

Blue Mountains Gazette - Letters To The Editor

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Conservation and Preservation

Two issues with significant ramifications for mountains residents and businesses have been focussing minds lately. One, the proposed redevelopment of Springwood, is in the balance, and concerns the preservation of our built environment. The other, the recently enacted bill making it easier to build tourist developments in national parks, concerns conservation of our natural environment.

The shared aspect of these issues is the requirement of trust in the political process, and that is where faith in our democratic institutions is sorely tested. A tasteless aspect of the recent meeting (23rd June) in the Springwood Civic Centre was the seeming arrogant disdain displayed by most councillors, through their body language palpably indicative of shut minds, for the quite unprecedented public response, in this case an almost unanimous resentment of the options provided. The phrase 'servants of the people' clearly doesn't resonate.

The tourism bill enactment seemed to be a deliberate tactic to quash further discussions on the bill by pushing the legislation through Parliament. Important legal questions were left unresolved. Legal advice from Tim Robertson SC, available to government on the operation of the Bill, was not acknowledged until after the bill was passed.

Until now, the purpose of national parks has been to protect ecosystems. Bordering towns provided the tourist infrastructure. The new legislation will weaken national park protection and potentially allow a broad range of buildings and activities in national parks for exclusive commercial use, including new large-scale resorts and private facilities for tourists, sport and recreation. If commercial operations conflict with the conservation objectives of a national park, it is not clear whether the conservation objectives have primacy, and commercial leasing has insufficient transparency and accountability provisions. More worryingly, the safeguards in the Bill offer too much ministerial discretion and thus will not be rigorously applied.

In both instances, the public interest is at risk of being subordinated to corporate greed. Such has ever been the case, and the need for people with voices never more pressing.

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