as there is always likely to be an alternative – or, it might be cheaper or better to provide an alternative. Thus apparent gaps may not be gaps at all.

Sometimes an analysis of the existing provision of recreation opportunities is more useful in helping planners understand the extent and types of excessive or duplicated provision – which opens up opportunities for reassigning uses – or for identifying competitor providers, than in understanding gaps.

There are several tools which can be used to assist with the process of assessing the existing provision of recreation opportunities. These are discussed in the following sections.

6.2 *Inventories of provision*

An inventory is simply a list: a list of what exists and what it is like. A recreation inventory can be an invaluable tool for recreation planning purposes as it will help answer the questions of what, where, how much, how accessible and how good in terms of recreation opportunities. Inventories are also particularly useful as a community information resource regarding what is available in the community, as an information resource when preparing budgets, or when applying for grants. As such, careful thought needs to be given to how inventory data is recorded and how and where it is made available. Systems can be readily devised for blocking confidential information included in an inventory when that information does not need to be made available.

While inventories are invaluable for planning purposes, it should be stressed that creating an inventory of recreation opportunities is not really the role of a recreation planning study. Creating an inventory from scratch is an onerous task and can use up scarce planning time if it has to be undertaken as part of the planning process.

Efforts should be made by all agencies concerned with recreation provision and recreation planning to create inventories which can be used as part of planning studies, rather than expecting planning studies to create inventories as part of the planning process. Such inventories need to be regularly, consistently and accurately updated if they are to be useful and it is generally best if one officer is given this task so that accuracy is maintained.

The following is a list of information which might be included in an inventory of recreation facilities.

Background

1.1   Council/agency
1.2   Venue name
1.3   Address and map reference
1.4   Contact person
1.5   Phone number
1.6   Postal address
1.7   Planning scheme zoning
1.8   Dates inventory is recorded and updated
1.9   Name of person(s) recording/updating the inventory

Facility Description

1.10   Venue number
1.11   Council property number(s)
1.12   Size
1.13   Description
1.14   Components: rooms, playing fields, change rooms, stores, play equipment and kitchens. Plus size, number and condition of all the above
1.15   Services: parking, disabled access, toilets (type, number), bike parking, pathways, signage. Plus size, number and condition of all the above
1.16   Venue classification
1.17   Venue hierarchy
1.18   Assessment of condition and quality

Use

1.19   User group names
1.20   Contact name/phone/email/postal addresses
1.21   Use times/seasons

1.22   Use levels/standards
1.23   Use numbers
1.24   Fees

Upgrading/additions

1.25   Needs: as identified through a professional inspection and/or user input
1.26   Site capacity to accommodate additions or availability of adjoining land
1.27   Priorities for action and recommended responsibility

Most government and commercial recreation provision agencies now have detailed asset databases with Geographic Information System links, and inventory information can be readily added to those databases. Alternatively, simple but powerful personal computer programs are now available which can be used to create comprehensive inventories.

It may be that not all of the items in the list above are needed, or needed immediately. Creating an inventory can be made far easier by committing to their progressive development so that only key items are initially recorded. If an effort is made to record everything about a venue it may take up so much time the process is never completed or it may discourage efforts to keep the information up to date. Thus, if there is no inventory available, one can be started by collecting the data needed for the planning study with additions being made later on. A key question to ask when collecting inventory data is "how useful will this data be?"

It is evident that there are variations in the range and detail of the information to be collected and in the layout of the forms. These reflect the different needs of the organisations they were created for.

The list of inventory components provided above includes some details on the use and users of each recreation facility and the programs and activities which are offered. Depending on the purpose of the planning study being undertaken, it may be useful to create a separate programs and activities inventory rather than recording this information as a dependent sub-set of a facilities inventory. This distinction is important as quite a few recreation activities are not facility-based and many using an inventory are initially seeking information on specific activities and only secondarily on where they take place. Modern technology will allow cross-referencing of different inventories.

A third and separate inventory to create is one that relates to recreation services. As already discussed, recreation services are critical to ensure people are able to access the activities they want. Thus understanding the services which do or do not exist is as equally important as understanding the existing provision of facilities and programs.

Several elements of a recreation inventory which are included in the list above but which have not been discussed are facility classifications and facility hierarchies. These are discussed in the later paragraphs of this section.

6.3 *Inventory data sources*

As a collection of information about specific venues, groups and services, inventories draw their data from a variety of sources. These include:

- title records of the organisations which own the facilities

- development and maintenance records of the owning or any leasing body

- state government agency records e.g. land management, water and town planning authorities

- surveys of user groups and user group records

- historic records

- site visits.

From a recreation planning perspective, site visits backed by good inventory data should be viewed as almost being mandatory. Visits allow the planners to assess conditions and needs first hand. As discussed in the later section on consultations with the community, site visits with local residents and with user and special interest groups are also invaluable as they can reveal needs, opportunities and priorities which would otherwise not be identified.

6.4   *Using an inventory for planning purposes*

The creation of an inventory does not in itself constitute recreation planning. To be useful, the raw information or data contained in an inventory has to be turned into information and that then needs to be summarised, interpreted and evaluated. Thus, in using various provision inventories, recreation planners should consider undertaking the following:

- preparing tables and maps recording the distribution of all and each different type of recreation facility

- preparing a review and discussion of the tables and maps and identifying apparent gaps for use as a guide toward where additional or alternate provision may be needed

- assessing the possible deficiencies of provision, against the population characteristics and the findings of community consultations and needs assessments

- preparing tables of the hierarchical distribution of each type of recreation facility as a guide to which activities can be pursued at a range of levels from local to elite and those which cannot. Again, any conclusions should be tested against the population characteristics and the community consultations /needs findings

- preparing tables of the area of land allocated to each type of recreation facility

- benchmarking the above data against other similar councils or study areas –especially if some can be found that are considered to be 'well serviced' or which have similar socio-economic characteristics – in order to identify significant differences of provision and the implications. 'Internal' benchmarking may also be considered. In this context, the 'best' of the venues, programs or services in the study area can be used as a guide to what might or should be achieved elsewhere in the same area.

As a further guide to the preparation of an inventory of recreation resources as a major input to the planning process, the following two sections discuss the classification of venues by type and by their hierarchical position.

6.5   *A classification of recreation facilities*

Because there are so many different types of recreation facilities, it is useful to categorise them such as outdoor sports or informal parks, or indoor cultural venues. This provides more understanding of the provision which has already been made. It also helps to avoid the danger of looking too closely at individual types of facilities or individual activities.

Legislation in several Australian states provides a classification of recreation facilities which are not particularly useful from a detailed planning perspective. As such, councils and other planning agencies often develop their own. These will be found in the various planning reports prepared by councils.

The following is a classification of recreation facilities which has been used in more than a dozen councils and with several other agencies in New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland.

Facility category and description

Parks

These are informal sites which have had their physical character and/or vegetation modified to support community recreation, community development and well-being uses. They provide ornamental gardens, play facilities, community gardens, informal lawns for picnics and relaxing and other similar unstructured activities.

Landscape and amenity

These resources are reserved primarily because of their attractiveness, to protect the character of an area and to provide a buffer between different types of land use. They can include irregularly shaped, wooded sites adjoining residential and industrial areas, ridge lines, river flats and planted section of road reserves. From a recreation perspective, depending on size, they support walking, conservation and educational activities, and creative arts.

Conservation

Such sites serve to protect and enhance natural resources. These resources can support a wide diversity of non-competitive, active or intellectually-focused leisure pursuits. Examples include national/state/local conservation parks, wetlands and coastal reserves.

Heritage

Such sites serve to protect and enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and post-European settlement resources. They include camp sites, artefact fields, fishing structures, buildings, fences, bridges, historic gardens, botanic gardens, streetscapes, townscapes, and building curtilages. These resources can support a wide diversity of non-competitive, social, active or intellectually-focused leisure pursuits.

Linear and linkage

These venues range from small pathways linking residential streets in urban areas through to municipal and regional trails. They include court head path links (paths at end of dead ends/cul-de-sacs), urban and bushland trails, state and national walks, water and fauna/flora corridors. They are used for walking, cycling and nature study activities as well as serving as drainage channels and corridors for animal and bird movement.

Outdoor sport

These venues usually support team sports. They are also used for sports practice, carnivals and fairs, and emergency meeting points. They frequently have indoor halls, club and social facilities, play equipment, BMX, skate and walking/cycle tracks associated with them.

River, lakes and bays/oceans

These venues support a range of recreational activities including swimming, fishing, a variety of boating activities, and conservation/nature study activities. Many rivers, lakes, bays and oceans also support other important activities such as flood management, aquaculture and transport.

Indoor sport

These are built facilities which cater for indoor sporting competition and include stadia, halls, ice rinks, and bowling alleys.

Indoor cultural

Indoor cultural venues include galleries, libraries, educational, and heritage buildings.

Outdoor cultural

Outdoor cultural venues include sound shells, town squares, showgrounds, and community gardens.

Entertainment

These spaces include indoor and outdoor picture and live theatres, performance spaces, halls, restaurants, casinos, nightclubs, and hotels.

Indoor health and fitness

Indoor health and fitness venues provide gymnasium and spaces for a range of activities including aerobics, fitness testing, health programs, squash, and aquatics. They also provide, social, crèche cafe and meeting facilities.

Multi-use community

Multi-use community venues offer indoor spaces for learning programs, health and wellness activities, crafts, computer skill development and other activities which reflect the assessed needs of the local and district communities. Community centres and neighbourhood houses are typical multi-use community venues.

Utilities and services

These sites include water and irrigation reservoirs; road, pipe-and power-line reserves; council depots; sewerage treatment pondages; airports and flight lines for airports. The recreational uses made of these sites include linear trails, model or full size aircraft flying areas, bird observing/conservation and boating.

Undeveloped

These sites are zoned for recreation to protect their assets or to meet future community needs. Undeveloped land may include greenfield sites in rural areas, in proposed/new residential areas, abandoned sites (e.g. former industrial/mining land) or land in urban renewal areas. Research will be required to determine the most appropriate future use(s) of these sites.

Proposed

Land which is proposed to be zoned or acquired for recreation purposes to protect it or adjoining uses or to meet assessed community needs once development of an area proceeds.

Table 6.1: A classification of recreation facilities

The above classification has 16 categories, but this could be reduced, for example, some types of provision were never likely to be achieved e.g. rivers, lakes, bays and oceans or if only outdoor or indoor facilities were being covered by the planning study.

It is of interest that quite a few of the categories are not primarily recreational facilities but rather,

facilities and venues reserved for other purposes which have major recreational values. The 'linear and linkage' category could readily include road reserves and lanes – as these are widely used for recreational activities – while car parks could be added to the 'utilities and services' category and shopping malls to 'multi-use community' venues. The point is that a broad view needs to be taken of what recreational open space is exactly as the traditional view has really only included parks and sports fields.

It's also worth noting that it is not essentially an area or region for which the planning is being carried out but an example of the type of recreation venue. Some areas excel in their capacity to support certain types of venues and not others and this often means that there are fewer types of venues and separate venues that are needed. However, it is almost certain that the wider the mix of facility types able to support recreation and the more accurately the distribution of provision reflects the distribution of users, the greater the recreation opportunities for the community or communities being served.

In applying the above classification of recreation venues, each asset should be allocated to a category on the basis of its predominant current use. This data can then be tabulated and mapped. If more detail is required, an asset could (also) be subdivided into three or four categories if it has a mix of uses. This subdivision could also be tabulated and mapped. Further, the assets should be tabulated and mapped according to their recommended future use.

Once tabulated and mapped, the existing provision of recreation assets can be described and evaluated in terms of:

how many venues there are of each type, and how the numbers compare

what the size range and average size of each venue type is

how the different types of venues are distributed across the study area

a SWOT ("Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats") analysis of the findings

what obvious gaps in provision is evident overall and on a locality basis

what the possible implications of 1 – 5 might be to future needs and provision.

SWOT analyses are a valuable review tool that can be carried out on a site-by-site, district or whole planning area basis. SWOT analyses can be somewhat subjective but are still useful and are most productive when carried out by a group.

A SWOT analysis proceeds by listing down all of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats which can be identified from the data which has been collected and the conclusions may then be added to the research findings or tested through the consultations process before some elements are included.

Some of the issues which might be considered in the strengths *and* weaknesses sections of a SWOT analysis of a recreation venue are:

- size

- location

- ownership

- facilities provided

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- utilities available

- use diversity

- management

- the quality/skills /resources of the users/ clubs/ competition

- standards of maintenance

- fees for use

- safety

- lighting.

Every weakness should be used as a guide to an opportunity in order to overcome or negate the weakness – as should every threat.

Common threats identified at recreation venues include:

- loss of users due to poor maintenance

- competitors

- changing community interests

- impacts of surrounding land uses.

As with all stages of the recreation planning process where complex data are being reviewed and evaluated, care must be taken with the evaluation of inventory data. A high level of provision for one group of activities might mean that those activities are very popular: but it might equally mean that a few influential people were able to push provision for them to the detriment of other activities. In the past, the mistake was often made of providing 'more of the same' of what appeared to be most popular. This can generate inequity rather than improved opportunities. At the same time, care must be taken to ensure that what is provided reflects community interests and needs, can be sustained from an operational perspective (i.e. that it doesn't unduly stretch the provider's resources), and should add to the diversity of opportunities without 'overdoing' it.

In some instances, the one set of data can be interpreted several ways: where this arises it is best initially to outline the alternatives. These can then be debated and a course of action can be agreed on which will best meet community needs, which will be viable and which best achieves the philosophical goals and objectives of the providing agency.

6.6 *Hierarchies of facilities*

The hierarchical position of a recreation venue is often overlooked as a planning issue and planning tool. However, allocating each asset to a position in a hierarchy is an important planning strategy because, as with the classification of assets, it helps with the assessment of what already exists and particularly, of its capacity to meet various types of need in the community. For instance, if the majority of sporting venues were classified as local, this could well mean that clubs would have difficulty competing at higher standards and/or that they may have to travel away to gain higher standards of competition.

As with the classification of recreation venues, a variety of hierarchical classifications have been developed by different agencies. There are no agreed or mandatory categories and many of the terms used – such as 'local', 'neighbourhood', 'district' and 'regional' – do not have universally agreed definitions of the areas covered and frequently overlap each other.

Further, different agencies may use the same words to mean different things and it is not uncommon for different officers in different organisations to make different interpretations of the terms in the one study. As such, it is essential that the categories used are clearly defined and agreed on and that the categories which individual sites are allocated to are also agreed on.

The following categorisation has been used in a variety of recreation planning studies over recent years and seeks to provide readily understood categories:

local

sub-municipal

municipal

regional

state

national/international.

Each level is defined in the following paragraphs and has been derived from the hierarchy presented in the City of Greater Bendigo study, Open Space Strategy, 2004 Volume 2[16]. The Bendigo study was prepared by the author of the present manual in partnership with Inspiring Place.

Local recreation venues

Local recreation venues predominantly serve small rural localities, small townships, and neighbourhoods or suburbs within the urban areas of one council. They are classified as local because:

- they are generally small in size and thus have little or no capacity to serve a whole council or region

- they provide opportunities which are similar to those available at a number of other locations and thus do not attract people from far away and do not need to serve people from far away

- their natural or built features are unremarkable and as a result, they do not draw users from a wide area

- they have been designed and sited in a way which ensures good access from nearby areas and possibly even, discourages access and use from more distant areas.

Playgrounds, ball sport kick-about areas, small reserves, neighbourhood pathways and local halls are

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common local recreation venues.

Sub-municipal recreation venues

Sub-municipal recreation venues serve substantial and often geographically-defined sections of, but not the whole of, the municipality because of one or more of the following:

- they are general larger than local venues, but are usually too small to meet all the needs in one council

- they support more specialised uses and therefore need to serve larger areas to be viable

- their natural or built features are unremarkable and as a result, they do not draw users from a wide area

- they are relatively isolated from other similar venues

- they are less frequently provided due, generally, to greater land requirements to achieve viability, higher provision costs and for some types of opportunity, the size of catchment needed to ensure viability.

Single or dual field sports grounds, larger playgrounds, linear trails, community halls, neighbourhood houses, swimming pools, informal parks and bushland reserves are common sub-municipal recreation venues.

Municipal recreation venues

Municipal recreation venues serve the total community living in a council area. They are classified as municipal because:

- they are used by individuals, groups or teams which are drawn from across the whole municipality

- they are provided by a council or other bodies for the residents of one council. Other councils provide their own venues for their residents

- they are often the only resource of their type in the municipality

- their natural or built features are sufficiently significant to draw users from across a whole council

- the size of the land requirements, the higher cost of provision and, for some types of use, the size of catchment needed to ensure viability, mean that no more than one or two venues

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can be provided by a council

- they have been sited so as to be accessible to the whole council community.

Municipal level recreation venues may include sports grounds, city/town centre reserves, botanic gardens, walking/cycling trails, indoor aquatic leisure centres, land which is also used for airport and sewerage works, and undeveloped reserves retained to meet future municipal needs.

Regional recreation venues

Regional recreation venues serve the needs of the residents of a number of councils. They are classified as regional for one or more of the following reasons:

- they are larger than other facilities of the same type and can accommodate a far larger number of visitors than council-only venues

- they need a substantial market or service area to remain viable and they need to draw that market from the council in which they are located and its surrounding region

- the council in which they are based generally has greater drawing power than other councils in the area

- their natural or built features are so outstanding, they draw users from a wide area

- they support either a wide mix of uses or high specialisation of use

- they are generally of higher quality than venues which are lower in the hierarchy

- they are generally costly to provide and/or maintain

- they are often unique to a region

- they have environmental, heritage, amenity or other special significance

- there is a low frequency of provision or natural occurrence.

Regional recreation venues frequently include golf courses, major sports grounds, major indoor aquatic leisure venues, libraries, galleries, performance centres, long distance trails, and various types of heritage and nature reserves e.g. forests, lakes, rivers, wetlands and waterfalls.

State recreation venues

State recreation venues have characteristics similar to regional venues but serve the whole state because their characteristics are generally considered to be even more marked or significant than

those of the regional venues. State level recreation venues generally occur in a particular part of the state because:

- a council, the government or some other body has determined that that is the best or politically most astute location

- that location has the largest population and the venue needs this and the wider markets it attracts to be viable

- the natural or built features and quality of the venue are of such a high standard that they are seen as the best in the state

- the type of venue is rare and one particular site is one of the few occurrences or the best of that type of resource in the state.

State level recreation venues include major galleries and theatres, museums, significant protected forests, sporting venues and heritage sites.

National and international recreation venues

National and international recreation venues have characteristics similar to state and regional venues but serve the whole country and often attract interstate and potentially, overseas visitors and or users. This is because they are unique or because their quality and other characteristics are generally considered to be more significant than those of state and regional venues.

National and international recreation venues include major sporting venues, theatres, man-made features such as Sydney Harbour Bridge and natural features such as harbours, lakes, waterfalls and forests.

Several important points should be noted in relation to hierarchies of recreation venues:

sites should be classified by both their existing and their intended position in the hierarchy, not by their present position alone. Recording the current category (if there is one) helps to identify any existing provision shortfalls or inequities. However, determining the intended hierarchical position provides the basis for changes in management, resourcing, use or other processes at venues, which presently do not match their intended position

it is not essential that each local area, council or region has a venue at each hierarchical category for each type of facility. However, a good range for each type at a range of levels means that there will be greater diversity and greater equity of opportunity across the community. The wider the mix, the greater the opportunities provided. Seeking to achieve

this diversity offers the planner the opportunity to be more creative and innovative

provision of a 'nested' hierarchy of recreation venues – where facilities at several different hierarchical levels are provided on the one site – warrants consideration. This is often an appropriate way of meeting a range of recreation needs, provided that local needs are not swamped by regional demands and users. This danger can be reduced by good design

a recreation venue should not be given a higher hierarchical position than is justified as a result of user pressure or the desire to be seen as having, for example, 'regional' facilities for a particular activity. This can lead to the demand for maintenance resources beyond those which are needed and beyond what can be justified or sustained

in keeping with 4, agencies which own and/or manage recreation venues should not allow users to determine where each venue fits into the hierarchy as this can lead to overdevelopment or inappropriate use and the misuse of resources. Adopting a hierarchical framework allows planning and management bodies to 'direct' or specify the outcomes they want to achieve for particular sites and for the region as a whole within the context of wider needs and issues, to develop a balanced diversity of opportunity types and to achieve a balance in the spatial distribution of different types of venues

designating where in a hierarchy each resource fits allows planners and managers to counter demands for action at venues which it is known, are not appropriate for development, and to encourage and support action at other more appropriate sites

by being clear as to the purpose of each recreation venue, a managing agency can more carefully 'target' how it allocates support resources and can more efficiently and effectively direct, control and schedule use. This delivers certainty to users and enhances the capacity to attract funding and support from external agencies

all recreation venues should be classified, not just those which are considered to be 'higher' order assets

if the recreation venues being included in a planning study are the responsibility of a number of different agencies, efforts should be made to have all parties agree to the hierarchical classification to be used. If the classification is not intended to be used by all agencies, efforts should be made to include it on all databases so that comparable data can be drawn from them and so that each agency understands the role designated for the various resources which are available

every effort must be made to avoid the influence of political decisions on provision or provision made as a result of pressure from narrow interest groups. Unfortunately, there

are numerous facilities around Australia which have come into being through the will and push of one or two people, through the decision of a particular political group or as the result of a particular financial commitment. These facilities are frequently not in the best location to ensure viability and only survive where there is a continuing political will and financial support which is often to the detriment of other more important priorities.

As with the classification of recreation venues by type, once the hierarchy has been tabulated and mapped, the existing provision of recreation assets can be described and evaluated in terms of:

how many venues there are of each hierarchical level and by type, and how the numbers compare

how the different hierarchies of each type of venue are distributed across the study area

what the possible implications of 1 – 2 might be to future needs, redevelopment and provision.

6.7   *Other recreation facility classifications*

The classification and hierarchy of recreation venues outlined above is only one of a wide range of classifications currently in use both across Australia and internationally. In some instances, alternate classifications can be just as useful or, if they are written into legislative planning documents, may need to be used. Several alternatives are reviewed below.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is a classification which was developed overseas during the 1970s and has been widely used in Australia, especially in the planning of recreation in wilderness and natural areas such as national parks[17]. Rather than being a classification of different types of recreation facilities, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum grew out of an initial desire from North American wilderness managers to protect the natural environment from development and focused on providing opportunities for a variety of positive, beneficial recreation experiences by identifying and planning for an array of different 'settings' or environments which have differing levels of management and of social interaction. The philosophical basis of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is that the wider the array of settings, management inputs and opportunities for social interaction, the greater the opportunity for people to meet their recreational needs and gain positive experiences.

The spectrum of settings defined by the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum ranges from 'primitive' to 'semi-primitive', 'semi-modern' and 'modern'. In the 'primitive' setting, natural conditions dominate such that there are no roads, huts, toilets, camps or trails. There are also low or no management inputs on-site, although there would be strong management controls over the numbers of users and

the activities pursued. Use is controlled so that there is low or no social contact. By comparison, the 'modern' setting consists of human-made, built facilities with strong on-site management inputs and high levels of social interaction with others.

As noted above, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum has been widely used in Australia and almost exclusively for the planning of natural areas. There has been little if any application to 'modern', urban settings. In applying the Spectrum, the land for which the plan is being prepared is divided into zones to create areas with different levels of access, isolation and servicing, the intent being to deliver a range of wilderness and semi-wilderness experiences. Detailed site and locality management plans are then prepared for each of the zones.

The value of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum lies in its focus on creating the conditions which generate recreation experiences and provide recreation benefits rather than just being a classification of different types of facilities. As such, it can be a useful tool in the planning and management of natural areas.[18]   One weakness with the classification process is that it assumes that different settings will deliver different types of experiences. While this is partially true, the experience which one person gains from a particular setting may be quite different to that of another person, simply because, for example, their different personal make-up, differences in their past experiences and education. As such, the allocation of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum categories to recreation resources should not be used in isolation and should be backed by information on the needs, interests and aspirations of the community.

Primary function, catchments, settings and settlements

Melbourne-based recreation planning company, @leisure, have developed an approach to the assessment and planning of recreation resources which combines elements of the classification and hierarchy outlined in Sections 6.5 and 6.6 and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum. This entails classifying open space and its facilities by identifying provision needs on the basis of, four characteristics. These are primary function, catchment, setting, and settlement type.[iii]

A comparison of the following list with Table 6.6 shows that the primary function category for a recreation venue as used by @leisure and the venue types in the Table (as detailed in Section 6.5) are very similar, albeit with a few variations. However, the philosophy behind the primary functions is somewhat different in that they aim to encapsulate the major benefits sought by people from open space i.e. child development, physical exercise, contact with nature, social engagement or belonging, as well as practical functions of spaces such as drainage and buffers. The primary function categories are:

- play

- social/family recreation

- community horticulture (community garden or farm)

- cemetery/memorial

[iii] The assistance of Sally Jeavons, Director of @leisure in reviewing and revising text in this section is gratefully appreciated.

- ornamental/botanic garden

- access way/trail

- sport

- flora/fauna conservation

- conservation of cultural heritage

- drainage

- visual amenity

- relaxation/contemplation/escape

- buffer e.g. around industry, or environmental hazard

- lookout/ridgeline

- water based recreation

- community centre/ forecourt

- wayside stop (generally in regional townships or along a highway).

In keeping with the methodology recommended in Section 6.5, @leisure recommends that recreation providers seek to provide a good mix of these different primary function categories. They also recommend that where numerous spaces in one area are found to be much the same, a conscious decision can be made to change the function of some so as to extend the range of opportunities available. Each type of space will have some essential characteristics. Some types, for example, are necessary in close proximity to a new residential area (e.g. social/family recreation), whilst others are not (e.g. cemetery or way side stop) and others will only be provided if the physical features are present (lookout/ ridgeline reserve). Also the typology acknowledges that some spaces are needed for non leisure purposes, such as drainage, power easements (even though they are used for leisure) and these may not necessarily serve the defined primary function. By determining what primary functions are needed in a new residential area and the physical, locality success criteria for each, it is possible to highlight where there are gaps in provision and where, as a result, a case can be put for far higher levels of provision. @leisure also identifies which of the categories can be funded from different sources such as local play facilities from developer contributions, district sports grounds from council resources and conservation and heritage, drainage reserves and water-based recreation from other agency programs, thereby assisting council in achieving a higher diversity of opportunities.

The concept of catchments used by @leisure is essentially the same concept as the hierarchies of provision recommended in 6.6. In fact, the categories recommended are very similar: local, township or district and regional. As recommended in 6.5 and 6.6, @leisure recommends that providers seek to offer a variety of primary function recreation resources at each catchment level.

Landscape setting types make up the third component of the @leisure categorisation. These reflect the experiential focus of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum or the 'form', rather than the function of the space. Common setting types used are:

- bushland/forest

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- ornamental or specimen plantings

- open grassy area

- native grassland/wetland

- lawn or managed sports turf

- open parkland

- specialist sports structures

- waterway corridor

- fore dune/beach

- rough natural area

- paved area

- tree plantation

- vegetable garden/pasture/agriculture.

These settings are used as a guide to different ways of enhancing the leisure experience and of achieving a greater diversity of opportunities offered to the community. For example, when recommending play venues, @leisure will recommend that different play venues be provided in different landscape setting types to strengthen the diversity of experiences offered. Different scales of play provision may also be offered at the different catchment levels to again ensure diversity of user experiences.

In their planning study reports, @leisure use the three-part classification outlined above as a basis for recommendations for the provision and upgrading of 'core service levels' at each catchment level. To illustrate, at the local level, @leisure may recommend a focus on social/family recreation, access way trails and play. These venues will be on sites which are relatively small but which have specified minimum sizes, and they will be provided in different types of settings. At the township or district level, the 'core service levels' may include some of the local facilities (although at a larger scale and with recommended support services which would not be provided at the local level) as well as sports grounds, water-based facilities and community horticulture facilities, again at specified service or provision levels (e.g. for sports, land sufficient to accommodate two sports grounds). These service provision levels are very similar to those detailed in Section 9 of this

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report.

The fourth element of @leisure's typology is the consideration of settlement type or scale. This refers to the nature of the residential area to be serviced. Settlement types are largely based on the size of private space and the density of urban settlement i.e. whether it is a rural area, a small village or hamlet, a small town or a dense metropolitan area. The rationale for this element is that the model for the provision of open space and venues needs to be different in each. In a rural hamlet, for example, venues would generally be clustered in one hub, rather than being dispersed as local open spaces in an urban area. Also, the range of functions and settings needed and provided in public space in a rural hamlet is likely to be less extensive than in an urban area, as more opportunities are likely to be available in private spaces and facilities – particularly where there are large private, farm areas and the more rural the context. This aspect of the typology embraces another principle of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.

The @leisure approach to the classification of recreation venues and their development brings together a number of useful elements and provides a strong foundation for decisions on future and additional provision. In particular, the experiential concepts embodied in the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum are brought into the process in a far more detailed way while the planning and future provision implications of the analysis are also highlighted.

6.8   Conclusions

Inventories of recreation assets and the various classifications of the venues are an invaluable planning tool. They provide an understanding of the mix of existing opportunities, the levels of use they can support and their distribution. They also provide a basis for decisions on changed or additional provision and for changes in the role the facilities and venues fulfil. By benchmarking the provision either against another provider or within the area being planned for, guidance is provided as to the extent of changes which might be needed.

It should be remembered that the findings of an inventory of provision must be assessed against the characteristics of the population to be served by the plan and against the needs of that population. It must be remembered that inventories can be a summary of inappropriate and outdated provision and not a guide to what the community likes to use. Even inappropriate recreation facilities will attract use if there are no alternatives. As such, while they constitute an important input to a recreation planning study, they should not be used in isolation from other planning tools, and especially, community consultations.

Finally, it warrants noting that creating an inventory of recreation opportunities does not create a recreation plan. Inventories are just one of the data sources or tools used in the preparation of a plan. They can be costly and very time consuming to prepare and planners must avoid spending too much time on them if the data which exists is poor or lacking. When preparing an inventory as part of a planning process, a useful question to ask of the inventory as a whole and of each inventory item being considered is 'how will this information help advance the planning process and outcomes?' If a clear answer is not forthcoming, review the need for the information or exclude the item: it can always be added later. More critical than having a rigorous complete inventory is a useful analysis of the implications of the information, as has been demonstrated in this section.

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7 Factors impacting on leisure interests and trends

7.1 Introduction

Many things impact on the recreation and leisure interests, activities and needs of a community. These need to be understood if the planning process is to lead to the most effective provision of recreation opportunities. In essence, there are four broad categories of factors, these being:

the environment and natural resources of the area being planned

the demographic characteristics of the society being planned for

social, community and economic trends in the community

the development of professional skills in the leisure and recreation industries.

Each of these influences is reviewed in the following paragraphs before some of the changes in recreation and leisure activity they have generated are reviewed.

In preparing a recreation plan, the planner must collect, summarise and evaluate the possible influences of each of these sets of factors on the demand for particular types of recreation. The planner should also use the information to make a preliminary assessment of issues such as the likely viability of any provision which is made, the scale of provision and the provision location. The analysis may also provide a valuable insight on issues such as funding, pricing, programming and management.

7.2 The environment

The natural environment provides a resource base or 'setting' for many recreation activities. Its influence on the activities which are pursued must not be under-estimated. Environmental conditions may suit one group of activities and not another and thus, recreational activities which might be considered appropriate for provision in one region may not be suitable in another. Conversely, an historic pattern of participation due to advantageous environment conditions may encourage provision levels well beyond what would otherwise occur. This in turn may mean that other, wider provision is not needed.

Whether a region has rugged or flat terrain; a hot or cold climate or a wet or dry climate has an impact on the types of activities which can and cannot be pursued. It also impacts on the types of facilities, programs and services which might need to be provided.

There are many recreation activities which require particular combinations of natural features if they

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are to be pursued: some of these include sailing (water bodies and wind), rock-climbing (rugged vertical relief), snow skiing (very cold weather and variable terrain), surfing (waves), bird observing/nature study, fishing and hang gliding.

There are still other activities which have grown and prospered because technology has been developed to overcome environmental adversity and thereby given those pursuits an advantage: competitive swimming - which at the elite level now almost always occurs indoors; musical performances and ice skating are but three examples.

It is also useful to give consideration to the barriers or opportunities posed by environmental conditions as part of the recreation planning process. The following checklist should be reviewed at the macro scale to ensure important issues or influences are not overlooked:

- terrain/relief

- lakes, rivers and storage/flows

- winter/summer weather

- wind

- precipitation form (e.g. rain, snow), amount and seasonality

- hours of daylight and seasonal variations

- location: whether the study area is far from other providers/resources.

Other factors related to the natural environment may also warrant consideration. For instance, in some rural areas, certain times of the year are devoted to critical stages of the farming cycle – such as shearing, fruit picking, tree and vine pruning - so that participation in either recreational activities or recreation planning studies is not possible.

At the micro level a further set of environmental conditions may warrant consideration particularly if the planning is being undertaken at a level relating to the development of individual facilities and programs. Here, the issues to be considered might include:

- geology and geological stability

- soil types and depth

- slope and direction of slope (aspect)

- flora and fauna and ecological significance

- drainage and propensity to flooding.

Also at the micro planning level, consideration might need to be given to a range of other issues including the size of the site(s) being assessed (and the capacity to acquire additional land if needed); adjoining land uses (and issues such as traffic, noise, lighting at night); past land uses and land remediation; and the availability of utilities and services such as gas, water, power, and public transport. On occasions, difficulties with some of these elements have led to the abandonment of 'preferred' sites and to a renewed program of research and analysis.

In preparing a recreation plan, research may need to collect a range of external materials relating to

environmental conditions in the area being planned. A separate paper or report section should be written summarising what are considered to be the relevant environmental issues and evaluating their implications to recreation provision needs and opportunities. Some elements of this assessment may usefully be cross checked through the review of existing recreation opportunities.

7.3 *The demographic characteristics of the community*

The history of people and their cultural origins, religion, value systems and traditions is critical to understanding the social context in which recreation activities are pursued. For example, one only has to look at an Australian community and compare it with a Japanese, Italian, Indian or Indonesian community to understand the different traditions and value systems which exist and the different recreation and leisure provision and needs. Similarly, a review of the changes in the 'Australian' community, which immigrants from a wide range of overseas countries have engendered, shows a wide array of impacts.

Whether a community is large or small; homogeneous or culturally diverse; well educated and fully employed, or whether residents live in rental, apartment or stand-alone housing has a significant impact on the nature and scope of the recreation interests the community will have.

The key characteristics which need to be considered in these contexts are:

- population size

- population distribution

- population age distribution

- income

- employment

- cultural mix

- type of housing

- household make-up

- education

- car ownership.

Despite the obvious importance of these factors, care must be taken in evaluating their impact. They must only be viewed as influences on recreational interests and behaviour, not as determinants. At best, the findings of an analysis of the demographics of a community can only be used as a guide to a range of possible interests and needs and therefore, to possible provision options – not as the basis for firm decisions for or against a particular initiative.

The following table highlights some of the key demographic and cultural factors which influence recreation interests and behaviour. These should be reviewed from the latest data available.

Wherever possible - depending on time, budget and data availability - an effort should be made to review how the characteristics have changed over the previous one or two inter- censal periods (i.e. over the past 5-10 years). This provides a more accurate picture of the population as broad directions of change can be identified rather than looking at the community at just one point in time.

Characteristic	Potential impacts
Population size	The larger a population, the greater the capacity to support activities. In small and declining communities, there may be insufficient residents to support activities which need a significant number of participants to be viable.
Population distribution	Generally, the higher the population density, the greater the capacity to support recreation opportunities. If people have to travel significant distances to reach the facilities they want to use they will travel less often and transfer their interest to other activities. Rural communities are often significantly disadvantaged by travel distances and costs and have been identified as pockets of rural disadvantage. As such they may warrant provision beyond what is normally expected and for that provision to be subsidised. Otherwise, these residents may have access to few or no recreation opportunities.
Population age distribution	Young populations seek active, team pursuits; older residents seek more cultural pursuits and active but non-competitive pursuits. In communities which are 'young' in that they have the majority of the population in age categories below 50 years, the mix of recreation provision which is needed is likely to be very different to that of ageing communities.
Income	The wealthier an individual, a household, a community, or a nation the greater the range of recreation opportunities that can be afforded. However, income in most communities is spread across a range of categories and special consideration may need to be given to those groups in the lower income categories - especially as low income is often associated with other indicators of disadvantage including lone person and single parent households, lower education levels, lower access to private transport and lower home ownership levels.
Employment	The mix of occupations in a community can be an important influence on its recreation interests and activities. In general, people in the professional and managerial job categories tend to pursue more intellectual, skilled and small group activities while those in more blue-collar occupations spend more time on large group and team activities.
Cultural mix	The cultural mix of a community has a great influence on the types of

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	activities which are enjoyed and on what is and is not permitted to be pursued by different groups in the community. The influx of non-Anglo-Saxon communities to Australia over the past 30 years has brought a wide diversity of new interests and opportunities to the country. Where a community has a wide mix of often small, cultural minorities, special support services and program provision may be needed to ensure equity of opportunity. In traditional societies, many social and recreational activities are used to help preserve cultural and value systems. In western societies, there is far greater leeway and far greater opportunities for individual expression. Other cultural characteristics of a community which should be considered include the: • countries of origin of non-Australian born residents • length of residence in Australia • languages spoken at home.
Types of housing	Stand-alone housing generally provides more space within and outside the home whereas people living in flats and apartments are more constrained. As a result, residents in their own homes can acquire and use a wide range of leisure opportunities at home. Residents in flats and apartments must frequently rely on public and commercial recreation opportunities.
Household make-up	The household make-up of a community has an important influence on recreation interests and needs. Communities with substantial numbers of families with young children or teenagers will have different needs to those where the families have grown up and left home. Increasingly, Australian families have a mixed make-up with members coming from as many as three or four originally different families. This too impacts on recreation interests, needs and opportunities.
Education	The higher the education levels in a community the greater the range of activities pursued, the greater the levels of disposable income allocated to recreation and the higher the value of the items and experiences purchased.
Car ownership	While not a true 'demographic' feature, car ownership provides a good understanding of the ability of the community to access recreation

	opportunities. This is because even where public transport is good, the majority of the community travel by car to many recreation venues because so much recreation occurs outside the times when public transport services are at their most effective. Communities with high car ownership levels reflect a need to rely on personal transport which in turn highlights the barriers to access faced by those without cars, for example, older residents, people with disabilities, low income earners, people below the legal driving age and so forth.

Table 7.1: Key demographic and cultural factors which influence recreation interests and behaviour

In reviewing the demographic and cultural attributes of the community in regards to recreation planning, it must be recognised that while a community might be dominated by cultural, income or educational categories, there will always be significant numbers in other categories. Hence, conclusions as to what the predominant target groups for provision might be must be tempered by an acknowledgement of the needs of other groups. In many instances, in fact, it is the minority groups in a community which are most in need of support as they have fewer resources to 'fight' with, a lesser capacity to join sporting and recreation groups and less flexibility to choose. Thus the implications of the demographic characteristics may be read in several ways. As noted previously, these differing interpretations may need to be presented so they can be debated and the most appropriate course or courses of action determined.

Demographic data sources

Data on the demographics of a community can be obtained from a number of sources, the most important of which is the five yearly Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing*. The latest national Census was undertaken in 2006 and all of the data collected is now available.

Australian Census data goes back as far as the early twentieth century so long term analyses of change can be undertaken. Over recent years, the ABS has prepared a number of reports which detail how various demographic parameters have changed over two or three sequential inter-census periods.

The Census and other ABS publications provide a wealth of detail on the Australian population, including each of the items listed in the table above. Much of this data can now be downloaded free in both table and mapped form and at geographic levels ranging from the whole nation to individual states, council areas, suburbs and collection districts, the latter often with no more than several hundred residents.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data can be accessed at:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/Home/Home?OpenDocument>

The ABS also provides a range of client services and can prepare data specifically for particular projects if there is a need.

In addition to the ABS data sources, a variety of state government agencies prepare demographic analyses for all or particular parts of the state for which they are responsible or on particular topics of concern. These often use Census data which has been reprocessed in light of greater local knowledge or which has been updated through specially-commissioned surveys.

A number of commercial firms now prepare detailed data analyses for local government authorities in a user-friendly format. Pull down windows, maps, projections of demographic change and other relevant information is now an integral part of many council websites.

Further data sources relating to the demographics of a community include regional economic development studies and plans (commissioned by either state or local government agencies) and university research projects.

Occasionally there may be no data for an area being planned or that what does exist is grossly out of date. This can be the case in new residential subdivisions or in urban renewal areas which have been developed after the previous Census. In these circumstances, it may be necessary to forego the analysis; to liaise with the developers as a means of gleaning information about the demographics of the residents, or to conduct a full or sample household survey to collect the data.

In undertaking a demographic review, a recreation planner should summarise the key features of the community as indicated by the data and draw some initial conclusions as to the possible provision implications.

7.4 *Socio-economic change and trends*

Modern, western society has undergone huge changes over the past 50 years. In fact, change over that period has almost certainly been greater than in the previous 500 or 1 000 years. As a result, the influences and needs of the past have often changed. Recreation planners need to be aware of these trends and any possible implications to future needs and provision.

Identifying wider trends which affect leisure participation and recreation participation itself can also be a useful way of introducing new ideas to a community which is reluctant to change and as a way of assuring communities that others have been through change and benefited from it.

Some of the key changes which have impacted on recreation opportunities and participation are:

- burgeoning economic development and enhanced personal and national affluence (although there are pockets of depression)

- population growth and in many parts of the country, an ageing population

- the emergence of a multi-cultural society with literally millions of Australians now having non-Anglo Saxon and non-English speaking backgrounds

- the growth of commercial recreation provision across all forms of activity and interest

- the relaxation of traditional social and cultural taboos which have allowed people to participate in new recreation activities and at times which were previously not permitted

- changing work, social and family structures: these have entailed longer work hours, extensive shift working, the breakdown of the weekday/weekend dichotomy, and families made up of members from a number of marriages, extended families and the like

- technology and the creation of new, different, more accessible and more affordable leisure opportunities

- the global accessibility of technology and information. Modern travel and technology mean that new overseas ideas and activities quickly become available in Australia

- a greater focus on equity and access for all, including federal legislation to protect the rights of disabled groups

- the expansion of education, the consequent growth in incomes and the greater awareness of and capacity to acquire recreation opportunities

- growing population concentrations and higher residential densities

- the recognition of the links between recreational activity and health and well-being.

While the majority of these changes have been positive in their impacts, changing work structures have dramatically impacted on volunteering and club activities. Further, significant pockets of disadvantage have emerged, particularly amongst newly-arrived immigrant groups, the aged, and residents in more remote rural communities which are progressively losing population and suffering the impacts of continuing drought.

The broad socio-economic changes outlined above need to be reviewed and, as deemed appropriate, added to in any recreation planning study. The possible implications to recreation provision, programming and management in the planning area should also be identified and discussed. Where there is uncertainty regarding the nature, extent and impacts of the changes, the listing can be used as an input to the consultations processes and participants can be asked which of the changes they have identified locally, how important they have been, what their impacts have been on recreation opportunities and what responses may be needed to ensure that the outcomes of the changes are beneficial rather than detrimental to the community.

7.5 *The changing leisure and recreation professions*

An important element which has impacted on leisure and recreation provision (and hence, on participation) over the past 35 years has been the emergence of a strong body of professional recreation planners, teachers, and researchers.

Thirty-five years ago there were no state or federal government departments or agencies with a direct responsibility for recreation planning and provision; there were no training courses for recreation, leisure and tourism professionals; there were no recreation officers or recreation planners in local councils, and no recreation planning; there was no data collection programs such as those now regularly undertaken by the ABS or the Australian Sports Commission, and needs assessment or other research was not being carried out.

Major initiatives occurred in all these areas from the early 1970s with Australia now having a highly educated group of recreation, leisure, cultural and tourism professionals working at all levels of government; a number of strong teaching and research institutes, and a detailed knowledge of the leisure influences, interests, and activities of Australians. There has also been extensive research into the impact of recreation on the environment; how to effectively plan to meet the recreational needs and interests of the community and of particular sub-groups within it, and into the economic, health and social benefits of recreational participation.

Not surprisingly, these professional changes have had a far reaching impact on the nature and quality of the recreation facilities, programs and services provided in the community and on the funding of provision. These changes have greatly enhanced the quality and diversity of the opportunities which are available.

7.6 *Current trends in recreation participation*

Not surprisingly, the range of issues, characteristics and changes outlined above have had extensive

outcomes in terms of recreational interests and activities.

The following text is taken from a recent report prepared as part of a strategic plan for the future development of aquatic recreation facilities in the Shire of Yarra Ranges in Victoria. The text lists an array of the impacts of socio-economic changes which have been identified in Victoria. It is then followed by a number of general leisure provision trends and a group of more specific aquatic leisure provision trends.

The impact of broad social trends

The broad social, economic and attitudinal changes occurring in society have led to the following changes in community leisure behaviour:

- a trend toward participation in non-competitive and passive activities rather than traditional formal sports

- a search for more flexibility and diversity in leisure pursuits rather than a commitment to a small number of activities

- participation in activities which range from increasingly elite levels of participation to casual and modified-rules participation in many activities

- dramatic falls in a number of traditional team and small group sports – including tennis and lawn bowls - with the marked exceptions of several sports including junior soccer and junior Australian Rules Football

- significant increases in non-competitive but active pursuits such as cycling, walking, travel and swimming across all age groups

- greater support for and more involvement in informal, community-focused activities including community days, carnivals, festivals, music concerts and markets

- participation in recreation activities across a wider period of the day and week with a major move to week day evening sports participation and weekend involvement with non-sporting pursuits and spectating

- continuing growth in home-based leisure entertainment

- the growth of more personalised leisure venues and services, as evidenced by 'boutique' health and fitness centres, the use of personal trainers, fitness videos/books/programs and home gyms

- a significant growth in concern for the protection and well-being of the natural environment from both a recreational and political perspective

- the use of natural and wilderness areas for a wide diversity of often conflicting uses. These include conservation and nature studies, educational activities, bushwalking, skiing, four wheel driving, abseiling, rock climbing and bouldering, hang gliding, caving, canoeing/rafting, and BASE jumping

- acquisition and use of a wide range of recreational equipment. This ranges from computers and video/DVD equipment to SCUBA gear, boats, hang gliders and aircraft, off road vehicles, metal detectors etc

- provision and use of a wide diversity of culturally and socially-focused recreation opportunities including restaurants, bookshops, amusement parlours, music outlets (recorded and live), hotels, theatres and galleries, and shopping centres

- the increasing demand for the management of natural resources on a sustainable basis

- the emergence of risk management and public liability issues as major concerns for recreation providers

- a growing desire for families to share recreational activities or to pursue related activities at one venue rather than pursuing a wide range of different activities at different venues. This often reflects changing work, leisure and family arrangements.

A number of the above changes have implications for any proposed new or replacement aquatic leisure facilities in the Shire of Yarra Ranges. In particular, the trends and changes suggest that any new or replacement aquatic facility should:

- add to the diversity of recreation opportunities available to the community. In other words, replacing like with like will be insufficient if changing community needs are to be met effectively

- be of a high standard: this includes not only the facilities, but also the management, programs and services which are provided. Increased attention may need to be given to targeted, personalised service. In particular, there will be an increasing need for programs and facilities which will specifically cater for the aging Shire population

- develop a focus on informal and formal recreation programming rather than on facilities management alone. Programs should be suitable and attractive to a wide range of ages, offer interesting user experiences and deliver long term personal and community outcomes

- have a strong family focus

- focus on the integrated provision of opportunities to optimise family and social outcomes and investment returns

- use the new provision as both a destination in its own right but also a base for wider recreation programs, including those provided by others

- be programmed for different types of users and uses at differing times of the day and week.

In preparing the recommendations for the present report, the broad leisure trends reviewed above and appropriate responses to them have been taken into consideration to determine what facilities should be provided. It will also be essential that the promotion of any new or replacement facilities take these issues into consideration.

Some key aquatic trends

In addition to the broad recreation trends outlined above, a number of specific trends have emerged in the field of aquatics provision over recent years. These are particularly relevant to the present study. Key amongst the aquatic provision trends are:

the growing recognition of the strong links between aquatics and community and personal health. This has led to a growing focus on healthy living and well-being programs and sports injury and special needs opportunities which ensure that aquatic leisure facilities are

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accessible to all residents regardless of their skills or physical abilities. This will be particularly important in the shire given the ageing of the community which has programming and services timetabling and design implications e.g. scheduling of special use times, provision of ramp, step and hoist access and provision of learn to swim lessons for young children

a significant diversification in the mix of aquatic facilities and an increase in the number of different pools provided at aquatic centres in response to different market needs. For instance, there has been an increase in specialist pools for learning to swim, water safety for children, rehabilitation and therapy, self-programmed health activities, school programs, squads, youth activities and unstructured family activities. This has yet to occur in any of the aquatic venues in the Shire and helps to explain the generally poor attendance rates. The provision of such a mix of opportunities means that facilities which can be used all year round must be accessible to the community

the provision of support facilities and services for parents and families. All recently built aquatic complexes are now providing child care facilities and family/disabled change rooms with these increasingly being seen as mandatory in most states

a growing percentage of the population is pursuing swimming as a recreation activity and there are an increasing number of participants of all ages. This reflects the aquatics-health link; the greater availability of improved, heated and all-year indoor facilities; the continuing position of swimming as a school curriculum activity, and the continuing international successes of Australian swimmers

in response to the aquatic trends outlined above, there has been a significant increase in the number of indoor aquatic venues throughout Australia over the past two decades, resulting in the community having a greater choice and awareness of standards and services. Venues which do not reflect these improvements will not attract the markets they need to be viable. This is only too evident in the shire: the poorest performing venues have changed little over the years and are unable to attract or meet the needs of large sections of the community

the 'packaging' of programs and services to make pools attractive to a range of groups in the community. These groups include in particular, public and private health providers, seniors in the community, schools and swimming clubs. There is little evidence of this occurring in the Shire

concerns over skin cancer have led to indoor pools being favoured over and/or in addition to outdoor facilities

virtually no pool-only developments have occurred in the past two decades due to their assessed poor operational viability. Many pool-only venues which were built in the past have progressively had a mix of other facilities added to them to strengthen their performance and market capacity. Unfortunately, this has only occurred at several of the Shire's nine venues and even that provision is either incomplete or has not been kept up-to-date. New aquatic facilities are now almost universally provided in association with a widening range of other dry sporting, health (physiotherapy, massage, and dieticians), fitness, quality food services and social facilities. This co-location reflects several factors:

c)   the user benefits gained from co-use programming

d)   wider client use of additional services and facilities

e)   major capital cost savings in the shared provision of toilet, change, cafe/food, parking and other support services

f) the capacity to cross-subsidise costly aquatic programs with other more lucrative dry health, fitness and social uses.

There has been little action on the co-location of facilities, programs or services at Shire venues:

few new 50 metre pools, whether indoor or outdoor, have been built outside the metropolitan areas or major regional centres in Australia in the past 15 years except where they will support state, national or international competitions and carnivals. This is due to capital and operational costs, lower use flexibility and the fact that where 50 metre pools are provided, other pools still need to be provided to ensure that community needs are effectively met

Further to the above, many of Australia's 50 metre pools were built following the country's success at the Melbourne Olympics of 1956. Since then, the international aquatics federation, FINA, has instituted 25 metre 'short course' regulations and world championships and the need for 50 metre pools has become far less important. Thus, unless regional competition needs are to be met, 50 metre pools are no longer required at anything less than the regional level. It is probable that the Shire is paying for the retention of too many 50 metre pools

Over recent years, a number of more modern facilities have been developed as indoor and outdoor venues. This has taken two main forms: first, provision of both indoor and outdoor pools (or water features rather than pools) in order to meet the assessed mix of community needs and second, through the construction of pools which can be accessed in summer and enclosed in winter (as at Inverell, NSW)

The provision of indoor/outdoor venues through the use of removable fabric enclosures has generally been a failure. This is because of the cost and difficulty of removing the covers, the ease with which covers are damaged, and because of the generally poor use conditions under the enclosure (noise, humidity, temperatures). This is only too evident at council's Kilsyth venue

at an increasing number of aquatic centres, indoor and outdoor non-pool aquatic areas are being developed as toddler water play areas. These provide, for example, matting-based water play areas and user-operated sprays and sprinklers set on what is essentially a large shower base. This option warrants exploration in the shire

there is an increasing provision of diverse non-aquatic areas. Indoor and outdoor venues are providing beach volleyball, picnic lawn areas, dry play facilities and multi-purpose rooms for teaching, group change and indoor activities in poorer weather. The latter spaces are also used for meetings, art shows, workshops, occasional care etc and are supported by existing amenities and services. This form of provision is lacking in the Shire

because of the increased 'supply' of aquatic leisure venues in metropolitan areas, more people 'shop around' to try out different venues (especially with children, friends) while others seek a venue which best fits their specific aquatic and other needs (e.g. health). Research undertaken on behalf of Sport and Recreation Victoria during the 1970s, 80s and 90s found that the proportion of users who visited only one centre dropped from 97 per cent to around 85 per cent as a result of this changed behaviour. Other research has shown that alternately, users will select one venue as a 'home' base and then make use of numerous other venues for more specialist services. Thus, only quality and different opportunities and quality staff will attract and retain a growing proportion of users. There is little variety of opportunity at the shire's aquatic venues. As a consequence, there is nothing to encourage the community to visit alternate venues and thereby increase use rates

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there is now a major growth in specialist 'boutique' health and fitness centres. These are often no larger than a single shop, have restricted memberships and offer totally personalised service. No provision of this form is evident at shire aquatic venues

aquatics venues are increasingly being designed with the capacity to allow staged additions which can accommodate emerging and changing needs in the community. The industry has evolved so rapidly that venues which were considered to be industry leaders 10 years ago are now seen as outdated. Unless changes can be made and new opportunities added, they will remain that way

despite the high expectations of the 1990s, there is less than a handful of pools which have been built and operated under BOO (where a commercial developer builds, owns and operates a venue with some form of initial council input) or BOOT (build, own, operate and eventually, transfer ownership to council) schemes. A number of developments which were initiated in this way have reverted to council operation.

It is certain that other influences on recreation behaviour and other trends in the activities of the community will emerge over time. Several which are likely to impact on behaviour over the coming years are climate change, the rising cost of fossil fuels, such as oil, and actions to curtail the impacts of recreational activities which are personally, socially or environmentally destructive.

In preparing recreation plans, the planners should give consideration to the changes which may have occurred in the planning area and to the implications to future needs and provision. As with demographic characteristics and changes, the lists of possible implications may warrant testing through the consultations stage of the planning process so that more local implications can be identified.

7.7   Conclusions

As noted in the introduction to this section, there are many factors which impact on the recreation interests, activities and needs of the community. These should be assessed to determine whether they are important to the area for which planning is being carried out and if so, what the implications to future needs and future provision may be.

Care must be taken in using general information such as that from the Yarra Ranges Shire cited above as it may not be directly applicable to the particular planning study. This concern can be

overcome by using the material as part of an 'issues paper' prepared as part of the reporting process, and by presenting it in councillor and community forums for review, comment and revision in the light of local circumstances. Planners should not assume that the types of consequences outlined above will naturally happen: at best, the listing is a guide to possible outcomes.

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8   Assessing community recreation activities and needs

8.1   *Introduction*

A program of consultations is an important part of any planning process. It achieves a number of things, not the least of which is the democratic involvement of the community. Equally important is the fact that consultations allow the views of people with a wide range of experiences, opinions and needs to be tapped into while also permitting contentious issues and possible planning solutions to be aired and tested.

This section provides details on the range of consultative approaches frequently used in the course of recreation planning studies.

8.2   *Why we consult*

A consultations program provides the opportunity for a range of people and organisations to put forth their views in relation to the issues covered by the planning process. It allows issues to be viewed from a range of perspectives, to be debated, evaluated and viewed from the perspective of different individuals and interest groups.

Perhaps more importantly, a consultative program enhances and extends democratic principles in the community. It gives people the opportunity to have a say on issues which are likely to affect them and which are likely to affect their quality of life in one way or another. From this perspective, the role of the recreation planner is really one of collecting and evaluating the ideas and interests of the community in light of a wide range of other factors and processes, not of deciding what is good for the community.

Many years ago, a North American sociologist, Sherry Arnstein[19], wrote a key paper outlining what she saw as the different types of consultation. Arguing from the premise that the form of community participation in the planning process is a measure of "citizen power", Arnstein claimed that citizen participation allowed the "have-nots… to be deliberately included in the future" and that participation was the means by which the under-privileged could "induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society".

Arnstein identified what she saw as eight hierarchical types of community participation, each of which gave more power and authority to the participants. These were[19]:

- **manipulation** - wherein community involvement and action are defused and diffused

- **therapy** - where professionals used the consultative processes to 'massage' the community while perpetuating their own views and objectives

- **informing** - wherein the community is permitted to comment on key issues but not determine what the issues are

- **consultation** - wherein community views and issues are collected and assessed but where the community has no decision-making powers in relation to those views and issues

- **placation** - where community members are appointed to decision-making groups but are "guided" as to the decisions which are made

- **partnerships** - wherein citizens have negotiating and decision-making powers equal to those of professional officers

- **delegated power** - where citizens achieve dominance and are able to initiate, develop and vote for the implementation of action plans

- **citizen control** - wherein there is community management of policy-making, planning and implementation without the influences of intermediaries.

Arnstein's hierarchy[19] can act as a guide to the purpose of a consultations program and the extent to which power is given to the community in the course of a recreation planning program. Clearly, the further up the 'ladder' one goes, the greater the level of community participation and the greater authority given to the community.

It warrants noting that while Arnstein[19] saw the process of citizen participation as a means of allowing the 'have-nots' and the 'under-privileged' to have a strong influence on the planning outcomes, that right should also be given to all other individuals and groups in the community.

Further, care must be taken to avoid 'consultation for consultation's sake' (or power for power's sake) and there is no guarantee that 'citizen power' will be as informed or as skilled as that of a professional planner.

Whatever view one takes on Arnstein's 'ladder'[19], a high level of continuing community involvement throughout the planning process – rather than just consultation with the community - will help ensure the quality of the planning outcomes. This is because:

- the needs and interests of the community can be better heard and assessed

- new and different provision ideas can be tested with the community

- there will be greater opportunities to evaluate alternate strategies with the community, to educate the community and to be educated by it

- where there are strong differences of opinion, a consensus can be sought - a process which helps to assure elected members that the process will not lead to conflict and dispute.

8.3 *Who should be consulted*

The number and range of people to be consulted will vary depending on the nature and scope of the project. For a recreation plan covering part or all of a council, the following should be considered:

- present and past elected members at the state and local government level

- council officers and former officers who have experience relevant to the study

- representatives from adjoining councils if these areas are likely to be impacted on by the outcomes or if their residents may be served by new or additional provision

- representatives from relevant state government agencies

- providers and/or managers of facilities, programs and services which are relevant to the study. These may be private operators, council employees, contractors to council, state government or public agency employees

- professional service providers e.g. from health, police, youth, aged, cultural groups, and educators

- professional associations

- sporting and recreation group executives and members

- users of any specific facilities being planned or upgraded or users of other nearby or competitor facilities

- university and other researchers

- general members of the community, with the area from which they are drawn being determined by the scope of the study.

8.4 *How to consult*

There are many different consultative strategies which can be used in the course of preparing a recreation plan. In general, the more diverse the methods, the greater the opportunity for people to make an input as different approaches suit different types of people. Some for instance, would not stand up in a public meeting and express their views, but they could provide an invaluable input through a personal interview or by walking through a piece of parkland which is being studied as part of the planning project.

In general, the more personal the consultative method, the more useful the information collected as people are able to relax, to consider alternate ideas, and to ask questions about the study.

Wherever possible, the consultative processes should be used as much to exchange views and ideas and to educate those being interviewed about the study and its processes as to collect information. Achieving this balance almost invariably ensures that better information is collected. It also builds trust and confidence on the part of those being interviewed.

In all consultative methods, an explanation of the study process and objectives and of the consultative purpose and processes should be provided. The focus of the consultations should be on encouraging participants to outline their views. The interviewer should collect these views largely without comment unless they are contrary to fact. He/she should refrain from expressing their own opinions or raising comparable situations as this uses up time, can sidetrack the discussion and may be off putting to the interviewee if contrary views are expressed.
The consultative methods which warrant consideration are listed below with explanatory notes. Readers are also referred to Veal (1997)[20] for a fuller discussion on consultative methods.

Personal interviews

- held early in planning process

- participants invited by phone call, personal contact

- allow collection of confidential and personal information which might not be disclosed during other forms of consultation

- indicates a sign of respect for those being interviewed

- information is collected by note taking or use of a tape recorder

- held at a central office or at place suitable to interviewee. The former is far more efficient as hourly interviews can be set up (allowing up to eight per day). For example, interviewing people in the mayor's office conveys a sense of importance. By comparison, travelling from place to place can more than halve the number of interviews completed in a day

- depending on the issues to be covered and the age and gender of interviewees, it may be appropriate for a male to interview males and a female to interview females or for interviews to be carried out by a mixed-sex couple

- held during day or evening depending on the work situation of the interviewees.

Small group discussions

- allow a number of people/groups with like interests and backgrounds to be interviewed at the onetime e.g. youth, teachers, program providers for special interest groups, commercial leisure providers, leisure services staff, council officers

- saves time when compared with personal interviews

- held at a central point e.g. council offices, public hall, club rooms, school, depending on the nature of the groups

- held during day or evening depending on the nature of the groups

- participants invited by letter, phone call, advertisement

- allows participants to hear the views and ideas of others and respond to them

- information is collected by note taking, tape recorder or recording on display sheets so issues raised can be seen by all and returned to if necessary/desired

- generally require one and a half to two hours

- names and contact details of interviewees can be collected to allow invitation to be involved in later study stages.

Structured workshops

- similar to small group workshops but use a list of specific questions or may have work sessions where participants complete surveys, mark issues on maps etc

- can take a variety of forms from open public gatherings through to search conferences and charrettes where only specifically-selected members of the community (and others) participate.

On-site meetings

- participants invited by letterboxing, newsletters, phone, letters to clubs or press releases

- participants invited to meet at key venues/study sites to walk the site and outline their needs and concerns

- meetings held after work or on weekends

- names and contact details of attendees can be collected to allow invitation to be involved in later study stages.

Open public meetings

- participants invited by letterboxing, newsletters, phone, letters to clubs, press releases and press advertisements

- meetings can be held separately at several locations across a large planning area (to enhance equity of access), or by recreation activity types, age groups, or special needs/interest groups

- information is collected by note taking, tape recorder or recording on display sheets so issues raised can be seen by all and returned to if necessary/desired

- generally require one and a half to two hours and can be held at different times of the day depending on those involved.

Street interviews

- interviewers contact respondents in shopping centres or via an information stall/shop display

- interviews held during week days and weekends.

Club and group surveys

- used to survey large numbers of club and groups when data on memberships, use trends, assets and needs are required

- use agency or researched lists of clubs and groups to identify recipients

- use postal distribution with free post return envelope provided.

User surveys

- conducted on-site at various times of the day which reflect use patterns

- allow collection of the immediate experiences of users

- can use a structured set of questions or can be open and general in nature.

Calls for submissions

- submissions from the community can be invited via newsletters (club, schools, council), web sites, press releases /advertisements and by letterboxing.

Resident surveys

- use posted, telephone or door knock processes to contact residents.

Web sites /surveys

- allow residents to access surveys and other information from home/work and express their views.

Community panels

- community panels have been established by a number of councils over recent years. They consist of randomly-invited residents, or residents who have put their names forward following a call for volunteers from council. These residents are used as a sounding board on issues of concern in the community. As many as 200 people might be included on a panel with this group being consulted either at meetings, by post or increasingly more commonly, by email.

Some comment is warranted on various aspects of community consultations:

- the validity of the information collected must be subjected to close scrutiny. Care must be taken to not allow consultations to be 'hijacked' by pressure groups or individuals intent on pushing a particular set of needs and priorities

- residents often express views and opinions through the consultative process which are consciously or unconsciously incorrect. While incorrect views may be useful in assessing concerns and perceptions amongst the community, care must be taken to ensure that inaccuracies are corrected or as appropriate, rejected

- only personal household and personal on-site surveys can be managed to ensure a valid and random sample of community opinion and only home-based surveys can be assured of allowing all residents to have a say. All other methods will automatically exclude some members of the community. This can be because they do not use the venues where user surveys are conducted; they do not go shopping; they do not have access to the internet; they do not have telephones; they cannot read or write, or they cannot read or write English. These problems can be addressed in home-based surveys. In all other consultative situations, residents have the opportunity to 'self-select' in terms of whether they will or will not take part and as a result, randomness is lost. The views which are then collected subsequently only reflect the opinion of those who have expressed them. Experience shows that these responses reflect the opinions of people who are either strongly opposed to, or in support of, one or more particular initiatives. Web-based surveys can be subject to particularly high levels of bias as one person can complete the survey many times. As a result, all the opinions expressed should be subjected to close scrutiny and verification from other sources

- it is not necessary to survey the whole population or even five or ten per cent of it when conducting a community survey. A sample of as few as 350 residents, if rigorously selected to ensure randomness, will achieve results which are accurate to within plus or minus four to five of what would have been achieved had everyone been surveyed

- postal surveys of both clubs and residents have very high non-response rates (i.e. up to 90 per cent even from sporting and recreation groups in the community). As a result, they should really only be used when no alternate method of collecting data is available. Reminder letters/calls/emails should be used to help increase response rates

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- the cost of the different consultative methods varies substantially. Street stalls and public meetings may only take several hours to plan, although identifying what information to collect will take longer. By comparison, the use of club, resident and other forms of surveys may require days of work to design and test, and more days and numerous staff to implement, code and collate the results. Depending on the nature of the study area, the populations being surveyed and the nature of the questions, random community surveys can cost from $10 000 to $25 000 for samples of 400-600 residents. Increasingly, translation services may need to be used in communities where there are significant numbers of residents who do not speak or read English. This can increase the cost per completed survey to as much as $35.00

- the mix and complexity of the issues covered can be far greater with home-based surveys than with other consultative methods. This is because respondents can be given a number of days to complete their responses. People surveyed by telephone or when using a recreation venue react negatively to having their activities interrupted by long surveys and interviews

- few of the consultative approaches have any value in collecting the views of young children. Strategies for conducting informal discussions, storytelling and drawing activities with children through schools, clubs etc can be very effective. On-site observation and informal discussions can also be productive although issues of child security must be addressed (see below)

- anyone planning to undertake on-site interviews should inform the local police station as to where, when and who will be involved and should carry copies of a letter of introduction to give to interviewees. Preferably, interviews should be conducted on a same-sex basis

- all the methods should be used in a two-way sharing fashion so as to provide information to the public about both the planning process and wider activities and initiatives of the planning agency. They should also be used to collect contact details from community members who may wish to be involved in other stages of the planning process.

8.5 *The information collected through consultations*

A wide range of information can be collected and tested through a consultations program and what is collected must be determined by the needs of the study. There is always a tendency to collect too much information; care must be taken to ensure that effort is not wasted collecting information which might be 'interesting' but which makes little or no contribution to answering the key questions of the study.

The most common information collected through personal surveys is:

- demographic and related data (age, gender, socio-economic measures, place and length of residence, car ownership, home style). This allows data cross-tabulations and the identification of the views and preferences of different sub-groups in the community. With users surveys, it also permits a comparison of user demographics with ABS data on the whole community

- recreation interests and preferences for types of activities (e.g. social, competitive, artistic, travel); the specific activities pursued and participation patterns (e.g. frequency, time spent, specific venues used, distance travelled, who pursued with, facilities used, standard of participation). This data allows a picture of current community behaviour to be developed and psychographic groupings of recreation preference types can be created. These are groupings of people with similar interests and expectations who also have strong similarities

in terms of age, gender, education, income etc. Commonly, six to eight groupings can be established and these are far more useful in planning than is trying to cater for hundreds of different individual activity needs

- the reasons for using the particular venues and programs they visit and why they select these over other opportunities

- participation data for organised sports and other recreational pursuits

- the catchments served by individual facilities, programs and/or services. This data can be collected by asking on-site survey respondents their suburb of residence (or workplace if they come from work), or their postcode or, if detailed information is required, where they live on a map of the district. Collecting information on user suburbs, districts or towns generally gives a more accurate picture than postcodes which vary in shape and size and can be very large in rural areas. The address of household survey respondents will be known, so a simple reverse mapping process is used in relation to the venues and facilities they visit. Data can also be collected on how far people travel to each venue they use.

  The resulting data - whether distribution maps or tables of numbers and percentages of uses by travel distance zones - is an invaluable planning tool as it helps to indicate where customers are and are not coming from - and hence, where marketing and/or provision efforts need to be changed or enhanced. Mapped data allows comparisons to be made between the demographic profile of users and the wider community and through this, an assessment of who is and who is not being served by the provision

- assessments and ratings of the existing recreation opportunities on the basis of range of recreation opportunities provided, and their distribution, quality, accessibility, management standards and cost.

  A useful tool in this context is importance/performance analysis. This process asks respondents to rate their perception of each of the *importance* and *performance* of individual facilities, programs and services or of types of recreation facilities, programs and services on a scale of say, one to five. The mean scores for all respondents or particular groups of respondents (e.g. age groups, gender, cultural background, residential location) are then calculated. Individually, comparisons of the results for different types of provision are invaluable. However, when matched *pairs* of importance and performance values are plotted on a graph with importance values on the X axis and performance values on the Y axis, the results are even more informative. The resulting chart will show those items with:

  - high importance and high performance: which should be retained

  - high importance and low performance: which need to be improved

  - low importance and high performance: which may be wound back

  - low importance and low performance: which can be discontinued

- the assessment of opportunities, needs and priorities for expanding, upgrading or adding new recreation opportunities. This can be tackled in several ways; householders (and on-site interviewees and workshop participants) can be asked what they *think* ought to be done or they can be given *lists of suggestions* identified through earlier stages of the consultative program. Across a random survey of 400-500 residents, the responses give a highly accurate indication of community needs and priorities. If the sample is large enough, the responses can be broken down by age groups, gender, cultural background and place of residence etc to give an even more specific indication of priorities for action

- other new, creative action proposals, concerns or issues which respondents want to raise.

Surveys of sporting and recreation clubs and groups and of other organisations relevant to the specific study being undertaken (e.g. schools, private clubs) cover different information to personal surveys. The items most commonly addressed are:

- name of club, contact details and office bearers (for updating inventories)

- membership numbers by categories over say, the past four to five years and reasons for any upward or downward trends of more than e.g. 10 per cent

- facilities used and assessments of any improvements and additions required

- club/organisation capacity to contribute to the cost of improvements

- priorities for action

- other issues and concerns.

Public meetings, on-site meetings and workshops are somewhat more flexible than surveys in that they can be – and should be – less structured so that people can raise issues, question directions and test ideas and proposals. In particular they can be used to:

- discuss, review and revise the draft policies and principles developed in earlier stages of the research program

- undertake SWOT analyses of individual or groups of facilities, programs and services

- collect the views of the general community or of the specific interest groups involved on needs and priorities. Participants will often give the best information to simple questions, and the four most commonly used are:

  - what 'works well' and why –whether a facility, program or service (as this can then be used as a guide or benchmark for other initiatives)

  - what 'needs fixing' to make it do the job intended of it effectively and efficiently

  - what 'needs adding' to ensure that modern, current day opportunities are provided; to ensure that sufficient resources are provided for an expanding community, or to ensure that a particular community remains attractive to new residents by having at least the same mix of recreation opportunities as other like communities

  - what are the priorities for action

- review maps, development plans and photographs and other materials on contentious sites. Participants can be asked to write notes on maps re 'good' successful achievements, and on problematic and 'urgent' sites as a guide for future action.

When assessing 'needs' it is useful to distinguish between 'expressed needs', these being the activities people actually do; 'latent needs', being the things they would like to do but for one reason or another cannot do, and 'normative need', this being what residents feel their community ought to have if it is to be as attractive as other communities. In assessing latent needs, residents are asked 'Are there particular activities you would like to do but cannot and what are the things that stop you pursuing those activities?' This is valuable in identifying both new provision needs but also servicing

needs (e.g. transport, information) and other barriers that stop participation.

All the issues raised at public and on-site meetings and at workshops should be recorded on large sheets of paper which are progressively put on display so that participants can go back and add to, or clarify and modify them as the discussion progresses.

A final group of research methods warrant a comment at this point. While these cannot be formally considered as community consultations, they relate directly to community use of recreation facilities, programs and services. These are observation and the use of physical evidence.

Observation entails visiting recreation sites and recording information on how many people are there, what their general demographic characteristics are, group sizes, activities pursued, resources used and not used, times and length of stay, method of travel and the like. While observation does not offer the opportunity to collect opinions, attitudes and reasons for use, it still provides a wealth of material on use, often from people who could not answer survey questions or who might be unwilling to do so (e.g. disabled people, CALD groups, children, busy mothers, school groups).

The collection of physical evidence can also prove useful. Scuffing of tan bark under a swing indicates use and research has been conducted in the past to determine the relationship between the extent of scuffing and the level of use. Likewise, the number of cars in a car park, the levels of rubbish in bins, car numberplate state of origin, and the car sales stickers on car back windows have all been used to assess visit rates and origins. The width of tracks, the depths of track erosion, visitor record books, campground registers and permits are also useful sources of data for some studies.

8.6 *Analysing the data and using the consultation findings*

Having collected some or all of the information outlined above, it must be collated, summarised and evaluated if it is to be used as an input to a recreation plan.

Where written material has been collected, collating and summarising can be achieved by grouping like comments under a series of headings. This process can bring all the findings together under those headings although preferably, it should distinguish between the findings gained from interviews, submissions, public meetings and random surveys, as the reliability and the detail of information from these three sources can vary substantially.

Consultative data which can be treated statistically can be presented as tables, graphs and charts. A number of commercial companies provide data collection and processing services if these are needed. While data collection by phone, postal and doorknocking can be expensive, the processing and preparation of comprehensive tables from survey returns can be as low as $2.00 per survey.

In all instances, however, it is essential that the planner *explains* the findings and *makes an evaluation* – or a number of alternate evaluations – of the information which has been collected. Little benefit will be gained, from simply presenting the material and leaving it to the reader to try to make sense of. At this point, the planner may also wish to identify some initial conclusions and even form some preliminary recommendations for action, with these to be carried forward to the final stage of the planning process, the preparation of the plan.

However, prior to the preparation of the plan, it may be that it is decided that a further round of consultations will be undertaken. In this situation, planners often prepare a set of issues or position papers detailing the consultative (and other related) findings and possible solutions to the problems or needs which have been identified. These are first presented to the commissioning authority for review, discussion and approval before being used to generate discussion and responses from the wider community. Such an approach helps to ensure that decision makers know what has been identified and can respond to it. It also helps to educate the community about recreation needs and

opportunities, the cost of these and the possible need to stage action. Perhaps most importantly, it demonstrates to the community that its views have been listened to and taken into consideration.

Once through this review and response stage, the planner can then proceed to the preparation of a draft and final recreation plan. This process is discussed in Section 10.

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9 Recreation participation and forecasting

9.1 *Introduction*

Data on current and recent recreation and leisure participation rates provides an understanding of contemporary leisure interests in the community. If used carefully, this data can also help to provide an understanding of the adequacy of the current provision of opportunities, of possible areas of over-provision, of gaps in provision and of possible future needs.

Data on participation across a range of recreation, sporting and cultural activities has now been collected in various forms by various agencies in Australia for a little more than 30 years. Prior to the early 1970s, the only data on recreation participation rates was that collected by individual sporting and recreation clubs and providers in the form of attendance counts and estimates, ticket sales and memberships.

Today, detailed data is collected on the levels of participation, patterns of participation and the characteristics of participants on a fairly regular basis by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Australian Sports Commission has collected annual data on participation in a range of recreational activities over the past six years.

This section provides an overview of current leisure and recreation participation levels in Australia and in Tasmania before outlining a number of approaches to forecasting possible future participation rates and through this, possible provision needs.

9.2 *Some warnings about leisure and recreation participation data*

Before proceeding to the review and analysis, several warnings need to be sounded regarding the use of participation data as a guide to recreation need and provision. These are;

> **Participation and culture**
> The culture of a community strongly influences the mix of recreation activities it pursues. Hence, low or high participation in one community, and even from one suburb, may not be a sound guide to another. Australians are keen followers of cricket; Canadians are fanatical about ice hockey, while residents of the US follow gridiron, baseball and basketball. Yet, all are from a predominantly European and Anglo-Saxon cultural background. Even within Australia, the southern states predominantly follow Australian rules football while in Queensland and New South Wales, the dominant ball sports are rugby league and union. All states follow tennis, soccer, cricket and to a slightly lesser degree, swimming. Thus, where average western participation rates or average Australian participation rates to be used as a guide to provision, there could well be some rather inappropriate outcomes.

Planning for the provision of leisure and recreation opportunities in Australia

Interestingly, there are relatively few recreation activities which nearly all cultures pursue; family activities, community social and cultural events, music, theatre, dance, and storytelling. Even some of these activities are forbidden by some religious and cultural groups.

Participation and supply

Participation in recreation activities is influenced by the supply of opportunities. If an individual or group decides to take part in a particular activity only to find that there are no facilities or programs for that pursuit available, they will find something else to do; something which will give the same types of experiences or the same or similar beneficial outcomes. As such, the demand for individual recreation activities can be extremely elastic. In wet weather, many people do something other than going to the football. In warm, sunny weather in the right season, Australians flock to the beach. But not every beach is crowded, Australia has so many beaches, the level of supply does not mean that every beach will be used or that everyone will be enticed to go because there is such good provision. A possible implication of this to recreation planning is that planners may do their best work if they can ensure a diversity of opportunities and the availability of *alternative* opportunities rather than trying to accurately match supply and demand.

Expressed, latent, substitute and deferred participation

A major weakness with recreation participation data is that it only measures what actually happens: that is, "expressed" or direct demand. This is the situation in which an individual can "express" his or her recreation needs and pursue the activity of their choice.

By comparison, if an activity is not immediately available, a person may wait for some time until it does become available. That is referred to as 'latent' demand; they still want to take part, but their demand has to be put on hold. They may hold off for some time, awaiting provision, *if they know that the opportunity is likely to become available*. In other words, they 'defer' their demand. Sometimes, latent or deferred demands are not caused by an absolute lack of provision. Rather, they may be due to a lack of transport to a venue, prices which are too high, inappropriate times of availability or a major barrier to access such as a river, railway or highway. An individual may want to participate even more strongly than someone who takes part regularly, but he or she cannot.

Not all people are prepared to wait or, if they know they cannot reach or afford what they had their heart set on, they change their minds. They then 'substitute' an alternate activity for the one they originally wanted to pursue.

There has been little research into how much of the recreation participation which is measured is direct or substitute demand and how much latent and deferred demand exists in the community. Thus, those who participate in an activity may be the totality of everyone who wants to. This often occurs with activities like reading, watching television or listening to music. These activities are ubiquitous so there are no barriers to access. Such a situation probably helps to explain why 'participation' in them is so high. By comparison, far lower participation figures for many other activities might totally misrepresent community interest in and desire for them. Many more people may well like to take part but cannot for a range of reasons. As an example, very few people go to football matches over summer as the governing bodies do not provide them. Yet, when the season starts, tens of thousands of spectators turn up every week. Many sports and other recreation activities have waiting lists, especially at the start of the season; many restaurants get booked out on weekends. Yet, the lists soon drop off and people don't queue up outside the restaurants; this is because people defer their demand –perhaps depending on how long they will have to wait—or they find a substitute.

The 'lowest common denominator' activity

Many people do not choose their recreation activities. Rather, they are chosen for them, by parents, carers, teachers, or even their partners. Activities which are chosen are not always what they would have chosen themselves. Instead, they are activities which can be described as the 'lowest common denominator activities', ones that it is known a person or most or all of a group can pursue. Activities that only a few members of the group can take part in, (whether due to cost, skill, equipment needs, time requirements or some other reason), are rejected. Research in Melbourne metropolitan regional parks some years ago found that over 90 per cent of the people who visited these parks in groups were not involved in the decision to visit. Rather, the decision was made for them by a senior adult or by a small group of family or club leaders. Hence, when a person indicates that they visited a park or went to a movie or went out for dinner, this response does not necessarily mean that these activities were what they specifically wanted to do. Rather, they were activities that were appropriate and acceptable to those taking part, and activities which provided the desired benefits and outcomes.

Measures of participation

One of the major difficulties with using data on recreation participation is ensuring the accuracy of the data. This issue arises because the timing of the collection, the process by which data is collected, and the questions asked all affect the results. To illustrate the issues regarding timing, if people are asked what they pursued in the last week, compared with the past month or the past year, the results will be very different due to both the seasonality of many activities and the fact that many activities are often only pursued once or several times a year. The Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Sports Commission surveys now generally ask questions about the previous year. But what of activities which are most probably really important to people but are pursued less regularly than yearly - such as family, work or school reunions, overseas and interstate trips, biennial arts festivals and the like? Almost certainly, participation is undercounted.

On the issue of the data collection methods, unless a rigorous methodology is applied to ensure that data is collected from everyone or from a valid random sample of the population being studied, the results will not be an accurate reflection of what the community does. As discussed in Section 8, a sample size of 300-500 people should be regarded as the minimum number of people to survey and they should represent all age groups, cultural groups and family styles in the study area. Surveys should only be conducted at home or at recreational venues if they are to represent the whole community or activity/ venue users. Telephone surveys are increasingly being questioned as many people now reject intrusive telephone marketing calls, and not surprisingly, confuse community surveys with these. Postal surveys have major weaknesses because of the low response rates and the fact that those who respond actually 'self select', so that there can be no guarantee that the responses actually constitute a random sample. Matching the demographics of a survey sample with the demographics of the total population does not mean that the thoughts, motivations and recreational interests of the two groups will also match. If some people do not respond to telephone or postal surveys, they must somehow be different from those who do, and it is possible that these differences will carry over to their recreational interests and choices.

Because of these problems, data collected by the different methods noted above has varying levels of accuracy (which cannot be readily measured), and as such, data collected by the different methods cannot be validly compared.

With regard to the form of questions, surveys which list activities and ask respondents to tick those they pursued are likely to achieve different results to those where respondents are asked to recall what they did. Surveys with wording which can be interpreted in several ways will almost certainly be interpreted in several ways. For example, if a survey asked

"Have you had any interested in activity X over the past 12 months?" as opposed to "Did you pursue activity X in the past 12 months?" will elicit very different responses. Questions which seek to 'force' responses by not providing a 'no opinion' option to attitudinal questions may simply be forcing inaccurate responses.

Participation and quality
The benefits gained from participation in recreation activities do not necessarily increase as the level of participation increases. An activity which a person pursues on a very occasional basis may be far more important and far more valuable to them that some other activity they pursue very frequently. Hence, measures of participation and the popularity of different pursuits is probably a very simplistic approach to assessing leisure and recreation need and may mean little in terms of the priorities for action.

The scope of the data collected
Most published recreation participation only covers a small proportion of the vast array of the activities which people pursue. Hundreds of pursuits which in total account for the interests of millions of Australians are not recorded. As a result, a small number of interests are given excessive attention while nothing is learnt about "minority" interests and perhaps most importantly, gaps in their provision.

Several points emerge from the foregoing discussion. First, there is a need to treat participation data carefully because it only covers one aspect of expressed need and may not indicate what people really want to do in their leisure time. In fact, it may well misrepresent the popularity or lack of popularity of different activities. Second, high levels of involvement or large numbers of participants do not necessarily equate with quality and beneficial outcomes. Third, unless a rigorous collection process is followed, the information could well be quite inaccurate.

In the light of the above, the collection and use of recreation participation data in the recreation planning process must be treated with extreme care. Planners must ask what they will use the information for and what additional light it will throw on understanding community needs and facility, program and service priorities. Participation data cannot be used in isolation as a guide to need or demand but rather should be used in association for instance, with information on the level of provision of facilities, programs and services provision, on community demographics, on the geography of the community and on the needs, values, attitudes and aspirations of the community.

9.3   *Leisure and recreation participation data in Australia*

Data on the levels and patterns of participation and on the characteristics of participants has been collected on an irregular basis over the last 35 years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Australian Sports Commission has also collected annual data on participation in a range of recreational activities, with the results being published annually as 'Participation in Exercise Recreation and Sport'.[21]

Unfortunately, the ABS collections have not been consistent in terms of their timing – so that occasionally, there have been gaps of many years between collections – nor have they been consistent in terms of the questions asked, the age groups covered, the activities which are included or the types of data collected. Fortunately, these shortcomings are gradually being overcome but at present comprehensive, comparable, long term participation data does not yet exist.[iv]

[iv] Much of the ABS data can be accessed free through the Bureau's web site www.abs.gov.au and by clicking on People under the heading "Themes". The ABS also has a special leisure and recreation research unit, the

A major value of the ABS collections programs has been the breath of coverage. This includes:

- household expenditure on sport, recreation and cultural facilities, programs and services

- sport, recreation and cultural participation by children and by adults

- attendance at cultural events

- retail sales on sport and recreation equipment

- provision of clubs, pubs, taverns and bars

- gambling

- amusement and leisure industries

- sport and recreation funding by government

- sport industries in Australia

- employment in sport and recreation

- sports volunteers

- sports attendance.

The Australian Sports Commission collection program was first instituted in 2001 and data has now been collected and published for each subsequent year through to 2006. The reports cover participation in around 160 or so sport and physical recreation activities (although data is not published on all of these) and they provide cross-tabulations of the activities by total number of participants, gender, age groups, states, frequency of participation, the type of organisation providing the opportunities, and whether the activities are organised or non-organised.

9.4   *Levels and trends in sport and recreation in Australia*

Despite the concerns expressed above regarding the quality of recreation and leisure participation data and its use as part of the recreation planning process, it is useful for recreation planners to have some understanding of what the community does and how interests are changing. They can then respond to unexpected local trends or fads or test national and state trends against the experience of the community for which the planning is being conducted.

Table 9.1 on the following pages shows data on active sporting and non-sporting pursuits as collected by Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Sports Commission surveys during the 1975 to 2006 period.

The following points should be noted with regard to the data in the Table:

g)   in column 1, activity names in brackets indicate that these activities were added to the

National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics which publishes data and reports on various recreation and leisure issues and which can be accessed through the ABS website.

original activity name at some point over the 1975-2006 period; in some instances, an initial group activity name e.g. Football, was later subdivided in types of football. These are shown on the following lines. The alphabetical ordering of the data is largely as listed in 1975. Later Australian Sports Commission tables may use different first words e.g. bowls rather than lawn bowls

h) gaps in the data which was collected are common at various points over the 31 year period and are indicated by the minus symbol,' - ', except in the final column

i) data with one asterisk (*) have an estimated standard relative error of 25-50 per cent and should only be used with caution

j) data with two asterisks (**) have a standard error greater than 50 per cent and are too unreliable for general use

k) columns 4 and 5 refer to participation by children.

The final column of Table 9.1 provides a broad indication of trends in participation in the various sports and physical activities which are listed. In the final column:

l) one, two or three + signs indicates comparative degrees of growth

m) negative signs (-) indicate comparative degrees of declining participation

n) the = sign indicates that there has been no or little significant change has occurred, although it should be noted that there may have been substantive variations in participation rates in the years between 1975 and 2006

o) activities with both + and – signs, indicates that both growth and decline phases appear to have occurred

p) where the box has been left blank there is insufficient or conflicting data such that discerning a trend has not been possible.

The Table highlights a number of interesting points about sporting and active recreation participation:

- in 2006, very few activities attracted a significant proportion of the adult population. In fact, only four of the 67 activity categories (aerobics, cycling, swimming and walking) were pursued by more than 10 per cent of adults. Only three more (golf, running/jogging, tennis) attracted between five and 10 per cent

- for those activities which both children and adults took part in, children's participation rates were generally two to five times higher than the adult rates. Yet despite this, there were again only five activities which attracted participation rates above 10 per cent among children: bike riding, dancing, soccer, skateboarding and swimming

- across the adult activities, there was a general tendency for participation rates to rise over time with 18 of the 67 activities listed increasing substantially. Significantly, the greatest increases occurred amongst activities which had a health and fitness focus; aerobics, cycling and running/jogging. By comparison, only eight activities had some or substantial falls in the rate of participation although another 25 remained largely unchanged or stagnated and fluctuated

- despite the generally far higher children's participation rates, only dancing saw a marked increase in the participation rate although martial arts and soccer grew to a lesser extent. Many children's activities seemed to stagnate or fall away between 1996-97 and 2000.

Table 9.1: Participation in sports and physical activities, Australia, 1975 –2006

Sports and Physical Activities (1)	1975 % Aust (2)	1996-97 % Aust (3)	1996-97 % Aust Childn 5-14 yrs (3)	2000 % Aust Childn 5-14 yrs (4)	2002 % Aust (5)	2003 % Aust Total (6)	2006 % Aust Total (6)	Apparent change 1975-2006
(Aerobics) (and fitness)	-	4.1	1.5	0.5	10.9	16.0	19.1	+++
(Aquarobics)	-	-	-	-	0.3	1.1	1.4	++
(Air sports)	-	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	- -
Archery	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	-	
Athletics	0.3	0.3	4.3	3.9	0.2	0.8	0.6	++
(Badminton)	-	0.3	-	0.2*	0.6	0.8	0.9	++
Baseball, softball	0.5		-	-		-	0	
: baseball		0.3	1.3	1.7	0.3	0.4	0.3	=
: softball	-	0.3	2.3		0.3	0.5	0.3	=
Basketball, netball	2.3		-	-	-	-	-	
: basketball	-	1.8	9.1	7.6	2.4	3.6	3.3	++
: netball	-	2.3	9.0	9.1	3.1	3.9	3.6	+
Bike riding	-	-	-	63.8		See Cycling		
Bowls –carpet indoor	0.9	0.3	-		0.2	0.3	0.3	-
Bowls -lawn	3.1	2.0	-	-	1.9	2.3	2.2	- -
Boxing	-	-	-	-	0.3	0.4	0.7	+
Canoeing (kayaking)	0.3	0.2	-	-	0.5	0.7	0.7	+
Car/cycle racing (motorsports)	0.7	0.7	-		0.9	1.1	1.2	++
Cricket (outdoor)	1.5	1.3	6.8	5.3	2.5	3.3	3.2	++
: indoor		0.7	0.9	0.3	0.9	1.2	0.9	=
Cycling	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.5	5.7	9.4	10.1	+++
(Dancing)	-	0.6	5.5	10.4	1.8	2.2	2.4	++
Darts	0.5	0.3	-	-	0.3	0.2	0.1	- -
Exercising, jogging, keeping fit	3.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Fishing	9.2	0.9	-	-	3.5	2.6	2.1	- +
Football (all codes)	4.0	-	-	-	-	-	3.8	
: Aust Rules		1.1	7.1	6.6	2.1	2.8	2.7	++
: Rugby League	-	-	3.3	3.6	0.7	1.1	1.3	+
: Rugby Union	-	0.3	1.1	1.4	0.6	0.8	1.0	+
: soccer (outdoor)	-	1.1	8.8	11.4	2.6	1.7	4.2	++
: soccer (indoor)	-	-	1.1	0.9	0.9	4.3	1.9	+
: touch	-	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.7	2.3	2.4	++
Golf	7.4	3.2	0.9	1.0	-	8.2	6.8	- +
Gymnastics	-	-	3.3	2.6	-	-	0.2	
Hiking, bushwalking, orienteering	1.5	-	-	-	3.2	-	-	
: orienteering	-	-	0.4	-	-	0.8	0.5	-
Hockey	0.6	0.5	2.1	2.4	0.5	1.0	1.0	+
Horseriding (and equestrian events/polo)	2.2	0.7	1.0	1.2	0.9	1.2	1.3	=

Table 9.1 continued:

Sports and Physical Activities (1)	1975 % Aust (2)	1996-97 % Aust (3)	1996-97 % Aust Childn 5-14 yrs (3)	2000 % Aust Childn 5-14 yrs (4)	2002 % Aust (5)	2003 % Aust Total (6)	2006 % Aust Total (6)	Apparent change 1975-2006
Ice/snow sports	-	0.4	0.5	0.2*	0.9	1.3	1.1	++
Lifesaving (Surf lifesaving)	0.1	-	0.7	0.8	-	0.2	-	
(Martial arts)	-	1.2	3.3	4.0	1.5	2.3	1.8	+
Power boating (Waterskiing)	1.1	0.2	-	-	0.9	1.1	0.9	=
Rockclimbing	-	-	-	-	0.5	0.6	0.5	=
(Roller sports)	-	-	0.4	0.2	0.6	0.8	0.6	=
(Skateboard or rollerblading)	-	-	-	30.9	-	-	-	
(Rowing)	-	-	-	0.2	-	0.3	0.4	=
(Running and jogging)	-	-	1.0	0.3	4.6	7.6	7.4	++
Sailing	2.0	0.5	-	0.3	0.7	0.8	0.5	
Shooting, hunting	2.1	0.7	-	-	0.6	0.6	0.5	- -
(Scuba diving)	-	0.2	-	-	-	0.6	0.5	+
Snooker, billiards (pool)	1.2	0.3	-	-	0.4	0.3	0.2	- -
Snow skiing	0.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Squash (racquetball)	5.5	0.8	-	0.3	1.7	2.2	1.3	- +
Surfing (surf sports)	1.0	0.3	-	0.3	2.0	2.4	2.3	++
Other surf activity	5.2		-	-	-	-	-	-
Swimming	15.5	1.8	12.8	14.4	10.9	15.3	13.6	=
Table tennis	0.6	-	-	-	0.6	0.5	0.5	=
(T-ball)	-	-	2.1	-	-	-	-	
Tennis	5.2	2.7	7.8	8.5	6.8	9.0	6.8	+
Ten pin bowls	1.0	1.2	0.8	0.6	0.9	1.1	0.7	=
Triathlons	-	-	-	-	0.3	0.2	0.3	=
Volleyball	0.2	0.7	0.6	0.3	1.1	1.3	1.2	++
Walking dog	4.7	-	-	-	-		-	
Walking for pleasure (exercise)	3.0	0.3	-	-	25.3	-		
Walking (bush)	-	-	-	-	-	5.8	4.7	=
Walking (other)	-	-	-	-	-	37.9	36.2	=
(Water polo)	-	-	-	0.2*	-	0.2	0.2	=
Water skiing (powerboating)	1.6	0.2	-	-	0.9	1.1	0.9	=
(Weightlifting) (training)	-	0.4	-	-	0.9	2.8	3.1	+ +
Yoga	-	-	-	-	2.1	3.1	2.9	+ +
Other sports	2.6		-	-	-	-	-	

While the full implications of these data would need to be assessed in each community being studied, they suggest that participation by Australian's in sport and physical activities is quite low. While it is known that some activities are pressured for space and facilities - such as soccer, junior football and some indoor court sports, overall, the data suggest that the community is not very active and that in fact, the level of activity is possibly declining. If this is the case, it has clear implications for the health and wellbeing of the community and suggests that greater efforts may be needed in promoting participation and in providing attractive, enjoyable activities rather than in providing more facilities.

A further set of sports and physical activity data which is of particular interest is that showing the relationship between participation in particular recreation activities and age. Selected figures are reported in Table 9.2. For purposes of comparison, data from both the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Sports Commission surveys covering 2005/06 are provided.

The data in the Table highlight a number of points regarding collecting participation data, patterns of participation and evaluating the implications. These are outlined below.

Data collection methods

Although the two sets of data record similar trends in participation by age, the figures from the two agencies differ quite radically at times. This is likely to reflect several factors:

- the time periods over which they surveys were undertaken varied, the ABS survey was conducted from July 2005 to 2006 while the Sports Commission results were aggregated from quarterly surveys undertaken in February, May, August and September of 2006

- both sets of results are derived from samples of the Australian population. Although the sample sizes were slightly different (ABS 14,219 and Sports Commission, 13,710), the ABS was somewhat more rigorous in its sample selection process

- the surveys used very different methodologies. The Sports Commission survey used a telephone interview method based on a response rate of 42 per cent whereas the ABS surveys were completed personally, with an 88 per cent response rate.

The question to be asked in relation to the above is, which data set is more reliable and could misleading interpretations arise from using either or both sets? In general, the recreation planning profession accepts that the ABS data is more accurate, yet many people now use the Sports Commission data because there a consistent time series set of six years of data. However, if provision was made on the basis of some of this data, twice the provision rate might be made

compared with using the ABS figures. As telephone contact with the community is becoming increasingly more difficult and as 60 per cent of those contacted in the Sports Commission study declined to take part, the accuracy of the data has to be questioned.

Sports and Physical Activities	ABS 15-17 yrs	ABS 18-24 yrs	ABS 25-34 yrs	ABS 35-44 yrs	ABS 45-54 yrs	ABS 55-64 yrs	ABS 65+ yrs	Aust Sports Comm 15-24 yrs	Aust Sports Comm 25-34 yrs	Aust Sports Comm 35-44 yrs	Aust Sports Comm 45-54 yrs	Aust Sports Comm 55-64 yrs	Aust Sports Comm 65+ yrs
Aerobics/fitness	10.3	20.1	17.2	14.1	12.2	7.6	5.4	25.1	21.4	19.7	19.3	15.4	12.4
Aqua aerobics	-	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.2	1.1	0.7	0.4	0.6	0.9	1.2	2.8	2.8
Athletics/track & field	3.3	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	-	-	2.7	0.1	0.1	0.3	-	0.1
Aust football	7.6	5.2	2.7	0.7	0.3	-	-	9.4	3.2	1.9	0.7	0.2	0
Baseball	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.2	-	0.1	-	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	-
Basketball	9.0	6.4	2.7	1.2	0.9	-	-	11.5	3.5	2.4	1.1	0.2	0.1
Canoeing /kayaking	-	0.2	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.6	0.9	0.7	1.1	1.1	0.1
Cricket indoor	1.4	1.7	1.8	0.6	0.3	-	-	1.9	2.2	0.6	0.3	0.1	0
Cricket outdoor	6.6	4.5	4.1	1.5	0.7	0.5	0.2	9.0	4.1	3.0	1.5	0.4	0.2
Cycling	5.9	5.8	7.9	9.5	7.0	5.2	1.7	8.1	13.2	17.0	9.8	8.6	3.1
Golf	1.2	2.8	5.0	5.5	6.6	8.6	5.4	3.8	5.7	7.2	7.7	10.2	6.9
Gymnastics	1.0	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.2	-	0.7	0	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1
Hockey -outdoor	1.2	1.2	0.7	0.7	0.2	0.2	-1.5	2.8	0.7	1.2	0.5	0.2	0.1
Horse riding/equestrian	1.5	1.1	0.9	1.2	0.9	0.4	-	2.2	1.5	1.6	1.3	0.5	0.3
Ice/snow sports	1.6	1.2	1.6	0.9	1.1	0.5	0.2	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.2	0.3	0.1
Lawn bowls	0.1	-	0.4	0.5	0.7	2.9	5.6	0.5	0.8	0.8	0.7	2.8	7.6
Martial arts	3.1	2.3	1.8	1.1	1.1	0.7	1.3	3.8	2.2	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.5
Motor sports	1.8	2.0	1.5	0.9	0.6	0.3	0.1	2.6	1.5	1.6	0.9	0.5	0.1
Netball	10.3	6.5	4.6	2.5	0.6	0.1	-	10.0	5.9	3.6	0.9	0.2	0.1
Rock-climbing	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.9	1.2	0.4	0.3	0	0
Rowing	1.9	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	-	1.1	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.1
Rugby League	4.1	1.4	0.8	0.2	0.1	-	-	5.3	1.4	0.5	0.1	-	-
Rugby Union	2.4	1.4	0.6	0.2	0.2	-	-	4.3	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.1	-
Running	3.6	7.0	7.4	5.7	3.9	1.4	0.1	12.3	11.5	10.5	5.3	2.5	0.6
Sailing	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.8	0.5	1.0	0.5
Soccer	15.6	6.3	3.3	2.1	0.2	0.5	-	13.7	3.9	4.4	1.8	0.3	0
Softball	1.5	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1	-	-	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.2	-	-
Squash/racquetball	0.4	1.6	2.4	1.5	0.7	0.7	0.1	1.4	2.5	2.0	1.4	0.3	0
Surf sports	2.2	3.2	2.9	1.9	1.5	0.5	-	4.2	3.2	2.8	2.4	0.5	0.3
Swimming	9.6	9.1	11.5	11.4	10.7	6.1	4.2	13.6	17.0	17.3	15.4	11.0	6.1
Table tennis	1.1	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.9	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.1
Tennis	8.9	5.9	6.2	5.0	4.6	3.8	2.0	9.4	8.0	6.7	8.1	5.5	2.6
Touch	4.8	3.7	2.5	1.9	0.4	-	-	5.4	4.2	3.0	1.1	0.1	0.1
Triathlon	0.4	-	0.7	0.3	-	0.1	-	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.1	0.1	-
Walking (bush)	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	1.8	5.1	5.6	7.1	5.9	2.5
Walking (other)	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	13.7	30.3	34.9	47.0	49.5	45.2
Walking for exercise	6.8	10.8	20.7	25.7	30.7	34.8	29.1	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Weight training	2.2	1.3	1.8	1.4	0.9	0.4	0.4	3.7	4.6	3.8	2.3	2.5	1.3
Yoga	0.3	1.2	3.1	2.1	1.8	2.0	0.3	1.6	3.7	4.1	2.9	3.4	1.9

Table 9.2: Participation by age in selected sports and physical activities, Australia, as recorded by the ABS 2005-2006 and the Australian Sports Commission, 2006 (nd = no data collected under this heading)

Patterns of participation

Both sets of data show that overall, participation declines with age. However, there are quite substantial variations between activities. In some, the rate of participation starts at a relatively high level and then declines dramatically so that by the time the 35-44 years age group is reached, participation is low or negligible;

Other sports and physical activities start strongly, build to a peak and then decline with age;

Still other activities - and these are predominantly non-competitive pursuits - continue to build with age and occasionally do not reach their peak until the 40s or 50s age groups. Walking is the strongest activity in this category; and

Finally, another group of activities maintains strong participation rates across all age groups. Swimming, cycling and walking fit into this category.

Evaluating the implications

As with the earlier tables, the data shown in Table 9.2 can be evaluated in a number of ways, depending on the philosophical stance of the researcher or the organisation commissioning the planning. For instance:

- an organisation wanting to strengthen junior sports participation as a way of giving young people a health and positive recreational program might initiate a range of strategies to keep them involved and to stop participation 'falling away' when they reach their teens, as the table so clearly demonstrates

- an organisation concerned with life-long activity, aged health and community wellbeing may push for more attention to be put on non-competitive activities such as walking and swimming which the data show, people pursue until much later in their lives

- an organisation with limited financial resources may seek to offer the community a mix of activities from which it can choose but focus on those that offer involvement through all life stages rather than investing heavily in activities which only meet the needs of younger age groups (and one or the other genders).

Other data sets prepared by the ABS which may warrant review and evaluation dependent on the nature and scope of a recreation planning study are those showing the relationship between participation and gender, cultural background, place of residence (metropolitan cities versus the regions, state versus state), and socio-economic status. All show statistically significant variations which can help enhance a planner's understanding of the community or communities they are working in. Clearly, however, great care needs to be taken in using participation data as a guide to the future provision of leisure and recreation opportunities. As has been argued with regard to the findings of all the types of research outlined in this manual, no one set of information should be used in isolation from a range of other resources.

9.5   *Participation in arts and cultural pursuits*

The foregoing participation data have focused on sporting and physically active recreation pursuits. Substantial data sets are also available on participation in arts and cultural pursuits. Some of the most recent data collected by the ABS is reported below. Readers are referred to the section 'People' under the heading 'Themes' on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website <www.abs.gov.au>. This provides a wide range of data, much of which can be downloaded at no

cost.

The report, *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities[22],* covered participation by five to 14 year olds in selected cultural and leisure activities over the 12 months prior to April 2006. Some of the key findings were:

- 20 per cent of five to14 year olds played a musical instrument outside school

- 12 per cent had lessons or gave a dance performance

- six per cent had lessons or gave a singing performance

- four per cent participated in drama

- Cultural activities were far more popular amongst girls than boys: 44 per cent of girls and only 22 per cent of boys were involved in one of the selected cultural activities and 12 per cent of girls and only three per cent of boys pursued two or more activities There were major differences in boy/girl participation rates in individual activities; 23 per cent of girls were involved in dance whereas only two per cent of boys were. By comparison, 18 per cent of boys played a musical instrument

- For most cultural activities, participation peaked amongst 10 year olds and then dropped. Dancing peaked at six years while playing a musical instrument did not peak until 11 to 13 years

- The vast majority of children pursuing cultural activities took lessons: dance, 93 per cent; musical instrument, 75 per cent; drama, 70 per cent; singing, 60 per cent.

Comparative data is available for 2003 and 2000. In reviewing the three sets of data, the ABS reported that:

> *"For the combined selected cultural activities, after no change to participation rates between 2000 and 2003, there was a three percentage point increase reported for 2006 (from 30% to 33%). This was largely due to a 5 percentage point increase between 2003 and 2006 in boys' participation (from 17% to 22%). Playing a musical instrument showed the largest increase (from 13% to 18%) between 2000 and 2006... playing computer or electronic games ... fell 7 percentage points between 2003 and 2006 from 71% to 64%. This was also below the participation rate of 69% for this activity in 2000".*

Participation rates in selected cultural activities by adults (aged 15 years and above) are reported in the ABS report, *Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events[23] (*for 2005-2006. Again, extensive comparable data from earlier years is also available. The full report provides data by age, gender, activity type, State of residence, family make-up, employment, education and household incomes. Table 9.3 reports participation by all residents on the basis of their state of origin.

Venues & Events	NSW %	Vic	Qld %	SA %	WA	Tas %	NT	ACT %	Aust %
Art galleries	20.8	23.9	22.0	24.0	22.8	24.0	25.9	39.7	22.7
Museums	21.3	20.9	21.7	26.9	22.2	30.8	38.2	47.3	22.6
Zoos and aquariums	33.2	37.0	33.2	37.9	43.4	31.6	36.0	41.4	35.6
Botanic gardens	28.3	36.7	37.2	36.5	33.4	32.3	38.8	44.4	33.7
Libraries	31.9	33.2	35.1	40.3	36.7	35.6	28.1	34.9	34.1

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Classical music concerts	9.7	9.3	8.2	9.7	10.8	9.3	7.9	13.3	9.4
Popular music concerts	23.9	23.6	25.8	26.2	30.8	24.1	29.5	34.1	25.2
Theatre performances	16.9	17.9	15.2	17.6	16.8	19.5	12.1	25.5	17.0
Dance performances	10.9	9.9	8.7	11.2	9.7	7.5	9.6	16.6	10.2
Musicals and operas	16.6	18.4	15.4	13.0	14.8	15.3	9.4	19.1	16.3
Other performing arts	15.3	16.7	16.4	20.5	17.6	16.9	14.8	19.7	16.6
Cinemas	62.9	67.1	66.8	64.0	66.6	56.4	68.2	71.3	65.2

Table 9.3: Adult attendance at selected cultural venues and events, 2005-06[23] (Note: NT data is for urban areas only)

The data reveal some significant features of Australian's involvement in cultural activities and in wider recreation participation. Visiting a cinema was by far the most popular activity with approximately two-thirds of the total population attending in 2005-06. By comparison, classical music concerts was the only activity to attract below a 10 per cent participation rate nationally. Rates varied quite substantially between the states for some activities. The very high rate of attendance for nearly all activities in the ACT when compared with the rest of Australia highlights these influences. Perhaps the most interesting point about Table 9.3 is the differences in attendances at cultural events compared with participation in sport and physical recreation activities as shown in Table 9.1. This shows that only four of the 67 sport and physical recreation activities had over a 10 per cent participation rate compared with only one cultural activity falling below 10 per cent.

Other significant findings from the 2005-06 cultural participation survey report[23] were:

- attendance rates dropped significantly after the 35-44 years age group and even more dramatically after 55-64 years. By 75 years and over, rates were 25 per cent below the overall average and 40 per cent below teenage rates

- attendances by females were generally five to eight per cent higher than male rates

- people of different ages had quite different preferences for the venues and events they attended

- the types of venues and events visited was strongly influenced by household make up with for example, households with children having far higher visit rates to zoos and aquariums

- English-speaking and Australian-born residents had higher attendance rates than those born overseas

- employed people had higher attendance rates at the more 'elite' events than the unemployed. However, libraries attracted higher rates of unemployed attendees

- people whose educational attainment was 10 years or less had significantly lower attendances at most types of venues and events

- there were major variations in attendances on the basis of whether residents lived in capital cities and other areas of the state

- cinemas and libraries attracted visitors on a very frequent basis (over 10 and 20 times in the past 12 months respectively) whereas museums, dance events, musicals, performing arts and opera generally only attracted one visit per person in the 12 month period.

A final set of data provided in the *2005-06 Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events*[23] report

is a comparison of the 2005-06 attendance rates with data for 1995 and 1999. This is summarised in Table 9.4 and the full report also provides data on changes over the 10 year period in relation to States, frequency of attendance, and age.

Venue or Event	Aust. 1995 %	Aust. 1999 %	Aust. 2005-06 %
Art galleries	22.3	21.2	22.7
Museums	27.8	19.9	22.6
Zoos and aquariums	35.3	33.9	35.6
Botanic gardens	38.5	36.1	33.7
Libraries	38.4	38.1	34.1
Classical music concerts	7.7	8.8	9.4
Popular music concerts	26.9	25.4	25.2
Theatre performances	16.6	16.5	17.0
Dance performances	10.0	9.0	10.2
Musicals and operas	19.3	16.3	16.3
Other performing arts	18.7	17.8	16.6
Cinemas	62.1	67.0	65.2

Table 9.4: Attendance at cultural venues and events by Australians, 1995, 1999 and 2005-06

Table 9.4 indicates that there was little change in attendances at galleries, zoos and aquariums, popular music concerts, theatre and dance performances over the 1995 – 2005-06 period. By comparison, attendances at museums, botanic gardens, libraries, musicals and operas and other performing arts fell – with museum and botanic garden attendances falling quite dramatically.

What is perhaps most significant about the results is that despite higher educational levels and greater government and commercial spending on arts and cultural initiatives, only classical music concert attendances rose, and then only marginally. So while high in popularity, when compared with sports and physical activities, support for arts and cultural pursuits would appear to have stagnated at best and in some areas, declined markedly.

Discussion

Interpreting the foregoing participation data and then using the conclusions for planning purposes is a complex and difficult task. For instance, the stagnation in participation in arts and cultural pursuits may reflect changing needs or it may reflect changes in the cultural mix of the community and perhaps, as a result, the reduced relevance of what is offered. In one culture or in a very conservative society, the response to this finding might be to put more effort into traditional cultural activities and to encourage newer immigrant groups to join in and 'assimilate'. In a more progressive, open society, those providing arts and cultural opportunities may decide instead, to bring in new forms of arts expression and performance which better reflect the more diverse culture of the community. Alternately, the figures may simply mean that supply and demand are well matched and that those who want to go to a cultural venue or event can go. So no changes of provision or programming may be made at all.

Where sports participation is booming, this may reflect a growing recognition of the value of physical activity, a rejection of more traditional sports, the impact of better management and improved marketing and world sporting events (such as with soccer over recent years). Or it may reflect the provision of good opportunities for that sport which allow growth to occur when provision for other activities is over-subscribed? Certainly, some of the differences which have been identified must reflect variations of supply e.g. those between the states, while they also reflect the impact of overall educational and income levels on demand.
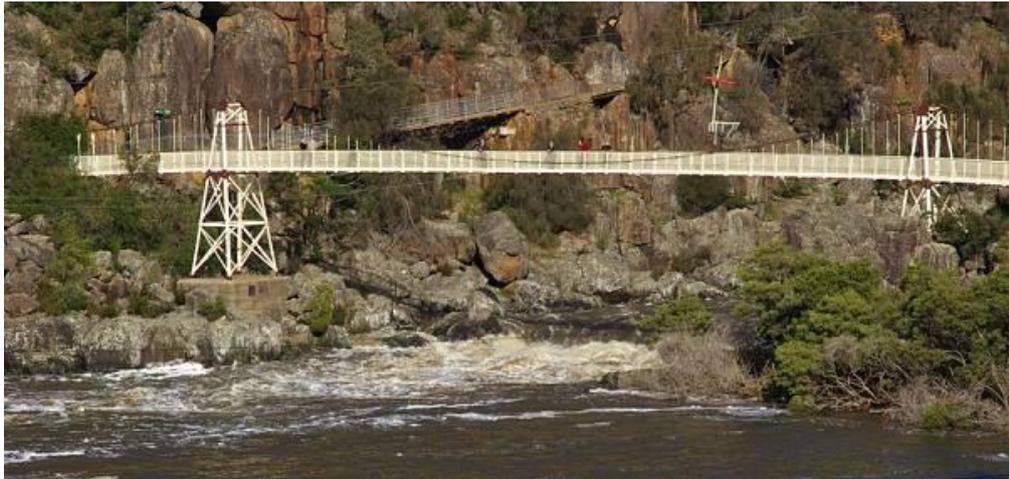
9.6 Forecasting

Forecasting is the process of taking a range of data (participation figures, expressed needs, demographic changes) and using it to build a picture of a likely future and likely future social, economic and resource demands. From a leisure and recreation perspective, forecasting seeks to create an understanding of future needs and aspirations and to understand the implications of this to the provision of leisure and recreation facilities, programs and services.

Because the Australian (and world-wide) sport and recreation participation data which is available is somewhat piecemeal (in that it has not been collected over a long period of time, has been collected irregularly and has been collected through the use of different questions, survey methods and sample sizes), it is not appropriate to try to forecast future leisure needs and provision priorities on the basis of this data alone. Rather, as has been argued in above, a broad range of information needs to be brought together before meaningful conclusions can be drawn about the possible future recreation and leisure interests of the community and the implications of this to provision and provision priorities. The 'broad range of information' which needs to be reviewed includes all that reviewed and discussed elsewhere in this manual and possibly, a wide mix of other data about other issues. This includes, from time to time, national and international politics, international relations, patterns and levels of world trade, issues of social equity, and in the current day and age, global warming, climate change, environmental protection and environmental sustainability. Given the complexity of these issues and given the very large elasticises of demand which can occur in leisure and recreation, making firm projections and predictions of demand and need too far into the future can be dangerous. Rather, one is far better to use the resources available to reach modest conclusions and to make a series of small, well-monitored and evaluated steps than to leap into the unknown.

9.7 Conclusion

This Section has sought to review and evaluate the use of data on recreation and leisure participation in Australia as an input to the recreation planning process. It has raised a number of concerns regarding the nature and accuracy of the data which is available and hence regarding its use. It has also provided a number of data sets which indicate broadly what types of recreation activities people pursue and how these can be influenced by a number of personal, locational and cultural influences. It is suggested that while this data is useful in understanding what people do at present - so that the planning process does not make proposals which are too radically different - it must be used with great care as a planning tool.

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Planning for the provision of leisure and recreation opportunities in Australia

10 Recreation provision in greenfield sites

10.1 *Introduction*

Recreation planning and provision is not an issue which is only considered in existing residential areas. The continuing expansion of Australia's major urban areas, of rural residential areas (or "peri-urban areas") of small rural towns, and of regional cities, means that the future recreational needs of the people who will move into new residential areas also needs to be considered.

One of the reasons town planners and others resort to open space standards and developer contributions is that when they are planning for new residential areas there is no community to consult and no existing provision to review and evaluate. As a result, a number of the planning strategies which have been covered in this manual cannot be applied and planners look for some other form of guidance as to provision needs and priorities.

So what does one do in this situation? The following paragraphs outline a number of strategies.

10.2 *Determine the objectives and principles*

Before any decisions are made about any form of provision, guiding decisions need to be made about the objectives of recreation and leisure provision in a greenfield area (and about a whole range of other services in new residential area) and about the principles which underpin these. This is critical as it will provide a basis for decisions on the mix, types and scale provision which is appropriate.

To illustrate, if a new development is near existing residential areas, a key guiding principle may be to provide local opportunities, on the expectation that residents will rely on higher order facilities elsewhere to meet their regional needs. By comparison, a planning authority may decide that it wants to use new residential development as a means of restoring derelict land, of bringing new wealth into the community and of attracting a form of residential living not previously available in the district. It may therefore, prepare principles which seek a very different type of outcome. In another instance, a heritage farm may form the basis of a new regional cultural centre, of a sympathetic open space system, or for a different approach to street layout and to the mix of community facilities which are provided.

One real advantage enjoyed by recreation planners is that there are no rigid, fixed standards as to what must be provided and where. As a result, planners have the opportunity to create exciting new residential environments. The fact that such creative thinking lives on in our cities is attested to by the layout of Adelaide and its parklands, by Canberra, and by the world-wide garden cities movement and the layout of many smaller towns and suburbs across the country.

10.3 *Assessing the context*

The first thing to do in planning for recreation in new residential areas is to assess the context in which the provision is to be made. This includes reviewing:

The natural environment and the associated opportunities and constraints

The climate, soils, terrain, aspect, geology and flora and fauna of a region - and their variability and rarity - will all impact on the recreation opportunities which can be provided. Hot, wet or dry climates and cold, wet or dry climates impose serious limitations on what can be provided and what residents like to do. A rugged environment with regular snow falls is likely to mean that quite different recreation participation and provision are likely.

If the local environment provides excellent beaches, rock climbing opportunities, wetlands or bushland trails, a greater interest in the use of these facilities will almost certainly evolve, with a consequent lesser need for other more traditional or "mainstream" recreation facilities, programs and services. At the same time, some of these resources may have an important non-recreational role and may thus be reserved and managed in a way which allows "secondary" recreational use e.g.: flood-ways, utilities easements, wetlands, conservation reserves.

The scale of the development

As discussed in the review of the @leisure planning model in Section 6.7, an understanding of the scale and nature of the residential development is important. The mix and scale of facilities which are appropriate to a small rural community will be very different to those provided in a larger centre or on the urban fringe.

Recreation provision in nearby residential areas

During their day to day lives, people like to stay in familiar environments. Research by geographers and town planners has shown that when people move house, or when young couples set up new homes, most move outward along growth corridors from where they previously lived or into new residential areas which reflect their past experience. Others move up the social ladder by moving into *nearby* new estates and suburbs or inner city apartments which are considered to be better or more modern than, but not far from, where they used to live.

By identifying where new residents are likely to come from, planners are able to assess what the demographics of the "donor" areas are like, what these people do and use in terms of recreation activities and as a consequence, what might need to be provided in the new residential areas.

Some property developers collect data on the characteristics, origins and leisure (and other) interests of visitors to home displays as a means of determining who is likely to move into the new estates and what this means in terms of the mix and level of provision. Obviously too, people buying homes priced at say, $280 000 will be able to afford and want different recreation opportunities to those buying homes priced at $500 000 or $1 000 000. Developers who put properties onto the market at the latter prices will have already done a lot of research into the 'demographic' they are targeting and what this means in terms of lifestyles, recreational interests and needs.

Similarly, developers building retirement villages, 'lifestyle' estates, holiday home estates or rural retreats will have formed a good idea of what their projected clients will want. In some of these instances, recreation provision will be focused on, for instance, a top quality golf course and club house or a marina, water ways and boat club. A high level of attention is generally also given to quality gardens and environmental amenity but residents wanting playgrounds, sports halls, football ovals, neighbourhood houses, scouts, seniors clubs, community halls and other more traditional facilities may find that they have to travel some distance to a nearby town for these resources. Of recent times, the majority of major new residential developments have featured lakes or water ways but developers have also been known to provide a range of other features to set their estates off from competitors and to attract buyers.

Major land and housing development companies report that they make quite extensive analyses of

existing local and regional provision and future provision plans as part of the planning of new recreation opportunities in new residential estates[v]. Some of the key elements of this analysis include:

- ensuring that the local and/or sub-municipal requirements of any regional and/or local planning authorities for recreation, childcare, aged services, health services etc are met

- assessing provision proposals in reports covering the wider region which address recreation, health, childcare, environmental and other similar needs;

- assessing existing recreation provision and future provision proposals by district councils and others, even if this provision is some distance away, in order to create "provision overlays". These overlays are then used as a basis for a gap analysis to determine what additional or new services might be required in the new residential areas

- the assessment of existing regional facilities to determine what complementary, local facilities might be provided e.g. a learn to swim facility to complement a regional council aquatic leisure centre. This analysis may also indicate where there are opportunities for providing new regional venues, or at least, reserving land for their provision

- consideration of the scale of the residential development. If it constitutes a small extension of an existing suburb or town, very little beyond local provision of play, social areas, trails etc may be required. However, if the development is more of a 'satellite' town development, then larger versions of these facilities as well as sports grounds and indoor venues may be needed

- the assessment of commercial provision and liaison with other property developers in the region to identify development opportunities and avoid undue competition

- liaison with other property developers to avoid provision duplication and undue competition

- the review of traditional provision standards to guide the level of provision for e.g. sports grounds, tennis and the like.

One potential weakness with this approach - and several of the other approaches outlined in this Section - is that it can lead to a regime of facilities, programs and services provision which is essentially a mirror image of what exists elsewhere and innovation and creativity can be overlooked. This problem can be overcome to a substantial extent if the initial provision processes are viewed as a starting point only and are reviewed and refined by a program of demographic analyses and consultations as soon as residents begin to move into the new estates.

State government or regional planning requirements

Many State and/or regional planning authorities have legislation and/or guidelines covering a wide range of issues which must be addressed by anyone undertaking residential development. These include a range of developer contributions schemes, the reservation of land for recreation and other community facilities, and the protection of resources which have potential for recreational use e.g. important fauna and flora areas, waterways, transport and utilities corridors and reserves for

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schools.

As an example, the Growth Areas Authority in Victoria has prepared Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines[24] for new communities in five metropolitan growth corridors. These require plans to be prepared for new subdivisions in these corridors. The plans cover major road networks, public transport, trails and pedestrian links, open space, community facilities and development land, activity centres and employment areas, residential provision at varying densities and in a form which will contribute to wider government policies, and a native vegetation plan.

Guidelines and planning principles are provided for each of these topics as are a set of performance measures. Recreation-related initiatives occur in each area, showing the close interrelations between recreation and all other aspects of community life. Examples of the guidelines which apply to leisure and recreation include:

- provide higher density housing for people who do not have access to private vehicles and locate these close to activity centres and public transport

- principal/major activity centres should provide shopping centres together with a mix of community facilities, higher density housing, cultural venues and entertainment and recreation opportunities

- principal/major activity centres should feature a town park with links to the surrounding open space network

- schools, health care and other community facilities should be adjacent to public transport services

- direct, safe and attractive walking and cycling routes should be provided to and from residential areas, activity centres and community facilities

- local community facilities should be located in or next to activity centres or clustered at junctions of the open space, trail and public transport networks

- open space areas and networks should be designed on an integrated and shared basis to serve multiple purposes based on assessments of the function to be served, the nature of the landscape setting and the catchment to be served

- provide open space at the local, district and regional scale that provides for social, cultural, recreational and sporting needs of different age groups and abilities

- connect open spaces into existing and planned open spaces in surrounding communities

- use waterways as part of the open space network

- incorporate aspects of any cultural or historical attributes of an area

- protect waterways and wetlands and integrate these with open space networks.

These and others of the Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines provide an invaluable set of tools for the planning of new residential areas.

Benchmarking

As discussed in Section 4, benchmarking consists of assessing the level and quality of what is

provided in other established communities and using this as a guide to provision in a new community. As indicated in the earlier discussion, this can be a useful check but care must be taken to ensure the comparisons are realistic and useful. There is little to be gained for instance, from benchmarking provision needs in a new, lower income outer suburb against the levels of provision and standards achieved in a wealthier, older inner suburb.

Assessing recreation activities and leisure trends

The analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data on recreation participation and recreation expenditure and bureau trend reports of Australian Sports Commission reports and of a range of other recreation studies, is an invaluable tool for helping to understand recreation provision needs and opportunities.

Care must be taken however, to not use the data analyses in a simplistic way and to simply provide 'more of the same'. Yet, if the data and report analyses show that Australian communities enjoy for example, outdoor sports, walking, arts and cultural pursuits, casual picnics, educational pursuits and the like, then provision can be safely made for them, provided it is made with some awareness of the likely characteristics of the population which will be served.

Another useful method of determining activity and leisure trends is to consult with sporting and recreation groups, clubs, sports teachers and coaches, arts and leisure groups, facility managers and recreation officers about what they know of changing district needs and the implications to future provision. This approach ensures that trends gleaned from state or national data do not lead to the misinterpretation of needs at the local level.

10.4 *Making provision*

The findings of research into the above issues will assist a great deal in determining what types of recreation facilities, programs and services might be appropriate for new residential areas. However, they do not indicate specifically what ought to be provided. In new emerging communities in fact, it is more important to ensure a longer term capacity to provide in response to evolving needs rather than to provide a complete mix of very specific facilities, programs and services upfront which it is later found do not effectively meet needs.

While the types of research outlined above will indicate a need for some types of provision, other

types of provision may not be as clear. To illustrate, the research is likely to demonstrate that a new residential development which is selling in a moderate price range on the fringes of a metro area or regional city is likely to attract young couples with young and still growing families from mixed cultural backgrounds. It is thus highly likely that the community will need maternal and child facilities, community meeting venues, cycling and walking trails, playgrounds, informal parks, childcare facilities, primary schools and the like. Thus, land can be reserved for these facilities. But what of trails, sports grounds, tennis courts, neighbourhood houses, and indoor courts: should these be provided? In short, the answer is 'no, not necessarily', as there is no proven need for them. However, as indicated above, the capacity to provide them should be ensured by reserving land which can be developed once needs are identified. If this land can be reserved adjacent to other community facilities where it is known there will be a need - such as next to schools - then greater certainty can be introduced.

To assist with ensuring a capacity to provide, the following actions are proposed:

> Prepare an outline development plan or structure plan for the area being developed. This entails designing the desired "skeleton" for transport, retail, residential, open space, cultural, educational, retail and community services provision across the landscape which is to undergo development to provide a framework to guide later more detailed development and provision processes.

> At the local government level, a council should involve each of its operational divisions in the structure planning process. It should also invite participation by a range of other state, regional and not-for-profit agencies so that a "linked-up" process of development can occur and so the potential needs of all elements of the future community are effectively addressed. In some States of Australia, the preparation of some form of structure plan is now required in new residential growth areas[24].

> Accept open space or financial contributions legislated for by developer contributions schemes but only accept the land in the form and at the locations where it contributes to recreational objectives which have been established and to other appropriate guidelines.

> Make provision for as wide as practical a cross-section of different types of recreation opportunities so that a diversity of experiences can be gained by the future community. Use Table 6.1 in Section 6.5 of this resource kit as a guide to the mix of facilities which might be provided.

> Exploit the natural resources which are available. Buffers along creek and drainage lines which are not already zoned for water and flood management purposes (and can thus be used for recreational trails as a "secondary" use), should be acquired or zoned to exclude inappropriate development so the creek environs can be used for passive recreational activities, for conservation studies and for walking. Swamps, rocky outcrops, other areas of natural value and heritage or historic sites should be protected for both their natural assets and for recreational and educational purposes.

Acquire a comparatively small number of open space sites but ensure they are a sufficient size to accommodate a mix of uses and ensure that those uses can be expanded if needed. Some key elements of this principle are:

- at the local level, do not acquire sites of less than 0.5 hectares (a minimum of one hectare is even better) for recreational activities, unless they have a predominantly informal seating and amenity role or a linear linkage role. These sites should serve local communities and offer a mix of opportunities including local play, kick-about spaces, seating, informal sports court/half court, ornamental gardens and trees, footpath/cycling links

- seek to provide local venues no more than one kilometre apart unless access is hampered by busy roads, railways, other land uses (such as retail, industrial, commercial), rivers, or changes of terrain, when a shorter distance may be appropriate so that these major barriers do not have to be crossed

- at the district and sub-municipal level, seek to acquire land parcels of a minimum of two hectares, or of a size which is sufficient for a mix of at least three to four (but not all) of the following:

    - two full size sports grounds, associated club and social rooms and off-street parking

    - informal seating, social areas

    - informal kick-about areas

    - outdoor court sports e.g.: a minimum of six to10 tennis courts, three bowling greens, or four netball courts (with club facilities shared with the sports ground users)

    - one or more playgrounds, with these designed to serve different age groups

    - informal amenity, seating and planting areas

    - linear trail links

    - neighbourhood house/multi-use community meeting centre

    - skate facility.

At the regional or council-wide level, seek to acquire land parcels of 10 plus hectares, or of a size which is sufficient for a mix of at least three to four of the facilities listed above plus, potentially, an indoor sports court complex with three to four indoor sports courts and an indoor aquatic leisure centre/ community activities /wellbeing centre.

Table 10.1 following is adapted from the Bendigo Open Space Strategy prepared by the author, Inspiring Place and Conceptz in 2003[25]. The open space classification is similar to that in Table 6.1. Column 5 records the mix of amenities which should be considered in at each open space type and, more importantly, column 6 records the indicative provision sizes and/or rates for the different types of open space. Additional categories could be developed for indoor, built recreation resources.

Ensure that the shape of all sites enhances access (for example, has its longest side facing a road or has road boundaries on at least three sides; is not narrow and deep and surrounded by back fences; has good pathway links from all directions to it), provides for passive supervision and does not have hidden corners or blind spots.

Ensure that local facilities are sited so users can develop an affinity with them (e.g.: put them near schools, shops, main roads etc so people know they exist) and use them without having to compete with non-local residents.

Seek co-location and partnership developments with schools, developers, shopping centres, welfare and other government and not-for-profit agencies and with transport routes and nodes to optimise

use and access[vi].

Evaluate opportunities for private investment in the initiatives.

provide footpath/trails and strong visual links between all recreation facilities and all significant community assets (such as schools, shops, railway stations) and where appropriate design these for both recreational and commuter use. Pay attention to issues of user safety with regard to view lines, regular access points, reserve widths for trails (e.g.: a minimum of five metres).

Ensure that all resources are effectively serviced with paths, shade, lighting, signs, and toilets, taps and car parking (depending on the scale).

Recent planning work undertaken by Stonnington Council in Melbourne has sought to break down the distinction between open space and the other resources which have recreational value to a community. These include shopping strips, streetscapes, pathways, road reserves, school grounds, car parks etc. All have been treated as part of the 'public realm' and the planning of all these spaces has been integrated with all aspects of for example, urban, transport, trails, community health, conservation and environmental planning rather than treating each as a separate entity. This is a valuable principle which warrants wider application in the planning of community recreation spaces.

The Stonnington approach highlights the point that there are new and often better ways of providing for recreation. Taking an integrated approach serves to recognise the central importance of recreation and leisure and to move it away from a focus on 'green' space to a focus on community life, community hubs, civic facilities and centres, waterways, community gardens, libraries, and to a sense of community and community wellbeing. Further, it raises the point that both existing and greenfield developments offer the opportunity to "break the mould" and to do something new and different in terms of recreation provision.

[vi] The co-location of a wide range of recreation and other community facilities and services is increasingly common. Examples can now be found where schools, libraries, pre-schools, child care centres, youth services, cultural facilities, neighbourhood houses, health services, hairdressers, physiotherapy, medical and recreational clothing retailers co-locate in what are being seen as community leisure and wellbeing centres rather than just recreation centres. Not only does co-location service a wider market and enhance viability, it also provides the opportunity to tap funding from a wider cross-section of non-for-profit, State and Federal funding agencies.

OPEN SPACE TYPE	DESCRIPTION	PRIMARY USES & BENDIGO EXAMPLES	SECONDARY AND OTHER USES	AMENITIES TO BE ASSESSED FOR PROVISION	INDICATIVE SIZES & BUFFERS	MANAGEMENT ISSUES
1. Parks	Reserves which have had their physical character &/ or vegetation modified to support community recreation, community development and well-being uses. Venues include ornamental gardens, play facilities, community gardens, informal lawns	Social activities, picnics Play activities Sightseeing Displays Cycling/walking Informal sports Relaxation Cultural activities: performances, fairs, displays of photography, painting, dance Examples: Local parks, playgrounds, Regional town centre ornamental and heritage park	Conservation/nature study Heritage protection Indoor/outdoor sporting, club, social, cultural, community services facilities Fauna/flora habitat Landscape & amenity Halls, swimming pools, stadia Social and management facilities/ rooms Flood mitigation Heritage conservation	Toilets Change Seating Shade Weather shelters Parking Lighting Bins Protective fencing Food services User information and regulations Information services Tourist services	Minimum size to be determined by primary uses. Local, 0.75 ha. min. Sub-/Municipal, 2 ha. min. Municipal and above, 10+ ha. depending on uses Buffers dependent on hierarchical position: Local, 3 m. from buildings, roads if fenced; 10 m. without fencing; Sub-Municipal and above, 10 m.	Noise, lighting, traffic and waste management Retention of quality Use management & controls to protect resource quality
2. Landscape & Amenity	Reserves created for their attractiveness and to add to or protect the character of an area Venues include reserves adjoining residential and industrial areas, ridge lines, river flats and sections of road reserves	Buffers between different types of land use Enhancing all forms of rural and urban land use A backdrop to all forms of recreational open space and Utilities & Services reserves Examples: Plantings around former mining sites; plantings adjacent to major road intersections; small plantings in shopping strips and along highways	Walking Cycling Nature study Conservation activities Educational activities Painting, photography Managing & directing urban form Nature conservation, protection and enhancement	Dependent on types and scale of secondary uses	Minimum 2 m. width and 4 m. length but dependent on plant species used, associated land uses and open space types and relevant government guidelines Buffers dependent on hierarchical position: Local, 1 m. from buildings, roads; Sub-Municipal & above, 3 m.	Weed and rubbish control Selection of appropriate species Clearing of native vegetation on private land Application of development controls over private land

Table 10.1: The Classification of Open Space Resources, adapted from City of Greater Bendigo, Open Space Strategy, 2003

OPEN SPACE TYPE	DESCRIPTION	PRIMARY USES & BENDIGO EXAMPLES	SECONDARY AND OTHER USES	AMENITIES TO BE ASSESSED FOR PROVISION	INDICATIVE SIZES & BUFFERS	MANAGEMENT ISSUES
3. Conservation & Heritage	Reserves created to protect and enhance natural and cultural resources	Natural and cultural re-source conservation protection and enhancement Fauna, flora research and study Scientific research Examples: Box-Iron Bark National Park; former mining sites of heritage importance	Water management Fire management Study/research Sightseeing Walking/cycling Camping Heritage appreciation Amenity Non-competitive, intellectually-focused leisure pursuits	As per 1., (Parks) dependent on asset rarity, conservation significance, fragility, location, user experiences to be provided, and management regime/objectives	Minimum to be deter-mined by primary uses, area required to ensure environmental sustainability and relevant government guidelines Buffers dependent on hierarchical position: Local, 3 m. from buildings, roads; Sub-Municipal, Municipal, 10 m., Regional and above, 50 m.	Protection from introduced plant species and feral animals Protection from degradation, vandalism & inappropriate uses, Weed and rubbish control Selection of appropriate species for regeneration programs Clearing of native vegetation on private land Application of development controls over private land
4. Linear & Linkage	Small pathways linking residential streets in urban areas to municipal and regional trails using former rail and water race reserves and dedicated land Creek and river reserves, floodways	Walking and cycling activities; linkage to recreational and other activities Commuter travel Habitat corridors Urban amenity and buffers Examples: Bendigo Bush-land Trail, Bendigo Creek Linear Park, Rail Trail	Conservation/nature study Amenity Utilities & services Recreation trails (when used as habitat corridors) Urban amenity and buffers (when used for recreation) Commuter/shopper access	Signs Toilets at points of intersection with other open space types Seats Shelter Lighting Road crossings Trees Protective fencing	Units of 200 metres to 1 km. long dependent on location & destination. 10 metres min. width unless preconditions limit this Local, 0.2 km min Sub-municipal, 1 km min. Municipal, Regional, 5+ km Buffers dependent on hierarchical position: Local, 3 m. from buildings, roads; Sub-Municipal, 5 m. from buildings, roads; Municipal & above, 20 m.	User safety Path materials User conflicts Rubbish control Control of inappropriate uses Management of impacts on surrounding land uses Positioning of amenities

OPEN SPACE TYPE	DESCRIPTION	PRIMARY USES & BENDIGO EXAMPLES	SECONDARY AND OTHER USES	AMENITIES	INDICATIVE SIZES	MANAGEMENT ISSUES
5. Outdoor sport	Venues designed to support team sports training and competition	Competitive sport Special events: fairs, shows; displays Examples: Regional football and cricket oval, regional harness racing venue, outdoor swimming pool	Play facilities, halls, pools, stadia, social & management facilities, informal lawns, gardens Walking/cycle Picnics, barbeques Amenity Emergency meeting points Fire refuge Helicopter emergency landing Buffering, amenity Flood mitigation Habitat preservation Open space types 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 as appropriate	Toilets Change Parking Seating Shade Weather shelters Lighting Storage Bins Protective fencing Food services User information and regulations	Dependent on whether Local, District, or Regional: Local, 5 ha. min. Sub-Municipal, Municipal, 5-10 ha. min Regional, 5-10 ha. depending on uses	Noise Lighting Traffic Waste management Use management and controls to protect resource quality Protection of secondary uses
6. Utilities & Services	Venues reserved for urban and rural support services	Water / irrigation reservoirs Pipe- & powerline easements Road sides & road reserves Council depots Sewerage treatment pondages Airports & flight lines Examples: Pipe and power line easements; water supply dams; sewerage works; airport	Linear trails Model aircraft flying areas Bird observing/ conservation Boating Golf Horse agistment BMX Motor bike courses Flora/fauna habitat, corridors Landscape and amenity	Dependent on any constraints imposed by primary use As per linear and linkage reserves if developed as linear routes for recreation Safety barriers, signs Advisory signs Protective fencing	Dependent on any requirements of primary use(s)	Ensuring that secondary uses do not impact detrimentally on primary use Weed and rubbish control and management Fire management Control of inappropriate uses
7. Un-developed	Land acquired or zoned for open space purposes to protect its assets, or to meet assessed community needs once development of an area proceeds	To be determined by future needs and feasibility studies Examples: Former mining wastes; farmland; forest on private land	Landscape and amenity value Informal, short term uses Others dependent on nature of any residential development	Generally nil but dependent on existing uses	Dependent on projected use but other-wise minimum of 0.75 ha.	Weed and rubbish control Environmental protection Fire management Control of inappropriate uses
8. Proposed	Land which it is proposed to zone or acquired for open space to protect its or to meet community needs once development of an area proceeds	Uses to be determined by future needs and feasibility studies Examples: Former mining wastes; farmland; forest on private land	Landscape and amenity value Informal, short term uses Others dependent on nature of any residential development	Generally nil but dependent on existing uses	Dependent on projected use but other-wise minimum of 0.75 ha.	Weed and rubbish control Environmental protection Fire management Control of inappropriate management prior to zoning or acquisition

10.5 *Conclusions*

This Section has sought to provide guidance for planners having to make provision for recreation opportunities in new residential developments where there is no existing provision to evaluate and no community to consult. It is evident that planning from 'scratch' raises a number of difficulties. However, a range of strategies and tools are available and these can be used to create an initial framework for provision. It is stressed, however, that once a base population of as few as several hundred or several thousand residents moves into a new area, planning authorities should begin using a number of the other planning methodologies detailed in this book. Consultations with residents and an analysis of resident demographics will be two of the most useful tools. A continuing programs of needs monitoring and provision reviews may be needed before the 'final' mix of provision is achieved and, as in any other community, this may need further review and revision on a regular basis.

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11 Planning for recreation in natural areas

<mark>This section is currently not complete; it will be included as soon as it becomes available.</mark>

[Introduction](#)

11.1 *Introduction*

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12 Preparing a recreation plan

12.1 *Introduction*

Although the process of undertaking the research outlined in the previous sections is quite complicated, it is not difficult to compile a comprehensive dossier of information about the community which is being planned for. This is likely to cover reviews and assessments of:

- the demographic characteristics of the community and recent and projected trends in these

- trends in recreation participation and provision

- the findings and recommendations of previous studies and reports

- the existing recreation facilities, programs and services available to the community

- the recreational needs and aspirations of the community.

Yet this information is of little use if it is simply presented as a set of factual material which has not been assessed, evaluated and interpreted. From a planning perspective, it will be of even less use if the future recreation provision implications haven't been identified, explained and prioritised. Quite a bit of the assessment, evaluation and interpretation should have been carried out at the completion of each of the research stages. Yet it is only when the information which has been collected is viewed as a whole that broader conclusions can be drawn.

This Section looks at the processes by which the evaluation and the identification of conclusions and recommendations occur.

12.2 *Evaluating the research findings*

The first step in the evaluation process is to go back to the draft goals, mission statements, principles and objectives which were defined at the start of the planning process and which make up the recreation plan's policy framework. These may have been reviewed and revised during the planning process through discussions with the community, key stakeholders or elected members of council or parliament. These statements broadly define what is to be achieved through a recreation plan and as such, can be used to evaluate the relative importance of the findings of each research stage.

Issues which emerge as having some level of importance through the research but which do not advance achieving the draft goals, mission statements, principles and objectives or which conflict with them, are likely to warrant serious questioning and may need to be dropped from a final action list. Obviously, careful explanations will need to be provided if this course of action is taken and it may be that alternate forms of provision can be explored which meeting the needs which have been

identified without conflicting with the goals, mission statements, principles or objectives.

Having agreed on the initial or revised goals, mission statements, principles and objectives, the researcher then turns to the research findings and asks a series of questions of them. With each question, answers are sought from the lists of needs and aspirations identified through the findings of each of the research phases. Sometimes a 'solution' cannot be identified or it might be found that a possible solution has not been fully thought through. Under these circumstances, it is the responsibility of the recreation planner to use his or her wider experience to propose possible strategies or solutions which would be appropriate to the communities to be served in keeping with the broad goals and vision statements.

It does not particularly matter which section of the research the questioning starts with, the population review findings, the existing provision findings, the consultations findings, or some other section. However, one useful starting point is the outcomes of a rigorously conducted random community survey, if that survey has included a list of issues and needs gleaned from all the other research elements. The random community responses to the issues which have been identified can provide a list of statistically valid 'priorities' which can be cross-tabulated by gender, age, residential location, cultural background, type of home, family make-up etc if this information has also been collected through the survey.

The process of building up lists of potential action priorities needs to be repetitive and circular so that the planner eventually comes back to the start, but with a lot more knowledge, to recheck and refine the earlier conclusions.

Some examples of the questions to be asked of the research findings are listed below.

Demographics

- What age groups are growing or declining and thus may need different levels of provision or alternate provision?

- Are there new or growing cultural groups in the community which will need provision?

- Are there substantial numbers of single parents, lone householders, families in rental properties or families with one or no cars and what facilities, programs and services may be needed to ensure equity of opportunity for them?

- Are there income groups who are likely to need special attention or who, in fact, can be left to their own devices and resources?

- How does the distribution of the population match the distribution of recreation facilities and programs? Are there geographic areas with no provision or potentially, excessive provision levels?

Recreation trends

- Are there recreation trends which have not been responded to in the past which are disadvantaging some or all in the community?

- What provision may be needed in order to reflect wider provision trends and standards of provision?

- What facilities and programs may need upgrading, changing or adding so as to better reflect trends in community interests and needs?

Existing provision

- Are there gaps in the mix of recreation facilities and programs?

- Are there gaps in the distribution of recreation facilities and programs?

- Does the existing provision reflect modern design principles, can it be upgraded or should new replacement provision be made?

- Is there excessive provision of some opportunities?

- Is the quality of the existing provision of an adequate and safe standard?

- To what extent does the existing provision match the needs identified through the consultations and where are the biggest gaps or disparities?

Community consultations

- What initiatives are given highest priority by the community? How do the top priorities vary between age groups, gender, cultural background, length of residence, family make-up, and location within the planning area?

- Do the priorities identified through the consultations match the needs identified from the other research stages and where there are clear differences, how can these be reconciled?

- Are there groups in the community - such as women, the aged, people with disabilities and emerging cultural groups - whose 'needs' ought to be met ahead of the 'wants' of other groups?

- What are the major themes emerging from submissions and how can these be accommodated?

- Is it possible to give all major groups in the community some enhanced opportunities while offering more to the most needy?

The answers to the above questions should be cross-referenced with the findings of all other sections of the research. For example, in the first list above, dot point two asks: 'Are their new or growing cultural groups in the community which will need provision?' If the answer is 'Yes', this should then be followed by the questions 'Where are they in the study area?', 'What needs did the consultations identify in association with these groups?', 'Did the evaluated the existing provision of recreation facilities, programs and services, that sufficient provision being made for these groups, or was it patchy provision, and was it reaching all groups?' As the questioning progresses, a list of needs and potential priorities is progressively built up and refined. This process will be greatly assisted if each component of the research material identifies a series of 'provisional' recommendations for action.

In following the above approach, several further strategies warrant consideration:

- Ensure some provision is made for each type of recreation opportunity e.g. sport, culture, passive, conservation/amenity, trails etc so that the diversity of opportunity is at least maintained, if not extended.

- Ensure some provision is made for each geographic area of the district or council being planned, even if the mix and scale of provision varies.

- Ensure that the principles of modern design and provision outlined earlier in this book are followed e.g. co-location of provision, multi-use capacity.

- Put a strong emphasis on upgrading, programming and servicing existing physical provision rather than simply providing more built infrastructure. All too often, recreation providers 'fix up old mistakes by building new ones' rather than applying high standards of management and programming to their existing resources.

- Take the draft conclusions and recommendations back to the community and other stakeholders and explain the reasons for the proposed actions. This will allow refinements, corrections, additions and most of all, the building of support for the proposals.

- Prepare a chart which lists the top 20-30 preferences for action as identified by age, gender, residential and cultural groups through a random community survey to identify which items have the strongest support across the community as a whole and which meet the needs of particular target groups. Make sure that the report recommendations make provision for initiatives meeting the needs of both these groups.

- Prepare importance/performance charts and evaluate which areas of provision or which specific facilities, programs and services need adding to or improving and which can possibly be wound back or abandoned.

Together, the above processes lead to a draft list of priorities for action which may be reviewed and discussed with the client organisation and steering committees, elected members and possibly, a further round of consultations. The final recommendations can then be presented in chart form ordered in a number of ways. These include:

- Listing all priorities from highest to lowest; listing the priorities identified for different types of recreation facilities, programs and services e.g. sports, culture, passive parklands; listing priorities for different geographic areas; and listing the priorities for different cultural groups in the community.

- Organising priorities under each of the objectives identified through the policy development process.

- Organising priorities under headings such as 'Managerial and operational initiatives', 'Budget issues', 'Enhancing and improving existing provision' (with subsections for each of facilities, programs and services), and 'Providing new recreation facilities, programs and services'.

In addition to the priorities for action, the recommendations chart can be made more useful by have additional columns covering:

- a summary or explanation of the action being recommended

- a timeline for action (e.g. short, medium and long term)

- an indication of who will be responsible for the action

- an indicative cost (although if details on costs are required, an additional project budget allowance may be needed for this).

On the issue of timelines for action, anything beyond 10 years is generally too long to trust that conditions and trends have remained unchanged. Conversely, the inclusion of very specific dates (e.g. by December 2010) can mean that if action is not achieved by that date, the plan is seen to have

failed and to be out of date.

Finally, it may be appropriate to provide a second chart which summarises the top ten or 20 priorities for action.

While the foregoing paragraphs have given some guidance as to how to identify priorities and recommendations for action, some guidance is also warranted on the format of the final 'plan' report. Increasingly, recreation planners are presenting their reports in a number of separate volumes. These may cover each of the research areas (population, past reports, existing provision reviews etc), or a volume covering all of these; an issues and discussion paper which has been prepared during the planning process as a means of airing critical issues, and finally, the plan itself.

Ideally, the 'plan' document should be a stand-alone report so that anyone can read it and get an understanding of the purpose, scope, methodologies and findings of the overall planning project. To achieve this, the 'plan' document essentially becomes an 'executive summary' of the whole study. Its chapters will generally be quite brief, but they could be expected to cover the following:

Chapter 1: A statement of the purpose of the planning study

Details on the scope of the research undertaken

Details on the research methodology and who was involved

Acknowledgements

Chapter 2: A 1-2 page summary of the core findings of each stage of the research ie: demographics, past reports review, consultations etc with references back to the 'research findings report' for fuller details

Chapter 3: The mission/goal/aim of the plan, the planning principles, and what they mean in terms of action by the client of the project

The objectives of the plan, which indicate the broad areas in which action will be recommended

The chart of recommended actions and the priorities allocated to them.

This format is indicative only and a range of other components may be added. A key point to note, however, is that the more succinct and 'readable' the 'plan' volume of the reports prepared as part of a planning study, the more widely will it be read.

12.3 *What if new issues emerge?*

It sometimes occurs that six months, a year or several years after the completion of a recreation planning study, a new issue or need emerges which has somehow been overlooked or missed by the study. This may be due to some constraint on the depth of the research which could be undertaken during the planning process or perhaps, due to some external factor such as a new government grants scheme, new overseas trends, a new commercial development, a new sporting club wanting to develop new facilities, a new creative idea on the part of one or more people, or a significant change in leisure technology.

The issue of how to fit the new idea or proposal into the recreation plan then arises. Should it await a revision of the plan? Should it be ignored or should it be slotted in somewhere along the list of priorities and risk the ire of others who have already been waiting their turn for new or upgraded provision? The following steps are proposed as a means of evaluating the proposal:

Does the proposal meet/contribute to achieving the recreation principles and goals set out in the recreation plan?

Is the proposal a fad? What evidence can be collected about the proposal from other sources that might sustain or reject it?

What group or groups in the community will the proposal serve and to what extent; what do members of those groups think about the proposal?

What are the present action priorities in the community; where would the proposal sit within these and would any of them have to change in their timing to accommodate the proposal? Would any changes in priorities detrimentally affect the benefits to be achieved through other priorities? Would any groups in the community be detrimentally affected by action on the proposal?

If the proposal is a facility, what is the size and viability of provision elsewhere, how does market size compare, are there economies of scale or is there a base unit of size regardless of market size? If scaling can apply, what is the minimum level of provision needed to provide a worthwhile recreation experience and can that be achieved within the assessed catchment?

If the proposal is a program or service, can it be accommodated at an existing venue? Can an existing organisation provide it?

What space requirements does the proposal have and what site opportunities exist? Will there be site impacts?

How small can initial provision be --how big may it need to grow to and is there sufficient space to accommodate future growth? If a venue for provision has been suggested, does the proposal fit with the agreed hierarchical rank of the venue?

What is the likely order of costs of the proposal and what are the implications to other desired actions?

What is likely to happen if the proposal is ignored?

Can the proponents of the proposal assist in funding and sustaining it?

Where is the most appropriate location for the provision of the proposal?

Once these questions have been answered to the best of the staff abilities, the value of the proposal and wider council provision implications can be assessed and decided on. If need be, other action priorities can be changed or sustained and a decision to take action or not - or to go to a fuller feasibility and planning program - can be made.

Working through the above steps may take as little as a few weeks or as much as a year. The proponents and the wider community should be involved throughout the process.

12.4 *Presenting the findings and the plan*

In the majority of the recreation planning studies prepared over the past 20 years, the findings of each of the research chapters has been written up and presented as an integral part of the recreation plan. This material has then been followed by a final chapter or two which presents the actual plan.

More recently, a number of planners have taken somewhat different approaches to the presentation of the research findings and the recreation plan and some client groups have also required different approaches. Some of these differences are:

> Preparation of an 'Issues Paper' which summarising one or more of the demographics, trends, existing provision review, consultative stages and other research issues. This paper is released for review and discussion with the findings then being used as an input to the formulation of the final plan. In some instances - more commonly where the study has a feasibility focus - subsequent stages of the planning process are only funded where the initial phases endorse the need for future action.

> Preparation of separate issues papers on each of the demographics, trends, existing provision review and other research issues, with each paper being issued and workshopped as part of the community consultations program in order to identify the implications.

> In this approach, the final recreation plan is likely to be a far shorter, document with a focus on the methodology, goals, principles, objectives and prioritised actions rather than a much larger document which presents all the information that has been covered, identified and assessed. A short, concise doc is far more accessible to all who are interested in the outcomes and only a few may need to or wish to read the full background 'research' findings.

> Preparation of a number of topic-focused discussion papers - such as on youth, sport, cultural needs, demographics, open space, aquatics, and particular needs groups or localities in the community. As in two, these are used as a basis for discussion, consultations and the identification of priorities for action.

> Use of a search conference approach wherein detailed workshops are held with senior officers, elected members, and key recreation stakeholders in the community to identify a short list of critical issues for action. This reduces what can otherwise be a quite long community consultative program which all too often produces extensive lists of needs and wishes, many of which are not strategic in nature.

These variations on the more traditional sequence of research stages to recreation planning have emerged as a means of reducing the volume of written material to be digested; of taking a more focused and strategic approach to the research, and making the consultative stages of the research more productive and less all-embracing in their reach. They also mean that a bright, attractive recreation plan can be produced and distributed widely in the community. The detailed research report then sits behind this and can be referred to by those in need of greater detail.

12.5 *Revising recreation plans*

As the earlier sections of this text demonstrated the determinants of recreation and the consequent nature and patterns of recreation and are changing quite rapidly. As a consequence, a recreation plan cannot be expected to guide future upgrading and provision initiatives over a long period. Needs change, priorities, the politics of the planning organisation, the wider community or the state and national governments change, and so must the recreation plans.

Most planning agencies do not have the resources to undertake a comprehensive and continual monitoring of change as recommended by Hamilton-Smith[1] in Section 2.1 of this text. Yet, they should monitor their performance and the extent to which the plan is being implemented on a continuing basis and if this is done, quite significant change can be made over a period of time. Similarly, they can monitor various facets of their communities on a regular basis (e.g. the characteristics of the population, the use of existing provision; the needs of particular groups in the community) without having to undertake a whole new planning program. This can identify ongoing

changes in the way in which and the extent to which recreation facilities, programs and services are changed.

Eventually, however, the goals, values and principles of a plan can become outdated and many of the recommendations will have been acted on, or if not, become dated and inappropriate. Then, a new planning study will most probably be needed. In rapidly growing and changing communities this may be needed within five to seven years while in older communities or communities undergoing little change, a new plan may only be commissioned every 10 to 12 years.

12.6 *Conclusions*

This report has sought to provide guidance for the preparation of recreation plans. It has sought to provide a philosophical basis for recreation planning and to detail a set of tools and strategies by which recreation plans can be prepared. There is no one ideal or correct method and in many instances, the processes which are followed will be influenced by State or other planning regulations and legislation, by the budgets available to planning agencies and by the nature of the areas and communities in which the planning is being carried out. The planning methods detailed in this text have been tried and tested over a period of 20-30 years: this does not mean, however, that there are no other methods that can be used.

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13 Appendices

13.1 *The benefits of recreation*

The following table is a summary of the benefits which recreation delivers to the community. It is drawn from the Canadian report, *The Benefits of Parks and Recreation. A Catalogue.*[26] It is published by Parks and Recreation Federation of Ontario and the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Ontario, 1992

Personal benefits

1.1   Physical recreation and fitness contributes to a full and meaningful life

1.2   Regular physical activity is one of the very best methods of health insurance for individuals

1.3   Relaxation, rest and revitalisation through the opportunity of leisure is essential to stress management in today's busy and demanding world

1.4   Meaningful leisure activity is an essential source of self-esteem and positive self-image

1.5   Leisure provides the opportunity to lead balanced lives; achieve our full potential and gain life satisfaction

1.6   Children's play is essential to the human development process

1.7   Leisure Opportunities for youth provide positive lifestyle choices and alternatives to self-destructive behaviour

1.8   Parks and open spaces bring beauty to an area, while giving people satisfaction and improving their quality of life.

Social benefits

2.1   Leisure provides leadership opportunities that build strong communities

2.2   Community recreation reduces alienation, loneliness and antisocial behaviours

2.3   Community recreation promotes ethnic and cultural harmony

2.4   Recreating together builds strong families, the foundation of a stronger society

2.5   Leisure provides opportunities for community involvement and shared management and ownership of resources

2.6   integrated and accessible leisure services are critical to the quality of life of people with a disability and disadvantaged individuals

2.7   Leisure opportunities, facilities and the quality of the local environment are the foundations of community pride

2.8   Leisure services enrich and complement protective services for latchkey children through after-school and other recreational services

Economic benefits

3.1 Pay now or pay more later! Investment in recreation as a preventive health service makes sense

3.2 A fit work force is a productive work force

3.3 Small investments in recreation yield big economic returns

3.4 Parks and recreation services motivate business relocation and expansion in your community

3.5 Meaningful leisure services reduce the high cost of vandalism and criminal activity

3.6 Recreation and park services are often the catalyst for tourism, growing sector of our economy

3.7 Investments in environmental protection through the provision of parks and open spaces pay for themselves

Environmental benefits

4.1 Through the provision of parks, open spaces and protected natural environments, recreation can contribute to the environmental health of our communities. This is an essential, life-sustaining role.

4.2 The public is often prepared to pay for environmental protection and rehabilitation in their communities, and to support parks and recreation organizations that play a lead-role in that protection

4.3 investing in the environment through parks and the provision of open space in residential areas, leads to an increase in neighbourhood property values through accessibility to environmentally friendly green spaces and associated recreation opportunities

4.4 The trend toward natural environment, based. leisure activities is insurance for a new and improved environmental future

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13.2 *Writing reports*

Some points

If you recognise that your writing skills are weak/poor, take a course

In writing a report, divide it into sections using sub-headings so it is easily read and digested in small 'bites'

Have an introduction which tells the reader (a) what the report is about and (b) what subsequent sections will cover. Do this for each major sub-section or chapter as well

If you use tables and diagrams, describe and explain them, a picture may be worth 1,000 words but it still benefits from 100 explaining it

Do not use colloquial, chatty or abbreviated language and spell check e.g.: replace 'We did x, y and z' with 'The Study did x, y and z.' Replace 'The experiment didn't really work' with 'The experiment did not work'

Do not plagiarise: acknowledge the sources of your ideas and information

Provide an accurate bibliography or information sources as footnotes

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