



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre draft master plan

Dorrigo National Park





Bird watching on the Wonga walk

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This is Gumbaynggirr Country

Ngiyalagay junga-ngarraynggi yaam: Gumbaynggirr girrwa yaam jagunda gungangulam-ay, yilaana ngiyalagay yanggidam juungawaygam, bayaygam garla-ngarraynggi.

Gumbaynggirr-Girrwaadu, manggarla daalbirrwirr-ambang, yidaa gungangulam juluum-, guunyju-, ganganan-, bindarraygundi marlanyay. Yaam wajaarr malaaw yidaa, yilaana yidaa Girrwaanbigundi marlanyay.

We acknowledge and respect the rights and aspirations of Gumbaynggirr People as custodians of their Country.

Gumbaynggirr People are the first protectors and continual custodians of these mountains, valleys, plains and rivers. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.



Ranger talk on the Wonga walk



1. Summary

Spectacular view over the Dorrigo
Rainforest Centre and Dorrigo National Park

1.1 A new beginning

Dorrigo National Park is an important visitor destination for the NSW North Coast region and attracts local, domestic, and international visitors. From an environmental and conservation perspective, it is highly valued at an international level as part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area.

The award-winning Dorrigo Rainforest Centre, built on the south-west edge of the park in the 1980s as a rainforest interpretation and education centre, is a key regional tourism drawcard that contributes significantly to local and regional economies. However, the existing facilities are ageing, with increasing maintenance liabilities and limited capacity to meet changing demands from current and emerging markets and increased visitation.

Evidence from around the world shows that demand is rising for experiences that connect people back to nature. At the same time, a rapidly growing North Coast population and improved transport links to the urban growth areas of South East Queensland and Greater Sydney will fundamentally change visitor demands over the next decade.

1.2 A vision for renewal

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has an opportunity to engage a broader audience by providing authentic and transformative nature-based experiences, and to work with Aboriginal partners to showcase local Gumbaynggirr culture and connections.

The proposed Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre meets these challenges with an imaginative and

inspiring vision for a sustainable visitor precinct that improves accessibility to help everyone experience the park.

As humanity becomes increasingly urbanised, we need to offer experiences for people who feel less familiar and safe in natural environments. A new Arc elevated walkway will overlook the rainforest canopy and cater for all weather conditions with an upper and lower deck. Walkways with more accessibility will take visitors down into the rainforest and connect with the existing 6-km Wonga walk and the new Dorrigo Escarpment great walk.

The new facilities, contemporary interpretive elements and ranger-guided experiences will create a compelling invitation for visitors to explore and connect with the rainforest along the upgraded walking tracks.

This draft master plan presents design principles and concept plans for the new visitor centre, along with indicative artists impressions of what the final design might look like. The designs are bold and take a big-picture 50-year outlook that will offer a nationally significant visitor experience and inspire destination travel to the region.

The Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre is the working title for this project and may change after further consultation.

1.3 The benefits are clear

The Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre proposal has the potential to deliver a range of environmental, social and economic benefits for NPWS and our communities.

Expected benefits include ongoing protection of our natural and cultural heritage, improved opportunities for visitors to explore and connect with nature, increased contribution to the regional economy, and health and wellbeing benefits for visitors and local communities.

The overall goal of the project is to future-proof and enhance the visitor experience at Dorrigo National Park by redeveloping and improving infrastructure and facilities in order to engage more people for longer in a rapidly changing environment. Visitation is already on the rise and we need to prepare the centre to effectively manage congestion and reduce impacts.

For many, visiting a national park is their gateway to caring for the natural world. Our aim is to invite people to arrive as visitors but leave as conservationists.



Photo: Eastern yellow robin, Dorrigo National Park



2. The case for change

The Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and Skywalk

2.1 The time is right

This master plan proposes a new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre that will cater for the forecast increasing visitor numbers to the national park and inspire destination travel to the region. The elements proposed are innovative and strategic, setting the stage for the next 50 years.

Dorrigo National Park is one of 40 parks along the Great Eastern Escarpment that make up the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage property (Gondwana Rainforests). This international recognition in 1986 prompted State and Commonwealth governments to fund the construction of an education and interpretation centre aimed at inspiring, stimulating and encouraging a deeper appreciation and understanding of the importance of the Gondwana Rainforests. The Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and Skywalk became celebrated additions to the regional tourism infrastructure and have played a significant role in the North Coast visitor economy for over 30 years.

The existing Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and Glade picnic area facilities are approaching the end of useful asset life in terms of safety, capacity and performance with increasing maintenance liabilities. They have limited scope to meet future demand and can't deliver NPWS's objectives, as outlined in section 4, over the long term.

The ongoing decline in the quality of visitor infrastructure will diminish the appeal of the area to visitors and limit our ability to engage with and educate visitors.

Upgraded and improved facilities and experiences in Dorrigo National Park will cater to the anticipated increase in demand by providing new and expanded interactive interpretation, enhanced storytelling, all-weather facilities and improved accessibility into the rainforest.

This project will also stimulate economic activity and job creation in the region, helping local communities to recover from droughts, bushfires, floods and the pandemic.

The proposal described in this draft master plan aims to deliver a major, high-quality site renewal that will strengthen Dorrigo Rainforest Centre's positioning as a leading regional visitor destination on the NSW North Coast and support the longevity of the precinct.

Strategic alignment

This proposal is part of the Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk project which also proposes a 46-km multi-day walk through Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks. See separate master plan for details. The project aligns with key NSW Government visitor economy plans and numerous local, regional, state and national strategies and goals. These are identified in Appendix A.

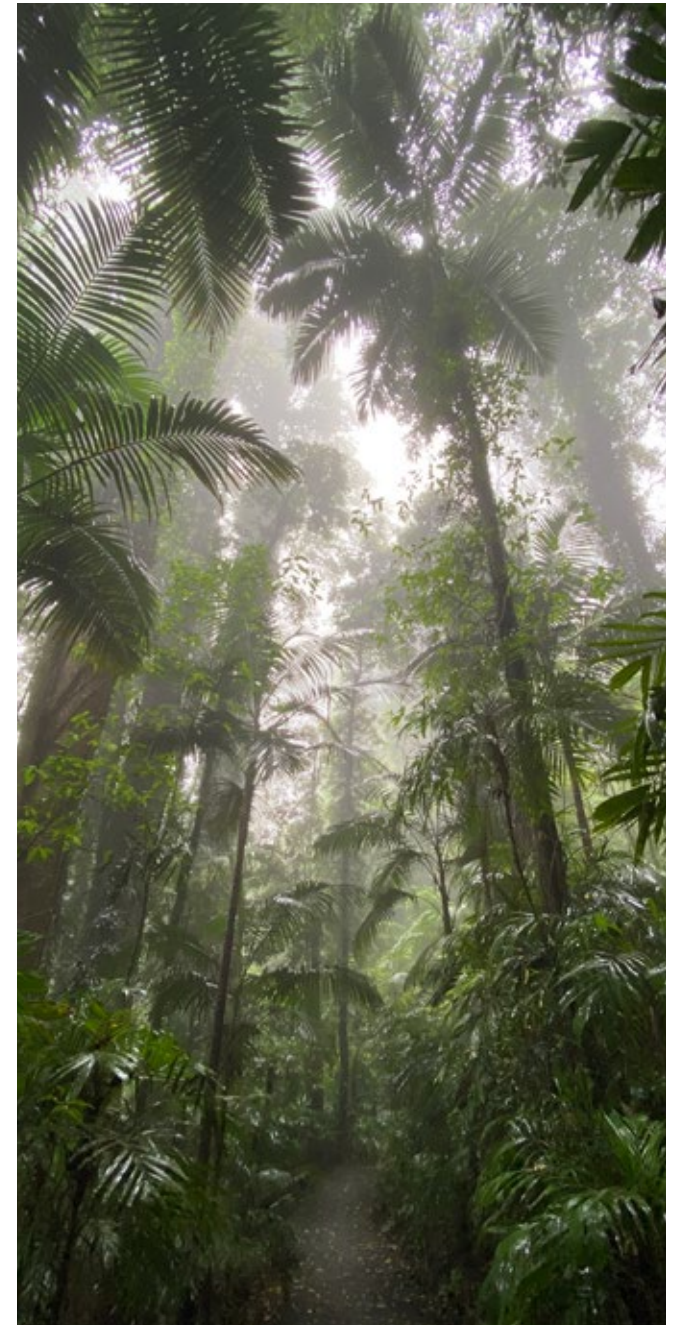


Photo: Walking track, Dorrigo National Park

2.2 Nature connection and wellbeing

Evidence from around the world shows that demand for opportunities to connect with nature through spending more time in national parks is increasing. At the same time disconnection from nature has and continues to rise with an increasingly urbanised population.

The benefits of engaging with nature for human and planetary health are clear. A mass of interdisciplinary scientific evidence – supported by personal experiences – shows that natural spaces are vital in maintaining and promoting mental, physical and social health. There are also substantial economic gains in health care savings and productivity increases. Critically, a strong connection with nature is shown to be a reliable predictor for pro-conservation behaviour, which is particularly relevant in this time of biodiversity loss and climate disruption.

Nature connectedness refers to how one thinks about, feels and experiences the natural world. This includes the extent that one sees themselves as being a part of the rest of nature and engages in actions that respect this interrelationship. The main distinction between nature contact and nature connection is in the noticing: nature connection is promoted through meaningful moments that allow one to absorb multisensory detail, find beauty, feel emotions and reflect on meaning.

All public green spaces provide wellbeing benefits, but if we can encourage people to stop, notice and appreciate nature in high quality environments such as Dorrigo National Park, then we can cost-effectively amplify the health benefits and promote positive changes in social behaviour.



Photo: Waterfall, Dorrigo National Park



2.3 Cultural connections

Dorrigo National Park and the surrounding lands are the traditional Country of the Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal People. The land, water, animals, plants and landscapes in the park have traditional and contemporary significance for local Aboriginal communities. NPWS acknowledges the park as a cultural landscape and works to protect natural and cultural values, strengthen Gumbaynggirr partnerships, recognise and support connection to Country and support a cultural visitor experience.

The new Arc Rainforest Centre will offer a spectacular place to acknowledge and celebrate Aboriginal cultural values and perspectives. It provides a wonderful opportunity for people to learn and connect with Gumbaynggirr culture, including using language in the naming of places. Aboriginal design will also be a feature of the new visitor centre to reflect Gumbaynggirr culture and embed knowledge and respect of Country and Traditional Owners.

NPWS is committed to ensuring that authentic Aboriginal tourism experiences are developed and delivered with Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal people, in a culturally sensitive way, that is, experiences that respect the authenticity and integrity of local Aboriginal People and their culture, adhere to cultural protocols, and recognise that Aboriginal culture is the cultural intellectual property of Aboriginal people.

The proposal aims to:

- provide new opportunities for Aboriginal communities to appropriately share their culture, and participate in and benefit from the regional tourism industry
- create culturally sensitive and environmentally sustainable nature-based experiences which deliver enhanced visitor management and environmental outcomes
- support Aboriginal employment opportunities and the sustainable growth of Aboriginal businesses.

Photo: Strangler fig

2.4 Our visitors are changing

Dorrigo National Park is one of the state's top-tier parks in terms of overall visitor numbers and a very significant park in the context of the NSW North Coast.

Visitor counters at the entrance to the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre have consistently recorded around 150,000 visitors a year (excluding COVID impacted years). In recent years, thousands of school and tertiary students have visited the park to engage in curriculum-linked education ranger-guided excursions.

Visitation from the local area is relatively small at around 6% of visits in line with population numbers, whilst those from slightly further afield (up to 100 km) generate another 19% of visits.

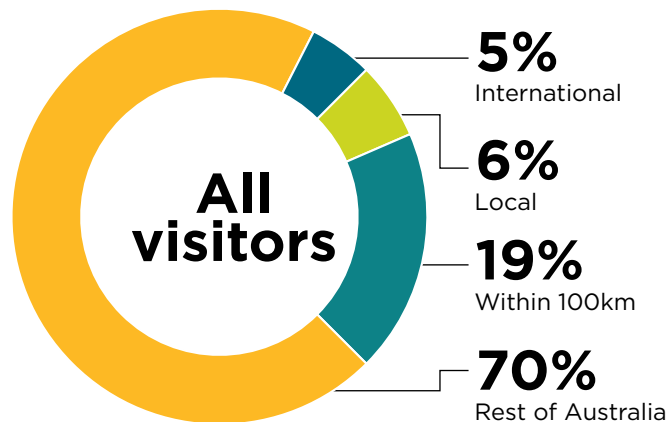


Figure 2.1 Summary of visitor statistics

Importantly from an economic perspective, visitors from outside the region and the rest of Australia generate 70% or the bulk of visits. The international market currently constitutes a modest proportion of visits, especially as international tourism recovers from the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic but is still significant when compared to other NSW national parks. International visitors come from markets such as the United States, Europe, Japan, New Zealand, India and Canada.

Population increases, a surge in the popularity of nature-based tourism and improved transport infrastructure has and will continue to

fundamentally change visitor demands over the coming decades. The improved M1 access from the booming population centres of South East Queensland will be game-changing by making the Mid North Coast a weekend destination.

Extensive market demand analysis and forecast visitor trends underpin the concepts for creating the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and further suggest the new centre has the potential to influence travel patterns within the North Coast region, including the ability to encourage stronger overnight visitor stays in surrounding towns.



Photo: Educational activity at The Glade

2.5 Nature-based tourism trends

Visitor' expectations and demands of national parks are diverse and rapidly changing – we need to understand their individual differences to help us develop and deliver visitor experiences that match our target markets and reflect both quality and sustainability. As the number of visitors to NSW national parks continues to grow, so does the range of interests, motivations, needs, preferences and expectations that we need to consider when facilitating transformational park experiences. Our market research builds on a decade of visitor survey data to outline a vision for the new visitor centre that connects people with Gondwana Rainforests and Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal culture for generations to come.

The exciting Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre proposal represents an opportunity to broaden the park's appeal and increase visitation and engagement, particularly for younger and more urban visitors. As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic seeking open spaces and nature connection, NPWS can personalise and curate a range of park experiences to meet the growing demand for sustainable, active, cultural, immersive and wellness experiences in a world-class natural setting.



Photo: Trailrider mobility chair

Accessible tourism

National parks are places for connecting with nature, culture and heritage. Everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy the experience and the benefits that come from visiting a park.

The benefits of access to national parks are well known. These include increased wellbeing, better physical and mental health, independence, dignity, social integration, and improved quality of life for individuals, friends and family.

Barriers that can limit people's ability to access parks and enjoy these benefits can include a combination of physical obstacles, a lack of information, or inadequate services or assistance.

The barriers to accessing parks are often most acutely experienced by people with a disability. However, everyone may experience access barriers at different times in their lives, including when elderly, caring for young children, or experiencing illness or medical conditions.

The natural environment of Dorrigo National Park presents particular challenges for reducing or removing barriers to access. The new Arc Rainforest Centre aims to address some of these barriers and encourage a wider diversity of the community to visit and enjoy the park.

NPWS has committed through its new *Accessible Parks Policy* to improving access where possible by integrating accessibility considerations into the new rainforest centre development. Some examples of these improvements include accessible pathways to viewing platforms, walkways into the rainforest, as well as improved accessibility linkages from the Arc Rainforest Centre to the rainforest floor.

The redeveloped rainforest centre will also include interactive interpretation that caters for a range of abilities including vision and hearing-impaired park users.

A lush green forest with a waterfall cascading over rocks and fallen logs. The scene is filled with dense vegetation, including ferns and moss-covered rocks. The waterfall is the central focus, with water flowing over a series of rocks and logs. The forest floor is covered in a thick layer of green moss and ferns. The background is a dense canopy of trees and foliage, creating a sense of a deep, unexplored wilderness.

3. The study area

Cascade along the Wonga walk, Dorrigo National Park

3.1 Background

Dorrigo National Park is perched on the dramatic Great Eastern Escarpment of the Great Dividing Range, in the Bellingen Shire on the NSW North Coast. It is one hours' drive from the main population centre and transport hub of Coffs Harbour, with regular flight connections to Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne.

Dorrigo Rainforest Centre is a key drawcard attracting visitors via the spectacular Waterfall Way, bridging the gap from the 'Mountains to the Sea' in a 185 km tourist drive linking Armidale to the Coffs Coast. The rainforest centre is the main visitor hub, housing the shop and cafe, staff office space, and access to the Skywalk viewing platform. From here, a steep ramp leads down onto the Wonga walk.

The Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre proposal is located on the western perimeter of the park, off Dome Road. It sits within the current approximate 4-ha footprint of the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and The Glade picnic area.



Photo: Motorcycle riders on Waterfall Way



Figure 3.1 Dorrigo National Park location map

3.2 Natural values



Photo: Strangler fig

World heritage

Dorrigo National Park is an iconic part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia. Sheltering in the high rainfall and rich soils of the escarpment, the rainforests of Dorrigo National Park are spectacular remnants of great rainforests that once covered Australia. Few places on Earth contain so many plants and animals that are so closely related to their ancestors in the fossil record. The park protects outstanding representatives of some of the Earth's first conifers, flowering plants, songbirds, ground frogs and other ancient lifeforms whose evolutionary journey dates back to before Australia separated from Antarctica, some 40 million years ago.



Photo: Dorrigo National Park

Rich biodiversity

Dorrigo National Park supports a diversity of wildlife and is home to 120 bird species, 44 reptile species, 30 mammal species and innumerable species of insects and invertebrates. Represented here are some of Gondwana's ancient endemic wildlife including the superb lyrebird, giant barred frog, pouched frog and southern greater glider. The park straddles the Great Eastern Escarpment's steep, rugged slopes and supports a rich mosaic of ancient rainforest communities nestled amongst old growth hardwood forests. The park features giants like the tallowwood and blackbutt; Gondwanan descendants like Antarctic beech and Dorrigo waratah; and rainforest specialists like strangler fig and giant stinging tree. A rich understorey of ferns, woody vines, palms, orchids and epiphytes thrive beneath the canopy. The thick leaf litter of the forest floor supports a rich invertebrate fauna and decaying logs provide the perfect foundations for a spectacular range of fungi.



Photo: Bracket fungi

Landscape diversity

Dorrigo National Park's spectacular landforms, ancient volcanic remnants and deep weathering provide unique insight into the formation of the Great Eastern Escarpment and its role in providing moist refuge for relict Gondwanan rainforests. The dramatic upward sweep of the kilometre-high escarpment acts as a significant barrier to moisture-laden coastal clouds, delivering rain to the slopes and creating ideal conditions for rainforest. The park provides refuge for dry, cool temperate, warm temperate and subtropical rainforest communities as well as areas of tall open forest, heath communities and grasslands. The Killungoondie Plain in the north-west of the park remains one of the best-preserved examples of the Dorrigo Grassy Plains. Initially resulting from regular Aboriginal burning, and perpetuated by heavy frosts and grazing, the orchids and wildflowers of these treeless plains create a brilliant contrast to the surrounding forest.



Photo: Fern frond

Connectivity

Dorrigo National Park is part of a broader conservation network linking tablelands to coastal habitats. They form an interconnected corridor along the escarpment protecting sections of the New England Tableland and the Great Eastern Escarpment. These parks also connect vegetation corridors from the coastal hinterland to the plateau. This extends from Dorrigo National Park through the mountain ranges to Bindarri National Park, to the coastal habitats of nearby Bongil Bongil National Park. The Great Eastern Escarpment facilitates landscape connectivity both in terms of latitudinal and elevation movement for ecosystems adapting to a rapidly warming climate.



Photo: View from the range

Protected waters

Dorrigo National Park contains the headwaters of 3 important rivers – the Rosewood and Never Never rivers that flow east into the Bellinger River, and Wild Cattle Creek that flows north-west into the Nymboida River. The high rainfall and steep escarpment results in spectacular waterfalls including Gleniffer, Red Cedar and Casuarina falls. The southern section of the park takes in part of the eastern escarpment of the Dorrigo Plateau. Numerous streams flow over the plateau edge to the Rosewood River creating cascades and waterfalls in their steep descent.

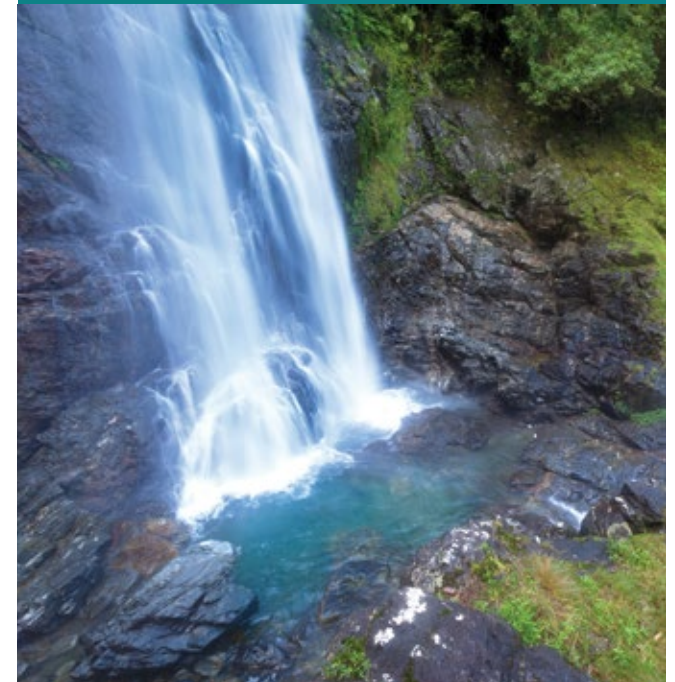


Photo: Red Cedar Falls

3.3 Cultural significance



Gumbaynggirr cultural landscape

Gumbaynggirr Country has special significance to Aboriginal people, who have an ongoing connection to Country. The Aboriginal cultural and heritage values of Dorrigo National Park are significant, although only limited archaeological surveys have been completed. There is evidence of people from the Gumbaynggirr nation living in the area for thousands of years, using the subtropical rainforest as a valuable supplement to the rich plateau and coastal ecosystems. It is likely groups camped on the grassland plains on the fringe of the rainforest at certain times of year to access abundant foods, medicines and resources. This included land management practices such as burning the rainforest margins to maintain the grasslands and stimulate new growth which attracted increased numbers of grazing pademelons and wallabies.

There are a large number of sites of spiritual significance in the broader area with many associated with or including natural features in the landscape. An example, McGraths Hump in Dorrigo National Park, is known to the Gumbaynggirr as Old Man Dreaming.

Photo: Smoking ceremony, Wonga walk



Historic heritage

The European settlement of the Dorrigo Plateau reflects the wider story of regional land use with timber-getting and agriculture gathering pace in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Opportunistic cedar felling was followed by more elaborate schemes to remove hoop pine using tramlines and timber shoots to get logs down the rugged escarpment. Relics of these logging practices are visible today including springboard marks and the Syndicate Tramway.

When NSW rainforests were protected from logging following the ‘battle for Terania Creek’ over 40 years ago, Dorrigo National Park doubled in size and was added to the World Heritage list shortly after. This park’s story reflects society’s changing attitudes to rainforests, and it remains a great place to experience and learn about our precious rainforest heritage.

Photo: View across Dorrigo National Park

3.4 Recreational values

The importance and diversity of Dorrigo's rainforests were recognised as early as 1893 by government botanist Joseph Maiden, and the first areas around the waterfalls were reserved 'for public recreation and the preservation of native flora' in 1901. The development of Dorrigo National Park proceeded under the care of a group of dedicated local trustees who built the first paths in the 1930s and The Glade picnic area in the 1960s. Never Never picnic area was established in the 1970s with 13 km of walking tracks, recognising the demand to explore the newly dedicated areas of warm temperate rainforest and waterfalls.

Dorrigo Rainforest Centre opened in 1991 and provides more-accessible facilities for visitors and better-quality tracks and boardwalks. The Wonga walk is renowned as one of the best rainforest walks in Australia and provides significant health and wellbeing benefits to visitors and the local community.

More adventurous hikers explore the rugged and remote areas of the park following management trails, remote tracks, creek lines and ridges. The proposed Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will provide a challenging new 46 km multi-day walk experience in Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks.

Dorrigo National Park provides a gateway for the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, where visitors can learn about World Heritage values and find out how to explore other parks in the region.



Photo: Hikers in Dorrigo National Park



Photo: School education activity

3.5 Educational values

Dorrigo National Park has long been a popular destination for school excursions, with quality assured, syllabus-linked programs available for primary, secondary and tertiary students lead by experienced and knowledgeable education rangers. Education programs cover nature conservation, biodiversity, environmental and ecological values, climate change impacts, fire in the landscape, history, rainforests and Aboriginal cultural content areas. Holiday ranger-guided tours provide rich interpretation and immersive educational experiences for visitors.

The park is also important as a place for scientific study with easy access to 4 different types of rainforests and other associated habitats. NPWS facilitates and encourages regular field surveys and research by tertiary institutions around Australia, and the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre has hosted a number of scientific conferences and forums and well as tertiary student excursions and field trips.

4. Vision and objectives



Gondwana guided tour



4.1 Vision and objectives

The project vision statement is:

Dorrigo National Park is an iconic World Heritage visitor hub that is a must-do experience on the east coast of Australia and sets a new benchmark in conservation and cultural education.

The vision for the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre is:

- to create inspiring experiences that connect people with Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal culture for generations to come
- to provide ongoing protection of our natural and cultural heritage, new opportunities for visitors to explore and connect with nature and culture, increased contribution to the regional economy, and health and wellbeing benefits for visitors and local communities.

The vision will be realised by implementing the concepts proposed in this master plan.

Objectives:

- Create an inspiring nature-based experience hub highlighting the Great Eastern Escarpment and the biological significance of World Heritage – listed rainforests and old-growth hardwood forests of Dorrigo National Park
 - Protect, respect and promote the park’s environmental and cultural heritage
 - Create high-quality nature-based experiences and educational opportunities that grow awareness of Australia’s ancient Gondwana rainforests and foster future conservation advocacy and stewardship
 - Generate economic benefit for the local community and sustainable growth of the regional economy
 - Offer opportunities to connect to nature which provide ongoing health and wellbeing benefits for participants
- Provide opportunities for Aboriginal communities to rightfully share their culture, participate in and benefit from the regional visitor economy
 - Create experiences for the growing nature-based tourism market, with well-designed, efficient facilities and infrastructure to manage increasing visitation
 - Support visitation by a diverse cross-section of the community and offer a range of experiences to enhance accessibility
 - Build strong partnerships with business, government and local communities
 - Enhance Dorrigo National Park’s financial sustainability, providing opportunities to generate revenue that supports NPWS programs and operations, including enabling reinvestment in local conservation, restoration and education initiatives.

4.2 Expected outcomes

The Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre proposal can potentially deliver a range of environmental, social and economic benefits for NPWS and our communities, as summarised below.



Photo: Goshawk in flight

Outcomes	Measuring our success
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1. Environmental

The Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre is an inspiring Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage experience that protects, respects and promotes the park's environmental and cultural values

- Increase in visitors with minimal additional environmental impacts
- Increase in awareness of Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage values
- Increase in visitor satisfaction

The purpose-built facilities are environmentally sustainable with passive design, low carbon materials and energy efficient operation

- Safe and comfortable spaces
- Energy/water efficiency of building
- Ongoing running/maintenance costs

The construction and operation of the visitor centre and Arc elevated walkway has minimal impact on the rainforest and scenic amenity, and creates a wildlife-friendly precinct

- Minimal impacts from construction
- Minimal impacts from visitors
- Minimal visual impacts
- Minimal wildlife impacts

A range of accessible rainforest experiences encourage visitors to connect with nature in a meaningful way and help build a legacy of support for conservation

- Visitors engage with a variety of interpretive experiences
- Increase in awareness of park's values
- Increase in visitors' stewardship attitudes and pro-environmental behaviours

Table 4.1: Expected outcomes and related measures of success



Photo: Education activity

Outcomes	Measuring our success
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2. Social

A more inclusive environment allows everyone the opportunity to experience the mental and physical health benefits of spending more time in nature with long and short walk options

- More universally accessible and barrier-free experiences
- A more diverse range of people visit
- Visitors with different needs feel welcome
- Increase in visitor satisfaction

Meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal people deliver authentic cultural experiences to create a deeper appreciation of Gumbaynggirr culture and perspectives and contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of the community

- Strong partnerships with Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal community
- Number of cultural activities and events
- Increase in awareness of Gumbaynggirr culture

Dorrigo National Park is recognised for providing evidence-based human health and wellbeing benefits resulting from meaningful nature connection experiences

- More people spend more time on walking tracks in the rainforest
- Visitors' engagement with nature contributes to their health and wellbeing
- New partnerships with health providers

The new facilities build relationships with the local community and make a valuable contribution to social cohesion and community pride

- Community feels pride and ownership of new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre
- Increased number of NPWS volunteers and opportunities
- Increased number of community events and activities



Photo: Gondwana Circle, Wonga walk

Outcomes

Measuring our success

3. Economic

The centre generates new employment opportunities for local communities and enhances the contribution national parks make to the regional economy and community wellbeing

- Increased job opportunities during planning and construction phases
- Increased job opportunities as a result of more activity at the precinct

Increased visitation and dwell time provides flow-on benefits to regional visitor economy

- New businesses established to support increased visitor activity
- Increase in visitor spend in local towns
- Increased occupancy rates for visitor accommodation

Strong commercial partnerships deliver a greater range of tours, experiences and events, contributing to sustainable and resilient regional economies

- Number and returns of licensed commercial tourism businesses
- Dispersal of visitation to off-peak periods supports local economy

Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre achieves stronger financial sustainability over the medium-long term

- Improved annual net financial position for visitor centre operations
- Reduction in deferred maintenance costs
- Increased revenue supports NPWS programs and operations, including conservation, restoration, and education initiatives

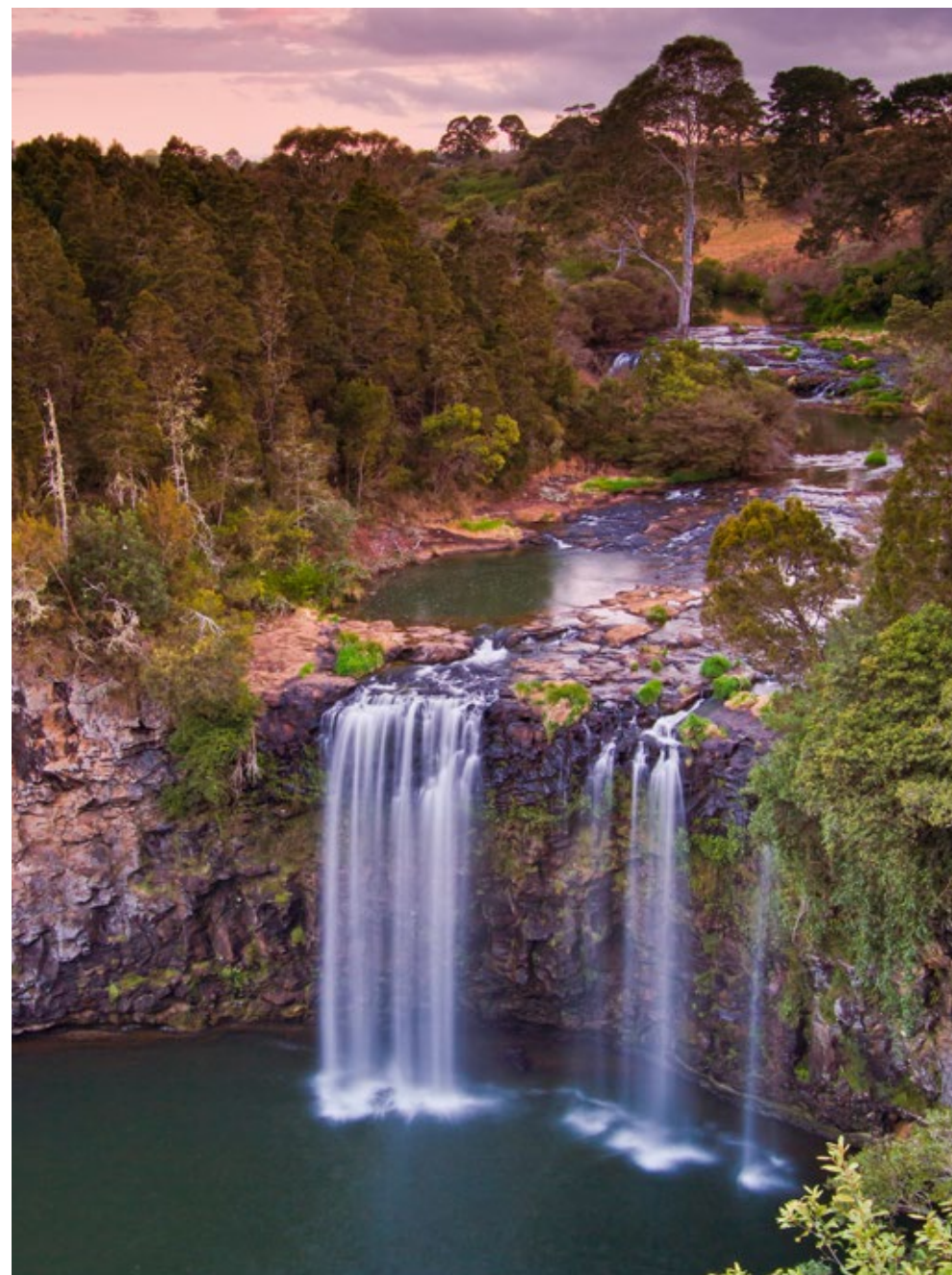


Photo: Dangar Falls, one of Dorrigo township's other main attractions

An aerial photograph of a large, curved, elevated wooden walkway, known as 'The Arc', winding through a dense tropical rainforest. The walkway is made of light-colored wood and is elevated above the ground. Numerous people can be seen walking along the path. In the center of the curve, there is a circular platform with a blue and white patterned floor. The surrounding forest is lush and green, with many trees and a thick canopy. The lighting suggests it is daytime, with shadows cast on the ground and the walkway.

5. Creating an immersive rainforest experience

Artists impression: The Arc elevated walkway viewed from above

5.1 The precincts

This master plan considers 2 key precincts: The Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and The Glade which are the main arrival destinations for people accessing Dorrigo National Park.

The Dorrigo Rainforest Centre is located on the intersection of Dome Road and Lyrebird Lane in an area that was previously cleared. It provides a gateway to the park where the landscape transitions from open farmland to luxuriant subtropical rainforest. This contrast helps to highlight the significance of the remaining rainforest protected within Dorrigo National Park.

The Glade picnic area is located 1 km away along Lyrebird Lane. It will play a key role in welcoming visitors to Dorrigo National Park during construction of the new centre. Proposed upgrades will facilitate a temporary visitor centre and revitalise the precinct as an all-weather multi-use activity hub into the future.

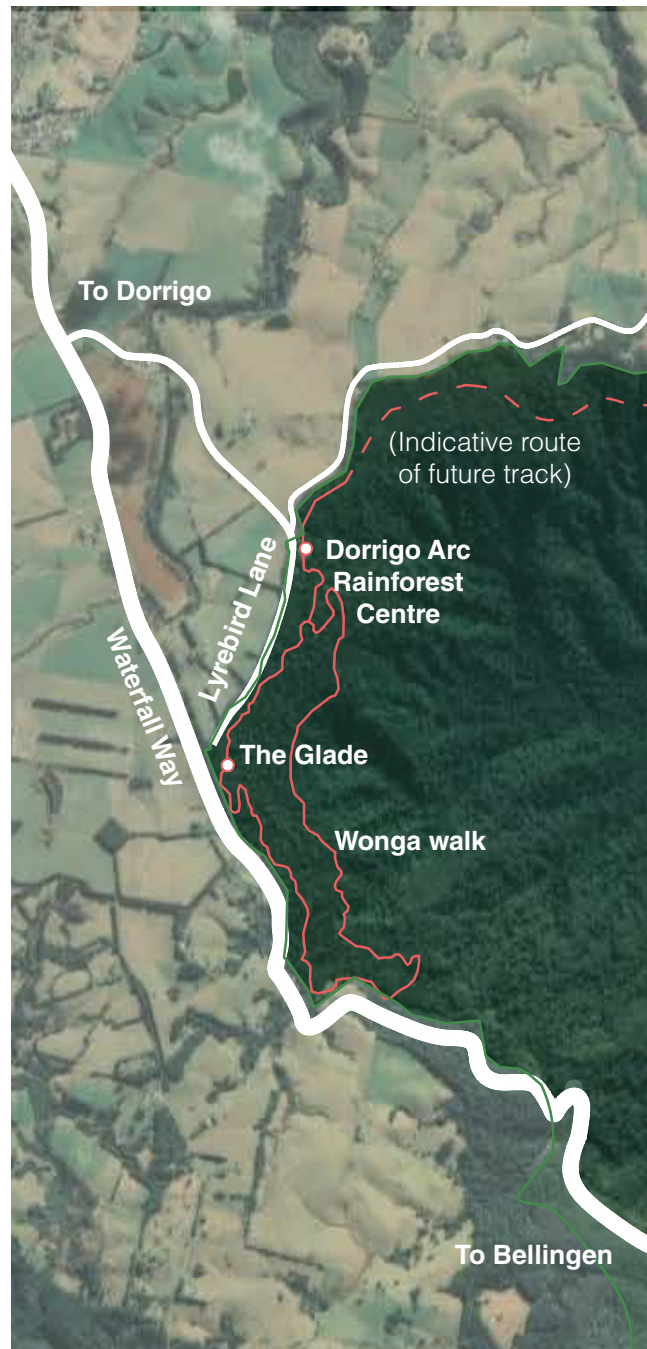


Figure 5.1 Location map of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and The Glade



Photo: Existing Dorrigo Rainforest Centre

Proposed improvements

- removal of the existing visitor centre, cafe and Skywalk lookout and replacement with a new rainforest centre including retail and cafe
- pathways with greater accessibility from the top of the escarpment down to the rainforest floor upgraded links to the Wonga walk and outdoor education space
- a new nature play area in the Pademelon picnic area
- expansion of the car parking area and associated services
- interpretive storytelling installations and features.



Photo: The Glade

The Glade proposal

- upgrades to the Glade picnic area infrastructure such as the BBQ area and car park
- development of a compact building to facilitate a temporary visitor centre during construction of the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre
- retention of the temporary visitor centre building for use as an all-weather venue for educational activities and events.

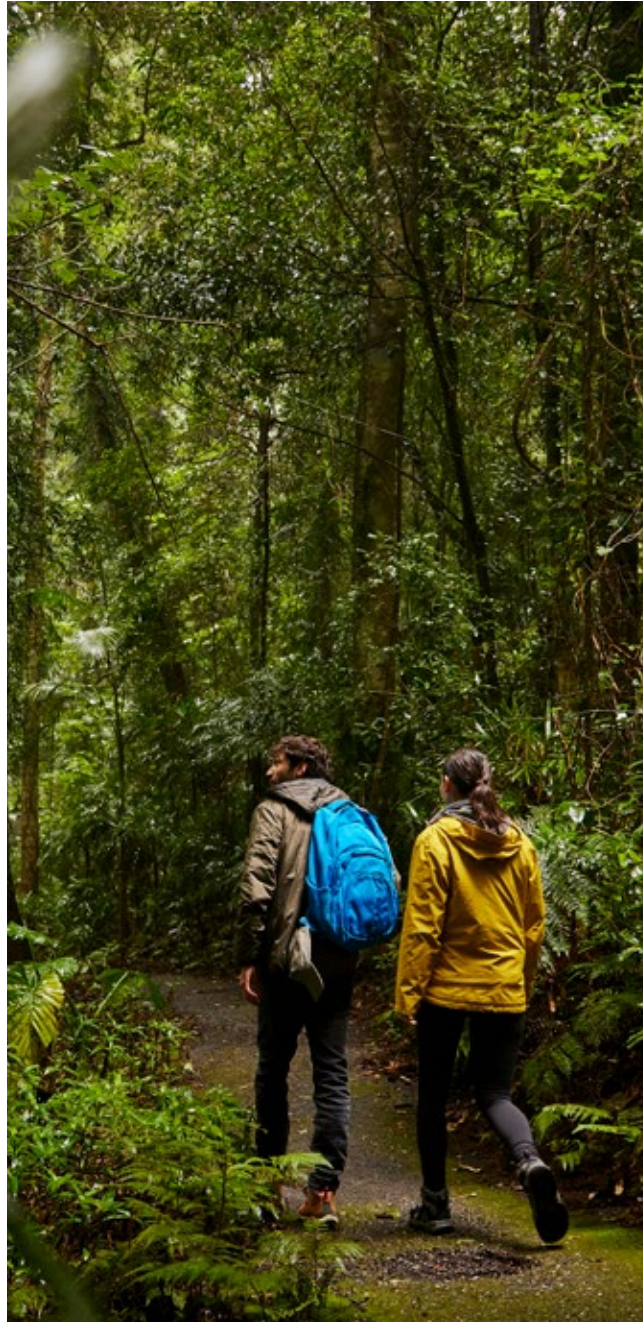


Photo: Wonga walk

Related projects

- Wonga walk track upgrades – walking track improvements including widening, surfacing, seating, lookouts and interpretation to improve the visitor experience and complement the major renewal of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre project in line with overall objectives.
- Dorrigo Escarpment great walk – a proposed 46-km 4-day, 3-night walk starting from the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and traversing Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks. This multi-day walk along the Dorrigo Escarpment, will showcase magnificent old-growth rainforest and eucalypt forests, swing bridges, spectacular waterfalls, and panoramic vistas over the Bellinger Valley towards the ocean. A shorter 21-km, 2-day, 1-night loop option will also be available, returning walkers to the Arc Rainforest Centre at Dorrigo. See the Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk draft master plan for more information.
- Depot upgrades – refurbishment of the existing depot in Casuarina Street Dorrigo so that it can house the NPWS staff currently occupying the rainforest centre, freeing up more space for visitor services.

5.2 Site strategy

The Dorrigo Rainforest Centre has engaged, educated, and inspired visitors for over 3 decades. However, the current infrastructure presents a range of challenges that affect the quality of the visitor experience. The proposed Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre addresses these challenges and seizes the opportunity to create a spectacular and more engaging, accessible, and sustainable visitor destination to meet the changing needs and growing expectations of visitors.

Existing challenges

1. Wayfinding is not intuitive as there is no clear entry to the building or the Skywalk
2. The staff office dominates visitor arrival and 75% of the building space
3. Amenities are accessed externally and are located far from the entry
4. The existing centre has limited outlook into the park
5. Entry is directly into the gift shop which takes up most of the visitor centre
6. Limited space for information and interpretive displays
7. The Skywalk has limited capacity – it is narrow with limited space to stop, rest, sit or hold tour group discussions and there are no sections sheltered from the elements
8. No continuation of experience on return from the Skywalk
9. No clear venue for events other than the theatre which is not fit for purpose due to lack of privacy, accessibility issues, main access being through the gift shop and poor acoustic and lighting performance
10. Pathway into the forest is a long, steep, non-accessible compliant gradient which forms a barrier to less-able visitors
11. Car parking does not meet peak demand
12. Pademelon lawn is visually isolated from the centre.



Figure 5.2 Site analysis showing existing challenges

5.3 Building siting

Figure 5.3 shows an overlay of the indicative footprint of the proposed Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre on the existing site:

1. Existing rainforest centre and Skywalk shown dashed in red
2. Proposed Dorrigo Rainforest Centre
3. Proposed Arc elevated walkway with integrated Weather Room

The key differences are:

The Arc elevated walkway extends approximately 10–20 m beyond the existing Skywalk (the final alignment will be within the crane radius area shown on page 46)

- The new rainforest centre creates a courtyard at the edge of the plateau sheltered from prevailing winds
- The Arc varies in width with the widest point designed with sufficient width to accommodate the anticipated visitation, activities and accessibility requirements
- The footprint will avoid areas of high value ecology.



Figure 5.3 Building siting plan

5.4 A new way to experience World Heritage

The Dorrigo Arc elevated walkway expands on the Skywalk experience by taking visitors on a flight out over the canopy of the World Heritage-listed rainforest with expansive views across the national park and towards the coast. Visitors can then journey along the descending walkway through the layers of the forest to the ground where they can explore the walking tracks on offer.

The Arc Rainforest Centre is located on the plateau's edge and includes a large arrival and Interpretation Hall that frames a central outdoor gathering space. Internally the centre will house a cafe, interpretive displays, retail, tours and information, a briefing and storage room for the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk, and a staff area.

The Arc has an enclosed 'weather room' where visitors can experience the rainforest in all conditions. The Arc elevated walkway will integrate interpretive elements that tell the story of the layers of the rainforest as they pass through them.

The design will be sensitive to the natural surroundings, resilient and sustainable. The building will include a number of sustainable features such as passive ventilation, energy efficient heating and water capture and re-use.

The final location and alignment of the Arc elevated walkway will be based on ecological, geotechnical and topographical surveys.

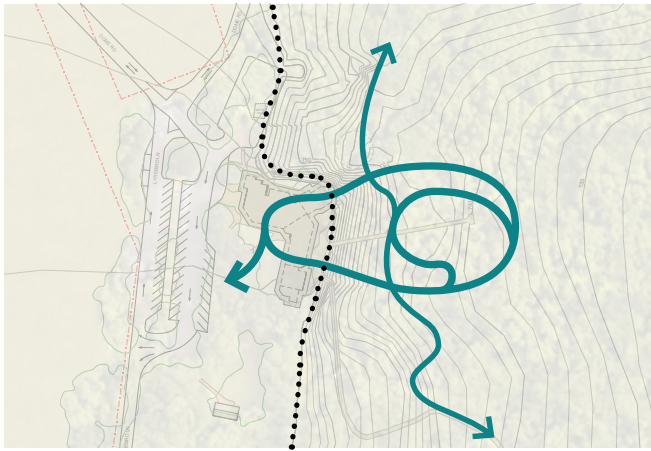
All artistic renders and drawings are indicative only and subject to change.





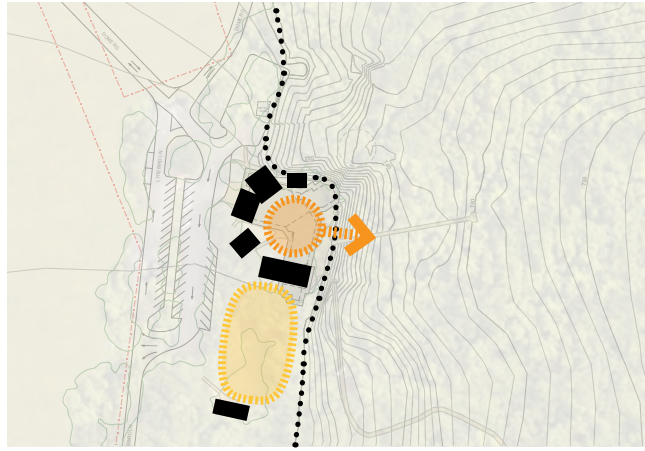
Artists impression: Dorrigo Arc with spectacular views across Dorrigo National Park

5.5 Project design principles



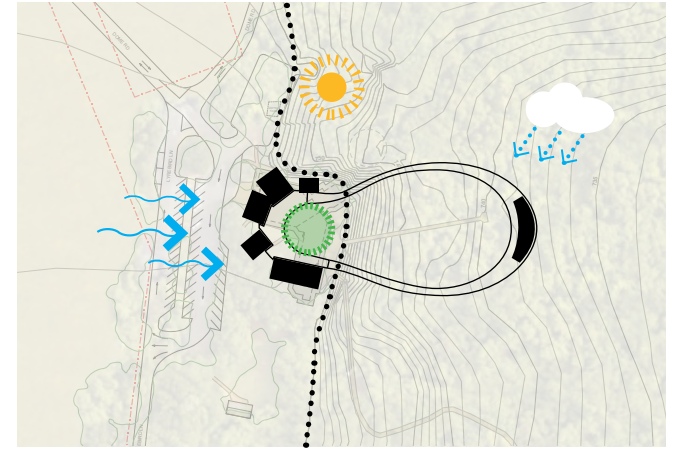
Create an immersive experience

An engaging, accessible and immersive journey from the edge of the plateau and through the rainforest.



Celebrate the edge of the plateau

Create and frame space at the edge of the plateau for cultural learning, events and to experience the escarpment.



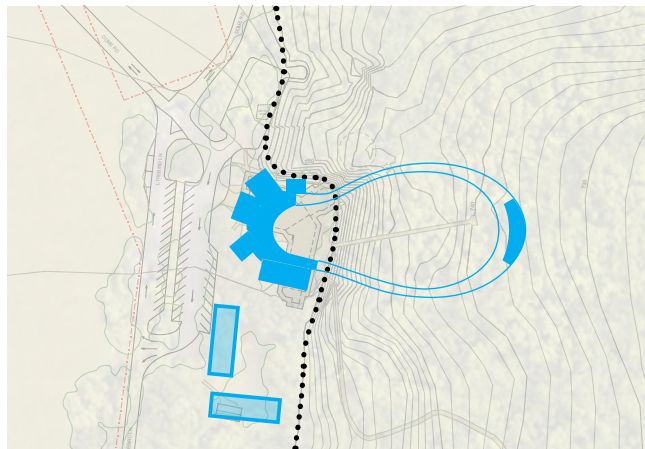
A climate-responsive design

Locate built form to create shelter from the breeze and wet climate, whilst harnessing passive ventilation and solar access.



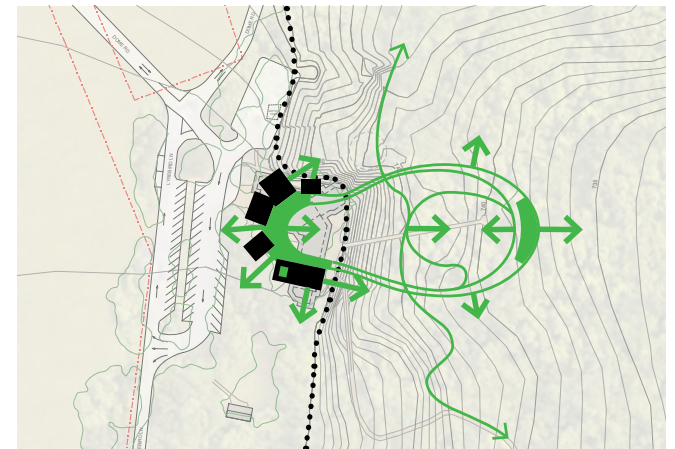
Make space for interpretation

Create space for interpretation and learning along the visitor experience.



Future flexible

A flexible design that can adapt to changing needs over time.



An 'open' experience

Create an accessible all-weather destination (rain, fog or shine) that brings the outside in and the inside out.

Figure 5.4 Design principle diagrams

5.6 Arrival and orientation

Visitors arrive via Dome Road to a reconfigured entry, enhancing the sense of arrival. Car parking and movement is managed to enable drop off points and clear accessible parking for a range of transport modes including buses.

A new entry court provides a clear point of orientation with sight lines to the entry of the rainforest centre, the cafe and to the Pademelon picnic area.

The rainforest centre will be located to frame and activate the previously isolated Pademelon picnic area. The cafe will be oriented to overlook the picnic area with outdoor seating.

The cafe will be able to operate independently of the rainforest centre, with varying opening hours if required. The outdoor area is intended to be utilised for nature play incorporating a large lawn that can be used for small outdoor events and picnics.



Artists impression: Entry forecourt of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre



Artists impression: View towards the cafe from the Pademelon lawn Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre

A space will be provided for registration and briefing of hikers embarking on the new Dorrigo Escarpment great walk.

The staff area will include separate staff amenities and a first aid room, and has a separate entry from the car park, allowing out-of-hours access, as well as direct access to the staff car park.



Artists impression: View towards the staff entry of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre



Artists impression: Interpretation Hall in the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre

5.7 Interpretation Hall

The Dorrigo Arc Interpretation Hall is the main arrival space, greeting visitors as they enter, and wraps around a landscaped courtyard at the very edge of the escarpment. The hall is elevated above the rest of the built form, allowing glimpses of the surrounds, blurring the boundary between the interior and rainforest.



Artists impression: The courtyard of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre

The Dorrigo Arc Interpretation Hall is a space to allow for agile, engaging, artful and inspiring interpretation that meets the ever-changing educational needs of visitors. The outer edge of the hall will house the information, ticketing and retail spaces, cafe, staff area and multi-day walk briefing area.



Artists impression: Interpretation Hall in the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre

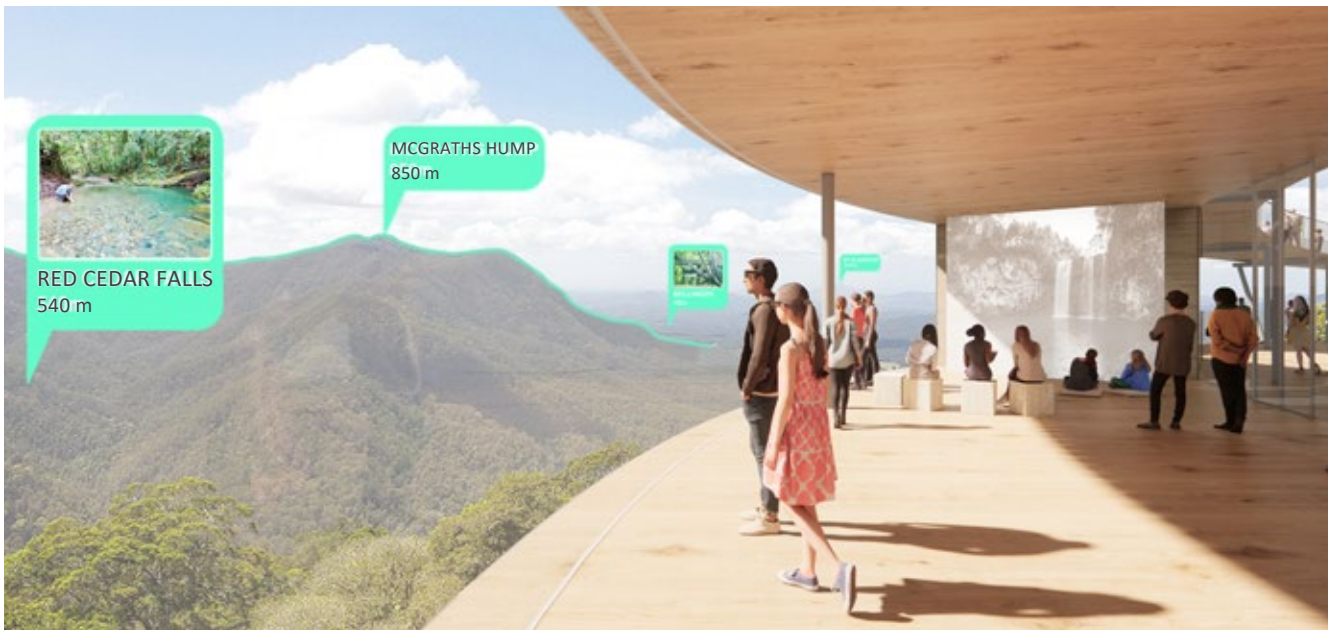


Artists impression: View towards the Dorrigo Arc entry

As visitors journey towards the Arc elevated walkway, they can experience physical and digital forms of interpretation. The building will include space for tour groups and visitors to hear cultural and ecological stories from rangers and guides.



Artists impression: The Arc elevated walkway



Artists impression: The Weather Room interpretation space and lookout

5.8 Arc and Weather Room

The Dorrigo Arc elevated walkway extends out from the escarpment towards the horizon allowing visitors to experience a bird's eye view across Dorrigo National Park, understanding the relationship between landscape and climate. The Arc widens at its furthest edge, creating a platform for visitors to engage with the surroundings and can host educational and cultural programs throughout the day.

An important function of the Arc is to create in the visitor a powerful sense of awe and wonder as they ponder the wild, undisturbed landscape. Research indicates that this experience can impart a range of physical and mental health benefits to visitors, including lowered stress hormones and elevated sense of wellbeing.

The Weather Room will be designed as an all-weather interpretation room set within the clouds. It will allow visitors to experience the unique climatic conditions of Dorrigo National Park where the weather is constantly changing.

5.9 Rainforest pathways

The Arc elevated walkway descends gently towards the rainforest floor – its path determined by the location of significant trees and vegetation. The accessible pathway allows a new audience to experience the rainforest in an immersive and meaningful way. Spaces will be provided to pause and take in the distinctive plant species and birdlife at different levels of the rainforest structure.

Projected increases in national and global urbanisation mean that visitors to the park will increasingly be unfamiliar with wild natural environments. The gently descending design of the Arc elevated walkway will provide a low-risk entry point for visitors who may lack confidence or feel unsafe entering the forest.

From here the pathway links to the existing walking tracks, recently rejuvenated, widened, and renewed, to encourage everyone to continue their exploration of the rainforest. The nearby Balaminda rainforest viewing platform allows visitors to pause, rest and fully immerse themselves in the ancient rainforest experience.

Just 400 m from the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre, the grade 3 Wonga walk loop offers 5.8 km (2–3 hours) of cool and shaded walking track that delivers all the delights of this subtropical rainforest. It is one of the best and most popular rainforest walks in Australia and features the cascading beauty of Tristania Falls, and the remarkable Crystal Shower Falls where you can walk behind the falls to look through the veil of falling water.



Artists impression: Spiralling walkway into the rainforest



Photo: Balaminda rainforest viewing platform

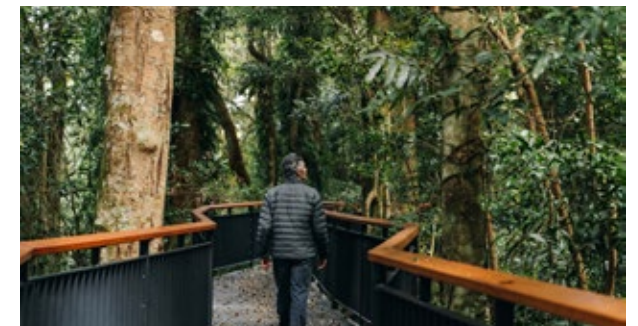


Photo: Walk with the Birds boardwalk



Artists impression: Outdoor classroom along the spiralling walkway



Photo: Strangler fig

5.10 The interpretive journey

Interpretation is a critical part of the visitor experience. The visitor journey through the precinct and into the rainforest is an opportunity for visitors to engage with the environment and Aboriginal cultural storytelling in an exciting and meaningful way. The interpretation strategy will imagine personal, physical and digital elements that allow visitors to engage with the park in new ways. Stories of Country, told from a First Nations perspective, will be fundamental.



Artists impression: Weather Room



Artists impression: Interpretation Hall

The overarching theme of 'The ancient refuge of Gondwana' reflects the key interpretive topics of Gumbaynggirr connections, nature connection and refuges.

The interpretation strategy (under development) will seek to:

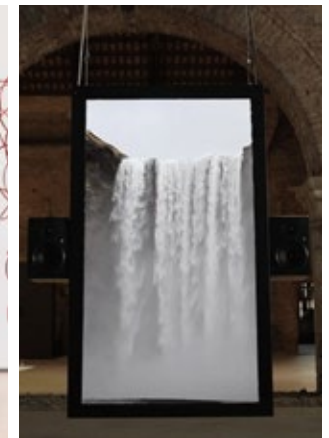
- create memorable, meaningful and engaging experiences that connect the visitor in innovative ways to this remarkable natural environment and foster a long-lasting love of nature
- deliver authentic cultural experiences to create a deeper appreciation of Gumbaynggirr culture and perspectives
- increase visitors' understanding, awareness and appreciation of natural and cultural heritage, particularly the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area
- communicate messages relating to nature and culture, including natural and historical processes, ecological relationships and human roles in the environment
- involve people through first-hand (personal) and interactive experiences
- facilitate a stronger connection to nature to encourage ongoing pro-environmental behaviours including actions to support the conservation of biodiversity
- increase the public's understanding and support for NPWS's role and management objectives.



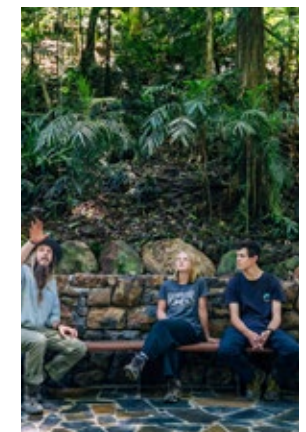
Interpretive artwork



Multimedia interpretation



Experiential interpretation



Guided interpretation

5.11 The Glade

The Glade provides the perfect low-key natural picnic and day visit setting and a link into the Wonga walk experience. It's a great space for families as they set out to explore the walking tracks and experiences on offer throughout the national park. It can also act as a dedicated space for larger groups and school education programs. The large, open lawn area provides opportunities to host community and cultural events. Groups have easy access to the Walk with the Birds boardwalk and to Crystal Showers for those that don't want to do the full 7-km loop. The Glade will become the primary precinct for visitors during the redevelopment of the rainforest centre precinct. This function will require several infrastructure upgrades to the existing Glade precinct, including:

- the existing picnic shelter will be retained to provide a space for group dining
- the existing toilet block will be upgraded with accessible toilets
- temporary toilets will cater for increased visitor numbers at The Glade while the rainforest centre is being redeveloped
- the existing car park will be redesigned to facilitate improved parking.

A new open plan building will be built to act as the temporary visitor centre while the new centre is under construction. The temporary visitor centre will include:

- external deck area for small events such as workshops and classes
- reception space with small counter staffed by NPWS staff to educate and inform visitors, and to facilitate ranger-guided tours on nearby walking tracks
- a demountable staff building situated next to the proposed temporary visitor centre will provide basic facilities for staff including a kitchenette and storage for education equipment as well as one accessible toilet to be locked and available for staff use only
- site infrastructure to facilitate a temporary pop-up cafe such as a trailer or container cafe
- upgrades to services including sewer, power, potable water and IT as required for the new infrastructure.

This building will transition into an all-weather education room for Discovery tours and school groups. It may also be available for small community activities and events.



Artists impression: Proposed Glade building



Photo: The Glade lookout



Photo: Example NPWS amenities block



6. Concept plan

Crystal Shower Falls



6.1 Site plan

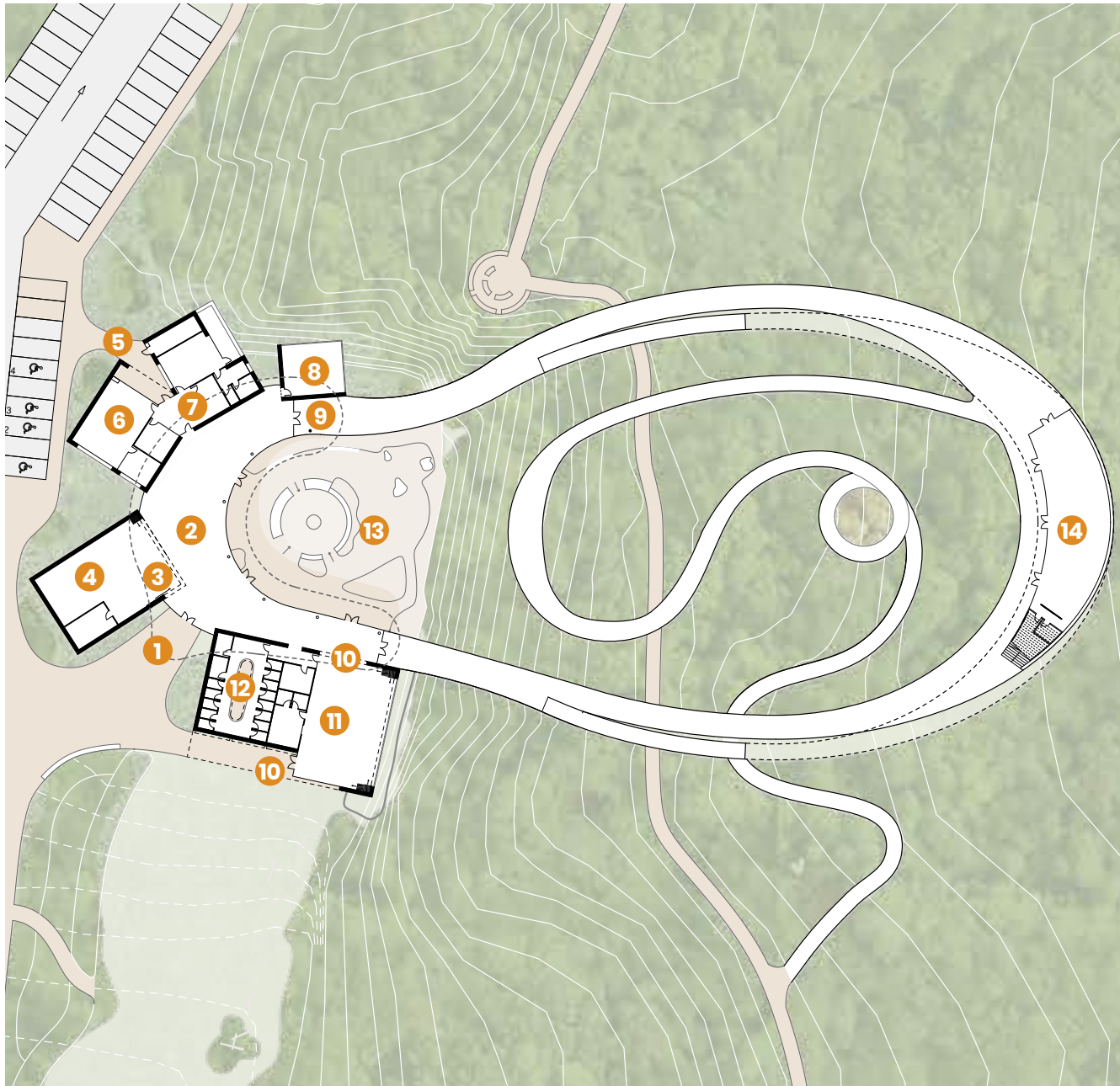
1. Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre
2. Gumbaynggirr courtyard meeting place
3. Arrival forecourt
4. Pademelon lawn with nature play elements
5. Expanded visitor parking
6. Existing Pademelon picnic shelter
7. New bus drop-off shelter
8. Waste collection point
9. Electric vehicle charging stations
10. Drive through caravan/RV parking spots
11. Permeable pavement
12. Education node (formerly a quarry site)
13. Top deck of Arc elevated walkway (Weather Room below)
14. Elevated ramp to Wonga walk
15. Track connecting site to Wonga walk
16. Alternate access to Wonga walk
17. Track connecting to the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk.

All drawings are indicative only and subject to change.

Figure 6.1 Site plan of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and elevated walkway



1:1250 at A3



6.2 Interior plan

1. Main entry
2. Interpretation Hall
3. Reception counter and information point
4. Retail space
5. Staff entry
6. Staff area and first aid
7. Dorrigo Escarpment great walk counter and briefing room
8. Group gathering point
9. Arc elevated walkway entry
10. Cafe entry
11. Cafe and kitchen
12. Amenities including accessible toilet and parents' room
13. Gumbaynggirr courtyard meeting place
14. Weather Room.

Figure 6.2 Plan of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and Arc elevated walkway



1:800 at A3

6.3 Access and circulation

The proposed changes to access and circulation to and within the rainforest centre are intended to enhance the visitor experience. These changes include upgrades to the car park as well as within the visitor centre and access to the walking tracks.

Vehicle circulation

To cater to increased visitation, car parking will be increased for visitors by economising the current layout and removing a number of staff parking spaces due to the office staff being relocated to the depot. A shelter for tour bus drop offs will be added, as well as electric charging stations for vehicles and bikes. The relocation of the car park entry, and the reconfiguration of the car park and circulation routes will improve vehicle flows and safety.

Visitor circulation

Access into the park has been improved with the provision of an accessible path to the forest floor. This replaces the steep and inaccessible existing ramp. Circulation is through the rainforest centre and onto the Arc elevated walkway and into the park as per Figure 6.3.

1. Entry
2. Reception counter
3. Dorrigo Escarpment great walk counter
4. Arc entry
5. Arc exit

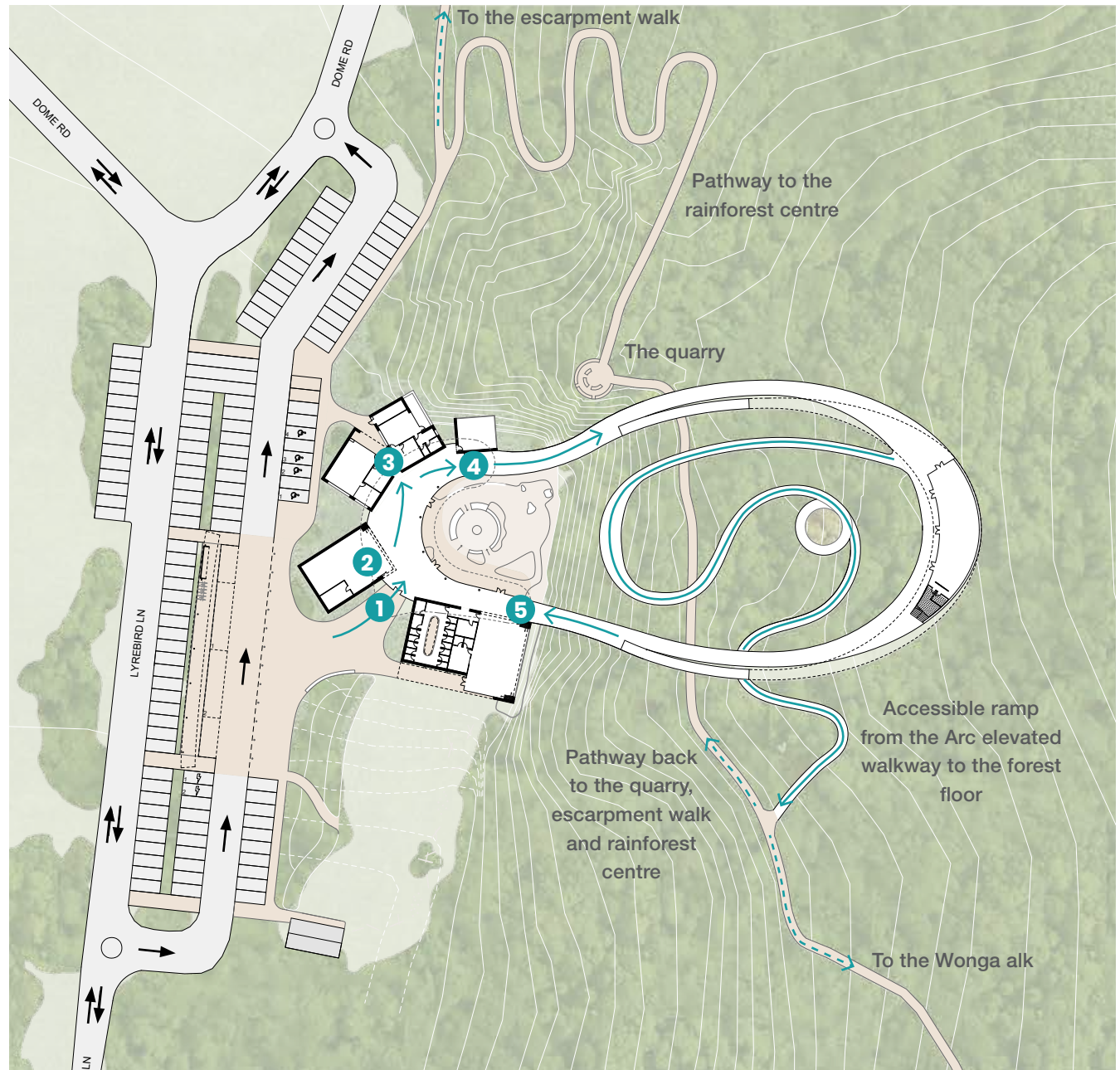


Figure 6.3 Circulation diagram



1:1250 at A3

6.4 Buildability

It is proposed that the new centre will sit on the same site as the existing rainforest centre in an area which was previously cleared farmland. As the existing centre will be demolished to make way for the new centre it is intended that the majority of materials from the existing building will be recycled or repurposed, examples such as:

- crushing of concrete, paving and bricks for re-use as sub-base materials under car parking areas
- roofing material removed and sold
- timber lining boards removed and sold
- timber trusses removed and sold
- windows removed and sold.

A number of buildability considerations and assumptions are being considered for each project stage to support the successful design and delivery of the project including:

- measures for the protection of the rainforest within the area of the development
- traffic flows and car parking management, both during the construction phase and once the centre is open to the public
- crane locations for the construction of the Arc elevated walkway, and possible requirements for staging of the build for accessibility
- logistical material procurement when considering the restraints of Waterfall Way east of Dorrigo, that is, consideration may need to be given to the procurement of larger items from the regions west of the site

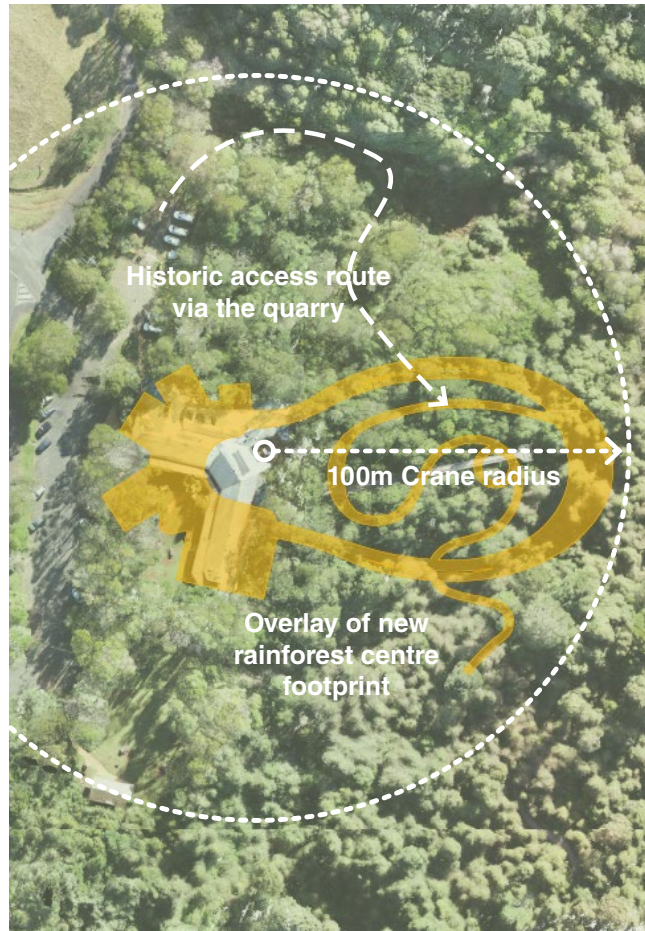


Figure 6.4 Buildability diagram

- waste control and treatment, both during the construction phase and once the centre is open to the public
- designing the building with consideration of ongoing operational and maintenance costs, that is, designing the building with low ongoing maintenance requirements and high energy efficiency.

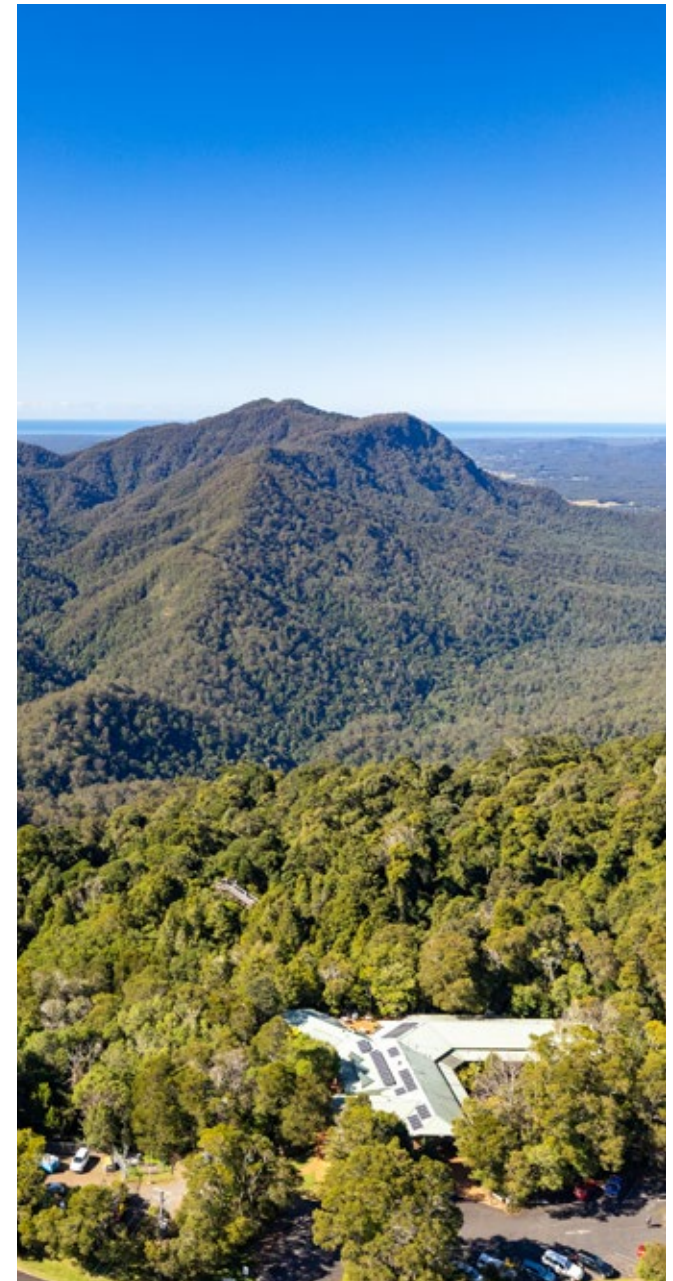


Photo: The rainforest centre is perched on the edge of the escarpment on a previously cleared site

6.5 Events and venues

The key focus of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and Arc elevated walkway is to enhance the visitor experience and provide a unique view of the rainforest canopy and its plants and animals, and a new perspective on Gumbaynggirr landscapes and culture. The facility will have the flexibility to host small events outside of visiting hours. These events could include community and fundraising events, talks, information sessions, book launches, small celebrations, or evening nature tours including astronomy.



Photo: Community event

Interpretation Hall

The Interpretation Hall can be used for events of up to 100 people, catered by the cafe. Retail and staff components can be locked.

Storage and amenities

An area will be provided for the storage of tables and chairs for events when not in use. Amenities will be designed to cater to everyday use as well as having the capacity for larger events.



Photo: Yoga on the Pademelon lawn

Pademelon picnic area

A large lawn area for picnics and nature play that may host outdoor events and gatherings.



Arc elevated walkway and integrated Weather Room

The open deck and enclosed Weather Room may be used for events in conjunction with the facilities within the visitor centre.

Cafe

The cafe opens seamlessly to the Interpretation Hall but will also operate independently with a dedicated entry. Under cover outdoor seating is provided to both sides of the building. The new location for the cafe will provide easy access to the Pademelon picnic area, potentially providing parental supervision of the adjoining nature play space.



Photo: Example of a cafe function

Staff area and first aid room

The staff areas are accessible out of hours via a separate entry and can be opened without the need to open the entire visitor centre. The incorporation of a first aid room allows for the provision of first aid treatment away from the public eye with any medical response personnel being able to enter via the separate entry.

6.6 The Glade and temporary visitors centre

1. Existing picnic shelter
2. Existing viewing platform
3. New toilets
4. New Glade education centre (for use as a temporary visitor centre)
5. Demountable staff building
6. Gathering area with seating
7. New pathway link to existing track
8. Entry/information sign
9. New track head sign
10. Picnic table settings
11. Existing car park
12. Temporary food/coffee van
13. Existing toilets.



Figure 6.5 The Glade concept plan



1:1000 at A3

A long-exposure photograph of a multi-tiered waterfall cascading over dark, mossy rocks in a dense, green forest. The water is blurred, creating a soft, ethereal effect. The surrounding vegetation is thick with ferns and other tropical-looking plants. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the waterfall.

7. Design intent

Rosewood Creek waterfall, Dorrigo National Park

7.1 Natural aesthetic

The precincts are characterised by a mix of natural environments and vegetation communities which will be preserved and improved through the management of vehicle and pedestrian movement and remediation works to reduce the impacts on the rainforest. Sensitive ecological design, landscaping and planting will ensure the natural environment continues to dominate the aesthetics of the site.

7.2 Materials

Material selections will prioritise natural materials that can withstand the unique climate and weather conditions as well as be in keeping with the national park's look and feel. The sustainability of material selections will consider embodied carbon, durability, recyclability and the circular economy. As detailed above the recycling or repurposing of material such as timber, steel and brick from the existing visitor centre and Skywalk is being considered.

Refer to photos:

1. Recycled material from the existing visitor centre integrated into the new construction
2. In situ concrete or rammed earth walls designed to weather with age
3. Timber lattice structure
4. FRP (fibre reinforced plastic) boardwalks
5. High performance glazing
6. Steel structure with minimal footings.

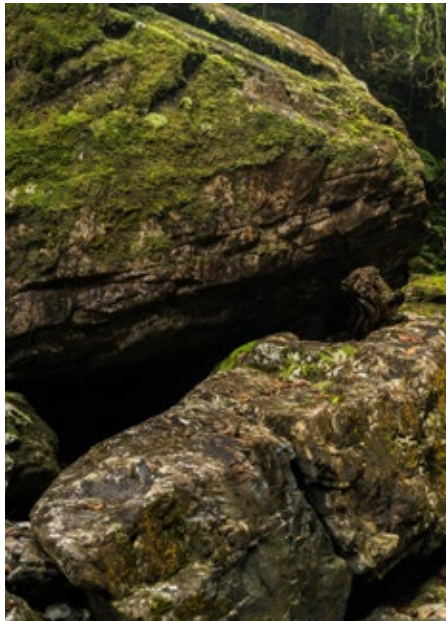


Photo: Rock formations



Photo: Dappled light in the rainforest



Photo: Structure of a leaf

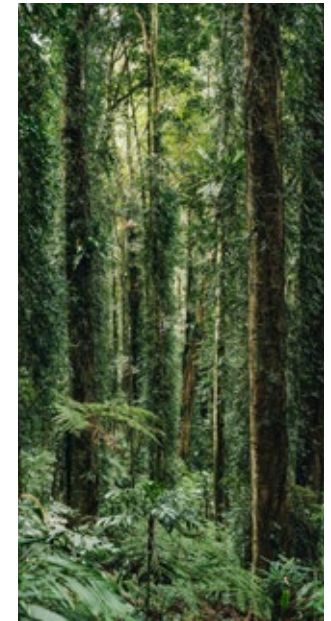
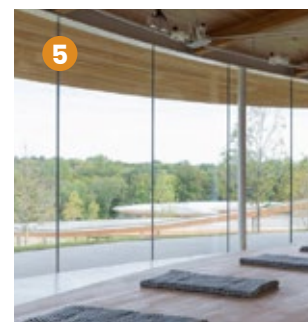
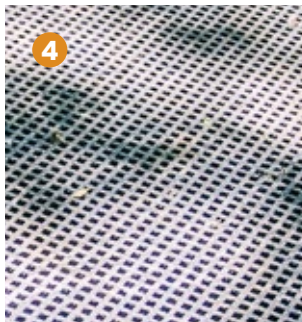
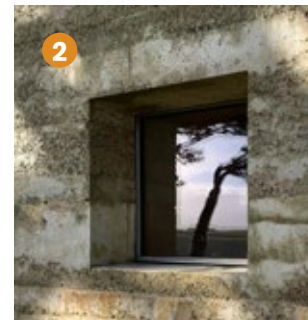


Photo: Rainforest layers



7.3 Designing with Country

Recognition of Aboriginal heritage will be incorporated into the fabric of proposed works with the involvement of the Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal community. This can take on many forms, from an understanding of and approach to the site, information on signage, use of Gumbaynggirr language, creative interpretation through artwork, and incorporation of cultural graphic elements into the built form.



Photo: Smoking ceremony



Photo: Stories of Country embedded in paving

7.4 Accessible design

In accordance with the newly endorsed NPWS accessible parks policy, the new infrastructure delivered as part of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre project (including that delivered for The Glade precinct), will be planned and designed to deliver improved accessibility outcomes and increase the range of opportunities for people with disability. This will include the following:

- fully AS1428.1 compliant buildings
- accessible parking and linkages to buildings
- accessible toilets
- universally accessible interpretation elements, addressing specific impairments where possible
- improved access from the new Arc Rainforest Centre located on top of the escarpment down to the existing walking tracks which will also be upgraded to a Grade 2 compliance level.



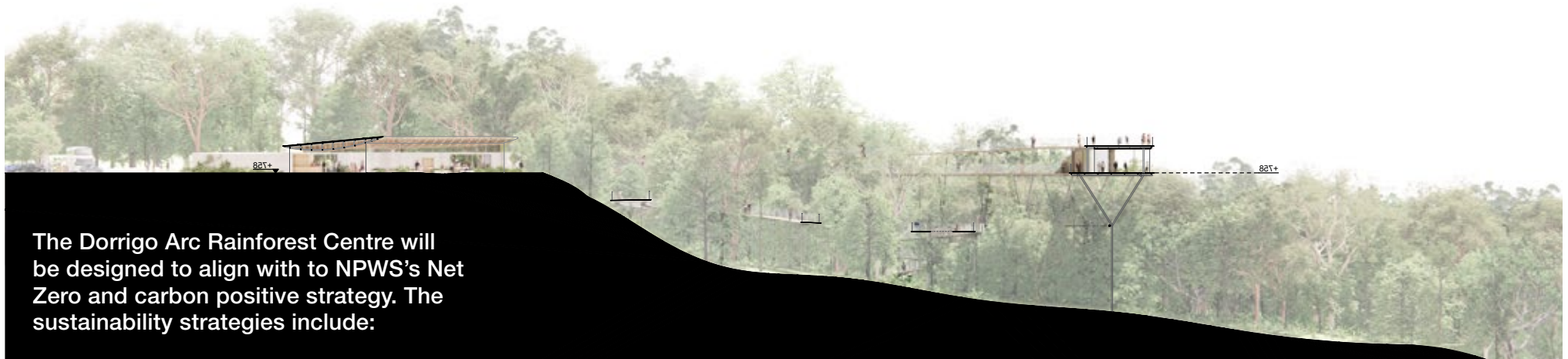
Artists impression: Accessible pathway into the rainforest

8. Social and environmental considerations

Blue-speckled forest-skink, Dorrigo National Park



8.1 Sustainable design



The Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre will be designed to align with NPWS's Net Zero and carbon positive strategy. The sustainability strategies include:

1. Climate resilience and adaptation

Design considers future climate scenarios and durability of materials to support change of use and circularity.

2. Passive design principles

Understanding local climatic conditions to inform building design and optimise energy consumption, for example, balancing daylight and solar gain, cross ventilation passive cooling, thermal mass, stack effect air flow, thermally efficient glazing.

3. Reduced energy inputs

Incorporation of photovoltaic panels within the site, no new gas supply proposed to site, energy efficient heat pump hot water and in-slab heating, low energy LED lighting.

4. Materials and embodied carbon

Minimise embodied carbon and consider life cycle of materials. Use of more environmentally responsible low volatile organic compound (VOC) materials in construction and fit-out.

5. Enhanced biodiversity and biophilia

Planting to enhance wellbeing and rainforest biodiversity through new plantings and connectivity to nature.

6. Water management

Rainwater collection for non-potable end uses to manage stormwater during rain events. Treatment of car park stormwater run-off utilising natural vegetation filtration systems and pollutant traps.

7. Building user engagement

Providing spaces that encourage repeat visits through smart sustainable building strategies.

8. Air quality

Natural bio-filtration of air through surrounding vegetation. Air quality significantly impacts health and wellbeing.

9. Thermal comfort and wellbeing

Managing experience and expectation through careful environmental modelling. This includes moderating solar access with thermal mass.

10. Transport

Travel options for peak visitation periods will be considered to include off park options such as 'park and ride'. Electric vehicle charging points will be incorporated into the onsite parking for visitors by car and bike.

Figure 8.1 Cross-section of Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and elevated walkway

8.2 Visitor dispersal

The new facility will be designed to meet the anticipated future visitor numbers and demographics, while protecting and enhancing park values.

Externally, the rainforest centre precinct will have an increase in the number and type of car parks available to meet the changing demographics of visitors over the anticipated life of the development. Robust pavements and generous pedestrian circulation spaces will be incorporated to provide safe passage for visitors from the car park to the centre. External shelters will also be integrated with wayfinding at key drop off points to assist with ease of visitor dispersal through the park at arrival.

The Arc Rainforest Centre redevelopment will improve the dispersal of visitors in several ways including:

- increasing the size of the public circulation area both inside the building and out in the courtyard on the plateau side, as well as the Arc elevated walkway
- spreading out the interpretive features throughout a larger area and along the Arc and associated new walkways
- creating better linkages from the cafe to the Pademelon picnic area
- creating a more accessible pathway from the Arc Rainforest Centre to the walking tracks within Dorrigo National Park.



Photo: School education activity

8.3 Visual amenity

The proposed Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre is to be located in the same development area as the existing rainforest centre and Skywalk which is sited on the edge of a cleared escarpment and old quarry pit respectively.

The proposed Arc Rainforest Centre will be a single storey-structure that will sit within the existing well-vegetated escarpment edge. The adjacent revegetated trees form a suitably dense visual screen around the site.

The location of the Arc elevated walkway has been informed by images of the canopy and rainforest floor using LiDAR (light detection and ranging) surveys. Renderings of the proposed Arc when viewed from elsewhere in the park have been prepared to demonstrate the subtle way in which it is to be nestled within the existing rainforest canopy.



Figure 8.2 Map of the location for view analysis

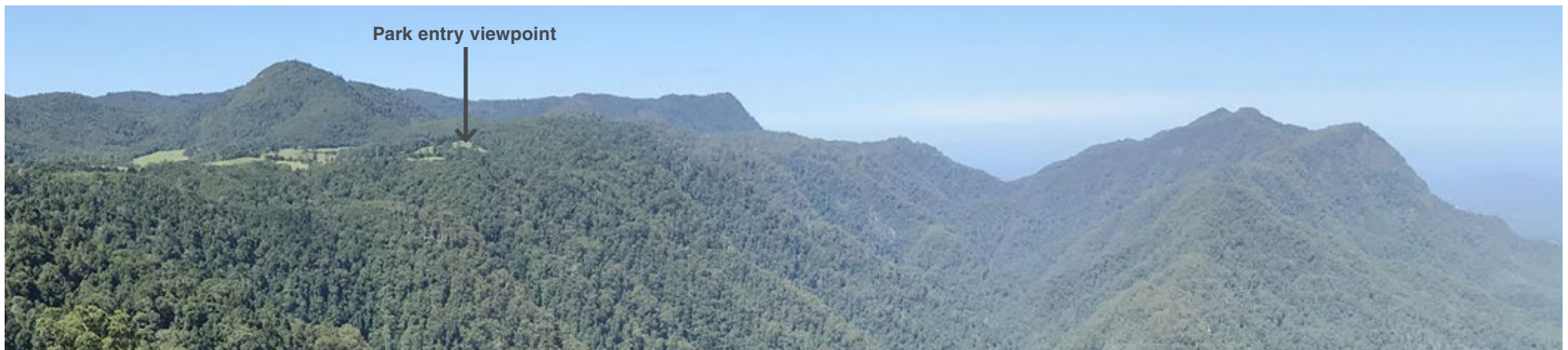


Figure 8.3 View towards the park entry viewpoint from the existing Skywalk

View from the park entry point

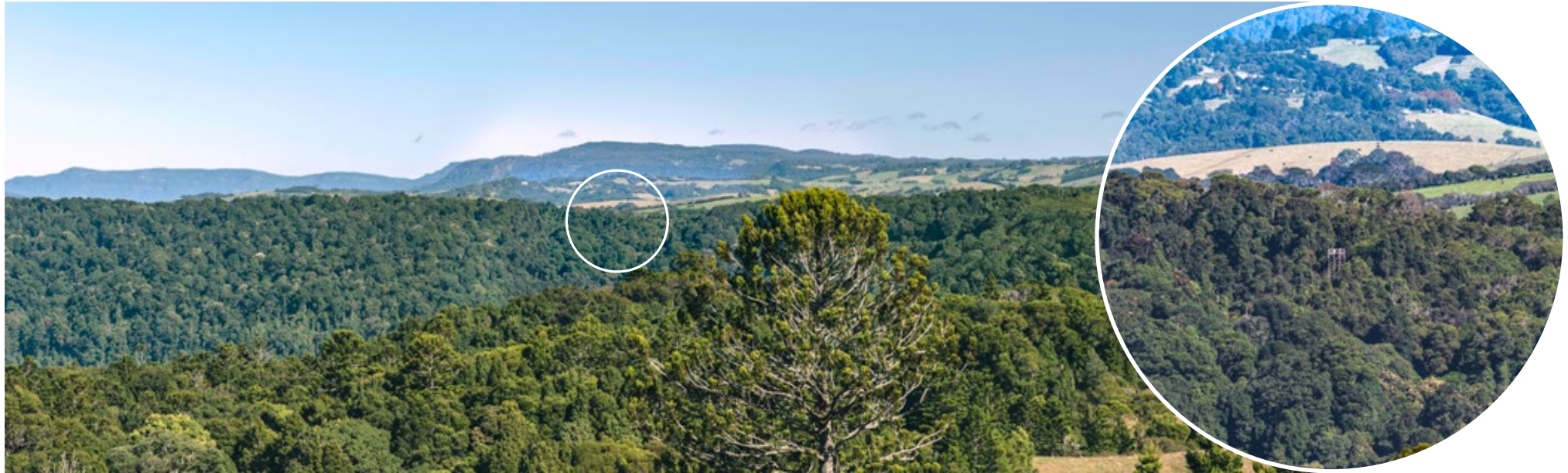


Figure 8.4 Current view from park entry point to the Skywalk

Zoom in (x10)

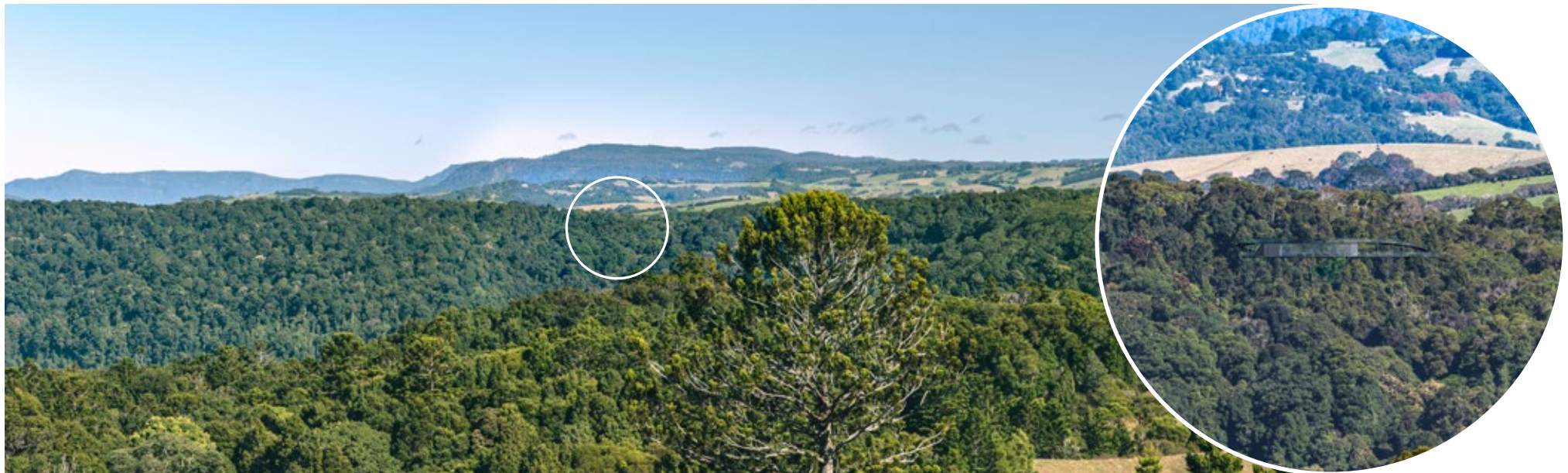


Figure 8.5 Artist impression of proposed Arc elevated walkway from Dome Road

Zoom in (x10)

8.4 Wildlife interactions

Located on the rim of the Great Eastern Escarpment, the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre looks out over a stunning vista of World Heritage-listed rainforest. Visitors begin to engage with these ancient forests from the moment they open the car door, but a truly immersive experience begins once they venture under the canopy where visitors come face to face with Gondwanan originals like the superb lyrebird, eastern yellow robin and satin bowerbird. A key focus of the design will be managing meaningful and respectful visitor interactions with plants and animals which enhance the visitor experience while ensuring that wildlife and their habitat remain safe.

The design of the building will incorporate a variety of tried and tested technologies to ensure that the impacts on wildlife are minimised and positive wildlife interactions are supported. Examples of some of these engineering technologies include:

- engineered glass solutions to enable birds to detect glass surfaces including applied films such as UV films or one-way glass
- design of waste storage facilities so that they are inaccessible to wildlife
- design of fully sealed services and buildings so that they do not become an attractive habitat for native animals such as snakes, marsupials and rodents.

In addition, NPWS will seek to engage visitors using ranger-guided education programs, multimedia tools and innovative interpretation to ensure that visitors are aware of:

- looking for and avoiding biological hazards such as stinging trees and lawyer cane
- effective and safe techniques for observing wildlife which remove the temptation to lure animals closer with food
- hygiene protocols to prevent the transfer of pathogens
- protection of flora and fauna by not introducing chemicals that are harmful to habitat.

The cafe seating area at the current visitor centre is the most common area where native animals can pose a nuisance to visitors and be negatively impacted. The cafe seating area will be a focus point for managing adverse wildlife interactions.

NPWS will work with the consulting ecologist, zoologist, and arborist to ensure that potential habitat is identified and protected during both the construction and operational phases of the project in accordance with best practice conservation principles.

8.5 Stormwater and waste management

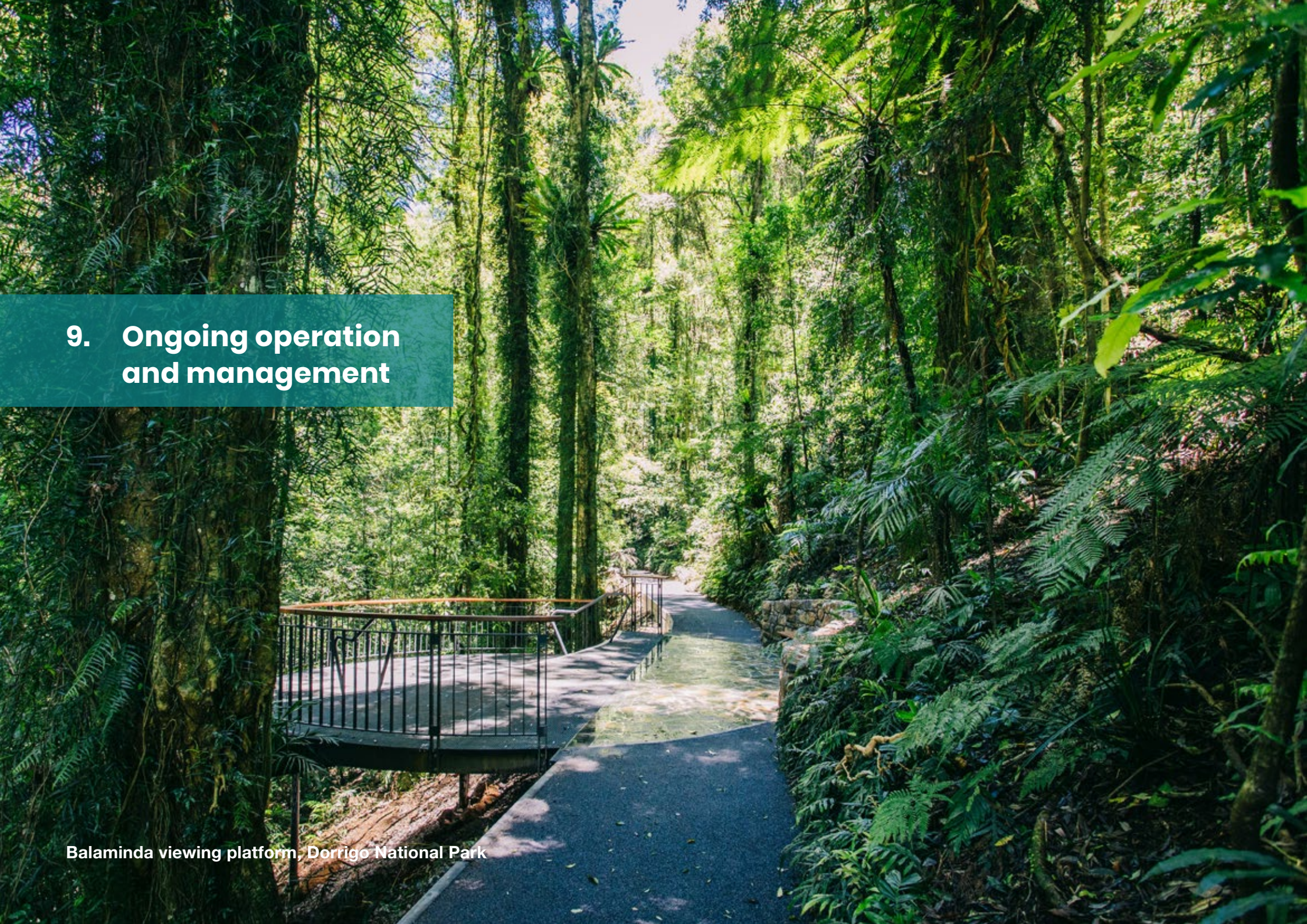
Stormwater management infrastructure, both during construction and during the ongoing operating phase of the building, will be designed in accordance with relevant statutory requirements. Additional controls will be put in place temporarily during construction to control the potential erosion of disturbed ground including water retention, sediment fences, haybales and filter socks fitted to the temporary stormwater drainage.

Septic waste will continue to be connected to the existing Dorrigo township sewer network.

General solid waste, recycled waste and green waste bins will be made available on site for staff and visitors to encourage recycling and composting.



Photo: Wompoo fruit-dove

A paved path leads through a dense, lush forest towards a viewing platform. The path is made of dark asphalt and is bordered by a low stone wall on the right. The viewing platform is a circular structure with a metal railing, situated on a raised concrete base. The forest is filled with tall, thin trees and a thick canopy of green leaves and ferns. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating dappled light on the path and platform.

9. Ongoing operation and management

Balaminda viewing platform, Dorrigo National Park

9.1 Visitor services

NPWS visitor centres are recognised for providing best practice in delivering high quality customer service and operational management outcomes. Our teams support operational teams in providing community incident messaging, and visitor information services that promote our natural and cultural heritage visitor experiences. This in turn ensures NPWS is supporting our local communities, destinations and visitor economies.

While the main function of the NPWS visitor centre network is to provide information, advice, interpretation and visitor experience information to the visiting public, we also provide a range of services such as accommodation, events, tours, administration, marketing and promotion of park experiences. We also work to ensure increased dispersal of visitors to sites across NPWS parks and reserves.



Role of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre visitor services

- A public face for conservation efforts
- A mechanism for strengthening tourism partnerships
- A means to educate and build stronger appreciation of national park experiences
- Support for community partnerships with volunteers, Arts Councils, Aboriginal community organisations and groups, local government etc
- An appropriate gateway and access point to Dorrigo National Park and individual attractions such as Crystal Shower Falls
- A sense of safety and security sourced from the presence and expertise of NPWS personnel which reflects the NPWS brand value.

Artists impression: Bird watching



Specific visitor services

- Operating 7 days a week year-round (closed Christmas day)
- Information services for Dorrigo National Park and surrounding area, and regional national park opportunities
- Booking and check in services
- Retail service
- Guided interpretation activities
- Briefings for Dorrigo Escarpment great walk hikers
- Registration for other long-distance walks and hiring of personal locator beacons
- Education program delivery
- First point of contact for emergencies and incidents
- Satisfying visitor needs and dealing with customer issues and complaints.

Artists impression: View from cafe



9.2 Partnership opportunities

Transport services

NPWS will work with partners to establish a shuttle bus service to transport independent and guided walkers from airports and nearby towns to commence the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk from the new Arc Rainforest Centre, and then pick them up at the end of the walk. A shuttle bus service would provide a seamless connection from key tourism locations and could be marketed as an optional part of the walk experience package as well as a general tourist service to Dorrigo.

Artists impression: Guided tour in welcome courtyard

Tour operators

NPWS recognises the invaluable role commercial tour operators play in supporting us to encourage visitors to appreciate, understand and enjoy NSW national parks. We are keen to work with licensed operators who share our values and run professional operations to expand the variety of experiences available to visitors at the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre. Current guided tour operators in Dorrigo National Park are listed on the national parks website.

Parks Eco Pass is the NPWS program for licensing operators who develop unique experiences and deliver authentic and high-quality services such as walking tours and educational activities in parks. The Parks Eco Pass program helps NPWS to regulate the access and activities of commercial recreation and tour operators through licence conditions to ensure they are aligned with all park management values, including environmental sustainability, and are respectful of Aboriginal cultural and historic heritage. Parks Eco Pass licences do not give licence holders priority or exclusive use of an activity or area within a national park or reserve.

Third party events

NPWS works closely with the arts, entertainment, sports and lifestyle sectors to present a healthy and vibrant annual program of events across NSW national parks and reserves that deliver quality visitor experiences and positive results to the NSW visitor economy. Example events include community sporting events, charity functions, cultural events and small-scale functions. The new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre will be a welcome addition to the region's venue options, with a focus on smaller natural and cultural themed events.

Through the delivery of innovative, inspirational and memorable events in our parks, new and existing audiences will have new opportunities to create memory-driven moments and engage with our natural experiences. Weddings and other small-scale functions provide another opportunity to draw visitors to precincts including the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and The Glade and are managed through an event application process.

NPWS undertakes an assessment of all events to limit any impacts on the natural, historic, and cultural values of the park, park management operations, other park users and the surrounding community.

9.3 Volunteering

NPWS supports volunteering as a valuable way for the community to engage in NSW environment and heritage conservation responsibilities, providing opportunities for people to develop skills and improve their wellbeing. NPWS recognises and appreciates the benefits volunteers bring to the organisation and their significant impact on conservation outcomes through their time, skills and enthusiasm as well as the positive benefits of volunteering for individuals and the broader community. Through volunteering opportunities, NPWS aims to:

- provide opportunities for the community to actively participate in conservation of NSW's environment and heritage
- provide opportunities for volunteers to develop and enhance skills that will assist them in their career and personal development
- respond to the demand for volunteering in the community
- support and encourage community involvement through volunteer opportunities in the Dorrigo National Park and the visitor services area
- continue and expand volunteer programs
- investigate and support voluntourism initiatives across the shire.



Artists impression: Cafe

9.4 Cafe lease

As with the existing Canopy cafe, there will be an opportunity to lease the cafe which is integrated with the Interpretation Hall and linked to the adjoining Pademelon picnic area. Final seating capacity (60-100) will be confirmed in the detailed design phase. After hours functions may also be considered in the cafe space under the lease arrangement.

9.5 Access, connections and transport

Vehicle access to the visitor centre will be from Dome Road which is accessed from Waterfall Way. It is anticipated that most visitors to the park will continue to stop at the rainforest centre as their first orientation point. They will then disperse throughout the park. The project team is working with Bellingen Shire Council to plan for ongoing maintenance of Dome Road.

The Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre will include additional car parks to meet the increasing visitor demands of the park. The existing gravel parking for The Glade precinct will also be formalised and sealed to provide all-weather parking.

NPWS will encourage a range of transport options from nearby population and holiday centres to provide a sustainable alternative to private vehicles. Group transport such as shuttle services or 'park and ride' services can reduce traffic congestion and improve parking capacity and security by providing an alternative option to private motor vehicles.

A shared pedestrian and bike path between Dorrigo and the new visitor centre will also be investigated to encourage active transport.



10. Developing the master plan

View across Dorrigo National Park towards the coastline

10.1 Project stages

The master plan is structured to provide an overview of the existing circumstances at Dorrigo National Park and identify opportunities for improvement. The master plan illustrates the design concepts proposed for the area using maps, site plans, diagrams of proposed infrastructure and visual representations of completed concept designs. It paints a picture of planned visitor infrastructure improvements at the site.

Our national parks are managed to protect areas that play a critical role in conserving biodiversity, and natural and cultural heritage. This includes providing meaningful visitor experiences and, where appropriate, new infrastructure including tracks and facilities to support engagement with visitors. NPWS is required to follow NSW legislative requirements for environmental and cultural heritage impact assessments and planning approvals, as well as NPWS policies and procedures for development consent.

The following flow chart outlines the key stages for the delivery of this project and demonstrates how public exhibition of the draft master plan sits within the project timeline.

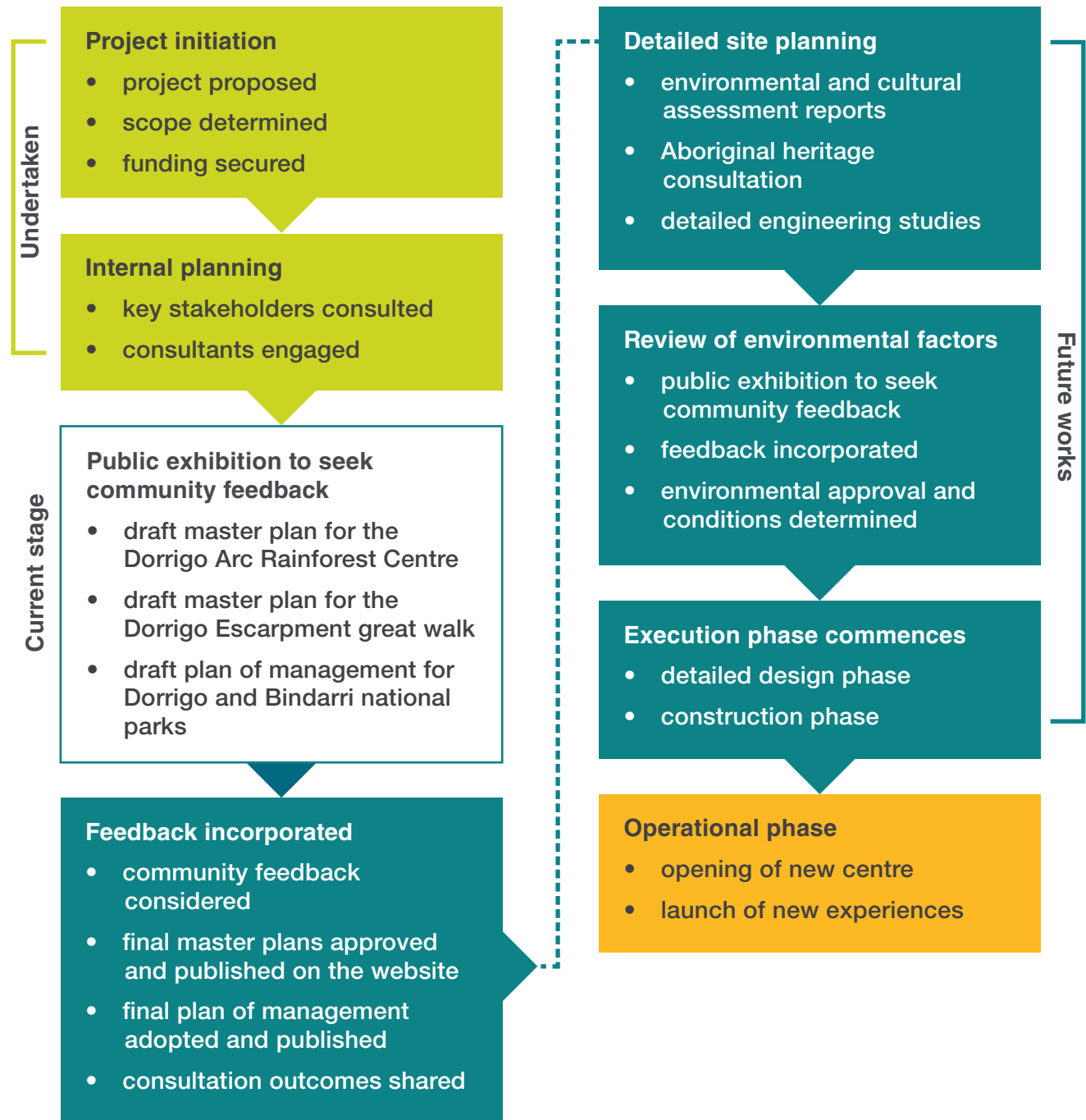


Figure 10.1 Project stages

10.2 Budget and financial sustainability

National parks play a vital role in the NSW visitor economy, generating \$18 billion of economic activity annually and supporting 74,000 direct and indirect jobs (2018). Over 75% of this activity is outside Sydney – national parks deliver important and sustained economic benefits to regional New South Wales. The NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 identifies the development of nature-based experiences as key to delivering the state's tourism goals.

The approved project budget for the design and construction of the visitor centre and the Arc elevated walkway is \$33.6 million which is part of a larger project valued at \$56.4 million with \$22.8 million being approved for the 4-day, 3-night 46-km walking track known as the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk.

Operational and maintenance plans are being developed to ensure they are operationally and financially sustainable into the future. The final design will be developed so that the financial sustainability principles are a key consideration in aspects including material selection, access for maintenance, design life and incorporate a floor layout that is adaptable to account for future needs.

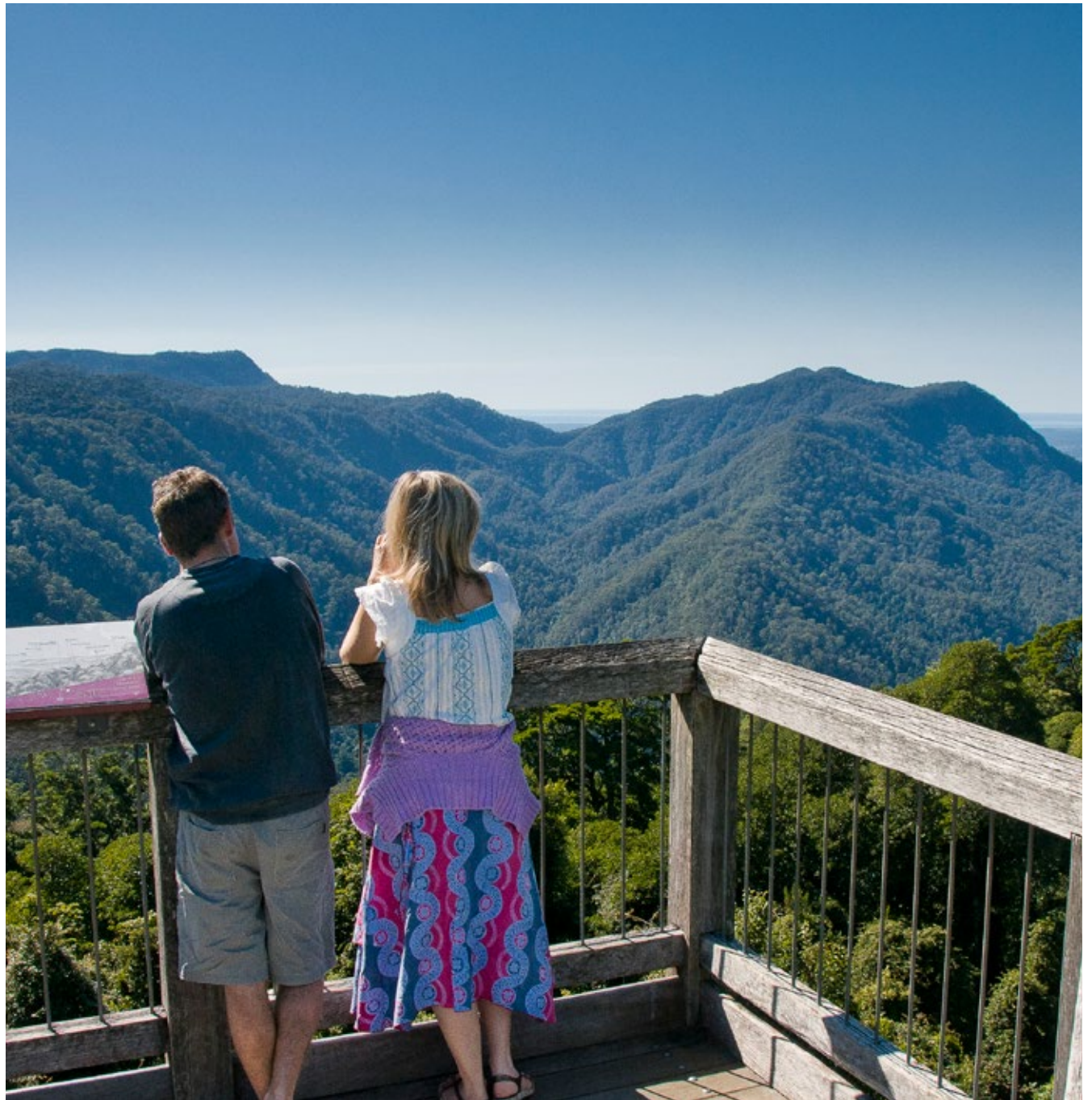


Photo: The existing Skywalk, Dorrigo National Park

10.3 Protecting park values

Our national parks are managed to protect their unique values and provide for sustainable visitor use and enjoyment. Rigorous environmental and cultural assessments will highlight any potential impacts so that the proposal can be modified to reduce or eliminate impacts.

The new centre will sit on the same site as the existing rainforest centre in an area which was previously cleared farmland. The majority of materials from the existing building are planned to be recycled or repurposed. Best practice sustainability and design principles will be employed to ensure that visitor infrastructure has minimal impact on the natural and cultural values of the park.



NPWS will undertake a number of environmental and cultural assessments prior to design and construction. These assessments will influence the design of the visitor centre and the Arc elevated walkway. These studies and assessments include:

- a review of environmental factors to identify the impacts and establish controls to protect areas of high significance, including an Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment
- referral of these reports to both NSW Department of Planning and Environment, the Heritage Council, and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to ensure the project meets the highest standards of environmental compliance in keeping with the park's world, national and state heritage listings
- data collection and analysis on current and potential visitation and vehicle movements to ensure that adequate parking is available
- extensive surveys of the development site including botanist, arborist and geologist assessments to identify and protect significant trees - these studies will assist in determining the final alignment of the proposed elevated walkway and ramps
- geotechnical surveying to determine stability of site and footing requirements.

Photo: Red-necked pademelon



Conservation initiatives

As well as protecting natural and cultural values when designing and building the new centre, increasing engagement with visitors can facilitate opportunities for them to contribute to or participate in conservation initiatives, leading to improved environmental outcomes.

Visitors can be encouraged to support conservation programs close to where they live or enjoy an immersive experience of environmental restoration during their visit through organised volunteer activities such as rainforest regeneration or weed control. Successful programs such as the Coffs Harbour Bushcare and Bongil Bongil Koala Tree Parents provide a model for ongoing restoration projects.

10.4 Community involvement in the project

Community input leads to better decisions for our national parks and reserves. Since the project's announcement, NPWS has actively engaged with a range of groups and individuals to inform and refine the concepts presented in this draft master plan.

NPWS established a consultation webpage for the project in June 2022, which received over 20,000 pageviews in the first 12 months. Email updates have been provided to stakeholders and over 1,080 people on the register of interest list.

Positive and ongoing consultation is occurring with the Aboriginal community through recognised Aboriginal land councils and cultural organisations throughout the region. NPWS will continue working with the Aboriginal community to help realise the proposal's potential cultural, economic and social benefits.

Feedback has also been received through the following consultation channels:

Around 50 stakeholder briefings and meetings with individuals and groups including NPWS North Coast Regional Advisory Committee, park neighbours, local councils, state government agencies, local community and business groups, bushwalkers and others.

A total of 405 visitor interviews at Dorrigo Rainforest Centre from September 2022 to January 2023 to understand visitor motivations and expectations, building on data from around 7,000 visitor survey responses since 2011.

NPWS has also commissioned a range of visitor and market research projects to inform planning for a number of proposed visitor infrastructure projects and great walks. This includes visitor profiling and segmentation, market analysis, demand drivers, choice modelling, product comparisons, population and visitor projections and economic impacts.



Photo: Regional advisory committee field trip



Photo: Community briefing

Have your say

The planning work that NPWS is doing at Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks has now resulted in three separate opportunities to 'Have your say'.




The formal public exhibition of this Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre draft master plan is the main opportunity for community members to contribute to the future direction of planning for the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and Glade precincts.

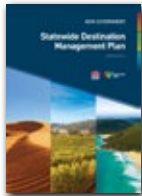

A separate draft master plan has also been developed for the proposed Dorrigo Escarpment great walk – a 46-km multi-day walk that traverses the rugged escarpment through Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks. This master plan also includes proposed visitor experience improvements at the Never Never picnic area (to be re-named Baliiga).

In addition, a new draft plan of management has been developed which outlines what's permitted within the parks and sets a high-level strategic approach to the broader management of both Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks and Bindarri State Conservation Area.

Through asking for feedback on these 3 draft plans, we seek to understand the various interests, values, needs and perspectives of the people our decisions affect, and use this knowledge to improve the final plans.

Appendix A: Strategic alignment

Policy/Plan	Objectives
NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 	Strategic Pillar 3 – Showcase our Strengths; (4) – Reconnect in Nature: National Parks, Iconic walks Action 3.09 – Grow the eco-wellbeing, eco-tourism and volunteer tourism sectors Action 3.10 – Develop and promote accessible tourism products, experiences, and visitor precincts
North Coast Destination Management Plan 2022-2030 	Opportunities: Facilitating growth and investment in nature-based tourism product and experiences to showcase the world-class natural attractions, National and World Heritage Parks. Strategic Pillar 3 – Showcase our Strengths Action 3.7 – invest and develop products aligned to the region's experiences strengths Action 3.11 – develop accessible and inclusive tourism product and experiences
North Coast Regional Plan 2041 	Goal 1: Liveable, sustainable and resilient. Objective 4: Understand, celebrate and integrate Aboriginal culture Goal 2: Productive and connected. Objective 12: Create a diverse visitor economy Goal 3: Growth Change and Opportunity. Objective 19: Public spaces and green infrastructure support connected and healthy communities Bellingen Shire narrative: More than half of the shire is national park or state forest and managing this unique natural environment appropriately will be key to delivering a sustainable future. Regional priority: Identify opportunities to enhance natural and cultural tourism through..., the world heritage listed national parks...

Policy/Plan	Objectives
Statewide Destination Management Plan 2019 	NSW Hero Destinations and Experiences: 'Hero' destinations are world-class, iconic and unique. NSW Current 'Hero' Destinations and their Experiences for the North Coast: World Heritage-listed Gondwana rainforest; and Green hinterland close to popular beaches. Key performance indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> increase overnight tourism expenditure in regional New South Wales maintain and/or increase NSW share of Australian overnight tourism spend increase the number of world-class products & experiences in identified categories.
20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW (Feb 2021) 	Tourism is identified as one of the engine industries that will drive regional NSW economies over the next 20 years. The Economic Vision for Regional NSW noted that 'A growing international tourist market from Asia and beyond will visit New South Wales looking for different travel experiences. Regional NSW's diverse and natural beauty will continue to draw domestic and overseas visitors, with opportunities growing for niche and personalised travel experiences championed by small and medium-sized businesses'. New investment areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visitor economy infrastructure: In coastal regions, combined bushfire and COVID-19 impacts led to an estimated loss of 43 per cent of tourism and hospitality jobs in 2019–20. A key focus is to draw in more domestic and international tourists in areas with tourism potential. A wide range of local businesses benefit from tourism. Unlocking areas of significant natural amenity and ecotourism potential will create unique destinations to drive increased visitation and spending in regional New South Wales. Core objectives – Future: Investing in new infrastructure to create major ecotourism destinations and capitalise on the rich natural and cultural resources in regional New South Wales through ecologically sustainable tourism.

Policy/Plan Objectives

Coffs Coast Regional Economic Development Strategy



Engines of Growth: The tourism sector is the second-largest employer and is the leading sector in the Coffs Coast's 5-billion-dollar economy, with visitors spending \$649 million in 2021 despite COVID-19 pandemic related movement restrictions. Recent investments in improved transport connectivity and major visitor economy infrastructure upgrades will continue to support further sector growth.

Strategy 1 – Grow the year-round visitor economy by further diversifying offerings and connecting businesses in the sector.

Opportunities: ...meet the existing tourist demand for adventure and eco-tourism experiences, including eco-accommodation.

Bellingen Shire Council Economic Development and Tourism Plan 2022-2026



The Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk project will be a game-changer for the Shire and is estimated to attract an additional 200,000 visitors per year. Many investment opportunities will be created as a result of this new development, for example more younger visitors and families, construction jobs and skills development, Dorrigo town centre master planning, alternative transport routes, and marketing opportunities (summarised).

Goal 3: Inclusive tourism that values the environment; Objective 2: New tourism experiences and accommodation options delivered to cater for a broader range of visitors.

BSC Inclusive Tourism Strategy 2020-2025: ensuring every visitor has a safe and enjoyable travel experience on an equal basis with others regardless of appearance or circumstances

BSC Brand Strategy: Defining our spirit of place (2021)

The strategy's aim is to create a destination brand that is 100% the Bellingen Shire, one that defines the essence of our Shire developed through meaningful discussion with the community. Aspects of the brand the community wants to support include:

- celebration of, and connection with, our unique natural environment
- clear and consistent education initiatives and messaging to 'respect our place', aimed at both visitors and locals
- recognition and respect for the unique custodians of this land and their connection to Country
- increase cultural awareness through development of education programs, tours, products and events for both community and tourists
- support and development of sustainably responsible tourism and other businesses.



Photo: Crystal Shower Falls walk

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Cover photo: Artists impression of proposed Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre courtyard. Studio Hollenstein/DPE

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