

MEDIA RELEASE

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More Public Money to be Spent – \$15 million Proposed for a Tourism Development in the Tasman National Park

The Tasmanian government is planning to spend over \$15 million of taxpayers' money on the 'Three Capes Track' - a new, hut-based walk in the Tasman National Park. Based on the government's costing (*2007 Three Capes Track Feasibility Study*) the \$15 million plus would not be recovered and no direct profit or return to park management is expected. The track fees would barely pay for the operational and maintenance costs of this tourism development.

The Tasmanian National Parks Association (TNPA) is extremely concerned about the proposal. "Not only is the economic basis of the proposal questionable," said TNPA's President, Anne McConnell, "but it ignores existing opportunities which could be developed to bring real benefits to the Tasman Peninsula almost immediately. There are also significant environmental risks which have not yet been fully evaluated".

"National Parks are set aside primarily for conservation purposes, yet the government is proposing a tourism development with no benefit to the park. The proposal is a totally inappropriate, large-scale development.

"It includes five overnight 'nodes' which are essentially villages. Each would have the capacity to sleep around 80 people a night plus have separate amenities buildings, a helipad and tracks," said Anne McConnell, the TNPA president. "This is a scale of development unprecedented in a Tasmanian National Park in a conservation priority zone. It far exceeds the infrastructure on the Overland Track which the government argues is the model for this project."

The TNPA also questions whether the risk of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (root rot fungus) spread - the greatest potential environmental impact in relation to this proposal - can be mitigated given the proposed route of the walk.

The proposal is being justified by the government on the basis of tourism dollars and 'spin-offs' to the Tasman Peninsula. According to TNPA's project co-ordinator, Janet Henderson, the economics have not been soundly assessed. "There has been no detailed economic analysis, no analysis in a state-wide context and no analysis of optional approaches for the Tasman Peninsula."

The TNPA is also concerned that the cost of walking the Three Capes Track would deter families and potential walkers. "The price tag is \$200 plus the unspecified cost of the unavoidable boat trips. There is also no guarantee that the government will not give the business to a commercial operator which would further increase the cost," said Ms. Henderson

In spite of these issues and unresolved environmental and economic evaluations, an amended management plan for the park has been recently released for public comment. "The government is asking us to approve changes to an accepted management plan to facilitate a tourism development which is of dubious worth and, at this stage, little more than a general concept" Ms McConnell commented. "This hardly seems a responsible approach to national park management."

The TNPA would like to see the alternatives which already exist used instead. The Tasman Coastal Trail is a four-day, tent based walk which takes in much of the spectacular coastal scenery in the Tasman National Park. There are also more than 30 day walks in the Tasman National Park which provide a range of opportunities for visitors.

"In our view the government has a clear conflict of interest with the Tree Capes Track development," said Anne McConnell. "The project is the brainchild of the Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage & the Arts; the same department would be the developer **and** the same department carries out the assessments and gives the approvals. There isn't an independent umpire anywhere."

The government's Three Capes Track development, as well as the process the government has chosen to expedite the proposal, creates an extremely dangerous precedent for reserved land management in Tasmania. The TNPA therefore calls on the government to utilise the more appropriate opportunities that already exist.

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