



16<sup>th</sup> June 2022

### **Comment on the South Coast Track Private Huts Proposal**

The Tasmanian Wilderness Guides Association rejects statements that suggest the South Coast Track has only been open to “a relatively elite group” of experienced, self-reliant walkers. Our members and tour operators who work on this track have frequently guided groups of walkers on tent-based trips and given them a safe and memorable experience.

Said Tasmanian Wilderness Guides Association President, Kenna Reid Clark

“Having worked on the South Coast Track as a guide I can honestly say it’s one of the pinnacles of my career. For many, the South Coast Track is the epitome of what makes a Tasmanian bushwalk a unique and life changing experience - because of its very nature - and it is a privilege to share this experience with people. Regardless of your pack weight, the South Coast Track is a challenging walk where the weather and terrain should never be underestimated. That is why guided options are already available to people who wish to walk the track with the security that comes from doing it with experienced guides.”

The Tasmanian Wilderness Guides Association has consistently maintained that the Tasmanian Government’s Expressions of Interest (EOI) policy and the Reserve Activity Assessment (RAA) are inadequate, and our concerns have not gone unheard:

- In 2021 UNESCO called for an effective moratorium on private developments within the TWWHA, citing the lack of a detailed plan for a comprehensive cultural assessment. This highlights international recognition of the lack of due process being observed by the Tasmanian Liberal Party in its haste to open Tasmania’s most pristine areas to private development under the flawed EOI and RAA processes.
- In the same decision, UNESCO also reminded the government of the need to inform the World Heritage Committee of their intention to undertake or to authorise major restorations or new constructions which may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. To the best of our knowledge, this has not occurred in relation to the South Coast Track proposal.
- In the Lake Malbena case, the Federal Court made it clear the RAA has no status under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999(Cth) (EPBC Act) and that the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment cannot rely on the RAA process in making decisions under the EPBC Act because the RAA process is non-statutory and not binding.<sup>1</sup>
- The Tasmanian Government has conceded the RAA process needs reform; with the Minister for Parks, Jacquie Petrusma, announcing on 9 September 2021 that the RAA would be replaced by a statutory process to provide for increased transparency and a more robust process. Nine months later, we are still yet to hear any details of these proposed reforms.
- On 7 June 2022 the Minister for State Development, Construction and Housing, Guy Barnett announced changes to the EOI process, including increasing the amount of information made publicly available on

---

<sup>1</sup> The Wilderness Society (Tasmania) Inc v Minister for the Environment [2019] FCA 1842.

existing proposals. We have criticised both the EOI and RAA processes for their lack of transparency and the failure to make information publicly available.

The Tasmanian Wilderness Guides Association believes existing EOIs currently being assessed under the RAA process should be halted until a new assessment and approval process is implemented – one that includes transparency and genuine community consultation, an independent, expert-driven assessment process and fair treatment of all tour operators.

Said Kenna Reid-Clark,

“As professional wilderness guides, we are dedicated to having a deep understanding of the remote and wild areas in lutruwita/Tasmania and we take great pride and care in facilitating incredible experiences for visitors in our mountains, rivers, canyons and oceans. Minimal impact standards are at the core of our profession to ensure that adventure tourism in Tasmania is sustainable and that the cultural/environmental values of these areas are conserved for generations to come. Since the 2014 expression of interest process for *‘Unlocking the potential in our Parks’* came about the South Coast Track Huts Walk EOI has been one of the proposals that has concerned guides the most. Proposals such as the South Coast Track Huts Walk EOI will irreversibly alter the landscape and the experience of all who visit the area, many of whom love the South Coast Track for its wild beauty, isolation and lack of infrastructure.”