



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Submissions summary

**Public exhibition of Macleay Coast
Destination draft master plan**



Acknowledgement of Country

The precincts featured in the *Macleay Coast Destination draft master plan* are on Dunghutti Country.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Dunghutti People, the traditional owners and custodians of these lands and waters, who have been part of this landscape for many thousands of years.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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Background

The *Macleay Coast Destination draft master plan* was developed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to guide upgrades of the visitor precincts in Arakoon National Park and Smoky Cape in Hat Head National Park.

Together, these 2 national parks on the mid-north coast of New South Wales attract more than a million visitors each year and make a major contribution to the local economy. However, the existing visitor infrastructure is ageing and has been developed in an ad hoc way over the past 40 years. This is impacting the significant natural and cultural heritage values of the area as well as the visitor experience.

In response, NPWS developed the draft master plan, which detailed proposals for improvement, including upgrading the visitor infrastructure and walking tracks within the parks. The aim of the project is to improve community wellbeing, further enhance the regional visitor economy and increase nature-based tourism in New South Wales.

To provide the community with the opportunity to have a say on the proposed upgrades and changes, the *Macleay Coast Destination draft master plan* was placed on public exhibition.

This submissions summary provides an overview of the community feedback received during the public exhibition period, NPWS responses to the feedback, and master plan revision pending finalisation of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report (ACHAR), a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) and a Statement of Heritage Impact (SOHI) for each visitor precinct.

Community consultation

The *Macleay Coast Destination draft master plan* was placed on public exhibition from 22 November 2022 to 3 February 2023.

More than 255 stakeholders were notified about the public exhibition, including those listed on the register of interest. It was also widely promoted through local media, social media, and posters in key locations. The draft master plan was available online and hard copies were available at the Trial Bay Gaol museum, Trial Bay Gaol camp kitchen, and NPWS offices at Verges Creek and Port Macquarie. Public drop-in sessions were held at the Little Bay picnic area.

Individuals and organisations were invited to provide their feedback on the draft master plan through an online survey or by submitting an email or written submission.

Prior to and during the development of the draft master plan, NPWS also:

- posted an invitation to approximately 1,000 local residents and park neighbours inviting them to join the register of interest
- considered views and comments from nearly 200 people who had registered their interest
- conducted stakeholder meetings
- undertook market research, expert interviews and visitor surveys.

NPWS has reviewed all the submissions and considered the community feedback and comments in preparing this submissions summary document. This summary has assisted NPWS to refine the master plan before completing the detailed design and final approval stages.

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Submissions received

NPWS received 151 submissions and survey responses from a range of stakeholders, including individuals, local residents, business operators, local councils, park users and other groups. This included 62 online survey responses and 89 written submissions. Eight organisations made written submissions.

How submissions were analysed

Every point raised in every submission was documented and considered by NPWS. Similar points were grouped into themes according to specific issues raised. Themes and their points were then assessed using criteria to determine whether a change should be made to the master plan.

Key points raised in email/written submissions for each precinct/issue were categorised under the themes presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Themes and number of comments in written submissions

Issue and themes	Number of comments
Trial Bay precinct	
Roads, traffic and car parking	180
Walking tracks and pedestrian circulation	39
Accommodation	61
Camping	8
Other visitor infrastructure	77
Cardwell Street precinct	
Roads, traffic and car parking	18
Walking tracks and pedestrian circulation	47
Pandanus nursery	55
Other visitor infrastructure	70
Little Bay precinct	
Roads, traffic and car parking	100
Walking tracks and pedestrian circulation	30
Camping	51
Other visitor infrastructure	84
Smoky Cape precinct	
Walking tracks and pedestrian circulation	5
Other visitor infrastructure	82
Walking trails	
Gap Beach	71
Walking track grade	31
Other	56

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Issue and themes	Number of comments
Other	
Aboriginal cultural heritage values	35
Historic heritage values	29
Environmental values	107
Park fees	14
Accessibility	4
Tourism and visitation	54
Consultation	27

Summary of feedback

There were a range of views and points raised in the submissions. Some supported the general intent of the draft master plan, while others opposed it or objected to specific proposals. Some submitters also provided alternative options to some of the proposals.

NPWS has considered where changes could be made to the master plan to improve outcomes for the parks' natural and cultural heritage values, visitors and the community. The feedback that we received and how it has been considered or addressed is summarised below.

Trial Bay precinct

Some submissions objected to or raised concerns about roads, traffic and car parking, while others supported specific elements of the proposals. Other submissions made comments about the proposed pathways. Many submissions objected to cabins, while some made specific comments relating to camping. Other submissions raised concerns about the removal of visitor facilities or changes to facilities.

NPWS response

- There is no compelling reason to change the roads, traffic and car parking proposals. The access proposals in the draft plan provide significant improvements overall by providing dedicated parking for day visitors and improved and safer access.
- The amount of vehicle parking at Gorilla Rock may have been misinterpreted by some submitters and this will be made clearer in the final master plan. Likewise, the visitor facilities near Gorilla Rock are being replaced and improved, not removed. This will be made clearer in the final master plan.
- Additional details about some specific proposals will be included in the technical specifications and construction plans to address concerns, such as construction techniques for pathways to avoid tree root damage.
- There was limited support for the proposed cabins at Trial Bay. NPWS will reconsider the range of accommodation types on offer in Arakoon and Hat Head national parks when a new plan of management for the parks is prepared.

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Cardwell Street precinct

Some submissions supported the proposed road and parking changes, while others suggested changes to the proposed route to improve safety and access. Many comments supported the pedestrian and cycling track from Cardwell Street to Trial Bay providing it does not impact environmental values.

Many submissions objected to the removal of Pandanus Nursery, with some suggesting it could be part of an educational and cultural learning space (together with Aboriginal custodians).

Other comments related to visitor infrastructure, the path/boardwalk and beach access for people with disabilities.

NPWS response

- The proposed roads and parking provide the safest and most practical of several design options considered. This includes restricting beach access to emergency and other authorised vehicles, and partially closing the existing carpark loop road.
- A review of environmental factors is being prepared for each precinct that considers the environmental and cultural heritage impacts of the proposal.
- The design of the access to the beach is still to be finalised but will consider the points raised, including pedestrian safety when authorised vehicles are accessing the beach. NPWS will also consider other points of access to the beach for disability access in Arakoon National Park.
- The design of facilities at the precinct is still being finalised, but concerns over beach erosion and storm surge will be addressed.
- NPWS acknowledges the role that the nursery plays in the community and is committed to finding an alternative and more appropriate location for it.

Little Bay precinct

Many submissions objected to the road closures and parking restrictions, particularly Overshot Dam Road. Many submissions also objected to the paved pathway, group camping and related visitor infrastructure.

There were mixed comments on the proposed amphitheatre, with many supporting the amphitheatre providing it is low-impact in design and provides for multiple-use recreational activities, while others objected to it and the use of it for events.

Other comments related to impacts on views and there were also specific suggestions about visitor infrastructure, facilities and signage.

NPWS response

- NPWS has reconsidered the closure of the Overshot Dam Road, and it will now remain open to vehicles. Traffic-calming devices on the road will be considered to reduce vehicle speeds, in addition to a dedicated pedestrian pathway.
- NPWS will identify parking spaces for walkers who want to park their vehicles for longer periods, which will free up more parking bays with ocean views for short-term visitors. Parking time limits may be introduced in the future if needed.
- The paved pathway is required so that visitors with restricted mobility have equity of access and for visitor safety reasons.

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- The proposed group camping area at Little Bay will not proceed and will be removed from the final master plan. Future camping opportunities within Arakoon and Hat Head national parks will be considered when a new plan of management for the parks is prepared.
- NPWS will make sure that any structures have minimal impact on views from beaches and headlands.
- The amphitheatre will be designed to blend into the setting and be unobtrusive. Any permitted use of the amphitheatre will aim to mitigate possible disturbance to neighbours.

Smoky Cape precinct

There were mixed comments on the Smoky Cape precinct. Many supported upgrading the toilets if views were not impacted, while others objected to viewing platforms and structures that could impact views.

Other submissions related to access to the vehicle track to the lighthouse for people with limited mobility, visitor tours, use of the stables as a kiosk and impacts on vegetation.

NPWS response

- The proposed viewing platforms between the carpark and the lighthouse will be removed from the final master plan as they could potentially impact the views and amenity of guests staying in the lighthouse keeper's buildings.
- The vehicle access to the lighthouse is very narrow and steep, making it difficult for the majority of drivers to navigate. There is also limited space for vehicles to turn.
- Some vegetation clearing is already undertaken in specific locations to maintain viewsheds, but no additional vegetation clearing will be required for the proposed works.
- NPWS already runs tours of the Smoky Cape lighthouse for small groups. Additional tours are run during the school holidays and private groups can book outside of scheduled times.
- All facilities will be carefully designed and located to ensure that impacts on views will be minimised.

Walking trails

Many comments objected to raised tracks, viewing platforms and other visitor infrastructure at Gap Beach and surrounding areas, while others supported the proposed walking track linking Gap Beach and Smoky Cape. Many suggested that the walking track should be Grade 4.

Other issues raised include the need for ongoing funding and maintenance, weed control, managing visual impacts and the proposed Five Headlands Walk.

The survey responses indicated mixed views on the proposed location for the new walking track.

NPWS response

- There are no plans to have raised tracks, viewing platforms or other visitor infrastructure at Gap Beach. The walking track design will ensure that the walking track and associated infrastructure have minimal visual impacts.
- The walking track between Little Bay and Smoky Cape is proposed to be Grade 4.

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- A review of environmental factors for the walk, including an Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment, will be undertaken before any works take place.
- Additional information about the Five Headlands Walk and its links to this project will be added to the final master plan.

Other

Other comments were made about Aboriginal cultural heritage, opportunities for Traditional Owners, historic heritage values, environmental values, park fees, accessibility, visitor numbers and the consultation process.

NPWS response

- A review of environmental factors is being prepared for each precinct, which considers the impacts of the proposal on natural and cultural heritage values.
- NPWS met with Aboriginal groups during the preparation of the draft master plan. The review of environmental factors for each precinct includes an Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment review.
- NPWS commissioned a heritage expert to prepare statement of heritage impact reports for the 4 visitor precincts. These will be also incorporated into the reviews of environmental factors for each precinct.
- The introduction of park entry fees is not being considered as part of the Macleay Coast Destination master plan planning process.
- All visitor facilities and access will be designed according to the NPWS *Accessible parks policy*.
- The way the visitor number data was written in the draft master plan could be misinterpreted. NPWS will make the visitor number and demographic information clearer in the final master plan.
- NPWS has provided many opportunities for input, including mailouts to local residents, meetings with key stakeholders, consultation with Aboriginal groups and public exhibition of the plan.

Next steps

This submissions summary accompanies the publication of the *Macleay Coast Destination master plan*.

To register your interest in the project and to receive project updates and/or notifications, you can do so on the *Macleay Coast Destination project* webpage.

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More information

- [Macleay Coast Destination](#) – Environment and Heritage webpage
- [Macleay Coast Destination draft master plan](#)
- [Macleay Coast Destination master plan](#)
- [NPWS Accessible parks policy](#)

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