

INFFER assists decision makers to assess and rank environmental/natural resource projects, comparing aspects such as value for money, degrees of confidence in technical information and the likelihood of achieving stated goals. The development of INFFER was motivated by a belief that we could achieve a lot more with the available resources if they were allocated well. Everyone involved in protecting the environment wants to make the best use of the money that is available, but the issues are complex, and it is difficult to tell what would be “best”. INFFER aims to help people determine whether the environmental/natural resource projects they are investing in will deliver tangible results within budget; whether the tools and technical capacity needed to attain those results will be available to the project; and whether the people who need to come on board to make it happen will be there when the time comes for action.

How it's applied

INFFER focuses on assets – specific areas of the natural environment that are considered to have high value from a public perspective. They could be rivers, wetlands, areas of coastal dune, bushland remnants, threatened plants, endangered animals or areas of land – so long as their physical location can be described, INFFER can be used to develop and evaluate projects to conserve, manage or repair them.

INFFER is a comprehensive tool – documents (manuals, templates, examples, FAQs, etc.) are available on the website at www.inffer.org. The seven-step process begins with identifying valuable assets, followed by project development, project assessment, project selection and finally monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management. INFFER complements existing available knowledge (technical and local), data and modelling tools.

For organisations who decide to use INFFER to make specific investment decisions, access to an on-line Project Assessment Form is provided. Users capture information about the asset, the threats it faces, the goals that the project will achieve, and the actions needed to achieve those goals. Judgements about the likelihood of success in terms of technical feasibility and community and government support are also made and recorded here, as well as the proposed project budget. This information collected is used to calculate a Benefit: Cost Index (BCI) that provides insight into the value for money that the proposed project will deliver. INFFER provides a Quality Assurance process so that investors have confidence that projects are of high quality and have defensible BCIs.

Along the way, practical support is provided, such as the Public: Private Benefits Framework, which helps determine the best type of delivery mechanism to use for the project, including positive incentive mechanisms, negative incentives, extension, technology development and informed inaction.

When it should be used

INFFER can be used to establish priorities for internal funds or to prepare proposals for external funds. The process could be undertaken each year to assist with the development of action plans, or less frequently, to develop an overall investment plan or strategy for the region. Government funding priorities tend to change depending on financial, political and environmental contexts. INFFER users can develop a stock of ‘ready to go’ projects, allowing rapid responses to funding opportunities with short time frames.

INFFER:

- is comprehensive - users are given detailed guidelines and all tools required
- actively encourages community and stakeholder consultation during project development
- requires the setting of clear and measurable goals which underpin the process
- requires users to draw together the best-available science
- considers and attempts to measure community support for the proposed project
- provides an indication of the costs associated with proposed projects, assisting organisations to budget well into the future, and to prepare business cases for investment

INFFER in Australia and internationally

State governments in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales have been involved in a range of INFFER assessments. It was also the only environmental planning tool recommended by the Australian Government in the 2009 round of applications under the Caring for our Country program. Three provinces in Canada have commenced a comprehensive pilot of INFFER, and it is also being used by environmental scientists at the University of Florence, Italy.

Eight ways INFFER adds value to environmental decision-making

1. It provides a strong basis for preparing business cases for funding
2. It highlights the funding required to achieve particular environmental outcomes
3. It provides confidence about using public money more cost-effectively through the choice of appropriate delivery mechanisms
4. It provides a robust, transparent basis to enable strategic direction setting, debate and discussion about the future of the assets in question
5. It builds on existing knowledge, integrating biological, physical, social and economic factors with institutional and political risks, and costs to assess the cost-effectiveness of actions.
6. It helps to highlight and prioritise limitations in current knowledge
7. It provides internal logic and consistency, ensuring that actions funded by the project will be sufficient to deliver the stated goal
8. It reduces bias in decision making by making the process fully transparent



For more information visit www.inffer.org or contact geoff.park@nccma.vic.gov.au.

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