



18 May 2026

RE: MP06_0310-Mod-4 Emirates One&Only MOD 4 – Temporary Changes to Helicopter Transport

To whom it may concern,

Thanks for allowing the Australian Climbing Association NSW to submit feedback and recommendations about the proposed *MP06_0310-Mod-4 Emirates One&Only MOD 4 - Temporary Changes to Helicopter Transport*

About ACANSW

Our organisation has over 500 members with the affiliated Sydney Rock Climbing Club and represents rock climbers throughout the state of NSW. Our aim is to advocate and promote responsible and sustainable access to and use of rock climbing areas. We are the main communication channel between the rock climbing community and land managers.

ACANSW Submission

Our submission will focus on the location of the flight path, and the volume of helicopter traffic - and how these will directly affect our members and the wider rock climbing community.

Flight path

Flights paths used by helicopters from Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley directly cross established and well used rock climbing areas located within National Park managed land.

The Australian Rock Climbing Association NSW (ACANSW) prefers the proposed modified flight path (across Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area and Wolgan River) in preference to the current approved flight path down Carne Creek. This is because Carne Creek has greater use by rock climbing user groups and past use of Carne Creek as a helicopter flightpath was seen as highly detrimental to rock climbing safety. Carne Creek area contains hundreds of recognized climbing routes, some that are considered world class and visited by international climbers.

The proposed modified flight path still crosses rock climbing areas on Sunnyside Ridge Plateau in Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area including [Sahara Point](#) and [Firecat Walls](#) that contain a total of 82 recognized climbing routes.

Increase in flight traffic

The Australian Rock Climbing Association NSW (ACANSW) strongly objects to the increase in daily flights as part of the proposal for the following key reasons:

- Rock climbing is fundamentally incompatible with frequent tourist helicopter traffic due to the need for constant verbal communication for climber safety.
- Thirty helicopter movements per day (15 arrivals and 15 departures) would create continual aircraft noise across nationally significant climbing areas and wilderness landscapes.
- The Gardens of Stone region is one of the last remaining quiet wilderness climbing areas near Sydney, and this proposal would significantly degrade its wilderness values.
- Noise modelling only considered nearby residences and did not consider bush user groups, for whom the noise impact is likely to be significantly greater. Flights within 200m vertical of rock climbing areas make verbal safety communication impossible for climbers.
- Helicopter flights for private luxury tourism are not an appropriate use of national park airspace and flights should be limited to emergency services and essential land management only.
- Road access for 2WD vehicles to Wolgan Valley is expected to reopen by 2026, removing any practical justification for expanded helicopter transport.
- There is strong concern these flights will operate as de facto scenic helicopter tourism under the guise of guest transport.
- Public access for traditional recreational bush users has been restricted under the proposed flight paths by the government, while helicopter access for wealthy visitors is being expanded, creating a significant equity issue.

This area is a nationally significant rock climbing destination, recognised for its wild and largely undeveloped landscape, strong traditional climbing ethics, and exceptional wilderness character. It is also promoted by local and state government as a nature-based tourism destination focused on minimal-impact recreation, including bushwalking, canyoning, mountain biking, and rock climbing. Rock climbers have been active in this region since the 1950s.

The Gardens of Stone area is one of the last remaining wilderness climbing areas near Sydney where road traffic and aircraft noise are still minimal. With the introduction of Western Sydney Airport, the Glenbrook to Mount Victoria section of the Blue Mountains is expected to experience significantly greater aircraft noise impacts, making the Gardens of Stone increasingly important as a uniquely quiet natural escape.

Rock climbing is fundamentally incompatible with frequent helicopter traffic. Safe climbing depends heavily on constant verbal communication between climbers and belayers. Instructions regarding rope management, protection placement, anchor systems, hazard warnings, route finding, and emergency response must be heard clearly and immediately. When helicopters operate within a kilometer of a cliffline or gully, communication becomes impossible due to the extreme noise intrusion. Activities must often be stopped entirely until the aircraft has passed.

Altitude charts as part of this modified proposal document show the helicopter operating within 200m vertical metres of escarpments that are used as rock climbing areas which would severely affect safety communication.

This is not a minor inconvenience—it is a direct safety issue. Communication failure in vertical environments can result in serious injury or fatal consequences. It also severely undermines the wilderness experience that attracts visitors to these parks in the first place.

Historically, even relatively low levels of helicopter traffic associated with the resort have had a significant disruption on climbing activity and bush visitor experience. During the years before Wolgan Road was closed, even two to three helicopter flights a day from the resort were enough to impact an entire climbing day and destroy the sense of quiet and remoteness that defines these places.

Noise modelling appears to have focused primarily on nearby residential properties and did not adequately consider bush users such as climbers, bushwalkers, canyoneers, and campers. In remote recreation settings, there is little background noise, meaning helicopter flights are often more intrusive and audible over much greater distances.

The noise impact assessment in the application predicts noise impacts for residential receivers near the resort and helipad, but does not address impacts on outdoor recreation user groups. The proposed helipad location is less than 3 km from significant established rock climbing areas. Based on an estimated source level for a Eurocopter EC135 of 85dBA @ 150m, our independent analysis estimates noise levels at this area will exceed limits set for sensitive receiver locations. Specifically, we estimate that LAmax is likely to reach 46.6 dBA, and an SEL of 63.1 dBA. This is sufficient to impact communication between climbers, posing a genuine safety issue. We argue that noise impacts on outdoor recreation areas in the region should be treated with the same consideration as other sensitive receiver sites in the proposal, and approval of the plan should consider impacts on the amenity of outdoor recreation user groups.

The proposal seeks to temporarily increase helicopter movements to 15 trips per day (15 arrivals and 15 departures), and 105 trips per week, until two-wheel-drive vehicle access can be restored to Wolgan Valley.

Thirty helicopter movements per day across this landscape would equate to multiple flights per hour during daylight hours, seven days a week, throughout the year. This is incompatible with the reasons people visit these national parks.

Road access for two-wheel-drive vehicles to the Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley is expected to reopen by 2026. There is therefore no logical justification for establishing expanded helicopter access for private resort guests beyond short-term operational necessity. There is strong concern that these flights will function as de facto scenic helicopter tourism under the guise of guest transport. It is not like they will black out the helicopter windows.

These flights are not for emergency services, bushfire response, park management, conservation work, or other essential public purposes. They are private luxury transport for wealthy visitors seeking rapid access and scenic arrival to a high-end resort. Convenience

for a small number of affluent tourists should not come at the cost of degrading nationally significant wilderness areas used by thousands of ordinary visitors for recreation, solitude, and connection with nature.

Residents and the broader Blue Mountains community have previously opposed scenic helicopter operations in the region because of their impact on quiet enjoyment and wilderness values, including opposition to proposals associated with helicopter flights at [Fairmont Resort in Leura \(2026\)](#) and scenic flights from the [Katoomba Airfield Lease \(2020\)](#). The same principle should apply in the Wolgan Valley.

There is also a significant fairness issue. Public vehicular access to the western escarpment of Carne Creek via Sunnyside Ridge has been closed, forcing recreational users to walk an additional 4 km to reach cliffline areas that were previously accessible. These closures were justified by National Parks partly on the basis of protecting sensitive visitor experiences from prior “incompatible” recreational uses such as 4WDing and motorbikes that create noise that conflicts with general enjoyment of the area.

It is therefore deeply inconsistent that ordinary public access is being restricted to protect the serenity of the area, while helicopter flights are proposed that would impose constant major noise impacts across the same landscape for the benefit of the wealthiest visitors. The general public is being locked out, while luxury helicopter access is being expanded.

National parks should be managed to protect wilderness values, quiet enjoyment, and equitable public access—not to prioritise exclusive luxury transport experiences.

For these reasons, ACANSW strongly objects to the proposed increase in tourist helicopter movements and requests that helicopter operations over Wollemi National Park, Gardens of Stone National Park, and Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area be limited to emergency services and essential land management only.

Final statement

We request that the Department refuse any proposal that would expand tourist helicopter operations in these areas. However, if the proposal is granted there **must** be set dates in the future to review the flight pattern and if the Wolgan Road reopens to 2WD vehicles that the flights will decrease back to the original Consent that only allowed a maximum of 4 helicopter trips per week.

If you require further information about the recreational use of these areas by the rock climbing community, and how helicopter flights interfere with this activity then please get in contact.

Yours sincerely,

Australian Rock Climbing Association NSW

Ph 0421 994 290

president.nsw@climb.org.au

aca.bluemountains@climb.org.au