

Carrying Capacity in the Alpine Resorts of Kosciuszko National Park



Stage 1 community consultation report

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Cover image: Lining up for T-bar lift at Perisher: J Spencer/OEH.

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ISBN 978 1 76039 491 2 OEH 2016/0552 November 2016

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Executive summary

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is reviewing the approaches used to measure and regulate the environmental carrying capacity of the alpine ski resorts in Kosciuszko National Park.

Between February and March 2016 initial public comment on the review was sought. A stakeholder information session was also held in Jindabyne.

Fifteen submissions were received during this Stage 1 consultation process, and a range of views were expressed.

Overall there was broad support for the review and the investigation of options other than the current approach, i.e. the use of bed number limits. However, some submissions raised concerns about the objectives of the review and the risks to the environmental values of the national park that might arise from any change in approach to managing carrying capacity.

All issues raised in submissions will be considered during the review. A summary of points from the Stage 1 consultation process submissions is provided in Section 3 of this report.

Key issues from the Stage 1 consultation process

- The use of clear, transparent and simple indicators to guide a carrying capacity framework is supported by resort operators, business representatives and local government. Resort operators also recommended the engagement of international ski resort planning expertise to assist in the review.
- Submissions from conservation groups and some others argued for a bed number to be retained, with resorts contained to existing boundaries and efforts made to reduce impacts. Some submissions also argued for the planned obsolescence and eventual removal of built accommodation in resorts over time, while others flagged the need for climate change to be factored into the review.
- Snow sport and cross country recreational groups emphasised the need for the review to consider the social aspects of carrying capacity. That includes management of day visitation and access, particularly in regard to affordability, crowding, congestion and shelter.
- Submissions from the local business community discussed the need to upgrade facilities
 to maintain the resorts' relevance and appeal, and noted that modern approaches to
 environmental sustainability are increasingly important. They also suggested increased
 staff accommodation would help the sustainability of resort village businesses.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In November 2015 the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) commenced a review of environmental carrying capacity in the alpine resorts of Kosciuszko National Park. Carrying capacity is currently determined by limits on overnight accommodation which are set out in the <u>Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management (2006)</u>. Overnight accommodation is measured by bed numbers.

Environmental carrying capacity is the level of visitors or activity that can be sustained in an area without degradation of the environment below acceptable thresholds. The environment includes biological, physical and social factors.

The plan of management acknowledges the relationship between bed numbers and the environmental health of the resort areas is unclear. The plan of management commits NPWS to look at other ways to measure and regulate carrying capacity in the alpine resorts.

1.2 Stage 1 community consultation

In late November 2015 stakeholders were notified that the review process was underway (Appendix 1).

Stage 1 was designed to give targeted stakeholders and the broader community the opportunity to provide comments and ideas on the current approach to setting carrying capacity in the resorts and possible future approaches that focus on environmental performance. It was intended as a 'warm-up' conversation to prompt community understanding and initial feedback.

Further consultation is planned. This will provide opportunities for community comment on future options and directions for an alternative approach to regulating environmental carrying capacity.

Depending on further community feedback and analysis of the feasibility of potential options, an amendment may be proposed to the existing *Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management*. If that occurs, the amendment will be formally exhibited for public comment in accordance with requirements of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

2 Consultation approach

2.1 Consultation objectives

Stakeholders and the community were consulted as part of Stage 1 to:

- present the carrying capacity issue and explain the NPWS approach to the review
- seek comment, feedback, ideas and suggestions for NPWS to consider when developing a potential carrying capacity framework
- build a database of stakeholders who NPWS could continue to engage with during future consultation stages.

In particular, feedback from stakeholders and the community was sought on the following questions:

- 'Are there any issues or points you believe are missing from or need emphasis in the discussion?'
- 'Can you suggest elements you would include in a carrying capacity framework that would deliver environmental outcomes and social and economic benefits? What would be the key things to monitor?'

2.2 How consultation was done

Consultation for Stage 1 was open between 15 February and 24 March (extended from 14 March) 2016.

A range of key stakeholders were identified and notified that the review was underway. These included:

- all resort operators
- leaseholder representatives, including SLOPES
- local businesses and organisations, including relevant chambers of commerce
- local government
- indigenous groups
- conservation organisations, including the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, National Parks Association of NSW and the Colong Foundation for Wilderness
- recreational groups
- commercial tour operators
- research and educational institutions
- advisory bodies, including the Southern Ranges Region Advisory Committee and National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council
- NSW Government agencies, including the Department of Planning and Environment and the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA)
- Victorian and NSW national park agencies
- NSW and Federal members of parliament.

Stakeholders and the broader community were informed using a range of tools.

Table 1: Tools and methods used for consultation

Tool	Method		
Stakeholder letter	A letter to stakeholders inviting comment and advising of the website and available documents.		
(Appendix 2)			
OEH website	Information was provided on the review, with links to a flyer, background paper, and frequently asked questions. Links were also provided to a submissions inbox and email address.		
Stakeholder information session (Appendix 3)	An information session by NPWS was held at Jindabyne on 3 March 2016. Invitations were provided to key stakeholders; 36 people attended.		
Media release (Appendix 4)	Issued on 17 February 2016.		
Public notices	The Stage 1 consultation process was advertised in:		
(Appendix 5)	The Daily Telegraph and The Sydney Morning Herald 17 February 2016.		
	Cooma–Monaro Express and Tumut and Adelong Times 18 and 19 February 2016.		

Key stakeholders and the community were encouraged to provide feedback via the OEH website link or project email mailbox.

3 Consultation summary

3.1 Overview

NPWS received submissions from fifteen people and organisations (Appendix 6).

Thirty-six people representing stakeholders attended the information session at Jindabyne on 3 March 2016. In addition, NPWS provided a briefing for SLOPES (the organisation representing 88 ski clubs in the Perisher Range Resorts) in Sydney as a representative was unable to attend the information session at Jindabyne.

3.2 Feedback summary and NPWS comments

Table 2 summarises the key points raised in the submissions.

Table 2: Feedback summary

Category	Comments from submissions
Bed numbers should remain as	Bed numbers must remain as a measure in the plan of management to limit resort development in Kosciusko National Park.
a measure 3 submissions	NPWS should not increase bed limits as this will increase environmental impacts.
	Bed numbers for each resort should be calculated on a better basis than is currently the case. It appears that numbers are currently selected by politicians or NPWS and is not done using any particular method or consideration for what is actually achievable.
	International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) frameworks do not exclude the use of accommodation limits to provide carrying capacity control.
Bed numbers should not remain as a measure	Bed number limits create a currency or artificial value, enhancing monopolies and excluding poorer people, as well as resort workers.
2 submissions	
Expanded development of	Resorts must be contained within existing boundaries in Kosciusko National Park.
resorts should be limited	The limits to growth should be defined.
4 submissions	Cease further resort development in the park. Future development should take place outside the park.
	Management of developed areas in the park should be directed at planning for obsolescence of the built accommodation (as a result of potential downturn in the industry from climate change) and not providing an avenue for future development.
	Make pre-1788 environmental levels the baseline from which to consider carrying capacity. Adopt a strategy of devolution back to ecologically sustainable levels.
Resort activities, buildings and	Activities within resorts should comply with national park objectives. Concerts and festivals are not consistent with these objectives.
utilities that are inappropriate	Only increase bed numbers if car parking can be increased.
1 submission	Community facilities, educational establishments, health profession consulting rooms, medical centres, places of public worship don't belong in the park and should occur instead in nearby towns.
Resort activities, buildings and	Thredbo Village has a state-of-the-art tertiary sewage treatment plant, which effectively services the resort.
utilities that are appropriate 1 submission	All the ski runs at Thredbo have been developed so environmental impacts should be apparent now, and should be low.

Category	Comments from submissions
Resorts' role in environmental management	Resorts must continuously improve environmental management systems to earn the right to remain within Kosciusko National Park.
6 submissions	Are resorts contributing to weed control programs?
	Resorts represent only about 0.34–0.42% of the total park area.
Resort activities (day visitors)	Current approaches to management do not take into account large numbers of day visitors.
3 submissions	Set a blunt limit for day use, such as setting a car parking space limit at current numbers.
Environmental threats (soil erosion) 1 submission	Mountain bike activity on exposed ski runs in summer is causing soil erosion. Bike tracks should be hardened with gravel.
Environmental threats (climate	Climate change will lead to pressure on the environment, such as need for increased water usage for snow-making.
change) 2 submissions	Climate change will lead to pressure on resorts. Resorts may need to scale down or move out. Need to address the issue of post-industry rehabilitation, including costs to government.
Social values 3 submissions	Monitor resort users' appreciation of the natural and cultural environment of the resort areas.
o submissions	Negative visitor experiences are related to the factors of overcrowding and reduced ease of access. Indicators that would decrease the social experience because of these factors are:
	lack of car parking space
	traffic congestion and increased travel times
	number of on-slope accidents
	cost for day tripper families
	lack of available shelter
	interruption of utilities – water, electricity and garbage
	sewage spills
	visual impacts– rubbish.
	Use NPWS management methods to ensure standards of quality are maintained. Could include educational, site management, and regulation.
	Including visitor experience under environmental carrying capacity is making the concept or eventual framework too broad.

Category	Comments from submissions
Collecting baseline data should be one of	What is the baseline from which to work? Is it current level of development, bed numbers, pollution etc.?
the first steps 2 submissions	Need to develop a comprehensive and rigorous set of baseline data to inform any framework.
There is a need for stringent	Any framework must be stringent, and legally tight, to guard against future pro-development, economic, social and political influences.
environmental guidelines 5 submissions	Indicators used to inform future carrying capacity must be objective, clear, transparent and simple and enable a sustainable commercial framework to be implemented in the resorts.
	Values previously identified by an independent scientific committee for protection include:
	alpine and subalpine areas
	peri-glacial and other geological features
	native plant and animal habitat, old-growth snow gums
	pest animals, weed and pathogens is a sea of a strict at a sea of a s
	increased nutrients in aquatic systems
	loss of scenic amenity, and experiences of remoteness. Foreign the propertionary principle and principles of coolegically.
	Favour the precautionary principle and principles of ecologically sustainable development over an adaptable approach.
	Environment should be the overriding concern, before social and economic interests.
A rigid carrying capacity may	If the carrying capacity is fixed then investment and re-investment in the resort areas will also be limited.
stifle economic viability of resort	Flexibility and encouragement needed for capital investment.
businesses 2 submissions	Quality infrastructure and investment in infrastructure can benefit the environment. For example, through improved water and waste management.
Each resort should be addressed individually 1 submission	There should not be a 'one size fits all' formula. There should not be a 'cookie cutter' approach which applies to all resorts.
1 3001111331011	
Engage international expertise	The review is a complex task and its outcomes will be of significant importance to the NSW tourism economy. In order to ensure international best practice is achieved, NPWS should engage
3 submissions	international 'ski resort planning' expertise (particularly North American) to guide the capacity review.

Category	Comments from submissions
Look at other options for accommodation outside resorts 1 submission	Snowy Hydro should be able to rent out existing accommodation on a short-term holiday commercial basis in Cabramurra (near the Mount Selwyn resort which does not have accommodation).
Supportive of process with no substantial comment 2 submissions	N/A
Out of scope 5 submissions	Some submissions contained elements that are considered out of scope or not directly relevant to the review. For example: • resorts should be phased out eventually • resort areas should be expunged from Kosciusko National Park and sold to commercial interests • comments about national parks generally, or the general process of public consultation • concern about continued accessibility and affordability of facilities.

4 Next steps

All feedback will continue to be considered as the review proceeds.

Further consultation is planned to seek community views on potential options and directions for an alternative approach to regulating environmental carrying capacity in the alpine ski resorts. That may include a proposed amendment to the plan of management.

NPWS will keep key stakeholders and the community updated on progress, including those people and organisations who provided feedback during Stage 1.

5 Appendices

Appendix 1: Stakeholder letter notifying intent to commence a review – 23/11/15

Appendix 2: Stakeholder letter inviting feedback – 15/02/16

Appendix 3: Stakeholder invitation to information session – 19/02/16

Appendix 4: Media release – 17/02/16

Appendix 5: Newspaper public notice - 17, 18, 19/02/16

Appendix 6: Submissions received

Appendix 1





23 November 2015

Subject: Kosciuszko National Park plan of management – advance notice of public consultation on a review of environmental carrying capacity in the alpine resorts

Dear Kosciuszko National Park stakeholder,

I am writing to advise that the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has commenced a review of environmental carrying capacity in the alpine resorts. The review is required by the Kosciuszko National Park plan of management.

As you may be aware, carrying capacity in the alpine resorts is currently managed by bed number limits specified in the plan of management. The plan recognises that there may be other ways to more accurately measure and understand the environmental carrying capacity of the resorts.

Public consultation on the review will commence in February 2016 and continue until mid-2016. NPWS is currently advising stakeholders in advance of the public consultation process commencing.

The NSW Government has also commenced a review of the governance arrangements for the Perisher and Charlotte Pass resorts, and has started initial stakeholder briefings. The review of environmental carrying capacity is expected to inform this process.

I will provide more information on public consultation arrangements for the environmental carrying capacity review in early 2016. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact Wil Allen at wil.allen@er.vironment.nsw.gov.au if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely

Mick Pettitt Regional Manager Southern Rangers Region

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APPENDIX 2





15 February 2016

Kosciuszko National Park plan of management – review of environmental carrying capacity in the alpine resorts - Stage 1 public consultation

Dear Kosciuszko National Park stakeholder,

Invitation to provide comment

As you may be aware, in December 2015 the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) advised that it was commencing a review of environmental carrying capacity in the alpine resorts of Kosciuszko National Park. Carrying capacity is currently determined by limits on overnight accommodation (measured by bed numbers) which are set out in the park plan of management.

I am now writing to let you know that the first stage of community consultation on this issue is underway.

This initial consultation will run from 15 February to 14 March 2016. This is an opportunity to provide comments and ideas on the current approach to setting carrying capacity in the resorts and possible future approaches that focus on environmental performance.

To assist people in understanding the issue and what some of the potential alternative options could be, a background paper and information on the review and consultation process is available at: http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/alpineiesorts/alpine-carrying-capacity-consult.htm.

You can provide comments on the review of carrying capacity by submitting through the above webpage. Submissions on the review of carrying capacity should be forwarded by 14 March 2016.

NPWS will be inviting stakeholders to attend an information and question and answer session in Jindabyne during the consultation period. If you are interested in attencing this session please write to carryingcapacity.npws@environment.nsw.gov.au. We will provide further advice on the location and timing of the information session shortly.

At the end of this first stage of consultation, NPWS will consider all comments and input. A second stage of consultation will be undertaken later in 2016 to invite community views on a proposed future approach to managing carrying capacity in the resorts.

Privacy information

All submissions received by NPWS are a matter of public record and are available for public inspection upon request. Your comments on the review plan may contain information that is defined as "personal information" under the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998. The submission of personal information with your comments is voluntary.

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Related reviews and consultation processes

NPWS is also undertaking a review of the specific arrangements governing the day-to-day management of the Perisher Range Resorts and Charlotte Pass Village. That review is considering matters such as how best to deliver municipal services (such as waste collection), management of leases, and opportunities to support investment in improved year-round activities and visitation. It will not consider the existing bed number limits in these locations as the carrying capacity review is examining this matter across all the alpine resorts.

Further information on the Perisher and Charlotte Pass governance review will be made available shortly, including opportunities for public input.

NPWS is aware that some stakeholders will be interested in both the overall review of carrying capacity for all resorts and the more detailed review of governance arrangements for Perisher and Charlotte Pass. NPWS will ensure that relevant information from community feedback is used to inform both review processes.

For more information

If you have any questions about the review of carrying capacity or how you can provide input, please do not hesitate to contact Wil Allen, Park Planning Officer, at carryingcapacity.npws@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

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MICK PETTITT Regional Manager Southern Ranges Region National Parks and Wildlife Service

Appendix 3





19 February 2016

Kosciuszko National Park plan of management – review of environmental carrying capacity in the alpine resorts - Stage 1 community consultation

INVITATION TO INFORMATION SESSION Thursday 3 March 5pm to 7pm Rydges Horizons 10 Kosciuszko Road, Jindabyne

Dear Kosciuszko National Park stakeholder,

As indicated in my letter of 15 February 2016, the first stage of community consultation for the review of environmental carrying capacity in the alpine resorts of Kosciuszko National Park is underway.

I am now writing to invite you to an information session on Thursday 3 March 2016 between 5 and 7pm, to be held at Rydges Horizons, 10 Kosciuszko Road, Jindabyne. The session will provide an introduction to the review, the issue of carrying capacity, and alternative approaches to the current use of limits on overnight bed numbers.

The session will be hosted by National Parks and Wildlife Service. There will be opportunities for informal discussions with NPWS staff, viewing of information material, and to ask questions following a short presentation. Refreshments will be provided.

If you have not already done so, I would be grateful if you could RSVP to carryingcapacity.npws@environment.nsw.gov.au. Please advise us of any special needs you may have.

For more information on carrying capacity

To assist people in understanding the issue and what some of the potential alternative options could be, a background paper and information on the review and consultation process is available at: http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/alpineresorts/alpine-carrying-capacity-consult.htm.

If you have any questions about the review of carrying capacity or the upcoming information session, please do not hesitate to send a request to carryingcapacity.npws@environment.nsw.qov.au.

Perisher Range and Charlotte Pass Resorts Review

NPWS is also concurrently undertaking this review into the best management model to provide day-to-day operational management of the resorts and increase investment to build year-round visitor activities. Details of the opportunities to provide feedback into this review will be available soon.

If you are interested in participating or would like further information please email: resort.consultation@environment.nsw.qov

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I hope you are able to accept this invitation to attend the information session on the review of environmental carrying capacity. I look forward to seeing you on 3 March.

Yours sincerely

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MICK PETTITT
Regional Manager
Southern Ranges Region
National Parks and Wildlife Service

Appendix 4





News Release

17 February 2016

Public invited to review Kosciuszko's carrying capacity

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is exploring ways to manage the environmental carrying capacity of Kosciuszko National Park's alpine resorts and is encouraging the community to have their say.

Mick Pettit, NPWS Regional Manager, said this timely review will look at the best ways to ensure the economic and social benefits continue to flow from visitation to the resorts without compromising the environment.

"Up until now the carrying capacity of the resorts has been guided by bed numbers and while they are an easily understood means to limit the number of people and their impacts in an area, sustainable visitation and environmental management needs a multifaceted approach," said Mr Pettit.

"The review delivers on actions in the Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management that recognises that bed numbers alone don't comprehensively reflect the environmental footprint of the resorts and their visitors.

"NPWS want to work with the community to develop a new way to manage environmental carrying capacity, one that may include thresholds for a range of parameters such as water quality, habitat condition, soil health and the quality of the visitor experience.

"The review commences this month and will initially involve scoping the views of the community, before moving to Stage 2 when a carrying capacity framework will be prepared for comment.

"The review will also take into consideration the impact of increasing summer tourism and day visitors, which are not adequately addressed under the existing carrying capacity limits.

"The unique economic and cultural values of the area require a robust framework that will sustainably manage the impacts of park visitors on the environment now and into the future," Mr Pettit said.

Stage one of the review marks the release of a discussion paper.

"I invite all interested parties to participate in the review, to discuss and provide comment on alternative methods and approaches for establishing carrying capacity," said Mr Pettit.

Further information on the review and how to have your say can be found at: www.environment.nsw.qov.au/alpineresorts/index.htm

ENDS

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voutube.com/user/NSWNatParks
 flickr.com/photos/48646673@N07

Appendix 5





KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

Review of environmental carrying capacity in the alpine resorts

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is reviewing ways of managing the carrying capacity of alpine resorts in Kosciuszko National Park. Carrying capacity is currently addressed by limiting the number of beds available for overnight accommodation.

The review may lead to an amendment to the Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management and changes to the way development is initiated and managed in the resorts.

Comments and ideas are invited on possible future approaches to managing carrying capacity. Further information on the review and the consultation process, including a background paper, is available at: engage.environment.nsw.gov.au. Comments should be forwarded by 14 March 2016 to carryingcapacity.npws@environment.nsw.gov.au

All submissions received by NPWS are a matter of public record and are available for public inspection upon request. Your comments on this plan may contain information that is defined as "personal information" under the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998. The submission of personal information with your comments is voluntary. N48434

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APPENDIX 6 Submissions Received

Number	Date	Organisation/Name
1	17/02/16	Anthony Dunsford
2	19/02/16	The Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd – Keith Muir
3	24/02/16	SLOPES – Frank Zipfinger
4	06/03/16	Noeline Franklin
5	10/03/16	Snowy River Shire Council – Adam Wood
6	13/03/16	Snow Skiing Fraternity - John Wholohan
7	14/03/16	Gary Bilton
8	14/03/16	Charlotte Pass ∀illage Pty Ltd – Kevin Blyton
9	14/03/16	Selwyn Snow Resort Pty Ltd – Kevin Blyton
10	14/03/16	NSW Alpine Resort Operators Group – Peter Brulisauer
11	18/03/16	National Parks Association NSW – Roger Lembit
12	21/03/16	NSW Biathlon – Toni Hulme
13	21/03/16	NSW Snowsports – Rebecca Clark
14	24/03/16	Thredbo Chamber of Commerce – Ian Foster
15	20/03/16	NSW Cross Country – Graeme Power