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SUBMISSION FROM THE HOBART WALKING CLUB ON THE TOURISM MASTER PLAN FOR THE TASMANIAN WILDERNESS WORLD HERITAGE AREA

General Comments

The Hobart Walking Club is pleased to see a small acknowledgement in the revised draft of our representations around being regarded as traditional users of the TWWHA, with a cultural attachment, but we are still concerned that the plan regards Tasmanian walkers as having the same status and requirements as interstate and overseas visitors.

There is still no concrete recognition of Tasmanian bushwalkers as traditional users, no recognition of contributions made by Tasmanian bushwalkers to the exploration and protection of the TWWHA and the continued relationship using traditional routes, tracks and campsites, and no articulation of the importance of community partnerships beyond those with the Aboriginal community.

Background

As stated in our earlier submissions, Tasmanian walkers and other members of the Tasmanian public have often established and maintained many of our tracks, huts and water crossings. Many continue to do voluntary work to look after the TWWHA and other places. Many Tasmanian families have other significant connections to the TWWHA, often running back some generations. These associations with the TWWHA and other areas differentiate the Tasmanian walker from tourists. A person from overseas has no such association and connection with the area that local walkers have. Thus, Tasmanian walkers need to be treated as a separate cohort.

The TWWHA is part of Tasmania and vital to us. Tasmanians have associations with it unlike tourists from, say, Germany, China, or New York. Many of us and our forebears put in the original tracks, worked in the area, and help care for various aspects; generations have visited. The area is more than a nature museum to us. Walkers are the single largest Tasmanian interest group and greatly value the area. It is the single most important area for 'nature' walking and allied associations, and by far the most important overnight walking area for Tasmanians, a key cultural value.

For most of us, being able to walk in the TWWHA is no less important than for environmental or Aboriginal interests; however current management and tourism policies fail to reflect this.

The different Relationship of Tasmanian walkers to the TWWHA

The Master Plan needs to acknowledge the different relationship and different requirements of local walkers in the TWWHA. Local walkers, particularly those who are members of walking clubs, visit the TWWHA and other parks and reserves more frequently than interstate or overseas visitors. This means that fee policies need to be tailored to ensure that visiting parks is not a prohibitive cost for local walkers. Local walkers already usually purchase annual parks passes but where additional access fees are charged over and above the annual parks pass, the costs to walk in the TWWHA can become prohibitive with Tasmanians priced out of their own walking areas.

This is a major issue for the Tasmanian walking community. Tasmanian walkers are now a small minority of users of the Overland Track, particularly during the permit season as the imposition of permits has displaced local walkers who traditionally used the track.

Local walkers also undertake car camping and base camping trips where a group will stay in an area for several days to a week to undertake day walks. This pattern of use relies on the availability of affordable budget camping or accommodation options. There are a number of areas adjacent to the TWWHA that do not have suitable accommodation options for tent-based camping. One example is the Strathgordon area. Teds Beach caters to camper vans but not tent based walkers.

Local walkers do different trips to interstate and overseas visitors. For example, while interstate and overseas visitors will walk the established tourist attractions such as the Overland Track and the Three Capes Circuit, locals will often use parts of these tracks to access other traditional walks and visit untracked areas. While some accommodation has been made for this in the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Management Plan and Policies, local walkers have often been frustrated by rangers not observing these policies and turning walkers back.

Locals have more interest in access, management and the preservation of the local walking heritage than other visitors to the TWWHA. Local walkers have pioneered most of the tracks, routes and campsites within the area. Walking clubs have provided thousands of hours of volunteer work on track maintenance in the TWWHA.

Walkers are currently the only regular users of large parts of the remote TWWHA and keep open many routes and tracks by basic maintenance such as clearing dead wood falls and taping/marketing routes. Overseas and interstate visitors do not have the local knowledge to find and mark these routes.

Walking clubs traditionally also undertake working bees for care and to do more comprehensive track clearing work. Local volunteers have also undertaken restoration work on historic mountain huts.

What the Hobart Walking Club wants included in the Master Plan

The Master Plan must provide overt equitable protection for recreational walking by Tasmanians throughout the TWWHA and recognise the unique connection of Tasmanian bushwalkers to the TWWHA.

As well as aboriginal cultural heritage, interpretation for parks and reserves needs to also include the relating of the many stories, history and traditions that the Tasmanian walker has in relation to the TWWHA as well as other aspects of historic use of the TWWHA for trapping, hunting fishing, the building of mountain huts, survey work and the erection of stone survey cairns, historic track building, farming and grazing.

Flexible access for Tasmanian walkers is required for this to continue. The area is, effectively, part of our backyard.

We also want protection for Tasmanian bushwalker (traditional) use to be written into management plans of various kinds (including tourism plans). Tasmanians should not pay extra fees for access to National Parks and Reserves beyond the standard Parks entry fee and no fee (reserves).

We want any fee structure to recognise Tasmanian bushwalkers as traditional users, acknowledging that Tasmania is our 'back yard'.

As Tasmanians, we want continued and unfettered access to our National Parks – we oppose any additional access restrictions for Tasmanian bushwalkers. We do not want quota system(s) imposed on walkers – neither TWWHA-wide nor over defined areas of the TWWHA.

We want access roads to walking tracks which have traditionally been maintained by Forestry, HEC, PWS and other land managers to be maintained into the future.

This includes things like access to the upper Cradle Valley by private vehicles being retained for Tasmanian walkers and families. Tourism is pushing for a cable car. Its use would increase the current \$2 - \$5 car costs to access Dove Lake for a private carload to \$200 - \$250. This policy is in order to retain affordability, amenity and after-hours access to prevent bushwalkers being stranded in the area. The average Tasmanian income is \$200 a week less than that of the average Australian.

Management for Community Engagement

The TWWHA belongs to **ALL** Tasmanians. Management decisions must be made on the basis that management of the TWWHA must be representative of all Tasmanians. (If there were to be subgroups directly part of management, overall representation should be proportional to areas of interest and established and documented use of the TWWHA or a group's percentage of the Tasmanian population, with perhaps some allowance for otherwise omitted necessary areas of expertise to advise management).

Consultation with local bushwalking groups is essential but consultation without effective representation is meaningless as the views of bushwalking clubs can be ignored. Tasmanian walking clubs must be represented on the management committee for the TWWHA as major users of the area and as organisations who pushed for the reservation of these areas of wilderness and scenic beauty.

The Club is concerned that the current Tasmanian Government policies do not recognise Tasmanian walking clubs as key stakeholders with a traditional connection to the TWWHA and that our historical volunteer contribution is not recognised.

We would like a genuine collaborative partnership approach, with consultation and agreements between land managers and Bushwalking Tasmania, its member organisations and/or individuals supports work on track maintenance and other interests both jointly with land managers and independently.

The best mechanism to achieve this would be representation on the management committee for the TWWHA Tourism Strategy by Bushwalking Tasmania, the peak body for Tasmanian bushwalking clubs. For some time, any person allegedly representing recreation has never approached us or the peak bushwalking body for input.

Ongoing, it should be recognised that:

- We have a role to play in track maintenance.
- We are keen to offer or maintain our and our members' services and would like land managers to better understand and appreciate the value of what we offer. This would require local bushwalkers to have the freedom to choose their priority maintenance projects for the benefit of local walkers.

Development in the TWWHA

The Hobart Walking Club has been broadly supportive of the zoning system for the TWWHA and most management of activities within the TWWHA but the recent development application for Lake Malbena has highlighted concerns about Parks and Wildlife interpretation of this zoning. Previously, standing camps meant tents and not huts and zoning of areas for self-reliant walking should preclude access and resupply by helicopter. Self-reliant walking should mean just that. Walking in these areas should be dependent on a person being able to cater for their own recreational needs by carrying their own food and equipment.

The Club supports **sensitive** commercial activities provided that current access is maintained to all areas (no exclusive access agreements for commercial ventures) and that choice is maintained (i.e. if commercial huts are permitted then the non-commercial huts and campsites are also retained).

The handing over of public land for private commercial development and the exclusion of walker access to public land as a result of such development is a matter of deep concern to our Club and the wider Tasmanian bushwalking community.

Development proposals need to be managed through an open and transparent process. The current secrecy attached to development proposals is also a matter of concern to our members.

We could agree to new sensitive commercial developments provided there is **no loss of amenity or access** to any area and the following conditions are met:

- Freedom and flexibility of access, no permission required.
- No extra fees.

- Overnight walks continue where they have been traditionally conducted.
- No bookings for our walking, camping and other traditional use.
- No additional group restrictions to the maximum 13 for sensitive areas under PWS (we often elect to have fewer always where actually warranted due to the sensitive nature of the environment)
- All year around access.
- Transparent process to ensure development is sensitive and appropriate, with built-in safeguards such as walking club representation on management bodies.

Commercial interests must not be able to own or exclusively lease land in the TWWHA. We do not support significant development outside of already recognised visitor services zones apart from possible track development. Any developed tracks inside the TWWHA must also be available for public use.

The TWWHA belongs to all Tasmanians and should continue to be managed for all Tasmanians and remain as public land.

I trust this helps to tailor the intended Tourism Master Plan to better accommodate the needs of local bushwalking in the TWWHA.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to comment.



Secretary
Hobart Walking Club