

6 June 2021

Project Manager
Maria Island Plans
Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service

SUBMISSION ON MARIA ISLAND NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

This is the first time that a review of a statutory management plan has been outsourced to consultants. The PWS needs to publicly clarify the roles of PWS and Inspiring Place. Who is responsible for what?

The TNPA's submission follows.

Maintain a natural experience

TNPA's overriding concern is to preserve the integrity of Tasmania's national parks and reserves to protect their natural and cultural values and maintain an appropriate experience of wild nature for all visitors. This experience can be negated by excessive numbers of visitors, inappropriate or unnecessary infrastructure, or other unnecessarily intrusive evidence of modern society such as excessive sight or sound of vehicles, motorised boats or aircraft.

Visitor Numbers

The discussion papers appear to be written on the assumption that increasing visitor numbers are both inevitable and desirable. Neither is correct.

Maria is an island so visitor numbers can be controlled more readily than at most other national parks. The vast majority of visitors access it via the commercial ferry service. The capacity of the ferry and number of sailings can be regulated by PWS as can the number of people camping on the island and the availability of other overnight accommodation.

The view of the TNPA and, apparently, most of those attending the consultation meeting in Hobart, is that the experience of visiting Maria Island is highly valued by the majority of visitors as it is. This appears to be shared by many of the current commercial operators.

It must be acknowledged that any major increase in visitor numbers is incompatible with the widely expressed desire to maintain the current 'character' of the island. Setting a 'carrying capacity' is difficult but this is not a reason for ignoring this fundamental consideration. It must be addressed in the forthcoming draft management plan.

Maria Island Re-Discovered

This document is referenced in the Visitor Experience Discussion paper and appears to be the source of most of the ideas proposed in the discussion paper. It is several years old, has

never been subject to public consultation and never been released to the public. The belatedly released *Visitor Experience Summary* fails to acknowledge the inherent contradiction between 'Maria Island is better for what it does not have' and 'Evolving to accommodate greater numbers' (both statements in page 1, right column, paragraph 1). Some of the recommendations are compatible with maintaining the existing visitor experience but many will result in over-development.

No information about *Maria Island Re-Discovered* was provided during the consultation period although a two page *Visitor Experience Summary* has subsequently been provided to TNPA.

In light of its apparently central role in the management plan review:

- The full *Maria Island Re-Discovered* report should have been included in the background material provided on the PWS website from day one of the consultation process. At the very least, the *Visitor Experience Summary* should be placed on the PWS website, and its availability advertised to all who have made submissions.
- PWS should make a public statement about the extent to which the management plan review is expected to provide for the implementation of *Maria Island Re-Discovered*.

Infrastructure and accommodation

The current 'character' of the island, which is clearly valued by most current visitors, is incompatible with overdevelopment. Some low-key improvements to infrastructure (e.g. to address water supply and toilets / disposal of sewage) are appropriate but anything more than this needs careful consideration. In particular food sales and additional commercial overnight accommodation (either in a purpose built building or standing camp) should be ruled out.

World Heritage Site

The most heavily visited part of the island is world heritage listed on the basis of its convict heritage. The protection of this heritage must take precedence over all proposals for additional visitor infrastructure.

Management of Recreational Use

The TNPA expects that the new management plan will provide a better experience for all visitors to the island. Planning will need to be supported by research on the impacts of current use of the island and the expectations of visitors. There is probably a need to (for example):

- Provide better short walks for short-term visitors in the vicinity of Darlington.
- Resolve recreational conflict. e.g. between walkers and mountain bikers (see mountain bikes).
- Control the proliferation of unplanned walking tracks.
- Maintain some areas in an undeveloped condition (a wilderness zone).

This will require detailed consideration of the distribution of visitor use around the island. Moving visitors away from Darlington may seem superficially attractive as a way of reducing crowding in that location but water taxis will provide an additional source of mechanical intrusion and require new infrastructure such as jetties.

Unrestricted private boat access to the all accessible points on the shoreline is apparently leading to rubbish and campfire remains, and may interfere with the experience of other users

who have chosen to camp in a secluded location only to have a large, noisy group from a boat camp nearby. This needs to be controlled by education/regulation.

This would need to be implemented by a more detailed zoning scheme than is provided in the 1998 Management Plan.

Interpretation and staffing

PWS staff need to be present to welcome all visitors to the island, particularly given the increasing number of visitors unfamiliar with the island or what to expect during their visit. The PWS staff can provide basic practical information, advice on behaviour (e.g. don't light fires) and provide interpretation. Purpose built facilities are not needed; they would only contribute to overdevelopment. It is not appropriate to expect staff of commercial operations to perform these functions and immediate consideration should be given to reversing the recent decision to remove of PWS visitor services staff from the island.

Cruise ships

The presence of large cruise ships close offshore, especially if anchored, will severely impact the experience of any visitors onshore who were seeking any sort of 'wilderness experience'. Smaller cruise ships (e.g. *Coral Discoverer*) will be even more intrusive if they are allowed to put large numbers (relative to those already present onshore) of passengers ashore.

Mountain bikes

Bicycles are an obvious way to travel around the island but their use needs to be controlled. They enable visitors to travel farther and faster than on foot, and mountain bikes with supplementary electric motors accentuate this. The increasing popularity of all-terrain mountain bikes (with very wide tyres that enable them to traverse sand) may also affect the areas used by mountain bikers. The TNPA assumes that bicycles of any sort are legally restricted to vehicle tracks but it appears that many users disregard this and venture onto walking tracks and beaches. A clear statement of where bicycles can and cannot go, explained by clear signage is needed. e.g. information of the ferry to remind cyclists that there are restrictions on locations where bicycles may be used, accompanied by signs at the start of individual tracks to indicate if cycling is allowed (Wellington Park does this well).

- If parts of the island are to be preserved in a wilder condition (refer Zoning) it may be useful to further constrain bicycle use: e.g. no bicycles south of the isthmus.
- Interaction between cyclists and walkers. The TNPA is unaware of any incidents on Maria but this is a potential concern which requires consideration. Cyclists move fast and silently. They need to be educated to slow down when approaching walkers (especially from behind) to avoid collisions or seriously frightening walkers.

Wildlife

Maria Island has more issues related to the active management of wildlife than any other national park in Tasmania. There is a long established cull of wallabies and the discussion paper hints at the need to cull wombats. An insurance population of devils has been established and it is time to investigate their impacts on the island's ecology (e.g. penguin breeding). The management plan is not the place to resolve these concerns but it should make strong recommendations about the need to resolve them and possible mechanisms for

doing so (e.g. any cull needs to be supported by an education program to explain the rationale – usually damage to native vegetation caused by excessive browsing).

Fire

Much of the island is covered by fire prone vegetation, very dry in summer especially, which has not been burned for decades. Fire is a major threat to the natural values of the island. The management plan is not the place to resolve fire management issues but it should require the preparation of a Fire Management Plan. Better education of visitors about the risks posed by fire is something that should be implemented immediately.

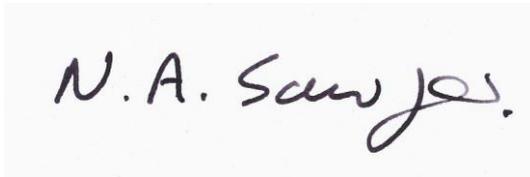
Marine Reserve

The TNPA supports the extension of the marine reserve in conjunction with strict restrictions on activities which can be undertaken within it.

Overflights, Aerial Access & Use of Airstrip

In accordance with the intention to maintain an undisturbed natural experience for visitors, aircraft activity should be minimised.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light grey background. The signature reads "N. A. Sawyer." with a period at the end. The letters are cursive and fluid.

Nicholas Sawyer, President, TNPA