

MEDIA RELEASE

DAY, 22 September 2020

Auditor-General's report to Parliament on Expressions of Interest for tourism investment opportunities

The Auditor-General, Mr Rod Whitehead today submitted his Report to Parliament on the Expressions of Interest (EOI) for tourism investment opportunities. The audit examined effectiveness of the EOI process for the development of sensitive and appropriate tourism experiences and associated infrastructure in Tasmania's National Parks and other reserves by commercial operators.

Mr Whitehead found the EOI process "was implemented and administered effectively and in a manner consistent with the Government's policy objectives".

The EOI process was designed to supplement but not replace or change existing application and approval systems, instead providing a gateway into the pre-existing assessment processes managed by Parks and Wildlife Services (PWS), including the Reserve Activity Assessment (RAA).

The audit found the process criteria and guiding principles to be fundamentally sound. Both the EOI and RAA processes were adequately administered and followed the prescribed steps but improvements were needed in the PWS document management system while advice from the Solicitor-General should be sought during the EOI process to provide greater legal insight into proposals.

The EOI assessment panel that reviews proposals had a reasonable set of skills but lacked independence as, following the departure of an independent member, it consisted of government agency officers. Broader representation from community stakeholders may be beneficial. However, there was no evidence to suggest assessment outcomes would have been different with an alternative panel composition.

Consultation with communities and stakeholders, undertaken as part of the processes, was conducted primarily by proponents. Mr Whitehead stated "obtaining a wider set of views might be beneficial in gaining a more complete view in assessing the proposals". Mr Whitehead went on to say "no evidence was found to suggest recommendations made to the Minister regarding proposals were adversely affected by the constitution of the assessment panel or quality of consultation".

Publication of information on recommended proposals to progress to the RAA process was timely and appropriately handled. Proponents going through the RAA process were supported by knowledgeable and diligent staff who provided adequate advice. Mr Whitehead found better guidance and advice could be given to proponents going through the EOI process, in particular how it related to the RAA process and that a positive recommendation to the Minister was not an approval for the project to start.

The EOI process receiving over 60 proposals was a positive indicator it was attracting new investment. However, only 11 had progressed to full commercial operation. Mr Whitehead stated "the EOI process has been successful in contributing to the objectives of economic growth that were the purpose of its instigation by the Government, albeit to a relatively minor extent at this point."

Mr Whitehead made 10 recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the EOI and RAA processes.

The complete Report can be downloaded from www.audit.tas.gov.au.

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