

Green and Dale Associates

*AUSTRALIA HABITAT
TARONGA WILDLIFE RETREAT*

*Environmental Impact Statement
Concept Report*

Taronga Conservation Society
Australia

FEBRUARY 2016



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1 Introduction

This report was prepared by Green & Dale Associates Landscape Architects & Environmental Planners as Lead Creative Design Consultants for the Australia Habitat and Taronga Wildlife Retreat.

This report was prepared for Taronga Zoo and subconsultants to gain conceptual and thematic understanding of the newly proposed Australia Precinct including the Retreat Wildlife Animal Sanctuary, Guest Lodge and Lower Australia Exhibits.

1.0 Introduction

Project Vision

- 1 To create an iconic, adventurous and interactive precinct with a direct interface between the animal and visitor, encouraging an intimate experience between animal and visitor in a space that supports enrichment and learning;
- 2 To create a strong platform to convey the conservation message and improve visitor interaction;
- 3 To integrate the proposed exhibit landscape with the Taronga Wildlife Retreat Buildings, including the 'Guest Lodge' and Accommodation Pods.

The exhibit landscape should be accessible to the Australia Habitat and Taronga Wildlife Retreat visitors and explorative in terms of topography to enable views and animal encounters from varying levels.



Concept Plan



2 Conceptual Response

2.1 Concept Description

Existing Site

The site is currently part of the Australian experience at the zoo, with remnant and introduced native vegetation. Existing exhibits consist of bird aviaries, red kangaroo and quokka. Key vegetation to be retained and protected are the Mature Ficus trees and Eucalypts to the service road to the east, and Eucalyptus trees adjacent to the Wollemi Gorge Aviary. Much of the vegetation challenges include maintaining this important vegetation during the construction of the proposed accommodation pods and while adding major structures and infrastructure.

The site also has steep grades and outcrops of natural rock, which will have to be included in the proposed design. The existing visitor path has a grade of 1:8 as it approaches the Tasmanian Devil exhibit.

Our design approach is to provide visitors with a holistic view of a typical Australian landscape, based on the Sydney Sandstone Scarp landscape and its Eucalypt woodland - to understand its complexity, its interconnectedness, and its fundamental importance to its existing wildlife. Most importantly there is a need to create an environment, a sanctuary, from an animal's perspective.

Key Design Objectives

To achieve these bold aims, the concept should provide visitors with educational opportunities that combine the indigenous community's ecological knowledge and relationship with the land with the experience of rich and diverse flora and fauna of this landscape.

The overriding aim of the conceptual design is to stimulate the Taronga Wildlife Retreat visitor's interest in the biodiversity of Australia.

Conservation Storylines

The conservation storylines and Indigenous interpretation should form the basis of concept design. The traditional knowledge of Australia's First Peoples, handed down through millennia, of the wildlife habitats of Australia, and Indigenous peoples' management and use of the land and the native animals are at the heart of the biodiversity conservation message that Taronga would want to impart to all visitors.

Indigenous storylines will be intrinsic in linking the Taronga Australian Precinct physical journey to the unique experience of place and will therefore provide a doorway to understanding the local history and culture of the First Peoples. Storylines will embrace the spirit of country, animals and place, keeping place, performance and presentation area and animal collection all specific to the celebration of Cammeraigal history, cultural practice, stories and practice. Animals guides will enable visitors to discover the Indigenous relationships to place, environment, story and practice using state of the art interpretive tools, beautifully-crafted Indigenous designs and a selection of Taronga's amazing animals.

Proposed Animal Species of the Wildlife Retreat

Platypus
Koala
Freshwater Eel and Native Fish
Long Nosed Bandicoot
Bridled Nail Tail Wallaby
Potoroo
Bettong
Echidna
Wallabies
Pademelon
Emu
Demonstration Native Bee hive



Conceptual Response

2.2 Concept Theme

The Journey Through the Taronga Wildlife Retreat

Provides a truly immersive journey that involves all of the senses. If we are truly engaged to deliver a sense of place we need to hear, smell, taste and touch the experience not just read about it. We are asking our visitor in the space to subconsciously understand the interdependence of animals, habitat and plants whilst taking home a memorable and rewarding experience. We are aware of our challenge to combine this with a raised awareness and some knew understanding of the Australian landscape, fauna and flora.

Storyline Concept and the Journey

The following description takes the visitor on a journey through the Retreat. Key areas are indicated on the Concept Plan page 4.

- 01 Wildlife experience separation of the main Zoo visitor circulation and the Wildlife retreat. The Wildlife retreat is accessed from a separate entry pathway from Bradleys Head Road, with a strong emphasis on an Australian landscape. The Guest entry pathway provides an evocative landscape of an Australian Rain Forest. A lush vegetation of ferns, shrubs and epiphytes are found under forest palms. A feature vertical timber/steel blade screen separates the Zoo from the guest area. Along the path shelters are located, to protect against inclement weather, with a light canopy roof reflecting the shape of a Forest Moth's wings.



- 02 The entry to the Guest Lodge, the pathway opens out from the forest walk, onto a timber deck entry and the Platypus pools.
- 03 The Guest Lodge provides an introduction for visitors to the Taronga Wildlife Retreat in living with the wildlife of a typical Australian Landscape, based on Sydney's sandstone country. A freshwater display of platypus provides a great attraction for both the Zoo visitor and the Retreat visitor. A 'creek' pool with glass window viewing of platypus swimming on the creek floor or along the surface can be seen by visitors walking down towards Lower Australia and Wollemi. The platypus can be viewed from within the Guest Lodge building, from the entry deck and an internal room linked to the main Retreat Guest Lodge.
- 04 The frontage to the Taronga Centre becomes a strong Australian landscape, with accent planting and smaller 'mallee sculptural' trees. The former road and alignment of a stone wall, are recognised in the layout of the pathway to the restaurant. Alongside the pathway informal landscape spaces are created, with seating. The Taronga Centre has a breakout space for staff. Guests will cross a low bridge which spans over a fern gully, before reaching the restaurant. The terraces to the Taronga Centre have hanging gardens installed, to reduce the mass of the Centre.
- 05 The general Zoo circulation from Upper Australia to the Lower Australia Precinct and Wollemi Aviary runs alongside the Guest Lodge, where the visitor can see platypus in a creek. A track leads the visitor to the west of the Guest Lodge where an elevated walkway along the edge of the Wollemi Aviary is found, demonstrating the Wollemi Gorge from a high viewing point. The walkway exits into a deck with views into the wildlife retreat. The pathway then leads back to the main circulation path to lower Australia and the rest of the Zoo.
- 06 Main entrance area into the Wildlife Retreat, coming down from the Guest Lodge stairs. This area is used for access to the Retreat and seating for the guests when animal presentations are held.



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Conceptual Response

amazing fish up close and learn more about these remarkable fish. This encounter pool is linked to the main viewing tank for eel access.

- 11 The main landscape feature that unites the upper and lower areas of the Wildlife Retreat landscape is the shallow rock strewn creek, that terminates at the Eel display, where it forms an exciting cascade over the scarp and drops into the lower wetland. There will be a location where kids and adults can dip their feet into the water at the shoreline and observe small local freshwater species.
- 12 The shallow wetland with its reed edge provides a perfect habitat for eels. At this point an Indigenous host or keeper will provide a talk on eels and their significance to the local cultural custodians - the Cammeraigal people.
- 13 The open grassland south of the wetland forms a wallaby grazing area, where visitors can encounter the Wallabies and Long Nosed Potoroo. Here the Retreat's keepers provide an encounter with the animals and an opportunity to feed the wallabies. This area will also accommodate a 'Nature's Bee house', to raise awareness of native bees and their importance in the ecosystem.
- 14 The pathway starts to climb upwards to the northeast, adjacent to accommodation Pod C. Here this guest can see Koalas in the trees, which line the building facade. A well-disguised koala enclosure is located, recessed into the landscape, with a rock scarp edge to the enclosure providing a restraint height. Koalas will be displayed in 'live' eucalypt or tristania species, supported by an array of deadfall trees for the koala to perch. Shade and shelter from prevailing weather will also be provided.
- 15 Climbing the steps to the scarp edge, and entering into the upper area via a gate, a view is provided showing the open range nature of the upper area's open woodland. Grassy woodland and the creek line provide an excellent habitat for some of the smaller animals such as Bettongs, Bandicoot and Echidna.

The pathway now exits into the accommodation complex and restaurant in the north eastern corner of the Wildlife Retreat.

- 16 An animal encounter is provided for guests in an aviary with an elevated walkway, where they can meet a beautiful mountain brush tail and Ring Tail Possum up close. These gentle and kind-natured creatures allow for a warming and memorable experience.
- 17 Off limit areas are provided for the koala and wallabies to the east of the site, alongside the service road adjacent to Bradleys Head Road. A service track and animal access way is provided under the elevated walkway between accommodation pods C & D.
- 18 Lower Australia - Bush birds Aviary. Zoo visitors experience the Wollemi Gorge and continue the journey on entry into a timber slab bushmans hut, a themed shelter with interpretation and introduction to a different habitat defined by small colourful birds, a drier landscape, and a smaller aviary. Here visitors get a close up of budgerigars, zebra finch, turquoise parrot and malleefowl.
- 19 Red Kangaroo and Tasmanian Devil's - leaving the bushbird aviary a large paddock is home to the Red Kangaroo, here the landscape is drier with open area of red gravel, grassed and a dry stone creek. The pathway is elevated 300mm off the ground, with a 1000mm high balustrade. Central to the pathway the existing heritage Circular Kiosk / Shelter, currently adjacent to the Taronga Centre, is now located, and forms a shelter entry for visitors entering from the Cafe below and BYB. The pathway leads eastward to the Tasmanian Devil Conservation Centre. A significant artwork at the entrance of the Tasmanian Devils building Leads the visitor to the exhibit. Artwork should be immediately recognisable to the viewing public in order to 'lead them in' and reminiscent of Tasmanian Devils and their natural habitat, in this case the Styx Valley of the Giants Forest, Tasmania.



2.3 Concept Views

Render Images

A series of concept renders are provided in this concept report which visually describe the journey through the Taronga Wildlife Retreat and what the visitor will encounter. This plan identifies the location of render images within the Sanctuary, with arrows indicating the viewing direction.



Concept Views



- A** Main entrance area into the Taronga Wildlife Retreat, coming down from the Guest Lodge stairs. The Guest Lodge provides an introduction for visitor's into the Taronga Wildlife Retreat. An introduction to 'living the wildlife' of a typical Australian Landscape. This area provides an opportunity for Sanctuary visitors to experience an animal encounter guided by an Indigenous host or keeper.



Concept Views



B Animal encounter at the upper shallow pool area where the long Nosed Bandicoot, Bridled Nail Tail Wallaby, Bettong, Red Necked Pademelon and Koala can be found in this free range zone. Here visitors can enjoy the storyline of the Retreat such as preserving important ecosystems and wildlife.



Concept Views



C

The Centre of the scarp sandstone landscape with further opportunity for an animal encounter or storytelling guided by an indigenous host or keeper. The visitor can continue on the path into the Retreat lower area or exit to the south accommodation pods via the deck walkway.



Concept Views



- D The open grassy woodland south of the wetland forms a freerange grazing area where visitors can encounter the Wallabies and Long Nosed Potoroo. The Retreat's keepers provide an encounter with the animals based on indigenous storylines and an opportunity for guests to feed the wallabies.



Concept Views



E

Climbing the steps to the scarp edge and entering into the upper area via a gate, a view is provided back north to the Guest Lodge showing the open range nature of the upper area woodland and its meandering creekline. All planting will be local species selected from the Sydney Sandstone Gully Forest of the Mosman area.

