



Sustainable Management of the Overland Track: has the promise been delivered?



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Key questions

- Has the walker's social experience on the track been improved?
- Have the management changes resulted in an environmentally sustainable experience?
- Is the track financially sustainable?



The Overland Track Experience

- Independent, group and commercial walkers
- Option of huts and/or tents
- Variety of ecosystems and scenery
- Rated in top 10 walks in the world

The Overland Track Experience



The Overland Track Experience



The Overland Track Experience

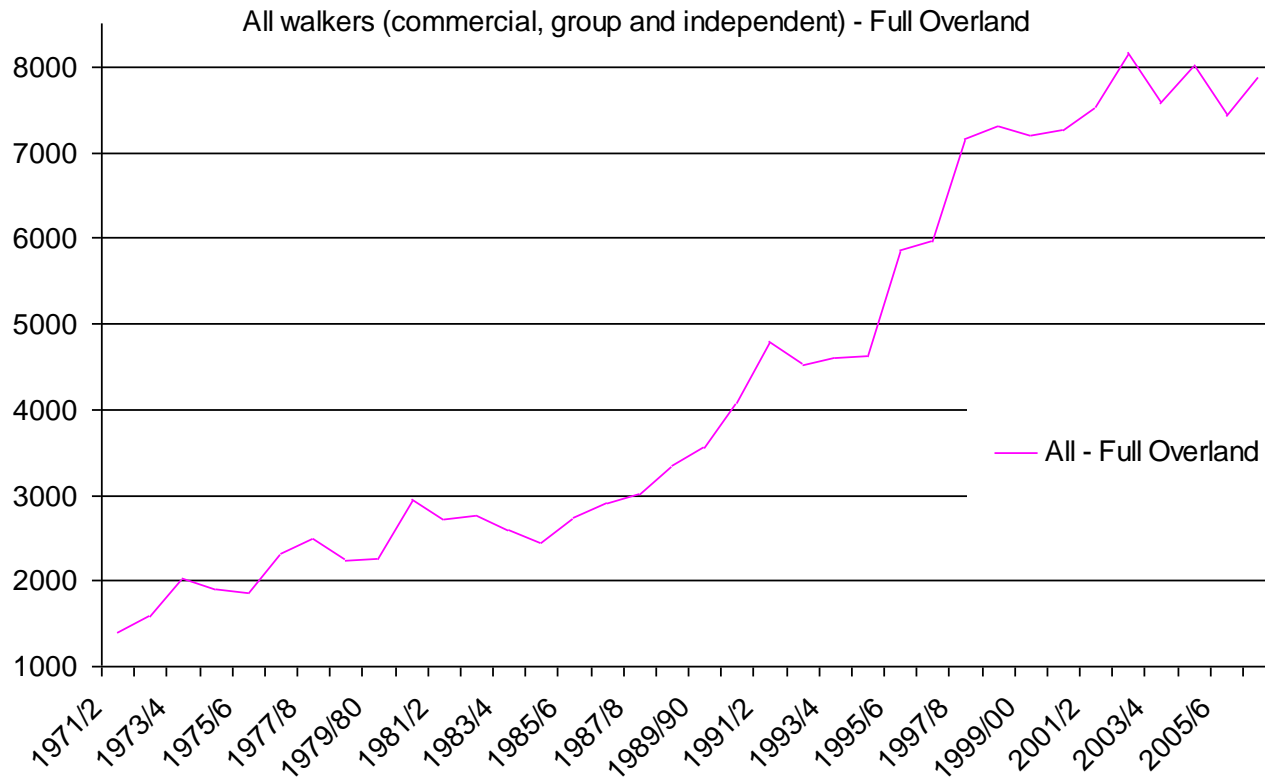


The Management Challenge

- 65km through Tasmanian Wilderness WHA
- High operational costs
- Environmental sensitivity
- Increasing popularity causing overcrowding during peak season
- Impacts on the environment and walker experience



Walker Registration



The Management Challenge



The Vision

***The Overland Track will be
Tasmania's premier
bushwalking experience***

- provide a quality experience for a range of visitor groups
- a sustainable experience that utilises best practice environmental standards
- demonstrate best practice management
- showcase the values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area



The Management Approach

- Departure Management
 - 60 walkers per day
 - North-south walking direction
- Peak season
 - Booking system
 - Facility fee

Retained revenue

Recreation Zone Management Plan



What has this meant for the walkers?

- Online 'real-time' booking system
- A quality walking experience
- Track Rangers to provide advice and information
- Improved track conditions
- Separation of groups from independent walkers, via secluded camping platforms
- Construction of new public hut at Windy Ridge



How should we measure sustainability?

- Environmental
- Social
- Economic

What is important and indicates sustainable management?

How should we measure sustainability?



10 Variables:

Environmental

- Water quality
- Track condition
- Campsite condition
- Litter
- Walker displacement

Social

- Walker numbers
- Social conditions
- Demographic mix
- Satisfaction rating

Economic

- Cost recovery

How have we measured sustainability?







Methodology

Measured variable	Indicator	Standard
Satisfaction rating	Satisfaction of walkers with their Overland Track experience.	90% of all walkers are reporting a very high or high level of satisfaction with their Overland Track experience.

How have we measured sustainability?



Performance reporting

	Assessed Performance	Implications for Management
	Green <u>Sustainable</u> – exceeds standard and indicators stable or improving	Management is on target and achieving the desired results.
	Amber <u>Caution</u> – exceeds standard but one or more indicators in decline	Requires ongoing management review and corrective action
	Red <u>Unsustainable</u> – below standard	Requires focussed management attention and significant change
	Grey <u>Data Deficient</u> – assessment based on old or incomplete data	Priority for baseline monitoring and/or repeat surveying

How have we measured sustainability?








Information sources

- Overland Track Walker Survey
- Track and Campsite monitoring
- Overland Track Business Enterprise
- Water quality monitoring
- Walker logbooks

How have we measured sustainability?



Environmental

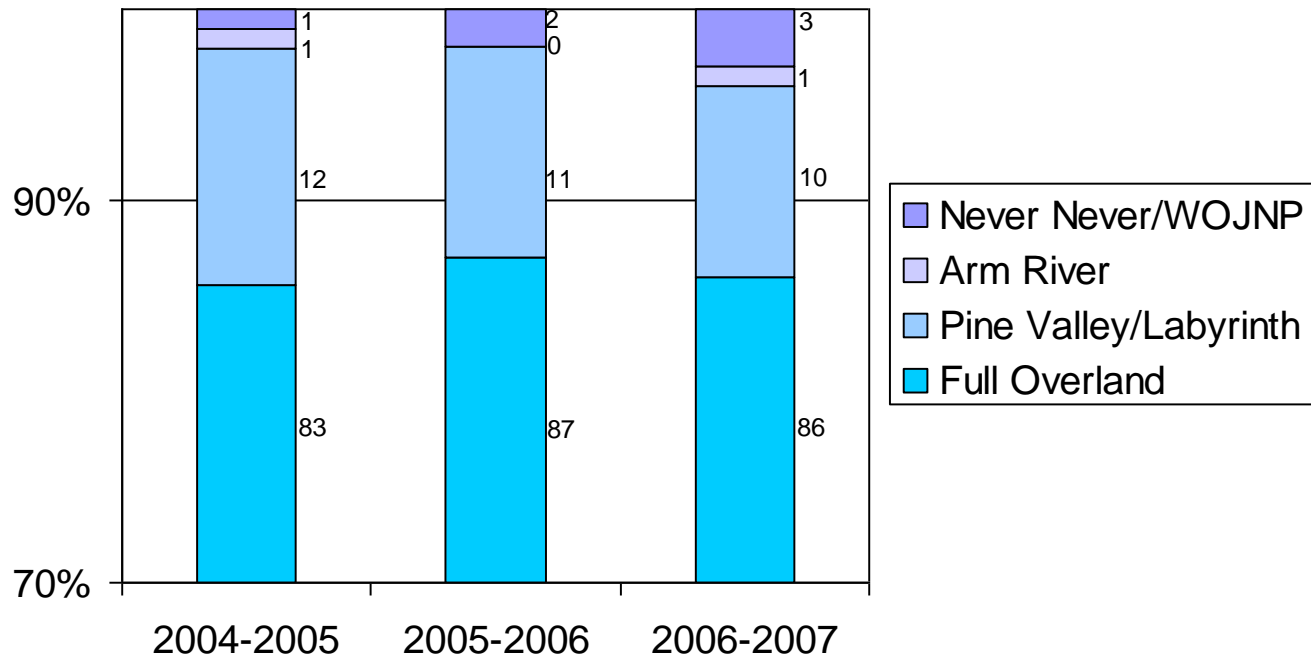
Water quality	 Data Deficient	Water quality at selected sites was last surveyed in 1999 and showed some minor issues with quality.
Track condition	 Data Deficient	Incidence of walkers being 'bothered' by 'muddy and eroded tracks' has declined from 47 to 20 percent. Inventory undertaken in 2006 noted 8.2 kilometres of track (mostly north of Pelion Gap) was in poor or very poor condition.
Campsite condition	 Caution	Two camping areas (Narcissus & Pine Valley) showed an increase in seriously-impacted campsites during 1999-2005.
Litter	 Sustainable	Incidence of walkers 'noticing' and being 'bothered by' litter has declined to 16% and 9% respectively.
Walker displacement	 Sustainable	For the first two years of the booking system, at least 88% of walkers have undertaken the track during the peak season (Nov. to April). Usage of Pine Valley or side-tracks to access the Overland Track appears stable.

Has the vision been delivered?



Walker displacement





Route Selected by Independent (FIT) Walkers



Has the vision been delivered?



Social

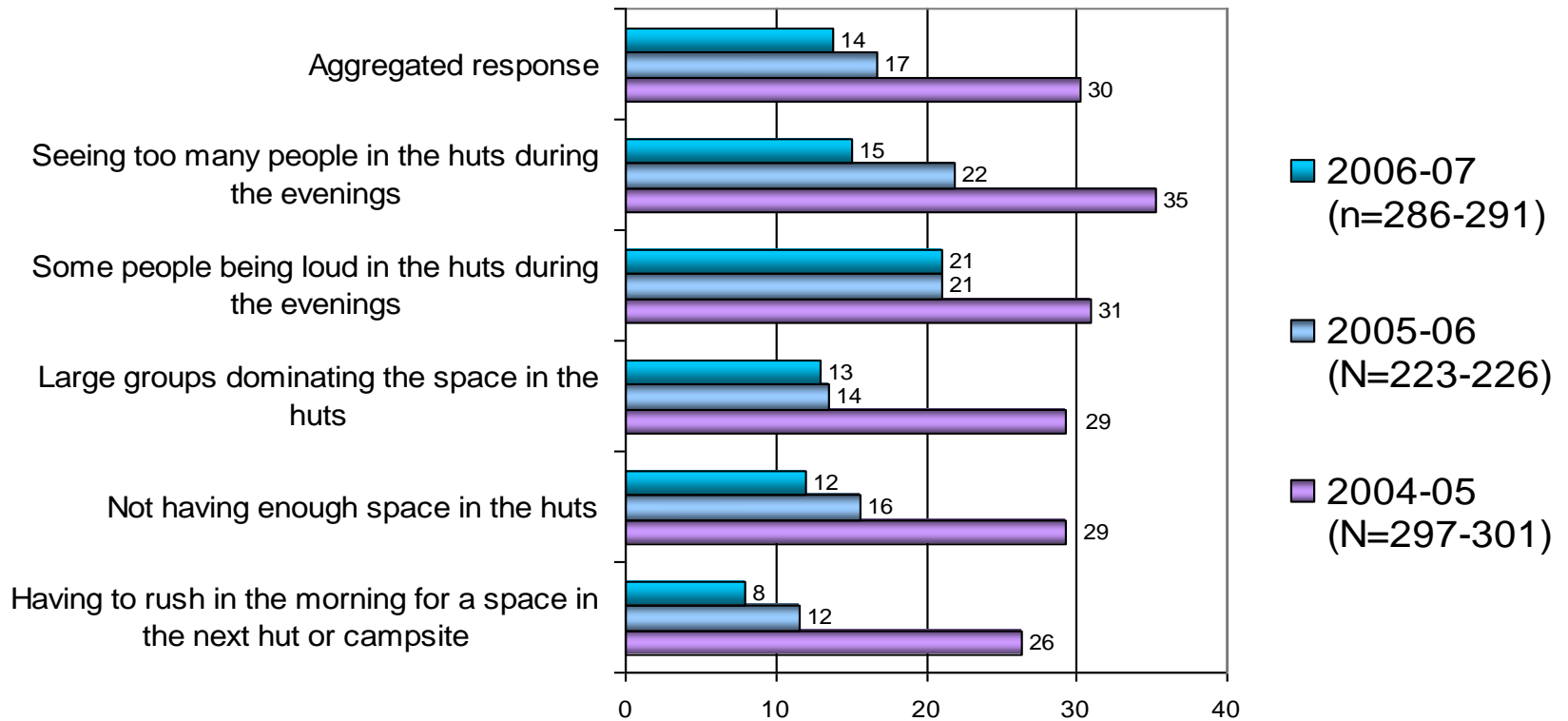
Walker numbers	 Sustainable	Average between 35 and 39 walkers per day. Capacity still available during shoulder months. Off-peak usage is increasing, continue to monitor.
Social conditions	 Sustainable	Level of 'botheration' reported by independent walkers for social conditions (aggregated response) has more than halved, from 30 to 14 percent, since the booking system was introduced.
Demographic mix	 Sustainable	Occupation groupings have remained within +/- 5 percent of levels recorded prior to the implementation of the booking system.
Satisfaction rating	 Sustainable	Walker satisfaction at 91% - exceeded target of 90% both years since booking system was introduced.

Has the vision been delivered?



Social conditions

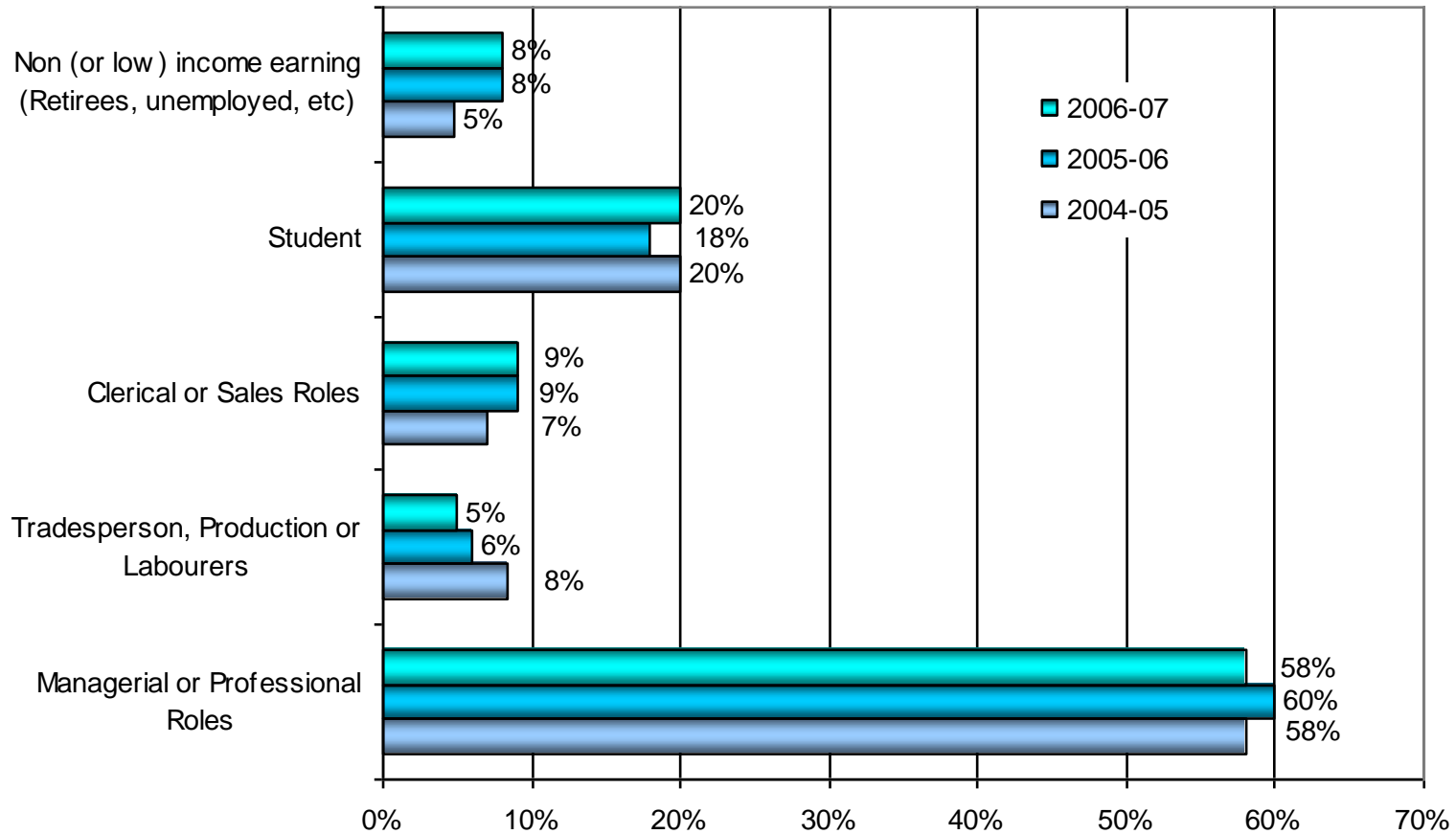
Levels of 'botheration' for Overland Track walkers (minus commercial groups)
2004/05 to 2006/07



Has the vision been delivered?



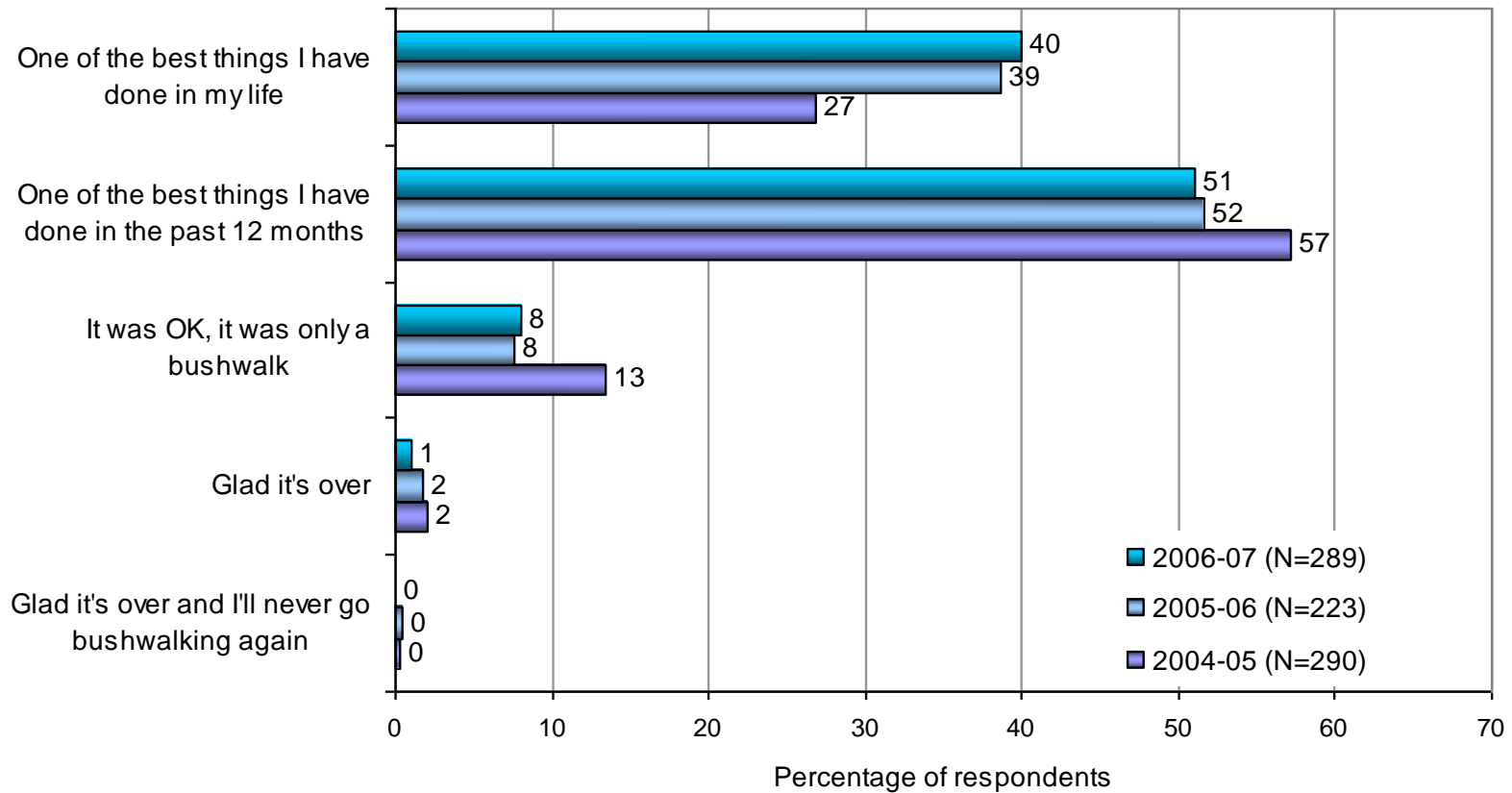
Demographic mix



Has the vision been delivered?




Satisfaction rating



Has the vision been delivered?



Economic

Cost-recovery	 Sustainable	Fee was raised from \$100 to \$150 per walker in 2007 to ensure operational costs are fully recovered. This has enabled maintenance schedules to be met, as well as catch-up on trackwork.
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Has the vision been delivered?



Cost recovery

- Fee originally \$100, raised to \$150 for 2007-2008
- Enterprise revenue is approx. \$750,000 per year
- All revenue raised by fee is reinvested into the Overland Track
- Track costs approximately \$750,000 to operate annually

Has the vision been delivered?



Cost recovery

“A walk along Tasmania’s iconic Overland Track is all that is required to remind one about the virtues of a soundly based user-pays system...it should be fair to users, it should encourage efficient use of public resources...and help reduce the loss of misplaced tax revenue”

Bruce Felmingham - *Sunday Tasmanian*, 6 April 2008

Has the vision been delivered?



"...the Overland Track is truly one of the greatest walks in Australia. It is the sort of walk to which you can return, confident that...the unique qualities of the region are being carefully protected and conserved and that in, the end, 'the Overland experience' is what you choose to make it."

Chris Baxter - *Wild* magazine

Has the vision been delivered?



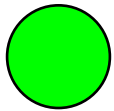
What the walkers think...

- After 30 years absence, noticed improvements on all trails and huts. Many more people on trail but still very enjoyable.
57 year old from USA
- Seen big improvement since last visit 11 years ago. Keep up track work, although boardwalks are an eyesore, but better than muddy sections. Loved the walk and will be back again.
38 year old professional from Victoria
- 3rd and best trip on Overland Track. Limiting numbers was well overdue & the park seems cleaner, less polluted and less people - Great!
51 year old professional from Tasmania

Has the vision been delivered?

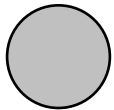


Results



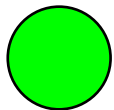
Social

Walker's social experience has improved dramatically



Environmental

Management changes have reduced environmental pressures however further monitoring required



Economic

Overland Track Business Enterprise is financially sustainable

Has the vision been delivered?



Conclusions

Management changes have significantly improved the results for each of the three pillars of sustainability

However, still some matters requiring attention:

- Finalisation of Overland Track Recreation Zone Management Plan
- Repeat sampling of water quality
- Repeat monitoring of track and campsite condition
- Analysis of other World Heritage Area track logbooks

Has the vision been delivered?



Comments or Questions?

Report is available on www.parks.tas.gov.au



Thank You