

NSW State Election March 2015
Blue Mountains Conservation Society
Environmental Questionnaire to Candidates

Candidate: Roza Sage (Liberal)
Date submitted: 28th January 2015

Section 1.

Your personal position on the big environmental issues of our age, and the actions you have personally taken in response.

Personal Question 1.

Do you believe Climate Change is real and represents a major threat to our world, and the fire-prone Greater Blue Mountains area in particular?

Answer: I believe climate change is real.

Personal Question 2.

Do you believe Climate Change is predominantly caused by human activity (that is, it is anthropogenic with very high certainty as stated by the IPCC¹ and CSIRO²)?

Answer: I believe that human activity is a contributor to climate change.

Personal Question 3.

In 1972 the landmark text *The Limits to Growth* ignited an ongoing public debate on the issue of continual economic and population growth in a world of finite resources. Focussing primarily on NSW, what broad-brush model of growth/change do you advocate?

- a) Business as usual, that is ongoing growth of both population and the physical economy
- b) Planned reductions in the rates of growth to achieve a steady-state population and economy
- c) Other scenarios of your own devising, but please avoid such logically inconsistent phrases as "sustainable growth"

Answer: This is a fundamentally important question for humanity broadly. Examining it specifically in regard to NSW would risk ignoring external influences on a national and international level. The question of controlling population growth goes to the core of basic human rights issues and poses moral and ethical dilemmas.

Many contentious approaches have been tried or proposed, from closing borders to China's population control measures.

Education, especially for women and girls, is a key to decreasing birth rates and increasing the standards of living. Until cultural norms change regarding reproduction and gender equality this problem will remain.

1 IPCC 2013: "degree of certainty . . . *extremely likely*: 95-100% probability"

2 CSIRO scientists 2014: "a close to certain probability exceeding 99.999%"

Personal Question 4.

What demonstrable actions have you taken to minimise your personal and your household's environmental footprint?

Answer: Growing up on a small farm with electricity being the only service, I learned at an early age the value of recycling and being careful with precious water resources. My family lived in an isolated area surrounded by bush. My love of the bush is why I chose to live in the Blue Mountains over 30 years ago.

These values of being careful with resources have stayed with me into my adult life. I am an avid recycler and have a rain water tank for use in the garden. I use a compost bin for organic kitchen waste and garden clippings. I also shop local whenever I can and catch public transport to the city.

Personal Question 5.

Over the last decade, looking beyond your own personal space, what are a few of the significant and demonstrable actions you have taken to protect, restore, or advocate for the environment?

Answer: See question 7. I have also belonged to a local Bushcare Group.

Section 2: Local Seat of Blue Mountains Issues

Note: The Society recognises that an individual, even if elected to Government, cannot single handedly guarantee legislative enactment or change. As such, throughout the questions below what we are really seeking is a clear commitment of "*support*", and in this context "*support*" of course includes real advocacy for the action mentioned, in both public forums/media and in your respective party rooms.

Also, some of the questions are more naturally phrased in the future tense, some more naturally in the present tense. Whichever tense is used, it should of course be taken to also imply the other where appropriate.

Background to all Society "Asks" can be found at: <http://www.bluemountains.org.au/election15-asks.shtml>

Local Question 1. (See Ask 1a for background)

Do you support the recently exhibited draft Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan?

Answer: The Blue Mountains is unique, the city being surrounded by national park. The Local Environmental Plan needs to balance the future requirements of the community as well as the surrounding World Heritage National Park. There are many worthy aspects within the Plan and many aspects which could be improved upon.

Local Question 2. (See Ask 1b for background)

Will you seek the deletion of the Blue Mountains, as an identified Metropolitan Urban Growth Area, from the Draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney?

Having personally attended the Planning NSW workshops pertaining to the draft metropolitan strategy, it was clear that the Lower Blue Mountains would not be included in the Urban Growth Area. I reinforced this by making further representations to the Minister and am pleased to report the revised maps in the Metropolitan Strategy make it clear that the towns and villages of the Blue Mountains are not part of Sydney's metropolitan urban area.

Answer:

Local Question 3. (See Ask 2a for background)

Do you support an "Instant Action" fund of \$50,000 per annum for the Blue Mountains volunteer bush regeneration program to facilitate a quick response capability for urgent/unforeseen tasks?

Answer: There are a number of competitive grants programs run through the Office of Environment and Heritage that volunteer groups can apply for.

Local Question 4. (See Ask 3a for background)

Do you support the protection of the Gardens of Stone on the western escarpment of the Blue Mountains by creating new reserves over this spectacular pagoda landscape?

Answer: I support protection of the Gardens of Stone.

Local Question 5. (See Ask 4a for background)

Do you support a 15% increase on the 2013/14 base funding/staffing levels for the Blue Mountains National Parks and Wildlife Service specifically to facilitate the protection of rare and threatened species? If not, what level of funding/staffing do you support?

Answer: The NSW Liberals & Nationals Government has committed \$4.8 Million to the new Saving Our Species program.

Local Question 6. (See Ask 5c for background)

Will you support legislation to enact a ban on both mining and gas extraction from all designated water catchment areas, as well as a similar ban on mining and gas extraction within one kilometre of significant water ways that feed these catchments?

Answer: The NSW Government has put a hold on CSG activities in the special areas of the Sydney Water Catchment. As well, the Aquifer Interference Policy was developed to protect aquifers and groundwater by setting objective criteria to assess the potential impact of all activities.

Local Question 7. (See Ask 5d for background)

Will you actively, and publicly, seek the removal of AGL's CSG exploration licence (PEL2) from all lands within the Greater Blue Mountains area? If so, how will you do it?

Answer: I have previously written to the Minister for Resources and Energy, the Hon Anthony Roberts MP, expressing my view that AGL's exploration licence (PEL2) for any areas covering the Blue Mountains should be relinquished. I also presented to the Minister the petition from BMCS regarding this issue in order that he understood the strong community sentiment in the region. It is worth noting I also strongly advocated against the petroleum exploration license application by CEEMAC Pty Ltd (PEL 158) which included parts of the Blue Mountains National Park. This application was rejected by The NSW Office of Coal Seam Gas.

In 2011 when the Liberals came to office there were two PELs over the Blue Mountains as a result of the previous Labor government's lack of a coherent approach to mining. Liberal policy provided a two kilometre exclusion zone from communities and national parks.

As a result of listening to the community and strong advocacy, all previous PEL's have been removed from the Blue Mountains. PEL 483 which was granted in 2010 was cancelled in Nov 2011 and PEL 2 was removed from the Blue Mountains.

(See illustrative maps provided to BMCS as part of this response)

Local Question 8. (See Ask 7a for background)

Do you support the NSW State Government providing funds to the City of Blue Mountains to facilitate the sorting, recycling, composting, and thermal treatment of waste?

If so, what level of funding do you advocate?

Answer: The NSW Government is committed to increasing recycling and diversion of valuable resources from landfill back into the economy. As a result of the Waste Less, Recycle More strategy the Liberal Government has allocated \$465.7 million for important environmental initiatives.

Under Waste Less, Recycle More Blue Mountains City Council has benefited by receiving \$65,627 as part of the Community Recycling Centre grant in 2013, and \$53,350 for the Combating Illegal Dumping: Clean-up and Prevention Program in 2014. Council has also received a further \$223,853.36 under the Better Waste and Recycling Fund for 2013/14 and \$196,649.96 for 2014/15.

Local Question 9. (See Ask 3d for background)

The Wollangambe River forms the Northern border of the Blue Mountains Electorate and is a declared "wild river" that flows through the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Peer-reviewed scientific testing shows that discharge water from the Clarence Colliery is polluting this "wild" river.

What steps will you take to protect the Wollangambe?

Answer: I will be writing to the Minister to reinforce my strong view that Clarence Colliery is required to meet its conditions and ensure the future of the Wollangambe.

I am informed that the Blue Mountains Conservation Society met with the EPA in December to discuss its concerns.

The Clarence Colliery underground coal mine holds an environment protection licence (EPL No. 726) which includes conditions relating to the discharge of the mine water into the Wollangambe River. The location of this mine near the headwaters of the Wollangambe River, which drains into the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, is taken into account and the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) requires that the company treat the mine water prior to discharging it into the environment.

The EPA is conducting a statutory review of the EPL held by Clarence Colliery under section 78 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997.

I am also informed that sampling of the Wollangambe River by the University of Western Sydney has been provided by the Blue Mountains Conservation Society to the EPA. The EPA will take these findings into account in undertaking the licence review.

Section 3: State Wide Issues

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State Question 1. (See Ask 1c for background)

Do you support the endorsement of the [Community Charter](#) drawn up by the Better Planning Network, and the adoption of the details as listed in the [Community Charter Companion](#) ?

Answer: As part of the delivery for A Plan for Growing Sydney, communities in the Blue Mountains will have the opportunity to shape their future by signing up and getting involved. Community consultation has already been a key factor in the development of the plan. The Government has already started work on a number of planning improvements to make the system simpler and easier to access for the community.

State Question 2. (See Ask 2b for background)

Answer: Do you support the proposal that the NSW Government establish a centralised database for all agencies to record weed removal projects in NSW?

Although it is challenging to capture the activities of all weeds managers across the State, NSW Department of Primary Industries is in the process of developing a 'real time' data capture system called the Biosecurity Information System' (BIS) which will soon be able to record all regulatory, extension activities performed by local Government weed officers across the state.

State Question 3. (See Ask 3b for background)

Do you support the return of base funding and staffing levels for NSW National Parks to at least 2013-2014 levels, adjusted for both inflation and new areas added to the estate?

Answer: I am aware of inaccurate Labor information about the NPWS budget. Budget paper 3 shows transfer or redirection of funds.

State Question 4. (See Ask 3b for background)

Further to Question 3 above, do you support additional supplementary funding and staffing to NP&WS to address: the many new trial programs staff are having to coordinate, and the growing threats posed by climate change, rapid feral animal population growth, and noxious weeds?

Answer: The NSW Government allocated an additional \$11 million over five years from 2012-

2013 to NPWS to implement and evaluate the trial supplementary pest program. In 2014-2015 the budget allocation is \$2.3 million.

State Question 5. (See Ask 3c for background)

Do you support the permanent cessation of all programs related to "recreational" hunting / feral-animal control by "volunteer hunters" in NSW National Parks?

Answer: I have consistently stated that there is not and will not be any volunteer feral animal control in the Blue Mountains.

State Question 6. (See Ask 5a for background)

Answer: Do you support a moratorium on all CSG operations in NSW until such time as the full framework of safeguards recommended in the NSW Chief Scientist's final CSG Report (30th September 2014) is put in place?

I support the NSW Government's recently released response to the report by NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer, Professor Mary O'Kane. The NSW Gas Plan adopts all of the recommendations in the final report.

Our Gas Plan cuts the percentage of the State covered by CSG titles and applications to just 15 per cent. The previous Labor Government had left 60 per cent of the State covered by title when we came to office.

Large swathes of the Blue Mountains were covered by petroleum title and exploration areas as a legacy of the previous Labor government. I am proud to say these title and exploration areas have been completely removed under the Baird Government (see illustrative maps provided to BMCS as part of this response).

The NSW Gas Plan provides a strategy across five key areas:

- Better science and information to deliver world's best practice regulation;
- Pause, reset and recommence-gas exploration on our terms;
- Strong and certain regulation;
- Sharing the benefits; and
- Securing NSW gas supply needs

State Question 7. (See Ask 5b for background)

Do you support the enactment of "No-Go zone" legislation to exclude mining and gas extraction from prime agricultural land and environmentally significant areas?

Answer: Each mining application is considered on a case by case basis to ensure that prime agricultural land and environmentally significant area are preserved. With particular regard to the CSG industry, the NSW Gas Plan is a comprehensive plan to deliver world's best practice on CSG to NSW. Labor's disastrous and reckless approach to coal seam gas in NSW saw the majority of the state covered by CSG titles and applications.

The NSW Gas Plan adopts all of the recommendations in the final report by the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer.

State Question 8. (See Ask 5b for background)

Do you support the proposal that, beyond the "No-Go" zones, mining and gas extraction applications should be assessed on the basis of environmental, community, and economic considerations equally; and that economic gains must not be the "*principal consideration*" ?

Answer: In assessing all applications the triple bottom is assessed - is it of benefit to the community, the environment and the economy of the area.

State Question 9. (See Ask 6a for background)

In the event of the collapse or watering down of the national Renewable Energy Target (RET), will you support the enactment of legislation at the state level to mandate a 20% renewable energy target by 2020 for NSW?

Answer: The NSW Government has a Renewable Energy Action Plan that guides renewable energy development in NSW. The Plan aims to increase the use of energy from renewable sources at minimum cost to the consumer. NSW is already progressing with 13% of energy production from renewable sources, well on the way to our 20% target.

State Question 10. (See Ask 6b for background)

Do you support a mandatory residential solar feed-in tariff? If so, in what form (gross or net), and at what approximate level (some examples: a fixed rate such as 15-20 cents per kWh, a relative rate such 10 cents below retail supplier peak kWh rate)?

Answer: Educating and encouraging residents to use renewables is a much better way of ensuring uptake rather than mandating pricing levels which takes away any flexibility in the marketplace. The NSW Regional Clean Energy Program has been improved and expanded to support early and effective engagement in renewable projects and the development of community-owned NSW renewable energy projects.

A market led rollout of Smart Meters has been announced, allowing electricity retailers the opportunity to provide customers meters as part of energy deals.