

## Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve – draft plan of management questions and answers

### What is a plan of management?

Every national park and reserve established under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* is required to have a plan of management. The plan provides guidance on key conservation and other values of the reserve, and directions for future management. Once adopted, the reserve must be managed in accordance with the plan of management.

### Why is a plan being prepared now?

A draft plan of management for Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve was previously exhibited in 2006.

The current draft plan has been substantially updated to take account of new information and plans guiding the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, fire management, a draft conservation management plan, and policies and guidelines on managing karst environments. It also covers additional lands that have been added to the reserve.

Preparation of the plan of management is occurring concurrent with a public process by the NSW Government to seek expressions of interest (EOI) for the provision of visitor facilities and services in the Visitor Use and Services Zone at Jenolan Caves. This 50 hectare area is currently the focus of both above and below ground tourism assets, including all accommodation facilities and cave operations, and is managed to support sustainable visitation.

The EOI process concluded in July 2013 and shortlisted respondents have been invited to submit a full proposal for detailed consideration. The draft plan of management will inform respondents in preparing their full proposals.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet is overseeing this process and working closely with the Office of Environment and Heritage on the plan of management.

### What is the reserve currently used for?

Jenolan Caves is the most popular show cave destination in Australia, combining spectacular world-renowned caves and cave formations within a largely undisturbed valley. It also includes significant heritage buildings and structures, some of which are currently used for visitor accommodation.

The reserve provides opportunities for a range of recreational pursuits including walking, cycling, horse-riding, cave tours and recreational caving.

Given the reserve's significant environmental and heritage values, any future proposals will need to demonstrate clear compatibility with these values and capacity to comprehensively manage operational matters such as access, visitor numbers and monitoring of the sensitive karst environment.

### **How will the reserve be managed?**

The Visitor Use and Services Zone within the reserve is currently managed by the Jenolan Caves Trust, established under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. The Trust Administrator reports to the Minister for the Environment.

Future management of this area will transfer to the Office of Environment and Heritage (which includes the National Parks and Wildlife Service) upon adoption of the plan of management and completion of relevant statutory processes.

### **Will new buildings be constructed?**

The draft plan of management provides that adaptive re-use of existing buildings or provision of new buildings may occur in the Visitor Use and Services Zone for purposes consistent with the management principles of the reserve. These purposes may include (but are not limited to) visitor and tourist accommodation, conferences and functions, and restaurants and cafes.

Any proposals will be subject to comprehensive environmental impact assessment, including consideration of cultural heritage matters, protection of the karst environment and sustainability.

### **What opportunities will the community have to comment?**

The draft plan of management is on public exhibition until 23 January 2014 and anyone can make comment.

To assist in making comment in the draft plan of management, the draft Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve Conservation Management Plan will also be available on the website as supporting information. Any future proposals for new buildings will also make provision for community input.

### **What is the role of the local council?**

Blue Mountains City Council and Oberon Council are important stakeholders in any future proposals for Jenolan Caves.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service regularly liaises with the councils regarding a range of park management and surrounding land use issues. Both councils have been invited to comment on the draft plan of management.

### **When will the plan of management be finalised?**

At the conclusion of the public exhibition period in late January 2014, all submissions will be comprehensively reviewed and input sought from the Blue Mountains Regional Advisory Committee and National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council, as required by the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.

Once all comments have been considered a final plan will be considered for adoption by the Minister for the Environment.

**Who will make the final decision on any lease or licence proposals?**

Future management of the reserve, including any proposals for the Visitor Use and Services Zone, must be consistent with the final adopted plan of management. Proposals will also need to satisfy all relevant requirements for environmental impact and heritage assessments, sustainability assessments, and public notification of lease or licences.

After adoption of the plan of management, and conclusion of all relevant assessment processes, the Minister for the Environment is responsible for determining whether to grant a lease or licence to any future proposals.