



Friends of the Royal National Park Incorporated

ABN 34 245 207 460

Submission on the Draft Wattamolla Master Plan

Friday, 3 June, 2016

We wish thank the Office of Environment and Heritage for the opportunity to comment on the proposals contained within the Draft Wattamolla Master Plan.

Friends of Royal acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Royal National Park lands, the Dharawal people.

Wattamolla was a significant location for the early indigenous people who inhabited this area for many thousands of years prior to European occupation. Despite their long presence in the area, the signs of habitation are rare, and, indeed, they are perhaps reserved for the few who know where to look and what to look for, and it is an imperative of any future plans for the Wattamolla area that these sites be protected into the future.

Friends of Royal inc. (FoR) is an organization that is made up of individuals with a wide range of interests within the boundaries of the Royal National Park. They have come together, as Friends, to share and impart their knowledge and to advocate for the efficient management, responsible use, and the future wellbeing of the Park and its adjoining reserves. Most FoR members have long and ongoing associations with the Park. Collectively they have an extensive understanding of the historic use of, and the challenges that confront the 'Park today.

The Wattamolla precinct, post European settlement, has long been a source of wonder, recreation and enjoyment for countless people, most from within the greater Sydney region but also from the wider NSW, interstate, and overseas. Indeed, an impromptu chat with visitors within the area will soon reveal a great variety of backgrounds and origins.

One of the major drivers for the re-evaluation of the current Wattamolla facilities has been the need to address the chaotic situations that arise at peak visitation times with road use, car parking and the orderly entry and exiting of vehicles from the Park being the critical issues at hand.

Toilet location, functionality and cleanliness, and also litter management, tracks and beach access are the main secondary issues to be dealt with.

With these factors in mind, and based on contributions and comments from FoR members, we submit the following for your consideration.

The Draft Master Plan

It is acknowledged that *Master Plans*, by their nature, are guidelines to inform Park managers of the options that are seemingly best suited to the chosen areas under their care. Our initial observations, upon reading the Draft, indicate that the consultant has provided a broad discourse on the range of choices and opportunities that could be available for inclusion in future Plans of Management for the Wattamolla precinct. However, we intend to raise additional important considerations that appear to have been under-researched or overlooked in the Draft paper.

We also raise the major point of difficulty for reviewers of the Draft in the lack of detail for some of the important propositions that the consultants have included in the document.

I. Safety

I. Fire.

Rightly, the safety of visitors needs to be paramount in the minds of planners and here we were disappointed to note the omission of any reference to fire safety, indeed the word “fire” does not appear in the Draft.

We recognise that fire safety considerations are perhaps beyond the expertise of the consultants, however, a glance at Figure 27 on page 16 of the Draft, and, on the same page, the number of persons in the area as “2646 at one time”, who will potentially be located at the eastern edge of a 3km + dead-end road, and, with the most popular visitation times in the peak fire season.

In this scenario it is probable that the majority of the potentially 2000 plus people in the area will no idea of what to do in the case of fire, and should a fire start at any point near, or along, the Wattamolla road, then the potential for a major catastrophe is highly possible.

We request that a risk assessment be undertaken to identify refuges and asset protection zones for the visitors and their property, and that the outcomes of such assessment be included as a prominent attachment to the Draft Master Plan.

Such an assessment needs to include input from NPWS, RFS, Police and insurers, and, given the massive fuel loads that currently exist in the Park, could perhaps be expanded to include all areas within the Park boundaries.

Considerations would need to take account of the possible inaccessibility of the beach as a refuge due to high water flows in the lagoon outfall, between the land and beach.

Should it be decided that Asset Protection Zones (large clearings) or fuel reduction actions are required, then we request that such areas be marked on suitable plans and made available for viewing.

II. Water based recreation

Much focus is given to the risk from injury for persons who jump into the lagoon from the clifftop at Coote Creek. It is noted, however, that historical research into drownings in the area reveals that six children under the age of 10 years have drowned in Wattamolla Lagoon. A table is included at the end of this paper that shows all drownings that have been uncovered, to date, in the Wattamolla area. Additionally, in more recent years, three near drownings have occurred.

In 2008 an 8-year-old child was rescued from the lagoon and resuscitated, and in a single incident in 2012 two children aged 4 and 8 years were rescued from the lagoon with one requiring resuscitation. It is not known if any suffered permanent injury from these events.

Information signage and warnings, along with resuscitation instructions should be considered for erection in the area.

III. Communications

The Wattamolla area is in a mobile phone blackspot and whilst some mobile reception is possible from the higher vantage points, the lagoon, beach and picnic areas remain isolated. Given the number of people who visit the area and the potential for accidents it is considered that a communication tower is justifiable.

It is also noted that some form of communication would be required to allow optimal use of future credit/pay-card transactions on the site, be it parking meters for use when the pay booths are unmanned or for transactions at the kiosk.

II. Upgrades, Stage 1, page 21 of Draft

I. Main Lawn Area

The proposal to upgrade the main lawn area is acceptable, however, the historic open space of the area should be maintained. It is noted also that many of the picnic areas remain waterlogged for long periods after rain and an investigation into soil depth and sub-soil drainage should be undertaken over the whole site.

The soil layers are generally shallow over a solid sandstone bed and that planting of larger shade trees without the addition of large quantities of topsoil may lead to failure.

II. Island car parking and car parking in general

The lower car park area, (*Island Carpark*, page 14), is proposed to be re-located westwards and parking spaces reduced to 33 spaces (page 16). Currently the lower area has a capacity for 57 cars with an additional 24 cars parking on the roadside approaches (81 total). No statement has been made regarding roadside spaces under the new configuration, and if we assume that none are allowed, then it will result in a net loss of 48 places in the lower area.

An increase of 2 tiers x 88 places (page 19) in the upper carpark (stage 1), coupled with the potential loss in the lower area will give a nett increase of 128 places.

It is noted that the current number of car parking spaces were effectively reduced several years ago when overflow parking along the Wattamolla access road was stopped. Here we again refer to Figure 27 on page 16 of the Draft, where it is shown on the aerial photograph that a number of cars are parked in reasonably close proximity to the Wattamolla precinct.

We suggest that the reviewers of the submissions view the original of this photo, in higher resolution, to ascertain the approximate number of car spaces that were lost at that time. It is our estimation from the low resolution image that up to 100, and perhaps more, were lost.

We make no comment on the reasons for the prohibition of parking in this area, there were probably good safety reasons for the determination.

It is also a fact that in relatively recent years, car spaces were lost at Garie Beach, where, in 2005, the carpark was upgraded but parking was reduced from approximately 230 car spaces to the current 175, giving a nett reduction of car 55 spaces. This reduction, coupled with the loss of the Wattamolla road parking has resulted in a total loss of around 100 to 150 car spaces at the only two coastal beach destinations within the Royal National Park. (It is acknowledged that overflow car parking was provided for at Garie with the opening on busy days of the Garie Ridge Helipad (capacity unknown))

Individual Friends of Royal members have offered various opinions on the carpark upgrade proposal, some are vehemently against any expansion of the parking areas whilst others concede that the precinct is a modified cultural landscape and that it should provide opportunities for more visitors on days of peak demand.

We find this proposal acceptable and that future monitoring be undertaken to determine the need for further expansion to tiers 7 and 8 as part of any justification proposal for the commencement of stage 3.

III. Picnic areas

The report notes the lack of shade in the picnic areas, however, it needs to be added that in the cooler months this is not such an issue.

Also there is a comment that the picnic areas have no visual connection with the lagoon yet no solution is offered here. Is clearing of vegetation to be undertaken?

IV. Area North of Coote Creek. (North Lawn)

It is suggested that the former cleared area be considered for reopening under stage 3.

We recommend that this option only be considered after a more detailed study has been undertaken to examine the soils, drainage and potential litter issues.

V. Camping Area

The proposed area is in reasonably close proximity to the amenities block which is a positive, however, the utilisation of the site is not defined, no mention of the number of camp sites. One issue with road accessible camping is that it provides an opportunity for other than coast track walkers to camp in the area and that "road supplied" parties may ensue to the detriment of others and the area in general.

More details are required for this proposal.

VI. Palm Flats.

No issues with the proposals

VII. Existing Kiosk.

No reference has been made to interviews with past tenants to ascertain the primary issues that are related to this site. Surely that avenue must be explored to gain an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of any proposals. No doubt the remoteness of the site, the lack of continuous power, and, that on any given day the business volume is determined by the weather.

One immediate problem appears to be that now, due to the prolonged closure period, there is no good-will and any business would have to start from scratch, leasing provisions should take account of this fact to allow the business to establish.

The suggested refurbishment of the building by dressing with timber needs to take into consideration the bushfire risk.

VIII. Deck Viewing Platform.

No issues.

IX. Paths and Balustrades

The upgrade of existing paths and tracks is essential and welcome.

The proposed balustrade is not well defined and the image in Figure 41 would suggest that it will look like a wall when viewed from an angle. **We are not in favour of this proposal.**

The suggestion that it will be more difficult to climb over the blade structure is perhaps speculative as the people who jump from the cliff would have no difficulty climbing such a fence, further, the integrity of blade structure would soon succumb to a handyman with a jack.

X. Existing Toilet Blocks

See the section on the Wattamolla toilets in the Toilet report to Royal National Park, from Friends of Royal in 2015.

In that report it was noted that the cisterns were open at the top and subject to leaf contamination and that many were observed to be leaking. This continuous flow condition was observed over many months during the survey and indicated an absence of a proper maintenance program.

Observations on Monday mornings, before cleaning, revealed that both male and female toilets were in an unacceptable state of cleanliness.

Allowances at peak times for multiple cleaning sessions per day must be included in future proposals.

½ Flush cistern options to be evaluated.

Any proposal for the fixing of roofing of the existing blocks needs to take into account provisions for lighting, however, the high roof design depicted in figure 33 on page 17 appears to be overdone.

The proposal for water capture from the roof of the toilets for showers needs to be backed with engineering assessments and designs in relation to the potential quantity of water to be captured and stored, the projected usage, and the maintenance frequency and other requirements for the clearing of leaf litter etc. from the roof, gutters and pipes.

How would the roof depicted on page 17 be cleaned? Cherry picker? It appears too high for a ladder.

Allowance for redundant systems and back-ups should be a major consideration of any upgrade to the sewage treatment installation.

Allowances to be made for the relatively new phenomenon of “*disposable wipes*” that may clog the systems.

Reports of past maintenance, and breakdown actions should be examined to guide any upgrade proposals.

XI. Cliff Jumping

This activity appears to have been happening for generations and is now part of the cultural heritage of the site.

Decisions need to be made as to the future of this activity, its management or other, as it would appear to be almost an uninsurable pastime, therefore comprehensive decisions need to be made.

XII. Footbridge

The installation of a footbridge as depicted in figure 41 **is not supported**, it is too intrusive and sandstone stepping stones, a simple footbridge, or a combination of both, is the preferred option here.

XIII. Beach Loop Track on northern side

Not supported, the northern side should be left as a natural area.

XIV. Swing Bridge. (Stage 3)

Not supported! Royal National Park has a poor history of maintaining assets and a metal structure in a salt-air-laden environment is just not viable, see also northern loop track note above.

XV. Coast Track Realignment. (Stage 2)

Careful consideration should be made here as the diversion to the southern headland will increase the distance of the coast track by around 400m and some will prefer to walk the old shorter route with its lesser grades. We note that the track from the southern headland to the *BOM* weather tower on the high ground would need to be well constructed as it passes over steep grades on friable soils.

XVI. Commercial Campground

No reference has been made to the experiences of the operators who have run the earlier overnight coast-walks and who have camped on the eastern flat. (around 250 meters from the Toilet Block—too far). It is noted that there will be provision for an amenities block on the proposed site (Item 25, p15) with sewage disposal above and to the east of the camp (p13).

Surely these operators would have meaningful contributions to make to the development of the Draft Master Plan, yet, here we have one of the more controversial topics with very little information supplied on the detail of such proposal.

It is foremost in the opinion of FoR members that commercial operations should not detract from the enjoyment or spaces now available for the public. Therefore the placement of the facility in a discrete location is desirable.

XVII. Zip Line

No Zip Line — unanimous

The proposed location of the zip line is in one of the most picturesque places of the locality, it is not acceptable.

XVIII. Relocation of the Bass and Flinders Memorial

The Memorial was dedicated almost 78 years ago, the same day that the current Audley boat shed was opened, see:

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/17530599>

FoR does not support the relocation of the foundation of the memorial and that any restoration of the plaques needs careful consideration including protective measures to make it extremely difficult to steal them.

Again more details of this proposal are required.

XIX. On Line Booking System

It would appear that a proposed on-line booking system has merit, however, the flow chart seems complicated and will require regular high-level-management decision-making to invoke the routine. There are many considerations to be examined before such a system is trialled.

- What will be the cost to Annual Pass and exemption card holders.
- What time will the gates be opened and closed and what hours will the pay booth be manned?
- What to do with vehicles that stay overnight? (fishermen, walkers, etc)- as now

- Will the system keep people away and lead to a loss of revenue?
- What to do with walkers who prearrange for Wattamolla to be a starting point or pickup point. (Now a common practice for people to walk from Bundeena or Garie or further south to Wattamolla, or to start an early day walk from Bundeena.)

XX. Diesel Water Pump.

The diesel powered water pump, located next to the dam on Coote Creek has been observed to run (noisily) for long periods during the day. Consideration is to be given to running the Pump at restricted times to preserve the amenity of the area. Consideration would need to be given to campers at night if the proposed campsite was approved.

XXI. Errors in the Document

It is noted that there are minor errors in the document that need to be corrected.

- List of figures, p3:— Nos 22 and 23 are reversed.
- Description of Wattamolla Lagoon as *Freshwater*, (page 4). It is "*estuarine*". 36 water quality tests undertaken between 2006 and 2015, (near to the Palm Tree), revealing that on the majority of occasions that its water exhibits an electrical conductivity 20% higher than fresh water and occasionally is similar to the salinity of the ocean.
- National Park Rangers and staff do not have authority over estuarine waters
- Coote Creek is variously named Coote's Creek (p3) or Cootes Creek,— "Coote Creek" is correct.
- Garie Beach is to the South West of Wattamolla not South East, (p3)
- Providential Point (p12, fig 21) is named as the southern headland, however, the GDA land maps have the southern headland as "*Boy Martin Point*". And the northern headland as *Providential Point*. We note here that some later NPWS maps have Providential Point on the southern headland.
- On the same map there is a box that mentions that "Wattamolla" means "*Land of Running Water*" This is slightly at odds with a newspaper report from the Sydney Morning Herald on 9th January, 1929, page 11. Where it is recorded that the name means "*a place near running water.*" As follows:-

According to Mrs. W. K. Symond's "Nomenclature of N.S.W.," Wattamolla or Watta-mulla signifies "a place near running water." Wattamolla Harbour was the means of saving Bass and Flinders from destruction on their memorable discovery of the Wollongong district and of Port Hacking in 1796. They first named it Providential Cove, afterwards adopting the blacks' name which Flinders spells Watta-Mowlee. (Source, extract, The Sydney Morning Herald, 9th January, 1929, page 11.)

End of Comments

Yours Sincerely



Chair

Friends of Royal inc.

Continued.

The next two pages show the history of Drownings and recent Near Miss drowning events at Wattamolla Lagoon and the nearby Ocean. Research is ongoing.

Drownings at Wattamolla and Surrounds Draft 31 May, 2016

Contact Friends of Royal for Inquiries

		In Lagoon			
Date yyyy_mm_dd	Name	Location	Age	Address	Hyperlink to Online Source
2015_10_03	ZHENG Shangju	Wattamolla	63	China	ABC
2011_05_07	JIAO Yun Chao	Betw'n Watta & Garie	56	Kangaroo Pt	ABC
1974_12_15	UKIL Sait	Watta Lagoon	6	Sydney	Canberra Times
1965_04_17	SHORT Paul Leslie	Wattamolla	38	Pagewood	(S:- Canberra Times)
1964_12_28	RITCHIE John Charles	Watta Lagoon	9	Cabramatta	(S:- Canberra Times)
1964_03_29	SWANENBERG Johan	Wattamolla	26	Hackett, ACT	(S:- Canberra Times)
1964_03_29	GYZEN Christian	Wattamolla	44	Blacktown	
1961_01_29	GRANDE Benedict	Watta Lagoon	20	Matrville	Canberra Times
c1960	DALY Michael	Watta Lagoon	2 yrs?	Helensburgh	<i>Oral History, Article not located as yet.</i>
1957_06_02	FIELDS Geoffrey	Wattamolla	24	Dulwich Hill	Bodies not recovered, Death Cert's. issued in 1961, see hyperlink next below, same incident.
1957_06_02	BRUCE William	Wattamolla	24	Haberfield	
1957_06_02	CHAPPELL Brian	Wattamolla	28	Balmain	
1956_08_29	HUNT Jack	Wattamolla	33	Yagoona	Canberra Times
1954_01_17	BAILEY Arthur John	Watta Lagoon	9	Auburn	Sydney Morning Herald
1953_12_27	THORPE Harry George	Watta Lagoon	7	Sans-Souci	The Courier Mail
1951_03_23	CASTELLETTI Francis	Wattamolla	28	Arncliffe	Sydney Morning Herald
1950_07_10	WORNUM Jenefer	Wattamolla	23	London	(S:- Sydney Morning Herald)
1943_02_11	BOWMAN William	Watta Lagoon	21	Walgrove	<i>On armoured car manouveres at Wattamolla, On a rest break, dived into shallow water, died later in hospital</i>
1939_01_08	OSLAND Ray	Watta Lagoon	6	Glebe, N'castle	Sydney Morning Herald
1926_12_30	HORNBY Arthur	"Watermarle"	20	Helensburgh	Sydney Morning Herald
1919_10_06	LIVERSIDGE Reginald	Wattamolla	24	Balmain	Evening News
1910_01_18	HEFFERNAN Stephen	"Wattoh Malla"	21	Helensburgh	(S:- Sydney Morning Herald)

Near Misses

2012_12_28	No names given	Watta Lagoon	4 & 8	Unknown	St George Leader
2008_01_12	No name given	Wattamolla	5	Unknown	SMH National
1935_06_17	PARKER E. A.	Between Wattamolla and Marley	21	Unknown	Albany Advertiser
	LYNCH J.		40	Unknown	
	SANDERS J		23	Unknown	