

RESPONSE TO PETITION

Petition No. 13 (100-22) of 2022 House of Assembly

The petitioners ask the House to:

The petition of the undersigned Residents of Tasmania draws to the attention of the House:

- The inherent failure of the 'Unlock the Parks' policy and the Expressions of Interest (EOI) process designed to facilitate development in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) and Tasmania's national parks.
- The Reserve Activity Assessment (RAA) process is flawed, opaque and lacks genuine public consultation.
- Widespread public opposition to private tourism developments within the TWWHA exists and has been consistently expressed.
- UNESCO's request for a detailed plan for a Comprehensive Cultural Heritage Assessment of the TWWHA before any development is considered has not been met.
- Signing public land over to private interests in secret leases and licences fails to properly respect the expectations of the community.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the House to call on the Government to abandon the Expressions of Interest process and halt all proposals currently being considered under the Reserve Activity Assessment process until a statutory assessment and approval process for private tourism developments in Tasmania's national parks is implemented.

GOVERNMENT POSITION:

Rejected.

RESPONSE:

- The government appreciates the passion with which our unique parks and reserves are treasured and takes its responsibilities for managing Tasmania's extensive reserve estate very seriously. It also understands the importance of our tourism industry to our economy and local communities and families.
- The Tourism Expression of Interest (EOI) process that was implemented in 2014 was designed to enable the development of sensitive and appropriate visitor infrastructure and tourism experiences within Tasmania's national parks, reserves and Crown lands.

- The EOI process strikes the right balance as a first level filter to encourage sensitive and appropriate tourism development in our natural areas by inviting proposals that will provide best practice environmental tourism and broaden the range of unique experiences on offer in our parks and reserves. The process delivers positive benefits including jobs creation, that support our regional economies by expanding visitation to the State and our parks.
- All proponents must demonstrate that their proposals meet strict conditions specifically designed to ensure the outcomes are environmentally sustainable and appropriate for their location.
- The EOI process is not a simple “tick and flick” exercise. If a proposal is recommended to progress through to the assessment process, it must then gain all relevant approvals.
- Any proposed development on public land is subject to a multi-level assessment and approval process. The proponent must meet all the required local, State and Commonwealth planning and approval processes in order to progress the proposed concept, which may include assessment under the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) Reserve Activity Assessment (RAA) process.
- Projects that have been approved to proceed via the EOI process to date will provide investment in Tasmania of over \$85 million and will create 273 full-time equivalent jobs when fully realised. From the Maydena Bike Park in the Derwent Valley to Blue Derby Pods Ride in the north-east and Freycinet Eco Retreat on the east coast, the EOI process has turned great projects into great successes. These types of sensitive developments and unique experiences draw visitors who share our respect for the environment to our State.
- The RAA process has undergone a thorough review resulting in a program of significant enhancement. In addition, the Tasmanian Government is invested in increasing transparency and public consultation and has committed \$6.49 million over four years as part of the RAA Reforms Project.
- The outcomes of this project include developing amendments to the National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002 (NPRMA) to recognise the RAA process as a statutory process, underpinning an improvement in transparency and opportunities for public comment and appeals.
- A consultation paper is being prepared for release in early October to outline, and seek feedback on, the Government’s proposed approach to the amendments and to seek input to assist in the development of the draft Bill.
- Targeted stakeholder consultation will accompany the release of the consultation paper.
- Importantly, the assessment and approvals processes consider local, state, national and international obligations, whereby projects may also be referred to the Australian Government to determine if assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBCA) is required. The EPBCA requires any proposal within the TWWHA to have regard to the protection of the Outstanding Universal Values with the State Party (being the Australian Government) notifying the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC) of any proposals that may cause significant impact to

World Heritage properties, including the TWWHA on a quarterly basis, which fulfils the requirements of the WHC.

- Understanding those values is an ongoing process, and it is in this context that the Detailed Plan for a Comprehensive Cultural Assessment of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (the Detailed Plan) is underway, and Tasmanian Aboriginal people are also closely involved in this ongoing process.
- The Plan identifies 10 packages or projects designed to strengthen the understanding and management of Aboriginal cultural values in the TWWHA. The Detailed Plan is a multi-year plan that is scheduled for completion in 2028. Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania (AHT) is currently delivering five projects under the Detailed Plan.
- Requests from UNESCO regarding World Heritage management – including the referral of proposals for consideration – are a matter for the relevant State Party.
- I understand that the State Party has informed the World Heritage Centre of the considerable work that has been delivered on a Comprehensive Cultural Values assessment for the TWWHA and has received further clarification on the intent of the recent decision.
- Proposals within the TWWHA do not need to be put on hold while this work continues. The WHC clarified this matter in a letter to the Australian Government in October 2021, noting that ‘any development’ should be interpreted in the spirit of Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.
- The Auditor-General’s 2020 review of the Tourism EOI process concluded that the EOI Process is effective, consistent and transparent.
- The Tasmanian Government is absolutely committed to continue to be open and transparent about the process, while respecting the confidentiality requirements which protect participants’ intellectual property, and also ensuring that we continue to operate strictly in accordance with probity guidelines.
- We have also committed to further improvement, and we are implementing the Auditor-General’s recommendations alongside other changes. Key enhancements include the following.
 - Ceasing any opportunity for potential land banking practices.
 - Reshaping the Tourism EOI Assessment Panel to include a broader range of insights and experience.
 - Building on the existing process where the Assessment Panel seeks advice from Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania (AHT), Mineral Resources Tasmania (MRT), and Parks and Wildlife Services (PWS) on every proposal.
 - Increasing the amount of information made publicly available on all submissions that have moved through the Tourism EOI process first stage and been recommended to

move to assessment as part of the next stage, which is available on the OCG's website at www.cg.tas.gov.au

- Through the continuation and enhancement of the Tourism EOI process we are helping to revitalise regions by attracting more visitors, helping to ensure visitors stay longer, spend more and travel more widely across the State.
- This process delivers unique experiences and provides employment opportunities for those seeking to work within Tasmania's natural and spectacular environment. We are meeting the Tasmanian community's clear expectation – expressed at each of the last three elections – that we will manage and showcase our State for the benefit of all Tasmanians.
- The Tasmanian Government remains committed to delivering the Tourism EOI process and the important role it plays in delivering tourism projects in the state while upholding natural and cultural values.



Hon Guy Barnett MP
Minister for State Development, Construction and Housing

Date:

27/9/22