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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC WORKS

# **RFA EAST COAST INTERPRETATION 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 *Wing* (Chairman)  
Mr *Harriss*

### **HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

Mr *Green*  
Mr *Hidding*  
Mr *Kons*

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: -

### **RFA EAST COAST INTERPRETATION 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 an Interpretation Centre and related facilities at Freycinet National Park.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) provides for financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government to Tasmania to the value of \$3.0 million for the development and construction of major interpretation centres at appropriate locations in Tasmania. The purpose of the centres is to focus on a broad range of conservation and heritage features of forested lands, promoting regional tourism and encouraging employment opportunities.

The development of such interpretation centres is subject to a formal agreement with the Commonwealth Government and the program is managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) under the direction of the Minister for Primary Industries, Water and Environment.

A planning study undertaken by Inspiring Place Consultants of Hobart identified an appropriate site location for an East Coast Centre within the boundaries of the Freycinet National Park.

## **THE NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Existing Facilities***

The existing office accommodation facilities for the PWS staff are entirely inadequate for their present function and would certainly not be able to respond to the Interpretation Centre function.

The Rangers' office is located in a small building formerly used for housing, with a single toilet provided in an adjoining house. The visitor reception and information function is provided from a booth on the entry road to the park.

The existing arrangement of the access road and entry booth detract considerably from the amenity of the Park in that area 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 parking areas, camping areas and day use facilities with visitor information and charges being managed from the booth. This is very unsatisfactory from the perspectives of visitor convenience and resource management, and could be handled in a much more efficient manner in a properly designed reception facility.

Houses and certain storage facilities for field staff currently occupy the proposed location for the Interpretation Centre and related facilities. These functions will be relocated and the facilities, which are of low worth, will be demolished. This is included in the scope of the work for this project.

## ***The Planning Background***

### **Interpretation Centre**

The need for improved office and visitor facilities at Freycinet National Park has been on the planning agenda of the PWS for some time and with the opportunity presented by the funding of a new Interpretation Centre in that location, it has been possible to achieve this in a manner which promotes and fulfils the RFA Objectives and a cost effective outcome for the PWS as well.

### **Site Planning**

A site planning study found that the most appropriate location and siting for the new Interpretation Centre is the site currently occupied by existing service buildings. The Site Plan has been made available for public comment.

The Site Plan makes clear recommendations in relation to siting, access, building development, landscape treatment, and conservation and protection measures.

### **Interpretation Planning**

The PWS has provided interpretation in a number of discrete areas at Freycinet National Park and it has been very successful in providing holiday programs for visitors. However, the Service has been keenly aware of the shortcomings of the introductory information and interpretation provided at the entrance to the Park. The construction of the new Interpretation Centre will

provide a long-awaited opportunity to rectify this deficiency and provide a greatly enhanced understanding of the region in which the Park is located.

The interpretive works are intended to enhance the visitor experience through entertaining and educational interactive exhibits, displays and interpretive works in the natural environment. Some provision is also required to facilitate formal educational programs on matters relating to the natural environment.

Apart from having a significant influence on the design of the built structures, it is expected that the interpretive works will comprise a significant part of the detailed fitout and treatment of the public spaces in the Interpretation Centre. Works will also be carried out external to the Centre.

An Interpretation Plan has been prepared for the Interpretation Centre development by Cotton Design taking into consideration the distinct qualities and natural attributes of the Freycinet National Park, the system of reserves under the Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement and the special contribution made by particular reserves in forests of the East Coast.

## **Visitor Potential**

Freycinet National Park is enjoying increasing popularity as a destination for interstate and overseas visitors and continues to be one of the most significant holiday destinations for Tasmanians.

In 1999/2000 the Freycinet Peninsula had an estimated 118,400 interstate and overseas visitors or 23% of the total number of visitors to the State. Visitors to the Park itself, including Tasmanian residents, was estimated to be 170,000 and increasing.

## **Visitor Surveys**

The PWS 1999 Visitor Survey Program included Freycinet National Park and considerable information was gained about visitor responses to the services and facilities provided. The Service conducted the survey to assist with the further development of visitor strategies for the provision of future services and will be invaluable for the detailed design of the Interpretation Centre development.

The survey indicates that a high proportion of first-time visitors would like improved on-site interpretation whilst the repeat visitors would be concerned if the on-site facilities for picnicking were not included in the scope of the site redevelopment works associated with the new Interpretation Centre.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE**

### ***Overall Requirements***

The overall requirement is for a development that is sympathetic to the natural and heritage values of the area, and also resolves a number of issues that detract from these values relating to the arrangement of existing services infrastructure.

In particular, the development is required to comply with the overall Management Objectives detailed in the Freycinet National Park Management Plan. At the same time, new visitor facilities must be provided that will serve to enhance the commercial viability of the National Park's operation in an efficient manner.

### ***Location***

A separate site planning study on the location of the proposed East Coast Interpretative Centre was conducted by Inspiring Place prior to commissioning of the consultants for the design of the Centre and after consideration of 4 different sites.

The Centre's final location was confirmed as the site within the Freycinet Park boundaries and in compliance with the Freycinet National Park Visitor Services zone site plan May 2000. This location is also in compliance with the statutory Freycinet National Park, WYE River State Reserve Management Plan 2000.

This site was considered as giving the best potential to translate an East Coast feel with vistas to the Hazards and Richardson's Beach, availability of infrastructure for water and sewerage and cost effectiveness for both capital and ongoing cost management. The presence of Park Management to staff the Centre was considered a substantial benefit.

### ***General Requirements***

The proposed East Coast Visitor Centre presents a contextual and empathetic response to the selected site both in material form and planning. The design conveys the essential feel of the East Coast of Tasmania maximising views both from within the building and external spaces.

The Centre creates a sense of place enabling a strong development of themes such as environmental sustainable design principles, ease of access and mobility around buildings and landscape providing appeal to a range of age groups and lifestyles.

Operational support areas of the building provide offices for Parks and Wildlife staff and combine all management functions of the Centre and Park in one location.

Both the building and carparks are situated within previously disturbed areas in a zone approved by the Freycinet National Park Management plan and accepted by the Glamorgan Council as appropriate development.

The design provides parking for a maximum of 60 car spaces and 4 bus bays with a further space designated for at least 40 car spaces.

The project provides for an upgrade to powered camp sites, a new ticketing booth, walking trails and improved site waste management. Relocated storage sheds and materials compound will ensure an improved visitor appreciation of the area.

Both of these plans have been through extensive public consultation processes.

### ***Design Response***

The principal objective of the Interpretation Centre is to convey the history, lifestyle, industries and activities of the East Coast of Tasmania in an informative, relaxed and enjoyable manner. Views of the water, beach and landscape are important elements in the anticipation of an East Coast 'feel'. Such objectives are crucial factors in both the siting, design and orientation of the proposed East Coast Interpretation Centre in order to achieve maximum visitor appreciation of the region.

The main entrance to the Centre is designed to focus on the visitors approach to the 'Hazards' and water views over and through the building. Interpretation of the site begins externally in landscaped areas and continues within the Foyer and Interpretation Gallery.

Externally the building attempts to convey the ribs of a 'boat like' form abutting the solid rock-like form of the main entry. Materials such as timber, stone and red ochre coloured render convey the colours found in the surrounding landscape. A mix of similar materials conveys the integrity of the site to both external and internal architectural form, colour and texture. The main Foyer and Interpretation Gallery leads to the external viewing deck overlooking the Hazards and Richardson's beach areas without impinging on campers or other traditional users.

The Centre is designed to enhance visitor experience within the Park as well as improve general perceptions of the East Coast lifestyle, flora and fauna. Utilitarian offices are provided for Parks Management Staff and an Operations Centre for emergency rescue and fire fighting services.

Sustainable design principles ensure an emphasis on natural ventilation and energy management is adhered to. All materials are designed to blend within this natural landscape setting.

## ***Design Concept***

The design concept has been developed in close co-operation with Parks and Wildlife staff and with the benefit of having the entire project team of architects, landscape architects, engineers and interpretative consultants engaged at the beginning of the project. This has enabled a high level of integration of services, interiors, building design and external landscape with the site.

This process has also been assisted and informed by local comment during the investigation stages of the project. All necessary approvals have been sought and confirmed.

## ***Functional Planning***

The building is arranged around the principal display Interpretation space. An open plan design principle in this area was favoured by Parks Administration with a mix of 'East Coast' Interpretation display and retail items. A centralised manned Interpretation desk will provide visitors with easy access for queries and information about the East Coast region and the Freycinet National Park. Administrative functions will be placed adjacent to the main Interpretative Gallery space. The proximity of the Parks Administration Offices will ensure overview and security of the Interpretation Centre.

Internally the function of the offices are planned to permit a high summer use period and accommodation for visiting summer programme Rangers in a lower ground floor operations centre. All entries and decks will be connected by external pathways.

## **COST**

A detailed cost plan is being maintained for the development to ensure that the building, interpretative works and engineering works are contained within the capital development allocation.

Interpretation Centre	\$790,000.00
Site Works	\$714,000.00
Interpretation Works	\$221,000.00
Fitout Works	\$30,000.00
Consultant Fees	\$240,000.00
Project Management	\$120,000.00
Locality Allowance	\$120,000.00
Contingency	\$65,000.00
Project Reserve	\$50,000.00

<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST</b>	<b>\$2,350,000.00</b>
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The major source of funding for the project is from the Regional Forest Agreement which allocated \$1.5m for the development of an East Coast

Interpretation Centre, within Freycinet National Park. Some of the funding from a separate Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) Project for the development of camping and day use facilities in the Freycinet visitor services zone has been allocated to this project.

## **EVIDENCE**

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Wednesday, 4 July 2001, and inspected the site of the proposal. Following the inspection, the Committee commenced hearing evidence. The following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:

- Sue Haimes, Project Manager - Visitor Centres, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment;
- Andrew Roberts, Manager - Visitor Services, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment;
- Paul Gilby, Joint Project Architect, Gilby Vollus Crawford Shurman Architects in Association;
- Andrew Shurman, Joint Project Architect, Gilby Vollus Crawford Shurman Architects in Association;
- Sue Small, Project Site Works Consultant, Susan Small Landscape Architects;
- Roy Cordiner, Consultant Project Advisor

## ***Project Background***

The Manager - Visitor Services, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Mr Andrew Roberts described the background analysis that has taken place regarding the development:-

*“A lot of research went into this area and the services that are needed in the Freycinet area. It goes right back to an attraction study that was undertaken ... with Tourism Tasmania and others to work out what it is that makes attractions work and what is required. One the key findings ... was that visitors want that information where they stop and one of our challenges is to provide that information and to cross-promote to the rest of the community from an icon point where people stop and then can spread out and enhance the viability of the clusters that gather around there. Further to that, we commissioned a location study to be done when the RFA funding that was allocated to this project wasn't that clear on the exact location - I think it was in the Freycinet area.*

*We had a study done that looked at location at the entrance to the turnoff to the main highway - one on the edge of town and one in the park itself - and looked at all the different facets that needed to make a centre viable. That was a key in one of the*

*funding allocations: that the centre had to promote tourism in the area; interpret the forest values; but also had to be viable in the long term in its operational costs. So that is where it became critical to identify an underwriting tenet and that income stream to help fund the operational and ongoing maintenance cost of the centre. That is the principal reason why the centre ended up at the edge of the park, because the park itself needed an orientation point. ... The idea is you can come to this centre and see what is on offer and you can book an experience or a product from that site as well. In relation to tours - we don't want it to become a total accommodation booking area. The idea is it is a self-help line; it is a copy of the one that is operating at the Strahan visitor centre and working very successfully. I think that puts it in context."*

### **Office Accommodation**

Witnesses were questioned regarding the source of funds for the project, other than the \$1.5 million provided from the Regional Forest Agreement. The following exchange took place:-

**Ms HAIMES** - *We had a \$1.15 million NHT grant that was to provide facilities for camping and day use within the Freycinet National Park.*

**Mr HIDDING** - 1.15?

**Ms HAIMES** - Yes.

**Mr ROBERTS** - *It was a component of the strategic package that was taken out of NHT that was to promote regional employment growth focussing on tourism. It is part of what has been used at some of the other sites, including Mount Field.*

**Mr HIDDING** - Then there was another amount of money -

**Ms HAIMES** - *It was about \$400 000 - \$200 00 from the State capital investment program and \$200 000 from Parks funding.*

**Mr HIDDING** - What was that -

**Ms HAIMES** - *There was also an additional \$100 000 earned from the RFA interest which unlike most of our grants which don't accrue interest, the funding was seeded to the State on the basis that any interest earned would be put back into the project. So \$100 000 is an approximate estimate of the interest earned so far on the \$1.5 million.*

**Mr HIDDING** - *The capital investment program, which budget was that out of - Parks?*

**Ms HAIMES** - *No, that is State Government - global State government; it's a capital investment program for capital works.*

**Mr CORDINER** - *It comes out in works and services, out of that budget.*

**Mr HIDDING** - *It is under Parks budget, though, isn't it?*

**Ms HAIMES** - *Yes.*

Witnesses were also questioned regarding the basis upon which \$400,000 of State funds could be applied to this project. The witnesses responded:-

**Mr ROBERTS** - *Part of having the Parks and Wildlife district base there, the district there at the moment, the Parks and Wildlife also concentrated a lot of its district management into this park and, instead of decreasing the size of the centre available to the public and increasing the size of the offices, the Government has recognised that and put more money into the building so that the offices can be expanded to cope with that district function.*

**Ms HAIMES** - *When you look at the floor area of the business centre, the floor area that Parks will occupy as office space is approximately 50 per cent of the total floor area and the \$400 000, if you like, equates to roughly 50 per cent of the costs of the building and the \$350 000 from the NHT equates to roughly 50 per cent of the site works costs. It is to cover the camping and some of the day-use facilities.*

When asked as to how the NHT money for camping and associated works apply to offices for Parks staff the witnesses responded:-

**Ms HAIMES** - *We have transferred that amount from the NHT on the basis that it was money for the site works associated around the visitor centre, including the redevelopments at the powered camping site and the parking and also the walks down to the beach.*

**Mr SHURMAN** - *The NHT money doesn't go into the building; it goes into the camp grounds infrastructure.*

**Ms HAIMES** - *And the day-use facilities surrounding the visitor centre.*

**Mr SHURMAN** - The building cost is \$750 000.

**Mr ROBERTS** - If the centre wasn't being built that money would have to be expended on visitor facilities in that area anyway.

**Mr HIDDING** - My point is we have \$1.5 million in total for the building, including site works. Once you flatten the buildings that are there, the \$1.5 million buys you the shell, of which 50 per cent is for Parks offices. It seems to me that you have plugged in \$400 000 of \$1.5 million - that's hardly a 50 per cent share.

**Ms HAIMES** - If you add the \$350 000 which Parks could have used in other areas of the park from the NHT funding, that then takes it up to about \$750 000.

**Mr HIDDING** - You've lost me with that. \$350 000 from NHT funding -

**Ms HAIMES** - That's right.

**Mr HIDDING** - that is for camping.

**Ms HAIMES** - As camping and day-use. What we are saying is that the facilities that are being done as part of this project include camping in the powered camp sites area and day-use facilities in the sense of parking and the access walks, the relocation of the outdoor theatre, relate to the day-use activities within the park. There will still be a substantial amount for other development of day-use and camping facilities elsewhere in the park as well.

**Mr SHURMAN** - In explanation, if you go to page 13, Mr Chairman, the interpretive centre works is the \$790 000, which is the building works; the interpretive works is the \$221 000 -

**Mr HIDDING** - That is fit-out later, though, isn't it?

**Mr SHURMAN** - Yes. So if you add those two together you are getting close - that is almost a million. Then you gather in a proportion of the fit-out works, that goes into that budget, so you get \$1.13 million and then you add a proportion of consultants fees, a proportion of project management et cetera and that comes up close to your RFA fund, which is only for that element. You can break down the proportion of the CIP funding and PWS funding as deducted off the proportion of the building which is for office only functions. So ultimately you come out with the balance - there's still

*\$1.5 million of your RFA is going into legitimate RFA (expenditure).*

### ***Responsibility for the project***

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to why the responsibility for the project did not come under the jurisdiction of Forestry Tasmania as the majority of the funding was derived from RFA sources.

Mr Roberts responded:-

*“One of the outcomes of the regional forest agreement was identifying the different areas of value around the place and one of the areas that was sought was the flow-on to tourism benefit of forests. The grant was given to the people who were the biggest operator in those areas - in this case, Parks and Wildlife was leading this one; in the Meander Valley, Parks and Wildlife is leading it but it is also including a whole range of people through the whole process.”*

The Project Manager - Visitor Centres, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Ms Sue Haines added:-

*“The general intent was to interpret the values of the reserves that were considered under the RFA process, not necessarily to interpret forestry. I guess Forestry have been consulted in terms of the interpretation. Pru Cotton and myself met with Forestry to talk about the interpretation that goes into the centre, interpreting the RFA values. We also have Forestry on that steering committee that sits above the project as well, so they are being kept informed and consulted throughout the process of the project. ... Within the east coast there are a number of different forest types and with the interpretation we will be interpreting those forest types across the east coast. Parks will also be doing some ancillary interpretation of those forest types as they relate to the Freycinet National Park.”*

### ***Visitor payment system***

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the proposed system for the payments of fees and charges. Mr Roberts submitted:-

*“The plan is that people come to the centre, there will be a vending machine up on the road, as well as one in the car park itself. The idea is principally though that people can buy their park pass, if they don't have one already, from the staff in the centre and then they will go on from there. If people have a pass already, they are able to go straight on past the car park. Part of this process of not having a boom-gate-type-booth that*

*we have at the moment is that you get to use the staff from the centre more but also it means you have to increase your enforcement time in the park. That will mean a bit more ranger time, going out checking on passes to make sure that each car that is within the park has a valid park space."*

### **Traffic management**

The Committee questioned the witnesses in relation to the management of traffic in the vicinity of the proposed centre. Ms Haines responded:-

*"There is provision for overflow parking down near the powered camp sites. The general approach, I guess, to most of our visitor centres is that we design for pretty average anticipated loads and then you manage the peak loads, rather than have a very costly and large car park to cater for absolute peaks. I guess the experience to date within the park, and allowing for some future growth, that is the figure that we have come to at that top car park, but there is room down in the overflow car park."*

Mr Roberts added:-

*"One of the keys to keep in mind is this is an orientation point. It is different to, say, Mount Field, where you go and stop and have your experience. This is probably a 20-minute to an hour experience here and then go on to the other parts of the park, so there would be a fair turnover in the car park."*

### **Commercial viability of the centre**

The Committee questioned the witnesses in relation to the commercial viability of the centre, Mr Roberts responded:

*The idea of the centre (is that) it's a full retail area for things like branded clothing - again, Cradle Mountain is the example here. That shop up there now is turning over \$400 000 a year in branded clothing and making a significant trading surplus which covers a lot of their costs. So the idea is that you get your camping inquiries properly managed from there, you get the park entry fee sales from there and you get retail sales. The information, staff can deliver in many cases, at no extra cost in staffing time, particularly in the low season. The staff are there anyway and they can make a sale and it often helps in the high season because it helps the truncated visitor inquiry ... The idea is to maximise those opportunities that are there but also we've got to work in with the local business community as well*

*and that's where this sharing - this self-help line with the other attractions goes.*

*I'm really keen to see it become a focus of the area and not just parks and wildlife. It has to be, 'Come to Freycinet, the east coast, and this is what else is on offer and this is how you go about getting it'. What they call it is a seamless visit in tourism jargon."*

### **Best practice and innovative techniques**

In light of the criteria that 'best practice and innovative techniques' are applied to projects funded from RFA sources, the Committee sought evidence as to how those criteria were satisfied in relation to the proposal. Mr Andrew Shurman, the Joint Project Architect, of Gilby Vollus Crawford Shurman Architects in Association, responded:

*"One of those things is try to build within the capability of the local area as much as possible and I think that is something we have taken on board. We have taken on board the nature of the site and the materials that we are trying to join to the site. Beyond that innovation there's no high-tech innovation, if you like, that relates to this project but we don't think that is a principle that we necessarily wanted to follow in this instance. It's really to make the building fit to its site. If innovation is about that then this is what this is about."*

### **Heritage and natural values**

The Committee sought evidence in relation to the attention given to the interpretation of the heritage and natural values of the area. The witnesses gave the following evidence:

**Ms HAIMES** - *I guess the cultural values which are historic, European, cultural values and Aboriginal values. The interpretation within the centre will have interpretation on both those aspects and in terms of the site we have done site surveys as part of the site planning exercise for this and the rest of the day area within the park on the Aboriginal values of the area and we've had liaison with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council in that regard.*

**Mr CORDINER** - *There was an Aboriginal cultural heritage survey.*

**Ms HAIMES** - *Yes, there was an Aboriginal cultural heritage survey and I guess the design of the building has taken that into account.*

**Mr GILBEY** - *From an ecological point of view the location, so that we're minimising disturbance of the park on the whole, we're locating the new centre over the top of the old buildings using the cleared area as the car park, so we're maximising the area that's already disturbed and minimising the area that we have to disturb in order to finish the centre.*

**Ms SMALL** - *Just as a feature of displaying some of that heritage, the rocks that we're talking about getting out of the quarry are ones that have showed the blasting and so it's showing that this granite was used in quarries and so it won't look very natural, some of it - it's cut and it's got the drill holes in it - so depicting that side of things. We're showing all the different sorts of rocks that have been mined in the area and the soil and sand and they'll be interpreted outside. We'll have pockets of those on display.*

**Ms HAIMES** - *Within the centre one of the key features is what's called a history book. You'll see it located on the plan - the last plan in the report which has the interpretative elements - and it's No. 12, the story book, which will have local stories. We also hope to have a number of photographs taken of the east coast by an Aboriginal photographer - a quite prominent one. That has to be developed yet but there will be significant elements of the history contained within the interpretative displays as well.*

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The evidence presented to the Committee demonstrated the need for the development of a Interpretation Centre at the Freycinet National Park which will provide improved visitor reception facilities and amenities, including retail, new interpretation displays and improved office accommodation for Parks and Wildlife Service management staff.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends the project, in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted, at an estimated total cost of \$2,350,000.

**Parliament House  
HOBART  
25 July 2001**

**Hon. D. G. Wing M.L.C.  
CHAIRMAN**

