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Sydney Harbour National Park Plan of Management Draft Amendment: Sustainable Visitor Use (Clark Island, Shark Island, Rodd Island and Fort Denison)

Sydney Business Chamber is dedicated to creating, advocating, and promoting Sydney as a City of Opportunity – a global city to invest, work, live and visit. A division of Business NSW, formerly NSW Business Chamber, Sydney Business Chamber represents over 145 leading corporations and through our work we drive the economic growth, prosperity, and sustainability of our great City.

The Chamber values the opportunity to comment on the amendments to the Sydney Harbour National Park Plan of Management. Sydney Harbour is the most iconic and portrays some of the most recognisable images of Australia that is presented to the world. Sydney Harbour and its natural environment plays a central role in the economic, social, and environmental fabric of our City and is critically important for the NSW visitor economy.

Given this economic, environment and social significance Sydney Business Chamber has always taken a strong and close interest in how our Harbour is managed and regulated.

Balancing the competing needs of environmental and cultural protection, pressures from human settlement and the growing demand for visitor access and active uses requires careful consideration. Ensuring the long-term environmental sustainability of these precious islands for future generations while also enabling them to be regularly accessed by locals and visitors alike, demands a more active and nuanced management approach than has been adopted in the 2012 Plan of Management.

To this end the Chamber supports the amendments to the current Plan which lifts the numerical restrictions on visitor numbers to Shark, Rodd and Clark Islands, and balances this with changes in the permissible activities on Fort Denison. We know that rationing daily visitation does not, in itself, ensure the Islands unique cultural and environmental values are protected.

A management system that sets arbitrary visitor limitations that does not necessarily reflect the true capacity of the Island to cater for visitation and environment protection is a blunt policy tool. A wedding with 250 guests, with associated marque, catering and sound equipment would have a much greater impact than 500 picnickers passively enjoying the vista from a blanket laid gently on an Island bunker.

A more effective and modern approach is to adopt a case-by-case assessment of each event or proposal to ensure that there is a sustainable and safely managed approach to environmental or amenity to minimise impacts.

In that light, Sydney Business Chamber supports the adoption of a risk-based assessment approach where individual events are assessed on their merits and against clear and transparent criteria, procedures, and policies. The proposed Event Management Guidelines provide these and their adoption is supported.

The Chamber also supports the proposed amendments to enable more of Fort Denison to be open to the public and leased for commercially based visitor uses. Removing some of the restrictions on storage which has restricted the operation of a restaurant or café is also valuable and potentially has a lower environmental impact than daily deliveries of supplies.

The proposed amendments to the Plan of Management will maximise the value and access to this public space and enable more people to use these precious assets especially during special events such as New Year's Eve and the Sydney to Hobart yacht race. They will provide opportunities for all Sydneysiders and visitors to access and experience sometimes hidden and restricted treasures while also ensuring they are appropriately preserved and protected for future generations.

Sydney Business Chamber values the opportunity to comment on the Sydney Harbour Plan of Management amendments and looks forward to continuing to work with National Parks and the NSW Government to improve access and appropriate opportunities that enhance the prosperity, productivity and sustainability of Sydney as a global city.

Should you have any questions or would like to discuss in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me at katherine.oregan@thechamber.com.au

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K O'Regan', with a long, sweeping underline.

Katherine O'Regan
Executive Director
Sydney Business Chamber