

Blue Mountains Conservation Society



BMCS “Election Asks” 2011 NSW State Election

This document describes the Blue Mountains Conservation Society’s “election asks” for the 2011 NSW State Election.

It is based on the Natural Advantage document and provides local detail of the needs and concerns of the Greater Blue Mountains area.

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A. GARDENS OF STONE STAGE 2 PROPOSAL

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society asks for -

1. the Gardens of Stone Stage 2 Proposal to be implemented.

- i. Covers an area of 40 000 hectares of sandstone escarpment and plateau in the western Blue Mountains, incorporating Mt Airly, Mt Genowlan, sections of the Western escarpment, Wolgan, Ben Bullen and Newnes State Forests.
- ii. Proposed to be a mixture of state conservation area (SCA) and national park tenure. SCA status allows underground coal mining to continue (recent changes to the Mining SEPP facilitate this).
- iii. Characterised by a unique assemblage of spectacular pagoda formations, coloured clifflines, canyons, forested valleys, windswept plateau heathlands, rainforest gorges and montane woodlands and swamps.
- iv. Contains significant Aboriginal heritage as well as the State's best preserved and heritage listed oil shale ruins.
- v. Newnes Plateau has the highest density of rare plants in the Blue Mountains such as the Wolgan Snowgum. Shrub Swamps are listed as endangered at a Federal and State level.
- vi. GoS2 would benefit the local economy. Based on comparable statistics and studies from NSW, Queensland and Victoria, the upper estimate for tourism to a GoS2 park with the proposed facilities is 50 000 visitors a year. This level of tourism activity is estimated to produce economic benefits of \$3- 4 million per annum to the region (Seeing the Gardens Nature-Based Tourism and Recreation in the Gardens of Stone Stage Two Park Proposal, BMCS and Colong Foundation, 2009).
- vii. Currently poorly managed and is threatened by illegal trail bike riding cutting tracks through swamps and woodlands. Small amount of native forestry.

2.3 Continue to build a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system by establishing new protected areas in accordance with the NSW National Parks Establishment Plan, as well as reserving Gardens of Stone (Stage 2), and converting Dharawal Conservation Area to National Park. Seek World Heritage Area inscription of the NSW eucalyptus diversity hotspots.

Natural Advantage - A 2011 NSW State Election Agenda reference

B. NATIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society asks for -

- 1. an increase of at least 5 million dollars per year (on 2010-2011 levels) to the Parks Service (NPWS) annual budget for conservation works in the Blue Mountains Region for the period 2012-2015.**
 - a. The budget for the Blue Mountains region of the NPWS has been shrinking by approximately 5% per year for the last 3 years. The region is increasingly reliant on Federal Government grants to carry out basic conservation works.
 - b. There are very few rangers to cover such a large area.
 - c. Core conservation work such as controlling weeds suffers from the lack of ongoing funding. Work in sensitive and remote areas is reliant upon volunteers and contractors when funds are available. Consequently the Grose River valley is suffering from major weed invasion following the 2007 fires.
 - d. Critical conservation work for the protection of endangered species has been threatened such as the control of phytophthora under the Wollemi Pines.
 - e. More broadly, the Parks Service has lessened its focus on land management outcomes and given more funding to new branches such as the Tourism and Partnership Branch.

- 2. a commitment to rule out commercial development inside National Parks in the Blue Mountains region.**
 - a. The National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Visitors and Tourists) Bill 2010 was passed June 2010. Based on legal advice provided by Tim Robertson QC, the Society believes that the changes allow new exclusive commercial operations in national parks that will compete with the restaurants, cafes, guesthouses and other tourist facilities in Blue Mountains townships.
 - b. BMCS supports well managed national parks in the Blue Mountains attracting people to enjoy their low-key walking tracks and picnic areas. Food, accommodation and other tourist services are provided by nearby vibrant townships.

- 3. Public Lands Rationalisation Stage 1 to be implemented and fully funded.**
 - a. State Government initiated a process to “identify high conservation public lands that would be more appropriately managed as a dedicated conservation reserve, either as part of Blue Mountains National Park, a Regional Park, a State Park or Community Land”
 - b. Stage 1 process was completed in December 2002 with approximately 4,000 ha of high conservation lands proposed for transfer to Blue Mountains National Park. Examples include Hat Hill Creek Reserve in Blackheath.
 - c. Lands transfer has never occurred due to a lack of funding for the Parks Service to manage the proposed lands.

- 4. Katoomba Airfield to become incorporated into the Blue Mountains National Park and retain its use as an airfield for emergency services.**

2.1 Invest in nature, by increasing public expenditure on nature conservation, restoration and park management to 5% of the NSW Budget.

2.7 Preserve National Parks Estate by prohibiting inappropriate tourism developments and firewood collection. Guarantee mining, logging and grazing will not be allowed in National Parks.

Natural Advantage - A 2011 NSW State Election Agenda reference

C. INVASIVE SPECIES

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society asks for -

- 1. a cross agency approach to weed control in the Blue Mountains incorporating a regional weed control plan and a budget of at least 1 million dollars per year in the period from 2011-2015.**
 - a. Cross agency approach currently exists between Blue Mountains City Council and the Parks Service. This needs to be expanded to include other agencies such as Railcorp, and the Roads and Traffic Authority to co-ordinate weed control programs.
 - b. According to the Invasive Species Council, “weed invasion imperils almost half of NSW’s threatened biodiversity. It is the most common threat to National Parks affecting “91% of park area, and a ‘high to severe’ threat for 48% of the total area”. “It is also the most costly natural resource management problem for farmers” (Stopping NSW’s Creeping Peril, August 2010).
- 2. ongoing weed control be conducted after hazard reduction activities by the Rural Fire Service.**
 - a. The type of work that can be funded under S 44 declarations should be expanded to cover weed spread stimulated by fire.
- 3. recreational hunting be prohibited in State Forests and Crown lands, the Game Council be abolished and saved funds be used for scientifically credible feral animal control programs conducted by DECCW.**
 - a. Recreational hunting needs to be administered efficiently . NSW Government expected the Game Council to be self-funding from 2007-08 (according to the NSW Auditor-General’s audit report of 2005), but its funding for the body has been increasing.
 - b. taxpayers have paid \$287 per feral animal killed, in state forests, and \$323 has been spent by the Game Council for each feral animal killed in the forests. (Dr Carol Booth, Invasive Species Council, Is Hunting Conservation? March 2009).
 - c. If spent on professional feral animal control programs, the millions of dollars of government funds directed to ineffective recreational hunting could have achieved substantial outcomes for conservation.
 - d. Programs need to “be carefully planned and co-ordinated”, based on an understanding of the impacts of the target feral animals, with clear, realistic goals and assessment of all possible solutions, and they need to be monitored. The only way recreational hunting can satisfy these conditions is if it is part of a professional program with defined environmental goals.

6.5 Implement the recommendations made by the Invasive Species Council to make weed management ‘core business’ with standardised weed mapping, reporting systems, and a cross agency approach.

2.6 Prohibit recreational hunting in State Forests and Crown lands to protect native fauna and visitor safety. Abolish the Game Council and redirect these public funds towards licensing and scientifically credible feral animal control programs within a government agency.

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D. PLANNING

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society asks for -

1. a commitment to maintain the standards of environmental protection provided by the Blue Mountains Local Environment Plan (LEP) 2005.

- a. The Blue Mountains LEP 2005 is a local 'place-based' plan which reflects the complexity and sensitivity of the Blue Mountains environment that sits within a World Heritage Area.
- b. The 2005 LEP is required, by the State Government, to be converted to a Statewide Standard LEP format by 2013. Under this format however, it is highly likely that the local provisions that currently protect and prevent the loss of environmentally sensitive areas will be weakened, unless those provisions are maintained in the revised Standard LEP.
- c. As an example, many bushland areas in which dwellings can be built have a subzone called Living Bushland Conservation under the current Blue Mountains LEP 2005. This zone protects areas of environmental significance, while still enabling dwellings to be built in less sensitive parts, but such zones will no longer be permitted in the Standard version of the LEP. Protecting such areas under the Standard LEP format will therefore be a challenge due to such rules. A major concern is that land currently zoned to protect environmentally sensitive areas will be degraded if any zone other than an Environmental Conservation zone (E2) under the Standard LEP is applied.
- d. The Standard Template will also make it more difficult to protect areas such as scheduled vegetation communities through the use of protected overlays. The current LEP 2005 overlay clauses will be replaced with "model" standardised and simplified clauses that may not adequately protect areas of environmental significance in this city within a World Heritage Area.

2. the State Government target of 7000 additional dwellings for the Blue Mountains over the next 25 years, as outlined in the Draft North West Subregional Strategy be reconsidered in view of the sensitivity and limits of the World Heritage environment.

- a. 7000 new dwellings is an unrealistic target for the Blue Mountains given its environmental constraints.
- b. It would be irresponsible to further open up areas between towns and build new houses on currently undeveloped, high fire prone ridges to accommodate such growth. The alternative of infill development within existing centres will alleviate sprawl, but is limited by proximity to public transport and other services. The 7000 target therefore should be reconsidered.

3. removing the Part 3A legislature.

8.1. Reform planning legislation to ensure strategic planning and development outcomes are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

8.2 Mandate **genuine, open and early public consultation** both on strategic planning processes and development assessment processes.

Natural Advantage - A 2011 NSW State Election Agenda reference

E. CLIMATE CHANGE & TRANSPORT

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society asks for -

- 1. a commitment to oppose the massive expansion of Mt Piper Power Station.**
 - a. NSW government has given concept approval for the installation and operation of up to 2,000 MW of new generating capacity on the existing Mt Piper Power Station site.
 - b. This is likely to be coal powered because there are no gas supply lines nearby.
 - c. The Mt Piper extension, if coal fired, will pump more than 10 million tonnes of additional CO₂-e into the atmosphere every year (based on Delta's projections). This will mean that NSW's greenhouse gas emissions increase by more than 6% as a result of just this Mt Piper extension.
 - d. Future energy needs can be met through energy efficiency measures and renewable energy. (See Dr Mark Diesendorf, University of New South Wales, Sustainable Energy Policy for Australia, 2010, www.energyscience.org.au/FS05%20Sust%20Energy2.pdf)
- 2. increased funding and priority given to rail transport.**
 - a. The peak of oil production has passed or is imminent, hence transport infrastructure planning should prioritise energy efficient rail freight and passenger transport.
 - b. Money allocated for the Mt Victoria bypass should be redirected to rail.
 - c. B doubles longer than 19m should not be allowed through the Blue Mountains.
- 3. a commitment to oppose the Bells Line of Road Expressway development.**
 - a. Feasibility studies for the Bells Line of Road (BLoR) rejected all highway route options because it is uneconomic and has many environmental problems e.g. http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/constructionmaintenance/majorconstructionprojectssydney/bells_line_of_road/bells/pdf/blor_corridor_study.pdf
 - b. 2009 Central West Transport Needs Study found that the existing road and rail network were adequate to serve the region for at least the next 25 years (http://www.nationbuildingprogram.gov.au/publications/reports/pdf/Central_West_Transport_Needs_Study_Summary%20Report.pdf).
 - c. RTA's ongoing program of safety improvements along the BLoR is supported by the Society. This includes passing lanes within the existing road easement, barriers to separate lanes and specific traffic control methods (warning lights, road-surface treatments) to cater for fog, snow and ice; it excludes any grade modifications or curvature realignments with the objective of increasing the road's suitability to take heavy trucking traffic such as B-doubles and semi-trailers
 - d. BLoR's value and character as a tourist asset within and through the GBM WHA must not be compromised

1.2 Commit to a **50% reduction** in carbon emissions from 1990 levels **by 2020** and develop a ten year plan to achieve this target. The plan, prepared by late 2011, will include annual milestones for emissions reductions, measurable actions and sufficient funding.

1.6 Replace fossil fuel powered energy. Become a key partner to construct a 50 megawatt concentrated solar thermal plant within three years in the Central West of NSW - a site identified in the Beyond Zero Emissions plan.

10.5 Commit to an **urgent rebalancing of the transport budget**, combining it with the roads budget and ensuring two thirds are spent on public and active transport and one third spent on roads.

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F. MINING & GROUNDWATER

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society asks for -

1. Mining and extractive industries

- a. A protection zone of 1km to be placed around Carne Creek, all other Creeks feeding the Wolgan-Colo system, and the headwaters of the Wollangambe Wild River on Newnes Plateau.
- b. Immediate exclusion of proposed mining and/or construction materials projects from Part 3A approval (e.g. Coalpac consolidation proposal).
- c. Imposition of enforced, far more rigorous quality and quantity standards in relation to mine-water and power station discharges to natural stream systems, particularly where those systems are within either the Coxs R or Wolgan R catchments.
- d. A more rigorously weighted evaluation of any project's direct and indirect implications for GGE, climate change and peak oil.

2. Groundwater

- a. Permanent retention of the embargo on new water bores for domestic and social purposes and for commercial water bottling.
- b. Imposition of an embargo over the 'Mounts' district and throughout the Greater Blue Mountains.
- c. Metering all existing bores as a basis for appropriate water charges.
- d. Re-introduction of level 3 water restrictions.

7.4 Mandate a **safety zone of at least one kilometre around all rivers**, wetlands and significant swamp clusters in the state, to protect them from further permanent damage through the effects of mining under, or too close to, water courses.

7.8 Ensure comprehensive **environmental assessment and restore public participation and accountability** by exclude mining proposals from Part 3A of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and reforming the *Mining and Petroleum Act*.

9.10 Set **licence limits for all pollutants** emitted from facilities holding pollution licenses, reflecting the sensitivity of the receiving environment and established environmental standards such as ANZECC guidelines.

***Natural Advantage - A 2011 NSW State Election Agenda* reference**