



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Submissions report

**Public exhibition of Dorrigo Arc Rainforest
Centre draft review of environmental factors**



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

© 2026 State of NSW and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

With the exception of photographs, the State of NSW and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) are pleased to allow this material to be reproduced in whole or in part for educational and non-commercial use, provided the meaning is unchanged and its source, publisher and authorship are acknowledged. Specific permission is required to reproduce photographs.

Learn more about our copyright and disclaimer at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/copyright

Cover photo: Rainforest detail. Ralf Hesse/DCCEEW

Artwork: Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway, from Aboriginal design agency Boss Lady Creative Designs, created the People and Community symbol.

Published by:

Environment and Heritage
Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water
Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124
Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)
Phone: 1300 361 967 (Environment and Heritage enquiries)
TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 1300 361 967
Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 1300 361 967
Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au

ISBN 978-1-76186-118-5
EH 2026/0017
January 2026



Find out more about your environment at:

www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Contents

Summary	1
The proposal	1
What we heard	1
Changes made to the REF	1
1. Overview of submissions	2
1.1 Public exhibition	2
1.2 General feedback	2
1.3 Analysis of matters raised	2
1.4 Support for the proposal	3
2. Key feedback themes	4
2.1 Built form and heritage	4
2.2 Amenity, social and economic impacts	6
2.3 Transport, traffic and parking	8
2.4 Environmental management	10
3. Next steps	12
4. More information	12

List of tables

Table 1	Topic areas and the number of total references in submissions	3
Table 2	Feedback received on the built form and heritage	4
Table 3	Feedback received on the impacts on amenity, social and economic values	6
Table 4	Feedback received on the impacts on traffic, parking and transport	8
Table 5	Feedback received on environmental management	10

Summary

The proposal

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is proposing to build and operate a new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre in Dorrigo National Park, comprising:

- a new car park with bus drop-off, parking for 2 coaches, charging points, entry road upgrades and landscaping
- a single-storey visitor centre including interpretation space, retail and staff areas, amenities and briefing space for Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk
- an arrival forecourt to the south-west and Pademelon Lawn nature play and picnic area to the south
- a Gumbaynggirr courtyard and group gathering space to the east
- an Arc elevated walkway with elevated ramp to Wonga walk
- the demolition of the existing rainforest centre and skywalk lookout.

Before the proposal can be authorised or the works carried out, the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* requires the potential environmental impacts of the activity to be assessed via a review of environmental factors (REF). The prepared draft REF for Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre was on public exhibition between 16 May and 16 June 2025.

What we heard

NPWS received a total of 11 submissions on the exhibited draft REF. These came from a range of community members and neighbours from the local area.

The top 3 most frequently raised topics in the submissions were:

1. environment and rainforest impacts – concerning impacts on the rainforest health, and protection of the environment
2. traffic and parking – concerning the amount of parking proposed and impacts, and congestion on local roads
3. amenity, social and economic impacts – concerning the impacts on neighbours, and social and economic impacts to the local area.

Changes made to the REF

NPWS proposes no changes to the draft REF in response to submissions.

Some minor edits and corrections have been made in the final version.

1. Overview of submissions

1.1 Public exhibition

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) exhibited the draft review of environmental factors (REF) for Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre (DARC) between 16 May and 16 June 2025 – a total of 32 days.

The exhibited draft REF was available online and via hard copies from the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre. NPWS promoted the public exhibition of the draft REF by direct email to 1,500 registered stakeholders through local media releases, public notice and posters on park and community noticeboards.

The online project pages received 1,242 views during the exhibition period (consultation page – 279 page views) and 217 documents were downloaded.

The draft Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment report was distributed to registered Aboriginal parties (RAPs) along with an email notification of the public exhibition period.

NPWS asked the public to provide comments online using the 'Have your say' consultation portal on the department's website and the NSW Government 'Have your say' website. These websites provided information on the purpose and intent of the draft REF.

1.2 General feedback

This report reviews the content of the submissions received during public exhibition. NPWS received a total of 11 submissions on the exhibited draft REF. These came from a range of community members and neighbours from the local area. No submissions were received from organisations. Submissions offered some constructive input on the proposal and the impact assessments undertaken as part of the draft REF.

The following is an overview of the submissions received on the proposal and the draft REF:

- **Agree** – 3 submissions support the proposed DARC and the REF's general assessment of it
- **Disagree** – 6 submissions do not support the proposed DARC
- **Neither** – 2 submissions. It is not clear if the submission supports the proposed DARC or not.

The top 3 most frequently raised topics in the submissions were:

1. environment and rainforest impacts – concerning impacts on the rainforest health, and protection of the environment
2. traffic and parking – concerning the amount of parking proposed and impacts and congestion on local roads
3. amenity, social and economic impacts – concerning the impacts on neighbours, and social and economic impacts to the local area.

1.3 Analysis of matters raised

NPWS documented and considered each point raised in every submission. Points were separated to one of 4 topic areas according to the subject of the comment as set out in Table 1.

Submissions report: Public exhibition of Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre draft review of environmental factors

Table 1 Topic areas and the number of total references in submissions

Topic area	Number of references
1. Built form and heritage	5
2. Amenity, social and economic impacts	5
3. Traffic, transport and parking	5
4. Environmental management	8
5. Support for the project	3

Notes: Multiple points or references in a single submission have been counted separately, and supportive and opposing points are included in the same topic headings. Therefore, the quantity of references for each topic shown above does not reflect the number or balance of submissions received about each topic and should not be used to evaluate importance or sentiment.

NPWS then considered all collated points within each topic area to see if a change to the proposal presented in the draft REF was needed. A change to the proposal was considered if any of the submissions raised points that met the following criteria:

- an alternative strategy or mitigation action that would better support delivery of the proposal's objectives
- new, updated or additional information of direct relevance to the impact assessment
- a basic factual or editorial error or omission that should be corrected.

Some of the written submissions on the draft REF raised similar issues to those received on the Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk REF. For a more detailed description, refer to the *Submissions report: public exhibition of Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk draft review of environmental factors*.

Each topic area raised in submissions is presented below with a summary of the key points and NPWS response.

1.4 Support for the proposal

Three of the 11 submissions provided support for the proposal, and those comments have **not** been summarised below with a response as they endorse the draft REF.

2. Key feedback themes

2.1 Built form and heritage

This topic covers feedback on 2 main elements of the proposed DARC including the building itself and the heritage of the park. The submissions received outlined the consideration of alternatives and challenged the construction of the new rainforest centre and Arc elevated walkway. Other issues raised in submissions concerned perceived dilapidation of the existing rainforest centre and repurposing the building, with another suggesting that a cable car from the valley is a better option. This topic was mentioned in 3 submissions and is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Feedback received on the built form and heritage

Topic area	Number	Summary of submission	Change to REF
Current building and design elements	3	There is no evidence that the existing building is nearing the end of its lifespan. The building is solid brick with massive steel powder coated glass windows in perfect condition. It is built on a slab, with quality terrazzo surface, which shows no signs of structural decay. It has been lovingly decorated by the local community with mosaic external artwork and has created a significant contemporary cultural sense of belonging and reconciliation in this community. There are no signs of significant structural damage. The suggestion that the building is not fit for purpose is purely subjective and entirely untrue. The current rainforest centre and skywalk operate more than adequately. Are these facilities so old that they need to be completely replaced?	No change
Heritage values	1	This development is likely to have a very significant impact on the natural heritage values of this World Heritage landscape and ecology because the activities that are being established will modify and inhibit landscape processes and accelerate the processes of erosion.	No change
Alternative built form	1	Dorriggo Rainforest Centre needs a cable car across the valley to Blackman's mountain. Have a lookout there or a zip line down the valley that will bring the tourists here.	No change

2.1.1 NPWS response

Current building and design elements

- The DRC building structure is 'L' shaped and constructed primarily of a wooden frame, infilled with brick sections. It features a corrugated metal hipped roof and wraparound verandah. The 3 extensions are all to the northern side and follow similar design principles. Internally, the building is divided into offices, educational rooms, gift shop, and cafe. It connects with a picnic area to the south-west and to the Skywalk overlooking the Dorriggo National Park to the east.

Submissions report: Public exhibition of Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre draft review of environmental factors

- The Skywalk was constructed on the edge of the Dorrigo Plateau; the footings were excavated in 1989. Similar visitor centres exist at numerous locations; the most similar are located at Fitzroy Falls, Minnamurra, Sea Acres and Snowy Region. There are comparable elevated walkways at Minnamurra and Sea Acres rainforest centres.
- The rainforest centre and Skywalk are still in their original form with only some additions to the centre but, given that these were designed by the same architect and integrated soon after the initial construction, they can be considered part of the fabric of the place. Both the rainforest centre and the Skywalk are approaching the end of their intended lifespan, requiring regular maintenance and repairs.
- NPWS acknowledges that the centre and Skywalk do have some significance for their social value; however, this is not considered sufficient overall to continue to maintain the structures in their current form.
- NPWS followed the appropriate requirements of an options assessment for preparing an REF, as stipulated in the EP&A Regulation. Early scoping work conducted by NPWS determined that the DARC feasibility, cost and environmental impacts are acceptable and impacts can be appropriately managed.
- A key objective of the project is to deliver a world-class visitor centre that will cater for local, regional, national, and international tourism in New South Wales, and to ensure facilities are adequately improved to cater for the increasing tourism numbers to the area.

Heritage values

- The DARC partially falls within the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage property (WHL #368), National Heritage Place (NHL #105704) and the State Heritage curtilage (SHR #01002) in Dorrigo National Park.
- The DARC has a very small overall footprint, measuring just 2.0 ha, where 0.63 ha of this is native vegetation or rainforest, with most incorporating plantings associated with the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and regrowth of previously historical quarry disturbance.
- Removal of vegetation will be minimised as far as possible. NPWS anticipates that significantly less than 0.63 ha will be impacted or removed with the use of micro-siting.
- The disturbed areas are primarily regenerating vegetation following clearing before the 1950s. The regrowth vegetation is only 40 to 50 years old and does not represent mature rainforest. For these reasons the impact on natural heritage is significantly less than would be the case if primary rainforest was affected, as this habitat is in a successional stage.

Alternative built form

Cable car is not a permitted land use under the plan of management and is not considered consistent with the general management objectives for the park.

2.2 Amenity, social and economic impacts

This topic covers feedback on the impacts on neighbours, and social and economic impacts to the local area. This topic was outlined in 2 submissions and is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Feedback received on the impacts on amenity, social and economic values

Topic area	Number	Summary of submission	Change to REF
Amenity	2	The residents are going to have to suffer an increase of traffic, no parking in the streets, less accommodation, much more damage to the already deteriorated streets and a loss of the peace and quiet that has made Dorrigo such a nice place to live.	No change
Local business	1	Those 30 odd businesses in Dorrigo likely to benefit and which may have to employ an extra staff member will not be sharing their profits with the rest of the community.	No change
Community consultation	1	Those few who constitute the Chamber of Commerce ... 'a minority' ... do not speak for the residents of this town.	No change
Social impacts	1	I am deeply concerned about the environmental effect of the proposed mega-tourist attraction/centre/ecological theme park/commercial venture into which the Park is being transformed. It will wreck the whole ambience and experience of the rainforest, and how will you even hear the birdcalls above the din of hordes of visitors.	No change

2.2.1 NPWS response

Amenity

- The REF considered the short-term impacts to be minor and localised, primarily during the construction period. These impacts include amenity (visual, noise, dust and access) and temporary changes to the access on Dome Road during construction.
- The potential long-term impacts relate to the introduction of new infrastructure and subsequent visitation to Dorrigo National Park. No immediate neighbours will be directly impacted due to parking at the DARC.
- There is no evidence that visitors to the DARC will severely impact parking availability in the streets of Dorrigo or reduce access to accommodation. Community feedback indicates that additional visitation to Dorrigo would benefit local businesses and the local economy by providing more customers.
- There is no evidence to suggest visitors to the DARC will create damage to deteriorated streets.
- NPWS will continue to consult with park neighbours about the impacts of the proposal on their operations and amenity.
- NPWS is developing a visitor dispersal strategy as part of the project to assist with implementing controls on daily visitor numbers, which will help minimise the impacts on the area and neighbours.

Submissions report: Public exhibition of Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre draft review of environmental factors

Local business

- Construction of the DARC is expected to generate a number of job opportunities for construction-related workers, including creating employment opportunities for the Dorrigo area and the wider Coffs Coast region. It is likely that the DARC will also generate a number of indirect jobs. The project will potentially provide additional benefits for local businesses servicing the construction industry.
- The proposal includes objectives to support local employment and business opportunities, provide skills and opportunity for cultural development and increase workplace diversity. NPWS has published an expression of interest for Gumbaynggirr and other local individuals and organisations who would like to be involved with the project to register their interest.
- Benefits to local business are expected during operation of the DARC including accommodation, hospitality and transport businesses.

Community consultation

NPWS has met and exceeded project commitments for community consultation including with Aboriginal organisations, local residents and interested individuals. The project team welcomes constructive feedback at any time and will continue targeted consultation as the visitor experience is developed and the DARC is constructed.

Social impacts

- The benefits of the project include the provision of more environmental and nature tourism opportunities for locals and visitors. The social benefits include building family connections, a sense of community and friendships, a safe environment, and nature connection and environmental education opportunities.
- A key objective of the project is to deliver a world class visitor centre within Dorrigo National Park that caters for local, regional, national and international visitors.
- NPWS recognises the significant benefits of the proposal to the outdoor and tourism community and in supporting the growth of nature and cultural tourism in New South Wales. As tourism is a key contributor to the NSW economy, this would have beneficial implications for local and regional businesses, including Aboriginal-owned businesses.

2.3 Transport, traffic and parking

Submitters raised concern regarding too much parking, safety on Waterfall Way and additional traffic. Feedback on this topic was made in 5 submissions and is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4 Feedback received on the impacts on traffic, parking and transport

Topic areas	Number	Summary of submission	Change to REF
Traffic	2	The traffic assessment does not encompass the impact of the proposal, which will certainly impact traffic numbers and therefore road safety on Waterfall Way. Improvements to the mountain section of the road, in particular, are required to counter issues stemming from increased traffic. The expected number of visitors once the centre is open – have you even considered that the road to this location should be the MAIN priority?	No change – see NPWS response below
Transport and parking	3	Concerns raised regarding parking and access. The car park you propose is an overkill, with 200 car spaces, more than 4 times needed. And I support the additional carparking spaces and the car park extension area. This is a better configuration than the layout that was shown in the master plan. The additional parking spaces located within the car park extension area is a significant increase in number, which should avoid car parking congestion at the site well into the future.	No change – see NPWS response below

2.3.1 NPWS response

Traffic

- NPWS and Bellingen Shire Council are working together to address traffic and road safety concerns on Dome Road. Dome Road is classified as a local road and provides access to Dorrigo National Park from Waterfall Way.
- Waterfall Way is classified as a state road (no. 76) and connects the rural communities of Bellingen, Dorrigo and Ebor with the urban centres of Coffs Harbour and Armidale. It is also a tourist route passing the waterfalls on Dorrigo Mountain and it provides a transport route for the timber and agricultural industries.
- The NSW Government has funded vital road and safety improvements along the Waterfall Way to the amount of \$50 million. Over the past 4 years, this funding has been used to improve safety, reliability and travel times, and to address safety for pedestrians and traffic in the Dorrigo town centre.
- Bellingen Shire Council maintains approximately 80 km of Waterfall Way under agreement with Transport for NSW. Updates on current works can be found on the council's website.
- Intersection modelling indicates that the Waterfall Way–Dome Road intersection will continue to operate well in all scenarios at level of service (LOS) 'A' (free flow) with minimal delays and queuing.

Submissions report: Public exhibition of Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre draft review of environmental factors

Transport and parking

- The level of parking is considered appropriate. Based on a worst-case analysis, future peak parking demand is estimated to vary from 285 parking spaces on the 94th percentile day of the year, to up to 564 spaces on the busiest day of the year (that is, 100th percentile day of the year).
- The parking supply of 293 car spaces within NPWS-managed land can accommodate the forecast (worst-case) peak parking demand on approximately 94–95% of days in the year. In practice, the future peak parking demand is expected to be much lower than this, as a result of current and future NPWS visitor dispersal strategies, which aim to spread visitation numbers out over the year to reduce excessive visitation peaks during school holidays.
- The proposed DARC parking plan will support appropriate parking, traffic and transport levels and include:
 - site-specific traffic controls (including signage) to manage and regulate traffic and pedestrian movements
 - a construction traffic management plan detailing access to construction sites including entry and exit locations and measures to prevent construction vehicles queuing on public roads
 - a response plan for any construction traffic incident
 - consideration of other developments that may be under construction to minimise traffic conflict and congestion that may occur due to the cumulative increase in construction vehicle traffic
 - provision for monitoring, reviewing and amending traffic controls.

2.4 Environmental management

This topic covers feedback on the impacts of weeds, pathogens and diseases on biodiversity values and the assessment of the significance of environmental impacts. Feedback on this topic was made in 6 submissions and is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5 Feedback received on environmental management

Topic areas	Number	Summary of submissions	Change to REF
Environmental and other impacts	5	The centre will destroy hundreds of native trees under your skywalk. Trees destroyed from continual root cutting, and the initiation of soil erosion through the destabilised soil and damaged root zone. No matter what safeguards are implemented, this construction will still have a detrimental impact on what little rainforest is left.	No change
Pathogens and diseases	1	I support the measures undertaken to minimise the potential introduction and spread of Phytophthora and other pathogens. In regard to the safeguards and mitigation measures, I would recommend using Phytoclean as a solution for cleaning and disinfecting shoes and tools.	No change
Weeds	2	The project will create erosion and weed infested areas. I want NPWS funds spent on protecting threatened species and much more intensive invasive species management.	No change

2.4.1 NPWS response

Environmental and other impacts

- The REF has considered all aspects related to threatened species and communities as detailed in supporting documents A and B. Construction will have some impact on the environment and special features of the park, but significant impacts are not anticipated. The proposed DARC has a very small overall footprint, measuring just 2.0 ha, where 0.63 ha of this is native vegetation or rainforest, with most incorporating plantings associated with the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and regrowth of previously historical quarry disturbance.
- Extensive environmental assessment leading up to the preparation of the REF and the ecological assessment report adequately assess the impacts of the proposed project.
- NPWS will develop a construction environmental management plan to communicate minimal impact requirements and conditions for the construction phase.
- NPWS has undertaken detailed surveys of more than 800 trees within the potential construction zone. These survey works allow for detailed planning of the project and improved mitigation strategies.
- NPWS will closely monitor the impacts of visitation and put control measures in place, where necessary, as detailed in the operational management plan, to minimise the impact on the environment.

Submissions report: Public exhibition of Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre draft review of environmental factors

- NPWS is committed to rehabilitating and restoring appropriate areas around the DARC following construction.

2.4.2 Pathogens and diseases

- Phytophthora, chytrid disease and myrtle rust are key threats to the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia outstanding universal values. Expert advice and existing research suggest that all 3 are present and potentially widespread in the parks.
- Researchers have recorded Phytophthora from soil samples taken at various locations and intervals since 2011 including at the Rainforest Centre.
- The implementation of strict hygiene infrastructure and protocols to help reduce the risk of spreading these pathogens and diseases is a key mitigation strategy. This will also help reduce the risk of introducing novel pathogens and diseases and environmental weeds.
- NPWS will develop a hygiene management strategy as part of the construction environmental management plan, including procedures for managing these pathogens. This will include strategies for managing Phytophthora, chytrid, myrtle rust and invasive weed.
- Detailed management actions are included in the REF.

2.4.3 Weeds

- The construction environmental management plan will include protocols for vehicle washing and notification for construction workers and vehicles.

3. Next steps

NPWS will consider this feedback in finalising the review of environmental factors. The Executive Director will then consider the REF to determine whether the proposal should proceed as proposed or be modified. If the proposed Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre is determined to proceed, we will publish the final REF and its decision statement, keeping the community informed and updated on its delivery.

NPWS will then refer the proposal to the Heritage Council of NSW to provide s 60 approval under the *Heritage Act 1977* for works or activities within the curtilage of heritage-listed items. The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage site is listed on the State Heritage Register for New South Wales.

4. More information

NPWS will continue to provide updates as the project progresses. Anyone who has not yet registered their interest in the project can do so on the [Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk](#) project webpage.

[Dorrigo National Park, Bindarri National Park and Bindarri State Conservation Area plan of management](#), DCCEEW, 2024.

[Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre draft master plan](#), DCCEEW, 2024.

[Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk draft master plans submissions report](#), DCCEEW, 2024.

[Submissions report: public exhibition of Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk draft review of environmental factors \(PDF 916KB\)](#), DCCEEW, 2025.