

Environment Protection Authority will not monitor helicopter use in Walls of Jerusalem

TASMANIA'S Environment Protection Authority will not assess or monitor a helicopter-accessed tourism development within the World Heritage-listed Walls of Jerusalem National Park because it falls outside its scope.

Freedom of information documents show EPA director Wes Ford declined to give advice to the Federal Government ahead of its decision to approve the standing camp at Halls Island on Lake Malbena because the proposal fell outside the agency's remit.

Mr Ford on Tuesday confirmed his agency — which employs the state's noise specialist — had assessed only one tourism development in the past 14 years.

“The EPA undertakes assessments for developments according to the provisions of the Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act,” he told the *Mercury*.

“For example, a tourism development that had its own large wastewater treatment system would need to be assessed by the EPA.”

A Parks and Wildlife spokesman said the service was yet to decide what conditions would be applied to the proposed development when asked how helicopter noise would be monitored.

Documents handed to the Federal Government by the developers said the helicopter flight path would avoid known walking tracks, give distance to the endangered wedge-tailed eagle and result in about two minutes of noise per flight, of which 120 were predicted each year.

The vast majority of trips are proposed for the warmer months.

A Parks spokesman said: “The Parks and Wildlife Service has been working closely with the proponent to mitigate and minimise any impacts to other people and the natural environment.”

Much of the opposition to the Lake Malbena development has centred on the approval process at state and federal levels as well as the proposed helicopter access.

Proponent Daniel Hackett said the helicopter was the most environmentally friendly method of accessing the Halls Island site as it would help preserve endangered bogs and fens.

He pointed out UNESCO sites Kakadu and the Great Barrier Reef were accessed by chopper. Helicopters would not be refuelled within the site, nor would fuel be stored within the national park, as requested by various agencies, Mr Hackett said.

“The whole [Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area] is not pristine wilderness,” Mr Hackett said, adding Halls Island had been accessed by humans for decades.

“Fifteen per cent of it is zoned for other usage ... we should be able to share that with guests.”

The Aboriginal Heritage Council voiced its strong opposition to the proposal, which was backed by Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania, according to documents.

Chairman Rodney Dillon — charged with advising the State Government on Aboriginal policy — said the council did not support any development within the Walls of Jerusalem as it was a site of great significance to Tasmania’s Aboriginals.

“This is ancient history and we don't want that destroyed,” he said.

Greens leader Cassy O’Connor said the Federal Government documents outlined in Tuesday’s *Mercury* raised serious questions about the project’s approval processes at state and federal levels.

The Wilderness Society will challenge the Commonwealth approval process in the Federal Court.