

Wilderness Society Submission:

Submission to the Tasmanian Public Works Committee Re: Proposed Tyndall Range Development (Next Iconic Walk)

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For more information about this submission, please contact:

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About the Wilderness Society

The Wilderness Society is an independent, community-based, not-for-profit environmental advocacy organisation. Our vision is to transform Australia into a society that protects, respects and connects with the natural world that sustains us. We are committed to protecting, promoting and restoring wilderness across the continent for the survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth. From community activism to national campaigns, we seek to give nature a voice to support the life that supports us all. We are powered by more than 150,000 supporters from all walks of life. **Please find below our submission to the Tasmanian Governments Public Works Committee (henceforth 'PWC'), regarding the proposed development in the Tyndall Range.** Our critique is three fold:

- 1) We question the exorbitant costs and their inaccuracy, given the substantial cost overruns of building the previous Three-Capes Walk, particularly given the more difficult nature of the terrain and challenging weather of the Tyndall Range;
- 2) We question whether the modeled income generated from the project seems reasonable (given expected walker numbers and permit costs), and whether this income will adequately cover the expected annual costs of maintaining the track and related infrastructure;
- 3) We provide some guidance on possible alternatives to the current project which could provide a greater economic return to west-coast communities, such as a selection of 'iconic' day walks together with in-town accommodation providing a better benefit-to-cost ratio alternative.

Priority questions regarding this proposal

- Will the PWC confirm the new timeframe of the development? And given these further delays - together with other external economic pressures - will the PWC require an updated Feasibility Study to ensure the final project costs are not a further risk to the Tasmanian budget?
- Will PWC recommend exploring the feasibility of a low-cost alternative of an updated 'great walks' package for the West Coast (i.e. the West Coast Council's initial idea for the areas Next Iconic Walk), through the 'creation' - or repurposing - of a series of short, existing day walks?
- Will the PWC suggest the Southwest Dark Sky Sanctuary alternative as a way to encourage economic growth in regional Tasmania while promoting an idea that protects the landscapes natural values - not degrade them - in establishing a new tourist opportunity?
- Will the PWC clarify whether the proponent will close access to the public for commercial use of the development? How will this conflict with achieving the 100% public visitation requirements to meet operational costs? Given the lengthy delays to this project, these figures are essential for holistic economic scrutiny of the project.
- Will the PWC confirm what evidence is available that the proposal will benefit local business and job opportunities, and how this will encourage walkers to extend their stay in the region compared to a day-walk hub alternative?
- Will the PWC confirm whether the proponent (or any branch or statutory body of the Tasmanian Government) be required to pay out mining exploration licence holders overlaying the proposed development? Or, more pressingly, how has the proponent accounted for the economic impact that a neighbouring mining venture - just a few hundred meters from the track - will impact the economic viability of the project?
- Given the project's market research confirmed there is much stronger demand for camping in tents across two nights, will the PWC confirm why tent platform capacity is reduced from 20 to 10?

Risks to a World Heritage grade landscape

The Tyndall Range (part of the West Coast Range) is of unquestionable World Heritage value. The Tasmanian Wilderness Society reminds the proponents that these values were identified and recommended for World Heritage protection by their predecessors in the Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage¹. As such, the values of this location must be managed to the highest standard (like those in the very adjacent Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area) before any development occurs. It is disappointing that the proponent has ignored these Outstanding Universal Values in pursuing this project, while shadily stating the project will be managed according to the tenure of the area (again, inconsistent with the areas World Heritage values).

Project delays and timeline out of date

The project website states if construction began in 2026 (e.g. now), that a 2029 completion is expected². According to the project update released in December 2023, the final Reserve Activity Assessment would be released for public comment by Easter 2024. However, this was only released in late-2025. Likewise, there is still public comment and decision on EPBC Act referral (pending) and on the West Coast Council development application (also pending). Further, the 2021 Feasibility Study expected construction to take between 4.7 to 6.1 years, with one additional year from final construction to actual completion. The original median construction timeline was July 2023 - November 2028, for a November 2029 finish of the project. Therefore, with no further delays, and with construction beginning in January 2026, the median completion of construction is April 2031, meaning earliest median start date is April 2032. **Will the PWC confirm the new timeframe of the development? And given these further delays - together with other external economic pressures - will the PWC require an updated Feasibility Study to ensure the final project costs are not a further risk to the Tasmanian budget?**

Tourists prefer day walks with an accommodation hub

According to Tourism Tasmania³, in the year ending December 2024 most visitors to Tasmania undertook a bushwalk while here (599,000 or 46%). Of all visitors, 35% (452,000) undertook a short walk (<4 hours), 12% (163,000) undertook a walk of four hours or longer

¹ Section 3.26, Page 44,

<https://tnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/TWWHA-Approp-Boundary-Report-1990.pdf>

² <https://parks.tas.gov.au/be-involved/projects-and-programs/next-iconic-walk>

³ <https://www.tvsanalyser.com.au/>

(but not overnight), and 4.2% (55,000) undertook an overnight bushwalk or longer. Market testing indicates that the Tyndall Range is unlikely to be a first-choice walking destination in Tasmania. Further, it is not known whether adding another so-called 'iconic walk' (and thus increasing competition to existing walks) will attract more visitors to Tasmania who choose to do an overnight bushwalk, also noting that the number of visitors to Tasmania choosing such an activity has declined in recent years. Most importantly, the majority of walkers prefer a hub and access to areas - not newly developed walks. Given this, an altered, pre-existing walker-hub would drive a higher benefit-to-cost ratio for west-coast communities. For example, a survey of walkers undertaking the Three Capes Track indicates only 31% spent at least one extra night on the Tasman Peninsula. **Will PWC recommend exploring the feasibility of a low-cost alternative of an updated 'great walks' package for the West Coast (i.e. the West Coast Council's initial idea for the areas Next Iconic Walk), through the 'creation' - or repurposing - of a series of short, existing day walks?** This will facilitate substantially higher visitation and accommodation use in towns (therefore increasing spend in regional towns) significantly driving a higher benefit-cost ratio for west-coast communities.

Dark Sky proposals offer higher Return on Investment repurposing existing infrastructure

There are other, publicly supported, nature-based, and economically viable projects that the Tasmanian Government should consider, such as the Southwest Dark Sky Sanctuary. Compared to the resource intensive project of the Tyndall Range Development, a Dark Sky Sanctuary presents a well-defined and readily achievable project with strong potential economic benefits. Key points of comparison include:

- *Timeframe*: The Dark Sky Sanctuary could be established within 12 months, offering a rapid opportunity for local economic growth, whereas the Tyndall Range development is projected for completion after 2032;
- *Seasonal visitation*: The sanctuary encourages tourism year-round, including the winter off-season, helping to spread visitation over the off-season. The Tyndall Range development is expected to primarily attract summer visitors, relying heavily on concentrated demand during peak months;
- *Use of existing infrastructure*: The sanctuary leverages existing facilities with minimal environmental impact, while the Tyndall Range development would involve new

construction within a highly sensitive, World Heritage grade landscape;

- Cost: With an initial investment of just \$1.15 million over two years, the Dark Sky Sanctuary represents a modest financial commitment compared to the \$40-\$60 million (or more) projected for the Tyndall development.

Will the PWC suggest the Southwest Dark Sky Sanctuary alternative as a way to encourage economic growth in regional Tasmania while promoting an idea that protects the landscapes natural values - not degrade them - in establishing a new tourist opportunity?

On-going maintenance and use

Track operation (including a shuttle bus operating 2-3 times per day in peak season) and ongoing maintenance is to be funded from the income generated from walker fees, though no final publicly available decision has been made on pricing. The economic viability of this project is questionable, as if the required walker numbers are not realised, an external subsidy will be continually required. What is additionally worrying is that the development proponent has also suggested that commercial opportunities can be able to use public resources in the future. **Will the PWC clarify whether the proponent will close access to the public for commercial use of the development? How will this conflict with achieving the 100% public visitation requirements to meet operational costs? Given the lengthy delays to this project, these figures are essential for holistic economic scrutiny of the project.** Much should be learnt from the costs associated with managing the Three Capes Track (\$6.11M in 2023-24⁴) to avoid duplicating this error.

Constraints on local visitation

The 'Next Iconic Walk' Feasibility Study notes that the development could be a catalyst for business opportunities including the provision of pre-and-post-walk accommodation, transfers, day walks, provision of food, gear hire and sales, and guided walks. While benefits would also accrue if walkers extended their stays in and around the west coast, potential benefits may be limited as most walkers generally fully prepare for a walk before leaving home. Additionally, public transport is incredibly limited on-and-to the west coast, and what is available is not set up for delivering and retrieving visitors from destinations outside of immediate town centres (i.e. no access to public reserve infrastructure or private

⁴ <https://tnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TNPA-News-39-2025.pdf>

infrastructure); further, the closest vehicle hire is in Burnie, removing visitors from the west coast location. **Will the PWC confirm what evidence is available that the proposal will benefit local business and job opportunities, and how this will encourage walkers to extend their stay in the region compared to a day-walk hub alternative?**

Shared tenure economic oversights

The proposed development shares land with existing mining exploration permits. The proponent states that the potential still exists for exploration and long-term mining activity in the area. It states that 'in principle support' for this route has been secured. **Will the PWC confirm whether the proponent (or any branch or statutory body of the Tasmanian Government) be required to pay out mining exploration licence holders overlaying the proposed development? Or, more pressingly, how has the proponent accounted for the economic impact that a neighbouring mining venture - just a few hundred meters from the track - will impact the economic viability of the project?**

Questionable capacity + guided walk projections

The development proposal currently cites year-round operation, with a maximum of 44 people departing per day (12 in pods, 22 in bunk rooms, and 10 camping), though seasonal changes in visitation to Tasmania and the less favorable weather on the west coast will likely impact walker numbers. **Given the project's market research confirmed there is much stronger demand for camping in tents across two nights, will the PWC confirm why tent platform capacity is reduced from 20 to 10?** [Noting that the annual management of the Three Capes Track is currently running at a loss⁵].

⁵ <https://tnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TNPA-News-39-2025.pdf>