



NSW NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Visitor destinations discussion paper

**Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Lion Island
Nature Reserve, Long Island Nature Reserve
and Spectacle Island Nature Reserve**



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Introduction

The NSW *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* requires a plan of management to be prepared for each national park and nature reserve. A plan of management is a legal document that sets out how the values of the park including natural, cultural (Aboriginal and shared heritage) and recreation values will be managed in the long term.

The current Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Lion Island Nature Reserve, Long Island Nature Reserve and Spectacle Island Nature Reserve Plan of Management has been in place since 2002. In this time, visitation to the national park has increased, new management challenges and opportunities have emerged, and community interests and expectations have changed.

In response to these emerging management challenges and opportunities and changing community interests and expectations, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is preparing a new plan of management for Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park and the island nature reserves.

Five discussion papers have been developed to inform preparation of this new plan of management and provide opportunities for comment and community feedback. The papers describe and explore key management areas focused on the following themes:

- Natural, visitor experience and shared heritage values
- Aboriginal values
- Recreational activities
- Visitor destinations
- Leases, licences and consents.

Purpose of this paper

Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park has several very popular visitor destinations, most of which are located on the foreshore of lower Hawkesbury River estuaries. The purpose of this paper is to invite discussion about how these popular places should be managed to ensure they will continue to provide an enjoyable and rewarding experience for visitors and conserve the park's natural and cultural heritage values.

The island nature reserves are not recreational visitor destinations. They are visited by volunteers and scientists, with NPWS consent, for conservation management purposes and are not open to the public. The island nature reserves are not discussed in this paper.

Visitor destinations

Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park is one of the most popular national parks in New South Wales, attracting 3.32 million visits in 2016. The park's proximity to centres of continuing population growth and its relative ease of access contribute to increasing park visitation. The importance of the park in providing rewarding nature-based visitor experiences is set to grow with this increasing visitation offering opportunities to capture and inspire a new generation of park visitors.

The main visitor destinations or precincts in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park are:

- Bobbin Head, Apple Tree Bay and Kalkari
- Akuna Bay and Illawong
- West Head and Resolute Picnic Area
- The Basin
- Barrenjoey Head.

These areas are the focus of most visitor use in the park. The first three destinations contain modified landscapes and facilities such as sealed car parking areas, toilets, barbecues, shelters and open space areas for picnicking. Kiosks and cafés are located at Bobbin Head in the Bobbin Inn and the Empire Bay Marina and a restaurant operates out of the Akuna Bay Marina.

Camping and picnic facilities are located at The Basin, which can be accessed by foot or by private boat or public ferry. Barrenjoey Head currently has no visitor facilities and is accessible by foot from a council managed carpark. Facilities and services that support visitor use at Barrenjoey Head are provided by council or private businesses and located off-site.

The smaller, less-modified visitor areas at the Duckholes Picnic Area, Salvation Creek Picnic Area, Brooklyn Dam and The Sphinx Memorial provide opportunities for small groups to experience the park away from the main visitor precincts. Day use facilities are provided at Duckholes Picnic Area and Salvation Creek Picnic Area and camping opportunities are provided at Brooklyn Dam for people using the Great North Walk. No visitor facilities are provided at The Sphinx Memorial site.

Increasing use of visitor destinations and ageing facilities is causing concerns

The park is set amongst some of the most densely populated suburban areas in Sydney. Large numbers of people (more than 500,000) live within 10 kilometres of the park and many people visit the park on a regular basis. It is expected that the proximity of the park to these growing areas and the demand for open space and opportunities to experience natural landscapes will drive increased visitation.

The park's rugged, steep landscape and significant natural and cultural values limit opportunities for the expansion of existing visitor precincts and the creation of new visitor precincts. Careful redesign of existing visitor destinations is needed to address the challenges posed by increasing visitation.

Each destination can only accommodate a certain level of visitation, based on the availability of car parking and the capacity of facilities. During peak visitation periods carparks can exceed capacity and infrastructure can be strained reducing visitor enjoyment and creating safety issues.

Available car parking spaces, particularly at Bobbin Head and West Head, do not meet demand during weekends and holiday periods. Observations suggest that the number of days where demand exceeds car parking spaces continues to increase. The increasing number and size of organised events can add to car parking capacity issues.

Some existing visitor facilities require major repairs or replacement to reach a condition that meets community expectations and current standards. Other assets that no longer meet visitor needs may need to be removed. Some park buildings currently in poor condition could be adapted to enhance visitor opportunities.

NPWS has adopted an Asset Stewardship program for the management of assets and infrastructure. The program provides a framework for prioritising assets and infrastructure investment and ongoing maintenance, and removal or replacement of assets and infrastructure to improve visitor experience, enhance heritage conservation and better support park operations.

Foreshore-based visitor destinations will be increasingly affected by sea level rise, and projections need to be considered in precinct planning. Inundation currently affects picnic areas at Bobbin Head, impacting the presentation and appeal of the precinct and vehicle access during periods of extreme high tides.

Social media is driving visitor interest in accessing locations that do not have visitor infrastructure. These places may be difficult to get to and present safety risks for visitors and park staff or emergency services. Unmanaged use can cause damage to sensitive natural and cultural features.

Some visitor destinations are not connected to mains services such as power, sewer and water. These destinations use site-based systems of fixed and limited capacity. Both mobile and landline phone services are limited or absent in some precincts.

What factors do you think are most important to consider in managing visitor destinations in the park?

Improvements could be made to visitor destinations

NPWS aims to:

- Manage precinct visitor numbers on peak days, particularly at Bobbin Head, Apple Tree Bay and Kalkari Precinct.
- Upgrade park facilities consistent with the Asset Stewardship program, facility standards, future needs, priorities and resource availability.
- Continue to provide smaller, less-modified day use areas to allow small groups and families to experience the park away from the main visitor precincts.
- Enhance existing visitor precincts where there is high demand for the visitor experience offered, or that could be offered, and where environmental impacts can be managed sustainably, and sea level rise accommodated.
- Provide increased information on the ground, via social media and on the NPWS website to provide early and accurate advice to visitors about changed conditions in the park, including temporary road closures and visitor precinct capacity, and to highlight other similar visitor destinations within the park and in parklands managed by other agencies.

- Encourage increased visitation on non-peak days and during the low to mid-season across a range of locations to spread demand and make best use of facilities throughout the year.
- Provide facilities that can be easily serviced and maintained. For example, visitor precincts should ideally be located where they can be readily accessed by vehicle and where adequate support facilities can be provided (such as drinking water and toilets).
- Permit temporary infrastructure or facilities during peak visitor season. For example, licenced commercial operators of pop-up cafés and kiosks, temporary toilets and temporary storage for events and park activities.
- Use visitor destinations as hubs for water, road, track and trail activities. The destinations will provide facilities and services such as resting places, potable water and toilets for bushwalkers, trail runners, boat tourers, cyclists and scenic drivers as they move around the park. These hubs would be designed to provide facilities for short-stay visits as well as facilities for single destination long stay visits. The hubs could be linked to enhance the visitor experience at each visitor destination as well as between visitor destinations.
- Use visitor destinations as places to heighten awareness of the park's special values and how people can help to look after these values. On-site interpretation, guided tours, meet and greet and mobile applications are examples of awareness-raising options.

What do you think about the above approaches to managing visitor destinations in the park?

Bobbin Head, Apple Tree Bay and Kalkari Precinct

The Bobbin Head, Apple Tree Bay and Kalkari Precinct is the most popular precinct in the park. On certain public holidays, celebratory days and school holiday periods, more people want to visit Bobbin Head than there are car parking spaces available. Observations suggest that the number of days the precinct reaches capacity has increased each year and this increase is expected to continue.

NPWS has a system in place to advise visitors that Bobbin Head Picnic Area's car parking areas are full once they arrive at a park entry station. A better system is required to advise visitors before they travel to the park.

An online booking system for the Bobbin Head, Apple Tree Bay and Kalkari Precinct could set an upper limit for each of the three locations based on the number of available parking spaces, provide options for half-day or full-day parking, and redirect visitors to less crowded precincts that offer a similar experience.

This type of booking system would greatly reduce the negative experience of preparing and travelling for a day out only to find that the precinct has reached capacity. It may mean that access to certain areas on particular days will only be available to those that have booked. Any system will need to ensure fair and equitable access, including making provision for people with disabilities and the elderly.

A masterplan for Bobbin Head and Apple Tree Bay was prepared in 2006. This masterplan proposed works to improve the precinct, including protecting natural and cultural heritage and enhancing the visitor experience. Most of the proposals in the masterplan have been implemented. The outstanding proposals have been deferred until the significant issues associated with tidal inundation due to projected sea level rise can be resolved.

It is timely to reconsider the opportunities for this precinct in light of growing visitor demands by revisiting and revising the masterplan and incorporating the Kalkari Discovery Centre and surrounds into precinct planning.

Would you support an online booking system for the Bobbin Head, Apple Tree Bay and Kalkari Precinct?

What new or improved visitor facilities or visitor experiences, if any, would you like to see in this precinct?

Akuna Bay and Illawong Precinct

Akuna Bay and Illawong Precinct is a secluded area tucked away along Coal and Candle Creek. Its relative seclusion is part of its attraction. This precinct has space, utility service and environmental limitations that mean it cannot accommodate as many visitors as some other precincts. There may be opportunities to enhance the visitor experience, improve access and provide additional facilities at this precinct to encourage sustainable use and enjoyment of the area. Possible enhancements, subject to capacity constraints and visitor preferences, could include:

- a new walking track linking Akuna Bay to Illawong with a short loop option at Illawong
- providing safe access across the road to waterside areas
- on-site interpretation
- improvements to the picnic area and car parking.

An important consideration when planning for these low-lying visitor destinations is sea level rise. Projections for sea level rise need to be closely monitored and factored into investment decisions.

What new or improved visitor facilities or visitor experiences, if any, would you like to see at Akuna Bay and Illawong Precinct?

West Head and Resolute Picnic Area Precinct

West Head and Resolute Picnic Area Precinct enjoys sweeping water views from the lookout and various other vantage points. The precinct has had a number of visitor facility improvements in the past 10 to 15 years. These included new visitor toilets at Resolute picnic area, parking formalisation, lookout improvements, new interpretative signage, picnic area enhancement and construction of a walking track to the West Head fortifications.

West Head is a very popular destination, particularly on weekends and during holiday periods. The mix of visitors includes road cyclists cycling to the precinct independently or as part of organised events (see the Recreational activities discussion paper). Car parking capacity does not meet demand at these times resulting in safety and environmental issues from visitors informally parking their cars and walking along West Head Road. Some car parking improvements have been made in recent years, but further works are required to address capacity-related issues.

Opportunities exist to improve amenity and address capacity constraints using carefully considered design and precinct planning. Options include continued upgrading of directional and interpretive signage, improvements to the picnic area and carpark and redirection of visitor flows using hubs.

What new or improved visitor facilities or visitor experiences, if any, would you like to see at West Head and Resolute Picnic Area Precinct?

Barrenjoey Head Precinct

Barrenjoey Head is a prominent landmark with high cultural heritage importance, including its historic lightstation. The headland is listed on the [State Heritage Register](#) and management is informed by a [Conservation Management Plan](#).

The headland is highly valued by visitors to the area and by the local community. Improvements are needed to protect the precinct's buildings, enhance opportunities for visitors to appreciate the precinct's historic heritage and to provide basic toilet facilities and drinking water. Improvements in recent years include repairs to the access trail and Smugglers Track, the installation of sewer and water mains connections to buildings at the base and at the top of the headland and conservation works to the lighthouse and the lightkeepers' cottages.

Currently, the lighthouse is the only building open to the public, with volunteer-led guided tours for a few hours on Sundays. There is scope for the buildings within the precinct to be appreciated more fully by the public. In 2016 NPWS exhibited a [draft Barrenjoey Head Concept Plan](#) with options for improved site access including short-stay visitor accommodation, improved interpretation of the site and the installation of public toilet facilities. This discussion paper provides an opportunity for the community to provide further feedback on ways to manage the precinct.

What new or improved visitor facilities or visitor experiences, if any, would you like to see at Barrenjoey Precinct?

The Basin Precinct

The Basin Precinct is located on the western Pittwater foreshore within the national park. Carefully considered design and improvements to the precinct would allow NPWS to attract a broader cross-section of visitors (e.g. mobility impaired), attract visitors at quieter times of the year and manage water, waste and energy more sustainably. Premium (potentially safari-style tents), standard and casual camping sites could be provided as well as improved amenities and picnic and barbecue facilities. The wharf could be upgraded to provide for disabled access.

What new or improved visitor facilities or experiences, if any, would you like to see at The Basin Precinct?

What mix of accommodation would you like to see at The Basin Precinct?

Cottage Point Precinct

The Cottage Point community is located on the foreshore of Cowan Creek and is surrounded by the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. Access to the community is via boat from Cowan Creek or by vehicle along a public road. Public moorings are available in Cowan Creek (see

the Leases, licences and consents discussion paper). There may be opportunities to improve access and parking to better support visitor activities at Cottage Point.

What new or improved visitor facilities or visitor experiences, if any, would you like to see at Cottage Point?

Other visitor destinations

The smaller, less-modified visitor areas at the Duckholes Picnic Area, Salvation Creek Picnic Area, Brooklyn Dam and The Sphinx Memorial are important alternative destinations that provide opportunities to experience the less developed and less crowded parts of the park.

These destinations will continue to be managed as low-key day use areas with minimal development to provide a range of visitor experiences in the park.

What do you think?

Your thoughts, ideas and comments on this discussion paper are now invited and can be provided using an [online comment form](#), by emailing ku-ring-gai.plan@environment.nsw.gov.au or by writing to Manager, Planning Evaluation and Assessment, PO Box 95, Parramatta NSW 2124.

The questions scattered throughout this paper are only intended to guide your thoughts. You may choose to comment on other aspects of the management of visitor destinations. All input will inform the preparation of a new plan of management for Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Lion Island Nature Reserve, Long Island Nature Reserve and Spectacle Island Nature Reserve.

There will be another opportunity to have your say when the draft plan is completed and put on public exhibition. If you would like to be notified when the draft plan is available, please [register your details](#).