



**Friends of Maatsuyker Island**



## **Friends of Maatsuyker Island (FOMI) Wildcare Branch submission relating to the TWWHA Draft Tourism Master Plan**

### **Key Points**

- Maatsuyker Island is critically important for the breeding of several threatened seabird species and has a sensitive heritage precinct.
- Considerable expense and effort has been invested in controlling and removing exotic plants, which had significantly impacted seabird breeding capacity, and restoring the heritage structures.
- Maatsuyker remains free of mice, rats and cats.
- A very high standard of biosecurity must apply to all visitation of Maatsuyker Island to protect its values and the habitat it provides.
- None of the current zone categories in the TMP is appropriate for Maatsuyker Island.
- Friends of Maatsuyker Island has a wealth of knowledge, experience and investment in protecting Maatsuyker Island and is well placed to advise regarding its potential for tourism and the risks that have to be managed.

### **About FOMI**

Friends of Maatsuyker Island (FOMI), a Wildcare Tasmania Inc. branch, was formed in 2003 and currently has over 150 members. It is an active, professional organisation run by a diverse, experienced committee. It has many supporters, including through partnerships with businesses and over 300 followers on social media.

Maatsuyker Island is part of the TWWHA, situated approximately 10km off the south coast of Tasmania, within the Southwest National Park. It has a wealth of natural and cultural values. The majority of the Island consists of pristine coastal tea-tree and melaleuca scrub, coastal heathland/grassland and cliffs. Maatsuyker Island supports significant seabird populations, having the most important burrow-nesting seabird colonies in southern Tasmania. The island is extraordinary in having no introduced vertebrate pests.

FOMI has a strong and mutually beneficial, professional relationship with the land manager of Maatsuyker Island, the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS), to contribute to the conservation, protection and recognition of the historic, natural and Aboriginal values of the island.

Our activities include natural and cultural heritage preservation, weed eradication, short-tailed shearwater population census and breeding population monitoring, support to the volunteer caretaker program run by PWS. FOMI also runs events and activities in the Tasmanian community to promote and share the values of the Island.

FOMI contributes to the conservation of Maatsuyker island through raising grants, fundraising, donations and in-kind. Since its inception in 2003 this amounts to approximately \$100,000 in value each year. Volunteers contribute in-kind both on and off island in planning, administration, meetings, grant writing, events and working bees.

In principle, FOMI supports the overarching framework of the draft Tourism Master Plan (TMP) for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), in providing a strategic approach to achieving best practice and sustainable management of visitation in the TWWHA however, FOMI has the following concerns:

1. The intention to increase visitor numbers on the South Coast prior to finalisation of the *South Coast Recreation Zone Plan*.
2. The continuing absence of strict biosecurity controls on all tourist visitations to Maatsuyker Island and other sensitive locations in the South Coast region.
3. The inappropriate designation of parts of Maatsuyker Island as a Visitor Services Zone (VSZ).

### **Increased visitor numbers along the South Coast**

PWS and the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania (TICT) have set the ambitious goal to make Tasmania the environmental tourism capital of the World (PWS & TICT, 2018)

The draft TMP states that:

“Tourism strategies over the life of the Tourism Master Plan are expected to continue to encourage the regional dispersal of visitors across our island.”  
(DPIPWE, 2020).

Cockle Creek is emerging as an iconic tourism destination, both as a scenic area, and entry point to the TWWHA via the South Coast Track. The Draft Cockle Creek Precinct Site Plan reports a 46.7% growth in visitor numbers in the four years to 2017 (PWS, 2018). Once tourism starts to recover after COVID19, further promotion of the region can be expected to result in visitor numbers following a similar trajectory as occurred in recent years at Cradle Mountain and Mt Field (Figure 6 p.25, Towards a Tourism Master Plan, DPIPWE, 2019).

Continued visitor growth will bring an influx of campers, surfers, fishers, day or multi-day visitors and bushwalkers (PWS, 2018) resulting in increased foot-traffic along the south coast and posing an increased risk to biosecurity of the region's wilderness. FOMI has heard anecdotal accounts from the volunteer rangers based at Cockle Creek and Melaleuca of many visitors ignorant or indifferent to the risks and responsibilities associated with recreation on Tasmania's South Coast, thereby increasing direct impacts and increasing the biosecurity risks arising from the traffic of visitors and the increased need for management and rescue access.

The opportunity for water-based interpretation is mentioned in the Draft Cockle Creek Precinct Site Plan (PWS, 2018), potentially leading to increased recreational boat visitation to Maatsuyker Island or other islands en route to the South West.

Whilst we appreciate that the TMP proposes that *Visitor Node Plans* will provide the detailed prescriptions for specific zones within the TWWHA, these must be fit for purpose and in place well before there is any increase in tourism development within the TWWHA, particularly for the south coast and South Coast Track that have particular geographic proximity to Maatsuyker Island. The current hiatus in tourism arising from COVID19 provides an opportunity for the Tasmanian Government to ensure that all *Visitor Node Plans* are adequately developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, any arising visitor codes, tourism operator instructions/training and visitor interpretive materials are fully rolled out before visitor numbers increase.

With the strict biosecurity protocols FOMI and the PWS have already implemented on Maatsuyker Island, we would expect to see plans such as the *South Coast Recreation Zone Plan*, and the *DPIPWE Biosecurity Plan for the TWWHA* implemented to help safeguard the island's natural values prior to further increases in tourist numbers, or the possibility for Maatsuyker to receive special consideration under the proposed Biosecurity Overlay.

## Biosecurity

Maatsuyker Island's seabird population includes three species that are listed on the Commonwealth's *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act (1999)*.

- Tasmania's third largest short-tailed shearwater breeding colony (*Ardenna tenuirostris*, *EPBC Act 1999 Migratory List*)
- Soft-plumaged petrel (*Pterodroma mollis*, Vulnerable on *EPBC Act 1999*. Endangered on Tasmania's *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*. (Wiltshire et al., 2004)).
- Sooty shearwater (*A. grisea*, *EPBC Act 1999 Migratory List*. (Brothers et al., 2001)).

The island is extraordinary in having no introduced vertebrate pests, unlike many of the islands around Tasmania where rodents and cats have decimated wildlife.

The vertebrate terrestrial fauna consists of:

- Swamp antechinus (*Antechinus minimus*)
- Three species of native skinks.
- At least 54 bird species

In addition, there are several species of marine mammals dependent on land for part of their yearly cycle:

- New Zealand fur seals (*Arctocephalus forsteri*)
- Southern elephant seals (*Mirounga leonina*) breed on the island
- Australian fur seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus doriferus*) use the coastal rocks as a haul-out site.

The terrestrial flora is rich and varied. It includes several spectacular flowering plants such as narrow-leaved trigger plants (*Stylidium graminifolium*) and Christmas bells (*Blandfordia punicea*), which are distinctively different from their mainland counterparts.

Weed invasion can alter the structure of Maatsuyker's unique vegetation and suitability of breeding habitat for important burrow-nesting seabird populations.

FOMI began its *Wildcare Weed Control Program* in 2004 to address significant impacts of weeds on Maatsuyker Island, particularly targeting infestations of blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) and Californian thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) (listed under the *Weed Management Act 1999* as declared weeds in Tasmania). Blackberry is also recognised as a Weed of National Significance (WoNS)) (Ziegler et al, 2011).

Primary control of other invasive environmental weeds Hebe (*Veronica elliptica*) and Montbretia (*Crococsmia x crocosmiiflora*) commenced in February 2008.

Working bees to undertake monitoring and follow-up work on all four target weed species have been undertaken annually (usually biannually, and often in harsh weather conditions) from 2004 – 2020. Recent staged implementation of the app Fulcrum, used to locate and record weed sites, has greatly improved data management. This project aims to continue weed control, including systematic surveys to accurately monitor areas and inform future work plan development.

The long-term Weed Control program is vital for ongoing restoration and maintenance of vegetation and seabird habitat values on Maatsuyker. To date 45ha of weed infestation in rugged terrain has been almost entirely eliminated. It is hoped that, with continued monitoring and removal work, these weeds can be completely eradicated from the island.

FOMI's *Wildcare Shearwater Monitoring Program* commenced in 2013 and runs concurrently and complementary with the *Weed Control Program*. It includes monitoring shearwater re-colonisation of areas previously infested with weeds. Now in its seventh year, it is becoming a vital long-term field study, which has demonstrated the real benefits of the weed removal to the viability of the breeding colonies.

FOMI has funded, designed and had manufactured a biosecurity advice sign for installation at the only sheltered landing area on the island.

Increased or un-regulated visitation to Maatsuyker, or the neighbouring coastline and islands has the potential to jeopardise the significant advances FOMI has made in managing weeds, restoring nesting habitat, and strengthening the biosecurity of the island.

A strict PWS biosecurity policy is in place and is required for all visitors, in recognition of the value of the island's pest-free status and to ensure the sustainability and conservation of the Island's values. Current biosecurity controls, which require measures to be implemented **before** people and craft set off for Maatsuyker Island, must apply to all people and craft arriving on the Island.

## **The designation of Maatsuyker Island as a Visitor Services Zone is NOT appropriate**

Currently the Island is cared for year-round by PWS managed volunteer caretakers. They maintain the roads, gutters, food garden and grounds, provide a security presence for the Island and neighbouring seal colony, assist with maintenance of the heritage buildings, provide regular weather reports to the Bureau of Meteorology and can be contacted to undertake specific observations. Despite their role, the caretakers are strictly confined to existing formed roads and tracks to prevent inadvertent impacts to breeding areas, which can readily be collapsed by walkers.

The island is periodically visited by PWS officers, maintenance workers for the existing infrastructure (AMSA, BOM and PWS), teams of FOMI volunteers undertaking weed control, seabird survey work, building restoration and small numbers of day visitors by small boat or sea kayak. These visitors must also observe restrictions on their movements, strictly limited to the work they are undertaking.

Certain areas of the island are classified in the TMP as a Visitor Services Zone. FOMI considers this designation inappropriate as Maatsuyker Island does not fit the definition given in the draft TMP:

”Visitor service sites provide you with either a gateway to more challenging adventures or, if you are time poor, an opportunity to explore and experience aspects of the TWWHA through a range of supported activities and services. You may wish to do your own exploring by way of easily accessible walks and lookouts that will showcase the very best of this special place.” (DPIPWE, 2020).

Towards a Tourism Master Plan lists a summary of allowable uses within a Visitor Services Zone (Table 1. p.13. DPIPWE, 2019) including commercial tourism operations, mountain biking, rock climbing, new visitor accommodation and walking tracks.

Maatsuyker Island is totally unsuitable for the ‘remote area recreation’ opportunities outlined in the VSZ definition above. The terrain is steep, the vegetation is dense and easily trampled shearwater burrows occupy nearly all the ground apart from the light station precinct and the formed tracks and road. The caretakers, and visitors other than field-workers undertaking weed control, seabird surveys and other PWS-approved activities, are currently not permitted off the tracks and formed roads due to the fragility of the environment and also its steep inhospitable nature. Emergency access in the case of an injured visitor would be expensive and quite possibly not timely. It is for this reason that all PWS and FOMI on-island activities are subject to strict and extensive safety protocols that any tourist operator (and tourist) would find difficult to adhere to.

With poor access by sea, and extremely weather-dependent air access, the existing infrastructure is unsuitable for increased visitor numbers, which would pose risks to the natural values and current infrastructure of the island. It is certainly not suited to hosting “safe and appropriate, sustainable tourism experiences” (PWS & TICT, 2018).

FOMI offers volunteering opportunities for Wildcare members with appropriate skills to assist in our annual / biannual working bees on the Island for weed control, shearwater monitoring and building restoration. Participation is subject to thorough screening and selection to ensure each working bee has the best available crew (of limited size) for the work to be undertaken. In addition, FOMI enables a very limited 'day visit only' opportunity, sensitive to the natural and cultural values of the island, to observe the current use of the facilities on the island, including the heritage buildings. The primary purpose of FOMI's day visit trips is to support the PWS volunteer caretakers by enabling them to have family members and friends visit them and gain a better appreciation of their remote service. These trips are also often used by prospective caretakers to assist them in appreciating what the undertaking will involve. FOMI runs a maximum of two day trips per year, subject to PWS permission and suitable weather. Prospective participants must accept the real possibility of last minute date change and/or cancellation without full refund.

These trips usually have room for small numbers of the public as an affordable option for people to experience this spectacular part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. Funds raised from these trips go directly to on-going conservation work on the Island. FOMI would oppose the expansion of the current visitor facilities and infrastructure for higher scale commercial tourism, as Maatsuyker Island is a heritage precinct and all structures are part of that heritage and subject to service limitations. Addition of, or conversion of structures for visitor facilities could harm the values of the existing heritage precinct as well as potentially compromising biosecurity and thereby threatening the island's unique natural values.

The PWS is a significant tourism agency in Tasmania but also has a role as custodian, conserving natural and cultural heritage (PWS & TICT, 2018). The Guiding Principle Number 1 of the Cockle Creek Precinct Site Plan (PWS, 2018) states "Conservation of significant natural and cultural values has primacy over ALL other matters". Any change to this approach could ultimately be at the expense of the natural and cultural values of the area if more proactive management measures are not introduced.

## **Recommendations**

**Increased or un-regulated visitation to Maatsuyker, or to the neighbouring coastline has the potential to jeopardise the significant advances FOMI has made in controlling weeds, restoring nesting habitat, and strengthening the biosecurity of the island. We strongly recommend that plans such as the *South Coast Recreation Zone Plan*, and the *DPIPWE Biosecurity Plan for the TWWHA* be carefully developed, completed and implemented before any further tourism is developed within the TWWHA, particularly on the south coast and South Coast Track which have proximity to Maatsuyker Island, to help safeguard the island's natural values.**

**It should also be recognised by the TMP that the Visitor Services Zone designation for parts of Maatsuyker Island are inappropriate due to the Island's sensitive natural and cultural values and its existing infrastructure.**

Submitted by



Marina Campbell (President)

For and on behalf of the Friends of Maatsuyker Island (FOMI) Committee

Email: [wildcaremaatsuyker@gmail.com](mailto:wildcaremaatsuyker@gmail.com)

20 May 2020

## References

Brothers, N., Pemberton, D., Pryor, H. & Halley, V. 2001. Tasmania's Offshore Islands: seabirds and other natural features, Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery.

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE). 2019. Towards a Tourism Master Plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. Hobart.

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE). 2020. Tourism Master Plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. Hobart.

Parks and Wildlife Service. 2018. Draft Cockle Creek Precinct Site Plan. Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment. Hobart.

Parks and Wildlife Service and the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania (PWS & TICT). 2018. Parks 21: The Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service and the Tasmanian Tourism Industry Joint Strategic Action Plan for tourism in Tasmania's parks and reserves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hobart.

Wiltshire, A., Hamilton, S. & Brothers, N. 2004. First record of Soft-plumaged Petrels breeding in Australia. *Emu* 104: 363-368.

Ziegler, K., Cronin, S. & Campbell, V. 2011. Maatsuyker Island - Weed Control, Friends of Maatsuyker Island, Wildcare Inc., Tasmania.