



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area

Draft amendment to the plan of management: Enabling hard-roofed accommodation at Garawarra Farm and new walking track connections and alignments



Acknowledgement of Country

The 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.

Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area are part of an ancient landscape which includes the Aboriginal people. The parks lie within the Illawarra and La Perouse Aboriginal Land Council areas and within the Country of the Dharawal Aboriginal people of the Dharawal language group.

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Have your say

Submissions must be lodged before 5 pm on 20 February 2026.

Your submission will assist in the preparation of an amendment to the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area plan of management. Submissions must be in written form and lodged via:



the online submission form at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/get-involved/have-your-say



email to npws.parkplanning@environment.nsw.gov.au



post to Manager, Planning and Assessment, NPWS, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124.

We are seeking your comments on this draft amendment. The best submissions:

- provide a short introduction about yourself or the organisation that you represent
- are concise and clear about the points that you raise
- include only the facts and references that directly relate to your key points
- use respectful and constructive language
- reference the relevant section of the draft amendment.

Your submission may be provided to the statutory bodies that have an advisory role under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* in the preparation of each plan of management amendment. These bodies include the Karst Management Advisory Committee, regional advisory committees and the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council.

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water complies with the *NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*, which regulates the collection, storage, quality, use and disclosure of personal information.

Draft amendment to the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area plan of management

Summary

Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area are protected in perpetuity through their reservation under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. The parks are managed to achieve the objects of the Act, which are centred on conserving the natural and cultural values of the parks, as well as fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of these values (Appendix A).

This draft amendment to the plan of management has been prepared to provide the public with an opportunity to provide feedback on proposed changes to the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area plan of management (NPWS 2022).

These proposed changes aim to facilitate the sustainable use and enjoyment of Royal National Park by changing the provision of hard-roofed accommodation from Garie Beach to Garawarra Farm.

The draft amendment also includes minor changes to Figures 1, 2 and 3 to reflect recent land additions to Royal National Park and the completion of upgrade works to the Royal Coast Track, including track realignments and new connections to link to existing tracks, notably a realignment of the track between Garie Beach and Little Garie Beach.

The draft amendment does not propose changes to the management of Heathcote National Park or Garawarra State Conservation Area.

As required under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, this draft amendment was prepared following consideration of the matters listed under section 72AA of the Act, including the objects of the Act (Appendix A).

After the public exhibition period ends, the Greater Sydney Regional Advisory Committee will review this draft amendment and all submissions. The committee may provide advice to the Minister for the Environment.

If adopted by the Minister, the plan of management will be updated to reflect the amended text. All operations undertaken in the parks must be consistent with the amended plan of management.

Draft amendment to the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area plan of management

1. Background

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is seeking to amend the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area Plan of Management, which was adopted in 2022.

An amendment to the 2022 plan of management is required to make changes to accommodation options for the Great Southern Walk and reflect new track connections and track realignments to support visitor outcomes including safety.

The Great Southern Walk (GSW) will be a new 67-kilometre multi-day walking experience extending from Kamay Botany Bay National Park through Royal National Park to the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area.

The GSW is designed as a 5-day/4-night walk, with overnight stops proposed at on-park campgrounds at Bonnie Vale, Wattamolla, Garie Beach, Garawarra Farm and Maddens Plains.

The original GSW concept included hard-roofed accommodation (hiker huts) at Bonnie Vale, Wattamolla, Garie Beach and Maddens Plains.

Following an analysis of campsite locations, some changes to campground configuration are required. This includes the removal of hard-roofed/hiker hut accommodation at Garie Beach and the establishment of a new campground with hard-roofed accommodation at Garawarra Farm.

The Garie Beach visitor precinct is one of the most popular destinations within Royal National Park and is frequently closed during periods of high peak season visitation. The introduction of an additional 5 buildings within a precinct that is already operating at capacity is considered inappropriate. Reductions in GSW infrastructure at other busy precincts, including Wattamolla, have also been made.

Garawarra Farm is a large, highly disturbed landscape that operated for many years as a working farm prior to it being transferred to NPWS. The site is not subject to the same visitation pressures as Garie Beach and, given its history of disturbance, is well suited to the establishment of a new campground.

This draft amendment proposes to enable hard-roofed/hiker hut accommodation at Garawarra Farm and to remove it as a permissible activity at Garie Beach.

All campground proposals require impact assessment, consideration and approval by NPWS. Such proposals must demonstrate that they would not result in any significant impacts to the natural and cultural heritage values of the park, such as threatened species, ecosystem function and Aboriginal sites.

The draft amendment proposes to replace some plan of management text, delete some text, replace maps at Figures 1, 2 and 3, and Table 4 and to modify Table 6. These changes should be read in conjunction with the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area Plan of Management. Section numbers referred to in the amendment refer to sections in this plan of management.

2. Proposed amendments

Section 3.1 Visitor management zones

Plan reference: page 12

Delete:

Hut or cabin and camping accommodation for walkers will be investigated and may be implemented at Bonnie Vale, Wattamolla and Garie to support the Great Southern Walk (see 3.2).

Replace with:

Hut or cabin or camping accommodation for walkers will be investigated and may be implemented at Bonnie Vale, Wattamolla, Garie and Garawarra Farm to support the Great Southern Walk (see 3.2).

Section 3.2 Camping and other accommodation

Plan reference: page 13

Delete:

The Great Southern Walk will be supported by the provision of up to 5 small-scale walkers huts or cabins in 3 existing visitor precincts (Bonnie Vale, Wattamolla and Garie) (Table 4).

Replace with:

The Great Southern Walk will be supported by the provision of up to 5 small-scale walkers huts or cabins in 2 existing visitor precincts (Bonnie Vale and Wattamolla) and 1 potential visitor precinct (Garawarra Farm) (Table 4).

Section 3.3 Bushwalking

Plan reference: page 16

Delete:

The parks provide a range of bushwalking opportunities with varying degrees of social interaction, physical challenge and self-reliance. Many visitors to the parks are attracted by the diversity of landscapes and extensive network of more than 100 kilometres of walking tracks. More than 250,000 local, regional and international visitors walk the Coast Track each year. Large numbers of people using walking tracks can accelerate erosion. This will be managed through closure of informal tracks and installation of boardwalks where appropriate. A small number of new connections may be constructed to provide alternative walking experiences and expand opportunities for multi-day walks (see proposed walking tracks on Figure 3). Some existing tracks may be realigned to protect park values or improve

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visitor safety, including a section of the Coast Track which may be realigned to cross Garie Headland.

Replace with:

The parks provide a range of bushwalking opportunities with varying degrees of social interaction, physical challenge and self-reliance. Many visitors to the parks are attracted by the diversity of landscapes and extensive network of more than 100 kilometres of walking tracks.

More than 250,000 local, regional and international visitors walk the Coast Track each year. Large numbers of people using walking tracks can accelerate erosion. This will be managed through closure of informal tracks and installation of boardwalks where appropriate.

A small number of new connections may be constructed to provide alternative walking experiences and expand opportunities for multi-day walks (see proposed walking tracks on Figure 3). Some existing tracks may also be realigned to protect park values or improve visitor safety.

Maps

Plan reference: Figure 1. Location of the parks

Replace Figure 1 in the plan with the Figure 1 below.

Plan reference: Figure 2. Map of Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area

Replace Figure 2 in the plan with the Figure 2 below.

Plan reference: Figure 3. Visitor management zones

Replace Figure 3 in the plan with the Figure 3 below.

Draft amendment to the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area plan of management

Map 1

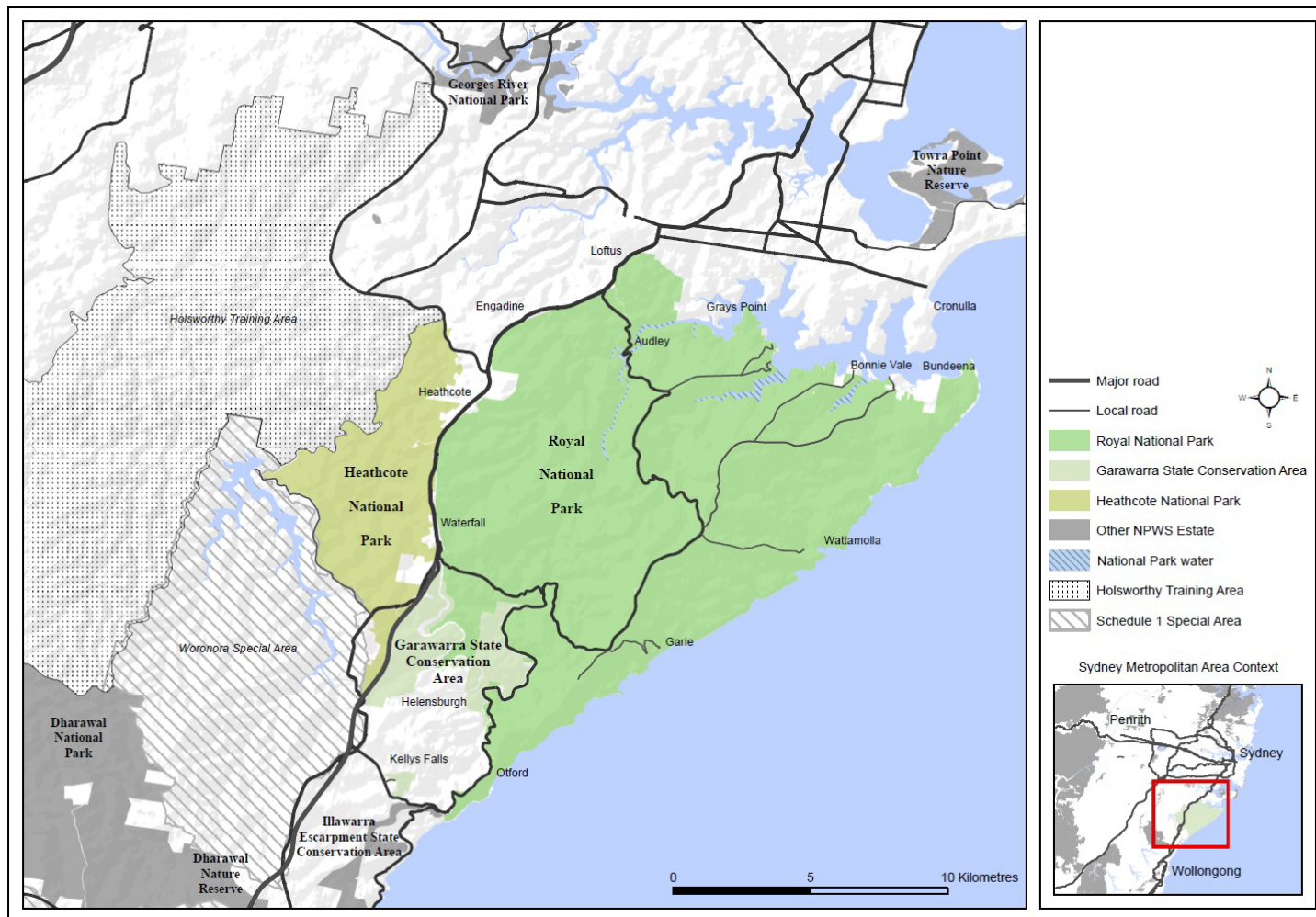


Figure 1 Location of the parks

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Map 2

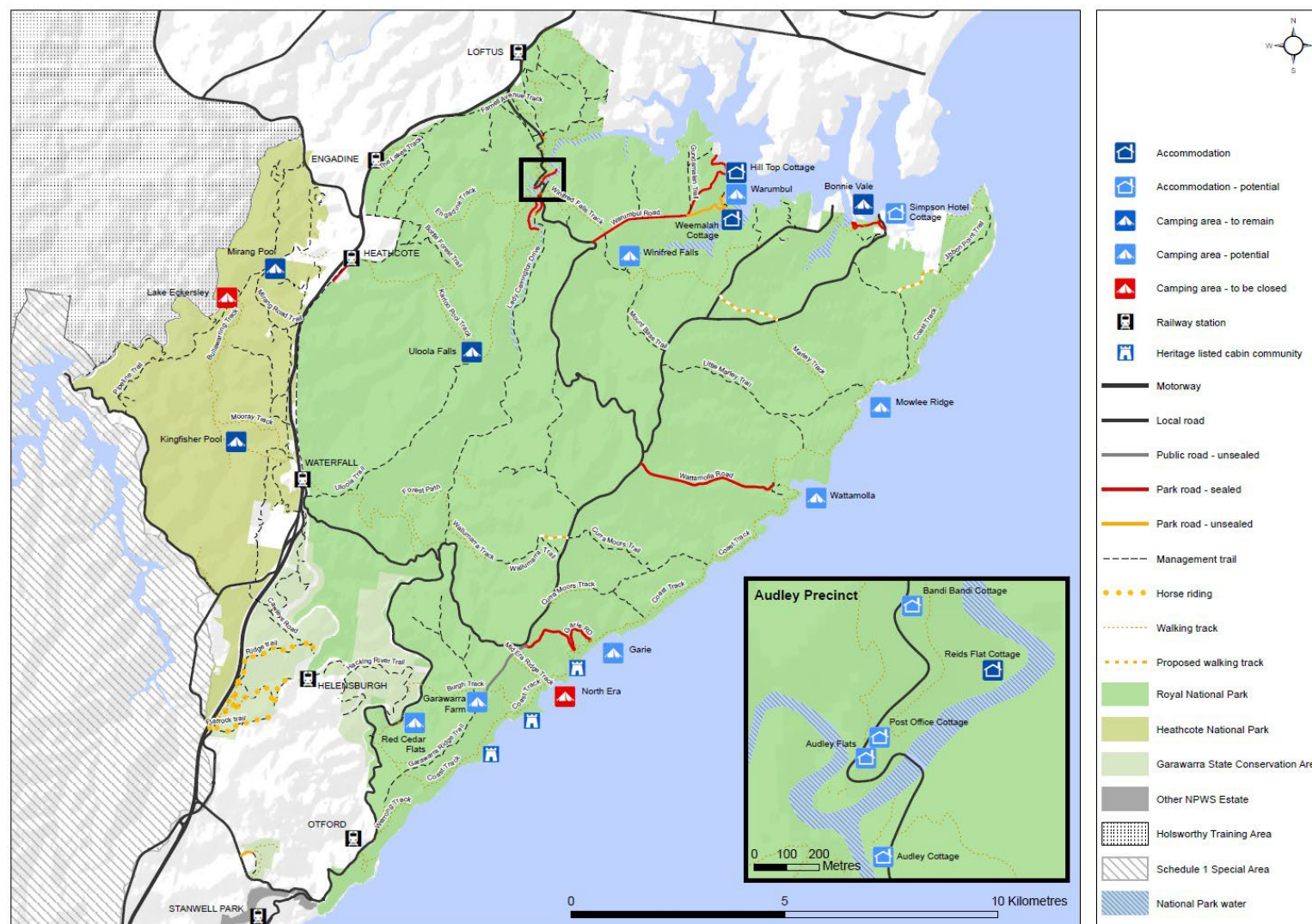


Figure 2 Map of Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area

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Map 3

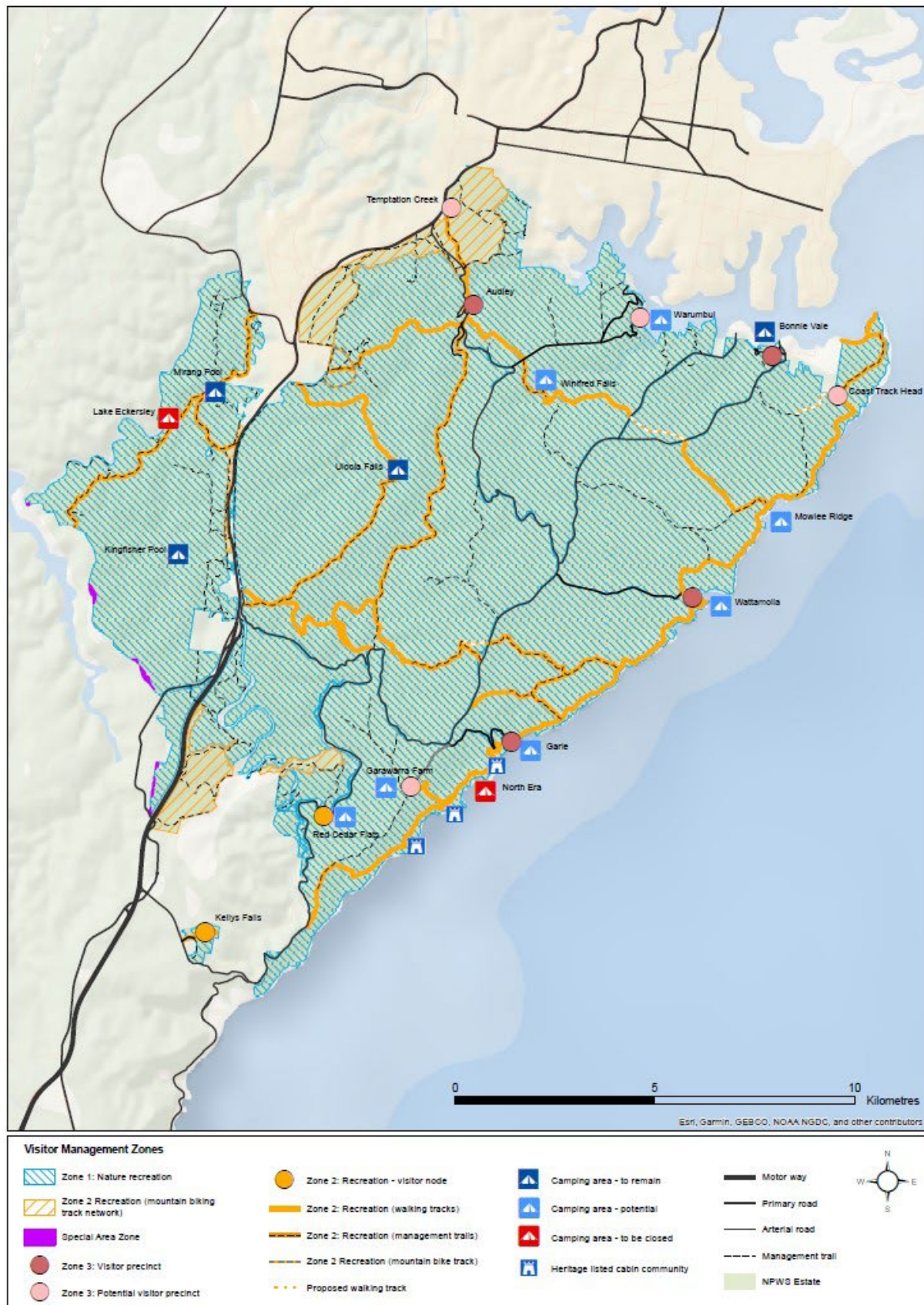


Figure 3 Visitor management zones

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Tables

Plan reference: Table 4. Hard-roofed visitor accommodation in Royal National Park: existing and potential

Replace Table 4 in the plan with the Table 4 below.

Site	Location	Existing/potential purpose
Hilltop Cottage	Warumbul	Existing visitor accommodation
Reids Flat Cottage	Audley	Existing visitor accommodation
Weemalah Cottage	Warumbul	Existing visitor accommodation
Post Office Cottage	Audley	Potential visitor accommodation
Audley Flats	Audley	Potential visitor accommodation
Audley Cottage	Audley	Potential visitor accommodation
Cottage on Simpson's Hotel site	Bonnie Vale	Potential visitor accommodation; café or kiosk; education or cultural centre
Walkers huts/cabins	Bonnie Vale	Potential visitor accommodation to support walkers doing the Great Southern Walk
Walkers huts/cabins	Wattamolla	Potential visitor accommodation to support walkers doing the Great Southern Walk
Walkers huts/cabins	Garawarra Farm	Potential visitor accommodation to support walkers doing the Great Southern Walk

Plan reference: Table 6. Scheme of operations

Replace Outcome 11, Action c in the plan with Outcome 11, Action c below.

Outcome	Actions	Priority
Providing for visitor use and enjoyment		
11.The parks provide a range of appropriate, ecologically sustainable visitor opportunities	c. Provide a network of tracks, subject to environmental impact assessment, for walking, mountain biking and horse riding, including: i. new walking track connections that support overnight walks and link to public transport (see Figure 2) ii. mountain biking tracks as guided by the mountain biking plan for the parks iii. short connecting track that links to existing horse riding network in Garawarra SCA iv. The closure and rehabilitation of unauthorised and/or inappropriate tracks.	High

Appendix A: Objects of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*

The objects of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, set out in section 2A of the Act, are as follows:

- a. The conservation of nature, including, but not limited to, the conservation of—
 - i. habitat, ecosystems and ecosystem processes, and
 - ii. biological diversity at the community, species and genetic levels, and
 - iii. landforms of significance, including geological features and processes, and
 - iv. landscapes and natural features of significance including wilderness and wild rivers,
- b. the conservation of objects, places or features (including biological diversity) of cultural value within the landscape, including, but not limited to—
 - i. places, objects and features of significance to Aboriginal people, and
 - ii. places of social value to the people of New South Wales, and
 - iii. places of historic, architectural or scientific significance,
- c. fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation,
- d. providing for the management of land reserved under this Act in accordance with the management principles applicable for each type of reservation.

Appendix B: Management principles for national parks

The purpose of reserving land as national park and the management principles for national parks are set out in section 30E of the National Parks and Wildlife Act as follows:

- 1) The purpose of reserving land as a national park is to identify, protect and conserve areas containing outstanding or representative ecosystems, natural or cultural features or landscapes or phenomena that provide opportunities for public appreciation and sustainable visitor or tourist use and enjoyment so as to enable those areas to be managed in accordance with subsection (2).
- 2) A national park is to be managed in accordance with the following principles –
 - a) the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem function, the protection of geological and geomorphological features and natural phenomena and the maintenance of natural landscapes,
 - b) the conservation of places, objects, features and landscapes of cultural value,
 - c) the protection of the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations,
 - d) the promotion of public appreciation and understanding of the national park's natural and cultural values,
 - e) provision for sustainable visitor or tourist use and enjoyment that is compatible with the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values,
 - f) provision for the sustainable use (including adaptive reuse) of any buildings or structures or modified natural areas having regard to the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values,
 - fa) provision for the carrying out of development in any part of a special area (within the meaning of the *Hunter Water Act 1991*) in the national park that is permitted under section 185A having regard to the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values,
 - g) provision for appropriate research and monitoring.

Appendix C: Management principles for state conservation areas

The management principles for state conservation areas, as set out in section 30G of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, are:

- (a) the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem function, the protection of natural phenomena and the maintenance of natural landscapes,
- (b) the conservation of places, objects and features of cultural value,
- (c) provision for the undertaking of uses permitted under other provisions of this Act in such areas (including uses permitted under section 47J) having regard to the conservation of the natural and cultural values of the state conservation area,
- (ca) provision for the carrying out of development in any part of a special area (within the meaning of the *Hunter Water Act 1991*) in the state conservation area that is permitted under section 185A having regard to the conservation of the natural and cultural values of the state conservation area,
- (d) provision for sustainable visitor or tourist use and enjoyment that is compatible with the conservation of the state conservation area's natural and cultural values and with uses permitted under other provisions of this Act in such areas,
- (e) provision for the sustainable use (including adaptive reuse) of any buildings or structures or modified natural areas having regard to the conservation of the state conservation area's natural and cultural values and with uses permitted under other provisions of this Act in such areas,
- (f) provision for appropriate research and monitoring.

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Garawarra State Conservation Area plan of management**

References

NPWS (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) (2022) *Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area Plan of Management*, Department of Planning and Environment, Sydney.

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