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**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET AT THE WEST COAST COUNCIL CHAMBERS, QUEENSTOWN, ON TUESDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2026.**

## **NEXT ICONIC WALK**

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**The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.**

**CHAIR** (Ms Butler) - Welcome, everyone. Before we commence the hearing, I will introduce the members of the Committee: to my right, we have Tania Rattray; we have Mark Shelton; we have Scott Hennessy and Georgia Gray, who are our Secretaries. To my left, I have Dean Harriss; Helen Burnet; and we also have Karen from Hansard. Thank you.

**Ms RATTRAY** - And yourself.

**CHAIR** - And also myself. I'm Jen Butler, the Chair. There are no apologies for the hearing today. Secretary, would you please read out the message from Her Excellency, the Governor-in-Council, referring the project to the Committee for inquiry.

**SECRETARY** -

Pursuant to section 16(2) of the *Public Works Committee Act 1914*, the Governor refers the under mentioned proposed public works to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works to consider and report thereon:

Next Iconic Walk.

Pursuant to section 16(3) of the Act, the estimated cost of such work when completed is \$40 million.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. The Committee is in receipt of seven submissions. Could I ask a member to move that the submissions be received, taken into evidence and published?

**Ms BURNET** - So moved.

**Motion agreed to.**

**CHAIR** - The witnesses appearing before the Committee today are representing the proponent, the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania. Could I ask each of you to state your name, your position and organisation, and then make the statutory declaration.

**Ms SOPHIE MULLER**, DEPUTY SECRETARY; **Mr KEITH RYAN**, PROJECT DIRECTOR; **Mr ALEK CAHILL**, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER (CONSTRUCTION and LOGISTICS); AND **Mr JOE EVANS**, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER (PLANNING, DESIGN and APPROVALS), PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF

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NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - Thank you for appearing before the Committee. The Committee is pleased to hear your evidence today. Just before you begin giving your evidence, I would like to inform you of some important aspects of committee proceedings. A committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament. This means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege. This is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom, without the fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of parliament. It applies to ensure that parliament receives the very best information when conducting its inquiries.

It is important to be aware that this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings. This is a public hearing. Members of the public and journalists may be present and this means that your evidence may be reported. Do you understand?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Great. Ms Muller, would you, or one of your colleagues, like to make an opening statement?

**Ms MULLER** - Thank you, Chair, I will make some initial comments and then pass on to Keith to go into a little more detail.

Just to start with, a bit of an overview of the project and how it's come about, and some of the history and context. I think it is a truly exciting project, for both the west coast and for Tasmania, to develop a new multi-day walking experience on our rugged and unique west coast. This walk will be a game changer that will deliver economic and social benefits to both the west coast and to Tasmania by creating a new walking experience that will attract visitors, encourage them to stay longer and, importantly, spend more.

The walk aims to build on the success of the Overland Track and the Three Capes Track, and it will enhance Tasmania's reputation as one of the great walking destinations in Australia, if not the world. Multi-day walks epitomise our unique brand, and visitors recognise this and will travel to Tasmania specifically for this.

During the first stage of the project, the Parks and Wildlife Service called for public proposals to help identify the location for this new walk. We received 35 different locations and they were each assessed. The Tyndall Range was selected as the preferred location, and this area was included in two of the 24 public submissions received.

The Tyndall Range was selected because of its extraordinary and dramatic glacial carved landscapes and unique geology, along with the Aboriginal history of the area. European heritage links to hydro power generation and mineral exploration collectively provide interpretive themes to enhance the visitor experience and tell the story of place.

Once the Tyndall Range was identified, the second stage of the project was to commission a feasibility study. Over 50 track routes options were considered during the feasibility stage, including a different number of nights, different tracks, return tracks, loop

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tracks, day walks and so on. During this stage there were over 1900 Australians surveyed to help inform the project and to develop the discrete choice modelling that was used to identify the options worthy of more detailed analysis and testing.

The final recommended option from the feasibility study was a three-day, two-night hut-based walk between Lake Plimsoll in the north and the Lake Margaret Power Station in the south. The study confirmed that this option was feasible, iconic and would deliver a positive benefit-cost ratio, both for Tasmania and the west coast. The feasibility was based on 5450 visitors over a six-month walking season, or about 60 per cent of the capacity during the six months.

The final proposal has been developed to allow for year-round operation and accounted for these costs in our business planning, with demand from walkers still heavily focused on the peak six-month walking season. Current demand is estimated at around 6857 visitors across the year, which corresponds to around 44 per cent capacity year-round.

The feasibility study concluded that the Next Iconic Walk has the potential to generate approximately 139 jobs during construction and, importantly, a further 40 jobs ongoing in fields such as tourism, hospitality, support services and transport operations.

The project itself has widespread support from the tourism industry, local employers, the west coast community, and we have letters of support from key stakeholders who we have been working with together to realise this project, including the West Coast Council, West by Northwest, the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania, Hydro Tasmania and the Tasmanian Minerals Manufacturing and Energy Council. The support of these stakeholders demonstrates that the benefits of this project extend well beyond reserve management and really do touch the whole community.

Like the Overland Track and the Three Capes Track, this track promises to provide benefits for Tasmanians, particularly west coast residents, for generations to come.

I will now hand over to Keith Ryan to explain a bit more about the track route, the proposed infrastructure to be developed and to address some of the key issues that have been raised in the consultations we have been undertaking.

**Mr RYAN** - Thanks, Sophie. Initially, I'd like to talk about the location of the walk and the specific track route, and address some of the concerns that we've heard from the public and stakeholders during consultations to date. When the Tyndall Range was identified as a preferred location for the walk, there were concerns raised around potential impact on the sensitive flora of the Tyndall Plateau, along with concerns about the risk of severe weather on the exposed higher altitudes on that plateau. I can confirm that the final route does not go onto the Tyndall Plateau, but it is a route to the east of the Tyndall Range, sheltered from the prevailing winds and at much lower altitude than the exposed plateau, and avoids the sensitive alpine vegetation.

We also heard concerns about the amount of rainfall on the west coast. We know it rains around 200 days a year, so we have designed the walk with the weather in mind, knowing walkers will get wet and they will seek a dry, comfortable place to rest at the end of a day walking. The distances between huts are relatively short compared to other overnight walks, so in bad conditions, walkers can get out of the weather quicker. We have designed the overnight nodes to be comfortable in all conditions, with electric heating sustainably generated through

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micro hydro systems and solar panels. It will also be in all common areas and bedrooms. All walkers, including walkers, will have access to heated communal lounges. Kitchens with pots, pans and electric cooktops will also be provided, and this means lighter pack weights for walkers. All walkers will also have access to drying cupboards to dry wet weather gear and boots overnight, avoiding communal spaces becoming defacto drying rooms.

When thinking about the rain on the west coast, it's worth noting rainfall in the area is around 2400 millimetres in Queenstown and 3700 millimetres at Mount Read. That's comparable to rainfall on the Overland Track with 2600 millimetres at Cradle Valley. This is far less than the rainfall received on walks at the west coast of New Zealand with the Milford Track receiving 6700 millimetres of rain and the Routeburn Track around 7000 millimetres of rain. Like the Overland Track, walkers will be advised to pack for all weather conditions year-round, regardless. Like the Overland Track, they will receive briefings to that effect at the start and in the pre-departure information.

Unlike the Overland, though, this walk does not extend into the Alpine zone well above 1000 metres above sea level. The majority of the walk is between 600 and 800 metres above sea level and both hut sites around 750 metres above sea level. Whilst we will see occasional snow on the higher parts of the track around 900 to 960 metres, it is not expected to persist for days and weeks, like it does at times on the Overland Track. We will have gear checks and briefings to make sure that walkers are prepared before they get there.

I will hand over to Alek to have a quick chat about some of the feasibility study.

**Mr CAHILL** - There has been some feedback during the public consultation that the feasibility study is out of date. While plans for the walk have continued to evolve following more detailed site investigations, surveys, specialist inputs and stakeholder considerations, the final proposal is still consistent with the recommended option from the feasibility study which is the through-walk that will be completed over three days and two nights, staying in huts and tents, starting near Lake Plimsoll and finishing at the Lake Margaret Power Station.

Walkers will check in at Queenstown where they will receive a safety briefing, including Leave No Trace messaging before taking a shuttle to the start of the walk. At the end of the walk, they will be picked up by a shuttle at Lake Margaret Power Station and returned to Queenstown.

Walker numbers will be capped at 44 per day, comparable to the 48 departures per day on the Three Capes Track.

The feasibility study proposed 30 people in huts and 20 camping per day, and the current proposal offers 34 beds in hut-based accommodation, which is 22 in bunk rooms and 12 in stand-alone pods, and 10 beds on the camping platforms. The numbers of tent-based beds were reduced following public consultations where concerns were raised around the weather, with the change supported by additional market research. Any significant changes to the assumptions from the feasibility study such as adding standalone pods, reducing tent numbers or extending operations from six months to a year, have undergone further market testing to ensure they do not negatively impact the viability of the proposal.

We're confident the business case is still sound, and walker fees will cover the annual operating and maintenance costs, so the project will not be a drain on Parks' operating budget.

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I will hand over to Joe to talk about potential impacts of the project.

**Mr EVANS** - With regard to impacts on wilderness, there is understandable concern from the public and stakeholders of the impacts of the proposal on environments or other users of the area.

This walk will not prevent access for people to undertake activities they currently do in the area, including four-wheel driving on the Lake Spicer Track, rock climbing and bushwalking on the Tyndall Plateau, including walking off track in this area, fishing in nearby lakes or accessing the area for mineral exploration.

Some have concerns around the visual impact of the walk, particularly from the Tyndall Plateau. We acknowledge that there will always be visual impacts when clearing a new track and installing huts and other infrastructure in the landscape, but we have done everything we can to reduce the visual impacts whilst still locating the huts and track in suitable locations. We sought specialist advice on visual impact and this assessment determined the impact was acceptable for the setting.

It is important to note that visual impact was just one of many considerations in the site and track route selection, with others including the following: access to water for micro hydropower generation; firefighting sprinkler systems; backup drinking water; and opportunities for swimming. Another is avoiding threatened species and communities, along with Aboriginal cultural heritage, European heritage values and geo-conservation sites. Bushfire risk is obviously a big one, and the need to have clear to highly modified hazard management areas around buildings is a consideration.

We looked at slope, aspect, solar orientation for passive solar gains, solar power generation, building health, and visitor experience. Operational and maintenance considerations came into consideration, including helicopter access, construction methodology, ground conditions, and landslide risk were also assessed.

We looked at the target market visitor experience including consideration of views near, mid and far, and time spent at the hut sites. When looking at the design, colours, materiality, reflectivity, size, shape, mass and orientation of the structures were all reviewed. Finally, we also looked at - there are many others - but working and living conditions of staff, and interpretation opportunities were all considered with the locations of the track and hut sites.

It is also worth noting, from the Tyndall Plateau, where there is the greatest concern about visual impact, you can currently see various human impacts on the landscape, including Hydro Tasmania-managed dams and lakes, high-voltage powerlines, sealed highways, four-wheel-drive tracks, mine tailings dams, man-made canals, radio towers and forestry operations.

Another fear expressed is that walkers will head off track onto the Tyndall Plateau and trample sensitive alpine plant species, however the route deliberately avoids the plateau. The target market for this walk do not typically have the navigation skills, experience, confidence, or motivation to spend hours walking off track and bush-bashing through the scrub in search of a remote peak. The Three Capes and Overland Track experiences are that walking off track is rare. The vast majority of people aim to leave no trace, and only walk off the main track to take recognised and signposted side tracks. Host rangers will help reinforce these messages out

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on track, along with providing interpretation, daily weather updates, and assisting with emergency management as required.

The environmental impacts of the proposal are currently being assessed through the Reserve Activity Assessment process, managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service, with input and review from various specialists outside of Parks, within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania. The proposal will also be considered by the Australian Government through the referral for assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC), where impact on Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) and national list of threatened species and communities will be assessed.

I will now hand back to Sophie to wrap up.

**Ms MULLER** - Thanks, Joe. As I noted earlier, we have been consulting with stakeholders and listening to feedback we've received over a long period of time. I thought I'd quickly share some of the refinements and the changes that we've made following this feedback to highlight how we've demonstrated our commitment to delivering the best product possible, and how we've done that in a way that's been responsive to what we've heard.

We've moved the start of the walk, in response to concerns about walker safety, shuttle logistics, potential conflict with other users, and to improve the walker experience. We've moved the separate campground back to the hut sites in response to concerns about the construction footprint, additional servicing - so the efficiency of our operations, walker safety and emergency response difficulties, and equity and quality of the experience for tent-based walkers.

We moved proposed hut sites in response to concerns about visibility from the trail, servicing difficulties, and visitor experience and comfort. We have extended the last day of the walk in response to feedback that the overall walk distance was too short, that the three days were too similar, and concerns about proximity to Hydro dam infrastructure.

We've avoided the Tyndall Plateau and picked a track alignment at lower altitudes in response to concerns about environmental impacts and walker safety. We've rerouted the first day of the track in response to concerns about access to mineral exploration areas. We've moved the northern depot in response to concerns about the footprint of roadworks required on the Lake Spicer Track.

We've added drying cupboards for tent-based walkers to improve their experience, in response to concerns about shared living or cooking spaces being used to dry clothes. We've provided additional water tanks and bushfire sprinklers to complement the required bushfire protection measures in response to concerns about the future impact of climate change.

Significant changes have occurred through the life of this project to date, in response to that feedback, and it's my pleasure now to hand back to you. Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. How we, as a Committee, like to conduct our scrutiny of the proposed project is to go page by page, but we will skip pages if questions have already been asked on certain subject areas.

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I will kick off with a question about the \$40 million cost. It's my understanding that the original cost was half of that price in 2019 - you can clarify in your answer if I have my dates right - because there was a significant increase in the cost of the Three Capes Track. Could you provide us with some details about why that cost has doubled from the original proposal and whether you believe that the \$40 million is an accurate cost because we know, with the Three Capes, it did increase significantly? Thanks.

**Ms MULLER** - Thanks, Chair. I will make a few initial comments and then hand over to Keith. I don't have the dates in front of me either, but we can look them up and confirm them. We know the cost of construction in recent years has significantly increased and that's certainly been an impact in terms of looking at the cost of delivering this project, so I think that \$20 million to 40 million is partly in response to the cost of construction and partly in response to the work that was undertaken in terms of the detail around the delivery of the project.

What I can say is that, in recent years the work we have done has really had a laser-sharp focus on delivering to the \$40 million budget. That's been one of many considerations, but it's been a pretty key consideration around the design of the build. We know that there are certainly challenges in terms of delivering construction in remote areas, whether that's around workforce, access to materials, access to site and weather constraints. So, as much as possible, the proposal is around prefabrication of the huts, for example, to reduce some of that uncertainty and to better manage our costs. I might just hand over to Keith to get a little bit more detail.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes- just to clarify the timing, my understanding is that the \$20 million was an initial commitment and that was even before a location was identified for the walk. So, we didn't even have a concept in terms of what the walk would look like, how long it would be -

**CHAIR** - Was it 2017 or 2019?

**Mr RYAN** - It was 2018, I think.

**CHAIR** - I think it was an election commitment.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, it was an election commitment. So, the election commitment came first and then we had to identify a location; that came out in 2019. Following the location assessment in 2019, that recommended doing a feasibility study to further scope out whether the proposal in that location would be viable and what would work best; whether it's a seven-day walk, a three-day walk, a 20-day walk - whatever.

Once we finished the feasibility study in 2021, that's when the ask was made for the \$40 million because we actually had a defined concept, a three-day, two-night walk, two huts and they had cost estimates at that point in time of what the track work would cost and what the huts would cost. So, that's where the \$40 million change came from. So, \$20 million, an election commitment, very early on in the concept of the walk, then you have a fairly detailed concept and a proposal and a costing, which was why we went back for the \$40 million.

**CHAIR** - Were there lessons learnt from the other walks, from the Three Capes Walk or the Overland Track -

**Mr RYAN** - Absolutely.

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**CHAIR** - that you will be able to translate into this but also, 'well this is really more realistic about what things cost'. Did that help?

**Mr RYAN** - I guess we're constantly reviewing previous projects, whether that's the Three Capes or Overland Track or it might be track works - we've done a lot of track work recently in response to fires in the south west, so I think it was around \$9 million worth of what we called the fire recovery project, a lot of track work there. As you said, costs change and prices change and that sort of thing, so you go back to the most recent example that you have as a reference point. In terms of the current costings, we then can relate that back to a specific design and we can take that to QS - quantity surveyors- and get them to estimate what it costs, then we build in contingencies and those sorts of things as well to allow that. We've used that \$40 million as the point of reference to make sure that our costs can match that and then we've adapted our designs accordingly.

**Mr EVANS** - Can I add that our latest QS costs only came in a couple of weeks ago and informed the costs that are in the submission, so we have quite recent quantity surveyor costs from the latest design development. Very recent.

**Ms BURNET** - A similar question, in your initial - the Next Iconic Walk creation document or the assessment report 2019 it says, the investment was 'up to \$20 million' to develop and construct the walk for the Next Iconic Walk. This is a huge blowout, considering that's \$20 million capped. What's the plan to pay that down? Are you confident that you are not going to spend over \$40 million? What's the plan to deliver on that?

**Ms MULLER** - A couple of things. First, I think Keith referenced the contingency that we've built in, so there's a significant buffer that's built into the budget. As I said, we've had a really strong focus on designing the product to the budget and the budget has really helped to shape key decisions that we've made. For example, a standalone campsite to integrate the campsite into the two nodes has reduced the number of separate toilet buildings that we need. So, key decisions that we've made to ensure that we're able to deliver under that \$40 million.

**Ms BURNET** - Has the footprint reduced overall because there have been some changes there? Can you describe what sort of changes there might have been?

**Mr RYAN** - I will give you a quick intro, but if you want to talk numbers, you guys can jump in. The concept has changed along the way. As Sophie said, there were plans for a separate standalone campsite at one stage which, obviously, had its own footprint with its own toilet which has now been removed. There was a shelter with that as well. We've brought them back to the hut site, so we've lost a shelter and lost a toilet in terms of footprint. We've also reduced - I guess we've spread - there was enough to cater for 20 campers at that central campsite. We now have 10 at each of the two hut sites, so we are neutral in terms of the footprint, in terms of the platforms.

We have added from earlier concepts. When we went out to public consultation we had four pods. We have increased that to six now, so there is an increase in the footprint there, but that's probably more in response to our desire to ensure that this walk pays for itself and is a viable operation and doesn't drain the Parks' budget year to year. The standalone pods generate the greatest income. Tent platforms generate the least amount of income, so that was a factor in deciding the balance of those at the hut sites.

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**Ms BURNET** - Over how many years are you likely to get a return?

**Mr RYAN** - A return on?

**Ms BURNET** - To make it viable.

**Mr RYAN** - Our focus is to ensure that the operational and ongoing maintenance costs are covered by walker fees and we're confident that we can do that basically from year one to cover the costs.

**Ms BURNET** - Year one.

**CHAIR** - Shall we move on to page four, five. Do we have any questions on page six? Page seven?

**Ms BURNET** - You're going very fast, Chair.

**CHAIR** - They've covered an awful lot of information in their opening remarks. We can always go back.

**Ms RATTRAY** - A couple of questions around the site. Given we know the climate in the area proposed for the walk is cold, wet and cloudy for much of the year, how is this Next Iconic Walk going to meet the aspirations of people who might want to come to Tasmania, particularly in regard to where we often are trying to increase visitation in the winter months - as it doesn't feel like this walk is something that's going to be an attraction in those colder, wet and cloudy months?

Why was this chosen and perhaps not something on the east coast, where the weather is somewhat more favourable and not as wet? I know there were 35 proposals - but how did we get to the west coast? Was it an election commitment that the west coast would benefit more than the east coast? Thank you.

**Mr RYAN** - I will jump in there. The criteria for assessment were a whole range of factors. There wasn't a specific directive or commitment to say this has to be on the west coast; everything was open and we opened it up to public submissions.

**Ms RATTRAY** - But this was the only one that had a feasibility study done for it.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, so it was selected at the end of that process.

**Ms RATTRAY** - That's really my question; why wasn't something else across the state looked at for a feasibility study?

**Mr RYAN** - Well, I guess at the end of the location assessment that this location was determined to be the best option and the most feasible on a range of those factors. I will jump to some of those criteria.

**Ms MULLER** - While there might be days that are wet and cold, that's kind of part of the experience as well. It's not necessarily a bad thing, and the storytelling elements that we talked about, the interpretation that really brings you from looking at these incredible, big

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landscapes to kind of the micro, looking at fagus, looking at the pipeline, like it's an extraordinary place for telling stories and for bringing it to life. That will really deliver and be part of the experience. It is not necessarily about having beautiful, clear blue sky and ocean, it's about really immersing yourself in the rugged terrain of the west coast and being exposed to the beautiful, incredible stories of the place.

**Ms RATTRAY** - The east coast or somewhere far northeast, far southwest didn't have that same appeal to those who made the decision?

**Mr RYAN** - I can't speak to the people who were making that decision, but it certainly didn't come out. There were certainly proposals all around the state.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I can certainly see that from the information.

**Mr RYAN** - They were considering a whole range of factors including what was already there and whether it complements existing activities and those sorts of things. That would've been a factor in choosing an east coast option given that the existing overnight walk opportunities that's already in that location. So, yes, the criteria included the offering, whether it complements something, the accessibility from major towns, the land tenure, the reserve status, the benefit to regional economic communities, the context and land use in the area and the operational benefits. There was a whole range of factors, and this came out as the one that stood out as the best proposal.

**Mr SHELTON** - Continuing that for a moment, and yes, there were 35 sites, I'm interested, from Parks and Wildlife Service, who are basically specialists in maintaining our walking tracks right across the state that range from a few hours' walk in and out of the Liffey Falls to the Overland Track. When it comes to looking at this one, driving down this morning, looking at Lake Plimsoll and the view to the left and out towards central Tasmania - they are fantastic views and some of the photos that are in this document are magnificent, it is a wonderful place.

In determining the nitty gritty of just where this walk goes and the minute detail about where it goes, protection of landscape and that sort of thing, how much effort in design and all that sort of thing has gone into creating the best walk you guys can put in front of us?

**Mr RYAN** - There's been a huge amount of effort. I guess when we got past the location and identified this area, there were 50 different options and route alignments we looked at - through walks, loop tracks, multi-modal tracks that had mountain biking or kayaking incorporated into it, or a boat trip at the start and the end. We looked at a whole range of values, whether they're historic values, conservation values, natural values, Aboriginal heritage. We're trying to work around them but also you can incorporate those into the interpretation elements. It's that fine balance between appreciating the elements you're trying to bring people to but not destroying them at the same time. It's been years and years. Seven years to get to this point to narrow down the final alignment, the hut sites, and those sorts of things.

**Mr SHELTON** - I notice in the discussions that have been had, Bob Brown was mentioned earlier on. He is mentioned a couple of times in some of the documentation. There was also proposal or some comment on this site from, I take that it was the Bob Brown Foundation - it wasn't Bob Brown, as in a different Bob Brown. This aligns very much with what I saw on that of the Bob Brown one as well.

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**Mr RYAN** - The Bob Brown Foundation - it might've been Bob Brown himself - wrote to the Department at the time when the Tyndall Range was identified as the location for the walk and marked up a map and said this is where the route should go, it shouldn't go up into the Tyndall Plateau. It's too exposed, there're safety risks for walkers and the vegetation up there is too fragile to cope with that amount of traffic. The alignment that he provided, if you put on top of our current alignment, they're very similar. But we've gone from following a ridge line on the first day to more on a valley floor. The rest of the alignment's very similar. The two hut sites are within hundreds of metres of where he proposed the hut sites to be. That was one of the first examples where we got feedback and we listened to that and we adjusted accordingly. Again, at that point we hadn't identified a specific route anyway. He was commenting on one of the public proposals which did identify a route which helped identify the Tyndall Range area as the location of the walk, but we hadn't then narrowed down that this is the alignment.

**Ms BURNET** - We're looking at the site and selection. Why was a new track proposed, rather than anything that was existing?

**Mr RYAN** - It probably goes to the goal of trying to come up with an iconic track and something that is actually going to be an attractor to bring people to Tasmania. A lot of the problems with existing tracks is they have just evolved over time. They haven't actually been deliberately planned like we have done for the last seven years, looking at all the values, looking at the slope and the topography and the soils and considering what the best place to build that is. Often the bushwalking groups have gone through, or individuals have cut tracks and they've put rock cairns or marked trees or whatever. That then just becomes the route and it evolves into a track, and then it becomes this eroded mess over time. Often it is the case it was never constructed and never intended to be what it has become. Trying to fix those and turn them into a track would cost more than building a new track from scratch often, because you're trying to fix a track in a place where it probably shouldn't be. You'd be on really steep gradients and soils that are subject to erosion and environmental damage you're trying to fix. If you start from scratch, you probably wouldn't have even put the track there in the first place.

**Ms BURNET** - But I suppose people use the track and like a track because of its natural features, and so forth.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes.

**Ms BURNET** - Anyway, yes, I hear what you're saying. So, the 12,000 to 16,000 capacity and likelihood, what sort of impact - and that might go to you, Joe - is that likely to have on this environment? What sort of risk mitigation have you had to have? That's a fair amount of foot traffic through this area.

**Mr RYAN** - I guess it comes back to my previous comment: that this track will be designed and constructed to cope with that amount of traffic, and built in a sustainable way so that we won't be impacting the environment by having an unplanned track that causes erosion and that sort of thing. It will either be, basically, a gravel-rock track or, in low-lying areas, there will be raised boardwalks in sensitive locations. Pretty much, people will be contained to the footprint that we will make sure is hardened and can cope with the traffic that it receives.

**Mr SHELTON** - How many did you say then per annum?

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**Ms BURNET** - Between 12,000 and 16,000.

**CHAIR** - It's on page six.

**Ms BURNET** - On page six.

**Mr SHELTON** - It's only 1500, isn't it?

**Mr RYAN** - No, that's absolute capacity. If you had that amount of people for the year, that's the maximum capacity. We haven't modelled it based on thinking that there's going to be 100 per cent people every year.

**Mr SHELTON** - My calculations are at 50 a day, is only 350 times by 52, is 15,000. That's a lot; 1500 is more likely the number, isn't it?

**Mr RYAN** - Times 365.

**Mr SHELTON** - What's the annual expected -

**Mr EVANS** - 44 times 365.

**Ms BURNET** - This is in the report on page six.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, 16,000 is the absolute maximum if you had 44 a day every 365 days of the year.

**Ms RATTRAY** - But it's not envisaged to have full capacity on 365 days a year. It's about 60 per cent. Is that correct? Capacity year round of between 50 per cent and 67 per cent over the peak of nine months. Am I on the money or not?

**Mr RYAN** - That's for the peak period, that's not year-round.

**Mr SHELTON** - The figure I saw was 5400.

**Ms BURNET** - Sorry, I was just quoting from the report, that's all.

**CHAIR** - For the record, could you run us through how the proposed project would complement the mountain bike riding in Queenstown? We don't believe that's really taken off as much as it could have.

**Ms RATTRAY** - That's what I learnt at Tullah this morning, on my way through when I got my coffee.

**CHAIR** - Got her sources.

**Ms RATTRAY** - It hasn't delivered as proposed.

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**CHAIR** - We also have the wilderness railway, which is fabulous, and the cruises on the Gordon River. How would this complement, as an attraction for tourists - interstate tourists, international tourists?

Are there any plans or are there any discussions, say, with Tourism Tasmania about transport options for travellers who don't drive? It is quite a hard destination to get to if you don't have a car or a hire car.

**Ms MULLER** - I might start with a few comments. We know that people who come for multi-day walks from interstate typically spend a night or two on either side of their walk. So certainly, this will be an attraction that will both bring people to the region but also then encourage them to stay for a few days on either side. Invariably, they will be looking for experiences that will complement their experience on the track, so I think you would expect to see a positive benefit across a range of businesses within the region, including the railway, for example. I might pass on to Keith to respond to the rest of the question.

**CHAIR** - It's always that impediment, isn't it? About how we get people here who don't drive.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes. We have been working pretty closely with tourism stakeholders along the way, including Tourism Tasmania, West by Northwest, the West Coast RTO (regional tourism organisation), over a number of years. And we continue to do that to look at the whole-of-trip experience, not just the walk. Obviously, up until now, Parks has been very focused on the walk, the huts and the track, getting them to the start and from the end. But how they get to Queenstown, where do they stay when they're here, all those sorts of things, is part of ongoing discussions with those stakeholders.

Even in the public information sessions, we had feedback from shuttle providers who take people to the Overland Track and pick people up from the Overland Track, and they're keen. They already see a market to help service, to get people to the start and pick them up from the walk, and loop into the Overland Track, potentially, and those sorts of networks.

Similarly, we have accommodation providers in Queenstown - and I've got a meeting with another one next week. So, we're constantly in discussion with hotel providers and accommodation providers going, 'When is this walk going to happen?', because they want to know when they can scale up their operations or do renovations, or upgrade things to cater for the walkers that will come for those nights or two either side, and how they get there.

**Ms BURNET** - What is the breakdown in the modelling of the percentage of overseas and interstate visitors versus locals for using this?

**Mr EVANS** - The experience from the Three Capes and the Overland Track is that the Tasmanian contingent is pretty low. I think it's about - it's over 80 per cent, or less than 20 per cent of Tasmanians.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, it's 17 per cent, I think, for Three Capes or Overland Track and 12 or 13 for the other. So you are looking at 80-plus from interstate or overseas.

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Ultimately, if you are looking at the objective of the walk, it is to attract people to Tasmania and the west coast region, and encourage them to come here and stay longer, and spend more money. That's your primary market.

**Mr EVANS** - To clarify, 17 per cent of Three Capes Track walkers are Tasmanian and 12 per cent for the Overland Track.

**Ms BURNET** - I have a question in relation to the TWWHA, this being pretty close to the TWWHA. What's the likelihood of this being taken up as part of the TWWHA?

**Ms MULLER** - At this stage, we are not doing any work in terms of looking at the classification of the land. It is protected. It is a conservation area, largely. It's there for recreational purposes currently, so the proposed use is consistent with its current classification. We have taken the TWWHA into consideration in terms of visual impacts.

**Ms BURNET** - And the natural benefits? Obviously, it is a conservation area but the natural features of it: is it an important piece of land?

**Ms MULLER** - We have certainly done extensive work assessing and considering the impact on those important natural values.

**Mr RYAN** - Specifically in relation to the World Heritage Area, part of our assessment in terms of the hut locations was to identify sites that were not visible at all from the TWWHA.

**Ms BURNET** - That really wasn't my question. The question was whether this was going to be incorporated, or was there any thought of this area being incorporated into the TWWHA because of its natural values?

**Ms MULLER** - There's no work that we are undertaking currently to reclassify.

**Ms BURNET** - Okay. My second question is around the mineral exploration, which you've touched on. It's a possibility, no doubt, that there could be mining in this area.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, there's mineral exploration licences all throughout the west coast and throughout this particular area. We have met with TMEC, the Tasmanian Minerals and Energy Council, and Mineral Resources Tasmania on numerous occasions to discuss our walk, and how the walk and mineral exploration activities can co-exist. The walk starts off the Lake Spicer Track, which is an access track that was originally put in there for mineral exploration and continues to be used for mineral exploration. We are working in partnership with them to ensure that both activities continue and can continue at the same time.

**Ms BURNET** - So there could be a mine opened in this area, or is it just for exploration?

**Mr RYAN** - Well, it's a possibility if there is an exploration licence over the area. If they find something they would have to put in to -

**Ms BURNET** - We're going to spend \$40 million and that's a possibility, though?

**Mr RYAN** - Part of the selection of the track route was to avoid the centre of those - most of those exploration licence areas cover a big area, but if you actually look at the historical

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records of what is in those, it's generally the middle of them is what they're trying to find and there's a big buffer around the outside of that. We've tried to keep our track to the edge. There are sections of our track that aren't covered by any mineral exploration licences and that's where we've obviously tried to concentrate on, to avoid that potential conflict.

**Ms BURNET** - My last question is, from a Parks' perspective, is there any other classification that would stop that sort of mineral exploration? If it was a reclassification, rather than a conservation area?

**CHAIR** - Is that out of the remit of this proposal?

**Ms BURNET** - The question that I'm - like this could have huge impacts - financial impacts on -

**Ms MULLER** - I'm not sure I understand the question.

**Ms BURNET** - A conservation area, you can do mineral exploration. Is there any other classification where you can't do mineral exploration?

**Ms RATTRAY** - I'm pretty sure mineral exploration covers everywhere - is my understanding. It covers prime agricultural land, it's open slather.

**Ms BURNET** - Maybe you can take that on notice.

**Ms MULLER** - If that's possible.

**CHAIR** - Alright, so the question will be, what would stop mineral exploration on this particular site?

**Ms BURNET** - Is conservation area or is there a different classification where mineral exploration would not occur?

**Ms RATTRAY** - It's a bit of a follow-on from both Ms Burnet and from Mr Shelton because we touched on the Bob Brown Foundation, or it might have just been Bob Brown himself who made the proposal, and you made some tweaks around this particular proposal, to fall in line with what was proposed, but it has been suggested that there's a trans-Tarkine track proposed by the Bob Brown Foundation for far less money, and yet is more workable and a better value proposal. What we saw this morning with that Bob Brown proposal, and what has been presented here, is that anywhere near the trans-Tarkine track? That's a completely -

**Mr RYAN** - That's one of the options that was considered in the location assessment study.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Okay, so that was a secondary option that was put forward by Bob Brown in relation to what was proposed?

**Mr RYAN** - It wasn't strictly a proposal. He was just saying, 'if you're going to go to the Tyndall Range, then don't follow this alignment, I suggest going this way.' He wasn't then saying, 'oh throw out our other proposal, that's a bad idea,' it was in response to the Philosopher's Tale proposal.

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**Ms RATTRAY** - So the trans-Tarkine track, was - I mean obviously it didn't have a feasibility study because there's only one track proposal that did have that. Was this high on the list or didn't get a guernsey like my east coast people?

**Mr RYAN** - I will have to have a look through the background report, but it was certainly considered. I don't know where it ranked in the scheme of things.

**CHAIR** - Could we put that question on notice perhaps?

**Ms RATTRAY** - I'm sure there was a shortlist, but I just was interested. It was put forward in one of the submissions that the committee received.

**CHAIR** - We might move on. I'm conscious of time. Page 12, 13, page 14, interpretation.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I have a question in regard to that. I did read - and forgive me for not being able to point to exactly what submission, but it also talked about the fact that it was suggested that this particular track doesn't need a lot of interpretation, purely the scenery and the ambience and the whole experience was the interpretation, from the person who was undertaking the walk. Am I wrong? Did I read that wrong - that there is not going to be heaps of signage saying 'this is what you'll feel' or 'this is what you'll see'? What's the suggestion?

**Mr RYAN** - In terms of our proposal or?

**Ms RATTRAY** - It could've been somebody else's. There's myriads of them there.

**CHAIR** - I think in one of the other submissions, talking about -

**Ms RATTRAY** - Yes, that was saying that interpretation wasn't high on the list of what walkers were looking for in this particular area. So, are you expecting to do a lot of interpretation on the track?

**Mr EVANS** - Yes. So, I think it might have come from Charlie Bravo Design, who are our interpretation consultants. It wasn't so much saying that they won't be doing lots of interpretation - there's lots of work they're doing - but one of the themes they're looking at is 'don't crowd the walk with interpretation,' in terms of physical interpretation. So, every few hundred metres, there won't be a track-marker-in-your-face type thing; allow the natural splendour to largely speak for itself. That comes from the interpretation consultants themselves. They're doing lots of work with the key themes and the sub-themes and looking at apps and work with consultants.

**Ms RATTRAY** - So, that's in conflict, really. We're not going to have a lot of interpretation but yes, we're doing a lot of interpretation.

**Mr EVANS** - At strategic locations.

**Mr RYAN** - I think that the point of difference there is that there's not a lot of interpretation on-track. The focus of the interpretation is around the hut sites and the shelter sites, rather than, like Joe said, every hundred metres you have a sign telling you what

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everything is. So, very focused interpretation around the built infrastructure, rather than creating more infrastructure just for the sake of interpretation.

**CHAIR** - A bit more subtle.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thank you.

**Mr SHELTON** - A question around the building design, and it was mentioned that fire is more prevalent in our environment now than what it has been, with the changing climate and so forth. The design in most of the pictures, or the artist's impressions, it appears to be timber-based, natural-based, all that sort of thing but, of course, that's not so fire retardant. In the design, are we looking at materials that look natural but are fire retardant? If you could just talk through that a little bit because in one of the designs it appears to have - similar to the wooden flume upside down - it appears to have a big wooden gutter in it. While that would be fantastic, if any embers land on it, it's going to burn if it's timber.

**Mr RYAN** - That's one of those interpretation features that's built into the design. So, that is attributed to the woodstave pipeline, but it is largely decorative. So, it sits underneath a metal gutter, that's not actually a gutter as such - it's more just there for interpretation purposes. That's that feature. A lot of the materials - and Joe can probably talk to this better than I can - the fire rating of those materials is a key factor. All the buildings have been fire-rated and meet current standards for that environment.

**Mr EVANS** - It will all be signed off by a building surveyor. The architects are looking, for example, at F27, which is a fire-rated material, which is a blackbutt, for all the exposed timber. There's always that balance between costs and compliance, so anywhere there's exposed, structural timber at this stage, we're looking at a blackbutt F27, which is compliant with Australian standards for fire.

**Mr RYAN** - They have to meet the appropriate bushfire attack level standard for their vegetation type and the type of buildings that we have.

**CHAIR** - As a supplementary to Mr Shelton's question, could you talk us through the way in which you're going to power these pods and the actual site itself? You ran through a few ideas this morning and they sound quite innovative. Could you run through, for the record, what that's going to look like?

**Mr RYAN** - Sure. So, at both hut sites -

**CHAIR** - Like power generation?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, we'll have a combination of power options. We'll be doing mini and micro, mini hydro systems. So, on the outflows of both Lake Huntley and Lake Mary, there will be a small outlet pipe that will draw water from the outlet stream into a small turbine that wouldn't even be as big as this desk and, once the water goes through there, it basically gets diverted back into the same stream. So, we have one of those at each of the hut sites.

Part of the orientation and shape and aspect of the buildings is also to have solar panels on the roofs, so we'll then have solar power that can generate electricity as well. They will both be fed through a battery system, so there'll be a central system that will switch between the two,

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so if we're getting lots of rain and no sun, the hydro will be drawing all the power, but if suddenly you get weeks like this where it's really dry and no rain, then the solar will be generating all the power. That will also be stored in batteries.

If we get a period where there's no solar gain and for whatever reason you're not running a mini hydro, you can have days of power from a battery system as well. We're pretty confident with those options. In isolation, the mini hydro will be enough to power everything that we have on site and, similarly, the solar will be. Together, they will complement each other so that we can balance those so that they're not having -

**CHAIR** - Will the campsites have access to the same bathroom and showering facilities as people in the pods or the bunks? Is that right? Or are they going to have separate facilities?

**Mr RYAN** - All the facilities are shared, so everyone staying there will use the same toilets and kitchens. There are no showers though. I must point that out.

**CHAIR** - Regardless of whether you are a camper. No showers? Oh dear, what about a hose?

**Mr RYAN** - There are not showers involved purely for environmental reasons. We have to try to manage the grey water. So yes, basically, toilets, sinks, interpretation space lounges and kitchen/dining, that's all shared.

We have individual drying cupboards for each bunk room and the standalone pods. We've also put some specific ones just for the tent-based campers within that same footprint of the main building. They can bring their wet weather gear and leave their boots overnight if they want to in the drying cupboards so that there isn't that temptation which happens on the Overland Track and places like that where everyone just pours all their wet weather gear into the main kitchen/dining/lounge area, and you sit in there with smelly boots and socks trying to eat your tea. We're trying to keep those separate. And having that extra power over and above what we have anywhere else.

On the Overland Track and even Three Capes, you have to fly in gas to cook or for a heater, or wood pellets for heaters and that sort of stuff. We will have the ability to generate electricity for electric heating and cooking so we're not flying in gas or pellets on a regular basis for heating or cooking.

**CHAIR** - On that, we discussed this morning but can you provide it as well for the record: what is the strategy or the plan for the removal of waste from the site, and what would that look like?

**Mr RYAN** - The toilet waste will be collected in full-capture pods, the same system that we use on the Overland Track, Frenchmans Cap and Three Capes. Basically, we capture everything and then we fly individual pods out to a central location where they can be pumped out into a pump truck and taken to a sewage treatment plant. So everything from the toileting will be collected so we don't have to try to deal with that in the environment.

In terms of other waste, the grey water, say, from handwashing and washing up will go through a grey water system on site. But the toilet waste will all be flown off-site.

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**CHAIR** - What about people who are hiking and might have wrappers and so forth? Whatever they bring in, they take out? Is that how it works?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes. Part of the walk will involve a briefing at the start of the walk. There will be safety messages in that; there will be gear checks; there will also be Leave No Trace messages. One of those bushwalking principles is whatever you carry in, you carry out. And having host rangers onsite at the huts also will help to reinforce those messages and make sure that people are carrying their waste out with them.

**CHAIR** - Do you have biosecurity measures in place to make sure that no contamination is coming from other areas into that site on people's boots and so forth? Have you got that far in, how you are going to protect that unique environment from outside contamination?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, I am happy for someone else to answer - our typical approach because it is our typical approach.

**CHAIR** - It is important for the record because it has been brought up in one of the submissions.

**Mr SHELTON** - It's a standard facility for most walks.

**Mr CAHILL** - We're planning to have boot-wash stations at the start of the track. We've got a biosecurity plan that was part of the environmental impact statement, so we'll be adhering to that through both the construction and operation of the walk. The construction phase as well is a really critical point in managing the potential to bring in pathogens and weeds, so there'll be strict wash-down procedures for contractors, vehicles, material, et cetera, during the construction as well - as well as messaging through the operation.

**Ms BURNET** - In relation to the bushfire protection modifications, what will need to happen around each pod?

**Mr EVANS** - If you look at the plan, there should be an orange dotted line and a purple dotted line on the site plan.

**Ms BURNET** - What page is that?

**Mr EVANS** - The site plan is in the appendix at the back, on your left-hand side. You will see there is a purple dash line and an orange dash line. They're our hazard management areas, mandatorily set by our fire engineers to protect the buildings. They will be managed to a certain height. I forget the height. Yes, a lowered cleared vegetation as a protection barrier, exclusion zone around the structures. The class of buildings, we don't require those for toilets or the rangers' services building. But you'll also notice the rangers' hut has a purple one as well. That's an exclusion zone. Basically, it's a buffer to protect from bushfire risk.

**Ms BURNET** - Can you describe how long each of the areas at Lake Huntley -

**Mr EVANS** - Yes. The Lake Mary building, as mentioned, was just over 60 metres long. It is quite a linear, narrow building to capture the northern orientation and makes it quite narrow. That key observation point from the Day 2 walk. Lake Huntley, the two wings are around 35 metres to 40 metres in length. We have square metreage areas we can provide if

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need be. It's a bit shorter for Lake Huntley. Around 40 metres is the maximum length of the wing. We can provide the square metreage footprint if needed.

**Ms BURNET** - Yes, that would be useful. I am curious to know what sort of fire activity there has been in the Tyndall Range.

**Mr RYAN** - As in bushfire activity?

**Ms BURNET** - Yes.

**Mr RYAN** - The area has been burnt before. There's a history of bushfires in the area, particularly if you look at where the buttongrass is, particularly. Typically, those are areas that have been burnt historically. We have done planned burns in the area as well to try to protect some of the natural values in the area. The Tyndall Plateau, because it is traditionally fairly wet, my understanding is that it hasn't burnt historically. That's why you've got some pretty old valuable alpine species that people are pretty keen to protect from bushfire. We have done planned burns around the outside of the Tyndall Range to try to reduce fuel loads and reduce the risk of bushfire getting up onto the plateau.

**Ms BURNET** - It would be an important area and one of the highest risks, I suppose, with the project?

**Mr RYAN** - Risk of?

**Ms BURNET** - Bushfire?

**Mr RYAN** - Potentially. I guess one of the benefits we will have is we won't necessarily be encouraging people to bring fuel stoves and things like that because we are providing all the electric cooktops and pots and pans, and all those sorts of things in the huts. So, it's only if people decide to cook outside of that for lunch, or something, that they might bring fuel stoves. Probably the biggest risk might be during construction with machinery. But we'd have emergency management plans and protocols around weather conditions.

Alek might be able to talk more about some of the things that the builders and contractors will have in place to prevent the risk of sparks and bushfires starting during the construction phase.

**Mr CAHILL** - There will be construction environmental management plans which will have to be strictly adhered to by the contactors during the build, and then action plans if there is a spark.

**Mr RYAN** - There may be days where the fire danger's too high, where you'll just say, there's no works. That's typical in all our reserves anyway. It's just like no hot works during these conditions because the risk of bushfire's too great.

**Mr EVANS** - I know the engineer Aldanmark is deliberately trying to design the structure in a way where we don't need a lot of welding, if any, onsite. In relation to your question around footprint, we're obviously always balancing that fit for purpose size for the 44 people in comfort but also considering cost. Not designing that with any excess, we're obviously always reviewing that with the architect. We have Lake Huntley, about 200 square

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metres smaller than Lake Mary, it'd be more of a restrictive site with existing conditions and area. That's just over 1300 square metres of building footprint. That's for all structures, not just the main hut building.

**Ms BURNET** - The rangers' huts as well?

**Mr EVANS** - As well, yes. It's more like 1550 around that mark. Obviously, small design revisions are currently happening, so I can't give a square metre, probably, but around that figure.

**Ms BURNET** - For comparison - because I'm not very good with the area as spatially challenged - can you compare that to the size of Pelion Hut?

**Mr EVANS** - The comparison I used was a soccer pitch. For comparison, a standard-sized soccer pitch is a bit over 7000 square metres. At Huntley we're probably looking at about 1300, give or take a few square metres based on those design provisions I probably don't have right now, but it's around that ballpark. A fifth of a soccer pitch, so we're talking much less than a half with Lake Mary slightly larger.

**Ms BURNET** - Thank you.

**Mr RYAN** - We have also done comparisons with the Three Capes' huts, both indoor and outdoor areas, just to compare deck space and indoor spaces and that sort of thing. Certainly, the huts we're proposing are very similar. The Three Capes' huts probably sit in between the two Next Iconic Walk huts in terms of area, so they're very comparable in that sense in our overall footprint. Generally, we've got slightly more indoor space and that's probably in response to the weather that we anticipate, and they've got bigger deck space because they'd probably try to encourage people to spend more time outside on the decks at the Three Capes.

**Mr HARRISS** - On the bushfires, have the construction sites been bushfire assessed yet? Do we know what compliance needs to be construction-wise?

**Mr RYAN** - A bushfire planner has done their plan and also a fire engineer has done their plan. That's all been in consultation and signed off by Tasmania Fire Service. That's part of what this response is.

**Mr HARRISS** - We understand what construction materials are at that because of the assessment?

**Mr RYAN** - They have - I can't tell you off the top of my head. There's a bushfire attack level rating for all the buildings. There's a different BAL rating for habitable buildings for sleeping as opposed to toilets and other things. The engineers and everyone are designing it around those ratings. We've also introduced fire hose reels as part of the plan. There are dedicated bushfire water tanks that we can't use for anything else. That's one of the differences - in the Three Capes they're sort of combined in the same tank. The bottom half is bushfire, and the top half is drinking water-type thing. In an emergency, they have a reserve. We've basically got dedicated tanks that are just for bushfire. On top of that we're also going to have basically temporary sprinkler systems that we can bring in each summer that, if we need to, we can

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connect them via pump from the lakes to pump in the event of a fire. They're really only to use if there's an actual fire rather than building them into the fabric.

**Mr EVANS** - To clarify, the BAL is 29 which came about from fire engineer reports. All designs, materials, electrical will have to be compliant with that.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I understand the project's market research confirmed there would be a stronger demand for tents and space. We've just talked about the space available - the soccer field analogy. If there was a less demand for pods, a higher demand for tenting, is there a capacity to facilitate that or is it you can only have 10 tent spaces, and it doesn't matter whether the pods are filled or not. What happens in that scenario?

**Mr EVANS** - I will let Keith probably clarify. I think a lot of the market research was - in terms of - if I could choose from a standalone campground, they'd prefer to have the campground there rather than standalone Keith, I think more so. Was that when we talked market research?

**Ms RATTRAY** - There was a reduction wasn't there, originally 20, down to 10. What if you need more of the tenting availability, and less of - say the pods, which obviously come at a higher expense? Can you facilitate that?

**Mr RYAN** - For the most part, particularly given the weather conditions, the demand for the tent will be the lowest of all of them. That's what our research showed when we did the market research, that the hut-based options - whether they're in bunk rooms or individual standalone pods - had the highest demand, over and above the tent-based camping.

That's partly in response to the target market you're trying to get, and then the weather. Then, so people know that they're going to have somewhere safe and comfortable at the end of the night to sleep.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Can you facilitate it if that's not quite how it plays out? Can you have more than 10 people tenting?

**Mr SHELTON** - Isn't it managed by the fact that you cart them out there, it's already been managed as they buy their tickets? You can't have any more than -

**Ms RATTRAY** - I mean what if the market is asking for more tent opportunities, and perhaps they're not looking for so many of the pods, maybe the higher end, which is what the pod arrangement is. Can you facilitate, as it's planned for this, or would that have to be something that would be looked at a later time?

**Ms MULLER** - I think it would have to be something that's looked at at a later time.

**Ms RATTRAY** - That's all I needed, thank you. Will there be any limited public access during the build or during the development of the walk, and then after? Are there any limitations on public access anywhere?

**Mr RYAN** - There are two elements to that. With the activities that you can currently do in the area, you will be able to continue.

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**Ms RATTRAY** - Yes, you said I can still take my four-wheel-drive up a track and I can still get in and out -

**Mr RYAN** - Like any construction site, though, we would want to prevent access to the public during construction of both the track and the huts. Then the track itself will be a fully booked and paid for experience, so we won't be encouraging the public to walk along that track. They can do what they can currently do, walk onto the Tyndall Plateau, they can four-wheel-drive the Lake Spicer Track, but we're not going to be encouraging people to walk into the hut sites, because we don't have space for them there. The whole focus of that is to be a capped number to keep that experience sustainable and appropriate for that setting.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Is there anything you can do about that? I mean we're not going to have a policeman up there saying you can't go.

**Unknown** - Officer.

**Ms RATTRAY** - What'd I say?

**Unknown** - Man.

**Ms RATTRAY** - A police person.

**Unknown** - Officer. Sorry.

**Mr RYAN** - There are issues in terms of compliance and how you try to enforce anything like that, and the reality of doing that is difficult in those situations. We will have host rangers at the hut sites. If you turn up to the hut sites, that's probably a point where you might be turned around.

Most likely access is from the northern end because the public can't access Lake Margaret currently anyway, because Hydro Tasmania manages the road's boom gates. The northern end is still boom gated, but obviously, you can get a key from Parks and drive along the Spicer Track.

There's a natural point where if people were going in for a day walk, you've either got to commit to then go downhill to the hut site or you turn around and go back from there.

**Ms RATTRAY** - That would still be publicly accessible?

**Mr RYAN** - Signage at that point would say, you realise you're on a track that's ticketed, paid for, and encourage people to turn around at that point.

**CHAIR** - Can you talk us through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* requirements you're required to pass and the Reserve Activity Assessments? You need tick-offs from both of those still. What are your timeframes on that and are they risks to this project?

**Mr RYAN** - We're halfway through the Reserve Activity Assessment process, which is the Parks and Wildlife Service approval process for any activities on reserve land. We submitted an EIS through that process some time ago and the proposal was released for public

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comment in October last year - October to November last year - for six weeks. We received 115 submissions, I think, all up. At the moment, those comments have to come back to Parks, as the proponent, the proposed developer, to respond to and then amend plans, or change plans, whatever, and then go through that assessment. As I said, we're sort of in the middle of that assessment process at the moment.

We have referred the project to the Australian Government for assessment under the EPBC Act. After a self-assessment suggested that we didn't need to do that, we've chosen to go through the highest level of approvals that we could, so we've still referred that to the Australian Government for assessment. That's currently open for public comment. I think it closes in a day or two. The Federal Minister has 10 days from the close of that public comment period to determine if it's a controlled action or not.

What that means, if it's not a controlled action, then that's an approval and we can proceed through other approvals that we're going through. If it is a controlled action, then there's a further level of assessment that will follow. If it's deemed not a controlled action, then it's probably a really low-risk, and by the end of the month we would know where we're going. If it's a controlled action, then the biggest risk is probably around timeframes, rather than anything. That's probably the biggest risk with most of the approvals, is just delaying the inevitable start of construction. Given the weather constraints, if you miss a six-month window, then you've lost a year effectively.

**Ms RATTRAY** - So, 2032 might not be - 31?

**CHAIR** - 2029.

**Mr RYAN** - 2029-30 is what we're looking at.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Right. So, it might not meet that timeframe if something -

**Mr RYAN** - If the approvals get delayed and we push into another year, yes.

**CHAIR** - Can I ask a quick question around the end of the walk, where you have the power station? Are you intending to do any renovation works to that particular site? Is that going to be turned into a feature inside or is it just the facade that's going to be used?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, so we've -

**Ms RATTRAY** - That's Lake Margaret.

**Mr RYAN** - That's Lake Margaret Power Station. We've worked with Hydro -

**Ms RATTRAY** - Hydro would be happy if you did.

**CHAIR** - It's a very striking looking site, that's all.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes. Look, it's still in operation, so we can't really touch that main building. Visitor access to that space is pretty restricted as well, for safety reasons. There is an old hall there which we did consider at some stage as being the kind of end point for the walk, but it's heritage listed. There are a lot of issues in terms of, again, how do you access that site through

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a working power station. Where we've sort of settled is to develop a standalone shelter and toilet outside the envelope of the current existing operation. It's still in that heritage site and we've tried to design it so it fits in with the existing buildings and the heritage themes of the area, but, yes, that will be a standalone spot for the shuttle to come in and pick people up. So, yes, we've tried to -

**CHAIR** - Probably need a shelter for them - maybe a coffee.

**Mr EVANS** - On page 22, there's an early concept of what that might look like with some site plans in appendix 1.

**Mr RYAN** - We're still working through with Hydro, in terms of long-term licence agreement, for who's responsible for what and what elements of the site and that sort of thing, both during the construction and the long-term operation. We're looking at the possibility of incorporating tours of the power station and the village, which you can do on a paid tour at the moment, but potentially having that as an add-on to the walk. Or, it might just be simpler that we add that into the price of the walk and everyone gets that as part of the experience as well.

**Ms RATTRAY** - How far are those discussions or negotiations down the track? I mean, you don't want to leave that to the last thing and that's the sticking point.

**Mr RYAN** - We have contracts with Crown Law at the moment, which we're reviewing the details of. So, yes, it's pretty progressed. In our submission, you would have seen we had supporting letters from Hydro and we've had three of them over multiple years, basically reinforcing that they're supportive of the concept and willing to work with us to make it happen. It's more the fine details that we're nutting out, but there's high-level, in-principle agreement with Hydro and Parks to make it work.

**Ms BURNET** - In relation to the Environmental Impact Statement, was that altered from the initial Environmental Impact Statement - your plans associated with that?

**Mr RYAN** - When it goes in, then the public has their say period and then we have the opportunity to modify based on that feedback, and then we will submit a final EIS. We haven't done that yet. There will be a modified EIS that will ultimately go through for the final assessment as part of the Reserve Activity Assessment.

**Ms BURNET** - Who does that RAA get assessed by?

**Mr RYAN** - That's the Parks and Wildlife Service.

**Ms BURNET** - It's an internal assessment.

**Ms MULLER** - Yes, correct.

**Mr SHELTON** - A quick one, which comes to the logistics of how it would work, and you probably haven't got to that stage of planning, but you don't want to put 44 people on the track all at once, cart them out in a big bus and then go bang or fizzle. Is it deemed that it will be staggered so that every hour you take someone out from 7.30 and picking up from Lake Margaret via a similar thing because not everyone is going to finish at the same time. If

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it's only the one pick-up time then, obviously, people are standing around waiting in the cold and the rain, or the sun.

**Ms RATTRAY** - No, in the shelter.

**Mr SHELTON** - Yes, or the shelter, but they're hanging around. That will be an operation on its own, the logistics of getting people there and getting them back again.

**Mr RYAN** - We would separate them into smaller groups because we don't want to chuck them all out on the track at the same time because you want to have that experience where you're not walking with 20 people in a long conga line. They will be staggered both at the start and the end. Both the start and end will be really well defined, particularly when you are on your last day coming in. Part of the briefing that the host ranger can provide the night before is that it roughly takes people this long to get to the end point, if you find yourself at this lookout or the shelter on the last day, you have an hour to go, or whatever it is, so that people can pace themselves so they don't turn up and have to wait two hours for the bus, or whatever. And, there will be set times, and then, 'If you are not here by this time, you are cutting it fine to make the last bus,' and those sorts of things.

**Mr SHELTON** - How far is it to walk into Queenstown?

**Mr RYAN** - Too far I reckon. After a 10 kilometre walk.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Was it eight kilometres? Was it?

**Mr SHELTON** - It is not that far, but it probably is after a three-day walk.

**CHAIR** - Subsequent to your question, communication with people on the track - I have had a few people in Queenstown this morning complain to me about Telstra - we're here at the moment - with their connections. Will people be using EPIRBs, or how will they communicate whilst they are on the track? Is there wireless connection in some of those areas along the tracks because it is not that far out of town, is it?

**Mr RYAN** - On high points you will get phone reception, but we have to remember it is a bushwalk and people go to get away from technology.

**CHAIR** - Will they be required to take with them an emergency beacon or is it close enough that they don't have to worry?

**Mr RYAN** - We would probably recommend it. We have not got down to the detail of the specifics of that, but I suspect we would suggest that they carry an EPIRB, and that's good practice to get into on any sort of overnight walks.

**Mr SHELTON** - You never know when there is going to be some sort of medical issue halfway along the track.

**Mr RYAN** - There are versions of those where you can text and message through various technologies these days. There are also modern phones now - we discovered with one of the contractors who went out there, if you have a certain phone and have Telstra coverage, you can

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do satellite calls and messages from anywhere basically. I think, as we get closer to this opening, some of that technology might change and it might be really accessible.

**CHAIR** - Any more questions?

**Ms BURNET** - A question around risk management, and it follows on from you, Chair, about people being lost. In low-cloud or if there are longer snow events than you expect, what sort of markers are you likely to have on the track?

**Mr RYAN** - I think we'd only consider the snow poles or markers that you would need in the higher altitude parts of the track, and they're pretty limited in terms of the profile of the track. So, we only get up over 900 metres on a couple of occasions, and two of those points are just access lookouts, not off the actual main track. So we would strategically, and over the course of the build, work out where the highest risk areas are and then we would signpost those with track markers accordingly.

The track will be pretty easy to follow, though, because of the standard of track that we're building. So it's only if you get into snow-type conditions that you would lose the actual track itself and potentially need markers.

**Ms BURNET** - I'm curious about the weather again. In the west of the state, do you get lots of blustery weather coming through, like low cloud? What happens?

**Mr RYAN** - You certainly get weather fronts coming through pretty frequently on the westerly air systems. In terms of low cloud, typically we find that that tends to sit around the mountain tops and the ranges, so you won't see the top of the Tyndall Range. But where most of the track is, you'll be below the ceiling, the cloud cover. We've got two cameras out there and weather stations. Over the last year or two, we've been monitoring the weather and the conditions, and that sort of thing, so we have the ability to monitor that over time.

**Ms RATTRAY** - A question around the \$80,000 for the art scheme component of the interpretation fit-out and commissioning. That's where it's bundled at this point in time. I'm interested in what you're thinking. Is that going to be some interpretation at the huts? I'd like to think that it's going to be something useful and practical that's made.

**Mr RYAN** - We haven't finalised that with our interpretation consultant. They've been to Queenstown on multiple occasions and met with local artists and makers, so I think we could spend that \$80,000 multiple times with the people who they've already spoken to.

**Ms RATTRAY** - But you only have one lot of \$80,000.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes. But it's in the same bucket as far as we're treating the interpretation. We have some interesting things around, potentially, sculptures, some water features to -

**Ms RATTRAY** - I mean, given that budgets do run over - and you'd like to think that the contingency of \$5 million is sufficient - but if there's any delay it might be eaten up fairly quickly. Is there a sense that there will be some practical aspects to that? A water feature's not really going to -

**CHAIR** - Shelter would probably be better.

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**Mr RYAN** - Some of the things we've talked about are different lighting fittings in the kitchen, dining, lounge area, different seats. We've got natural timbers or reclaimed timbers in the lounge area. So there are lots of different alternatives there that we can use. We have to have that element, but we can make it an artistic element, and interpretive element as well.

**Ms RATTRAY** - If you just keep your focus on practicality, I think it's always a useful thing. A fancy water feature somewhere up there is probably not going to be advantageous.

**Mr HARRISS** - Do we know what procurement looks like at the moment? Will it be one principal contractor, or will there be multiple ones overseen by Parks?

**Mr RYAN** - I think, realistically, we'll probably have multiple. Historically, we've typically separated different elements out. So you would have, say, the track as a different contract from the huts and then, within that, you might even break that down even further. You might offer both huts as separable portions, so you might get one builder doing one hut, another builder doing another hut. Economies of scale, it makes sense to probably combine them. The design is designed to be constructed off-site, prefabricated and built. If you are doing two of them, it's going to be more efficient than doing one separately. The only way you would probably do that is if there were real time pressures and you wanted to get it done quickly.

Probably the biggest time pressure is really around the track construction because you are building 30 kilometres of untracked area. That we might offer to multiple track construction crews to do different sections, and they might come from different ends. There's lots of different ways that you might offer the track tenders out as well. I guess to answer your question, we haven't finalised that but there are lots of different ways we can tender it. But more often than not, we will break that up.

The other element I didn't mention is also probably the helicopter operations that service both the track construction and the building construction. There are pros and cons both ways of going for a principal contractor that manages the helicopter as well. But then how do you do that if you are then managing track builds as well as hut builds, and who gets priority for the lifts that day, and that sort of thing? Sometimes that's easier if we separate that and we manage the helicopter drops.

**Mr HARRISS** - If it's broken down, Parks will project manage that. Is that how it works normally?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes.

**Mr EVANS** - Further to Keith's comment, there are parts of the build that don't rely on helicopters. The depots are all accessible by road vehicles, so there may be opportunities to look at packaging up work so a smaller local contractor who may not be experienced with large heli-operations may have access to a smaller Lake Margaret Power Station or depot construction - a smaller piece of work - and isn't reliant on heli-ops to build that. It's a chance for more options, and more local options as well.

**Ms BURNET** - We have a breakdown of information for funding and development costs in our report. It is not incredibly detailed. For the record, could you describe why there isn't more information in this report in relation to some of these items, please?

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**Ms MULLER** - The overview of the cost for the delivery of the project is done at a reasonably high level. That's with a view to driving some competitive outcomes in terms of the tendering and procurement process.

**Ms BURNET** - Okay. I know it's probably not covered, Mr Harriss mentioned that in-house project work. What other things are likely to be covered in-house in relation to the design and construction?

**Ms MULLER** - In-house is the project team, who -

**Ms BURNET** - Just the project team?

**Mr RYAN** - In terms of construction? Alek's position is project manager for the construction phase of the works. Most likely we will also have a track construction supervisor and a building works supervisor who are basically out on track during the build to oversee contractors and, essentially, quality control as well. When a builder puts in a payment claim, they will be able to see whether it's actually happened and they will be the first point of call if there is some variations or issues that have to be dealt with on site.

**Ms BURNET** - Overall, how many Parks staff will be associated with the overall project once it's constructed?

**Mr RYAN** - Once it's constructed, the latest figures that we're working on, which is based on a year-round operation, we're looking at about the equivalent of 13.5 FTEs. That includes the host rangers out on track, rangers and field staff, maintenance staff, business enterprise manager and visitor reception staff in Queenstown that will do those briefings at the start and check people into the walk. That's where we're looking at the moment.

**Ms BURNET** - As additional staff or is that absorbed by other staff?

**Mr RYAN** - They would be new staff.

**Ms BURNET** - New staff?

**Mr RYAN** - And funded by the business enterprise. The business model that we're working on, the walker fees would basically pay for those positions.

**Ms RATTRAY** - And the maintenance?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Does anyone have any further questions? I'm conscious of time and we have other submissions. Thank you, we will talk to you again after we hear from our witnesses.

**The witnesses withdrew.**

**The Committee suspended from 3.40 p.m. to 3.48 p.m.**

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**CHAIR** - Welcome, our next witness is Grant Dixon, representative of the Tasmanian National Parks Association. What we're planning to do with this afternoon's hearing is provide 10 to 12 minutes for your presentation and then around another 10 minutes for questioning. That way we should ensure that every person's perspective is heard. We do have comprehensive evidence that has been provided by the witnesses already, which all Committee members have read, so we will also ask you questions to that.

**Mr DIXON** - Thank you for the opportunity to present today.

**Mr GRANT DIXON**, TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**Mr DIXON** - The Tasmanian National Parks Association has a particular interest in the appropriate management of reserved land in Tasmania.

**CHAIR** - I do believe I have to read you the statement before evidence.

**Mr DIXON** - Oh, sorry.

**CHAIR** - That's fine. Thank you for appearing before the Committee, Mr Dixon. The Committee is pleased to hear your evidence today. Just before you begin giving your evidence, I would like to inform you of some important aspects of committee proceedings. A committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament; this means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege. This is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom, without the fear of being sued or questioned in court or place out of parliament. It applies to ensure that parliament receives the very best information when conducting its enquiries. It is important to be aware that this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings.

This is a public hearing, members of the public and journalists may be present, and this means your evidence may be reported. Do you understand?

**Mr DIXON** - I do.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Mr Dixon, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr DIXON** - Yes, I would. Whilst noting, as you've said, that you've obviously got our submission and you've read through it, I'd like to work through a few - highlight a few salient points. In particular, the reason it's worth recapping some of those is also to address some of the points that have come up in the proponent's presentations earlier, actually. I have perhaps more information on, or perhaps a different view on, et cetera, so it's to relate everything in context, I guess.

As I started saying earlier, the Tasmanian National Parks Association (TNPA) has a longstanding - we've existed for 25 years - interest in the appropriate management of reserved land in Tasmania. In terms of my particular expertise and interest, I worked for the Parks and Wildlife Service and its predecessors for 25 years, specifically on back country management, monitoring impacts and such like, so I know a fair bit about constructing tracks and what goes on out there, and the impacts of such activities.

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The Tasmanian National Parks Association, as is apparent from our submission, has longstanding and fundamental concerns about this proposal, from the time it was first announced in 2018-19, and most of those still remain.

Starting with the choice of location, most of these dot points are summaries of what you will have already read, but it's worth noting that 35 locations were suggested by various public individuals or groups during the call for expressions of interest in 2018. Only two of those were on the west coast, and the other one has already been mentioned today as well - that was the Bob Brown Foundation proposal. The process that selected from those was basically opaque and the current proposal, around the Tyndalls, is essentially cherry-picked from one of them. It isn't really one of the proposals that came out. Parks made a choice in some opaque way.

Then, of course, there's been the feasibility study, solely into that choice, in 2021. A third option is briefly mentioned in that feasibility study, a third option in addition to two overnight options, and that was a series of day walks, making use of hubs on the west coast, like Queenstown. The Tasmanian National Parks Association and others have long argued that would be a better way of getting money into the community and bringing people to the west coast, than having a walk that's basically bus in, bus out, like Three Capes, for example.

In fact, in that 2021 cost-benefit study, even though the day walks weren't really assessed, they were just referred to as a benchmark, because it was all about an overnight walk already at that stage - the option for a series of day walks, for example, has a higher cost-benefit ratio. Seriously, if the benefits to the west coast communities and western Tasmania in general is really the priority, why are we talking about one of the options that didn't have the highest cost-benefit ratio? One of our strongest suggestions is that this latter option - reinvestigating the idea of a series of day walks and community hubs, rather than this massive amount of infrastructure in a currently undeveloped area, warrants consideration, before you start turning a sod.

In terms of the location as well, a couple of comments were made by the Parks representatives - I mean, despite claims to the contrary, it's pretty clear that this location was chosen because it's in Braddon. It was in the context of the elections, et cetera, at the time - and it's hardly surprising that the government of the day didn't choose an option that was proposed by the Bob Brown Foundation. That's why we're here really. It's not just about whether it's an appropriate site. Again, in terms of contributions to local communities, some of the other 33, 34, I think, might have contributed a bit more.

While we're on the subject of the Bob Brown Foundation, I mean, yes, Bob, or his foundation, I can't remember which, did make comments soon after the Tyndalls location was announced which led to the relocation of the route from the sensitive alpine plateau, which I will come back to for other reasons later, to its current site east of the range, but that was in no way support or acknowledgement that this was a good idea. It was just, in context, a less bad location, basically. Obviously, their proposal up in the Tarkine is the one they might've preferred.

I mentioned the feasibility study that is being talked about and it is obviously fundamental to where we are now, but it was carried out in 2021. A lot of things have happened since 2021, I mean, the model itself has changed, they've relocated a few things, there are now more structures, it now has a longer season, the number of modelled walkers has increased, obviously

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all aiming to do the arithmetic so that the thing stacks up. But, it's worth bearing in mind that the 2021 feasibility study, even though it was using a slightly different model, still concluded it was only marginally feasible and it was only marginally feasible if the budget was increased to \$40 million, which, of course, subsequently happened.

Once you factor in on top of that things like construction costs generally, not just in Tasmania but everywhere, have increased a lot in the last five years, it almost goes without saying that any government infrastructure project is going to go over budget. So we would question that this could ever possibly be built for \$40 million. If you want to be serious about it, it should go back and completely redo the feasibility study with all the current conditions and the current costing of everything, et cetera. If that's been done, great. It'd be nice for stakeholders outside like us to see the results, but I don't think it has. In order for the Committee to make an informed decision, I think you need to get an updated feasibility study.

The Three Capes Track inspired this and, notwithstanding the statements from Parks' staff that they've learned a lot since then and along the way, it's still perhaps instructive to reflect on the fact that it ended up costing basically three times the original estimate and then we only ended up with a two capes track. No detailed cost-benefit study has ever been released publicly that shows whether it really stacks up.

The various financial information about the Three Capes Track has been extracted from the government in more recent years due to questions in parliament from Tabatha Badger and an RTI. One of my colleagues, Rob Campbell, did an analysis of the Three Capes Track, which there's a link to in our submission. The link goes to a more substantive article than just the tables that are in our appendix and, basically, we've concluded that it was costing about \$6 million a year to operate the Three Capes Track. The income during those years we got the numbers for, 2022 to 2024, was less than that.

The Three Capes Track would appear, despite all the rhetoric about how successful it's been, to be operating at a loss, or barely making money, maybe in other years. It's certainly not making any return on capital investment, which is what a previous version of your Committee said was going to be the case.

You have \$6 million to run Three Capes Track in a much more benign, attractive environment weather-wise and less remote than here, but the figure still being used in most recent stuff I've seen, for the operational costs of the proposed Next Iconic Walk, are only \$2.9 million. It's going to be more than that, and if it's more than that, then how do you know whether the numbers stack up any more? Another reason for doing a proper feasibility study, again.

The TNPA is also concerned that building yet another major collection of infrastructure that Parks and Wildlife has to manage, when there aren't resources out there to even maintain the existing track network, basically just means ongoing degradation that's been happening now in some places for 20 years is just going to get worse. Of course, if the Next Iconic Walk doesn't make money - and the Three Capes Track is, indeed, losing money - then who's going to keep carrying the gap, basically?

The promotion of the Tyndalls is another concern, and illustrates the fact that Parks hasn't got the resources to look after what it's already got: The Tyndall Plateau is very sensitive and special. I will talk more about the values for that in a second. It's been acknowledged that that's

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the case because, in terms of moving the original proposal off the plateau, it wasn't just about the weather; it was about the trampling sensitivity.

The promotion of the Next Iconic Walk project by Parks and Wildlife itself has contributed to a massive increase in visitation to the plateau just of casual walkers, but they don't have any resources to start addressing the problem. The contribution of Parks was actually acknowledged briefly several years ago in terms of saying, 'Oh well, we'll put some money aside to look after the Tyndall Plateau, which is going to remain public access if the Next Iconic Walk is built', then the higher-ups decided that that would be withdrawn.

The responsibility of looking after this problem, created by one part of the agency, has now fallen to the cash-strapped on-ground rangers in the north west region. So far, nothing has happened. We've already got collateral damage to an irreplaceable asset just by promoting the idea of this walk. Who knows what's going to happen when it's actually up and running, and being fully promoted.

It's been acknowledged in the evidence by one of the Parks witnesses earlier that day walkers might access the northern end of the proposed Next Iconic Walk route. Whilst they wouldn't necessarily go on to the hut, it gets them up high on the range and potentially offers a more easy access to the sensitive alpine plateau from the north, and another informal track develops, and you've got another management problem to look after which requires resources. One thing leads to another, basically.

There are real concerns, demonstrated already, that there will be collateral damage to other irreplaceable natural assets by construction of this proposed track. Some of those natural values are very special. The existing land tenure, which has been mentioned as essentially providing an opportunity for this development to occur - and, in fact, was one of the criteria for calling for ideas, expressions of interest that led to those 35 submissions in 2018, was that it should be on lower level of protection reserve land and outside the World Heritage Area. The fact the proposal is within a conservation area and a regional reserve is no reflection of the actual level of values of the area. It's a reflection of the fact that the area is considered prospective for mineral exploration. Therefore, it's a mineral prospectivity zone under the *Mineral Resources Development Act 1995* and no government of any colour for a long time has been prepared to lock up land that someone might find something in, even though exploration has been going on for 100 years and there's not a mine there yet.

While I'm talking about that, you, I think, asked a question about land tenure and mineral exploration. In National parks and state reserve land tenures in Tasmania, under our Act, mining and mineral exploration are not allowed. But other land tenures - conservation area, regional reserve, nature recreation area - and there're a couple of others - mineral exploration and mining is allowed.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thank you.

**Mr DIXON** - One of the reasons for selecting this area for this development by the land manager responsible for conservation land management is that it gave them management flexibility to, essentially, avoid their conservation remit and propose the development unencumbered by an existing management plan. There are longstanding arguments for incorporating the reserved land into the World Heritage Area and probably increasing its tenure to a national park as a result. Going back 50 years, from both my organisation and its

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predecessors, this being a recent publication about potential extensions to World Heritage Area, that covers that. But also -

**CHAIR** - Just giving you a warning of - we're already going over time so maybe if you just want to pinpoint the really significant points that you'd like us to be aware of.

**Mr DIXON** - Okay. The predecessor to the Parks and Wildlife Service also produced a report that said the Tyndalls should be part of the existing World Heritage Area in 1990. The values are known, even though they're not recognised by tenure, and should be looked after better than they are. Building a new development of this scale through the middle of it is not the best way to do it.

I will touch on wilderness, and most of these words are in my submission so you can read them there. There was a bit of talk about visual impacts in the previous presentation. There's an appendix to our submission which talks about that as well. It just seems to beggar belief that a collection of structures that are a 60-metre-long hut, a 35-metre-long hut, 1300 metres in total, are not going to be visually intrusive from known viewpoints. With that in mind, just going back to here, that is the view of Lake Huntley from up on the Tyndall Range, now visited by several thousand walkers a year, probably, and the dot is where the Lake Huntley village - 15 structures - is going to be. The visual analysis people concluded that it was acceptable in context, but it's a pretty subjective statement, I would suggest.

Weather and safety has come up quite a bit in your questioning, so I won't continue on that.

Basically, we think that you should conclude negative for both the things that you're tasked with doing and, for both financial and environmental impact reasons, the Tyndall Range proposal, the Next Iconic Walk, is the wrong thing in the wrong place.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. I will open to questions.

**Ms BURNET** - Thank you, Mr Dixon. You talked about the sensitive alpine area. I am curious to know your understanding of fire in this area and potential impacts of fire if a bushfire were to go through this area?

**Mr DIXON** - The Tyndall Plateau is the alpine part, and its trampling sensitivity has been recognised by moving the original route idea off it, so that's good. The late Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick, who was arguably one of the ecology experts in Tasmania, concluded, based on studies up there, that it probably hadn't been burnt since the last Ice Age, which makes it pretty special in the context of alpine vegetation in Tasmania. Also, being in one of the western mountain ranges, it's more alpine than many other parts of western Tasmania because the tree line is lower the further you go west.

All the species up there that are iconic, the various endemic conifers, pencil pines, King Billy pines, *Nothofagus gunnii*, deciduous beech, lots of it is cushion heathland, et cetera, they are all fire-sensitive in that if they're seriously burnt, they don't recover. There are plenty of examples of that in the rest of Tasmania. The plateau is special anyway and deserves high-level fire management that may follow from the way Parks designates areas that they target for fire abatement activities. But if there is more intensive management, more people in the area at the

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foot of the range, notwithstanding that some of them don't need to carry stoves, you probably are increasing the risk of fire destroying what is an irreplaceable asset.

It's not just about the Next Iconic Walk. There's been reports to us from supporters out there in the last year or so of visitors to the Tyndall Plateau coming across campfire scars, for example, which suggests the education programs to not have fires in these places of years ago needs rejigging. There are a lot of potential ignition sources, and climate change, of course. It's a concern, yes.

**Ms BURNET** - You have walked up in this area, I take it. What sort of weather conditions have you faced through that?

**Mr DIXON** - Everything. It would be beautiful up there today. Tomorrow, I am not so sure. There is supposed to be 20 millimetres of rain in Queenstown tomorrow. Then, of course, in shoulder seasons outside of summer - we're talking about a year-round operation here - it'd be pretty horrible. Notwithstanding that you're off the crest to the range, you could be walking in the cloud and getting very wet. I note that the Parks presenters were saying, 'Okay, well therefore, we've got more comfy shelters, et cetera, for people to sit in' but if you can't see much and you're just scurrying from shelter to shelter, it doesn't sound like that much of an experience. It would be better to have a Next Iconic Walk built in a more benign climate.

**CHAIR** - You raised that day walks have a higher cost-benefit ratio. Could you talk us through where you developed that information from?

**Mr DIXON** - It's in the 2021 feasibility study. The starting point for the feasibility study was to assess whether what we've now got, or something like it, was feasible and a series of day walks was used as - I think they called it, a 'benchmark'. I can't remember the methodology - but they did the numbers for what is called a cost-benefit ratio. The option that they quoted for their option 3, which was a series of day walks, is three times their option 2, which was the best of the overnight walks. They're the numbers that I was referring to.

Intuitively, TNPA has long argued that, surely, a series of day walks keeps people in the communities, where they then have to stay overnight and spend money there, than having them bus in, maybe stay a night, go for a walk, and then nick off to Burnie or something.

**Ms RATTRAY** - It's an extensive submission, thank you for that.

**CHAIR** - Beautifully done.

**Mr SHELTON** - Obviously, you've done a lot of study and understand the process really well about walking tracks. You had some degradation there and a photo of it and you mentioned 2000 people annually probably use the plateau on the Tyndall Ranges. Given Tasmania and its selling point of 'clean, green' and so forth, we're obviously getting more and more tourists coming down here wanting to go for day walks and/or multiple day walks. How do we manage that, keep them on a decent track and off the so-called not defined tracks off the Tyndall Range? Isn't this project about trying to keep people on a defined track where they're not damaging our environment like you showed in the photo?

**Mr DIXON** - Yes, but the environment, within which this new track is proposed, is currently completely undeveloped, natural and undamaged. You're creating a footpath in a

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place that doesn't have anything at the moment. The better logic would be to, for example, find a place where there's already a track going to a place that could be promoted, then use the opportunity to harden that so that the environment gets protected and then you're not just creating another impact. The impact of the stuff on the Tyndall Plateau that I showed, for example, exists already, and, as I said, is being escalated by promotion around the Next Iconic Walk. That still needs to be dealt with, plus, if the proposal goes ahead, building a completely new set of stuff to look after.

There's already 2000-plus kilometres of walking tracks in Tasmania managed by Parks and Wildlife. I use the term 'managed' very loosely, because in practice very little happens on most of them. Some of them are seriously eroded or damaged; some of them are in alpine country, like the Tyndall Range - they all need to be looked after. Creating another experience in another new area just seems counterproductive long-term. You can never look after everything. Continuing to open up new areas without looking after what you've got doesn't seem a great way forward.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Given that everything is going to be new and shiny, if this receives approval, what sort of timeframe would you expect that significant maintenance would kick in, given your understanding of what we already have, the Overland Track and the two capes - supposedly Three Capes Track?

**Mr DIXON** - I can't really offer much of an opinion on that. I'm not a building engineer. However, logically, you'd think that in a more extreme environment, like the Tyndall Range, it's probably pretty similar to the Overland Track, things might need more work sooner than on Three Capes, for example.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thank you, appreciate that.

**CHAIR** - Before you leave the table, I'd like to reiterate the statement I made earlier about committee proceedings. As I advised you at the commencement of your evidence, what you have said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you may need to be aware that privilege does not attach to comments you may make to anyone including the media, even if you are just repeating what you said to us. Do you understand that?

**Mr DIXON** - Yes, thank you.

**The witness withdrew.**

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much for attending and giving evidence. The next witness is Andy Szollosi. President of the Tasmanian Wilderness Guides Association, Mr Szollosi, could you please introduce yourself and then make the statutory declaration?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - Absolutely, yes. Hello, my name's Andy Szollosi, here as the President of the Wilderness Guides Association.

**Mr ANDY SZOLLOSI**, PRESIDENT, TASMANIAN WILDERNESS GUIDES ASSOCIATION, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

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**CHAIR** - Thank you for appearing before the Committee. The Committee is pleased to hear your evidence today. Before you begin giving your evidence, I would like to inform you of some important aspects of committee proceedings. A committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament; this means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege. This is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom without the fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place outside of parliament.

It applies to ensure that parliament receives the very best information when conducting its enquiries. It is important to be aware that this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings. This is a public hearing, members of the public and journalists may be present and this means your evidence may be reported. Do you understand?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I do.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, Mr Szollosi. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I would, yes. It is clear that a lot of planning has gone into the Next Iconic Walk's' development, and I am here to represent the wilderness guides of Tasmania who spend a lot of time out in the field facilitating bushwalks around the state. I have listened to what they have to say and am here to present some of the views that guides in Tasmania have on this proposal. I'm here to provide some counterpoints to the presentation of Parks and Wildlife and to talk a bit about the nitty-gritty stuff as we are the people who are out in the field dealing with the little logistical challenges. I would like to highlight some of the issues quite likely to arise should this proposal go ahead.

**CHAIR** - Okay, proceed.

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - Tyndalls is based on the success of the Three Capes model. The first thing we have to acknowledge is the climate is very different to the Three Capes. I have brought up some climate averages from the Bureau of Meteorology.

**Ms BURNET** - Can you make that bigger, Andy?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I probably could.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Just read it out?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I will read it out. Basically, rainfall is the main one. This is based on 30 years of data from the Bureau of Meteorology. We have Port Arthur - Palmers Lookout, which is basically your Three Capes climate. You have 1100 milimetres of rain there and 143 days where there is rain more than one millimetre each day. For the Three Capes, your average elevation is going to be somewhere within 350 metres to 900 metres above sea level. If we take the Queenstown averages and the Mount Read averages, that is 129 metres to 1100 metres and somewhere in the middle of that is what we would expect to the number of cloudy days and rainy days to be on the Tyndalls track. You have either 2400 milimetre or 3700 milimetre so you could probably expect about three times the amount of rainfall in the Tyndalls to what we get on the Three Capes and the temperature averages there are much lower. This is to put it in perspective.

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One of the challenges that the Three Capes, out of experience from an operational side, is mould in the huts as a result of condensation build up and from the wet environment these huts are in. We know that certain parts, like the window frames, have had to be stripped out of the Three Capes public huts and replaced. This problem is only going to be worse in the Tyndalls, and this is going to add to the ongoing maintenance costs. Not only that, because we have so many auxiliary buildings with no sealed doors, so there are no air locks, and when people are exiting and entering those pods especially, the water is going to get in. It is inevitable there are going to be mould issues in these huts, which are going to be a public safety hazard. That is going to be costing the taxpayers, and it's basically going add to the ongoing maintenance costs of this experience.

The power generation capabilities - it is great they are providing heating and cooking, but there is a fair chance that the power they are going to generate to supply such high demand is not going to be adequate. We have seen this on Three Capes. The batteries weren't enough; they had to fly in new batteries. There are one tonne diesel generators that have to be flown in to provide enough power that the rangers have to turn on at 5.00 a.m. in the morning when the power runs out. That's not exactly environmentally sustainable. There is less sun, more rain. The hydro is a great idea. I am not sure how much power the hydro is capable of providing but I would be looking at the nitty gritty and getting engineers' perspective on how much power is likely to be required there.

On top of this you have the safety risk for the walkers. Rescues in Tasmania have gone up from 2013 around 134 rescues to 479 rescues in 2024-25, with 193 of those helicopter-based rescues.

**CHAIR** - Do you have a slide on that bit?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I do not, I've just got those numbers written down. I quoted that from an ABC article.

**CHAIR** - That happens to me sometimes when I'm presenting, I forget where I've kind of -

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - Yes, I will bring up something else. My presentation is a bit more scattered, but the number of rescues has gone up.

The cold, wet climate is going to be a risk to walker safety and, again, add to the cost of maintenance. If there are rescues, the taxpayer will be paying.

The main other point I would like to make here is that there's no group campsites at any of the nodes, so basically there's no opportunities for school groups to undertake this walk, or if they do they would have to book out the public spaces in the huts, which would probably only happen in shoulder season, when the weather is questionable. It also means that there'd be a limit to guided trips on the Tyndalls track, so from the guide's perspective, this minimises employment opportunities. The group campsites - the lack of them - is kind of a big gap in the plan, I think. That's the logistical, operational side of things.

There's some issues I think are worth considering. The environmental impact is the other key problem that our members have raised. The report that Grant alluded to was a report

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prepared by Parks and Wildlife in 1990, provided to the then-Minister. That is the Tyndall Plateau, looking at Mount Geikie, and in this document there was basically a recommendation made to extend the World Heritage Area - I do have it kind of highlighted here - the glacial features and the flora tick two of the outstanding universal values requirements to be a World Heritage Area. So the recommendation was made to actually extend the World Heritage Area to include the Tyndalls Range, which - I just drew this up in LISTmap, that was basically the recommendation, the proposed walk pretty much goes right through the middle of that.

Parks in 1990 said, 'Hey, this should be a World Heritage Area', and in 2026 they want to clear 85,000 square metres of native vegetation in that proposed area. That's 12 soccer fields worth of native vegetation that they're going to brush cut, they're going to chainsaw, they're going to destroy, to build this walk. That is world heritage value. How is that being an environmental custodian of the place?

Moreover, this *Phytophthora* -

**CHAIR** - We have to wind up in about another one minute if that's alright, and then some Committee members want to ask questions. Your presentation is really good.

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I understand, that's no problem at all.

Within the EIS or the Environmental Impact Statement, they've plotted the *Phytophthora* locations, which is great. There's just one clear consideration that's missing there. I will just point it out here. The walk is proposed to go through here, so where there's a red dot, there's *Phytophthora* there. That's a root rot disease that's carried in wet soil, bushwalker's boots. It's present very close to one of the nodes that's proposed. It's also present here, which is - the track's not shown here but the track does go pretty much to that point, and what needs to be considered is that experienced walkers might use the newly built walk to access the Tyndall Plateau from the eastern side, via Farquhar Lookout, and they might very well go through that spot where the *Phytophthora* is.

Any kind of management of *Phytophthora* needs to include the possibility of walkers using the new track as an access route to go up to the top of the plateau from the eastern side, which is different to the western side where there is the current track that takes people up there. That needs to be considered.

Just a real quick conclusion, a series of day walks would have lower impact, would bring more benefit to the local community. You could provide better options in terms of bad weather - you've got the waterfalls, you can check out around Queenstown, Rosebury, Tullah, people could stay in town, spend more money in town, explore the local heritage of the area as well - the wilderness railway - I think that would be a better alternative to this proposal.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thank you, I hope I can call you Andy.

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - That's fine.

**Ms RATTRAY** - You just talked about the potential for the chance of root rot disease to be taken up to the sensitive Tyndall Plateau because they might well go from the eastern side and not the western side as they go now.

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**Mr SZOLLOSI** - That's right.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Are you meaning that these would be people who are on the walk, that they would have time to go up there, have a look, then come back and be part of the group, if they were seasoned walkers? Is that what you're saying? Or would they be walkers who were not part of the 44?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - There's two options to that. It could be either. It could be walkers who are officially registered on the track, or in the off-season, potentially, when there are not many registered walkers. That's potentially when some of the more experienced local walkers might go out and use that track as a means of - maybe when there are no bookings and it's quiet, they might use that track to access. It's hypothetical, but it's not hard to imagine a scenario where someone might go off the built track, and go up the obvious spur that is the easiest means of access through that plateau straight through that *Phytophthora* zone there.

**Ms RATTRAY** - And take that rot up onto the plateau and that could wipe out the plateau. Is that what would happen?

**Mr SZOLLOSI I** - It could have an impact on the plateau, absolutely, and that's where the world heritage plant communities are, your *Fagus* and alpines as well.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Right, but it's not currently world heritage listed?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - It is not, but it has recognised world heritage values.

**Ms BURNET** - Thanks for your submission. I'm curious to know what level of fitness or capability or experience someone walking this would need?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - Walking the proposed track?

**Ms BURNET** - Yes, the proposed track.

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I think if it's anything like the Three Capes, if that's the standard of the track, then it would be an easy track to follow, and it wouldn't be a challenging walk in that sense. There's a little bit of elevation change. The biggest challenge is going to be dealing with the environment for people who are not experienced in cold, wet, windy conditions. I think that's going to be the biggest challenge in that sense.

**Ms BURNET** - Do your association's members do guided walks on the Three Capes and those other walks?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - A lot of our members who are active guides who work on the Three Capes Track. They will work on the Overland Track. Those are the two biggest ones for guides but also out at Freycinet, Maria Island, Flinders Island, and occasionally in the south west, the south coast track, occasionally the Arthurs.

**Ms BURNET** - Finally, the 85,000 square metres of native vegetation - would you expect that to occur on any track building, usually? It seems like an incredible amount.

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**Mr SZOLLOSI** - It is a lot, and that includes the node. That's all in the Environmental Impact Statement; that's where I got that number from. That's the track, that's the overnight nodes, that's everything together. It seems like a lot. Just to enable people to go for a walk, that's a lot.

**Mr SHELTON** - Andy, I take it that you're a guide as well?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - Yes.

**Mr SHELTON** - I'm curious, from a statewide perspective, the numbers that you see and that you are guiding - and Tassie is the place to come and have a look at its natural environment, that sort of thing - you're amongst that. What's sort of increase have you seen in visitation needing walks - or that are coming over here for the walk?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - The Overland Track has always been a really popular walk, and now the Three Capes. I think they're the two biggest drawcards in terms of overnight walkers. In terms of the trends, I think in terms of the commercially guided trips, it seems that the more popular model seems to be away from your kind of expedition style, multi-day trips, towards a base camp and then daytrips with a lighter pack. That style of trip seems to be gaining popularity. Your kind of hardcore bushwalking trips where you're carrying all that stuff, they're getting less bookings, so that seems to be the overall trend.

**Mr SHELTON** - But the business is increasing? You see an increase in numbers coming your way as well as everybody else, as far as I understand? The Overland Track is basically booked out all year and -

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - The demand seems to be higher on the Overland. I think the first day of booking for the Overland Track, it was like trying to get a concert ticket - if you weren't there at 9 a.m. on the dot, you missed out - 4000 bookings on the first day of the bookings opening. With social media these places are becoming more and more popular and we're seeing people from around the world wanting to visit these places more and more.

**CHAIR** - Can I ask a question around the mould issues which you raised?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - Sure.

**CHAIR** - You've raised a significant issue and you also use an example of where there have been issues with the Three Capes walk. Is that just a matter of good design, to be able to eliminate or mitigate the mould issue in this new design? I'm not a builder or an architect, but that may not have been taken into account with the Capes walk, but with this one, because they know that the dampness is a significant issue, can that be mitigated with good design? Can proper biosecurity be implemented to try to eliminate the risk of the root rot as well, which you were talking about? Can they be navigated?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I'm probably not an expert enough in those fields to give a conclusive answer to that. I think the design -

**CHAIR** - Because mould is really not good for you at all. It's very dangerous.

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**Mr SZOLLOSI** - Look, it's possible to create a design that would eliminate or minimise the chance of mould, but my impression is that that design hasn't been applied to this proposal.

In particular, I'm not sure what the ventilation - if you give people a chance to close the windows at night, they will because they feel the cold. Unless there's mandatory ventilation and, at the same time, some kind of constant minimum temperature maintained in the huts - I understand that to be the requirement of the mould not growing: to not have the moisture in there in the first place. You need a warm temperature and constant airflow that's not able to be shut down by the visitors. That's a key challenge. Also, opening and closing the doors when it's wet; you need airlocks. You need a double-door system to eliminate that chance and that hasn't been incorporated into the design.

In terms of the *Phytophthora*, I mean, you know -

**CHAIR** - What do other places do when it comes to that? How do they keep it -

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - The boot-wash stations are great, but they need to be maintained, so there needs to be funding allocated to that and they need to be monitored. The people who use those boot-washing stations need to be shown how to do it properly because if you let people do it themselves, nine times out of 10 they don't clean their boots properly. Resources need to be allocated to that.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Andy, how many commercial guides are there in Tasmania? Is it dozens, is it -

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I'd say it would be hundreds if not thousands, yes. It's probably in the hundreds who are actively guiding this season. I'd say potentially more than 500, maybe less than 1000, but that's just a wild guess.

**CHAIR** - Before you leave the table, I'd like to reiterate the statement I made earlier about committee proceedings. What you have said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware that privilege does not attach to comments you may make to anyone, including the media, even if you are just repeating what you said to us, do you understand that?

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - I understand.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much for attending and giving evidence. We appreciate it.

**Mr SZOLLOSI** - Thanks for hearing it out, appreciate it.

**The witness withdrew.**

**CHAIR** - The next witness is Jimmy Cordwell, representative of the Wilderness Society. Mr Cordwell, please introduce yourself and then make the statutory declaration. I will give you a minute to set yourself up.

**Mr CORDWELL** - Howdy all. This one first?

**CHAIR** - I will read this to you. Do you have a presentation?

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**Mr CORDWELL** - I don't, just the paper in front of me.

**CHAIR** - All right.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I like that.

**Mr CORDWELL** - Too many issues with technology.

**Mr JIMMY CORDWELL**, WILDERNESS SOCIETY WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - Thank you for appearing before the Committee. The Committee is pleased to hear your evidence today. Before you begin giving your evidence, I would like to inform you of some important aspects of committee proceedings. A committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament, which means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege. This is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom without the fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place outside of parliament. It applies to ensure that parliament receives the very best information when conducting its inquiries. It is important to be aware that this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of parliamentary proceedings.

This is a public hearing, members of the public and journalists may be present and this means your evidence may be reported. Do you understand?

**Mr CORDWELL** - I understand, yes.

**CHAIR** - Mr Cordwell, would you like to make your opening statement?

**Mr CORDWELL** - Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for making it today. I really appreciate the time to be able to give, hopefully, a bit of perspective on this proposal from the Wilderness Society of Tasmania.

My name is Jimmy, and I'm from the Wilderness Society. We are in our 50th year this year and are a non-government organisation that started in Tasmania but is now based all around the continent. Our primary concern is the protection of wild places, special places, natural places, and not just protecting them, but also their ongoing management into the future for perpetuity.

A very quick bit of background about myself: my expertise outside of this is old trees. I love old trees like pencil pine, King Billy pine and Huon pine that we find in these areas. I've also done a lot of bushwalking and hiking both here around the continent and overseas: Camino de Santiago; the length of New Zealand, the Te Araroa trail; all across the continent. Long walks, short walks, day walks. I humbly believe that the best bushwalking in the world but also on the continent here is in our lovely Tassie. That's my sort of background.

A lot of what I was thinking of presenting the guys have already covered off on a fair bit of it, but I did want to begin by touching on some of those values and repressing - this is

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a physical copy, not an electronic copy of the Department of Parks and Wildlife, and Heritage, and their proposal for World Heritage protection around what was in the TWWHA.

**CHAIR** - In 1990?

**Mr CORDWELL** - 1990, yes. In a nutshell, there's outstanding universal value here. It's so classy. Parks identified this as a landscape that's the better part of half a billion or so years old, geologically. As Grant alluded to, it hasn't burnt in well beyond living memory - some of the trees up there are themselves a couple of thousand years old. It's about as good as it gets. Parks identified it - as have so many people - as having outstanding universal value. We believe it should be protected by joining the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. I will touch on a little bit about that later. Hopefully some of the things that I suggest, maybe some questions that could be followed up later, or ways to reassess what's sitting on the table now.

We are opposed to the project in its current form. That said, trying to be proactive about an option that's good for the west coast is looking at that hub idea of bringing folk in to not just Queenstown, but Tullah, Rosebery, Strahan, what have you, and creating a great walks hub. Hopefully, some of the things I say can feed into that.

First, obviously the budget right now for the state is a bit under the pump. We made a pre-budget consultation which I wrote about in our submission. Some of the questions when we were submitting for that pre-budget consultation, 'which programs or projects could refocus to deliver to core outcomes with more streamlined resources or refined focus. Are there initiatives or investments that could be reconsidered helping balance the budget now without losing sight of our long-term goals?' I think the proposal we put in was a great alternative. For example, reimagining the feasibility study we could redo, we are looking at that great hub, and Grant alluded to the benchmark that was used in the feasibility study. A stitch in time hopefully saves millions of dollars and we're talking \$40 million or so - the Two Capes Track obviously went over. The Two Capes Track was partially funded by the Federal Government too, so Tasmania didn't hold the full burden of that end-price tag. Maybe we could relook at the great hub as an option for the west coast community and save a bit of cash there, reimagine these projects, and not lose sight of our long-term goal, which we think could come from the great hub option.

On the next point, I wanted to first preface that this is by no means my expertise, but looking at the economic modelling that was used in the feasibility study of 2021, what was used was input-output modelling but there's other forms of econometric models. Partial and general econometric models were mentioned in the feasibility study but not used and that was because of financial reasons, but if we reassess the great hub option and look at saving some cash for the state then you have cash there that can be reused to reassess this program, one would argue.

Reasons why those would be beneficial to reassess - one is that with the input-output model, the data they drew on to assess the potential econometric impacts of this proposal, they used a comparison with the Bass Coast council.

**CHAIR** - Which coast council?

**Mr CORDWELL** - Bass Coast Shire Council in Victoria near Phillip Island, south-east of Melbourne. Potentially not the greatest comparison, but I could be wrong, but the west coast population is 4500 or so people and the Bass Coast population is 45,000 people. Similar

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size - around 800 to 1000 square kilometres. The major difference is Bass Coast Council is 1.5 or so hours from 5.3 million people. The west coast population is 3500, 4500, 5500, and for me down in the Huon Valley from 100,000 to 250,000 people. Maybe there is an option for reassessing what we are comparing to, such as the Bass Coast Council.

Second, is that the partial economic analysis that was given could focus on what ultimately this project is about, which is tourism gains. Within the proposal the social benefits aren't really covered, we believe. The environmental benefits also not so much, given its world heritage value, but if we're looking at economics we reckon there's a really good option there [inaudible] because you can focus on tourism. One of the critiques of the input-output model is it tends to overstate the economic impacts due to its rigid assumptions.

**CHAIR** - Mr Cordwell, I need to advise that you are running short on time, so if you can select your key points for us, otherwise we will run out of time. I do apologise because it is a good submission.

**Mr CORDWELL** - It's okay, I've got to get home before midnight. The partial analysis would be an excellent option for reassessing the great walks hub.

I have a couple of little notes that may answer some questions that have been raised throughout the day. Further to Grant's, the cost-benefit ratio from the feasibility study was 43 versus 13, which blows it out of the water in that case. Also, tourism expenditure within the area is \$10.5 million compared to \$6 million, which is what's on the table here. When it comes to the tourism market, most folk who visit Tassie - around 50 per cent of folk who visit Tasmania - undertake some form of walking experience. Of that, around 70 per cent undertake a short walk, under four hours; 22 per cent, a long day-walk; and 8 per cent is overnight.

You have a significant, large part of the market that wants short to maybe a day-walk, that's what the market is saying. On top of that is also retaining people within an area. I could be wrong on this, I'm pretty sure it was in the feasibility study, but - 30 per cent of folk on the Two Capes Track might stay one extra night on the Tasman.

If we want to keep folk within the area rather than bypassing Queenstown and going to Strahan or not going to Tullah, Rosebery or the variety of options around the place, if you can keep folk for three or four days within towns and use a hub as an option, the great walks hub, you're talking waterfalls during the day when it's a bit wet; some of the best waterfalls on earth are just around the corner, not on the proposed walk. You can visit the hydro history or the mining history of the area as well as, on days like today, get out in relative safety in these higher places. There's pre-existing infrastructure that could be reimaged into some of this.

**CHAIR** - I'm going to have to wind you up. Just a closing summary?

**Mr CORDWELL** - My final summary is that what hasn't been considered is the world heritage value of this place. Across the world, there's 1200 world heritage properties and I'd argue that 1200 of those, if not most, have received substantial economic gain by protecting those areas. Creating a world heritage area ensures world-class protection, as we have within the TWWHA, expanding that over here and protecting these areas properly brings the economic gain just from protecting them through the ways they deserve. That's another option we really think should be considered given these outstanding universal values.

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**Ms RATTRAY** - Thanks very much, Jimmy. What conversations, if any, have you had with West Coast Council, Parks, Tourism Tasmania around what opportunities there are for great walks out of Queenstown, Rosebery or wherever they might be? Obviously, there's a focus on Queenstown. I've walked around town this morning and it seems like there's plenty of accommodation available. What have you had in the way of discussions?

**Mr CORDWELL** - Not me personally.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Your organisation or somebody?

**Mr CORDWELL** - We didn't make a submission to the Next Iconic Walk process. So far as specifics go, the Philosopher's Tale was one example that tried to look at a variety of options, I think that was the West Coast Tourism Association that pitched, Grant mentioned that earlier, within that I believe was identifying these walks in the areas, so falls up near Zeehan, Rosebery and the likes, Mount Murchison, which is possibly the best day-walk in the continent - tough but good - all the way from Owen and surrounds. There's been options, I think that was within the initial pitch of 35. Just trying to cover on that hub.

**Ms RATTRAY** - In your view, there's a number of opportunities that could make short walks, day-walks, half-day walks and make this the hub here -

**Mr CORDWELL** - Reimagine them.

**Ms RATTRAY** - to be able to still get people into the area but also not impede on what you consider is pristine world heritage?

**Mr CORDWELL** - In a nutshell, yes. We are always a fan of reimagining or repurposing infrastructure. Infrastructure begets more infrastructure, so if you already have something there, keep it in good condition and try and reimagine ways it can be used. What I was going to say has escaped me, but - I'm sorry, I just totally bunked on that one, but yes.

**Ms BURNET** - Thanks for your deputation. I'm also curious about that economic aspect. We're looking at \$40 million on this project; do you reckon that will be enough to cover some of the hub walks?

**Mr CORDWELL** - The feasibility study pitched the Next Iconic Walk at \$35 million to \$40 million. I believe the benchmark came in at something like \$15 million to \$20 million, so substantially less. One of my critiques of that though was that it included constructing a day walk into Huntley or something like that. The \$15 million to \$20 million would include the development of the new track, which we would be opposed to. There would be whatever you remove from that.

You need things like better trail head access at Murchison and Dundas and the likes. I imagine most of that infrastructure would be at trail heads and the shaping of track's a little better. I'm sure someone can give a precise view on that, but surely it's got to be substantially less than whatever the ballooning amount is from this morning.

**Mr SHELTON** - Quick question, have you been onto the Tyndall Plains? Have you walked up there?

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**Mr CORDWELL** - I have, yes.

**Mr SHELTON** - I'm sure -

**Mr CORDWELL** - I spent a few days up there walking around.

**Ms RATTRAY** - East or west side?

**Mr SHELTON** - Careful answering that question, although you can't be sued.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Andy is listening.

**Mr CORDWELL** - I will be honest; I actually went on my toughest day bushwalking up on the Tyndalls. Funnily enough, I haven't been back there since. I was solo bushwalking, I had three really good days, and the fourth day was really rough -

**Ms RATTRAY** - Was it the weather that made it rough for you?

**Mr CORDWELL** - It was the weather, yes. It's truly outstanding on the global scale.

**Mr SHELTON** - From my perspective, I've only walked a few waterfalls and that sort of thing around Tasmania. I've been out and about a bit. The special values that are up around there, walking to the Liffey Falls, it's a special place, but it doesn't have the same values. I imagine that interstate visitors - when we get over 80 per cent of the visitations to the main parks coming in from the mainland, they actually want to see something iconic, Tasmanian, that sort of thing. Where else can you find that in Tasmania?

**Mr CORDWELL** - Where else can you find the Tyndalls or that quality? Or the specifics? I think the Tyndalls are truly unique in their own way if you just scratch the surface of both geology and also the vegetation there. That said, I guess that's sort of the beauty of the hub option - you can capture a variety of what the west coast can offer. Beautiful waterfall one morning or checking out some of the Anglo mining history in the area as well. There are some awesome side tracks there: Mount Murchison; Mount Read was suggested which I don't think it a great suggestion; Mount Owen and the likes. They all offer pretty world-class examples of what Tasmania has going on for it. The beauty of those is that they are pre-existing but also, they don't go right through of what should be in the TWWHA. I'm not sure I've really answered your question to be fair, sorry.

**Mr SHELTON** - That's alright.

**CHAIR** - Any more questions? Before you leave the table, I'd like to reiterate a statement I made earlier about parliamentary proceedings. What you have said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table you need to be aware that privilege is not attached to comments you may make to anyone including the media even if you are just repeating what you have said to us. Do you understand?

**Mr CORDWELL** - I do.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Mr Cordwell. Appreciate you coming in.

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**The witness withdrew.**

**CHAIR** - I'd like to call the next witness, Chris Wilson. Thank you very much for attending, Chris, and giving evidence. Thank you for appearing today before the Committee. The Committee is pleased to hear your evidence today. Before you begin giving your evidence I would like to inform you of some important aspects of committee proceedings. A committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament. This means it receives a protection of parliamentary privilege. This is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom without the fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of parliament. It applied to ensure that parliament receives the very best information in conducting its inquiries. It is important to be aware that this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings. This is a public hearing. Members of the public and journalists may be present and this means your evidence may be reported. Do you understand?

**Ms WILSON** - Yes, I do.

**Ms CHRIS WILSON WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.**

**CHAIR** - Thank you, and would you like to make an opening statement, keeping in mind that we are limited in time.

**Ms WILSON** - Yes, I don't plan to be up here for a long time.

**CHAIR** - We want to hear what you want to have to say. Please go for it.

**Ms WILSON** - I am going to be a bit different. I am going to talk about a particular man who was called Thomas Bather Moore. He was known as T. B. Moore and he often signed his track reports T. B. Moore, Explorer, because that's what he was. Over the years I've developed a relationship with T. B. Moore, even though he died in 1919, through my readings about him, his life, his work, and then by connecting with his descendants, in particular, his granddaughter, and I found out quite a personal side to this man. How does he fit into this story? He fits in nicely because he was, arguably, the first European explorer to head up into the Tyndalls, so a very special person.

A special mission in his life was to explore and discover all he could about the west coast. It was his absolute passion to go all over the west, explore, name things, prospect for metals, describe the plants, describe the creatures. He was an all-round bushman extraordinaire; an intellectual, but very practical.

In about 1878, he went, often solo and, in this case, I believe it was solo, up into the Tyndall Ranges and his mission was to see what was up there. He was an explorer who was up there to map - to name mountains, draw lakes, and get a map in his mind of this beautiful place. It wasn't just the Tyndalls that he went to and did this, but I am talking about Tyndalls today, obviously.

He is a man who has many facets to him. One of those facets was a geologist and I will call him that even though he was what you call a lay geologist. He is up in the Tyndall Ranges

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and he is observing the geology. He is observing the geomorphology, and he is immediately aware that this landscape has been glaciated. He is aware of the dominant rock type, which is a siliceous conglomerate, very tough. He marks out where all the lakes are. He works out that's a glacial lake and one of the most gobsmackingly awesome, magnificent examples of a cirque glacial lake is Lake Huntley.

Here he is, on his own up in the Tyndalls mapping, describing and falling in love with the place. He was an exceptional man and while he was up there he was going to name quite a few of the lakes after ladies. We know that he named several of the lakes up there, including Lake Margaret, including Lake Mary. If you have studied your plans, you might think Lake Mary, that has a node around it. I believe that's still the case, unless it has been removed from the plans. He named Lake Mary after his sweetheart who he went off and got married to.

**CHAIR** - I might need to draw you back to the report and how this evidence - even though I'm enjoying this, we are short of time. Can you summarise for us?

**Ms WILSON** - Yes, so I wanted to say to you this was a man who had an appreciation of what was up there and, in particular, that Lake Huntley, cirque lake -

**CHAIR** - How important it is.

**Ms WILSON** - How a geological feature that is, how important and how magnificent it is as it is and what I'm trying to say to you is I believe it should be unaltered in its appearance. I'm saying that any notion of a human-built structure on the edge of it would be absolutely a terrible thing for that to happen.

The first time I saw Lake Huntley was from a nearby hill, Walford Peak, that was a lookout point and that gave you the view into Lake Huntley without being encroaching on it and I found that that was magnificent.

When I heard that this proposed walk was going to have a 'hut', and you have to use inverted commas, don't you? Because it's not a hut, not most people's perception of a hut. I was quite horrified that there would be this structure on the rim of this magnificent geological feature. That's where I'm going to with this background of Moore, his connection to that land, his appreciation of the geology and the geography up there. I don't believe that the plans for that Huntley node will be changed - I'm a realist- but I'm just going to say that I don't think it would be a fitting thing to have in front of that magnificent geostructure there. I'm going to finish with that.

I want to go on to something a bit more general and that is the recognition of T. B. Moore when it comes to interpretation on the walk. I know his family really wanted the walk to reflect the importance of Moore to that area.

**CHAIR** - We can raise that.

**Ms WILSON** - They wrote a submission, quite a lengthy one, very impassioned about recognising this explorer, T. B. Moore. They would've have liked to have seen his name appear prominently in some respect, be it the name of the walk or be it at some important interpretation.

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**Ms RATTRAY** - But not on the hut?

**Ms WILSON** - Not on the hut.

**Ms BURNET** - That was the question I was going to ask. Thank you for that. It's very interesting history.

**CHAIR** - I'm more than happy to raise that as well, that importance. Thank you for bringing that to my attention; I haven't heard of T. B. Moore before, which is, I know, very ignorant. I do apologise.

**Ms WILSON** - It's stunning, and if you haven't heard of him, read his story because it's absolutely amazing.

**Ms RATTRAY** - He's the Denny King of the west coast, is that right?

**Ms WILSON** - Well, probably more than that.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Probably more than that.

**Ms WILSON** - As you drive on the Lyell Highway between Queenstown and Derwent Bridge, you can thank T. B. Moore. He was the one who found the way.

**Ms BURNET** - Moore's Garden, is that named after him?

**Ms WILSON** - Yes, he has his name scattered all over the west and south-west. He named things and things are named in his honour.

**CHAIR** - As I advised you at the commencement of your evidence, what you have said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware that privilege does not attach to comments you may make to anyone, including the media, even if you are just repeating what you have said to us. Do you understand that?

**Ms WILSON** - Yes, I do.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Chris, for coming in and giving evidence. We appreciate it.

**The witness withdrew.**

**CHAIR** - I'd like to call the witnesses from the Department back to the table to give further evidence. Would you like to respond to any of the information or evidence that has been provided to us by the other witnesses?

**Ms MULLER** - Thank you, Chair; yes, I will. It's fascinating sitting here listening to the commentary from the witnesses. I think one of my key reflections is a recognition that the natural environment on the west coast is one that is inherently important to protect. Also, I think there was widespread recognition that it's also a value to our communities, to our local economy and to the state economy. How we interpret that varies from witness to witness, but I think there was common ground in terms of the acknowledgement that our natural environment is

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inherently important to protect and conserve. That has been a really key part of how we have gone about researching, investigating and planning the walk, so I think we're in alignment in that regard.

Also importantly, our parks and reserves - our protected areas - are really important to our local communities, they're important to our health and wellbeing, and they certainly are important to social considerations. Getting people out of their homes, off their screens and into the natural environment we know has immense health benefits as well. I think for me, that was something that came through really strongly, that recognition of the value of our natural environment to our communities and to our economies. We need to protect and showcase that beautiful, unique natural environment. That's very much part of the proposal today.

From my perspective, I think the conversation around short walks, and investing in short walks versus investing in an iconic, globally significant, multi-day walk has been an interesting part of this afternoon's conversation. We know that multi-day walks trigger decisions to come to Tasmania. We know that we're full of incredible short walks all over the state, but I think building on the success of the Overland Track and the Three Capes Track as a really iconic showcase of the beautiful, remarkable natural environment; done in a way that's very sensitive that is minimising impact, I think will be a gamechanger economically to the west coast in particular.

We also know that when people come to Tasmania for these walks, they frequently return. The research shows that if you've done the Three Capes Track or the Overland Track, the vast majority of those people would be keen to come back and do that walk. If people are attracted here for that walk, once they've experienced the wonderful trip to Tasmania, they're far more likely to return again and again and again.

**CHAIR** - Would it be fair to say that this new walk, the iconic walk, could be as big as the Overland Track, or is that a bit much of a statement to say - or is it to complement that, because that seems like such a groundbreaking walk? Can this compete with that?

**Ms MULLER** - I think 'complement' is absolutely the right word to be using. It's complementary in the sense that it's not so much competing, because we know that if you've done the Overland Track you will have an interest in coming back, whether it's to do the Overland Track again, lots of people return and do it again, or whether it's to do the Three Capes Track or the Next Iconic Walk.

We also know in other jurisdictions over the last five to 10 years there has been investment in multi-day walks, so we really need to maintain our competitive edge in terms of offering products to the market that will bring people to the state. I think we all recognise and acknowledge that our natural environment is a really key pillar to our tourism industry and that this walk will complement particularly those two walks.

I might cover a couple of specifics, but I will do it briefly, on some of the issues that were raised. Firstly, there was some commentary around the feasibility study and whether there was a need to revisit that. On that note, I recognise that it was done at a point in time to determine the cost-benefit of the project and establish if it was a viable proposition. While the project itself has been refined and there have been some changes since that feasibility study was done, they haven't materially altered the offering, which is a three-day, two-night walk. So we continue to look at the costs, look at the revenue, but fundamentally, is there a need to revisit

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that feasibility study? It is our view that there isn't a need. It informed a decision at a point in time. It largely remains relevant and regarding the cost-benefit to the west coast communities, the case is strong and the costs overall to the Tasmanian community as well still stands.

There was some commentary around the Three Capes Track and the operating costs of that track and maybe some of the experiences on it. As Keith's talked to, the team has looked closely at the Three Capes Track experience and that has informed the development of this walk. I should note it is quite a different walk in some ways in terms of costs, because it has the ferry, it has a shuttle and it has entry to Port Arthur, and the costs associated with those is around half of the operating costs of the walk itself. The walk here won't have those same sorts of overheads in terms of those operating costs. That is just one example of the difference between the two.

**Ms RATTRAY** - A \$3 million difference, because that is pretty much what it is - \$2.9 million to \$6 million.

**Ms MULLER** - Yes, we have looked closely at the operating costs and the revenue and we're confident that the two are largely in balance. Keith may talk to that a bit more in a moment if we want to unpack that further this afternoon, but in answer to your question, yes, it is in that vicinity.

We have also learnt from the Three Capes Track in terms of some of the mould issues that we referred to, for example, and that has very much informed the detailed design work that has occurred, such as some of the approaches in terms of the drying rooms and cupboards, et cetera. Again, we can talk to that in more detail if there's an interest in that, but it has very much informed the detailed design work.

Safety was touched on. I should note that anecdotally, the safety search and rescues generally don't come from people who are doing a walk where they have been inducted or had a check-in and are doing a hosted walk. We tend to find that the people who need rescuing are people who are either doing a day walk who are not well prepared, or people who are walking alone frequently can get into trouble. So we have a strong campaign of messaging around putting in place all those safety elements to ensure you don't get into trouble. I won't go into any detail now because I know we're short on time, but safety will be a key part of both the design of the track that Keith has talked to in terms of the length of the walks each day, but also how we undertake the first aid, check-ins and having the host rangers on the track as well will help to make sure people are safe. Safety is a key consideration for us. I might leave it there and see if Keith has anything else specific he wanted to comment on.

**Mr RYAN** - Following up particularly on the mould issue with the Three Capes that was raised, we've looked at all our huts from the Overland Track to Three Capes to even Frenchman's Cap, which is the closest one in terms of the ventilation system. That was raised in terms of ventilation and heat is one of the key ways to reduce mould. So all the sleeping areas in these huts will have low-level heating to raise the ambient temperature, which is one of the key factors in condensation forming in the first place.

With the hydro power and solar power that we will have, we will have mechanical ventilation and a heat recovery system; so, it's going to be another level of circulating air and taking the moisture out. We've basically engaged specialists in building health and the servicing

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of the ventilation and power systems to make sure that can cope and deal with the mould and ventilation issues.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Would the power generation sufficiently cover what's required for all that?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I mean, it's going to be highly mechanised.

**CHAIR** - They don't want to use diesel generators there, do they?

**Mr RYAN** - No, the power systems we have are a totally different scale and capability compared to what is in, say the Overland Track or Three Capes, which rely totally on solar and small battery systems. The hydro will basically be able to power the whole thing. In some respects, the solar is really there for backup if, for some reason, the lake levels drop. If we suddenly don't get the rainfall we expect, then the solar will kick in and that will kick in when, obviously, there isn't rainfall so there's higher solar radiation, so the two will complement each other.

We will also have a battery backup system which, if we had no power generation, we could still run the huts for, I think, three or four days, continuous power with all those systems operating at full capacity. If it all just failed, we could then scale things back and go, 'Okay, we're not going to have lighting to this place or we're not going to have heating in that room'. You know, there will be opportunity to scale back, to extend that longer until you can get repairs done on those systems. We're pretty confident that that will work.

**CHAIR** - I would like to ask a question on behalf of Chris Wilson, who provided us with the evidence around T. B. Moore, the explorer, and whether or not your Department is aware of the importance of him as an explorer and whether or not there is consideration down the track for recognition on that actual trail about his contribution?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, we're certainly aware of T. B. Moore. We spoke to Chris at the public information session and she raised the same thing with us at that point in time. Our interpretation consultant, I spoke to her last week and coincidentally, she said she was reading that book at the moment, *The Track Cutter*, but yes, we're well aware of -

**Ms RATTRAY** - I think it's done, Chris. I think you're right.

**CHAIR** - The squeaky wheel. Well done.

**Mr RYAN** - We know the history of the naming of the lakes and the mountains and, you know, he was the one who first really documented the glaciation processes in the area. So we're well aware of the history and connection there. We haven't made any decisions around names of anything at this point, but we're certainly aware of his place.

**Ms RATTRAY** - There's been some comment this afternoon about no group campsites - you can't accommodate a school group experience. Is that just not on the radar? The weather's not conducive? It wasn't something that was considered? I don't mind who answers.

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**Mr RYAN** - We didn't deliberately create group camping sites as in, say, like the Overland Track or something, where you have dedicated spaces well away from the communal huts and that sort of thing. A part of that is due to site constraints and, in the same respect, we've also had people saying the footprint's too big but now we want bigger campsites. We always have to balance what we put on the ground and we've tried to provide facilities that are adaptable and can potentially be used by groups. They might not be able to have everyone sleeping in tents, but there's no reason they couldn't go into the bunk rooms and book those out at a period in time. We've tried to make the bunk rooms smaller because a lot of the feedback we get from Overland Track and Three Capes is that people don't like sharing rooms with strangers. They don't like sharing big rooms where there's a high probability someone's going to snore or wake up at five o'clock or go to bed at midnight or whatever.

We've gone for four bed-bunk rooms to give most people the opportunity to be in a room with people they know. There is one six-bed bunk room, which potentially, if you combined that with the tent platforms, you could take them as a group site. We tried to keep the space as flexible as we could within the site constraints and the footprint.

**Ms RATTRAY** - You're comfortable with the 85,000 square metre footprint overall?

**Mr RYAN** - Well, I guess that's partly -

**Ms RATTRAY** - It does seem a lot.

**Mr RYAN** - Well, that's misleading to some degree because that's the whole footprint.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Is that not correct? Correct me if I'm wrong.

**Mr RYAN** - It relates to the footprint of the whole development, which includes helicopter bases outside of the walk, road upgrades where there's already a road and we've included the whole width of that road for 2 kilometres. The actual footprint - Joe, you might want to give the actual figures - when you look at the actual huts and the track, it's considerably less than that. It might be worth sharing those.

**Mr EVANS** - Yes, so, 84,000 - almost 85,000 - was the figure in the EIS for construction impact. That allows for the four-wheel track corridor, which obviously allows for some micro-siting and flexibility - obviously the track won't be that wide.

**Mr RYAN** - Just jumping in on that. For the track corridor, we get approved to build within a 50 metre-wide strip; that's included in that footprint. The track is literally going to be a metre wide or less, so when you include those 50 metres in, for 31 kilometres, the numbers add up pretty quickly.

**Mr EVANS** - If you want to use the soccer ground analogy - as Keith mentioned - both depots are about 7000, so pitch size. One's just outside Lake Margaret Power Station on existing road; one's just off Anthony Road, outside of that wilderness rating - it doesn't factor into that. And, as Keith mentioned, the track. But, when we're looking purely at the hut sites, and there's been a lot of commentary on Lake Huntley, it is down around that 1500 square metres. It's worth looking at the break-up, I suppose, when considering that 85,000 construction impact because, as Keith mentioned, you're not going to build a track that's 50 metres wide.

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**CHAIR** - Any more questions?

**Ms BURNET** - Just one last question from me. We heard of the Parks proposal for world heritage inclusion of this area in 1990. Why the departure from that position?

**Ms MULLER** - I'm unfortunately not able to comment on deliberations in 1990 and what's transpired between then and now. I think that it's certainly an area that has natural values that are important and are currently protected through its conservation area status. It's also an area that has hydropower, mineral exploration licences; it's an area of mixed history and some degree of disturbance in some places. What I would say is that's currently protected under our legislation.

**Mr RYAN** - If I could just add there, it comes across that that report was solely on the Tyndall Range, but that covered the whole western side of the World Heritage Area, and, I don't know the exact number, but there were 20 or 30 areas that were suggested to be extensions to the World Heritage Area. Some of those have been added in since 1990 and some haven't. Tyndall Range is one of those that hasn't been added.

**CHAIR** - Alright. I have a series of questions here; these are our standard Public Works Committee questions, and they're based on the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1914*. Does the proposed works meet an identified need or needs, or solve a recognised problem?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works the best solution to meet identified needs or solve a recognised problem within the allocated budget?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works fit for purpose?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Do the proposed works provide value for money?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works a good use of public funds?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - As I advised you at the commencement of your evidence, what you have said here to us today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table you need to be aware that that privilege does not attach to comments you may make to anyone, including the media, even if you are just repeating what you said to us. Do you understand that?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

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**CHAIR** - Thank you. Thanks for today.

**The witnesses withdrew.**

**The Committee adjourned at 5.29 p.m.**