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## Natural Acumen

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The Flinders Island Trail:  
Identifying the next steps

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## THE FLINDERS ISLAND TRAIL – NEXT STEPS

### The Trail project

Bushwalking continues to be one of the most popular recreation or sporting activities undertaken by Australians (equal 7<sup>th</sup> or 4.8% of the population), and the 5<sup>th</sup> most popular in Tasmania (9%) during 2010<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, according to the Tasmanian Visitor Survey<sup>2</sup> (TVS), during the year ending March 2013:

- 23% of visitors to Tasmania undertook a bushwalk of less than 2 hours during their stay in Tasmania;
- 14% undertook a bushwalk of between 2 – 4 hours in duration
- 7% undertook a bushwalk of over 4 hours but not overnight
- 3% undertook an overnight bushwalk.

Significantly, for the 12 months to March 2013, the greatest growth was in the number of visitors to Tasmania who undertook an overnight bushwalk during their stay, increasing 29% on the previous year. Moreover, it is evident from other research<sup>3</sup> that high-end iconic walks have the ability to attract visitors to regional areas of scenic beauty in Tasmania and bring with them employment opportunities and economic benefits.

It is understandable then that the Flinders Island Tourism Association (FITA) is keen to develop the Flinders Island Trail, hereafter the Trail, as the lead nature-based tourism product for the island and to be a catalyst for increased visitation to the island.

To date FITA has secured the support of the Flinders Island Council, Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, Tourism Northern Tasmania, Northern Tasmania Development, Geoff Lyons MHR – Member for Bass and Michael Ferguson MP – Member for Bass and a T-Qual Grant application was submitted to the Commonwealth Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism in May 2013. The application is to secure funding (\$50,000 grant/\$50,000 FI Council) for the development of a business case for the Flinders Island Trail. It is anticipated successful applicants will be announced in July or August 2013.

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out the next steps to bring a sustainable Trail concept to the point that it is 'shovel ready' and identify the key decision points along the way. The 'next steps' do not consider securing funding for the construction of the Trail as a number of critical milestones need to be achieved prior to that time. The following table has been informed by discussions with stakeholders including members of the Flinders Island Tourism Association undertaken during a site visit, Flinders Island Council and the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (TPWS) as the principal land manager and the TQual Grant Application. The steps outlined have also been guided by the successful process and planning undertaken by the TPWS in the development of the Three Capes Track currently under construction on the Tasman Peninsula.

### Background

The Trail was initiated in the 1970's by Don Napier, a land management officer. The Trail runs from Holloway Point (North East River) on the tip of Flinders Island, west then south along the coast via Palana, Killiecrankie and Emita to Sawyers Bay where it heads inland to Walkers Lookout. From Walkers Lookout the Trail heads south through the Darling Range Conservation Area to Manns Road to the southeast of Pillingers Peak. Leaving the Darling Range Conservation Area, the Trail strikes southward through farmland then into Strzelecki National Park where it continues on to Watering Beach on the southern coast of the island. At this point visitors can head east to Badgers Corner or west to Trousers Point.

<sup>1</sup> Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport 2011. *Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey 2010, Annual Report*. Australian Sports Commission, ACT: 62 & 143.

<sup>2</sup> TVS, Year ending March 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service 2007, *The Three Capes Track, Tasman National Park, Feasibility Study 2007*; Syneca Consulting 2010. *Economic Impact Analysis for Three Capes Track, Tasman National Park*, Syneca Consulting Pty Ltd, Sydney, NSW.

The condition of the Trail is mixed as it traverses beaches, walking tracks, access tracks and fire trails all in varying states of repair. In fact, some sections of the trail have been rendered all but impassable by post fire regrowth of vegetation.

The trail currently offers a mix of private and commercial experiences that include walking, mountain biking, four wheel driving and quad-biking. While there are no statistics available, it is clear that there is variable use of the track with some sections of the trail are more popular than others; the most frequented areas appearing to be the coastal sections in the north. It is likely that few, if any, people traverse the Trail in its entirety.

The 'Next Steps' table on the following pages is broadly presented in four phases: Destination management, which outlines roles and responsibilities, product pre-feasibility studies, feasibility studies and the development approval process. The pre-feasibility component is specified to enable rapid assessment of potential intractable issues that may affect planning for the Trail.

	Step	Task	Explanation / Rationale
Destination Management - roles and responsibilities	1	<b>Establish project Steering Committee</b>	<p>A project Steering Committee should be established to ensure the project's scope and vision is commonly understood and aligns with the requirements of the Business Owners and key stakeholder groups. The membership is determined by the Project Sponsor and may consist of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Project Sponsor, who normally chairs the meetings</li> <li>• the Business Owners</li> <li>• representatives with project management governance expertise</li> <li>• representatives from selected key stakeholders</li> <li>• experts from within relevant agencies</li> <li>• external, independent representatives, quality consultants, specialist consultants.</li> </ul>
	2	<b>Define experience/product that is the Flinders Island Trail</b>	<p>This should be done in a couple of stages: firstly, a workshop to define an agreed 'product' for market testing, and secondly the development of an experience statement to guide the Trails design, infrastructure requirements, interpretation, etc. Such a statement ensures the project is consistently focused on and aligned with delivery of the desired experience/s. The Experience Statement will be further refined with the results of the market testing.</p>
	3	<b>Develop a Project Plan and secure approval from key stakeholders.</b>	<p>There are a range of reasons to develop a project plan, but three important ones are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To build on the initial letters of support for the Feasibility Study (see T Qual Grant Application)</li> <li>• To communicate the project intent in the same way to multiple stakeholders. It gets everyone on the same page.</li> <li>• A plan rooted in facts and checks emotions and predispositions at the door – this can clarify decision making and overall strategy.</li> <li>• Identifies the key objectives and questions to be answered and issues resolved.</li> </ul>
	4	<b>Secure/confirm in-principle agreement amongst stakeholders with respect to the development, ownership and operation of the proposed Flinders Island Trail</b>	<p>Establishes a common understanding of the projects intent and the implications for each of the stakeholders. Such an agreement will provide the foundation for further investment in the planning and development of the Flinders Island Trail.</p>
	5	<b>Secure the flindersislandtrail.com.au URLs</b>	<p>The flindersislandtrail.com URL has already been registered by Wilderness Adventures based in South Australia. The .com.au address should be secured by FITA to protect the brand.</p>

	Step	Task	Explanation / Rationale
Product pre-feasibility studies	6	Identify the market	A clear target market needs to be defined as the population of consumers with which the appeal of the Trail can be tested.
	7	Product testing	<p>Market research to understand consumer appeal and likely conversion (that is, visitors on the ground). While an analysis of the demand/need and supply, as outlined in the TQual Grant Application, is important, it is critical that the product is tested with the market/consumers via a quantitative survey as undertaken for the Three Capes Track. Importantly, the consumer research approach should be customised to examine the experience/s to be tested. Discrete Choice Modelling is one favoured potential approach as it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) simulates the trade-offs consumers make when comparing and purchasing a product, and</li> <li>b) will identify the different contributions the various components of a product or service (e.g. guided/unguided, on-trail/off-trail accommodation, mode of travel, etc.) make to individuals decision in purchasing.</li> </ul> <p>Such research will provide guidance to refine the Flinders Island Trail product, route and price options as input to the business case. The market testing should report on the level of market support for a number of potential Flinders Island Trail experiences and the likelihood of travel to Flinders Island.</p>
	9	Desktop identification of potential 'show stoppers' - values that could impede or stop development.	A desktop survey of potential 'show stoppers'. A desktop and literature survey of natural and cultural values of the proposed route corridor to identify the known presence of natural and cultural values that may be impacted and prove significant impediment to the development of the Trail..
	10	Assessment of existing route alignment	Desktop review of current route alignment to identify options for realignment to avoid private land. Where private land cannot be avoided, potential for securing access needs to be determined and a process for easements determined.
	11	Decision point	<b>Does the research indicate sufficient appeal and likely conversion to underpin a sustainable return on investment (ROI)?</b>

	Step	Task	Explanation / Rationale
Product feasibility studies	12	On-ground ecological survey (natural values) of proposed trail alignment where upgrading and new trail construction and associated works are required.	An on-ground ecological survey of the trail alignment is required to identify the presence, if any, of rare and threatened species and communities or other natural values along the proposed Trail alignment. Develop a mitigation and management strategy for any risks identified. This may necessitate a revision of the Trail alignment.
	13	On-ground cultural heritage survey of proposed trail alignment where upgrading and new trail construction and associated works are required.	A cultural heritage survey of the trail alignment is required to identify the presence of significant cultural heritage artefacts or sites along the proposed Trail alignment. Develop a mitigation and management strategy for any risks identified. This may necessitate a revision of the Trail alignment.
	14	Trail survey and preliminary costing	Initial indicative costing estimates based on field survey by track design and construction specialist and, if necessary, a quantity surveyor for roofed accommodation/shelter. Collate field data with industry standard meterage rates to determine indicative track construction costings.
	15	Development of Business Case including market analysis, financial viability and operating conditions.	Incorporating identification of intended market environment & identified market, likely demand, competitor and gap analysis, consideration of marketing and promotion, the production/operating requirements, definition of the business model for the management of the Trail. Project start-up costings, maintenance costings, financial projections, likely socio-economic impact and overall financial viability for commercial operations and the Trail itself. Identification of environmental and social risk factors and mitigation strategies.
	16	Master Concept Plan	The Master Concept Plan will outline the planning and design principles, levels of service (as used by TPWS that define the provision of infrastructure and maintenance requirements), track route highlighting necessary additions, upgrades and reroutes, location and conceptual sketch designs for overnight nodes (if required), interpretive themes, visitor safety and environmental considerations.
	17	<b>Decision point</b>	<b>Does the Business Case indicate potential for the Trail to operate on a sustainable basis?</b>
	18	Detailed scope of works	Building on the original trail survey, develop detailed trail construction costing, including the development of overnight nodes if required.
	19	Review of the Business Case	Review of the financial feasibility of the Trail in the context of the costs envisaged by the detailed scope of works.
	20	<b>Decision point</b>	<b>Does the review of the Business Case illustrate the Trail can operate on a sustainable basis?</b>

	Step	Task	Explanation / Rationale
Planning & Approvals	21	Preparation of planning documents	Prepare a Development Proposal and Environmental Management Plan to support Reserve Activity Assessment, Flinders Island Council development application and referral to Commonwealth Government under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)</i> if necessary. This document will also provide information on the proposal for interested groups and individuals.
	22	Completion of a Reserve Activity Assessment (RAA) submission	Complete a RAA submission in consultation with the Parks and Wildlife Service.
	23	Commonwealth Referral (if necessary)	Prepare a Referral under the provisions of the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)</i> if 'Protected Matters' may be impacted.
	24	Council planning application	Council planning application submitted to Flinders Island Council
	25	Interpretation Plan	In liaison with Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service to enhance visitor experience on the Trail
	26	Marketing Plan	In liaison with Tourism Tasmania and Tourism Northern Tasmania to optimise/maximise visitors to the Trail
	27	Flinders Island Trail website development	Develop a website as the portal for all things and products Trail related. Product must be fully bookable and transactable online to ensure full uptake.
	28	Development of Environmental Management Plans	Development of plans to manage risks from the track development (including threats from pests and diseases) and incorporate with PWS and other users maintenance schedules.