



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Sustainable visitation at Barunguba Montague Island Nature Reserve



The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is preparing a new plan of management for Barunguba Montague Island Nature Reserve. A draft is on public exhibition and we are seeking community feedback.

The draft plan proposes changes to the number of visitors able to visit the park each day. These proposed changes are expected to help conserve the island's biodiversity and Aboriginal and historic heritage while allowing sustainable visitation into the future. They would also ensure that infrastructure provided for visitors has the capacity to support an outstanding visitor experience.

Why does Barunguba Montague Island Nature Reserve need a new plan of management?

National Parks and Wildlife Service manages Barunguba Montague Island Nature Reserve to conserve biodiversity, maintain ecosystem function, and protect Aboriginal cultural and historic heritage. Promoting public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the reserve's natural and cultural values and providing appropriate research and monitoring is also essential and a requirement of the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

The current plan of management for Barunguba Montague Island Nature Reserve was adopted in 1995 and amended in 2003 and 2009.

A new draft plan has been prepared to address several issues, including visitation, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green Listing, the declaration of Barunguba as an Aboriginal Place and the impacts of climate change.

How does the draft plan of management provide for sustainable visitation?

Minimising human disturbance to the park's biodiversity, Aboriginal and historic heritage while promoting public appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the values through tourism is challenging.

In response to that challenge, we regulate visitation to the park. Visitors must be part of an authorised tour led by an NPWS guide, the locations available for visitors are limited, and the numbers of visitors per day and at any one time are controlled.

Why is sustainable visitation important?

- To improve protection of natural and cultural values of the nature reserve
- To increase visitor safety
- To enhance visitor experience and enjoyment
- To better align with infrastructure capacity

What changes are proposed?

Visitor numbers	Limit in current plan	Limit in draft replacement plan
Maximum number of visitors in 24-hour period	200	120
Maximum number visitors at any one time	80	40
Visitor to guide ratio	40:1	30:1

Visitors will still need to be part of an authorised tour and the existing locations available for visitors to access will remain unchanged.

Why cap visitor numbers at 40?

We have considered a range of factors to determine a sustainable level of visitation to the nature reserve, including:

Visitor safety

There are various locations on the island where overcrowding can threaten visitor safety. For example, when visitation at the penguin viewing platform exceeds 40, visitors overflow onto the surrounding, uneven and poorly lit rock surface, increasing the risk of slips and falls.

Protection of natural and cultural values

The island has significant natural values as an important seabird nesting site. It has been listed as an asset of intergenerational significance for the protection of the endangered Gould's Petrel. It is also one of the first places in the world to be listed on the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas. The historical significance associated with the lighthouse, established in 1881, is recognised through listings on the NSW State Heritage List and the Commonwealth Heritage List. Capping the visitation to a maximum of 40 people at any one time will reduce crowding and allow for closer supervision of tour groups. This will help protect the historical features of the island and limit disturbance from visitation on the little penguins and other breeding bird colonies.

Visitor experience

Many visitors are drawn to the island to see inside the lighthouse and experience the view from the top. A maximum of 10 people is allowed to access the lighthouse at a time. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority sets this number. This takes into consideration the heritage values of the lighthouse and the confined space within it. Changing visitation to the island to a maximum of 40 people at any one time will allow for a better visitor experience, reducing wait times and crowding at the lighthouse's base.

Large tour groups also mean long wait times as multiple vessels wait to disembark/embark passengers, adversely impacting the visitor experience.

Barunguba Montague Island Nature Reserve is relatively wild and unspoilt, and early lightkeepers experienced a strong sense of isolation. Overcrowding on the island risks damaging this. Visitors wish to experience some sense of this isolation, and smaller group sizes have been publicly supported.

Capacity of park infrastructure

As already described, park infrastructure impacts visitor safety (for example, penguin viewing platform) and visitor experience (for example, jetty and lighthouse).

Other infrastructure, such as the island's sewage system, also restricts visitor numbers to the park. Overflows of untreated sewage could occur if the sewage system could not cope with the number of visitors.

Similarly, the supply of water can constrain visitation. For example, drought conditions in the past have forced the importing of water, but this has limited capacity and is expensive.

Heritage constraints and shallow soils limit installation of a larger sewage system or additional water storage capacity.

Guide to visitor ratios

Promoting public appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the island's values through guided tours is a key function of NPWS management. An enjoyable visitor experience, without frustrating delays, allows visitors to truly absorb the values the island is famous for.

NPWS staff and volunteers operate the guided tours. The replacement plan of management is proposing a new maximum of 1:30 guide to visitor ratio. Smaller groups will make it easier for guides (some of whom are volunteers) to deliver consistent tour content and educational messaging. It will also enhance individual visitors' ability to sense the relative isolation and remoteness experienced by early lightkeepers.

What does this mean for day tours and overnight stays on the island?

The new plan aims to focus on sustainable visitation to the island by capping the numbers of people on the island at any one time. Continuing with the 3 daily tours to the island and introducing a cap of 40 day visitors at any one time, means the maximum number of visitors on the island would be 120 per day. Existing visitation levels largely fit within the proposed 120 visitors per day limit. The cap will affect only a small number of high demand days per year.

There is no change proposed for overnight guest numbers. These will continue to be based on available beds/rooms and be managed to minimise impact to historic heritage values and ensure a remote, secluded experience.