

Thoughts on the 2014 Kakadu Draft Plan of Management

This is probably the best plan yet. There is not a lot specifically about bushwalking or that affects bushwalkers but there are a number of things which might be worth commenting on. I have put the item I like best in red. They need positive feedback.

- If you want to get a genuine feel for what the land means to the traditional owners, you need to read page 10. It begins, “For Bininj/Mungguy, there are no local language words that equate exactly with the Western concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘country’.”
- **5.1.7 (b)** replacement of Balanda place names with Bininj/Mungguy place names. If this is done, I think it would be good if the park website had something you could click to hear the names pronounced. Yellow Water Billabong is called Ngurrungurrudjba (Noor-roon-goo-rooj-bar) by the local people. I’ve copied the official phonetic pronunciation here but I’ve heard it pronounced and don’t think the phonetic approximation does it justice.
- **5.3 Managing park-wide threats affecting values**
Bushwalkers go to places that park staff don’t regularly visit. I think it would be useful if bushwalkers were given a small info kit so they could report any sightings of non-native ants or weeds. It is conceivable that this would allow an infestation to be stopped before it got out of hand.
- **6.1.10** “In consultation with Bininj/Mungguy, develop, implement and progressively review a strategy for walking in the park that provides for a range of day and overnight walking opportunities and describes prescribed walking routes and permit conditions.” In principle, this sounds good. How it is applied in practice is another question.
- **6.2.1** “Commercial tourism operators will be promoted and will be encouraged to provide new visitor experiences in the park consistent with Sections 6.1.17 and 6.1.18.” I would like to think that this might mean that supervised groups might be allowed to go into areas which are currently out of bounds. That might eventually open more of the park to everyone.
- **6.3 Promotion and marketing**
Near the beginning of this section is a quote, “I want visitors to feel something they’ll never forget – and have in their heart and mind forever.” Bessie Coleman, Wurrkbarbar clan
I think it is important to let park managers and traditional owners that this is exactly how most bushwalkers feel.
- 9.3.4 “Review and, where possible, improve systems for the processing, administration and management of permits, licences and leases/subleases. This may include investigating the feasibility of developing an online system for self-generating permits and bookings for bushwalking”
If you’ve ever applied for a Kakadu bushwalking permit, this sounds wonderful but putting it into practice would be very difficult. Maps of approved routes would need to be made available and some way of ensuring that two groups weren’t at the same campsite would have to go into the program.
- **10.4 Access.** In the background section of ‘Road Access’ it states, “Roads and tracks within the park will be maintained for as long as practicable into the wet season, and opened as soon as practicable after the wet season to provide residents and visitors access to the park.”

I think the planners should be commended for including this statement.

- **10.4.11** Permits may be issued for the landing, take-off and operation of aircraft in the park, following consultation with Bininj/Mungguy, for the following purposes:
(d) commercial bushwalking tours or heli-touring ventures

This could be a dream come true. For nearly ten years, first with the Darwin Bushwalking Club and then as Willis's Walkabouts, I used helicopters to get to parts of the park which were otherwise inaccessible during the wet season. I've been granted permission to use a helicopter for a food drop next May before the roads open but as yet, I don't have permission to bring people in or out.

While I don't want to see helicopters landing in reasonably accessible places during the dry season when the noise would disturb others, using them in the Wet when there is no one around would allow more than just the very fittest individuals to experience the best that Kakadu has to offer at that time of year.

If you've ever thought that you might like to visit a place like Jim Jim Falls in the wet season without having to commit to a three week expedition, you ought to state your support for this.

- **10.7 Recreational activities**

- **10.7.4** Permits may be issued for overnight bushwalking activities using prescribed routes in the park, subject to a range of permit conditions that protect the health and safety of visitors and the natural and cultural values of the park.
- **10.7.5** Permits may be issued to light a fire in areas other than a fireplace provided by the Director when associated with other activities such as bushwalking.
- **10.7.6** Bicycles may only be ridden on a vehicle access road or vehicle access track or a track for riding provided by the Director, and subject to any prohibitions or restrictions by the Director under Section 10.2 (General rules for managing use of the park).

I think it is very important that these three remain in the final draft. The first two say that bushwalking can continue, that we can continue to use campfires (which can be more environmentally friendly than stoves in this environment).

The third reflects new thoughts about bicycles in the park. Many years ago both the Darwin Bushwalking Club and Willis's Walkabouts used bicycles on 4WD tracks which were closed to vehicles to gain access to areas in the wet season. With luck, this could lead to that becoming possible again.

- **Appendix E. Summary of the timeframes and consultation process used in developing this plan** (p 196)

Reading this will give you an understanding of why developing this plan has taken as long as it has.