

## THE GREAT KAI'MIA WAY



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*You cannot teach a land ethic...people learn by being involved in nature*

*Anon*

*The Great Kai'mia Way is over 200 kilometres of sustainable access routes to the foreshores of the Georges And Woronora Rivers, linking with the Illawarra Escarpment and Botany Bay. It is a vision of non-motorised movement through the valleys – on foot, by bicycle or in canoe, respecting the ecological, cultural, social and heritage values of the area. It is also a vision about partnerships and community participation, about building an asset that respects the past, the current and future generations.*

## Background

The Great Kai'mia Way project arose from the insight of a number of individuals who have had a long-term love and involvement in the Georges River Catchment. It was given momentum through a series of inquiries and studies that highlighted the need to enable access to foreshores and bushland areas to encourage better management and community engagement with nature.

In 1998, the State Government established the Georges River Foreshores Improvement Program (GRFIP) to find means to improve the health of the Georges River. The Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (SSEC) and Georges River Environmental Alliance (GREA) recommended that a feasibility study be carried out into the establishment of a continuous system of trails and tracks along the foreshores of the Georges and Woronora Rivers.

This report is the result of that study, managed by SSEC and GREA. It is intended for use by councils and community in the catchment, as well as state government departments with responsibility for urban planning, environment and health. It provides the rationale underlying the study, the routes that seem to be the most suitable for sustainable access, and recommendations for the coordination and action required to implement the Great Kai'mia Way.

## Partnering with stakeholders and the community

The strategic cornerstone of this project has been the process of establishing partnerships with stakeholders and the community. Both SSEC and GREA canvassed the views and interest of community even before the study began. Preparatory discussions were also held with a number of council staff, Councillors and State members of Parliament.

### **The Great Kai'mia Way has the potential to:**

- Increase community awareness of river and catchment environmental values
- Enhance recreational and educational opportunities
- Provide safe, traffic free routes linking communities to their surroundings
- Promote appreciation of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal heritage
- Encourage active and healthy lifestyles
- Increase protection of foreshores and bushland in the catchment
- Foster cross community ties between indigenous and non-indigenous groups

During the course of the study, four formal meetings were held at the premises of different councils in the catchment to provide updates on the progress of the study and to solicit advice on issues and difficulties encountered by the project team. On a more informal level, numerous meetings were held with interest groups, council staff and landholders to ensure that all concerns and issues were properly addressed during the course of route selection.

It is worth noting that the enthusiasm with which the project was embraced indicated a latent demand for the possibilities the Great Kai'mia Way offers. A number of community groups and councils have already instigated their own plans for access along the foreshore, and others looked forward to educational and recreational opportunities associated with the establishment of the Way.

## **Route descriptions**

The feasibility study was carried out as two overlapping parts. The first part deals with the route along the Georges River and the second deals with the route along the Woronora River. The Woronora River is the smaller and less urbanised of the two rivers and is located in only one Council area (Sutherland Shire Council). As a result it was possible to do an in depth study and provide detailed advice about this part of the Great Kai'mia Way. The study of the longer, more urbanised Georges River, on the other hand, involved discussions with many councils, state and federal government agencies, and other landholders. The advice about the route for this section is more generalised. It is envisaged that a next step in the project will be carry out the same in-depth work for the Georges River as was done for the Woronora River section of the Way.

Although in two parts and with different data detail, the Way information presented in this report is in a standardised format:

1. The routes have been divided into subsections and each subsection has been given a name. The information in the tables also identify suitability of the route for pedestrians, cyclists and canoeists.
2. A standard grading system has been adopted to indicate difficulty of the walk from 1 (wheelchair accessible) to 5 (experienced walkers only).
3. Some parts of the Great Kai'mia Way are already in place, other parts require construction. Subsections are prioritised to highlight the importance of the section to the function of the Way, and the difficulty and funding opportunities for implementation:
  - A Highest priority - recommended completion within two years
  - B Medium priority - recommended completion in next five years
  - C Lowest priority - within ten years.
4. Each subsection presents its own benefits and challenges which are listed in short form.
5. The project team has done its best to ensure that all relevant stakeholders for each subsection have been contacted. The project team hopes that by listing stakeholders in this way, those who have not been identified will contact the team to provide relevant input.
6. Actions and estimated costs of implementing each subsections are also noted.
7. Maps are a critical part of the way information is delivered in this report. Each subsection is accompanied by a map of that subsection. Larger scale landscape maps are also provided to increase ease of orientation.

These routes should not be seen as final, and are subject to further community consultation and refinement as the project evolves.

## Coordination

A factor that became evident during the course of the study was the need for a coordinated approach to implementation of the Way. The Great Kai'mia Way traverses twelve local government areas, tracts of Crown Land, National Parks, Aboriginal Land Council land, private land, Sydney Water Land and land belonging to other government authorities and agencies. Many sections of the Way already exist, but the standards of access and signage vary considerably. Many sections of the Way are missing and commitment from landholders varies from area to area. These issues are part of the subsections discussion.

The project team identified four aspects of the Great Kai'mia Way that require coordination:

1. Sustainability and safety
2. Signage
3. Use of materials
4. Implementation.

The report recommends a range of protocols for users of the Way, for infrastructure works, signage along the route, and for materials used.

A number of stakeholders were particularly concerned about the damage and danger caused by trail bikes and four wheel drive vehicles in natural areas, as well as inappropriate use of pedestrian tracks by mountain bikes. The report acknowledges concerns and therefore recommends limiting access through infrastructure works and appropriate policing.

## The future of the Great Kai'mia Way and recommendations

This report delivers information necessary for the progressive implementation of the Great Kai'mia Way. It details where routes could best be allocated, the priority for implementation of sections of the route and guidelines for the coordinated implementation of the project.

Many stakeholders have been involved in the provision of information for this report. The project team recommends the following to ensure that stakeholders remain involved and the Great Kai'mia Way vision is realised:

1. That the precautionary principle guide development of the great Kai'mia Way, and that no development proceeds till appropriate management measures have been agreed to by stakeholders.
2. That the Great Kai'mia Way vision be implemented, appreciating the information for routing and priorities noted in Chapters 3 and 4 of this report, and ensuring that the precautionary principle is the arbiter of both route selection and implementation.
3. That the relevant communities name subsections of the Way<sup>1</sup>.
4. That the safety code developed by the Great Kai'mia Way project team be adopted as the minimum standard for work carried out on the Great Kai'mia Way.<sup>2</sup>
5. That the codes of conduct detailed in the Great Kai'mia Way report<sup>3</sup> be noted on signage and on literature relating to the Way for the three main categories of non-motorised recreational uses: walking, cycling and canoeing.
6. That a regional strategy be developed to provide opportunities for cycling experiences while controlling inappropriate access through bushland.

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<sup>1</sup> The names provided in this report are suggestions only.

<sup>2</sup> Councils and government agencies, and other landholders and managers will have more detailed occupational health and safety procedures. These will, of course, be the ones applicable for works on their land. The recommendation here is for *minimum* standards only.

<sup>3</sup> The Great Kai'mia Way: Chapter 5.

7. That trackside benches and drinking fountains, such as bubblers, be provided where mains water supply is available at strategic access points along the Way, generally at roadside stops.
8. Access to the Great Kai'mia Way should encourage legitimate non-motorised transport through appropriate entry points, and the provision of bike racks and parking.
9. Level or gently sloping sectors of the Way with good access should be developed and promoted to provide opportunities for less mobile people to use the Great Kai'mia Way.
10. Bans on the use of 4WDs and Trail Bikes on the Great Kai'mia Way should be reinforced with:
  - Provision of alternative places to go which are affordable;
  - Police and rangers should have powers to confiscate bikes;
  - System of fines and heavy penalties for transgressing law;
  - Amendment of laws to ban their use on the Great Kai'mia Way;
  - More frequent patrols by rangers backed up by police enforcement teams; and
  - Signage<sup>4</sup>.
11. That land managers adopt a protocol for closing routes during severe fire danger periods, and maps show routes to enable quick exit in case of emergencies.
12. That the Great Kai'mia Way maximises the potential for people to use public transport and local amenities.
13. That traffic calming measures and associated signage be installed at intersections of roads and the Great Kai'mia Way
14. That landmanagers be encouraged to adopt the guidelines for signage recommended in the report and adopt the "family of signs" concept for the Great Kai'mia Way.
15. That a standard be adopted for construction and upgrade of track works, consistent with existing Australian Standards for walking track classification signage and infrastructure AS 2156.1-2001 and AS 2156.2-2001: a combination of Class 2, Class 3 and occasionally Class 4 out of 6 classes, where 6 is the least developed class (see appendix dd for details of standards).
16. That infrastructure on the the Great Kai'mia Way is free of all CCA treated pine products.
17. Effective measures be implemented to exclude trail bikes and 4WDs from sensitive areas by using, for example, gates made from galvanized steel pipe, fencing made from galvanized steel double rope, and kissing gates to enable access by legitimate users.
18. That Type A barriers as described in *AS2156.2-2001: Track Infrastructure* be installed at lookouts and other relevant locations for safety and risk management at the discretion of track managers based on an assessment of effective fall height.
19. That stakeholders adopt the feasibility study through a signed memorandum that commits them to:
  - 19.1 a project staging plan as detailed in the feasibility study;
  - 19.2 a coordinated strategy for implementation of the Great Kai'mia Way, including:
    - 19.2.1 common signage as detailed in Chapter 5;
    - 19.2.2 ongoing communication between stakeholder groups to ensure appropriate linkages;

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<sup>4</sup> For example: Trail Bikes and all unauthorised vehicles prohibited - Max Penalty \$11, 500.

- 19.3 adoption of the principles of sustainability in the implementation of the Great Kai'mia Way backed by increased research into the aspects of sustainable management;
- 19.4 adoption of the planning checklist for development as detailed in Chapter 5
- 19. That Councils incorporate the Great Kai'mia Way route and vision for sustainability into their planning instruments and provide consistent funding through budget allocations and S94 developer contributions.
- 20. That Way community groups – local “friends of the Great Kai'mia Way” – be recognised and if necessary, established to help with the implementation of the Great Kai'mia Way vision.
- 21. That the Aboriginal community be an integral partner in the design and implementation of the Great Kai'mia Way.
- 23. That a management and implementation system be set up that will enable:
  - 23.1 An ongoing structure for decision making that involves land holders, land managers and interested community members, with particular note to engage the Aboriginal community;
  - 23.2 A funding structure that encourages contribution from a wide pool of stakeholders: community, private organisations and government;
  - 23.3 A commitment to continued promotion of the Great Kai'mia Way for environmental, cultural, recreational and health purposes;
  - 23.4 A commitment to sustainability whilst enabling access to as many users as possible.