



NSW NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE

# DETERMINATION REPORT

## Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk review of environmental factors

### Dorrigo and Bindarri National Parks

*This determination report fulfils National Parks and Wildlife Service requirements as a determining authority under Division 5.1 of the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979.*

<b>Reserve:</b>	<b>Dorrigo National Park and Bindarri National Park</b>
<b>Off-park sections:</b>	<b>Crown Land, Council roads, State Forest and private property</b>
<b>Proponent:</b>	<b>NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service</b>
<b>NPWS Area:</b>	<b>Coffs Coast Area</b>
<b>NPWS Branch:</b>	<b>North Coast Branch</b>
<b>Date received:</b>	<b>28 May 2025</b>
<b>File reference:</b>	<b>SF24/144712</b>

### Determination report tracking

Determination report	Prepared by (position)	Dated
Assessed by	Tom Denman/Barbara Webster - Senior Project Officers	26/05/2025
Reviewed by	Chris Petrov – Principal Project Officer	2/06/2025
Endorsed by	Emma Bleechmore – A/Director North Coast Branch	13/06/2025

# 1. Overview of proposal

## 1.1 Reference material

Reference	Dated	Status	Adequacy	CM10
DEGW Review of environmental factors	2025	Final	Adequate	<b>DOC25/422282-3</b>
DEGW REF A: Ecological assessment	2024	Final	Adequate	<b>DOC25/422282-4</b>
DEGW REF B: Matters of national environmental significance assessment	2024	Final	Adequate	<b>DOC25/422282-5</b>
DEGW REF C: Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment report	2024	Final	Adequate	<b>DOC25/422282-6</b>
DEGW REF D: Statement of heritage impact	2024	Final	Adequate	<b>DOC25/422282-7</b>
DEGW REF E: Project mapping	2024	Final	Adequate	<b>DOC25/422282-8</b>
DEGW REF Submissions report	2025	Final	Adequate	<b>DOC25/422282-9</b>
Addendum report – amendment to the DEGW REF	2025	Final	Adequate	<b>DOC25/422282-10</b>

## 1.2 Proponent's contact details

Proponent	
Glenn Storrie	NPWS Manager, Coffs Coast Area
Contact details	M 0427 257 631 E Glenn.Storrie@environment.nsw.gov.au

## Summary of works

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is proposing to construct the Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk (DEGW). The DEGW is located in Dorrigo National Park (Dorrigo NP) and Bindarri National Park (Bindarri NP), which form part of the declared World and National Heritage-listed Gondwana Rainforests of Australia.

### On-park components

The DEGW is a single-direction 4-day, 3-night walk starting at the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre (DARC) as proposed in Dorrigo NP and finishing at the Bindarray picnic area in Bindarri NP. The walk includes:

- 44.1 km of 600 to 900 mm wide grade 4 walking track constructed per the *Australian Standard 2156: Walking tracks classification and signage*, where possible
- about 5.8 km of upgraded management trails (5.2 km) and dormant park roads (600 m)
- 3 new camps, incorporating hut-style accommodation, a camping area and communal buildings
- 1 upgraded existing remote camp area, to include new camping sites and amenities
- upgrade to the existing Baliiga picnic area, to include parking, roads and amenities
- 43 new waterway crossings, including 5 single-span pedestrian bridges greater than 20 m long and one vehicle bridge
- 14 scenic viewpoints
- wayfinding and interpretation signage components

- temporary access
- temporary construction sites.

### Off-park components

The DEGW has the following off-park components, which require relevant approvals through consents, licences or agreements with the relevant land managers,

- walking track construction on freehold land (Lot 65/752842)
- Temporary use of existing vehicle tracks and/or walk-in access for walking track construction purposes, with consent arrangements for:
  - Tuckers Knob Road (Forestry Corporation NSW) Addendum 1 moves the location of camp 3 which no longer requires this road to be upgraded for ongoing access
  - Lots 61, 62, 64 and 65 DP 752842 (freehold land) in the Brooklana Wondurrigah area
  - Lot 35/755561 – freehold land in the Dome Road area.
- Road work upgrades:
  - Whitneys Trail (works within the existing trail alignment) for ongoing management access through parts of lots 55, 61, 62 DP 752842 (private property), Crown Land road reserve and City of Coffs Harbour local road reserve.
- Ongoing existing management access using existing roads and trails:
  - Whitneys Road – freehold, Crown Lands and City of Coffs Harbour
  - Slingsbys Road – Crown Lands NSW
  - Jersey Bull Road – within Bindarri NP with sections within City of Coffs Harbour and Crown Lands (currently being transferred to National Park tenure)
  - Dome Road – Bellingen Shire Council
  - Baree Fire Road – freehold (lot 65 / DP752842) – Mt Wondurrigah.

### NSW Government objectives

The proposal is part of the government's objectives to create a network of multi-day walks across NSW to provide more opportunities for people to explore and connect with nature. The DEGW objectives are to:

- create a new multi-day walking experience of international standing that showcases the dramatic Dorrigo Escarpment
- protect, respect and promote the parks' environmental and cultural heritage
- create nature-based experiences that grow awareness of Australia's ancient landscapes and foster future conservation advocacy and stewardship
- provide opportunities for Aboriginal communities to rightfully share their culture, participate in and benefit from the regional visitor economy
- offer opportunities to connect to nature, which provide ongoing health and wellbeing benefits for participants
- generate economic benefit for the local community and sustainable growth of the regional economy
- create safe and durable walking tracks and camps which are designed for minimal impact and long-term sustainability with climate change resilience
- support participation of a diverse cross-section of the community
- build strong partnerships with businesses, government and local communities
- contribute to ongoing maintenance costs and ensure financial sustainability.

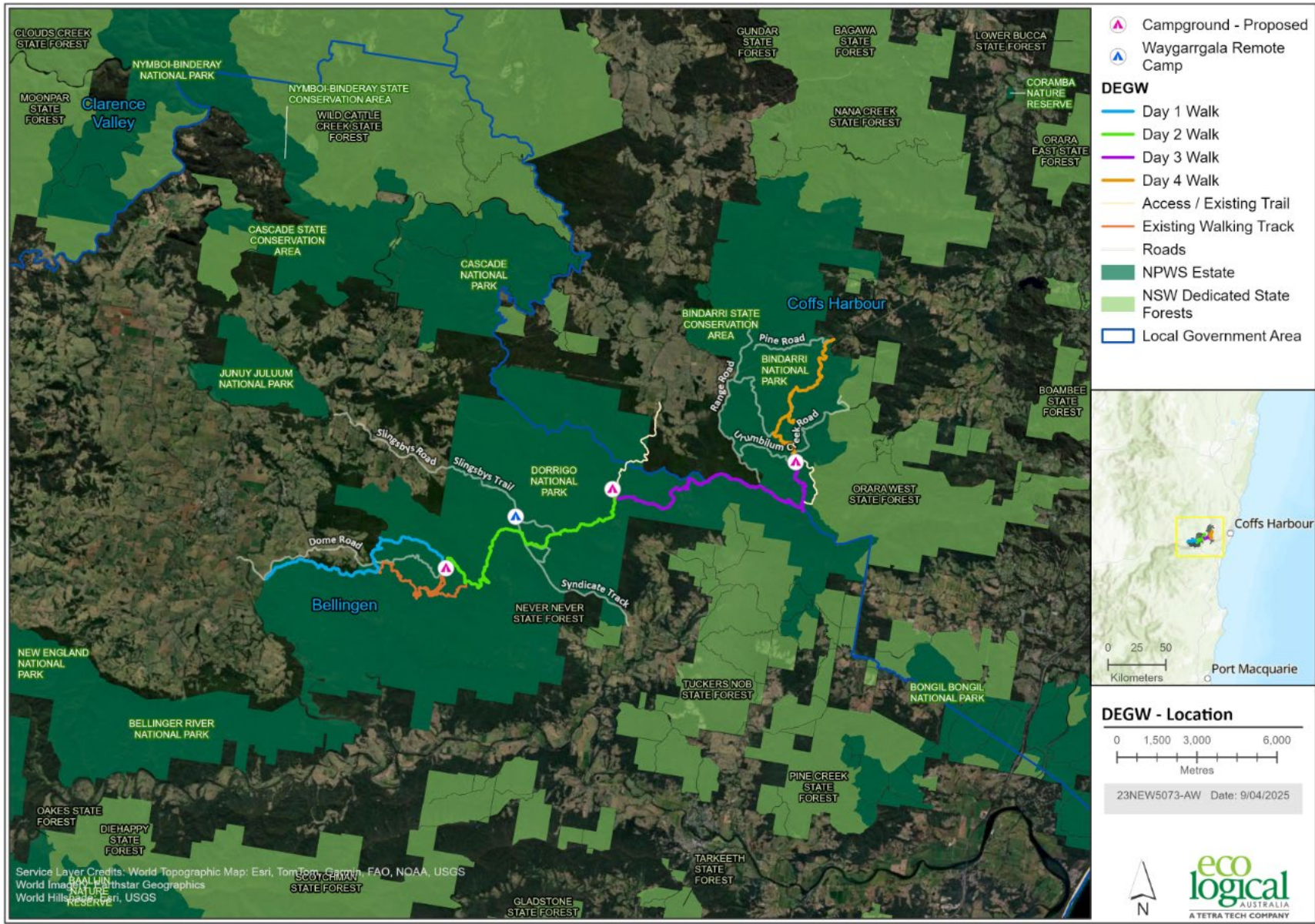


Figure 1 – Location of the DEGW, including camp locations.

## 2. REF content review

### 2.1 Statutory requirements under the NPW Act

Permissibility under	Addressed?	Comment*
<i>National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974</i>		
objects of the Act and management principles	Yes	Addressed adequately in <b>Section 3.1.1</b> and <b>Table 1</b> of the REF with an emphasis on avoidance, minimal risk and mitigation of potential environmental (natural, cultural and social) impacts whilst fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of natural and cultural heritage associated with the parks and their conservation. DEGW provides opportunities for appreciation and understanding of the parks natural and cultural values.
public interest in the protection of park values and appropriate park management	Yes	Addressed adequately <b>Section 3.1.1</b> of the REF and through consistency with the adopted <i>Plan of Management for Dorrigo National Park, Bindarri National Park and Bindarri State Conservation Area plan of management</i> (NPWS 2024a). The proposal promotes and protects the park's natural and cultural values while increasing opportunities for access, engagement and education, but remaining consistent with the public interest in its protection.
s 39 (or equivalent)	No	NA
s 81 – consistency with the plan of management	Yes	The DEGW accords with the adopted <i>Plan of Management for Dorrigo National Park, Bindarri National Park and Bindarri State Conservation Area plan of management</i> (NPWS 2024a) and the REF in <b>Section 3.1.1</b> Table 1, p14) demonstrates permissibility with the plan.
s 87	Yes	Addresses cultural heritage risk and impacts under <b>Sections 5 &amp; 8.4</b> of the REF as a summary and in detail under Support Document C: Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment report (ELA 2024c). The Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment report (ACHAR) was prepared to assess cultural values in detail over the subject site. The ACHAR determined that the DEGW has low overall archaeological potential, with no to limited risk of harm, with no specific areas requiring further archaeological investigation. Standard cultural monitoring will be ongoing through construction works, delivered per the ACHAR under the CEMP. Significant sites have been avoided in consultation with the RAPs. In consultation with NPWS Aboriginal Partnerships and Heritage Unit, due diligence was undertaken to determine whether the act would likely harm an Aboriginal object and has concluded that no Aboriginal object is likely to be harmed. A s.90 of the NPW Act Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Impact Permit is not required for the DEGW, see <b>Section 8.4</b> of the REF for the summarised outcome of the report.
s 146(3)	Yes	The DEGW proposes work on non-park tenure and has/will enter into relevant agreements under s.146(3) of the NPW Act with property owners such as private landowners, Crown Lands, Bellingen and City of Coffs Harbour councils and Forestry Corporation of NSW. This will include easement agreements and temporary licences, see <b>Section 3.6.2</b> of the REF for a detailed explanation.
s 151A	No	NA

Permissibility under	Addressed?	Comment*
s 151B	No	NA
s.153D	No	NA
s.153I	Yes	Bindarri NP is a declared AIS under Part 12A of the NPW Act for the endangered Koala. No significant impacts are expected from the proposal, and the activity is consistent with the objectives of the adopted conservation action plan. These are adequately documented as part of <b>Sections 3.1.1</b> and <b>9.2</b> and <b>Table 23</b> of the REF.

## 2.2 Statutory requirements under the EP&A Act

Permissibility under	Addressed?	Comment*
<i>Environmental Planning &amp; Assessment Act 1979</i>		
Confirmation that development consent is not required	Yes	The REF under Division 5.1 of the EP&A Act is the applicable assessment pathway for the DEGW. As the activity in its entirety may be undertaken as <i>development permitted without consent</i> under the provisions of s 2.73(1)(a) of the <i>State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021</i> (Transport and Infrastructure SEPP), see <b>Section 3.2.1</b> of the REF.
<u>Guidelines for Division 5.1 Assessments</u>	Yes	The REF applies and remains compliant with the statutory guidelines for Division 5.1 assessments under the EP&A Act, see <b>Section 3.2.1</b> of the REF for more details.
Factors in s 171(2) of EP&A Regs	Yes	<b>Sections 8 &amp; 9</b> and <b>Tables 22-29</b> of the REF assess the environmental matters and factors likely to be affected by the activity. The REF also provides detailed mitigation measures to avoid and reduce the risk or severity of the activity. Residual and cumulative impacts are also considered in detail, with an adequate assessment of the significance of that impact complete. <b>Section 11</b> of the REF provides a summary of impacts and conclusions.  A Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be prepared to communicate and implement measures to minimise impacts on the environment during the activity.  An Operational Management Plan (OEMP) will be prepared and implemented to specify and ensure ongoing protection of sensitive natural and cultural values, while mitigating or managing risks associated with the DEGW operations to address potential visitor use impacts as discussed in <b>Section 6.4.6</b> of the REF.
Publication trigger under s 171(4)	Yes	<b>Section 3.6.3</b> of the REF states why publication following determination is required under section 171(4) of the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021 (NPW Regulation) before it may be carried out. Refer to Table 6. The DEGW exceeds the capital investment cost trigger of greater than \$5 million and requires a s.60 under the Heritage Act 1977- triggering publication of the final REF.
Chapter 5 BC SEPP	No	NA
Chapter 6 BC SEPP	No	NA

## 2.3 Policy and standards

Consistency with	Addressed?	Comment*
Landslides and rockfalls Policy	Yes	Section 3.5 Table 5 of the REF
Visitor accommodation policy	Yes	Section 3.5 Table 5 of the REF
Visitor safety policy	Yes	Section 3.5 Table 5 of the REF
Walking tracks policy	Yes	Section 3.5 Table 5 of the REF
Tree risk management	Yes	Section 3.5 Table 5 of the REF

## 2.4 Compliance with other NSW legislation

Does the REF comply with the	Addressed?	Comment
<i>Heritage Act 1977</i>	Yes	<p><b>Section 3.3.3</b> of the REF addresses the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia as listed on the State Heritage Register (listing ID 01002) under the Heritage Act. The project team consulted with NPWS Historic and World Heritage Unit and the Heritage NSW Approvals Committee in finalising the REF.</p> <p>As described in the Statement of heritage impact (SoHI - REF Support Document D), the walk is partly within the curtilage of Gondwana Rainforests of Australia listing. Under the Heritage Act, the project will require approval under s 60 of that Act from DCCEEW -Heritage Group (as Heritage NSW).</p>
<i>Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016</i>	Yes	<p><b>Section 3.1.3</b> of the REF provides the overall summary of the BC Act application, with values addressed in <b>Section 8.3</b> of the REF. The Support Document A: Ecological assessment report (ELA 2024a) provides the detailed assessment.</p> <p>The REF and DEGW design applied the principles of avoidance, minimisation, and mitigation hierarchy. The significance of the DEGW impact (direct, indirect and cumulative) on the 48 listed threatened communities and species likely to occur in the study area was assessed in a 5-part test of significance, see the Ecological assessment report.</p> <p>No significant impacts to threatened species, populations or ecological communities are predicted to occur. No further assessment is required under the BC Act. The DEGW, as proposed, is not considered to be inconsistent with the objectives of the Act.</p>
<i>Fisheries Management Act 1994</i>	Yes	<p><b>Section 3.3.2</b> of the REF provides an overall summary of the application of the FM Act. As the proposed DEGW has 43 waterway crossings or elevated structures over rivers and creeks, impacts to, and increased access to the aquatic habitat were assessed. Construction also has the potential to impact waterways by mobilising sediment. Mitigation was addressed in detail in <b>Section 9</b>.</p> <p>Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Fisheries was notified as per s.199 of the FM Act and had no objection to the proposed works if the safeguards provided are implemented to avoid or minimise the impact to key fish habitat. The 12 matters for consideration under s199 of the FM Act must be included in the CEMP.</p>

Does the REF comply with the	Addressed?	Comment
<i>Rural Fires Act 1997</i>	Yes	<p><b>Section 3.1.4</b> of the REF demonstrates consistency with the RF Act. Note that Planning for Bushfire Protection requirements do not apply to the activity (non-residential accommodation) and that safe refuges (as per ecotourist facilities under PBP) or APZ clearings are not feasible or appropriate in terms of environmental impacts. Hut designs will comply with National Construction Code and Australian Standards and have appropriate BAL construction ratings.</p> <p>As a bushfire fighting authority, NPWS will adopt additional mechanisms to manage the fire risks through the OEMP, such as proactive park and track closure triggers and activity restrictions in the emergency response plan and walker education and compliance.</p>
<i>Roads Act 1993</i>	Yes	<p><b>Section 3.1.5</b> of the REF demonstrates consistency with the Roads Act. Under s.138 of the Roads Act, it states that the <i>surface of a public road may not be dug up or disturbed without prior approval from the Roads authority</i>. Works on Whitneys Road (unformed track) will require City of Coffs Harbour approval and Crown Lands consent before works commence.</p>
<i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i>	Yes	<p><b>Section 3.3.5</b> of the REF demonstrates consistency with the Biosecurity Act and NPWS responsibilities as a public land manager. Twelve (12) weed species were recorded in the study area, with 3 additional species of concern identified as known to occur. The construction and operation of the DEGW as proposed may also result in the introduction and distribution of pathogens, such as viruses and fungi. Pathogens detrimental to biodiversity are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>chytridiomycosis or chytrid fungus, which impacts amphibians</li> <li>phytophthora, which causes dieback in plants</li> <li>disease-causing rusts (basidiomycete fungi of the order Pucciniales) which affect Myrtaceae plant species through myrtle rust.</li> </ul> <p><b>Sections 8.3.10 and 8.3.11</b> of the REF outline the priority weeds and pathogens that were recorded during the field survey and their associated duties under the Biosecurity Act 2015. <b>Section 9.2</b> of the REF includes safeguards and management measures to manage these weeds and pathogens in accordance with the Biosecurity Act during construction and operation of the DEGW as proposed.</p>

## 2.5 Compliance with Australian Government legislation

Is the proposal consistent with	Addressed?	Comment
<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>	Yes	<p><b>Section 3.4.1</b> of the REF addresses the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> as it applies to the proposed DEGW where it affects matters of national environmental significance (MNES):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21 nationally listed threatened species, 1 ecological community and 6 listed migratory species</li> <li>World Heritage or National Heritage values of <i>Gondwana Rainforests of Australia</i>, listed on the World Heritage List and National Heritage List.</li> </ul>

Is the proposal consistent with	Addressed?	Comment
		<p>The project team consulted with NPWS Historic and World Heritage Unit and the Heritage NSW Approvals Committee in finalising the REF.</p> <p>The ecological assessment report (REF supporting document A) and the MNES assessment report (REF supporting document B) detail the outcomes of the assessments. In summary, given the very small disturbance area, large amounts of similar and higher quality habitat nearby, and the application of the DEGW design, NPWS has focused on avoiding and minimising impacts to the MNES values. NPWS has also proposed to limit the numbers of walkers using the whole track, so overall the DEGW is unlikely to significantly affect the ability of local populations to persist in the study area, this assessment considers the impact to be negligible and not considered to significantly impact the outstanding universal values of the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage property.</p> <p>The assessment concludes that the preparation of a referral under the Act is not required in relation to MNES, however, given the potential for impacts, referral to the Commonwealth will be recommended to the Deputy Secretary, to provide the highest level of public confidence in the project. Two pre-referral meetings with Cth DCCEEW for the EPBC Act assessment process have occurred to inform the REF.</p>
<i>Native Title Act 1993</i>	Yes	<p><b>Section 5.1</b> of the REF has addressed Native Title and Future Act implications to validate the proposed ‘public works’, a native title notification letter has been sent to NTSCorp (as the NSW native title representative body or service provider, on behalf of any future native title holders or claimants). No response was received.</p> <p>The project team consulted with NPWS Aboriginal Partnerships and Heritage Unit to identify the locations where native title has been extinguished and where it still exists. NPWS also consulted with the local Aboriginal community regarding Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment requirements in preparing the ACHAR.</p>

### 3. Notification and consultation

#### 3.1 Notification and consultation during REF preparation

Target	Adequate?	Comment
Councils	Yes	<p><b>Section 4</b> of the REF, notification (under TISEPP) and consultation with Bellingen Shire and City of Coffs Harbour</p> <p><b>Section 3.6.2</b> of the REF re consultation with City of Coffs Harbour over approval for works on Whitneys Road.</p>
Other public authorities under TISEPP	Yes	<p><b>Section 4.2.4</b> of the REF notification (under TISEPP) and consultation with Forestry Corporation of NSW.</p>
Crown Lands	Yes	<p><b>Section 3.6.2</b> of the REF re consultation over approval for works on Whitneys Road and Slingsbys Road.</p>
Heritage NSW	Yes	<p>Pre-lodgement presentation on Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk proposal to the Approvals Committee on 1 April 2025 re Gondwana Rainforests of</p>

Target	Adequate?	Comment
		Australia (SHR no. 01002). Feedback was received on 28 April requiring no change to the REF.
Aboriginal community	Yes	<b>Section 5 &amp; Section 8.4</b> of the REF documents how NPWS consulted with the Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal community during the preparation of the ACHAR as the RAPs in line with the prescribed requirements, including 10 on-Country field trips and numerous meetings. Ongoing consultation has focused on creating a cultural governance framework and protocols for cultural interpretation opportunities to ensure that all cultural content is accurate, genuine, informed, and approved.
Broader community	Yes	<b>Section 4.2.2</b> of the REF documents that the community consultation on the concept planning with workshops commenced in 2019, with wider consultation on the DEGW commencing in June 2022 when funding was announced. Since 2022, NPWS has attended around 100 face-to-face meetings, group briefings and field trips, and the project webpages have had over 20,000 views. Public exhibition of REF from 24 January to 24 February 2025. 40 submissions were received and a submissions summary report completed, resulting in several changes to the REF. Community meetings with interest groups and other local community members were also held at Dorrigo, Gleniffer and Upper Orara during the public exhibition of the REF, as the activity is likely to affect sites of importance for recreational or other values, or access to the parks.
Adjacent Landowners	Yes	<b>Section 4.2.1</b> of the REF covers the consultation with, and negotiations undertaken adjacent landowners.
Interest Groups	Yes	<b>Section 4.2.3</b> – Table 7 of the REF.

### 3.2 Referral or consultation during REF determination

Target	Comment
NA	

## 4. Activity description

Criteria	Adequate?	Comments
Activity description is complete	Yes	<b>Section 6</b> of the REF
Activity construction footprint is adequately described	Yes	<b>Section 6.3.6</b> of the REF covers off on the conservative approach used to calculate the maximum area of direct impact. The actual area impacted is expected to be less, for example, much of the 2 m wide footprint for the track may have 600-900 mm of direct impact only.
All stages are described	Yes	<b>Section 6</b> of the REF
Safeguards and mitigation measures are described as adequate	Yes	<b>Section 6.4</b> and <b>Section 9</b> of the REF

## 5. Adequacy of value and impact assessment

### 5.1 Analysis of REF's impact assessment

As a determining authority, NPWS has assessed the likely impacts on the receiving environment under section 171 of the EP&A Regulation 2021. The outcome of that assessment is provided in the tables below.

#### Natural values

Environmental factor	Assessment adequate?	Comments				Impact
<b>Geology, geomorphology, topography &amp; soil</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<p>Soil and ground excavation will be medium to short-term. Impacts are addressed through track location, design and construction techniques that minimise clearing and use of machinery and manage water, erosion and sedimentation risks.</p> <p><b>Section 9.1</b> of the REF includes mitigation measures. Use of existing walking tracks and management trails where possible, to reduce the impacts of new construction. Camps located on previously disturbed sites away from water courses and to have minimal excavation and use of pier or screw piles to reduce need to excavate or use concrete for footings. All camps are to be elevated off the ground through raised boardwalks between facilities to reduce ongoing ground impacts.</p>				Short term: Medium negative  Long term: Low negative
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Watercourses, waterbodies, coasts, estuaries and wetlands</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<p>The tracks and crossings design avoids environmentally sensitive areas where possible. Permanent creeks and rivers will have elevated crossings to reduce ongoing impacts to water quality and habitats. Construction phase medium impacts. CEMP with strict erosion and sedimentation controls. Use of pre-fabrication of structures as far as possible including pre-fabricated footings where appropriate. Temporary impacts during construction through siltation erosion to be managed with erosion and sediment controls - <b>Section 9.1</b> of the REF.</p> <p>Crossings do not block fish passage, no large woody debris is removed, structures are designed with peak flow modelling and in-stream works undertaken in low flow periods.</p> <p>During DEGW operation, actions identified to reduce impacts include washing facilities at Camp 2 and education to reduce risks to waterways through improved visitor hygiene (pathogen and propagule transmission) and behaviour.</p>				Short term: Medium negative  Long term: Medium negative
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Threatened species</b>	<b>Yes</b>	7 Threatened flora species and 40 threatened fauna species were identified as likely to occur during the field surveys. Impacts were assessed and identified in terms				

Environmental factor	Assessment adequate?	Comments				Impact
		<p>of several threatened plant species likely to be impacted as a worst-case scenario.</p> <p>Works will avoid threatened species where possible, and actual impacts will be reduced via mitigation. Track and camp designs have avoided sensitive areas where possible, and micro-alignment allows for further avoidance during the construction phase.</p> <p>Note that several Rusty Plum plants are recorded on Whitneys Trail, which will be impacted during maintenance works. Rusty Plum was recorded in high numbers during surveys, and advice from specialists is that the species is locally abundant. Mitigation actions are identified in <b>Section 9.2</b> of the REF, including the preparation of a vegetation management subplan to the CEMP to govern clearing.</p>				<p>Short term: Low negative</p> <p>Long term: Low negative</p>
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Threatened ecological communities</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<p>1 endangered EEC identified – Lowland Rainforest in NSW North Coast - 0.46 ha identified as impacted through DEGW construction. Minimal clearing of vegetation and natural surface construction to limit impacts. No removal of canopy trees permitted or required. Note Commonwealth TEC definition 0.04 ha impacted. Assessments concluded unlikely to have significant impacts. Mitigation actions in <b>Section 9.2</b> of the REF, including the preparation of a vegetation management subplan to the CEMP to govern clearing.</p>				<p>Short term: Medium negative</p> <p>Long term: Medium negative</p>
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Ecologically sensitive areas</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<p>Known ecologically sensitive areas have been avoided as far as possible through design. Waterways and habitats are the key sensitive habitat areas, and elevated bridges are a key mitigation. Introduction of weeds and pathogens is a key threat that has potential to impact sensitive areas. Strict hygiene requirements during construction and ongoing operation will be a requirement to prevent the spread of existing and new variants <b>Section 9.2</b>.</p>				<p>Short term: Low negative</p> <p>Long term: Low negative</p>
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Threatening processes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<p>Addressed through hygiene controls, education, ongoing monitoring and park management actions to address fire, pest and weed impacts – see <b>Section 9.2</b> and included in the CEMP. Koala AIS (Bindarri NP) CAP activities, including bushfire mitigation, are also addressed in the CEMP and OEMP.</p>				<p>Short term: Medium negative</p> <p>Long term: Medium negative</p>
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Environmental quality</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<p>Addressed broadly with an approach to avoid, minimise and/or mitigate impacts on environmental quality.</p>				<p>Short term: Low negative</p>
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	

Environmental factor	Assessment adequate?	Comments				Impact
						Long term: Low negative
<b>Overall Impact</b>		<b>Short term: Low negative</b> <b>Long term: Low negative</b>				

### Cultural heritage values

Nature & extent of likely impacts	Assessment adequate?	Comments				Impact
<b>Aboriginal cultural heritage impacts</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Section 9.5</b> addresses impacts and identifies mitigation measures, including the unexpected finds protocol. No removal or damage to large trees proposed. ACHA planning works and surveys resulted in adjusting track locations to avoid known sensitive areas. Further micro-alignment allowances enable further avoidance. Pre-construction cultural heritage inductions for all contractors by trained staff before commencing works.				Short term: Low negative  Long term: Low negative
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	N/A	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Native title implications</b>	<b>No</b>	Addressed in <b>Section 5.1</b>				Short term: N/A
Mitigation measures	N/A	Performance measures	N/A	Monitoring planned?	N/A	Long term: N/A
<b>Culturally sensitive areas</b>	<b>No</b>	No areas identified on the walking route, however areas which were identified during the planning and ACHA surveys have been avoided. Unexpected finds protocol in place through the ACHA. Ongoing consultation and site monitoring with RAPs to take place through the construction phase.				Short term: Low negative  Long term: Low negative
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	N/A	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>State heritage</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Section 3.3.3</b> addresses 'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia' in Dorrigo NP as World Heritage List (WHL #368), National Heritage List (NHL #105704) and State Heritage Register (SHR #01002) and 'High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest' (SHR #01487), small areas in the curtilage within Bindarri NP, a Heritage NSW s60 application is required.				Short term: Negligible  Long term: Negligible
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Local heritage</b>	<b>Yes</b>	'Escape Road' in Dorrigo NP is listed in the <i>Bellingen Local Environment Plan</i> (LEP #A50). <b>Section 8.5.5</b> of the DEGWS REF assesses impacts. Unlikely to be any historical archaeological resource within the study area.				Short term: Negligible  Long term: Negligible
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	N/A	Monitoring planned?	Yes	

Nature & extent of likely impacts	Assessment adequate?	Comments	Impact
Overall Impact		Negligible	

## Social

Nature & extent of likely impacts	Assessment adequate?	Comments	Impact			
Recreational, amenity, public access	Yes	<b>Section 9.3</b> assesses short-term impacts, including closures or restrictions to certain areas during construction. Longer-term positive impacts through increased opportunities for a broader range of people to experience day and longer overnight walks in the parks. No reduction in public recreational access.	Short term: Low negative  Long term: Positive			
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
Education and scientific	Yes	<b>Section 8.6.2</b> and <b>8.4.5</b> . Opportunities for promotion, education and appreciation. Access improved for education and scientific purposes, in particular, Aboriginal cultural heritage.	Short term: Negligible  Long term: Positive			
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
Services and infrastructure	Yes	<b>Section 9.3</b>	Short term: Negligible			
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	N/A	Monitoring planned?	Yes	Long term: Positive
Safety	Yes	<b>Section 9.3</b> Addresses through design and standards for key areas such as landslides and rockfalls, fall risks and tree risks. Bushfire risks are also addressed.	Short term: Low negative  Long term: Low negative			
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
Sustainable use of natural resources	Yes	<b>Section 9.4</b>	Short term: Negligible  Long term: Negligible			
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
Overall Impact		Short term: Low negative Long term: Positive				

## Matters of national environmental significance (MNES)

Environmental factor	Nature & extent of likely impacts	Comments	Impact
Ecological character of a Ramsar wetlands	No	<b>Section 9.7</b>	Short term: N/A

Mitigation measures	N/A	Performance measures	N/A	Monitoring planned?	N/A	Long term: N/A
<b>World or national heritage values of a listed world or national heritage property</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Section 9.7</b> The statement of heritage impact has found that the proposal will have a negligible impact on the heritage values of the study area as per its World Heritage listing.				Short term: Negligible  Long term: Negligible
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	Identified	Monitoring planned?	Yes	
<b>Listed migratory species</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Section 9.7</b> The matters of national environmental significance report concluded that no significant impact is likely to result from the proposal.				Short term: Negligible
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	N/A	Monitoring planned?	Yes	Long term: Negligible
<b>Nationally listed threatened species or communities</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Section 9.7</b> The matters of national environmental significance report concluded that no significant impact is likely to result from the proposal.				Short term: Negligible
Mitigation measures	Identified	Performance measures	N/A	Monitoring planned?	Yes	Long term: Negligible
<b>Is referral to the Australian Government recommended or needed?</b>	<b>Yes</b>					

## 6. REF determination process

### 6.1 Public comment on the REF

The REF was placed on public exhibition from 24 January 2025 to 24 February 2025. This decision was based on the proposal having:

- Low level of expected environmental impact
- High likelihood of being of community interest.

The submission report summarises the 40 submissions received, provides NPWS's response to topics raised in the submissions and outlines the changes made to the draft REF.

In summary, submissions were received from 35 individuals and 5 non-government organisations, with similar numbers of submissions supporting and opposing the proposal. Many submissions indicated support for the intent of the proposal, whilst having some concerns about elements of the proposal or the assessment. The top 3 most frequently raised topics in the community submissions were:

- environmental management – concerning the impacts of weeds, pathogens and diseases on biodiversity values and the assessment of the significance of environmental impacts
- social and economic impacts – concerning impacts on neighbours and local infrastructure, and also acknowledging the benefits of the proposal, including health, wellbeing and economic benefits to the community
- description of the activity – concerning walk alternatives and options, the construction of huts and elevated walkways and the booking of both the walk and the huts.

Submissions offered constructive input on the proposal and the impact assessment, resulting in several changes to the final REF document to further clarify permissibility and description of the proposal and its impacts. An addendum report describes and assesses a change to the location of Camp 3 to reduce overall impacts with consequent changes to an access trail, a bridge and realignment of a section of walking track.

**Based on the above, and after reviewing all the submissions, it is concluded that:**

1. The proponent has adequately responded to the issues raised and made some changes to the REF document and a modification to the proposal, presented in an addendum report.
2. The issues raised in submissions can be addressed through the relevant conditions of determination governing design, construction and operation of the DEGW.

## 6.2 Referrals and notifications

### Notifications under the Native Title Act

The activity requires notification to NTSCorp, on behalf of future Native Title holders in accordance with requirements of the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993*. Appropriate notification was provided but no response was received.

## 6.3 Site inspections

The site of the proposed activity has been inspected and surveyed by NPWS staff, Registered Aboriginal Parties as part of the ACHA surveys (9 survey days), ecological and archaeological consultants (ELA) as part of the natural values assessments (17 survey days) and various other technical specialists on walking track design and construction, over a period of 2-3 years from 2022 to the present.

## 6.4 Matters addressed during determination

Matters as identified by the assessing officer are summarised in the table and have been raised and addressed as part of the Determination process.

REF section	Matters identified	Changes requested	Adequately addressed?
3.6.2	Off-park section descriptions improved and refined, including where and what type of approvals are required for construction and future operation of the DEGW.	Yes	Yes
8.3.13 and 9.3	Bushfire risk descriptions and mitigation actions were defined and improved. Operationally, they will be addressed in the OEMP.	Yes	Yes

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1 Environmental impact

#### The environment

Based on the information in the REF and its consideration of the overall environmental impact of the proposal, there **is not** likely to be a significant effect on the environment of the park or adjacent lands, and therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) **is not** required.

The activity is not likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance listed under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and so **will not** require referral to the Australian Government. The recommendation of this determination, however, is to make a referral to provide the highest level of public confidence in the project.

#### Threatened entities

Overall, the proposal's impact on terrestrial or aquatic threatened species (populations), ecological communities or their habitats **is not** likely to be considered significant. A Species Impact Statement **is not** required.

There **is not** likely to be a significant effect on threatened species, populations, ecological communities or their habitats and a species impact statement **is not** required.

### 7.2 Summary of overall impact and justification

Table 30 in **Section 11** provides a summary of impacts and conclusions.

The REF has considered the permissibility and potential impacts to the environment, biodiversity, heritage and community both under State and Commonwealth legislation. Comprehensive assessments of the natural and cultural heritage values through systematic surveys using specialist consultants and representatives from the Aboriginal community have taken place.

Extensive community consultation has occurred over the past 3 years, including through the master planning and design and assessment phase. Public exhibition of the master plan and the draft REF has provided valuable feedback.

Overall, the REF concludes that there would be minor negative impacts on the local environment and some parts of the community during construction in the vicinity of the DEGW alignment. During operation, there would be negligible environmental and community impacts.

Potential impacts have been avoided and/or minimised wherever possible through design and site-specific and project-specific safeguards. The REF outlines the maximum area or subject site within which the proposed DEGW and its associated construction works will be located. This provides as much clarity and certainty as possible during the DEGW's early design, but retains flexibility during construction to avoid, minimise and manage any potential environmental impacts and indirect impacts. The REF has assessed the impacts through consideration of plans of management under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, the Biodiversity Conservation Act, areas of outstanding value, impacts on threatened species, ecological communities and their habitats as well as other protected fauna and native plants. It has also considered potential impacts to matters of national environmental significance listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The proposal, as described in the REF, best meets the project objectives but would still result in some minor impacts on biodiversity, hydrology and create temporary noise, odour and dust impacts during construction. Safeguards and management measures as detailed in this REF will ameliorate or minimise these expected impacts. On balance, the proposed DEGW is considered justified.

NPWS recognises the potential positive impacts of the proposal for local Aboriginal people and the broader community by providing indigenous employment opportunities on Country, sustainable cultural tourism and fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of Aboriginal occupation and history of the area.

### 7.3 Post-determination publication

The REF meets the publication triggers for post-determination publication and will be published.

### 7.4 Overall risk to NPWS

The proposal represents a low to moderate overall risk to NPWS.

1. The development of new tracks and camps and associated infrastructure in a World Heritage area and the assessment of the associated impacts can be complex and contentious.
2. Providing accommodation in the form of hiker huts is new in New South Wales and has also been a point of contention for other projects. Key difference is that DEGW camps are not visible in the forest, and the walk alignment is not an existing popular bushwalking route.
3. The REF has assessed the overall impacts as being not significant with minor negative impacts during construction.
4. NPWS may be said to have secured social license for a remote and affordable multi-day walk with equitable access to accommodation for independent walkers, as described in the proposal.

See the table below for organisational risk assessment:

Risk type	Risk Assessment	Treatment	Residual Risk
Stakeholders & community	Reputation & trust (Minor / Unlikely) Low	Comprehensive internal and external stakeholder consultation during the review and exhibition process (broad support for the project) and ongoing communications	Low
<i>Environmental</i> Culture & heritage	Damage to environmental or cultural values (Minor / Possible) Medium	Risks are adequately addressed in REF, and effective controls are identified	Low
<i>Environmental</i> Climate change	Financial / built assets Risk of increased frequency of extreme weather events causing asset damage, track closures and reduced revenue (Minor / Possible) Medium	Infrastructure located, designed and constructed to bolster resilience and sustainability, e.g. suspension bridge height, tree risk management, track drainage and bushfire mitigation  Administrative controls for track closures and a documented emergency management plan for the walk	Low
<i>Stakeholders &amp; community</i>	Reputation and trust	Successful mitigation of environmental and cultural impacts is reliant upon ongoing	Low

Workforce & resourcing	Workforce (Minor / Possible) Medium	resourcing of effective monitoring, maintenance and education activities Inadequate workforce resourcing will impact morale and productivity	
Contractual / procurement	Business objectives (Minor / Unlikely) Low	Strong project management and procurement controls to address risks The procurement plan was approved by the Steering Committee, and the ongoing risk register	Low
Political / organisational change	Reputation and trust (Minor / Unlikely) Low	Explicit project objectives and operational plans to ensure the proposal is executed within the social licence, or additional consultation is required	Low