

CAWA RESPONSE TO THE ALBANY COAST DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN – July 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to the Draft Albany Management Plan (DAMP). We are submitting comments in regards to the recreational activity of rock climbing described in the DAMP.

The Climbers Association of Western Australia (CAWA) is the peak representative body for rock climbing in Western Australia. Rock climbing is a designated activity guided by the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW's) Policy Statement No. 18 'Recreation, Tourism and Visitor Services' as provided for in the DAMP under 'Managing recreation, tourism and community values' (page 55):

"Strategic objective

A key strategic objective of this plan is to provide for recreation, tourism and community use for the appreciation of the area's landscape, natural and cultural heritage values (Section 2.1 Management direction). The department's Policy Statement No.18 – Recreation, Tourism and Visitor Services (DEC 2006) outlines the principles, operational guidelines, procedures and administrative arrangements in relation to facilitating recreation and tourism within the planning area."

Firstly, we would like to point out that rock climbing is two words, not one, and that all 'rockclimbing' should be replaced with 'rock climbing' throughout the management plan.

In Policy Statement No. 18, rock climbing and abseiling are acknowledged as two separate activities. This must also be reflected in the Albany Draft Management Plan, as these two activities, while sometimes undertaken at the same locations, have different requirements for management, as outlined in the Policy.

The management plan should be amended in the following locations to reflect the above:

1. Key Values (page 4) amend last bullet point to reflect this by putting a comma instead of a /. I.e. the following:

"a diversity of recreational experiences and opportunities such as bushwalking, picnicking, **rock climbing**, abseiling, fishing, hang-gliding, camping, birdwatching and whale watching. The 900km Bibbulmun Track walk trail passes through West Cape Howe and Torndirrup national parks and terminates in Albany. Torndirrup National Park also contains the well-known day-use sites: 'The Gap' and 'Natural Bridge'.

2. **Rock climbing and abseiling** (page 65) this paragraph is required to be revised to ensure that rock climbing and abseiling are treated separately.

West Cape Howe National Park offers some of the best rock climbing **and abseiling** in Australia (Herford 1990, CALM 1992a), and rock climbing also occurs in Waychinicup and Torndirrup National Parks.

CALM 1992a does not state that West Cape Howe offers abseiling. In addition, WCH is not suited to recreational abseiling in most locations as the cliffs drop straight into the sea, and abseiling involves sliding down a rope and then walking back to the top of the cliff, and therefore West Cape Howe is impractical for abseiling. This is also the case with many of the rock climbing areas along the Albany coastline, such as The Gap and Peak Head.

It is also recommended that some text be included from the West Cape Howe Management Plan: "Height, aspect and quality of the climbs are all seen as exceptional by climbers who use cliffs around the Cape area itself as well as on the coast north of Shelley Beach to Forsyth Bluff. Access to climbing spots is mainly by 4WD vehicle though some groups walk in. Access for casualty evacuation may be required in the event of an accident. Although not a common problem at present, non-climbing spectators on cliff tops can pose a danger to climbers if they dislodge material or tamper with anchor points."

CAWA does not consider some top anchors for abseiling access to climbing routes to be visually impacting as was previously stated in the West Cape Howe Management Plan. Almost all non-climbers that have been spoken to at West Cape Howe have not noticed these bolts, as they have been installed to ensure low visual impact.

[New paragraph] Under section 33 of the CALM Regulations, abseiling cannot occur on department-managed land without lawful authority, except in an 'abseiling area', which is an area declared under regulation 6(1)(a) to be a designated area for the purposes of regulation 33, or an area designated by sign as an abseiling area. **There are currently no designated abseiling areas in the planning area.**

The following statement needs clarification "West Cape Howe, Waychinicup and Torndirrup national parks will be gazetted as designated areas for abseiling, including the identification of specific areas that are suitable for abseiling or not suitable for abseiling (such as 'The Gap' and 'Natural Bridge')." Our interpretation of the way this paragraph is written is such that rock climbing and abseiling are restricted to areas designated 'abseiling areas', and therefore DPaW's intent of this sentence was for rock climbing as well as abseiling to be limited to the areas gazetted as designated areas. We would like to reiterate that as per Policy Statement No. 18, rock climbing and abseiling are two different activities and some areas designated for climbing may not be suitable for abseiling, as discussed above.

Policy 18 does state that 'Area management plans or interim management guidelines will specify suitable areas/sites and may indicate any restrictions on rock climbing or abseiling activities.' As such, the plan should reflect that rock climbing is allowed at West Cape Howe, Waychinicup and Torndirrup national parks. Therefore we recommend that the plan be left with the first statement (as amended) in this section above ("West Cape Howe National Park offers some of the best rock climbing in Australia (Herford 1990, CALM 1992a), and rock climbing also occurs in Waychinicup and Torndirrup National Parks.")

With regards to restricting this activity at the Gap and the Natural Bridge, we recommend that a risk based approach is undertaken. These cliffs, particularly with the completion of the new lookout, are one of the most visited locations in the region. And therefore we recognise that impacts on other users, including safety must be taken into consideration.

Climbing has been undertaken at the Gap since 1973 (this is the date of the first recorded routes). There is little impact on the environment from climbing as the majority of climbing is using natural (removable) protection in cracks and other naturally occurring features, with little requirement for bolts. Bolts, if required, would be placed on the cliff face and therefore very low visual impact to regular visitors as there would be very few and they would be very hard to spot. There are no rare or endangered flora and fauna that live on these faces that could be impacted, as the cliffs are often subjected to strong seas and winds and not conducive to supporting life. The main risks are to climbers themselves from king waves, and from non-climbers dislodging or dropping objects on climbers, or tampering with anchor points, as described above. Climbers mitigate the risk of king

waves by always ensuring that they are anchored to the rock (this is a normal part of climbing). When a climber descends to the base of a sea cliff, they set up an anchor using natural protection (or existing bolts) to ensure they are secured to the face. The leader then climbs up and places protection as they go clipping in their climbing rope, which the belayer at the bottom feeds out as the climber ascends. The two are always joined by a rope. As such, in the event of a wave, the two climbers are always secured to the cliff face and cannot wash away.

There are no risks to non-climbing visitors from dropped objects as climbers will always be below the visitors, as the access is via the top of the cliff. It is not a credible risk to say there is an increased risk for a non-climbing spectator to be watching a climber and fall off a cliff. This is the case with whale watching, and the lookout points provided by DPaW are designed to ensure that visitors are kept as safe as practical. Climbers visiting that area only do so if the weather permits, i.e. low wind and waves, not raining. There is a much higher risk of someone getting blown off the cliff edge than watching a climber on a calm day and them accidentally falling off.

As is the case with many other locations around the world, one of the key aspects of rock climbing is to be able to undertake it in 'Natural areas' as described in Appendix 4 of the DAMP. This is to achieve the recreation / visitor experience captured in the appendix, namely:

- Opportunities for solitude, independence, closeness to nature, tranquillity and self-reliance in an environment that offers high degree of challenge.
- Little interaction between visitor groups.
- Visitors need to be self-reliant.

It is noted that the principle purpose is designated as "Conservation of significant natural and cultural values, with low level recreation, and it is hoped that the areas designated as 'Natural' will also be considered to allow a 'natural' or more wilderness experience for climbers and other responsible park users in the future. Climbing has been recorded in the Albany area as early as 1973 when almost no infrastructure, tracks and limited specialised climbing equipment was available. The climbers were out for an adventure. This is still the case, with some areas being remote and requiring a long walk in, some of the key requirements for the selected.

As rock climbing continues to grow in popularity, CAWA are keen to work with DPaW to formulate agreed, sustainable and responsible areas in which climbers can recreate and experience and interact with nature. In line with our code of ethics, CAWA encourages all climbers to act responsibly in order to maintain access and share our natural resources.

Climbers come from all over the world to climb at our premier locations, including West Cape Howe and Peak Head. Access to climbing at The Gap should also remain open for rock climbing. It is noted that in many national parks around the world, climbing is seen as an attraction on high visibility locations such as El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, California. We hope to foster the same spirit here in WA, as climbers can also be seen as an attraction for visitors to the park, to share the natural resources we have and appreciate the unique landscape in which we live.