

Freycinet National Park



Management Plan 2004

(Altering the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000*)



Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania

DEPARTMENT of TOURISM, PARKS, HERITAGE
and the ARTS

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PARKS *and* WILDLIFE
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This management plan for Freycinet National Park has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Part 3 of the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*.

Unless otherwise specified, this plan adopts the interpretation of terms given in the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*. The term 'Minister' when used in the plan means the Minister administering this Act. The terms 'park' and 'national park' refer to the Freycinet National Park.

In accordance with Section 30(1) of the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*, the managing authority for the park, in this case the Director of National Parks and Wildlife, shall carry out his or her duties in relation to the park for the purpose of giving effect to, and in accordance with the provisions of, this management plan. The position of Director is held by the Secretary of the Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts.

APPROVAL

This management plan was approved by His Excellency the Governor-in-Council on 29 November 2004 and took effect on 22 December 2004, being seven days after publication of that approval in the *Government Gazette*.

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Section 1 Introduction

Freycinet National Park is currently managed in accordance with a statutory management plan, the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000*. This plan has the effect of altering the 2000 plan in specific areas. The reasons for preparing this plan are twofold. Firstly, it has been prepared to provide for the construction and operation of extended potable water storage capacity in the Middleton Creek Tinfield area. Secondly, it has been prepared to provide for redevelopment of the Wineglass Bay lookout track.

Section 2 of this plan sets out background on the water storage proposal, while Section 3 sets out background on the lookout track proposal. Section 4 sets out the proposed changes to the plan

The management of the Freycinet National Park will be governed by the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000* and this plan read together.

Section 2 Potable Water Storage Extensions

The Issue

Coles Bay has a reticulated town water supply system. Currently the system storage consists of a main town dam on a tributary of the Saltwater Creek, augmented during dry summers by water pumped from smaller dams situated in the catchment of the neighbouring Middleton Creek in an area known as the Middleton Creek Tinfield within the Freycinet National Park. Water resources on the east-coast are scarce; particularly so on the Freycinet Peninsula. For the last several years the Coles Bay system has been barely able to cope with existing demand patterns. Further, the physical condition of the component dams is poor.

Rising demand for water from within the Coles Bay township, coupled with recent low rainfall years and increasing development opportunities such as the planned Federal Hotels luxury resort, has focussed attention on problems with the supply of adequate quantities of potable water for the Freycinet Peninsula.

The Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council proposes to use this opportunity to undertake a major upgrade of the town water supply to place the future water supply needs of the whole town on a more secure footing. As a result Council has lodged an application to use and further develop the Middleton Creek Tinfield site within the Freycinet National Park to harvest potable water.

Those components of an upgraded town potable water system that lie within the Middleton Creek Tinfield consist of a new dam within an area known as the 'tin mines dam cluster' along with repairs to the southern tin mine dam (NSS 2003¹).

As indicated, the Middleton Creek Tinfield is already being used to harvest potable water for the township of Coles Bay. The proponent indicates that this project will significantly extend the storage capacity of that site, providing sufficient town water to exceed the needs of Federal Hotels and provide additional supply for the broader community. Extending the dam capacity will involve extensive earth works but generally limited to the existing disturbed area of the mine site, and primarily using on-site materials to build new dam walls. A range of other options has been investigated, the principal one involving harvesting water from an undisturbed catchment with consequent environmental impact. These other options have been considered unsatisfactory.

Description of the Middleton Creek Tinfield

The area is accessed from the Freshwater Lagoon Track, which in turn is accessed from the Coles Bay Road about one kilometre north of Coles Bay. This track heads in a generally northerly direction into the park emerging on the coast just west of Freshwater Point. About one kilometre within the park boundary on the Freshwater Lagoon Track a rough spur track on the right steeply ascends the ridge to the Middleton Creek Tinfield (see Map 1).

¹ National Strategic Services Pty Ltd, 2003; Tin Mines Dams – Dam Application and Environmental Impact Assessment, report to DPIWE published at <http://www.publicinfo.tas.gov.au>

The tinfield and surrounding land was proclaimed part of the park by statute under the *Regional Forest Agreement (Land Classification) Act 1998*, which became effective on 30 April 1999. Prior to this the area had been unallocated Crown land.

Presently the Middleton Creek Tinfield consists of a series of interconnected dams, spillways, tailing deposits and the scattered remains of mining machinery and occupation sites. Many of the dams are considered to be in poor condition and have breached or are likely to breach in the foreseeable future, mobilising considerable amounts of sediment.

The Middleton Creek Tinfield has long been known to possess cultural heritage values. It has been mined for tin on and off since 1872, using both small-scale techniques and large-scale mechanical techniques in the most recent mining phase from 1972 to 1980. An interim assessment of cultural heritage values, carried out before the present project was conceived, found the values of the site were degraded by this latter mining phase, but never the less continued to exist. The site is listed on the Tasmanian Heritage Places Index and an informal statement of significance recorded there indicates:

The Middleton Creek Tinfield is moderately significant, being a small-scale example of a significant site type in Tasmania's mining and prospecting history. It contains the remains of turn-of-the-century tin prospecting which demonstrates pre-mechanical prospecting techniques.

As part of developing an application for dam works the project proponents have undertaken a formal assessment of the values of the site and surrounds and of the impact of the proposed development on those values (see next section).

The Project Assessment Pathway

Approval of this plan is not a sufficient step to ensure the dam construction project can proceed. Other approval steps include a test for consistency with other statutory responsibilities held by the management authority (PWS) and a permit for dam works.

Section 4.5 of the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000* provides the current protocols for assessing development within the park required by the management authority. The assessment protocol firstly requires an assessment of the scale of the project, based on scale, public interest or the potential for substantial impact. Depending upon the outcome of this process the assessment process is either an internal process, or one that is made available for public comment. The assessment process is primarily designed to test the project's consistency with the management authority's statutory responsibilities in relation to the conservation of natural, cultural heritage and wilderness values

Being a dam proposal, the approval process is specifically excluded from consideration under the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*. It is instead subject to a separate assessment process under the *Water Management Act 1999*. In the case of small-scale projects such as this one a Dam Assessment Report is prepared and assessed by the Assessment Committee for Dam Construction (ACDC), following a 14-day minimum public comment period.

In order to streamline the approval process, the test of consistency of the management authority's statutory responsibilities and the dam construction approval process were combined into a single step. The *Tin Mines Dams – Dam*

*Application and Environmental Impact Assessment*² included an assessment of impacts on the values for which the management authority has a statutory responsibility. To provide additional transparency the above document was made available for public comment at the same time as this plan was released for public comment. The community, through this process, had the opportunity to comment on both these matters.

² see previous footnote

Section 3 Redevelopment of the Wineglass Bay Lookout Track

The Issue

Currently the single most important attraction in the park is the Wineglass Bay lookout track. Two successive visitor surveys (1998/00 and 2002/03) have shown that the opportunity to view Wineglass Bay is the prime reason that visitors come. The exit survey completed in summer 02/03 indicated that sixty eight percent of the 200,000 visitors to the park, or 136,000 people, walked to the lookout. To get to the lookout visitors leave their cars at the Wineglass Bay carpark and walk the 1.2 kilometre length track, ascending 120 metres to the saddle lookout to enjoy panoramic views of the now world famous bay. However, the inadequacies of this major tourist experience have been recognised for some time. The *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000* states:

The extremely erodible granitic and sandy soils of the Park mean that a track subjected to such high use is difficult to maintain, and is considered to be unsafe by many visitors. Visitors have slipped and fallen on the Wineglass Bay lookout track, injuring themselves and requiring rescue and medical attention.

The plan goes on to prescribe as follows

- *Upgrade and maintain the entire Wineglass Bay track at "Walk" standard.*

Since the writing of the 2000 plan the situation on the Wineglass Bay lookout track has further deteriorated. With the rapid increase in visitor numbers the narrow track with its many high steps is more and more frequently overcrowded, exacerbating risk issues and further reducing the quality of the experience. In the busiest month of 2003 (January) there were more 500 people walking the track every day. The 2002/03 exit survey also indicated visitor dissatisfaction with the condition of the track, the need for seats and better signage and problems with the current lookout capacity. The time has definitely come to act on the 2000 plan prescription and upgrade the track.

Proposed Redevelopment of the Track

Having determined to upgrade the lookout track the Parks and Wildlife Service recently hired specialist trackwork consultants to provide recommendations on the best approach. The consultants have assessed the problems of the current track and are currently developing alternatives.

The major issue is the grade of the current track; it is simply too steep for both walker comfort and stability of the surface. To address both of these matters a new route is required.

A second issue relates to the current and future levels of use of the track. Qualities of solitude, quietness and appreciation of nature rapidly decrease with increasing visitor numbers. Current predictions are for further significant increases in visitor numbers in the coming years. Presently visitor numbers at

Freycinet are as high as Cradle Mountain but the predicted growth rate (5%) is much higher than for Cradle. The quality of the experience will be greatly improved if a one-way loop track is developed. Visitors moving around a one-way loop track will have a much lower incidence of encounters with other parties, greatly reducing both the apparent level of crowding and the risks associated with groups passing each other in this steep terrain. This will provide a more relaxed experience. Additionally the different routes up and down will enhance visitor interest along with opportunities for developing intermediate nodes at strategic vantage-points with seating and interpretation.

Creation of a loop track is technically difficult and may not be possible in this steep, difficult terrain.

Why the 2000 Plan Requires Alteration

While, as indicated, the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000* provides for the lookout track to be upgraded, the current zoning system severely limits the options the Parks and Wildlife Service may consider. As indicated in Map 2, the existing track occupies a narrow 100 metre wide corridor of land zoned for recreation, with the land either side of this zoned for conservation. The plan provides the ability to upgrade the track so long as it remains within this narrow recreation zone corridor, but expressly rules out new tracks in the conservation zone except in certain limited circumstances. Current investigations are demonstrating a high desirability for this restraint to be relaxed, but only in relation to the Wineglass Bay lookout track, and not in relation to other tracks in the park. These investigations have yet to be finalised, so the location of the proposed loop walk, as shown in Map 2, is still subject to some final adjustment.

The Project Assessment Pathway

Approval of this plan is not a sufficient step to ensure the Wineglass Bay lookout track project can proceed within the conservation zone. Other approval steps include a test for consistency with other statutory responsibilities held by the management authority.

Section 4.5 of the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000* provides the current protocols for assessing development within the park required by the management authority. The assessment protocol firstly requires an assessment of the scale of the project, based on scale, public interest or the potential for substantial impact. Depending upon the outcome of this process the assessment process is either an internal process, or one that is made available for public comment.

It has been considered appropriate that the proposal for a new loop track to the lookout entering the conservation zone be regarded as a major project. Consequently, per Section 4.5 of the 2000 plan, a 'development specific site plan' has been prepared and made available for public comment for a period of thirty days minimum. This site plan has now been separately approved.

Section 4 *Alterations to the Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000*

Purposes of Reservation and Objectives of Management

This plan is to alter the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000* in relation to the Middleton Creek Tinfield area and to allow for a new loop track to the Wineglass Bay lookout location. The purposes of reservation are those stated in the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000*, page nine. The management objectives to apply within the plan area are those stated in the *Freycinet National Park, Wye River State Reserve Management Plan 2000*, page nine, together with specific objectives as stated on page 10.

Text Changes

Page 52, Table 2

In Table 2 the seventh entry in the Conservation Zone column which reads:
'No new tracks'

is to be replaced by:

'No new tracks apart from a new loop track to the Wineglass Bay lookout'

Page 53, column 2

The following sentence under Conservation Zone, Policies:

- 'Except for safety, environmental or heritage protection, water supply links from the former tin mines to Coles Bay water supply, and fire management, new structures or any other type of development (including new tracks) will not be allowed.'

is to be replaced by:

- 'New structures or any other type of development (including new tracks) will not be allowed, apart from the following exceptions:
 - a new track to the Wineglass Bay lookout, being a loop track if technically feasible,
 - additional water supply capacity at the former tin mines,
 - water supply links and associated pumping equipment to connect the former tin mines to Coles Bay water supply, and
 - works associated with the proper maintenance of this water supply and/or capacity, and
 - in circumstances of safety, environmental or heritage protection, or for fire management.'