

A Greens' Guide for Sustainable Tourism in Tasmanian Protected Areas

Maintaining the Authenticity of the Tasmanian Wilderness

Presented By

Cassy O'Connor MP

Tasmanian Greens Leader and Parks spokesperson

and

Andrea Dawkins MP

Tasmanian Greens Tourism spokesperson

behalf of the Tasmanian Greens MPs





Introduction

Of the 1,031 properties included in the World Heritage List, the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (WHA) is the only one with the word 'wilderness' included in its title by the United Nations. This stunning and ancient protected landscape meets more World Heritage criteria than any other place on the planet. This sets Tasmania apart on a global scale and is a quality that must be protected, along with the rich Aboriginal history of the TWWHA dating back tens of thousands of years.

Tasmania's wild areas are the most potent factors that influence people to visit our State. Even if a tourist doesn't visit the TWWHA or a protected area directly, research tells us that the fact they exist in the State positively influenced the decision to come to Tasmania over other destinations.

Visitor numbers are soaring and tourism businesses are looking to expand and develop new offerings. Each visitor will return home with stories of the wonderful, globally unique experience they had in Tasmania.

Decisions we make now as a State will determine whether this expansion becomes a sustainable long-term growth benefitting future generations of Tasmanians. It could also become a short-term boom and bust where we see overdevelopment, a degraded wilderness area, disappointed tourists and dwindling economic returns.

The current Expressions of Interest (EOI) process instigated by the Government risks enshrining an ad hoc, piecemeal approach to assessing tourism proposals in and around our wild places and rich cultural landscapes. In short, the EOI process lacks clarity, transparency and opportunities for public input. There may be a number of good proposals contained in the EOIs, but they risk being tainted by a flawed and opaque process in this headlong rush to exploit the States' protected areas.

What is lacking is an overarching statement of the type of tourism we want in Tasmania and the steps the Government will put in place to manage risks to outstanding wilderness and Aboriginal cultural heritage values.

In response to the Liberal Government's Draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 2014, the World Heritage Committee Reactive Monitoring Mission recommends that:

"In line with a recent Committee request (Decision 39 COM 7B.35), the Management Plan should establish strict criteria for new tourism development within the property, which would be in line with the primary goal of protecting the property's Outstanding Universal Values, including its wilderness character and cultural attributes."

"Wilderness is harder and harder to find these days on this beautiful planet, and we're abusing our planet to the point of almost no return."

Betty White

A second round of Expressions of Interest for commercial development in the TWWHA and other protected areas will be opened in October 2016, yet the critical work on developing strict criteria for new tourism development in the TWWHA has not yet been done by government.

Criteria for the sustainable enjoyment of Tasmanian protected areas is critical. A well managed process which has sustainability at the heart will see more visitors spending money in the State, more locals employed in tourism businesses, and well protected natural and cultural landscapes the value of which climbs with each successive generation.

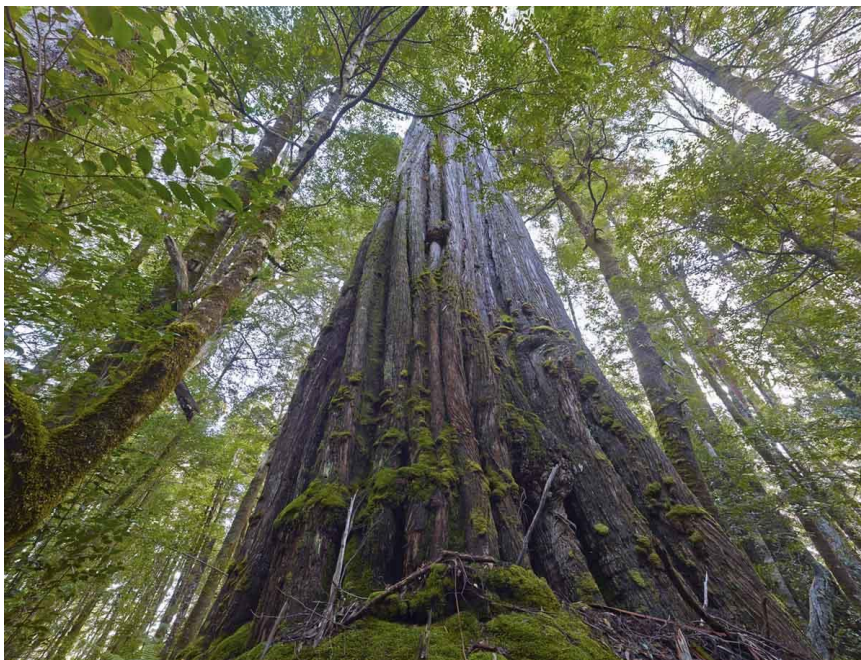
As the world becomes more populated, more developed and more polluted, what Tasmania has to offer will only become more scarce and more economically and socially valuable. We can not allow private enterprises to gain exclusive rights over this precious public asset.

If, however, we have no or low standards and a poorly managed process, we would see degraded wild areas resulting in poor experiences, ultimately leading to fewer jobs and diminishing economic returns.

Alarm bells are already ringing in some quarters, with Lonely Planet advising the people who are thinking of visiting Tasmania:

"Now is the time to experience these astounding wilderness areas before compromises are made."

We must protect these precious places and we can't let our reputation as a world class visitor destination slip. We can't afford to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs for the State's tourism economy.



Putting the protection of natural and cultural values before the making of short-term profits for the few, will ensure Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area and other reserves are maintained in good order for their intrinsic value and to underpin sustainable economic growth in the future.

The Need for a Guide to Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area and protected areas are in the global spotlight like never before.

Three decades after the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage area was officially proclaimed, the time has come to comprehensively plan for the next three decades of sustainable tourism growth. We need to plan now for the period to 2046.



Freycinet National Park, Rob Blakers

In the absence of a strategic plan, the Tasmanian Greens are concerned the combination of increased visitations, poor political understanding of the value of wilderness and cultural heritage and an increased development push in protected areas presents a risk to the Tasmanian reserve system. Once lost, wilderness and cultural values cannot be restored to their natural and original state.

If we fail to plan for protecting Tasmania's wild places and cultural landscapes, we risk diminishing its quality of wilderness and authenticity as well as losing our competitive advantage.

With this risk in our mind, we believe the key principles outlined below should guide a sustainable tourism in protected areas for this beautiful island state and its world class reserve system.

As Tasmania opens its eyes to new economic opportunities and moves to diversify its economic base beyond resource extraction, the Greens recognise ample opportunity exists for common ground in the joint project of maintaining the authenticity of our wilderness and wild areas. Ultimately, we all get most benefit – the environment and the people in it – if we find that common ground.

The Tasmanian Greens have been instrumental in establishing Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area and protected areas and we want to be part of guaranteeing these globally unique assets deliver prosperity to Tasmanians over successive generations.

The key to this is in protecting natural and cultural values.

Guiding Principles

Definitions

Protected area

Those areas in Tasmania that are National Parks, World Heritage Areas or other reserves, as defined under the *Nature Conservation Act 2002* (Tasmania).

Eco-tourism

Environmentally responsible travel in natural areas, in a manner that conserves that environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.

Wilderness

An area that is, or is capable of being restored to be:

- large enough to allow long-term preservation of its natural systems and biological diversity;
- substantially undisturbed by society (colonial and modern); and
- remote at its centre from points of mechanised access and other evidence of colonial and modern technological society.

“The idea of wilderness needs no defense, it only needs defenders.”

Edward Abbey

Recognition of Ownership and the Need for Consultation

1. Tasmania’s First People have a deep respect and enduring connection to their country. Aboriginal engagement in the management of Tasmania’s natural and cultural landscapes is both necessary and a moral imperative.
2. Protected areas, that are now a significant driver of tourism business and economic activity in the State, belong to all Tasmanians. They are public assets set aside for the protection of their natural and cultural values.
3. Public consultation is part and parcel of private operations doing business on public land. A well engaged community can act as a valuable support to tourism. However, a community that feels shut out of decision-making will lead to a diminished visitor experience over time.

Protection of Wilderness and Cultural Values Front and Foremost

4. We should prioritise the protection of wilderness and culturally significant landscapes in all decisions relating to protected areas.
5. Mechanised access, and mechanised access routes (i.e. roads) resource extraction (such as timber and minerals) using non-native animals for transport or primary production, are all incompatible with Wilderness.

6. The protection of natural and cultural values and the visitor experience are directly related, and are not in competition with each other. This is on the basis of the existing presumption that accommodation facilities and other commercial infrastructure should be located outside the TWWHA or protected areas, in towns and regions that can benefit economically from their proximity to a protected area.



Tarkine wilderness, Rob Blakers

7. Visitor based infrastructure in protected areas should be publicly funded and owned.
8. Private infrastructure is best situated on privately-owned land, and where there is minimal environmental impact. Proposals for privately operated infrastructure on public land, such as protected areas, need to be limited to small carefully defined, restricted zones. They also need to be sustainable and low-impact eco-tourism.
9. Proposals for private operators to profit on public land warrant a high degree of transparency and public consultation, with a return to the public for use of its protected asset.
10. The details of the proposal, potential risks and proposed methods of risk management should be publicly viewable documents. A statutory assessment process for private operations on reserved lands must guide this process. The assessment process should include public consultation and third party appeal rights.
11. Some parts of our protected areas are simply 'no go areas' due to their inherent sensitivity, wilderness and importance to Aboriginal Tasmanians.

12. The assessment of tourism proposals in, and around, protected areas must include the cumulative impacts of all existing and proposed developments, rather than each new proposal being viewed in isolation.
13. Successive governments have underfunded the Parks and Wildlife Service, leading to significant difficulties in providing maintenance, upgrades and good management of protected lands. As a core principle, the PWS must be adequately funded to execute its statutory functions, ultimately providing a more positive visitor experience.

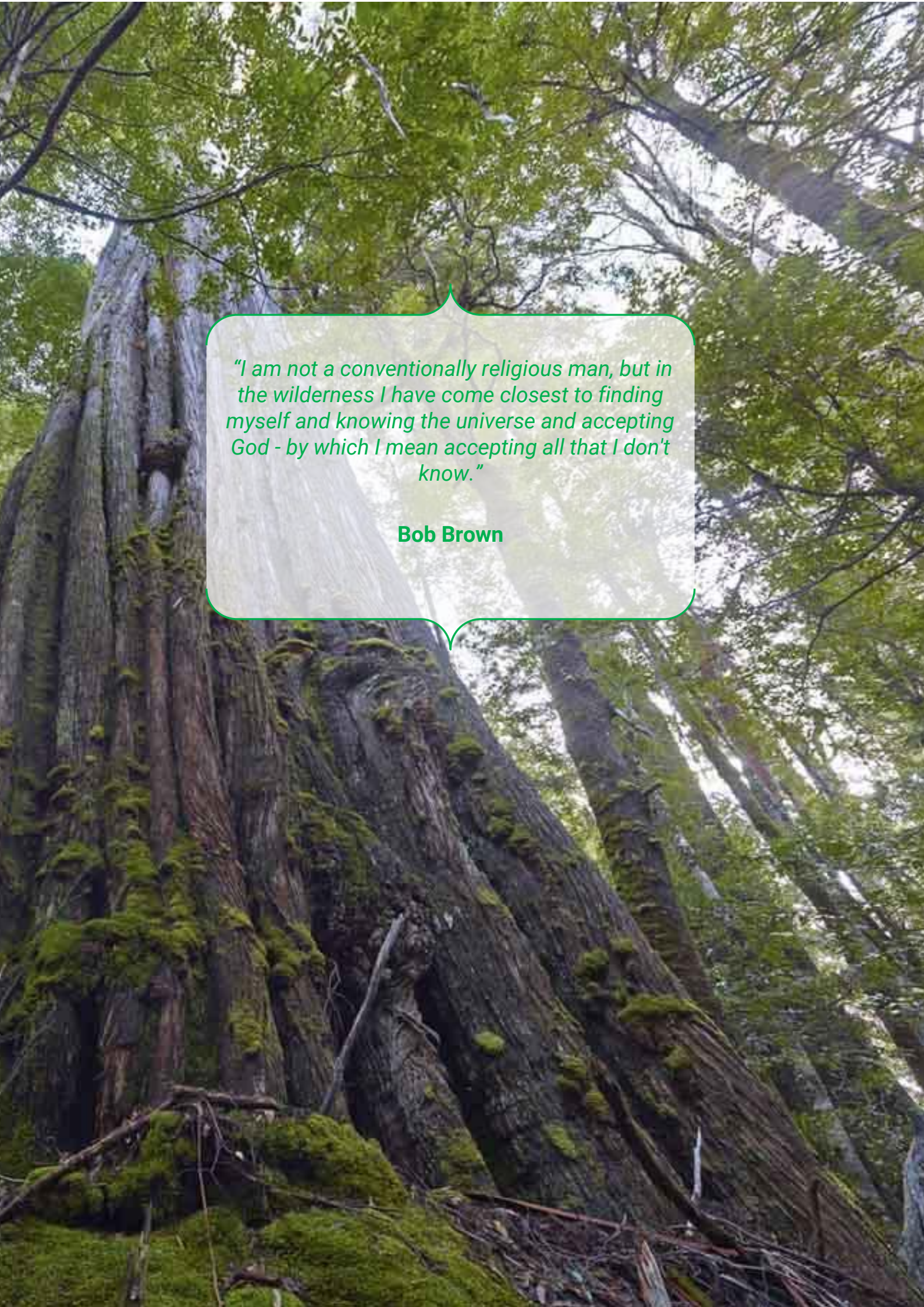
Tourism Proposals to be Sensitive and Provide Universal Benefits

14. Tourism proposals must be low impact and utilise publicly funded facilities. They should not lead to exclusive uses of public protected areas.
15. Tourism proposals should provide for positive experiences for visitors as well as local communities and should not detract from the amenity and experience of other park users.
16. Proposals should provide financial benefits for business, local communities as well as conservation activities.
17. Proposals should provide memorable interpretative experiences that reinforce sensitivity to cultural, environmental, and social climates.
18. The maintenance of existing roads and walking tracks and low-key signage is an important government investment in delivering a good-quality visitor experience
19. Access to protected areas should not diminish solitude, remoteness and natural quietness. Protected areas should generally be free of low flying aircraft, and have highly restricted or no motorised access. The conditions guiding the landing of aircraft within protected areas should be tightened over time, not loosened.

The Government to Facilitate Promotion and Healthy Competition

20. There needs to be an annual marketing spend by government to international audiences to promote the wilderness and Aboriginal cultural experiences available in Tasmania.
21. New nature based and low impact tourism opportunities through expansion of the national park network should be actively pursued.
22. Business operators and PWS play a pivotal role in showcasing Tasmania and its natural areas, in encouraging positive visitor behaviour, and by increasing understanding of the importance of environmental protection. Government has a leadership role to work with the industry to provide excellent tour standards and accreditation.

23. Protected areas are owned by all of the community and commercial tourism operators will not be allowed exclusivity rights that denies access to people who want to experience the area by their own method (i.e. by foot, watercraft, or with a tent).
24. No tourism operators should be locked out of protected areas due to an exclusivity arrangement granted to their competitors. Competition delivers innovation and excellence.
25. Competition will also ensure Tasmania caters for differing clientele experiencing protected areas on all different budgets.



"I am not a conventionally religious man, but in the wilderness I have come closest to finding myself and knowing the universe and accepting God - by which I mean accepting all that I don't know."

Bob Brown