



NSW NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area Discussion Papers

Summary of submissions



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Contents

Overview	1
Mountain biking	2
Recreational activities	3
Walking	3
Camping and accommodation	3
Water based activities	3
Volunteering	4
Horse riding	4
Drones	4
Other issues	4
Visitor destinations	4
Garie	5
Bonnie Vale	5
Wattamolla	5
Audley	5
Garawarra	5
Protecting park values	6
Protecting natural values	6
Pest plants and animals	6
Coastal cabins	6
Fire	6
Other issues	6
Commercial activities	7
Aboriginal cultural heritage and landscapes	7
Next steps	7

Overview

The plan of management for the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area (the Parks) is 18 years old and needs to be replaced to address a range of new challenges to the management of these Parks. These Parks:

- are in highly urbanised surroundings
- have important natural and historical heritage values
- are part of the lands of the Aboriginal people of the Dharawal language group
- have a regional, national and international profile as a visitor destination.

As part of the process of developing a new plan of management, six discussion papers were developed and exhibited for public comment:

- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Landscapes
- Protecting Park Values
- Recreational Activities
- Visitor Destinations
- Mountain Biking
- Commercial activities.

The papers were exhibited from June 2017 to August 2017.

This report provides a summary of the comments received from the community and interest groups on the discussion papers.

A total of **438 submissions** were received, with 2306 individual points raised. There were responses from 58 organisations and 380 individuals. Figure 1 details the total number of comments raised on each of the discussion paper themes. Most comments were received on mountain biking, followed by recreational activities, visitor destinations and protecting park values.

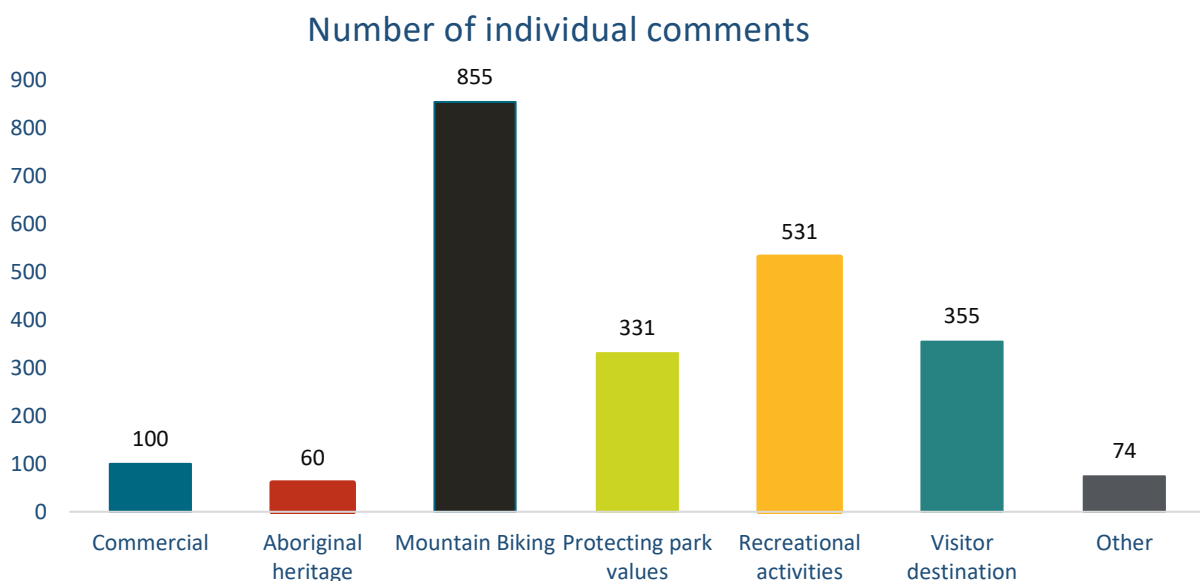


Figure 1 Total number of comments received relating to each of the 6 discussion paper themes

Submissions indicated support for:

- maintaining Aboriginal connection to Country and promoting culture through the formation of a culture centre
- protecting the Parks' natural values, biodiversity and waterways
- pest control (both vertebrate and weeds).
- the expansion of minimal impact camping and walking track networks
- limitations on visitor numbers
- creating new public transport options
- upgrading of facilities throughout the park (e.g. parking, toilets, walking tracks)
- encouraging local towns to provide facilities such as accommodation and food
- upgrading facilities at the four major precincts.

Submissions indicated general opposition to the following:

- the expansion of commercial operators and exclusive use of areas of the Parks
- car-based accommodation, campervans and 'glamping'
- closure of the North Era campsite without the provision of additional sites
- expansion of horse-riding regions
- provision of adventure activities and use of drones.

The most contentious issues with differing views presented were:

- the proposed mountain biking network
- the potential closure of Bonnie Vale boat ramp
- boating and jetski use.

The submissions and further planning investigations will help inform the development of a draft plan of management for Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area. The community will be invited to provide comments on the draft plan when it is placed on public exhibition.

Mountain biking

The [mountain biking discussion paper](#) attracted the highest number of submissions and was the most contentious paper. A total of 255 submissions were received that commented on this issue, with 855 individual comments. Several responses were received from mountain biking clubs, groups and organisations.

Many submissions supported the proposal to create a mountain bike network in the three designated regions specified in the discussion paper. The key suggestions were that the proposed network:

- should cater for riders of all ability levels, including the provision of difficult tracks
- provide linkage trails to connect riding areas
- provide links to existing rail networks.

Submissions also encouraged the use of volunteers from mountain bike organisations to establish and maintain tracks.

Several submissions opposed all mountain biking in the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area due to concerns regarding:

- protection of the natural landscape, fauna and Aboriginal heritage
- conflicts with other park users
- conflicts and risks from multi-use tracks.

Recreational activities

A total of 199 submissions were received that commented on the recreational activities discussion paper including six from organisations, which contained 531 individual comments.

Walking

Most submissions supported:

- the expansion and improvement of the walking network, including new inland tracks
- the coastal track upgrades, including the use of boardwalks and the northern gateway project
- the provision of toilet facilities in areas of high traffic and at the start and end of walks.

A few submissions opposed the expansion of the track network for ecological reasons.

Several submissions opposed the use of a booking system on the coastal walk on the basis that walkers often do not use the entire track and all walking tracks should be readily available and free of charge.

Camping and accommodation

There was general support for walk-in camping and accommodation, with key comments including:

- support for the upgrade and provision of minimal impact camping facilities for walkers within the park
- opposition to the closure of North Era camp site without providing additional sites
- support for walk-in accommodation at North Garie and Wattamolla. Some concerns over managing compliance at these locations were raised.

There were mixed reactions to car-based camping and accommodation, including:

- opposition to car-based camping and glamping due to concerns about environmental impacts, waste disposal and managing compliance
- opposition to caravan and campervan accommodation within the Parks due to concerns about environmental impacts, waste disposal, overcrowding and managing compliance
- suggestions from many submissions that local towns should provide these facilities.

Water based activities

Key comments on water-based activities included:

- suggestions that jetskis should be banned, due to safety and environmental concerns
- suggestions that boats should be banned at Bonnie Vale and Cabbage Tree Basin
- support for allowing private non-powered watercraft at Audley
- support for a continuation of moorings at South-West Arm.

The suggested closure of the boat ramp at Bonnie Vale received a mixed reaction, with most submissions opposed to the closure but some supporting its closure for ecological and safety reasons.

Volunteering

Many submissions detailed the volunteer work that occurs in the Royal National Park and suggested that the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) needs to acknowledge and form collaborative partnerships with community groups.

Horse riding

Most submissions opposed the expansion of horse riding, mainly due to ecological reasons. Submissions also suggested limits be placed on horse riding by commercial and large groups.

Drones

Seventeen submissions commented on the use of drones in the park. All but two opposed the use of drones due to environmental concerns (e.g. disturbance of birds) and privacy concerns.

Other issues

Other issues raised in submissions included:

- a perceived lack of resources and rangers in the Royal National Park, leading to issues of compliance and regulation of activities
- opposition to providing adventure activities
- general opposition to allowing large group activities within the Parks.

Visitor destinations

A total of 96 submissions were received that commented on visitor destinations, with 355 individual comments. Several submissions highlighted the need to balance visitor experiences with the preservation of the integrity of the natural landscape.

There was significant support for upgrading existing facilities, including:

- toilets
- carparks
- rubbish bins
- signage
- visitor centres
- provision of additional cafes at Wattamolla and Garie.

Several submissions indicated they were concerned about a lack of funding for upgrades.

There was support for managing visitor numbers at key destinations through:

- the creation of new precincts to ease overcrowding
- limiting visitor numbers at the four main precincts
- introducing a booking system to manage visitor numbers during peak times.

Garie

There were 35 comments about the Garie precinct. The main comments were:

- support for backpacker style accommodation, with several submissions favouring rebuilding the former youth hostel
- opposition to utilising Garie Surf Life Saving Club as an accommodation venue
- opposition to car-based camping or campervans
- some support for walk in camping.

Bonnie Vale

The proposed upgrade to the Bonnie Vale precinct attracted 116 comments. Most comments addressed the closure of the boat ramp (see '**Recreational activities**' for further information). Other key issues included:

- support from most submissions for some improvements to the Bonnie Vale precinct
- support from most submissions for an on-site manager for the campsite, with a small minority opposing this
- mixed views on the provision of additional accommodation. Several submissions were in favour of providing more cabins and the reuse of Simpsons Hotel.

Wattamolla

There was general support for an upgrade of facilities at Wattamolla. Most submissions related to camping and opposed car-based camping or campervans at Wattamolla.

Audley

There was a mixed response to the proposed bridge over Kangaroo Creek with half of the submissions on this issue supporting the proposal and the other half opposed.

Some submissions proposed that accommodation be provided at Audley.

Garawarra

There was general support for upgrading carparking and toilets and providing rubbish bins at Garawarra. There was a mixed reaction to proposed car-based camping.

There was general support for using Garawarra as an Aboriginal cultural centre (see '**Aboriginal cultural heritage and landscapes**' for further information).

Protecting park values

A total of 106 submissions were received that commented on protecting park values discussion paper, with 331 individual comments. Several submissions noted there was a lack of detailed ecological information (e.g. species lists). This detailed information will be included in the draft plan of management.

Protecting natural values

The majority of comments expressed, in some form, the need to protect the natural values of the Parks, including the plants, animals, waterways and geology. Many submissions said that conservation of the natural values of the park should be the major focus of the plan of management.

Pest plants and animals

Key comments on management of pest plants and animals included:

- support for controlling pests to preserve the ecological integrity of the Parks
- suggestions for strategies to control pest species, including deer
- identification of a variety of pest animals as being of particular concern, including foxes, deer, rabbits and feral cats
- support for controlling weeds in the Parks.

Coastal cabins

Many submissions commented on the need to preserve the coastal cabins within the Royal National Park and to recognise the volunteering work that the cabin community provides.

Fire

A small number of submissions commented on fire management and the need for adequate hazard reduction burns, including around coastal cabins to protect these communities from fire. Some submissions noted that Aboriginal communities should be consulted on fire management.

Other issues

Other issues raised in submissions included:

- concerns over the proposed F6 road extensions
- support for World Heritage listing for the Royal National Park
- concerns regarding the current level of staffing for on-ground works and compliance enforcement in the region
- support for upgrading walking tracks to manage erosion.

Commercial activities

A total of 39 submissions addressed the commercial activities within the Parks, with 100 individual comments. Several submissions highlighted issues with the management of current commercial activities within the Parks.

Key comments on commercial activities included:

- opposition to the expansion of commercial operators and activities
- opposition to the exclusive use of areas by commercial operators
- a preference for commercial activities to be run by NPWS
- suggestions that services such as accommodation, restaurants and guides should be provided in nearby local towns
- support for upgrading existing facilities
- opposition to commercial camping or glamping
- opposition to sporting/large groups events
- support for providing rental bikes in Audley
- support for commercial activities only if the activities promoted nature and conservation.

Aboriginal cultural heritage and landscapes

A total of 36 submissions were received that commented on Aboriginal cultural heritage and landscapes, with 60 individual comments. Key comments on this issue were:

- overwhelming support for the protection of cultural sites, values and retaining Aboriginal connection to Country
- unanimous support for retaining and further strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal people in the management of the Parks
- support for upgrading the facilities at Garawarra including the establishment of a cultural centre, toilets and car parking
- support for the provision of basic camping facilities at both Garawarra and North Era (see '**Recreational activities**' for further information) with management of these campgrounds to be undertaken in conjunction with Aboriginal communities
- some concerns about providing exclusive use rights to the Aboriginal community.

Next steps

The findings of this report will be used along with relevant literature, data sources, NPWS and NSW Government policies and legislation (including the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*) to inform the remake of the draft Plan of Management for the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area.

While all points made in submissions are being considered, key points of focus include:

- enabling the provision of an Aboriginal culture centre within the Garawarra region of the Royal National Park.
- strong support for enhancing Aboriginal connection to Country and the inclusion of Aboriginal communities in the management of the Parks.
- further exploring the location and design of a mountain biking network, balancing this with the protection of the Parks' heritage in our decision-making process.
- investigating the provision of new walking networks throughout the Parks.
- exploring the advantages and disadvantages of commercial and non-commercial camping/accommodation opportunities.
- further investigating the need to upgrade visitor facilities and the creation of new visitor precincts
- addressing the pressures of increasing visitation to the Parks, including consideration of the risks associated with overcrowding and options for better managing the impacts of high visitor numbers to the Parks.
- considering the advantages and disadvantages of using commercial groups to run activities within the Parks, including consideration of the need to protect the Parks cultural and natural heritage.

From consultation undertaken to date, it is clear that the community sees the protection of the natural values of the park as a major priority. In developing the draft Plan of Management, NPWS will consider the key priorities for the Parks for the next 10 or more years, recognising its unique heritage, high quality natural values and opportunities for sustainable recreational activities.

The community will be invited to provide comments on the draft plan when it is placed on public exhibition.