



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Amendment to the Plan of Management

Establishing accommodation for the Great Southern Walk



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This amendment was adopted by the Minister for Environment and Heritage on 19 January 2023.

Cover photo: View over the Illawarra to the ocean from escarpment on the Woodward Track in the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area. Nick Cubbin/DPE

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ISBN 978-1-922975-52-2
EHG 2023/0060
February 2023

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Summary

Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area is reserved to achieve the objectives of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. These objectives are centred on conserving nature and cultural heritage values and fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of these special values.

The Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Plan of Management (OEH 2018) describes how the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) intends to achieve the Act's objectives. All operations undertaken in the park need to be in accordance with this plan of management.

Section 73B of the National Parks and Wildlife Act enables the Minister to amend a plan of management following public consultation.

This amendment to the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Plan of Management changes the current plan to ensure the objects of the National Parks and Wildlife Act continue to be achieved, by:

- facilitating establishment of a campground, including camping sites, walkers' huts and associated infrastructure in the park's north, near Maddens Plains, as part of the Great Southern Walk
- allowing for rock climbing in certain areas north of Bulli Pass.

The following points were considered in preparing this amendment:

- the 7 management principles for state conservation areas listed under section 30G of the National Parks and Wildlife Act
- the matters listed under section 72AA of the National Parks and Wildlife Act
- submissions received on the draft amendment to the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Plan of Management
- advice provided by the South Coast regional Advisory Committee.

The amendment replaces some of the existing plan of management's text, adds some new text and replaces one figure. These changes have been incorporated into the adopted plan of management, reissued February 2023.

Background

Establishing camping and accommodation for the Great Southern Walk

In partnership with other land managers, NPWS is developing the Great Southern Walk. This is a multi-day walk starting in the northern part of Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area, extending north through Royal National Park and finishing at Kamay Botany Bay National Park.

The establishment of the walk within the park through the upgrade of existing tracks and provision of some new tracks is permissible under the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Plan of Management. However, the establishment of new campground with walkers' hut accommodation and associated infrastructure in the Maddens Plains area (see Figure 2) is being considered, and is this not currently provided for in the plan of management.

The location and design of the campground and walkers' hut accommodation will be subject to heritage, environmental and sustainability assessments. Should it be developed, the campground will be located in either Part 11 land, or the state conservation area. This decision will depend on the outcome of environmental and cultural assessments.

The Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Plan of Management identifies a clearing along the Gibson Track at Austinmer (Austinmer Camp) as a potential site for walk-in camping. However, a campground and walkers' hut accommodation in the Maddens Plains area would be more appropriate location to support walkers on the Great Southern Walk. The campground at Austinmer receives little use, has experienced antisocial behaviour which has potential to impact on nearby residents. The Austinmer Camp will be closed and rehabilitated.

The amendment increases group size limits for climbing parties and removes group size limits for walk-in camping. Walk-in camping in the park will now only occur at the proposed campground at Maddens Plains, and group sizes there will be determined by the capacity of the campground.

Promoting recreational opportunities

The escarpment between Bulli Pass and Stanwell Park has a longstanding history of rock climbing. The Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Plan of Management previously provided for rock climbing on the south- and west-facing cliff lines of Mount Keira subject to safety and environmental acceptability. This amendment extends the areas available for rock climbing to include cliffs north of Bulli Pass.

Amendments

Amendment 1. Establishing camping and accommodation for the Great Southern Walk

Section 4.5 Recreation, education and research

Plan reference: page 25, under Camping

Replace the heading:

Camping

With:

Camping and accommodation

Replace the second paragraph:

In order to undertake overnight walks along the length of the escarpment, it would be desirable to have two camping sites approximately one day's walk apart. A clearing along the Gibson Track at Austinmer (Austinmer Camp) is currently available for walk-in camping. No facilities are provided, and the site receives little use, but use would be expected to increase as further walking track development occurs. It is important that overnight use does not lead to environmental or social problems given the proximity to residential areas. The site could also serve as a picnic spot for day-walkers.

With:

In order to facilitate overnight walks along the length of the escarpment, campsites will be investigated subject to environmental and cultural assessment. A campground including camping sites, walkers' huts, other hard-roofed and/or tented accommodation and associated facilities, such as walking track connections and a vehicle service road, may be developed in the Maddens Plains area, as part of the Great Southern Walk. Final siting and design of this infrastructure will be subject to environmental and cultural heritage assessments.

Add after the fourth paragraph:

NPWS may engage services to support walkers on the Great Southern Walk. This could include guiding, food and supply drops, facilities maintenance (see Figure 2 for potential campground locations) of walker accommodation and hiker pick-up and drop off services. Campsites for independent walkers will be available.

Plan reference: page 27, under Commercial activities and short-term licences

Remove the fifth dot point:

Austinmer Camp – the grassed area

Plan reference: page 29, under Management response

Replace the tenth management response:

Permit walk-in camping at Austinmer Camp. Provide a toilet, picnic table and rainwater tank if warranted. Close the site to walk-in camping if use becomes inappropriate.

With:

Close the former Austinmer Camp site to walk-in camping and undertake rehabilitation.

Permit walk-in camping in the Maddens Plains area as part of the Great Southern Walk (see Figure 2 for potential campground locations). Subject to environmental and cultural heritage assessments, provide camping sites, walkers' huts, other hard-roofed and/or tented accommodation and associated facilities, such as walking track connections and a vehicle service road.

Plan reference: page 30, under Management response

Replace:

Limit the size of group activities without written consent to:

- cycling, including mountain biking: 20 people
- horse riding: 8 horses
- rock climbing: 4 per roped party
- walk-in camping: 16 people
- other activities: 20 people.

With:

Limit the size of group activities without written consent to:

- cycling, including mountain biking: 20 people
- horse riding: 8 horses
- rock climbing: 8 per roped party
- other activities: 40 people.

End pages

Plan reference: Figure 3, end pages

Remove Figure 3 in the current plan of management and **replace** it with Figure 2 below.

Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Amendment to the Plan of Management – Establishing accommodation for the Great Southern Walk

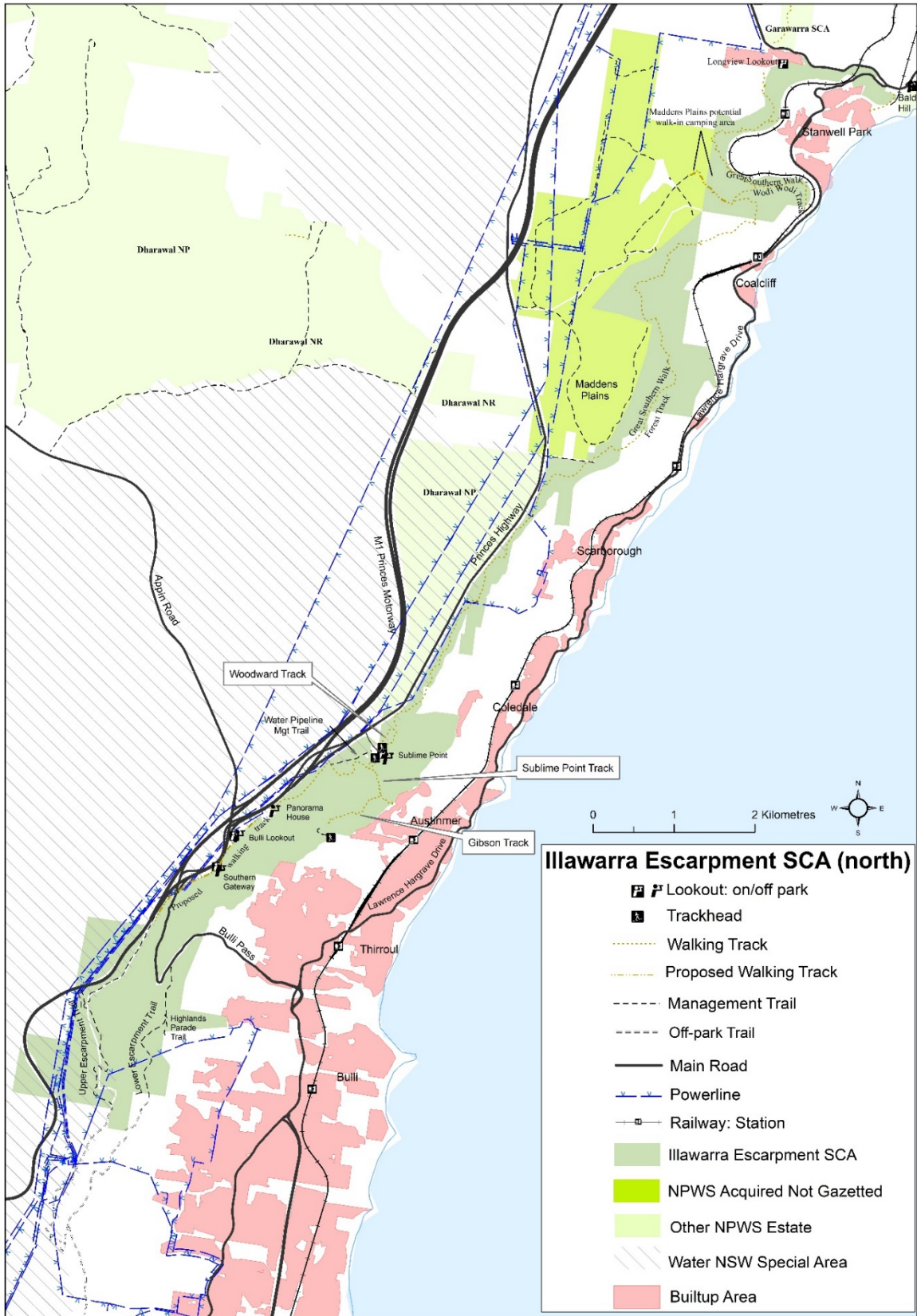


Figure 2 Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area (north)

Amendment 2. Promoting recreational opportunities

Section 4.5 Recreation, education and research

Plan reference: pages 26–27, under Other activities

Replace:

The west- and south-facing cliffs of Mount Keira are used for rock climbing and abseiling, and this has resulted in numerous bolted climbs and the creation of informal access tracks. To the extent that these activities occur on park, they will continue to be permitted provided safety standards and environmental impacts are acceptable. Basic amenities are available nearby at the Mount Keira Summit Park and access is provided via the Dave Walsh Track. Abseiling and rock climbing are not permitted elsewhere in the park owing to risks to the safety of participants and other visitors from geological instability, damage to vegetation and rock faces, damage to cultural features and soil erosion.

With:

Rock climbing and abseiling will be allowed on the west- and south-facing cliffs of Mount Keira and on cliffs north of Bulli Pass. Basic amenities are available nearby at the Mount Keira Summit Park and access is provided via the Dave Walsh Track.

New bolts or anchors may only be installed with NPWS consent, and park infrastructure such as safety railing may not be used as anchor points as they have not been designed for this purpose. NPWS will not install, assess or guarantee bolts or other fixed protection points. Participants in these activities are solely responsible for their own safety.

Locations where rock climbing and abseiling are allowed may be reviewed and altered to address safety issues, risks to visitors or impacts on cultural values or environmental values. Temporary closures of rock climbing and abseiling locations may be applied to limit impacts. Permanent closure of sites may also be necessary. NPWS will consult with representatives of the local climbing community before implementing any permanent closures.

Plan reference: page 29, under Management response

Replace management response 4.5.19:

Permit rock climbing and abseiling only on the south- and west-facing cliff lines of Mount Keira, as long as it is undertaken in a safe and environmentally acceptable manner.

With:

Permit rock climbing and abseiling only on the south- and west-facing cliffs of Mount Keira and on cliffs north of Bulli Pass.

References

NPWS and Wollongong City Council (unpublished), *Illawarra Escarpment Walking Tracks Master Plan*.

OEH 2018, *Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area Plan of Management*, Office of Environment and Heritage (NSW), <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/publications-search/illawarra-escarpment-state-conservation-area-plan-of-management> <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/Parks-plans-of-management/blue-mountains-national-park-plan-of-management-010129.pdf>