

# Yardstick: A new measure of success in parks & recreation

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Chris Champion, IPWEA National CEO.

Yardstick is IPWEA's latest project with a new focus on parks and recreation activities.

This new service collects and compares a range of information relating to the provision and cost of parks & recreation services. It extends to asset management processes, and planning & policy information.

The approach is designed to encourage and enable 'best practice' operations. This goes well beyond normal benchmarking exercises. It is centred around tight definitions and site visits by a project manager to ensure information supplied is as comparable as possible.

Membership of Yardstick is now available through IPWEA in Australia. It is an award winning initiative and used by 60% of councils in New Zealand. There are a number of Australian councils who are already members.

## Benefits of Yardstick

Yardstick is a benchmarking project originally developed by the New Zealand



parks industry, for the parks industry, focused on parks and recreation activities. It collects and compares a range of information relating to the provision of services, cost of service provision, asset management processes and planning and policy information.

The development of an asset management approach to the long term operation and maintenance of assets has resulted in Councils needing to develop a new set of practices. These include the need to identify detailed information about their assets, services and costs and to plan for the future management and replacement of those assets and services.

Yardstick is designed to promote 'best practice' for the management of parks and recreation.

It does this through a set of questions on specific parks operation categories.

Over the last three years these have included the following:

- Policy and planning
- Cemeteries & crematoria
- Aquatic structures
- Playgrounds
- Walkways
- Furniture
- Grass maintenance
- Toilets
- Signs
- Garden maintenance
- Trees
- Carparks and Roads
- Service providers
- Asset management planning
- Sportsfield Services

Yardstick guides organisations to achieve best practice by:

- determining if the organisation has the asset information to actually be able to answer the question. For those that cannot - it has the benefit of guiding them as to the type of information that needs to be collected, and can also assist in resource allocation to enable staff to collect the information in the future;
- determining what practises organisations are applying in managing the assets. By comparison across the industry, this helps managers to determine what they should or should not be doing, to obtain resources or to prioritise their resources so they can do what the majority of the industry is doing;
- comparing Levels of Services in terms of asset/service provision and level of expenditure. This enables managers to determine if they are providing a comparable level of service to other similar sized/located organisations.

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### Yardstick Australia

To date there are eight Australian members. Six organisations are based in South Australia (Onkaparinga, Tea Tree Gully, Victor Harbour, Salisbury, Adelaide, Charles Sturt cities), plus Melbourne City Council and Canberra Urban Parks.

These and other members will shortly have the opportunity to form their own Australian Technical Group, so that specific questions or possibly a whole question category specific to the Australian parks industry can be developed.

A significant strength of the project is that it is owned by the industry, so as Australian membership grows they will be able to determine how they want the project to be developed and delivered in Australia to suit Australia's particular needs.

The additional benefit of Yardstick is the opportunity it provides to create a network where information can be shared and levels of service reviewed.

### Sample Questions, Definitions & Reports

Participation in Yardstick is by subscription to self-fund the project. Fees vary depending on the population size of the authority. Membership applications are now being accepted for 2006.



Member Councils receive a formal annual yardstick report which provides a summary of data for all participating Councils. Analysis and interpretation of the results is also provided. The results are presented in order of population size, and each member's results are identified by organisation. This means you are able to compare your results with other organisations of a similar size or similar situation.

You can quickly identify the level of service and performance for your organi-

sation compared across the industry.

Future developments being investigated include Park Check, a nationwide park user survey, and Yardstick for Pools. Yardstick for Pools would aim at best practice for aquatic facilities.

For further information including sample questions, definitions, membership fees, application form and extracts of Yardstick reports to be sent to you, e-mail Chris Champion at [cchampion@ipwea.org.au](mailto:cchampion@ipwea.org.au). 