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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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**PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS**

**MOUNT FIELD NATIONAL PARK  
VISITOR CENTRE DEVELOPMENT**

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*Presented to His Excellency the Governor pursuant to the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1914.*

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**MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
*Mr Harriss*

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY  
*Mr Green* (Acting Chairman)  
*Mr Hidding*  
*Mr Kons*

By Authority: Government Printer, Tasmania

To His Excellency the Honourable Sir Guy Stephen Montague Green, Companion of the Order of Australia, Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

### **MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY**

The Committee has investigated the following proposal:-

### **MOUNT FIELD NATIONAL PARK VISITOR CENTRE DEVELOPMENT**

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the *Public Works Committee Act 1914*.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This reference sought the approval of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for the development of a Visitor Centre and related facilities at Mount Field National Park.

The overall development includes a new Visitor Centre, improved site access and parking arrangements, improvements to site visitor facilities and interpretation works both within the Visitor Centre and elsewhere in the Park.

### **BACKGROUND**

Tasmania's first nature reserve was created around Russell Falls in 1885 and encompassed an area of 300 acres. This was extended to 27,000 acres with the creation of the Mount Field National Park in 1916. Aside from huts at Twilight Tarn and Lake Fenton, most of the visitor facilities were concentrated at the Park entrance until the opening of the Lake Dobson Road in 1937. This led to the development of ski facilities including lodges and ski tows closer to Mount Mawson.

The Park is recognised as a significant tourist attraction in the State and the need for a Visitor Centre is identified in the draft Management Plan for the Mount Field National Park and the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999.

The area available for a Visitor Centre at Mount Field is limited and it is proposed that the area occupied by existing facilities, including the management office, staff housing, the kiosk, etc., is redeveloped. The correct siting of the Centre is crucial to the maintenance and improvement of the existing recreational pursuits of picnicking and family activities.

A lease agreement has been entered into for the operation of the existing kiosk (and campground facilities) at Mount Field with John and Anne Trigg and they will be the operators for the new retail facilities in the Visitor Centre when it is commissioned.

## **PROPOSAL**

The primary purpose of the Visitor Centre development is to provide orientation, information and interpretation for visitors to Mount Field National Park and the nearby World Heritage Area.

The overall objectives are:

*Environment and landscape* - Retain or enhance the natural and scenic qualities of the area and protect it from environmental degradation; promote the conservation of the area with the design of the Centre reflecting the site's particular sense of place.

*Information, interpretation and education* - Create a welcoming environment for visitors; orientate visitors to Mt Field National Park and the World Heritage Area. Interpret Mt Field National Park and the World Heritage Area values - specific to the Park and general to the World Heritage Area; target information and interpretation to specific user groups ensuring that each target market has some form of interpretation to add value to their experience.

*Recreation* - Provide information about the diverse range of recreational opportunities in the area and the World Heritage Area in general. Provide a major recreational node catering for such activities as picnicking, sightseeing, walking, barbecues and nature walks, including external interpretation; and upgrade and expand day visitor facilities to cater for an increase in the number and duration of stay of day visitors.

*Tourism* - Assist the development of the local economy by increasing tourist visitation; improve the awareness of visitors regarding the availability of local facilities and services; extend the duration of visitors stay; and increase visitor expenditure in the area. Enhance visitor experiences by providing high quality eating and retail services to compliment other visitor services and facilities with the Park.

*Park Management* - Explain management regulations and influence visitor behaviour appropriately; provide a range of reception services and facilities of a level and type that is appropriate to the areas features; visitation patterns and management goals and provide facilities necessary for Park management.

*Operational* - Encourage safe and conservative Park use; inform and explain to visitors any hazards or constraints which may prevent their full use of the area, and encourage the development of a more self-reliant user able to make use of the area's resources of their own terms.

The scope of work comprises:

- The construction of the Visitor Centre.
- The construction of a new car park, internal roads and the provision of site services and landscaping.
- Improved access for visitors to the Russell Falls walking track.
- Interpretation works, including displays and signage.
- New workshop and storage facilities for field staff remote from the main area of visitor activity.

The existing arrangement of the access road, entry booth and parking are confused and do not serve to introduce visitors to the available facilities in a satisfactory manner, particularly during peak visitor periods. The access road proceeds beyond the entry booth to a series of divergent tracks with visitor information and facilities presented in an entirely haphazard fashion. This is very unsatisfactory from the perspectives of visitor safety and amenity, and places an additional workload on the kiosk and field staff, providing information that could be presented in a much more efficient manner in a properly designed reception facility.

Many of the existing picnic shelters and related site infrastructure are entirely appropriate in their design and arrangement and will be retained but the kiosk is not suitable for adaptation and, backing onto its principal approach, is sited in a manner that does not promote visitor access and safety.

An existing brick built toilet block at the top of the existing car park is inappropriately located from a site access management perspective and is of inappropriate construction for the area it occupies. It will be demolished and will be replaced by facilities within the new Visitor Centre, which are being provided to meet Building Code requirements. The proposed location for the Visitor Centre and related facilities is currently occupied by workshop and storage facilities for field staff. These will be relocated.

The development also necessitates the removal of redundant buildings and facilities currently used by Park management staff who will be relocated to the new Visitor Centre.

## **COSTING**

The budget cost allocations are:

Visitor Centre	\$720,000
Site Works	\$390,000
Interpretive Works	\$200,000

Workshop relocation	\$130,000
Furniture and Equipment	\$100,000
Artworks	\$20,000
Commissioning reserve and contingencies	\$205,000
Site allowance	\$76,000
Professional Fees	\$183,000
Site planning	\$29,000
Project management costs	\$100,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,153,000</b>

The above estimates of cost exclude any allowance for escalation costs due to increases in the Building Cost Index (which are expected to be minimal).

The Committee sought a breakdown of the Professional Fees component abovementioned. Such breakdown was provided to the Committee and was taken into evidence.

## EVIDENCE

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Wednesday, 26 April 2000. The submission of the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment was received and taken into evidence. The Committee inspected the site of the proposed Visitor Centre at Mount Field National Park. Following such inspection, the Committee commenced hearing evidence. The following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:

- Sue Haines, Project Officer – Visitor Centres, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE)
- Andrew Roberts, Manager – Tourism and Recreation, DPIWE
- Neal MacKintosh, Project Architect and Director, Jacob Allom Wade Architects
- Neil Wade, Director, Jacob Allom Wade Architects
- Sue Small, Project Site Works Consultant, Susan Small Landscape Architects
- Roy Cordiner, Consultant Project Advisor

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Manager – Tourism and Recreation, DPIWE, Andrew Roberts, gave an overview of the project for the benefit of the Committee and submitted:-

*“... The development of the visitor centre at the park was to provide improved visitor reception facilities, amenities, including cafe and retail, new education facilities and improve office accommodation for Parks and Wildlife Services management staff. It will also provide better recreational facilities through the improvements to the site layout of the Russell Falls visitor services zone.*

*... in early 1999 Parks and Wildlife Service called for expressions of interest in the operation of the retail and camp ground facilities at the park with the objective of maximising the centre by getting investment to expand its opportunities. We subsequently entered into a short term contract with the leaseholder with the option to extend that lease through into the new centre - I don't have a final agreement of the details for the contract. The overall development obviously has to work within the natural values of the park as governed by the draft management plan that is presently up for public comment and the draft site plan which is also out for public comment and shortly to close.*

*Again, it is looking at improving the site access, improving a park that has basically been a key local recreational park for a long period. It is arguably the second most visited park in the State, with Freycinet receiving lots of visits but not as many visitors - which is the fine point that people debate about. The park itself hasn't had a whole lot of money spent on its visitor information. Recent visitor surveys have shown that it lacks both quality facilities and orientation. We have addressed both of those in this project."*

## DESIGN

The Project Architect, Neal MacKintosh, described the design of the proposed development:-

*"Basically the building is divided up into three functional components: the Parks administration areas, interpretation areas and retail area. There is some reasonably complex interrelationships to do with some of those management functions which have governed but what we have ended up with is basically one reasonably large building and we have tried to break down the form as much as we can so that it doesn't become too massive; the idea being that it sits fairly unobtrusively on that site.*

*So, if you like, entering through the main entrance you come to the reception area and there you have an opportunity to partake in the cafe and shop retail area or you can move through into the interpretation spaces or indeed the building has the start of the walk to Russell Falls and that is another rear door which takes you directly onto the Russell Falls track.*

*Public toilets are located at the entrance to the building so that they are available for after-hours use as well so there's a permanently open door here. A multi-purpose area will also have an external access so that can be used after-hours without interrupting the other areas within the building and, by the same token, there will be security grilles which allow the retail spaces to operate by themselves without the rest of the centre necessarily being open.*

*The form of the building is, as I have mentioned before, quite simply is just basically a one major pitched roof building. Primarily the cladding in it will be rough-sawn timber with a stain - it will be a grey stain aesthetically.*

*... The retail areas will be served through the car park via their own service entrance from the back, which is screened off from the cafe areas, so that's there's no conflict between patrons and service vehicles and that also accesses the rear entry to the administration areas for the Parks staff."*

The Committee sought evidence as to whether the design of the proposed centre was considered to be of an appropriate scale and standard of presentation for what is the principal entry point and 'staging area' for the park. The comparison with the Visitor Centre at Lake St. Clair was made. Consultant Architect, Neil Wade submitted:-

*"It is a different scale and we wanted to bring the scale down, not to be oppressively large competing with the natural environment. It is about the park, not about the building and this is just a facility that aids the appreciation of it, so we deliberately off-centred the centre so that it is not in your face. What you see when you go up that vista of plain trees is not a building saying, 'Look at me' - it is off to the side; we are looking at that stand of big eucalypts at the end. It was us playing low key as architects and designers and landscape architects. It was a very conscious policy to do that and draw people through the building by subterfuge, if you like, not by demanding that they have to go to that entry.*

Mr Roberts added:-

*"The key difference between this and Lake St Clair, if we can make some comparisons, this one you've driven through an avenue of trees coming into the centre - that's something we've still to address at Lake St Clair - coming up to the centre itself your use options are in that entry outside the foyer area, the paved area, there is the walk options, there's the daily activity options. At Lake St Clair the key problem there is the choke point outside the interpretive centre.*

*What this would, ideally, is when you come up, even though it's not height you'll be able to see right through it, you will see the bush out the back, you'll see the action inside. You have a lot more pre-entry orientation there and you don't have as many choke points."*

## PARK ENTRY

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to what, if any, changes are proposed to the official entry point to the Park generally and to the various walking tracks within the Park. Mr MacKintosh submitted:-

*"The plan is to retain the entry booth but only use it in peak visitor periods - in shoulder and winter periods according to loadings. The purchase point will be brought back into the visitor centre. The booth works best when there are cars coming regularly but at slower periods it's much softer to have people come into the centre and buy a pass and their car is just outside in the car park. It is utilising the scales of economy with labour as well, rather than having someone sitting in the booth all day and someone sitting inside all day, to bring them together.*

*... There is a secondary path, which you can see better in the site plan, which will go around this way for after-hours access when the centre isn't open. But they will certainly be encouraged to go through the building when it's open, both for retail purposes and for the added interpretation on the layout performance, it's a combination of both."*

Mr Roberts added:-

*"The booth is the most effective method to quickly manage the purchase of park passes to incoming people in peak times - in shoulder periods, that is when the car park will have more vacancies - people parking further from the centre, so they are the periods where you have the park pass sales within the centre itself. So you'd arrive, purchase your pass, put it on your vehicle if you didn't already have it ... "*

## SEWERAGE TREATMENT

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to how the proposed development provided for sewerage treatment. Mr MacKintosh submitted that the existing sewerage lagoons, located near the workshop, will continue to be used. The intention is also to re-use the existing pumps, which are located near the current buildings to disperse back to the lagoons. When questioned as to whether any study had found this proposal to be an adequate solution, Mr MacKintosh replied in the affirmative. Ms Haimes added "we expect the loading to be not much different as having the single centre as opposed to the various parks facilities that are there at the moment."



## INTERPRETATION

The Project Officer – Visitor Centres, Sue Haimes, addressing herself to the plans, described the interpretation aspect of the proposed development as follows:-

*“There will be interpretation external to the building ... through this playground area ... and some linking-in with the interpretation that is going to happen on the Russell Falls track as well. Basically the main element of the interpretation is entry from the side, ... it directs people as to what this building is about. The forecourt area is to try to show them what types of walks to participate in in the park. That is based on this statewide walking track strategy classification which breaks the walks down into short walks, medium walks and long walks and people can see what's clearly available within the park and they can access that information when the centre is not open.*

*... we need weather information clearly available at all hours, particularly for people who are going to the ski fields. We have basically map-type information on the reception counter which will be like public relations.*

*This feature here is basically talking about the contrasts within the park particularly, say, the vegetation at the lower level and at the higher level. This wall talks about the overnight stays. This is, if you like, the main area of the interpretation gallery. We will have some information about Russell Falls here, but only limited, because basically that Russell Falls experience needs to be interpreted actually out there.*

*This is a history part of the interpretation, which is basically going to recreate one of the historic huts - not recreate but bring ... and one of the huts that is at the top of the mountain and we will have some of the artefacts that we consider that might be more at risk with that top area actually included in the parks, so you actually enter the hut.*

*... the paving within the entrance area will actually visually lead people through to the Russell Falls car park, so we are talking about actually having a different type of floor covering, basically not carpet if you like, that leads people through the centre and will also continue to this area which we see as a more active part of the interpretation. So elements within that, we're building a glacier to see how the geological formation of the park has happened over time, also talking about the role of the park and also the south-western water catchment of Hobart. The Lake Fenton water supply supplies 20 per cent of Hobart's water, so within the park they are actually talking about the role of maintaining the purity of that water catchment and perhaps even giving people a taste of that water.*

*We are also talking about having, just while we are on water - one of the creatures in the park, which is what is called an anasprodes - and the interpretation consultants have, as a way of engaging interest from younger children, created this character called 'Annie Anasprodes' that will be used to link the interpretation throughout this part to that audience to give them something to draw them through. So what we actually want to do at this stage, we are hoping we can actually have some anasprodes in a tank where people can see what they look like."*

#### FLEXIBILITY OF DESIGN

The Committee sought some indication as to the flexibility of the design. The witnesses submitted:-

***"Ms HAIMES*** - *The size of that interpretation gallery, excluding the audio-visual multipurpose room, is comparable to Lake St Clair or Cradle Mountain, so it's a fairly decent size.*

***Mr CORDINER*** - *There was the opportunity too to have temporary exhibitions in that space and what you really need in that case is as much wall space as you can and probably some temporary screens in the centre so you can hang pictures around, and that would be one of the uses. I think the idea of having those double doors leading into it is, if you do open up like that, it will be a substantial opening for people to come in from the foyer. I think to get as much wall space as we could in the gallery and the room itself, we did pretty well to keep it.*

***Mr ROBERTS*** - *One other consideration was that that centre, that room by itself can be accessed after hours without accessing the rest of the centre, so it's secured off.*

***Mr WADE*** - *I suppose also, while we have tried to plan for as far as we can conceivably see, ultimately if things are required to change it's basically just a big timber frame house and they are very demountable, so if in ten or fifteen years time some other function was perceived you could easily just bash out a few studs and put a lintel through and open it up, so there is that flexibility."*

## TOURIST ATTRACTION

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the potential tourist attraction of the Park and its environs. Mr Roberts submitted:-

*"The future for this park, I think, is part of what - the latest terminology we're using is 'clusters' - the Hobart cluster. It is a cluster, one that John Trigg likes to use, his wildlife and wilderness as a tag, you could offer it to say to someone, you guarantee your wildlife, you also might see it in the park, so if you can guarantee your wilderness in the park, a bit of both, so it's a real catch in.*

*We have the Salmon Ponds which has always been looking for someone to tag into. Some of these aren't big enough in their own right to draw people out but together they will. In the years to come, there is the Lake Pedder and Lake Gordon area but at the moment that is a long drive; it is not something that I would see that we'd be prioritising as a promotion in the shorter term. Mount Field is this icon site as a cross-promotion point for the region and is again one of those critical needs of the region. You drive into that region and you just don't know what's there. If you have something like this where it says, 'Okay, while you're here there's this, this and this'. It all adds value."*

## WORKSHOPS

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to how the workshops were proposed to be accommodated in the development at the 'farm site'. Ms Haimes submitted:-

*"The work will involve the making of a concrete pad under the existing structure that's there and a bit of a shoulder thing to service and wash down vehicles. The building will be clad, there will be separate workshop areas for different types of workshop activities like metalwork and that sort of thing. There will be the creation of what is commonly called the 'crib room', which is basically an amenities room for the field officer staff who will be working outside. That will link in with the existing services on the site. The existing workshop, it is a bit like - as Andrew referred to with the building codes - if you are doing something new you have to comply with things you might not have had to comply with before so, in terms of the occupational health and safety issues for the staff who are working here, we will be upgrading to comply with the requirements."*

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The evidence presented to the Committee clearly demonstrated the need for the development of a Visitor Centre at the Mount Field National Park which will provide improved visitor reception facilities and amenities, including café and retail, new educational facilities and improved office accommodation for Parks and Wildlife Service management staff. It will also provide better recreational facilities through improvements to the site layout of the Russell Falls Visitor Services Zone.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends the project, in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted, at an estimated total cost of \$2 150 000.

**Parliament House  
HOBART  
15 May 2000**

**B. A. Green M.H.A.  
VICE CHAIRMAN**