

NARACOORTE and TANTANOOLA CAVES UPDATE

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Summertime 2013/14

Naracoorte Caves National Park (NCNP) World Heritage Area is one of South Australia's Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) four commercial sites that operate businesses within distinctive natural settings, in our case three show cave tours and four adventure caving activities, plus a café and campground with tenting sites and bunkhouse accommodation. Tantanoola Caves is the second site managed from Naracoorte Caves – Tantanoola is a delight of a cave.

Visitor numbers to NCNP as been up this year (records are kept July - June) with multiple tours per person in December and January reaching the high uptake of the early 2000s. This was very pleasing after a static start to the year. Increases occurred across the board in regional, international and interstate markets. Numbers from the Melbourne and Adelaide have increased and internationals were up from 10 to 12% of the total.

Tantanoola Cave's visitor numbers have remained steady compared to previous years. The frequency of high fire days in SA means constant assessment of the weather conditions and Naracoorte and Tantanoola Caves have been closed due to catastrophic conditions twice since New Year in 2014.

NCNP WHA Master Plan

The Master Plan was preceded by four stages - in 2009 the Education Programme was reviewed; 2010 saw the development of the Naracoorte Caves Visitor Strategy, followed in 2012 with the Brand Strategy and Interpretation Framework and an Interpretation Concept Plan.

The Master Plan has considered strategic visitor experience priorities, operational requirements and how will they be achieved - including but not limited to:



*Tantanoola Cave speleothems
Photo: Steve Bourne*

- Documenting the infrastructure, services and experiences
- Looking at the potential for private sector investment
- Deciding interpretation improvements
- Costing estimates

Development priorities are currently ranked in high/medium/low clusters. Funding is likely to come from a variety of sources and until the plan is approved, planning and prioritising of funding applications is in an infant stage.

On 29 January 2014, a meeting was held for key stakeholders who engaged in a lively, interested evaluation of the plan presented by architectural consultant David Shannon (Shannon Architects, Adelaide) and interpretative consultant Karl Meyer, (Exhibition Studios, Adelaide). Attendees included Australian Fossil Mammal Site - Riversleigh (EO Jean Balson); South East Aboriginal Focus Group (representative David New); Naracoorte Lucindale District Council (CEO Helen Macdonald); Flinders University (Strategic Professor John Long; palaeontologist Dr Liz Reed); Friends of Naracoorte Caves (President Mick Dennis); Regional Development Australia (Biddie Shearing). Apologies were received from South Australian Tourism Commission, South Australia Tourism Industry Council, Natural Resource Management Board, South Australian Museum and the local Business and Tourism group.

Site staff input was gathered again on 6 February with staff this time being asked specifically to assess how the Shannon and Meyer designs would work from an operational perspective.

Feedback was invited from stakeholders prior to David finalising the document for presentation and approval by DEWNR Executive, after the Executive team have visited the site.

World Heritage Executive Officer and Reference Group

Naracoorte Caves National Park (NCNP) is a mega faunal fossil mammal site, co-listed with Riversleigh in North Queensland as the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (AFMS) UNESCO World Heritage Area. Together the sites provide complementary evidence of the evolution of Australia's mammal fauna of the last 30 million years.

Obligations

The obligations of the managing agencies are to ensure the AFMSs are managed so as to enhance the understanding, protection, conservation, promotion and,



Thylacoleo carnifex and the fossil bed, Victoria Fossil Cave, NCNP WHA

Photo: Margaret Smith 2012

where relevant, rehabilitation of the Outstanding Universal Values for which sites are listed. Until now, Naracoorte Caves WHA has not had an Executive Officer and community reference group. However in 2013 the site successfully applied for funding to establish an Executive Officer position. Key stakeholders who have participated in the Master Plan reference group will be invited to participate in a reference group, giving community perspectives around the management of the AFMS - Naracoorte as well as supporting the implementation of the Master Plan recommendations.

SAREX

In November 2013, a very successful Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX) training session was run for Naracoorte Caves guides by Richard (Harry) Harris of CEGSA supported by Graham Pilkington and Ian Lewis, CEGSA, Dean George, SAAS, John Probert, local CFS. A full scale SAREX is proposed mid 2014.

ACKMA Conference 2015

Naracoorte Caves National Park and World Heritage Area will host the 2015 ACKMA Conference. The venue will be the Naracoorte Town Hall which is booked for Friday 8 May to Friday 15 May 2015.

DEWNR will establish a conference committee in conjunction with Naracoorte Lucindale District Council and Friends of Caves (our Friends of Parks group). ACKMA will be updated of the details at the AGM in May 2014.

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