Identifying visitor preferences for alternative experiences to summiting Wollumbin (Mt Warning): Final report 2 of 3: stakeholder interviews

Pascal Scherrer  
*Southern Cross University*

Erica Wilson  
*Southern Cross University*

Noah Rud Nielsen  
*Southern Cross University*

Betty Weiler  
*Southern Cross University*

Brent D. Moyle  
*Southern Cross University*

*See next page for additional authors*
Identifying Visitor Preferences for Alternative Experiences to Summiting Wollumbin (Mt Warning)

FINAL REPORT - Report 2 of 3

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

By: Pascal Scherrer, Erica Wilson, Noah Nielsen, Betty Weiler, Brent Moyle & Rod Caldicott

Prepared for: New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service

JUNE 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the input from senior managers and staff from the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, as well as the people who generously gave up their time to participate in this research. This work was funded by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service and received substantial in-kind and infrastructure support from Southern Cross University.

SUGGESTED CITATION


CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Southern Cross University: Pascal Scherrer – Email: pascal.scherrer@scu.edu.au
National Parks & Wildlife Service: Damien Hofmeyer – Email: Damien.Hofmeyer@environment.nsw.gov.au
We value your feedback. If you have any comments/suggestions please send them to pascal.scherrer@scu.edu.au.

Front cover photograph:

Looking north towards Wollumbin (Mt Warning) with the Border Ranges National Park rising on the left. Northern Rivers\(^1\) region, NSW. Hamilton Lund; Destination New South Wales.

\(^1\) The Northern Rivers is sometimes referred to as North Coast and Far North Coast. Each is used in this document relative to its historical context.
# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... 1  
SUGGESTED CITATION ............................................................................................................. 2  
CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ............................................................................. 2  
1 INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................... 5  
2 FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS ............................................................... 5  
3 THE WOLLUMBIN EXPERIENCE .......................................................................................... 6  
  3.1 Connection to Wollumbin ................................................................................................. 6  
  3.2 An Iconic Visitor Experience ......................................................................................... 8  
  3.3 Walking on Wollumbin .................................................................................................... 9  
4 CULTURAL AND OTHER MANAGEMENT ISSUES ............................................................ 10  
  4.1 Please Don’t Climb: Indigenous Cultural Issues ........................................................... 11  
  4.2 Visitor Management Issues ........................................................................................... 14  
  4.3 Environmental Management Issues ............................................................................. 15  
5 STAKEHOLDER-IDENTIFIED ALTERNATIVES ................................................................. 16  
  5.1 Need for Alternatives ..................................................................................................... 16  
  5.2 Rainforest Walking Alternatives ................................................................................... 17  
  5.3 Cultural Alternatives ..................................................................................................... 18  
  5.4 Landscape and Viewing Alternatives ............................................................................ 19  
  5.5 Modifying and Extending Experiences Outside the Park .......................................... 20  
6 ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPECIFIC ALTERNATIVES ......................................................... 23  
  6.1 Indigenous Tours ............................................................................................................. 23  
  6.2 Visitor Centre .................................................................................................................. 24  
  6.3 Ziplines .......................................................................................................................... 26  
  6.4 Ecolodge ........................................................................................................................ 27  
7 CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVES ............................................................ 28  
  7.1 Under-developed Tourism Industry .............................................................................. 28  
  7.2 Lack of Funding and Other Resources ......................................................................... 29  
  7.3 Need for Greater Collaboration ................................................................................... 30  
  7.4 Need for Community Support ...................................................................................... 31  
8 CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................................... 32  
APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW GUIDE ....................................................................................... 33
1 INTRODUCTION

Wollumbin is an extinct volcanic plug that forms a distinct and widely visible landmark in the northern rivers region of New South Wales. While referred to by its Aboriginal name throughout this report, the dual named mountain is popularly known also as Mt Warning. Wollumbin, particularly the mountain summit, is considered a sacred site of spiritual and cultural significance to Indigenous tribes of the region and the activity of summiting Wollumbin is contrary to Indigenous spiritual tradition. Nonetheless, the ascent of Wollumbin along the so called summit track is one of the region’s key visitor attractions. The ascent is nationally and internationally promoted as a ‘bucket list’ item through outlets such as Australian Geographic and Lonely Planet Guides and each year an estimated 100,000 visitors attempt to climb Wollumbin via the summit track. This presents a raft of challenges for the sustainable management of the site.

This project originated from the closure of the Wollumbin summit track following major storm events in late January 2013. The dramatic downturn in visitor related business to the local area, following the closure of this focal attraction, highlighted a need and opportunity to diversify nature-based visitor experiences in this area by offering alternative visitor experiences. While the track was reopened in November 2013, physical, environmental, cultural and financial restrictions to managing the site continue to point to the need for a diversification of local visitor experiences and a strategy to disperse visitors and reduce visitor pressure on the Wollumbin summit track.

Thus the focus of this research project entitled “Identifying Visitor Preferences for Alternative Experiences to Summiting Wollumbin (Mt Warning)” was on identifying and testing activities and scenarios of visitor experiences in the region as potential alternatives to the experience of summiting Wollumbin. The project was funded by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service with substantial in-kind support from Southern Cross University.

2 FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

This document, Report 2, is the second of three reports to make up the Final Report for the project “Alternative Experiences to Summiting Wollumbin (Mt Warning)”. It reports the findings of the stakeholder interviews which informed the development of scenarios to be explored in a survey with potential visitors (see Report 3).

A series of qualitative, semi-structured interviews was conducted with key ‘Wollumbin’ stakeholders. There were two key purposes to the interviews: First, the interviews served an important function in terms of broadly scoping stakeholders’ thoughts, perceptions and attitudes about Wollumbin-Mt Warning, and the management of the Park. Stakeholders are an essential part of the sustainable management and presentation of the Wollumbin region, and the interviews were a good starting point to ‘touch base’ and engage with those stakeholders. Second, the interviews directly sought stakeholders’ ideas about existing and alternative visitor experiences to summiting Wollumbin; in combination with the historical analysis outlined in Report 1, this helped to develop the potential scenarios which were then test in Stage 3 (survey). See Appendix A for a full list of interview questions.

A potential list of stakeholders was developed based on advice from and discussions with NSW NPWS. This list targeted senior managers and rangers in the Parks Service and the Office of Environment and Heritage, as well as representatives from relevant environmental, tourism and Indigenous associations, local government and the Northern Region NPWS Regional Advisory Committee.

---

In total, 22 interviews were conducted during October and November 2013. For the purposes of this report and the presentation of quotes, stakeholders are grouped into the following categories below, also showing the number of participants from each group):

- NPWS/OEH: 8 interviewees
- Tourism: 9 interviewees
- Indigenous: 3 interviewees
- Other Community: 2 interviewees

Interviews were tape-recorded (with permission from participants) and then transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were coded by the researchers using a detailed thematic analysis method, aided by NVivo qualitative data analysis software, and commonalities and core themes were elicited. The interview analysis resulted in the emergence of 5 key themes, each with several associated sub-themes, with consideration for the development and implementation of alternative experiences to summiting Wollumbin. These themes were:

1) The Wollumbin Experience
   - Connection to Wollumbin
   - An iconic visitor experience
   - Walking on Wollumbin

2) Cultural and Other Management Issues
   - Please don’t climb: Indigenous cultural issues
   - Visitor management issues
   - Environmental management issues

3) Stakeholder Identified Alternatives
   - Need for alternatives
   - Rainforest walking alternatives
   - Cultural alternatives
   - Landscape and viewing alternatives
   - Modifying and extending experiences outside the park

4) Assessing Attitudes to Specific Alternatives
   - Indigenous tours
   - Visitor centre
   - Ziplines
   - Ecolodge

5) Challenges in Developing Alternatives
   - Under-developed tourism industry
   - Lack of funding and other resources
   - Need for greater collaboration
   - Need for Community support

The following sections expand in detail on each of these themes, and associated sub-themes. Emphases within the sub-themes are demonstrated through bold text. To demonstrate each theme, we have provided an excerpt of a number of relevant quotes from the interview transcripts (suitably de-identified to ensure confidentiality and protect anonymity). The only attached identifier is the broad stakeholder group from which interviewees were sourced.

3 THE WOLLUMBIN EXPERIENCE

3.1 Connection to Wollumbin

All interviews began with questions about stakeholders’ perceptions of Wollumbin-Mt Warning, their direct experience with the mountain, and its role in the life of the community.

While only a few interviewees had a direct role in the day-to-day management of Wollumbin, all spoke in one way or another of a close connection to the mountain. This ranged from Indigenous custodians who felt spiritually connected to Wollumbin, to those who had a connection to the mountain that went back to childhood.

*That is where my great, great grandmother came from, out that way. I descend from the original people from out that way.* (Indigenous)
It has been from an early stage in my life as an indigenous person with a cultural heritage and a strong connection to this country here. Wollumbin plays an extremely large part in our communities and in our cultural learning and understanding and spirituality and so forth and so on. (NPWS)

I used to come here as a kid, coming to Mount Warning and sleeping on Mount Warning when I was little. (NPWS)

We know Mount Warning – Wollumbin - as the central sacred mountain... since I was a child. (Other Community)

The way that interviewees spoke of Wollumbin was of a mountain with a 'layered' history – not only geologically, but also layered in its cultural history, involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The mountain’s got a history ... and it involves a lot of the community; not only the Aboriginal people. (Indigenous)

The layers of history, layers of geography and geology and how all that stitches together. It gives a perspective, particularly when you’re on top of Mount Warning, of what the Tweed looks like and how come it looks that way. (Tourism)

So you’ve got the story of Captain Cook and his first sighting of the East Coast. ... Then you can drift into the importance of the area in stories around the Rainbow Serpent and the Dreamtime story and that connection to country. (Tourism)

It's extremely significant in a cultural setting, and I always put that first and foremost. But I can understand that it was named by Captain Cook when he sailed past Mount Warning. ... It has its place in Australian history as a whole. (NPWS)

Wollumbin was widely regarded as a significant cultural area for the local indigenous population. Interviewees discussed the sacredness of Wollumbin and its surrounding landscape. Stakeholders – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous - spoke of the mountain’s ‘sacredness’. Many also noted their desire to enhance the visitor experience at Wollumbin through cultural interpretation.

We know from our families that it was a very important place of lore, and I mean a very important to men. (Indigenous)

Uncle *, he considered the place to be like a church. (Indigenous)

I am aware that is it very important to the Aboriginal people, to their stories and to the whole area, really. (Other Community)

I would like to see them [Aboriginal cultural associations] more in the forefront and to the visitor experiences to this area. (NPWS)

I think it’s a huge opportunity to really promote the Indigenous tie to that mountain and the stories behind it. (Tourism)

It should be recognised for its importance as an Aboriginal place. It needs to be part of the visitor experience, but it needs to be done in a way that is respectful of the tradition owners. (NPWS)

Others talked of a personal connection with Wollumbin – the mountain and particularly the caldera ‘plug’ – as a key, oft-sighted feature within their regional landscape, within their everyday lives, and within the life of the community.

I can roll on my bed and look out and see it. (Tourism)

The property where I live looks over Mount Warning, Wollumbin. (NPWS)
My kids both turned five and at five years of age it was their initiation to go and climb the mountain. (Tourism)

I went for a period of time that every birthday I actually climbed... I love it. My wife and I spent one of our anniversaries there... My sixteen-year-old boy was eighteen months old when we carried him up to the top. (Tourism)

The importance of Wollumbin’s **geological, tourism and landscape values** was also made evident. The area was recognised as providing World Heritage-class examples of geology and ecological formations.

*It is such a unique place because of its proximity to the coast but also it is the most important example of a caldera that we have got anywhere, nationally and internationally. The variety of landscapes that you go through and the rainforest down the bottom.* (NPWS)

*I think its main value, to me, is its landscape value as part of the caldera and how important it is. Providing opportunities for people to appreciate that landscape value ...* (NPWS)

*And the caldera is unique in itself, geographically.* (Tourism)

### 3.2 An Iconic Visitor Experience

Interview questions were also asked regarding stakeholders’ vision for Wollumbin and the National Park as a visitor experience, and as a destination in itself.

All interviewees viewed Wollumbin as an important visitor experience, quite central to the region. It was seen variably as the region’s ‘tourism ticket to the world’, and as one of the **most iconic landscapes within NSW**. Wollumbin’s importance was emphasised on a range of levels, such as historical, geological/landscape, recreational, and natural.

*It’s a major attraction...* (Tourism)

*It should be one of the hero experiences for the region.* (Tourism)

*It’s central to the region and it’s the iconic feature.* (NPWS)

*It’s very important. In my view, it’s one of the most iconic areas in the state.* (Tourism)

A key discussion point was the limited visitor data for Wollumbin National Park. When probed about their thoughts on traveller motivations and key markets, visitors were perceived to be largely **self-drive and independent travellers**. As there is limited accommodation within the caldera region, the vast majority of tourists were seen to be sourced either from Byron Bay or South East Queensland.

*A lot of the visitors that go to Byron Bay go to Wollumbin... I know backpackers go there. It was popular for them to climb and see the sunrise.* (Tourism)

*It is mostly domestic tourists... they might be in Byron Bay or they might be on the Gold Coast.* (NPWS)

*Day-trippers coming out of Southeast Queensland, I’d say, would make up at least seventy percent of the visitation up there.* (Other Community)

*The visitation for Wollumbin is quite broad... we have anything from the grey nomads through to the youth market via Nimbin that are backpacking and camping. Also local community residents still utilise the park.* (Tourism)

*There’s a mish-mash of people that go out. I’ve seen the elderly people, I’ve seen families... everyone from the hippie types to some Army-fit types.* (Tourism)
Stakeholders spoke of a need for greater provision of activities for a broader range of visitor types (e.g. families, people with disabilities, etc.) as well as additional interpretation and engagement with the mountain’s natural features. As one Tourism representative said: ‘I want Mt Warning to appeal to everybody, so people with a disability, people with kids, and people with strollers or impediments can access that natural environment in a meaningful way.’ Others spoke of the need to **move beyond the recreational focus**.

*It has always been popular to climb it and to see dawn and all of that, but I would like to see more emphasis upon cultural associations and the World Heritage associations and values.* (NPWS)

*I want everyone to see it... I like people to see it. I like people to appreciate it... I’m always talking up the geology.* (Other Community)

At the same time, there was a *sense of caution* with regard to Wollumbin’s promotion, marketing and commercialisation, particularly with respect to Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

*We need to be careful with the marketing so we don’t destroy what people come to see, but if we can get a message out there, it can be our identifiable ticket to the world; our iconic place to visit when you come to Australia.* (Tourism)

*From a natural perspective, from a historical perspective, a cultural, local Aboriginal heritage viewpoint - it's a very important attraction.* (Tourism)

*We want it to be something of cultural and educational significance, as well as being visually significant as well without being ruined by commercialisation.* (Tourism)

## 3.3 Walking on Wollumbin

Walking on Wollumbin was seen as the key visitor experiences in the National Park, if not within the entire region. Most of the stakeholders interviewed had been to Wollumbin and made the partial climb; only a handful had reached the summit. Those that had summited described it as a ‘spectacular’, ‘fantastic’ place with ‘unequalled views’ as well as outstanding World Heritage values. Even though the majority of stakeholders interviewed were non-Indigenous, Indigenous issues around the climbing of Wollumbin was an important and often discussed issue (this will be discussed further in Section 3.0).

The perception from stakeholders was that the **majority of visitors come to climb** to the top of the mountain. The walk was seen as a strenuous recreation activity, with a substantial reward in relation to both the summit view and the sense of physical accomplishment.

*It’s to the top of a mountain where you get a great view.* (NPWS)

*These people are looking for a bushwalking experience. A day out type experience... Most people tend to walk to the top.* (Other Community)

*[These are people that] want to experience nature and want to go out and push themselves a little bit.* (Tourism)

*I think it’s a lot of people who want to get to the top. I don’t know how many get to the top, though.* (NPWS)

Wollumbin was also well-recognised as the **first place in Australia to see the sunrise** (though this ‘fact’ was also debated). These sunrise walker numbers increase at particular times such as New Year’s Eve.

*It’s the rite of passage for a lot of the backpackers. ... For them it’s that part of the experience and the adventure.* (Tourism)
We would usually climb the mountain for sunrise that would be the normal pattern. (Tourism)

It’s not the first place [to get the sun]. It’s sometimes the first place. (NPWS)

There was a general view that visitors were generally climbing Wollumbin with a purely recreational focus – or to conquer the mountain. These visitors were perceived to be less appreciative of the mountain’s natural and cultural values.

Some visitors see it as an experience to hike a mountain and purely that. They walk up there 100 miles an hour and they conquer a mountain... Then they come back down and they’re ready to get in their car and go. (NPWS)

That’s why people are attracted to the mountain, because there’s a peak to reach and it’s a physical, achieve something [desire], than it is a nature emersion or cultural desire. (Tourism)

I think there should be something else for those people to do. [Those that] need to climb something, to conquer it. (NPWS)

They just want to conquer to the mountain.... (Indigenous)

They’re not going there for the national park experience. They are going there to climb. (Other Community)

At the same time, there was a belief that the walk was considerably more strenuous and difficult than many of the visitors were led to believe. Several stakeholders spoke of the need for additional interpretive attention as the walk’s difficulty, and associated safety concerns.

For an everyday kind of tourist, that’s a tough walk, there’s no question about it. (NPWS)

I have passed dozens and dozens of people who looked like they shouldn't be climbing it, but they were determined to do it because that is the challenge of getting to the top. (NPWS)

It’s not for the faint-hearted, that climb! (Other Community)

It is a difficult climb. I had trouble not going up, but getting down. It would have been interesting to actually read something on how to manage your physical problems, if they arise on that track. (Other Community)

I cannot believe the lack of accidents on that chain. That’s an exposed rock face that is not completely straightforward to climb... If there was logic to be applied to it, that reason for not climbing to the summit would be of huge significance. You would certainly convince our quality risk guys that that's an important thing to consider (NPWS)

4 CULTURAL AND OTHER MANAGEMENT ISSUES

As demonstrated in Section 2, stakeholders acknowledged Wollumbin as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of the region and the National Park estate. At the same time, there was discussion regarding a number of significant management issues around visitation, use of the Park and the summit climb.

The most complex and perhaps contentious issue was local indigenous custodians’ desire to see the summit climb either modified or closed. This view was shared by other stakeholders as well. Other broader visitor management and environmental issues were also discussed.
4.1 Please Don’t Climb: Indigenous Cultural Issues

All stakeholders were aware of the cultural significance of Wollumbin to the local Indigenous community/ies, and of Indigenous people’s desire for people not to climb. Wollumbin and its surrounding caldera were noted as being important to a number of different tribal groups. These different groups/tribes have different stories and different associations with the mountain.

*I think that the different tribal groups each having conflicting ideas about … they’ve each got a different story associated with the mountain, and then conflicting ideas about how it should be managed.* (NPWS)

*And then Githabal to the west.  They’ve got Arakwal in the Byron Bay and then you’ve got western Bundjalung too.  I know a lot of the people from those communities, they have connection and association with the mountain over time.  It’s extremely significant to a lot of people.* (NPWS)

Several Indigenous people spoke adamantly of their community’s desire to stop the climb and see the walk closed. This was seen as a sustained message ongoing with NPWS for several decades now, starting in the 1970s and 80s and becoming more formalised around the contentious 2000 millennium New Year’s Eve celebrations and the recent cyclone events.

*I think a lot of the indigenous community members feel strongly that the place shouldn’t be climbed.* (NPWS)

*What we really want, is to shut it all down.* (Indigenous)

*There was a lot of conflict around the millennium with the no-climb message was put forth very strongly by the community.* (NPWS)

*Only the very highly initiated, those very important men were entitled to go to the summit. There were women’s places in its surrounds, but it’s certainly not our place to be anywhere near the summit.* (Indigenous)

*Within our communities there was talk that this would be a perfect time [after the cyclone] to close it down … We go up there and say, the mountain’s not happy.* (Indigenous)

Non-Indigenous stakeholders also reflected on their own personal conflicts with climbing the mountain for cultural reasons. For some, it was enough to prevent them ever climbing (or to stop, if they were previous summiters). For others, they still climbed, struggling with internal tensions around this cultural issue.

*Well, it’s not on my bucket list anymore. I’m 52. If I’d desired to do it I would’ve done it. Well, it’s a culture and fitness thing. Now, it’s a fitness thing.* (Tourism)

*I’ve chosen not to climb it for those [cultural] reasons but I’d love to go up and see it close up.* (Tourism)

*I respect what I’ve been told about the site, and my first priority is not to offend the traditional owners. So I wouldn’t climb it.* (Tourism)

*I have climbed the mountain many times. I have climbed it as an adult knowing that Aboriginal people don’t want me to climb it… it is not a straightforward thing, but I can understand it.* (NPWS)

*I’m torn between respecting the Aboriginal request and my one self-interest.* (Other Community)

Others again felt that visitation to Wollumbin was being overly restricted by Indigenous concerns rather than being used as a ‘shared’ resource. *I think that it’s vulnerable to being locked up for one interest group and that’s of concern.*
I don’t think from our perspective that’s what we want to see.’ (Tourism). ‘There’s been a general trend, in my view, to say, no access... But in the long term, it’s probably not going to fly with the broader community.’ (NPWS).

There were also comparisons to the jointly-managed Uluru, where cultural concerns have led to widespread knowledge of – and adherence to - the ‘don’t climb’ message.

We say it’s a little bit like out at Uluru. You know, they’ve got a desire the same as here. They are asking people not to climb it. (Indigenous)

It is similar for me, the tourist experience of the Uluru, and how the traditional owners they were very adamant that they didn’t want any climbing to the top of Uluru. I know that Uluru is still climbed but there are options for people to look at it elsewhere. (NPWS)

Use Uluru as an example, to phase people out of going to the top has taken a number of years and a lot of education in their marketing and the way they work with the tour operators. (Tourism)

Personally, I climbed Uluru... That’s one of the most amazing experiences of my life. I think it’s a real shame that people can’t experience climbing Uluru anymore. (Tourism)

While there was general understanding around the Indigenous reticence for climbing, stakeholders felt that there were mixed messages being communicated. This resulted in confusion and misunderstanding, and a desire to know what the key Indigenous concerns were – and why.

The mix of messages in the community... oh the indigenous community this, the indigenous community that, those urban rumours are not necessarily actually what the indigenous community want, but trying to nail down that single point and go, where do you stand? What are your thoughts? Because if you come out and say, “You know what, no, we don't want people walking up there”, hey, we'll change our marketing message to be more collaborative than that and we'll look to Parks to work on an alternative. (Tourism)

The question they [visitors] come back to us with is “Why don't they want us to climb the mountain?” And there’s a genuine interest from visitors but they're unsure about why. Is it a spiritual thing? Is it a birthing site? Is it burial grounds? (Tourism)

We get wildly different stories depending on who you talk to and so it wouldn’t matter how sensitive or careful we want to be ... over 20 years, I've not been able to get a consistent picture of an Indigenous person’s attitude or expectation regarding Westerners. (Tourism)

As a result of these perceived ‘mixed messages’, a uniform cultural message was seen as a possible solution, which could then be used for a sustainable and informed approach to visitor communication, promotion and management. In line with this, it was seen as important to make visitors aware of the cultural desires before reaching the Park, particularly as visitors would have likely travelled considerable distances.

I don’t have any problems if people are informed about the reasons why they shouldn't climb ... If the Aboriginal people are saying, well it’s up to you, well I think that’s okay for people to make their decisions but there needs to be information provided to people on the reasons why not. (NPWS)

I understand why, I know it is really complex and it is fraught, especially about getting out uniform messages about places that are publicly accessible and what is not but I would love to see that as part of the visitor experience. (NPWS)

The traditional owners are saying ‘We don't actually want people climbing to the top of this mountain’, yet the phones in this office never stop ringing about how to get to the park and how to it, how to climb that mountain. ... I would like to see the options for getting people away from the mountain to getting people to recognising its purpose. (NPWS)
If you don’t know the cultural reasons why not to climb, and you get there, well you’re probably going to climb anyhow, because it is a fair bit of a distance and windy roads to get there. … Really it’s pre visit information that you need. (NPWS)

Rather than a restrictive ‘do not climb’ message, it was noted that a ‘request not to climb’ might work better, where visitors are made aware of the sensitivities but still allowed to make their own judgement. Further, having people visit in a culturally appreciative way could allow an opportunity to educate visitors about the area’s Indigenous sacredness and significance.

It’s just making sure you manage it properly. (NPWS)

As long as they’re given the information on why Aboriginal people don’t want them to climb it, and I think then it’s an individual choice. (NPWS)

It should be a choice or a decision of the individual in relation to this as a sacred area for the Aboriginal people, and local community elders. (Tourism)

There was a view put forward by some Indigenous and NPWS representatives that while all parts of the Wollumbin area are culturally significant, it is the summit that is the most sacred part. ‘The aspect of the Wollumbin, is everything is [culturally] important… the summit itself is the most important, the chains, up. That’s the most significant for men… If we could stop one thing from happening, going past the chains would be the first thing. The lower down, the better.’ (NPWS).

Stakeholders were thus questioned regarding restriction from the summit itself, or a half-way compromise, rather than the entire mountain trail. Many believed that visitors would be restricted by their health or fitness before any indigenous concerns, and that this option may lead to ultimate disappointment.

I think the only barrier that stops people getting to the top now is their health… they’re really deflated and really upset that they couldn’t get to the top. (NPWS)

It comes back to the decision to climb or not to climb. So, the rocky outcrop at the top is also one of the most spectacular parts of the experience so it’s quite difficult. (Tourism)

I don’t know that I’d be climbing it if I couldn’t get to the top, because it’s uphill all the way. I think if you could get to a point where there was a reasonable view that wasn’t the top, like a compromise, maybe. (Tourism)

I think it’s in human nature to want to achieve the ultimate experience if it is available, so if it’s less than that, then I think yes, definitely, it would alter the experience. (Other Community)

Modification of the Wollumbin trail was seen as a potential strategy to provide visitor experiences, while still protecting cultural values. Stakeholders spoke of the need to strike a balance between Indigenous and visitor desires.

That’s the most important bit. Finding ways to allow people to enjoy it, view it, even photograph it, but not crawl all over it. (Tourism)

I’d like to see a balance maintained between the indigenous significance of it and the requirements of the indigenous people and our Western, I suppose more National Parks or visitor focused approach. (Tourism)

I think it’s trying to marry that recreation with the cultural sensitivities that are there. (NPWS)
4.2 Visitor Management Issues

A key visitor management issue related to the perceived lack of visitor data and market research regarding Wollumbin National Park, and the climb itself. Many interviewees expressed an interest in knowing more about the actual visitors.

I don’t know. I’d like to know more … and I don’t know how many make it to the top. (NPWS)

I think people like to think that the dark green tourists are attracted there. I’m not sure if that’s the case or not. Yeah, it’s hard to know without seeing any research. I’ve never seen any research on it. (Tourism)

Wollumbin was reported to receive around 100,000 visitors per year. For some interviewees, it was management of the visitors and associated facilities which provides the main challenge to Parks. There were many comments – from both NPWS and other stakeholders – about the costs and resources of visitor management, such as site-hardening, track upgrading and maintenance of visitor facilities.

National Parks has put a lot of work back into opening up the trail. So, making sure that trail is maintained and so that the visitor experience there is a main one. (Tourism)

I think it’s a very steep walk it has and it’s in an environment, especially in summer where we get lots of rain and storms like we’ve had just recently, and I think the maintenance and the cost of maintaining the track are really huge. I think that’s the biggest issue. Also, the issue in relation to the car parking there. (NPWS)

We know the National Parks guys too and they’re racing to keep up with the track maintenance with budgets that are really limited. (Tourism)

In addition, many noted the limitations in terms of car parking, access and interpretation facilitates.

There’s inadequate parking for everybody… when all those people, cars in there, and there is no space, there’s very little reverse space. (Other Community)

I mean, it’s a really bad sort of design in terms of accessibility for people, so I think that’s another big issue. (NPWS)

One of the other big issues is the road in. Purely from an access point of view, it’s one road in. When it’s topped out, you can’t get to the top of the … you can’t get to the end. There’s nowhere really to turn around. (NPWS)

Several stakeholders spoke of the visitor management issue of managing communication between NPWS, potential visitors and the tourism network. This was specifically discussed in terms of track closure and the previously alluded to ‘mixed messages’ around the Indigenous request not to climb and the NPWS promotion of the other values of the walk.

When you climb it you have one sign saying please don’t climb it and the next sign you have is saying this is the most amazing place you’ll ever be in your life. The whole way up the mountain is sort of climb it, don’t climb it, climb it, don’t climb it. It’s a very sort of mixed message. (Tourism)

Well, mixed messages, right now. Is it open? Is it closed? Are we allowed to… I don’t even know what the current status is. So that’s probably the biggest issue. (Tourism)

I’m aware there’s a conflict between Aboriginal groups about whether you climb or don’t climb. I don’t think the message is very strong; the majority of the people … people will be confused about that. (Other Community)
You get there and find that if you don’t know the cultural reasons why not to climb, well you’re probably going to climb anyhow, because it is a fair bit of a distance and windy roads to get there. I don’t know if there’s information on the website or through the tourism industry about the reasons why people shouldn’t climb. Really it’s a pre visit information that you need because if you drove all that way. (NPWS)

Several interviewees spoke of the considerable resources expended on rescuing injured or lost visitors to the park. Most of the rescuing efforts seemed to involved visitors who left the track or were unprepared for the climb.

There have been a lot of resources putting into search and rescue, like people who have, despite the amount of signs that are all over the sides of the mountain about sticking to the path, there are still people that just ignore that, and they end up lost. (NPWS)

Yeah, the safety dramas on that walk on Wollumbin are ongoing and continuous. (Tourism)

The amount of rescues that are done and the expectation that the helicopter is going to turn up and parks staff are going to come and carry them out because they’re not fit enough to do it. (NPWS)

I think the biggest issues for Wollumbin in relation to the park are probably based around the sheer volume of visitors that go to the park. The maintenance and upkeep and obviously the cultural sensitivity, particularly with the local Aboriginal community, are the three biggest issues. (Tourism)

4.3 Environmental Management Issues

Linked to the 100,000+ visitors that Wollumbin is quoted to receive, there was concern about significant environmental impact due to visitation, or perceived increasing visitation. These impacts included: soil compaction, loss of trees, erosion, visitor littering and toileting in the forest and general environmental pressure on the mountain.

We don’t want to love it to death. That’s a big issue. (Tourism)

I think there’s a few environmental issues... We filled three or four rubbish bags of wrappers and cans and bottles so litter is one issue. Toileting is another issue for a lot of people to hold on for five hours is not really something that they’re used to. Foot traffic, particularly in wet weather. (Tourism)

I think that it’s so fragile I don’t think it’s going to be able to cope with the amount of traffic that it is currently receiving. (NPWS)

When you’re walking through bush, you’re seeing trees dying because there’s too many people walking over their roots. They’re the sort of things that sort of really matter. (Indigenous)

There was a recognition that providing visitor facilitates (such as the walking tracks and toilets) would be difficult in such mountain terrain; for others it was more of an engineering and management approach.

Close it off. I think that’s the only option we could sort of look at for management on the mountain, it’s just too deep and too hard to manage it... It’s just not viable. You can’t do it. It’s too steep, it’s just too dangerous. (Indigenous)

So the track will always be at issue, given that it’s just something that’s on a skin... but engineering will sort that, engineering and technology will sort that out. (NPWS)
5 STAKEHOLDER-IDENTIFIED ALTERNATIVES

One of the objectives of these interviews was to explore – in a freely elicited way - stakeholder ideas about potential alternative experiences to summiting Wollumbin. This question was influenced by the recent closure due to storm damage, as well as the ongoing concerns by NPWS about unsustainable levels of visitation.

In recognising the cultural, visitor and environmental issues discussed above in Section 3, all stakeholders interviewed were aware of the need to create sustainable alternatives. There was a general feeling that if visitors were to be directed away from Wollumbin, however, there needed to be genuine alternatives, substitutes or modifications on offer. This section explores some of these options.

5.1 Need for Alternatives

For some, there is a need for alternatives suitable to deter visitors from climbing Wollumbin, although in the words of one interviewee: ‘You could give them 100 options but at the end of the day, they just want to climb the mountain.’ (Indigenous). While there were other attractive areas within the region’s National Parks, none offered Wollumbin’s unique combination of rainforest, recreation and superb summit views. At the same time, it was perceived that if there were suitable additional or alternatives to summitting, this would reduce visitor numbers to Wollumbin and help with the management of the visitors to the mountain.

If we want to stop people going to the top, we need to obviously provide them with alternatives. (Tourism)

We need to definitely find those alternatives so that we can direct people to them and give them the option. (NPWS)

Trying to find alternative walks is the only thing that’s going to stop people from walking it. (NPWS)

For some, it was the impact of recent storm events which highlighted the lack of alternatives available to the visitors. A common response was to tell visitors to “come back when it’s open” (Tourism). Other comments were similar:

There’s nothing and it’s always been a problem ... In our destination, there’s always been a lack of product. There’s nowhere similar. (Tourism)

Considering that most people go for the experience, I’m not sure what else they would do. (Other Community)

We need to explore alternatives to the climb, because we experienced the climb being closed for all those months, and the impact that it’s had around the community. Not just economic impact, ... but generally the movement of people through the Shire and access to these things from a visitor perspective. (Other Community)

Even when the walk was open, the need for additional alternative experiences beyond the summit walking track was identified. There is a feeling that visitors should be provided with a wider range of experiences at Wollumbin and the surrounding parks.

There is a dire need for alternatives, for appropriate walking tracks. ... It’s completely uphill one way, completely downhill the other. (Tourism)

There should be something else for people to do. (NPWS)

We need those alternatives, not just to support cultural wishes, but also for the visitors to NSW and associated business and those two aspects, they dovetail together really nicely. (NPWS)
While other sites within surrounding Parks were identified, they were qualified by the constraints of distance, travel and time, and not viewed as true alternatives to the unique Wollumbin visitor experience.

They might have one day and we are telling them to drive an extra four hours that day from Byron or from Gold Coast. (NPWS)

I know the tourism authority’s had a lot of trouble with that sort of question. They try and direct people out to the beaches, and out to other areas of interest in the Shire, of which there’s not a great number that fit the same bill, of a nature experience like that. (Other community)

There’s a range of good walks in Nightcap that take you to Minyon Falls and Protesters Falls and things like that, but... They’re more out of the way, harder to get to. (NPWS)

### 5.2 Rainforest Walking Alternatives

When posed with the question of alternatives, stakeholders responded with a range of options focused on other rainforest tracks, lookouts or bushwalks. Importantly, these alternatives centred on the experiences individually, rather than in combination as at Wollumbin.

Current visitation to Wollumbin is based on the four hour strenuous summit climb. The development of new, off-site substitutable walking tracks was seen as having the greatest potential for diverting visitors from Wollumbin. This was in recognition that a summit experience was undeniably a key desire in the region.

Wollumbin is a better walk [than the other walks] and trying to find alternative walks is the only thing that’s going to stop people from walking it. (NPWS)

Out of the Tweed-based area bushwalks we have very few options for people, so bushwalks, long and short. (NPWS)

There’s no decent walk in the Northern Rivers. There’s two walks in all the Northern Rivers that are more than 10 kms. One’s the historic walking Track from Mount Nardi across to Minyon Falls and the other one’s out at the Border ranges. (NPWS)

What we’d like to produce is a loop walk around [Mt Nullum] that takes in that National Park’s land, plus the Council land, and have some interpretive stuff. (Other Community)

Well there’s a brochure called the 30 Great Walks of the Northern Rivers. So I think from a walking perspective, that’s something that’s done well... I think there’s a scope for many other things. Things such as having an overnight walk. (Tourism)

Beyond creating alternatives to summiting Wollumbin, it was felt that the development of better regional track and trails network would allow the region to develop as a bushwalking destination. Ideas centred on the producing short, medium and long trails – some guided and others for independent hiking. A caldera rim walk, for example, was seen as an interesting alternative to the Wollumbin climb.

Some bloke years ago was pitching the idea of having a caldera walk, like a walk, right around the caldera (Other Community)

A ring walk. Like Kings Canyon in the NT. (NPWS)

I think the walking trails are a great idea. They seem to be well patronised in other areas like Tassie and New Zealand. (Tourism)

Probably guided trails ... without interrupting the biodiversity and the ecology of the place. Not just half day, or a one day, as it seems but people who want that full on, three or four day adventure. (Tourism)
If we link up all of these short walks, we can create some compelling product, experiences for us to take to market or capture people here; walk the rim! (Tourism)

I’d like to develop more walks, and to add some more long distances ones. (NPWS)

It was also suggested that additional trails on Wollumbin would be able to divert visitors from the summit. The provision of other walks, rather than the climb, was also considered as a way of broadening the current visitor market.

A better track around the bottom would be an obvious one. (Tourism)

I would love for there to be a series of tracks, specifically ones that families and disabilities can utilise ... whether it’s a circular track all the way around or a series of loops. (Tourism)

I know that there has been talk for quite some time about a base walk around Wollumbin. (NPWS)

Interestingly, some stakeholders readily identified a range of South-East Queensland national parks and visitor experiences as alternatives to climbing Wollumbin. SEQ is recognised as having substantial nature-based tourism opportunities with extensive parks and visitors facilities. In comparison, the NSW side of the border was perceived to be quite ‘under-developed’.

In the Green Cauldron, there’s a mountain of alternative bushwalks and trekking ... experiences from Binna Burra right through Springbrook, the O’Reillys. (Tourism)

Let’s not get stuck on the border issue, but also provide alternatives. (Tourism)

Natural Arch, Mount Springbrook, the lookouts that are up there. Some of the walks around Springbrook Falls and so a couple of times ... rather than go climb Wollumbin while it was shut we went in that direction [QLD] rather than back this way [NSW]. (Tourism)

I’d probably say Mt. Tamborine, if they were wanting to go and climb something. (NPWS)

While many attempted to identify substitution activities to the Wollumbin experience, others put up a range of purely alternative activities including scenic drives, tourism information and art centres, cafes and beach walks.

Check out the rainforest centre and get an experience of what it’s like out there, and spend your time looking around the heritage of Wollumbin. (Other Community)

Just drive around the countryside and look at it. Go to Caldera Art and have a look at what Andy has there in the way of interpretation. And that’s about it. That’s all that I can really offer them as far as an alternative Wollumbin experience. (Tourism)

I’d tell them to do the Cape walk, the Cape track, which takes about an hour an hour and a half or something. Then they can get views and they get a coastal experience I think that’s a really beautiful walk. (NPWS)

5.3 Cultural Alternatives

Stakeholders also identified a number of cultural alternative experiences and opportunities. If alternatives were to be used to attract visitors away from Wollumbin, then they needed to provide high quality visitor experiences, and be developed in consultation with the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community.

Whatever the products that they’re developing, they’re not quite up to standard that they need to be to make it a, because you’re not experiencing the hike or the view, you need to have something that’s to match that. (NPWS)
I know it’s going to have to be big, but also it’s going to have to be great, and it doesn’t need to include climbing the mountain. (Indigenous)

If you were going halfway, there’d have to be some sort of value-add to the experience, so whether it’s going halfway to then meet an elder and hear a story about the ... why the top view is special, that sort of thing. (NPWS)

These alternatives also needed to be **culturally sensitive** and involve extensive indigenous consultation.

So I think that’s the real dilemma for us right now, is... Whether it’s culturally right, and in the right place is the issue for us. (NPWS)

Once again, when you start dispersing the people to different areas and when you look at it in a cultural landscape, probably sometimes it seemed like a good thing to do, but it might be another. (NPWS)

I might say to you well I reckon this, this area here would be a good place to walk, and then somebody else speak up and say hey, now wait a minute, that’s the place that this ... you know? (Indigenous)

There was a recurrent theme that developing an Indigenous element into an alternative Wollumbin visitor experience could be used to deter visitors from summiting. This could be developed in a range of ways, however it would involve having **Indigenous interpretation and interaction** with visitors.

I get the feeling that people that visit the country respect the culture. Probably 9 out of 10 wouldn’t make the walk based on the cultural significance, if it was worded better and promoted better. (Tourism)

If they could have some sort of cultural heritage experience, that might then perhaps discourage them from going all the way to the top. (NPWS)

That’s where the business case wouldn’t just be about doing a cultural centre to take pressure off Wollumbin but also because our present serviceability to international tourists. (NPWS)

I think the only thing that can match [the climb to the summit] is cultural interpretation, the landscape, a real-life cultural experience. ... Not entertainment or stuff that we’ve seen in the past, but something with local Aboriginal people doing their thing. (NPWS)

Having a place within the national park where you could see the top, some sort of a viewing platform that you could walk to in an area that wasn’t going to offend, that wasn’t going into sacred sites, and you could see the top. And you could have a person there to talk, that would be a big help. ... listen to the authentic custodian talk about it. (Tourism)

### 5.4 Landscape and Viewing Alternatives

As shown earlier in this report, many identified the real value of Wollumbin in its landscape features, such as the view. It is seen from many locations around the region and appreciated for its iconic shape and meaning. The mountain is represented in much of the tourism collateral of the region.

In their responses, stakeholders often focussed on opportunities for **viewing Wollumbin**, and they identified a range of lookouts around the caldera – some of which they thought were better than the Wollumbin experience itself.

I come back again to what people were looking for and what were their reasons for climbing. If they told me they were looking for a view, they wanted to just get that view and the perspective of the landscape and the altitude, then I’d say, "The best of all lookout’s open and it’s a very, very short walk." (NPWS)
The thing is, they want to go out there for the view. They’re looking for some decent view. There are options there. (Indigenous)

Many stakeholders felt that **better capitalising on the landscape values** of Wollumbin and the caldera would be able to provide alternative experiences for a significant segment of the visitor market.

> Providing people opportunities to appreciate the scenic beauty and to understand its landscape values and how it came about, and everything. I think that’s more important than the rainforest values. (NPWS)

> I know from a personal perspective, and it’s only how I view things, for me to look at Wollumbin is better than to go to Wollumbin, to look at it in all its glory as it stands up there with the sun going down behind it. To view Wollumbin from afar is very nice. (NPWS)

> I like people to see it. I like people to appreciate it. You don’t have to go up there to do that (Other Community)

> I really am concerned for the health of the economies through tourism in our region and it does help the economy. But if there was another way for people to experience it without climbing it, that would be the ideal thing. (Tourism)

Some identified **alternative viewing spots** on nearby private land or other national parks. Interviewees spoke highly of the Blackbutts and the Pinnacle in the Border Ranges National Park, and the ‘best of all lookout’ in Springbrook NP. However these were considered to take considerable effort to visit.

> I mean the landscape, scenic beauty is something that people really enjoy and so giving that experience at the moment when you there you can’t really appreciate what it is. (NPWS)

> You do not get an appreciation of Wollumbin walking around the base. There’s hints of that majesty, of that eruption. You’ve got to see it from another viewpoint and a higher viewpoint. (NPWS)

> You can walk up to the top of this grassy knoll and you get a view straightaway to Wollumbin. So that’s the secret viewings we were looking for. (Tourism)

> Certainly if we could afford the time to go to Black Butts or the Pinnacle, we would. That’s the best view in my opinion. (Tourism)

> The Pinnacle: that to me is a far more amazing view of the landscape than going to Wollumbin, because you don’t get any of that. You get a great view of Wollumbin and you get a great view of how the landscape all lies. (NPWS)

> You want a good sunrise view, don’t worry about climbing the top of the mountain in the dark. Just go to Blackbutt Lookout and set the tripod up and your billy and that sort of stuff and watch the sun silhouette it. (NPWS)

> I think for the respect of the place and of the people, just to look at it from a distance, admire it from a distance. (Indigenous)

### 5.5 Modifying and Extending Experiences Outside the Park

In discussing alternatives to climbing, a range of current visitor sites and activities within surrounding parks was also mentioned with regard to their being **modified, or developed further**. Some of these sites currently had rudimentary level visitor facilities, such as informal picnic areas, or un-marked walking trails. Stakeholders saw opportunities to develop some of these existing sites into more formal experiences with better facilities, signage, and interpretation.
Some picnic areas as well, such as this Unicorn Swimming Hole, which is a great place for a picnic or on a hot day to swim. (NPWS)

It’s not presented in a way that ... if you were going to say the best lookout to see Wollumbin is Pinnacle, it’s not presented in that way when you get there. The setup doesn’t match the view. Without the infrastructure, it doesn’t match the amazing view. (NPWS)

It’s like a rainforest walk that you can get in other locations... That needs to be weighed up against promoting Minyon Falls more, or promoting the Cape more. (NPWS)

National Parks can do a better job of packaging up our lookouts. (NPWS)

I think it’d be great to promote Mount Nardi. (NPWS)

If it is the Border Ranges, ... then we need to sell that experience as the best opportunity to see Wollumbin, and the infrastructure needs to be much better. (NPWS)

There were also new alternative activities that could be developed within the region’s National Parks, as well as off-park locations. Within Wollumbin and the surrounding parks there were considered areas suitable for a range of recreation activities such as bushwalking tracks, mountain biking, climbing and abseiling, horse riding, canoeing, tree canopy walks and viewing platforms, events and more. Many of these activities were seen as providing opportunities to tie together experiences between National Parks and other land tenures.

Mt Nullum, it turns out, we had the Adventure Australia guys come out and do an audit of the rock faces. You know what, this is actually really appropriate for teaching rock climbing and abseiling and basic skills. (Tourism)

If you wanted to do mountain biking, you can ... and this is fantastic sort of outdoorish, nature-based type, adventure trail, exercise trail. (NPWS)

You do just the tower with a viewing platform on the top. (NPWS)

The opportunity for trail development for canoe trails, for horse riding trails, for mountain bike trails and for walking trails might, the goose laid the golden egg here, but it’s going to take some thinking about and some investment. (Tourism)

There’s a potential for some other experience or some other walking options or whatever. If you get up on Brummy’s lookout and look at the western side of Mt Warning from that vantage point you know there's big room up there. What’s possible in terms of climbing or abseiling or other ways of engaging with the Park and with the mountain, but still being immersed in the subtropical rainforest. (Tourism)

Improving Brummy’s; improving The Pinnacle; Mt Nullum. These features ... some of them are more accessible than others. I think if we want to showcase the caldera from a variety of perspectives, there are options like that that we could ... I’d like to see them further developed. (Other Community)

We looked at Hatton’s Bluff, so we canoe up the Tweed River, we go the other way. come up the Tweed River, abseil and climb at Hatton’s Bluff, cross the River go out Mt Nullum, go out Mt Nullum, travel Mt Nullum from north to south, come out on Smith’s Creek Road, over Mt Chowan and eventually if you keep riding or walking you come out at the foothills Mt Jerusalem. (Tourism)

Further, several surrounding national parks, such as Mebbin and Mt Jerusalem, were seen as very underdeveloped in terms of the range of visitor experiences being offered. These parks were considered to be accessible to visitors already visiting Wollumbin, however they were absent of formal visitor experiences.
In Mebbin, though it has fantastic World Heritage lagoons... There are pros and against opening an area so ecologically sensitive up like that but at the same time, my feeling is we need to show people how important and how wonderful, and what is so important about this place. (NPWS)

Koonyum Range (east side of Mt Jerusalem NP) has an informal lookout, which was an old state forest lookout, but it has got no park facilities there whatsoever. (NPWS)

Mt Jerusalem NP is World Heritage quality... it's one of those places where we will start promoting a bit more for its mountain biking and its horse riding just because people are allowed to do that. And Mebbin is the other one where they're allowed to do that and probably develop a lot more mountain biking in the forestry plantation in the old plantation areas. (NPWS)

Some saw an opportunity for more exclusive tourism experiences to be developed within the region. Stakeholders knew of very few tour operators with permits, so the focus of activities remained on the independent self-drive visitor market. There was also some interest in up-market visitor activities, such as 5 star ‘glamping’, in addition to the independent drive and bushwalking experiences.

If you helicopter in and you’ve got this isolated, where no other people go. It’s extremely exclusive. You get a tent that’s like a five-star tent. You’re in the middle of the bush. You get catered to, you get the whole silver service thing. (Tourism)

We don’t have much upmarket or different types of accommodation in national parks. It tends to be camping or nothing. (Tourism)

To have a helicopter, what a fantastic landscape, why can’t we land in there, and the day things, half day things. ... You know, or ballooning, maybe there are some points where ballooning could be an interesting way to get around the caldera and stuff, that would that be in launch points, in parks and reserves, why not, you know? (NPWS)

Stakeholders also identified off-park activities that they were involved in or believed could influence visitation to Wollumbin and the region. These off-park activities were being developed by tourism organisations, local and state government and at times NPWS. They are included here to demonstrate the type of tourism experiences being worked on within the region. The primary activities discussed were the rail-trail, track and trail networks (walking and mountain biking – across a range of tenures) and the adventure activities on Mt Nullum.

To my mind, if you had a walk that went from Murwillumbah, or a cycle that went from Murwillumbah to Byron, along the corridor- how good would that be...from here [Murwillumbah] to Casino, it would be contiguous with twenty-four National Parks. (Other Community)

We’re working on the Rail Trail. (Tourism)

While there was interest in developing new experiences and attractions within National Parks, some were cautious of the impacts of creating too many new or upgrading activities.

The Lyrebird Walk, which gives some visitors a taste of it. Of the vegetation on the lower slopes. I don’t know that I’d want to see it further exploited beyond what’s there now, because that just magnifies the maintenance and protection tasks that you already have. (Other Community)

The Pinnacle's getting up-graded again, although it’s not going to be as far because of that endangered plant issue that we have got there. (NPWS)

The stories or threats of gondolas going from valley floor to the top of Mount Warning are really quite scary from my point of view. I don’t think that’s what we want to turn something that has cultural and tourism and metaphorical significance into just another easy-peas recreational option that you pay a lot of money to access. (Tourism)

Whether you are at risk of introducing elements in there you don’t want in there [when opening up new areas]. (Other Community)
6 ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPECIFIC ALTERNATIVES

As shown in Report 1, Wollumbin and the surrounding caldera region has been the focus of nature-based tourism discussions and planning for many years. Four particular tourism experiences (namely Indigenous tours, a visitor/cultural centre, ziplines and ecolodges) have been discussed and debated over the years, and noted in several management, planning and tourism plans and documents.

Section 5 above summarised stakeholders’ freely elicited ideas about alternatives to climbing Wollumbin. This current section documents the answers to questions regarding four specific experiences.

6.1 Indigenous Tours

All of the stakeholders interviewed believed that developing a specific Indigenous component to the Wollumbin experience was a favourable idea. They offered overwhelming support for Indigenous tours being offered in or around Wollumbin, as determined appropriate by the local indigenous community. Indigenous tours and experiences were considered to be of particular interest for the international visitor market, a market for which there was considered limited experiences for at this stage.

Greater Aboriginal involvement and storytelling is a no-brainer. (NPWS)

The cultural experience sells and that’s why tourism bodies keep pushing that cultural experience, because it’s one of the number one sellers. (NPWS)

I think that a lot of people are interested in the Aboriginal heritage here, so I think that those things would be great. (Other Community)

From an experience perspective we lack completely anything Indigenous, but for an area that is steeped in culture and symbolism… I would love to see guided tours. (Tourism)

Huge potential... There’s a sense of ownership, and a sense of belonging. I think only they can share their experience and their perspectives. (Tourism)

What I really, really want is an Aboriginal person to be with us to tell us those stories while we’re standing there looking at things. (Tourism)

International visitors find that fascinating and want to know more. So their question then comes: "Can we get an Aboriginal guide to tell us more?" (Tourism)

Providing an Indigenous tourism experience to visitors was seen as a missing element that could attract visitors to other elements of the Wollumbin experience. It is Indigenous people and their stories which were seen to bring the uniqueness and individuality of Wollumbin’s natural features. Further, some thought good Indigenous experiences possibly deter climbing to the summit.

I think that as far as hiking, as far as mountain biking, as far as all the other adventure activities or the eco retreats and lodges, I think the only thing that can compete with that [walking Wollumbin] is the cultural experience. (NPWS)

They can sit down with Aboriginal people and learn the significance of the mountain. Once they get an understanding of that, I’m sure that they’ll say, "Well, yeah." ... They’ll think twice about going there. (NPWS)

If they could have some sort of cultural heritage experience that might then perhaps discourage them from going all the way to the top. (NPWS)
For some stakeholders, it is the Indigenous connection and stories around Wollumbin and other natural features which provide the most interesting level of understanding into these features.

You can climb a mountain or you can walk in a forest or go for a paddle on a lake or whatever, a paddle is a paddle and a walk is a walk, really. But what differentiates, in my opinion anyway, those generic, nature based experiences is culture, because the culture is the thing that is unique to that land; there’s the stories there. (Tourism)

In addition to Wollumbin, there were other potential cultural sites where activities could take place, including The Pinnacle and the Sphinx and even as far as Nimbin Rocks and linking to cultural activities in Byron Bay and Tweed Heads. Further, stakeholders raised the connection of the tribal groups around Wollumbin who could also provide activities at these different sites. There was a view that these different sites and activities could be linked together to tell a broader landscape story.

I think there’re a lot of other places. You can drive the full circle of the mountain on good roads. There’s plenty of places where you can go and you can view the mountain from different perspectives. (NPWS)

The Pinnacle has pretty significant involvement … like the Aboriginal heritage around The Pinnacle, apparently, is quite strong. People from the community have told me that you’ve got Sphinx Rock, The Pinnacle, and the peak of Mount Warning. They’re the three main features for the Aboriginal heritage perspective. (Other Community)

The connectivity with the people within the valley down there, which is a different group, and the whole … Because we’re crisscrossed by ancient trails here, and it’s absolutely amazing. (Tourism)

Other than the regional links there was also interest in a cultural centre, located in the caldera (but not necessarily on mountain) which could provide appropriate cultural interpretation and experience of Wollumbin.

I don’t know if there’s any opportunity to link any of the Aboriginal places in this area on a sort of a … like a circuit type thing, so to link the stories together and including the Cultural Centre. If there are any Aboriginal art centres, put it all together into one experience. (NPWS)

It doesn’t have to be on Wollumbin either. If there’s another site we can interpret, then we’ll leave Wollumbin just has the occasional person walk it, then all the better. (NPWS)

In a similar vein to the challenges of developing culturally appropriate tour experiences, having enough Indigenous people from the local community with the interest, skills and dedication to provide quality cultural tourism experiences was viewed as a challenge. ‘Make sure it’s sustainable and interesting. Not the McDonald’s style, but I think it’s untapped, yeah. It’s a huge opportunity.’ (NPWS). ‘Experience in the Aboriginal people, the availability of Aboriginal people that are approved by the local Aboriginal community. So getting the guides, being available, the guides being committed and being wow and fantastic… So, you need those people. (NPWS)

6.2 Visitor Centre

Several years ago a World Heritage Visitor Centre proposal was developed by the Tweed Shire Council for the top of Mt Nullum, with views towards Wollumbin. The top of Mt Nullum is partially Council owned land and partially NPWS. Stakeholders were asked for their attitudes towards this style of experience.

There were several stakeholders who were optimistic about developing a World Heritage Visitor Centre on the top of Mt Nullum, with a focus on visitor education and interpretation, as well as bushwalking and adventure tourism (rock climbing etc) possibilities. Stakeholders spoke of the potential to educate visitors about the caldera as well as to link visitors to the coast with river cruises and a wide range of visitor activities that could be developed around the mountain and nearby Tweed River.
I think it’s a fantastic idea... I think Nullum should be explored. I think we should be looking at how do you turn that into a place to go. (NPWS)

You can get a total appreciation of the geology from that there... I think it would be a great visitor experience and it would be like the sort of thing maybe you see at the top of Mount Wellington and Hobart, where they’ve got a really good centre set up. It’s done sympathetically with the rest of the environment, and you can take in the whole vista. It would be a good thing, but logistically difficult. (Other Community)

To enhance the visitor experience and to extend the stay.... Would have been, again, a magical experience. (Tourism)

It lends itself to doing what they do in Queenstown and create some sort of a way of getting up there quite easily from the valley floor. Having all of that world heritage rainforest information at a place like that and then from there, you’ve got roping, expeditioning, all sorts of options around the Visitors Centre. (Tourism)

Some of the respondents were more cautious about managing the costs of visitor centres and the demand for such projects. However, there was more interest in an Indigenous cultural centre idea, similar to that at the Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre in Far North Queensland.

I just have a bit of an allergic reaction to visitor centres. They’ve become an enormous financial burden on councils. (Tourism)

Whether it’d be visited or I don’t know, they’d have to certainly do their research on it. It’d cost a lot of money. Whether it’d be a white elephant or not. (Tourism)

It will never work. I mean, it’s off the beaten track. (Tourism)

I’m not that keen on visitor centres to be quite honest... [But] if there’s some way of incorporating a keeping place or an Aboriginal cultural centre where you could see marvellous work or purchase something really authentic. (NPWS)

There’s a heap of visitor centres and gateway centres around the world that are going broke, so visitor centres cost a lot of money to build first... So if you’re going to do it, do it well. Make it unique and really do that through the Indigenous area... You don’t want to build a big white elephant. (Tourism)

I like the Mossman Gorge idea, if there’s going to be something there. I don’t know whether it should be called World Heritage Visitor Centre... Maybe it’s the hub, like an Aboriginal cultural centre hub. The Mossman Gorge has got a cafe, all staffed. The people do hospitality training. There’re local artists, all that sort of stuff. (NPWS)

There were several other notable challenges for the Mount Nullum site for a major tourism activity. These included the recognition of Mt Nullum as a site of cultural significance to the local Indigenous people and well as access to the site. There were concerns that developing tourism activities on Mt Nullum to take away pressure from Wollumbin may bring with it addition cultural concerns. It was suggest that an extended process of consultation with Indigenous community would be required to understand the meaning of such concerns.

Once you remove pressures from somewhere else, you’re just putting the pressure somewhere else, onto another place. Regardless of all that, it comes back to proper and adequate consultation with the indigenous community to work with those cultural concerns. (NPWS)

I have to talk to them other mobs [about Mt Nullum’s significance]. (Indigenous)

From that prospective, Mount Nullum’s significant [to Indigenous people] plus... it’s also got major access issues. (NPWS)
It’s an awkward spot to get to in terms of vehicle traffic, then you’ve got a gondola goes through top to bottom. (Tourism)

6.3 Ziplines

A zipline project had been initiated in the Tweed in the 1990s. This was a joint project between a local landholder and State Forests at the time. The project was started but never completed. Stakeholders were asked about their support for adventure style activities. Several stakeholders knew of ziplines that had been developed in other national parks, such as in Tasmania, and showed some support for zipline infrastructure.

It was the thrill of going through the canopies and there was, every time you stopped on a platform, it was around the tree and they showed you how the platform was connected to the tree without harming the tree. It was like a clamp system that it just ... there was a pressure and weight and it allowed the tree to grow. It told you how far above the ground and where you were in the canopy. What’s likely to be in this part of the canopy and all this type of stuff. (Tourism)

I can’t imagine it would be a very huge market, but ... It’s probably something worth exploring as long as it was environmentally sound, as long as the biodiversity and environmental aspects were adhered to. (Tourism)

There’s more of an appetite for it... Adventure Australia, you know, they bring out 80 - 90 people at a time, it’s all done on private properties. I guess what I’m saying is the market’s already here, they’re just doing in private property. If the facilities like that were there, they would be utilised. (Tourism)

The whole area, particularly Border Ranges, but also Nightcap with its mountain biking and something like a zipline, to offer that adventure so you can market it, I think that would be great. (NPWS)

It’s an opportunity... if it’s in park, it should be in plantation. We’ve got the plantation, so we could probably do that. (NPWS)

However, some stakeholders were concerned about the viability of zipline/adventure projects, particularly around market demand. ‘I think it’s a great idea, I just don’t know how commercially viable something like that’s going to be, unless you built other things around it and you made like an adventure park or you made ... it wasn’t just that experience alone.’ (Tourism). There were also noted concerns about how the local community and Indigenous people would view such adventure tourism activities. Specifically they questioned whether such activities would be supported by Indigenous and environmentally focussed community. For some the focus on adventure activities was seen as talking the focus away from the more traditional focus on nature and promotion of indigenous values within the NP system.

You’d want to minimise the amount of built infrastructure you’ve got superimposed on the natural world. (Other Community)

Those are things that ... You do get the environmentalists and the greenies jacked-up about. (Tourism)

That was highly controversial and was strongly opposed by the Byron community and I think the same thing would happen again. (NPWS)

Yeah well, the first thing what I think of zip-lines is the first thing that comes in my mind is the cultural perspective; is it culturally appropriate? What do the local people feel or think about it? (Tourism)
I think the promotion of more nature based type not activity based stuff I think is what people want and have more indigenous stuff rather than adventure stuff.... I think the community would still maintain a strong opposition to it. (NPWS)

I don’t know about that [ziplines]. I think we can do better than that. I actually think we can do better than that. (Indigenous)

6.4 Ecolodge

In the 1990s and early 2000s an ecolodge proposal was put forward for the Tweed caldera. The idea was to attract the Emirates Group, however the proposal was unsuccessful and the interested group went on to develop Wolgan Valley instead, west of the Blue Mountains. The current study was interested in canvassing stakeholders’ attitudes towards the idea of a luxury-level ecolodge in the caldera region.

Indeed, stakeholders confirmed a lack of accommodation within the Wollumbin region, and were supportive towards the ecolodge idea and other accommodation facilities. Some were interested in seeing accommodation facilities developed within the NP tenure (though it should be noted this was not the focus of the questioning).

Physically in national parks, the only response we’ve got is that you can camp if you’ve got a tent or if you’ve got a van. So there’s no lodge type accommodation, there’s no self-contained. I think any form of development like that is certainly a gap in the market that’s lacking. Particularly for that higher end. (Tourism)

I think the Tweed Valley undersells itself when it come to the potential to attract well-heeled international visitors into what is a really special place. (Tourism)

It’s in dire need of a really upmarket, eco-lodge type scenario. It has to be really beautifully designed, and quite high-end. (NPWS)

I think within the Parks in this particular area, they don’t have a lot of infrastructure in them... I know that there are a couple of very successful ecolodge type places in Queensland ... right on the border. (NPWS)

While some stakeholders felt support of the development of ecolodge style accommodation, others saw them as risky developments in terms of investment/development as well as the need to attract a new visitor market to the region.

I don’t know, the picture I get from that is what happened up at Kooralbyn near Beaudesert. Again, that was a similar concept and I’m not sure who did that, but that’s a worry. Whether you’re left with just pieces of infrastructure there that sits there and rots and then nothing happens to it. (Tourism)

It would be out there by itself with no other activities or restaurants or high-end product that would need to go with it. (Tourism)

I think an ecolodge is a good idea, high-end but I think whether the feasibility of it all or whether people would prefer to come and stay at a high-end Byron at Byron being on the beach, or whether they want to spend there. (NPWS)

Similar to the other proposals outlined in this section, stakeholders saw cultural, community and environmental issues as critical to whether they would be supported.

I’ve got no problem with it, outside of parks, and if they’re using the national parks, then they have all the respect for those values. (Other Community)
Whether it’s an interp centre or an ecolodge … both have got to be a fit with the land, with the place. I mean that on every sense like environmental fit, a cultural fit, a spiritual fit, the whole gamut, not just commercial fit. (Tourism)

You can’t comment until the place is surveyed properly, but certainly wouldn’t support it in any areas that have got any cultural significance, at any rate. (Indigenous)

7 CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVES

Stakeholders were asked about the perceived challenges of developing alternative activities to climbing Wollumbin. Four dominant challenges arose relating to: an under-developed tourism industry, lack of resources, stakeholder collaboration and managing community concerns.

7.1 Under-developed Tourism Industry

Stakeholders frequently commented on the under-developed nature of the tourism industry as a challenge in developing new visitor activities in the Wollumbin region. It was recognised that several small operators had tried to set up activities, but did not have the capital behind them to stay in business. As a result, the region remained without key tourism services and resources.

Everyone feels defeatist here, in my view… They come and go and they’re like the shooting star. They’re in it for five minutes. If it doesn’t happen tomorrow, they’re out. They’re gone again. There’s no stayers here. (NPWS)

There’s no major tourism organisation in the area that can actually claim to be here but 20 years … All your tour operators are sort of hand to mouth, you know, if the bus breaks down, they go bust the next week. (NPWS)

The standard of accommodation outside Byron is not fantastic. (Tourism)

I don’t think ideas are a problem. There’s a lot of people with a lot of great ideas around here. It’s just creating an experience and then turning it into a tourism product. So, providing stimulation, resources, and support. (Tourism)

There was a perceived need to slowly change the visitor market to provide/support the development of other types of tourism activities. Current visitation is primarily domestic self-drive market which does not use ‘traditional’ tourism products and services.

Predominantly the Tweed is really immature when it comes to tourism development and the structure of product and markets we work with and the distribution channels we work within. (Tourism)

Byron’s not like Cairns. You go to Cairns and you do trips everywhere because there’s so not so much to do in Cairns, you either go out to a reef or you go up to Daintree or a rainforest. Byron people come to Byron and they don’t go out of Byron because they come to Byron for the beaches and the café, and the lifestyle and all that sort of stuff. (NPWS)

Apart from the buses that go to Nimbin, there’s nothing else and I don’t think the market’s there. (NPWS)

A further challenge was identified around the history of involvement of National Parks and the development of its tourism/recreation activities. This was in part related to the Park’s logging-to-conservation development, as well as to the background and educational focus of Rangers in the area. Several NPWS stakeholders saw it as important to engage more with sustainable tourism and the Park’s visitors.
When the Forestry areas came across, we had a massive intake of new rangers, who just mostly finished their conservation degrees and most of them did a Bachelor of applied science in environmental management, not in recreational parks and recreation. Whereas the ones prior to that, our focus was parks and recreation management or wildlife management. (NPWS)

There are definitely more people in the parks doing more visitation. That’s where we’ve been caught short in Northern Rivers because we just don’t have that [recreation opportunities]. (NPWS)

I think we need to keep that relevancy and that may mean we have to change the way we look at conservation... if it is a lock out mentality, then it’s difficult to maintain that relevancy. (NPWS)

7.2 Lack of Funding and Other Resources

Appropriate resources were seen as essential for the development of sustainable alternative experiences. Nearly all stakeholders spoke of the lack of funding within NPWS or other government agencies to support the development of Wollumbin.

The trouble is National Parks, or the Federal Government, has got to cough up some funding to enable this to happen. If there is no funding to create another track and beautiful lookouts and whatever, and facilities, toilets, all that sort of ... if there’s no money there, we’re just talking for nothing. (Indigenous)

We struggle to get money for interpreting material, such as new signs. Upgrading a track, if there was the will behind it I think it would be fantastic, but I think that would be a huge challenge, just getting the money to put towards it. (NPWS)

You can’t sell something as being the best place to see Wollumbin if... we don’t even have the time to fix the bad infrastructure... how can we sell an experience as being the best when we can’t even fix the infrastructure? (NPWS)

While creating alternatives for summiting Wollumbin was the focus of this project, many stakeholders also spoke of a lack of funding (private and public) for any new visitor activities or services in the region at large.

Resources are really hard to come by in this area and I think it’s that we’re not a mature tourism destination. (Tourism)

There’s no [government] money around for development. (Tourism)

I argue and advocate that our region needs seed funding, with certain elements in there to help it grow. The industry is not large players. They are small players up here and that is the biggest constraint we have to developing that range of products on the ground. (Tourism)

Indigenous cultural experiences/cultural centres were seen as particularly important opportunities, requiring support from government agencies or other partners during all stages of development.

It would need to be a really strong commitment by the various government departments. (NPWS)

Well, we have to have the backing of the government. Where’s the money coming from? You can’t develop; you can’t even start planning to develop a business without a business plan of some sort. You need funding for that. (Indigenous)

Funding for infrastructure, funding for land acquisition ... Then I think what comes next is training and education for community members that are willing to be involved, whether it be on-the-job training, pre-job training... . (NPWS)
It would be a good opportunity for the Indigenous community to develop a business, but they've got to be prepared, they've got to be trained, and everything's got to be there to back them up; I don't see any issues with non-Indigenous businesses even if they employ Indigenous tour guides. Again, there's got to be a balance there. (Tourism)

Over the past decades there have been several attempts made to develop cultural tourism experiences around Wollumbin but these businesses were never fully established. Long-term commitment, resourcing and support were required.

A guy called and wanted to do minibus tours around the caldera at various locations, but it never went far. Never got off the ground. (Other Community)

It’d take a little while to develop, but if it’s done properly. We’ve seen a lot in the past that was put together really quick and really fast without a good sort of goal and vision. (NPWS)

I say bring it on, but what I’m looking for is longevity. Longevity for a man or woman from the Indigenous community to jump on board and work with us to create a business for them, which can then be handed down generation to generation as opposed to here is the tourist business, today gone tomorrow. (Tourism)

To build all that up to make that happen for Wollumbin is a big journey. (NPWS)

7.3 Need for Greater Collaboration

The need for greater collaboration among stakeholders was seen as a further challenge. Collaboration on the provision of information regarding Wollumbin was seen as critical (for example, during its closures), as was communication regarding the cultural wishes and desires of the Indigenous custodians.

Further, NPWS stakeholders commented the challenges they have in marketing visitor experiences to the local tourism industry and visitor market. For some, local government and other park boundaries worked against better collaborations for visitor management.

Where we had a lot of grief initially was when Wollumbin got closed. The people weren’t looking at the official website they’re looking at everything else and the dual name, Mount Warning and Wollumbin. A lot of people were still calling it Mount Warning and so they weren’t looking at Wollumbin to see it was closed, they were looking at Mount Warning that was open. (NPWS)

We try hard with the 30 Great Walks, but it hasn’t been marketed hard. Some of that’s because we don’t actually have the money and the government doesn’t let you market that way. (NPWS)

They [visitors] see that Wollumbin is part of the Byron Bay experience, they see that Lennox Head’s part of the Byron Bay ... and Nimbin. They’re all part of the Byron Bay experience, even though they’re not in the Shire...but there’s never been any kind of engagement or program that really effectively helps to distribute the visitors, I would say mainly because of previous councils in Byron Shire. (Tourism)

For me it is probably one of my biggest barriers, because all roads lead back to Council. (Tourism)

There was also a need for better collaboration among local government areas, tourism operators and NPWS for the provision of sustainable visitor activities and experiences.

That’s where we have to play together, Tweed and us. That’s where Destination Tweed really can be vital to anything we do. (NPWS)

I think bundle together the tracks and trails and if you can connect all these different experiences up so that people have access to them and we all hop in the sandpit and share the shovel and
that the funding like the funding like the T-QUAL, that will really sit up and take notice for our little Northeast corner pocket. (Tourism)

It’s going to take Tweed Shire Council and the National Parks and private landholders to actually get their heads together and get into agreement about some things. That’s significantly challenging because some of those groups are obstructionist and just don’t have the budgets to drive what’s required. (Tourism)

Further to the collaboration required of government agencies and NPWS, several stakeholders spoke of the need to engage with entrepreneurs to develop new and interesting visitor activities.

Let’s be a little bit more sensitive to everybody’s needs. Let’s make sure there’s a win-win in it financially for Indigenous, local council, state government, local or a private operator and landholders or locals that have an entrepreneurial spirit and ability to make things happen. If we leave this to bureaucracies, nothing will happen is my opinion. ... Well that’s my experience. (Tourism)

Entrepreneurs and bureaucracies are at loggerheads consistently. This will be another one of those challenges. (Tourism)

I think it’s pretty exciting times if there is a preparedness with national parks, state government, local government, to actually be serious about being creative and making the place economically viable. I’m not convinced that that’s currently the case. I hope that changes. (Tourism)

### 7.4 Need for Community Support

Finally, community support – both local and Indigenous - was important for any alternative visitor activities to be developed. Unless the Indigenous community was heavily involved in the development of alternative activities to the climbing of Wollumbin, there were concerns that similar issues could arise again or that the provision of cultural tourism activities would remain under-developed.

Unless you get the Aboriginal mob then they have that same collective vision for the area prepared to work together in terms of involving Aboriginal people it’s not going to happen. (NPWS)

I think it’s just changing the attitude and mind-shift of the people, I think... I think that would be the biggest challenge and even with the locals. (Indigenous)

Stakeholders were also very sensitive to environmental concerns of development within Parks and believed it was important to recognise antagonism which would arise if activities were deemed damaging.

I think any form of physical infrastructure within national parks comes with a variety of challenges based around regulation and obviously doing it to ensure that the environment is protected. (Tourism)

For us to be responsible for marketing the area we also need that educational message through that, and that movement control to protect or preserve what the people come and see so it's sustainable. (Tourism)

The developments ... need to be done in a way that takes into mind the community and the environment. ... I think the community wants to see the attractions that are done in a way that protects and showcases our environment. (Tourism)

Getting the balance right, amongst all the different stakeholders. You’re never going to get all the people happy all the time. But working hard on finding a consensus that works would be an important thing to do... To actually run a good community consultation process. (Tourism)
8 CONCLUSION

This Report has presented the findings of a qualitative stage of the project which sought the views, attitudes and ideas held by key Wollumbin stakeholders. A total of 22 interviews were conducted with representatives from NSW NPWS/OEH, Indigenous groups, local government, the tourism industry, and other regional associations.

Analysis revealed five overarching themes, which brought together the main issues surrounding alternatives for climbing Wollumbin: 1) The Wollumbin Experience; 2) Cultural and Other Management Issues; 3) Stakeholder Identified Alternatives; 4) Attitudes towards Specific Alternatives; and 5) Challenges in Developing Alternatives.

These core themes, along with their concomitant sub-themes, help to provide insight with regard to the development and implementation of sustainable alternative experiences to summiting Wollumbin.

In conclusion to this report, a number of summary points can be made:

- There is a strong commitment and connection to Wollumbin and the National Park; the mountain has a special, sacred and unique role in the life of the Wollumbin community;
- Indigenous ownership of and connection to Wollumbin - both past and present - is recognised by all stakeholders, and seen as vital to any tourism plans;
- The summit climb is paramount in the iconic Wollumbin visitor experience, and may have no true substitute, yet there is potential for several other walks and sustainable nature-based experiences;
- Current funding for resources, infrastructure and management in Wollumbin National Park is stretched, and this presents challenges for developing new alternative experiences;
- Tourism stakeholders expressed a desire for more high quality, nature-based tourism experiences in the Wollumbin region – it is important to build up skills and infrastructure, and keep more visitors in the region;
- The conflicting messages about the cultural appropriateness of summit access causes confusion for many stakeholders;
- There is a great deal of goodwill among stakeholder groups, and so many shared ideas and opportunities expressed. At the same time, however, there needs to be better engagement and communication among the Indigenous community, National Parks and tourism.
APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW GUIDE

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

PREAMBLE
Thanks again for agreeing to meet with me today. I’m [Name of Interviewer], as you know, from Southern Cross University and you would have received your information sheet about this project and an informed consent form regarding participation in this interview? (Reminder to Sign)

Just to remind you, we are conducting a research project on behalf of NSW NPWS titled identifying visitor preferences for alternative experiences to climbing Wollumbin (Mt. Warning). You were selected as a key stakeholder given your involvement in the region and/or Wollumbin National Park, to help identify the alternative and/or complementary opportunities and experiences that may be available to climbing Wollumbin.

Participation is voluntary and if you agree to participate the interview will take between 30-40 minutes. All personal information, including your name and phone number, will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with any person or group that is not associated with this research.

Before we get started can I please just confirm that you understand that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw at any time? Also, is it OK if we record this conversation for research purposes?

Great, let’s get started.

INTERVIEW (see below)

WRAP-UP
That’s all we have for now, and I’m conscious of your time. Unless you have any other last issues or questions you’d like to discuss? Thank you very much for your time and insights.

If you have any other relevant information, documents or data that relates to this project, please don’t hesitate make us aware of it.

If you wish to contact the researchers for further queries about this research, please note the contact numbers provided in the Information Statement.

THANK YOU.
INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Can you start by telling me a little bit about you, and what you do in relation to the region and Wollumbin?
   *Probe - personally and professionally: connection, history, involvement with Mt Warning.*

2. How would you describe your vision for the importance of Wollumbin - Mt Warning in terms of visitor experiences to the region?

3. What would you say would be the biggest issues for Wollumbin-Mt Warning NP right now?
   *Probe - impacts, closure of summit walk, increasing/type of visitors tourists, sacred site for Aboriginal people etc.*

4. Who do you think visits Wollumbin and what do they do there? *(Probe - categories of visitor types and their key motivations)*

5. What do you think about people climbing Wollumbin? Does it make a difference if they get to the top?
   *Probe - cultural, management, environmental, economic, social perspectives*

6. Recently, the climb up Wollumbin was shut because of the storm damage. What alternative activities did you/would you recommend to visitors to the Caldera?

7. Do you see any potential to develop further any of the existing visitor experiences of Wollumbin and the surrounding National Parks? *(Probe - Mebbin, Border Ranges, Nightcap, Mt Jerusalem NP’s)*

8. Over the past few years, a range of proposals have been floated for new visitor experiences within Wollumbin and the surrounding National Parks. I’m interested in your views towards some of these and insights as to why they have not developed.

   *(a) Wollumbin National Park - Guided indigenous walk to summit*

   *(b) Other parks: Mt Nullum World Heritage Visitor Centre, Zipline/Flying fox (adventure tourism activities) in Jerusalem NP/SF, Ecolodges in Caldera,*

9. In terms of visitor experiences to the Wollumbin and surrounds, are there any other tourism experiences that you would like to see developed?

10. What do you think would be the greatest challenges to developing any of the new experiences in the region?

11. Can you think of anybody else that we should be talking to about these issues?