

11.1 Notice of Motion - John Forrest National Park Redevelopment Proposal - Cr John Daw

File Code	GR 3 RES.7537
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Disclosure of Any Interest	Nil
Attachments	Nil

SUMMARY

Councillor John Daw has advised his intention to move the following notice of motion:

MOTION

That Council writes to the Western Australian State Government through the Premier, Minister for Tourism and Minister for the Environment regarding the proposed closure and demolition of the John Forrest National Park Wildflower Tavern and expresses its concerns as follows:

- 1. That there has been no public consultation regarding this redevelopment proposal for the John Forrest National Park and Council strongly suggests that the matter go out to public consultation; and*
- 2. Council expresses its deep concern about the proposed redevelopments to the John Forrest National Park, particularly the decision to permanently close the Wildflower Tavern - a tourism and hospitality amenity where locals and visitors can eat and drink with birds and kangaroos in and around the facility - a truly unique and iconic experience.*

Cr Daw has provided the following rationale relating to his notice of motion:

The Shire is in the process of developing its tourism and economic development strategy and integral to that process is the provision locally of hospitality venues like the JFNP Wildflower Tavern which is to permanently close on 31st May 2022.

The Department have expressed that they are not expecting to redevelop the facility for two years or more or however long it takes to rebuild a 'visitor's centre'.

DBCA's current time line could result in there being no tourist amenity in the park until at least June 2024 or in the present overheated construction market, it could be 4 or 5 years before a replacement which will not include a tavern is completed.

Local residents and ratepayers in the Shire who have not been consulted through any state government consultation process, have expressed serious concerns and reservations about this proposal.

BACKGROUND

John Forrest National Park (Park) was founded in 1900 and it is the oldest national park in Western Australia. The Park was named in honour of the famous explorer and statesman Sir John Forrest, who was WA Premier between 1890-1901. In 2020-21, the Park received more than 130,000 visits. The Park is managed by Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).

Of keen interest to many Park visitors is the John Forrest Tavern (also known as the Wildflower Tavern) which opened in 1978 and has become both famous and infamous for its enablement of interaction with the wild kangaroo population of the Park.

The DBCA have a lease agreement with a commercial operator for the Tavern which is due to expire on 31 May 2022. DBCA recently confirmed that the existing lease agreement would not be renewed as a result of the planned enhancement of the Park.

On 25 February 2022, Environment Minister Reece Whitby announced; "Architect appointed for enhancement of WA's oldest national park" as part of a planned \$8.4 million upgrade to improve services and facilities at the park. The supporting ministerial media release provided further detail on the planned Park upgrades by DBCA which includes the following:

- New park visitor and interpretation centre as a focal point;
- Food and beverage facility;
- Retail trading space;
- Improved picnic areas;
- New park access point;
- Universally accessible facilities; and
- Safer increased parking (up to 600 bays).

The ministerial media release of 25 February 2022 also stated that a construction programme for the above upgrades is intended to be staged and due for completion by mid-2024. To minimise disruption to Park visitors, DBCA are currently examining how to provide interim food and beverage facilities for park visitors and this includes the option of licensed food vans.

STATUTORY / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The *Shire of Mundaring Meeting Procedures Local Law 2015* states, among other things:

"4.10 Elected members motions of which previous notice has been given

- (1) Unless the Act, Regulations or this local law provide otherwise, a member may raise at a meeting such business as he or she considers appropriate, in the form of a motion, of which notice has been given in writing to the CEO and which has been included on the agenda.
- (2) A notice of motion under subclause (1) is to be given at least seven clear working days before the meeting at which the motion is to be raised.
- (3) A notice of motion is to be accompanied by supporting reasons and is to relate to the good governance of the district."

The Notice of Motion was received from Cr Daw on 31 March 2022 and is in accordance with the *Shire of Mundaring Meeting Procedures Local Law 2015*.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Nil

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Mundaring Strategic Community Plan 2020 - 2030

Priority 1 - Community

Objective 1.2 – Flourishing local businesses

Strategy 1.2.3 - Support tourism development and promote the distinctive character of the attractions of the district including arts, food, sustainability and natural environment

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The Ministerial Media Statement of 25 February 2022 for enhancement of the Park states that:

- “The Park Centre will showcase the Park's heritage and culture in a contemporary facility that will complement the surrounding environment.”
- “The design will include environmentally sustainable, accessible and culturally appropriate spaces, with a strong emphasis on integrating the facilities into the natural surrounds.”
- “The Park Centre will include an interpretation space dedicated to John Forrest National Park, Western Australia's other parks and reserves, and the Aboriginal culture of the Park and the State.”

RISK IMPLICATIONS

Risk: Reputation: Not advocating on behalf of the local community for appropriate public consultation to be undertaken by DBCA could lead to community dissatisfaction.		
Likelihood	Consequence	Rating
Likely	Minor	Moderate
Action / Strategy		
1. Council to consider advocating for public consultation of the proposed closure of the John Forrest Tavern to be undertaken by DCBA; and 2. Shire representatives to participate in the planned enhancement of the park through consultation with DBCA on concept designs.		

EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

Elisa Skillen – Parks and Reserves Manager, Perth Hills District, Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions, 1 April 2022.

COMMENT

There is uncertainty at the time of this report to Council as to the level of public consultation undertaken or proposed to be undertaken by DBCA for the planned \$8.4 million enhancement of the Park.

In response to this, consistent with this Notice of Motion, Council may consider requesting that the matter to go out to public consultation and express concern regarding the proposed developments within the Park. This would enable the voice of the local community and visitors to Shire of Mundaring a participatory voice in the planned enhancement of the Park.

In doing so, it may also be beneficial for Council to give consideration to the following points regarding the likely negative/positive aspects of the project:

Potential **negative** aspects of the proposal to date:

- Uncertainty regarding the level of consultation that has been undertaken to date, or proposed to be undertaken by DBCA with regard to the proposed closure and demolition of the John Forrest Tavern and planned Park development;
- DBCA have advised that the majority of concern from the general public has centred around the ongoing welfare of the existing wild kangaroo population that frequent the John Forrest Tavern and interact with visitors;
- DBCA have for many years stated an objection to the feeding of the wild population of kangaroos that congregate in the vicinity of the Tavern and this practice has never been granted any formal approval;
- There is a petition on Change.org titled "Save the Wildflower Tavern – John Forrest National Park" that has attracted over 14,000 signatures as at 5 April 2022; and
- As this is effectively a State project, on State land, development approvals will be determined by a State planning authority (WAPC or State Development Assessment Unit). So while the Shire is a stakeholder who will be invited to comment, the Shire's statutory influence is constrained / limited.

Potential **positive** aspects of the proposal if implemented:

- The proposal is significantly advanced with the Minister for Environment announcing that the funding has been committed and subsequent appointment of an architect to commence design work on the visitor and interpretation centre;
- The commitment to spend \$8.4 million on a key tourism attraction within Shire of Mundaring over the next three years is likely to have many positive impacts (social, environmental and financial);
- With regard to the Shire of Mundaring as a stakeholder, Shire Planning staff have visited the Park with DBCA staff for a briefing on what is planned for the project and have requested a briefing for Council, with DBCA expressing preparedness to do that. Staff have also advocated for public consultation on the project. Further, the DBCA Project Manager will seek future Shire involvement and feedback on the concept designs for the Park;
- The planned Park enhancements will provide new and improved services and facilities once finished and in the interim period, DBCA are committed to provision of other temporary food and beverage services for visitors;
- The Park Centre will showcase the Park's heritage and culture in a contemporary facility that will complement the surrounding environment;
- The design will include environmentally sustainable, accessible and culturally appropriate spaces, with a strong emphasis on integrating the facilities into the natural surrounds;

- The Park Centre will include an interpretation space dedicated to John Forrest National Park, Western Australia's other parks and reserves, and the Aboriginal culture of the Park and the State;
- A new, larger car park will more than triple the current parking capacity at the Park to more than 600 bays;
- Visitors will enter the Park via a new access point and the new car park will be designed to have minimal visual impact;
- An iconic, universally accessible elevated walkway will provide pedestrian access between the new car park and the Park Centre complex; and
- Construction will be undertaken in stages to minimise disruption for park visitors, with the upgrades expected to be fully completed by mid-2024.

VOTING REQUIREMENT

Simple Majority

MOTION

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