

# THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

## — STILL NOT ANOTHER SUBURB OF SYDNEY

**Dear Minister Paul Scully, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces,**

We write as members of the Blue Mountains community to call for urgent intervention regarding the proposed development at 142–150 Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba.

This is the first housing development in the Blue Mountains to be assessed under the NSW Government's Housing Delivery Authority (HDA) fast-track pathway - a process designed for urban growth areas, not environmentally sensitive and bushfire-prone land within a World Heritage Area. In May 2025, on the HDA's recommendation, you declared this development a State Significant Development (SSD).

The proposed development comprises nine four-storey buildings containing 218 residential apartments and 52 serviced apartments, alongside restaurants, an art gallery and information and education facilities.

Taken together, the scale and mix of uses indicate a substantial tourism and lifestyle precinct with accommodation - not a conventional residential development.

If approved, this development would override key provisions of the Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan (LEP), bypassing environmental protections developed over more than 30 years of carefully crafted local planning and setting a precedent for similar inappropriate developments across the Mountains.

### **A fast-track pathway unsuited to this landscape**

This 'fast track approval' pathway is fundamentally inappropriate for a city within a UNESCO-declared World Heritage Area, where bushfire risk and environmental sensitivity demand careful place-based planning and where the heritage and character of our towns require protection.

The Environmental Impact Statement was due to be on public exhibition for 14 days. This time frame also

represents a significantly reduced opportunity for community input, compared to other major development projects that are typically 28 days. For a project of this magnitude - in one of the most environmentally significant regions in Australia - a 14-day exhibition period is patently inadequate.

### **Environmental consequences cannot be ignored**

The development site sits upslope from endangered Blue Mountains swamps that regulate water flow, filter pollutants and support threatened species, such as the critically endangered Dwarf Mountain Pine (*Pherosphaera fitzgeraldii*), whose entire global population is restricted to just a handful of waterfall colonies in the upper Blue Mountains.

The introduction of extensive hard surfaces on this steep slope would reduce pervious surfaces and groundwater recharge, increase the volume and velocity of stormwater, accelerate erosion, degrade ecosystems and impact Sydney's drinking water catchment.

Severe swamp degradation would undermine habitat for threatened species and affect the ecological values of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

### **Bushfire and evacuation risks**

The Blue Mountains is one of Australia's most bushfire-prone landscapes. Concentrating hundreds more residents and visitors in a single-access escarpment location significantly increases risk to life and emergency services.

Local roads are already congested and were never designed to accommodate large increases in traffic. Critically, all evacuation routes from the development site travel through bushfire-prone land, meaning residents and visitors could be cut off from the highway. The Great Western Highway is the sole evacuation route east and west, and can be blocked in both directions by a single accident.

### **What is at stake**

The Blue Mountains is defined by its unique World

Heritage national park, its distinctive villages and its balance between nature, heritage and community life.

Tourism, a cornerstone of the local economy, depends on preserving these natural, scenic and heritage values. Our visitor economy relies on the integrity of our national park and World Heritage status, and development that erodes landscape character threatens that economic foundation. The proposal represents a shift toward high-density urban development that is inappropriate for this site and for a city in a World Heritage Area. If the HDA pathway is allowed to override local planning controls, it will not stop at the Narrow Neck Road development. The planning framework that protects the entire Blue Mountains will be put at risk.

### **Our request**

**We respectfully call on you Minister Scully to not approve the development at 142-150 Narrow Neck Rd Katoomba and intervene to ensure that the Blue Mountains Local Government Area is exempt from the Housing Delivery Authority pathway.**

Housing supply is important and there are areas that are more appropriate for development. The Blue Mountains Local Government Area is already meeting its state residential housing targets through development that complies with the Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan.

Because we are in a World Heritage Area, housing in the Blue Mountains must be environmentally responsible and aligned with long-established planning principles embedded in our Local Environmental Plan.

The NSW Government recognised environmental and bushfire constraints when it exempted the Blue Mountains Local Government Area from its Low- and Mid-rise Housing Policy in June 2024. For the same reasons, the Blue Mountains should be exempt from the Housing Delivery Authority pathway.

Yours faithfully,

- Australian Conservation Foundation (Greater Western Sydney)
- Better Planning Network
- Blackheath Area Community Alliance
- Blue Mountains Association of Cultural Heritage Organisations
- Blue Mountains Community Land Trust
- Blue Mountains Conservation Society

- Blue Mountains Design Group
- Blue Mountains Historical Society
- Blue Mountains Unions Council Inc.
- Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment Inc.
- Hawkesbury Environmental Network
- Leura Community Alliance
- Lithgow Environment Group Inc.
- Medlow Bath Residents Association

- Megalong Valley Community and Landowners Association Inc.
- Mountains for Wildlife Ltd.
- National Trust of Australia (NSW), Blue Mountains Branch
- Nature Conservation Council (NSW)
- Resilient Blue Mountains
- Springwood Bushwalking Club



**To find out more** go to the Society website where you will find the Society's submission opposing the use of the HDA pathway for this development [www.bluemountains.org.au](http://www.bluemountains.org.au)

**What you can do** - we want people to write to the Hon Paul Scully, the Minister for Planning, Housing and Infrastructure expressing their concerns about the HDA pathway being used in the Blue Mountains and requesting:

1. That he not approve the development at 142-150 Narrow Neck Road Katoomba, and
2. That the Blue Mountains be exempt from the HDA pathway.

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society recognises that the Blue Mountains is located within the Country of the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples. We recognise that the Dharug and Gundungurra Traditional Owners have a continuous and deep connection to their Country, which is of great cultural significance to Aboriginal people.