



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

ABN 38 686 119 087

PO Box 29 Wentworth Falls NSW 2782

Phone: (02) 4757 1872

E-Mail: bmcs@bluemountains.org.au Web Site: www.bluemountains.org.au

Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

D

Date: 14 May 2019

The Hon. Matt Kean MP
Minister for Energy and Environment
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Cc. Trish Doyle, MP,
Member for Blue Mountains

Dear Minister Kean,

Katoomba Airfield, Medlow Bath

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society (BMCS) is a community based volunteer organisation with over 800 members. Its mission is to help conserve the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains, and to increase awareness of the natural environment in general.

The BMCS were extremely pleased to see the directions that you intend to take with National Parks in NSW as evident in the Sydney Morning Herald article of May 5th 2019.

We were particularly glad that a focus would be on looking for opportunities to expand the National Park estate where possible. It is in regard to just such an opportunity that we are writing to you.

Katoomba Airfield is a Crown Land inholding in the Blue Mountains National Park (BMNP) which is part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. We are concerned about the impacts on the surrounding world heritage national park from the activities that the proposed commercial lease would allow.

Although only 35.71 ha, the site is in a key location in the upper reaches of the Grose Valley and within 2.5 hours from Sydney. It lies on a ridge above the sensitive Grand Canyon, adjacent to Greaves Creek, and is surrounded by important habitat for a number of threatened species including *Dasyurus maculatus*, the spotted tailed quoll - an iconic species of the upper mountains.

The Society also has a number of serious concerns about the process undertaken to date by the Department of Industry-Crown Lands (the Department) in relation to a proposed lease applied for by 'direct negotiation' over Katoomba Airfield.

Our concerns also include the lack of community consultation over the process to date, which

has not publicly canvassed any consideration of transferring the land to the National Park.

We wrote to the previous Minister for Lands and Forestry, the Hon. Paul O'Toole in December 2018 regarding these matters. In the interim, there has been a rising tide of community concern over the future of the airfield including the formation of a number of local community groups and the delivery of a petition (with over 10,000 signatures) that calls for no commercialisation of the airfield and its inclusion into the National Park. The petition has been handed to the local Member of Parliament, Trish Doyle.

BMCS continuing interest in the Katoomba Airfield

The Society has been making representations about the future use and management of the Katoomba Airfield site since 1997. Previous use of the airfield for commercial joy flights was controversial and heavily opposed by the community, with residents in Medlow Bath, North Katoomba and areas adjacent to scenic lookouts in Leura, Katoomba and Wentworth Falls particularly impacted. Walkers and park users also complained of low flying aircraft including in remote areas. The current proposal has the potential for serious impacts on our local tourism industry, particularly those who visit BMNP for walking, camping or sightseeing.

The Society has raised continuing concerns about the management of the airfield site. The site contains two hanging swamps, which are threatened by sediment flowing off the eroding airstrips. Sediment is also flowing into the Katoomba and Greaves Creek catchments and hence into the Blue Mountains National Park.

In 2000 and 2008 the (then) Department of Land and Water Conservation undertook two assessments involving community consultations on the long term future of the site. We understand that in both processes the Department concluded, supported by Blue Mountains City Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, that the land should not continue to be commercially leased and that the site be incorporated into the Blue Mountains National Park and used for emergency and bushfire air operations only.

Apparent lack of community consultation prior to the issuing of the current licence

Despite the outcomes of previous assessments and community consultations, as well as ongoing community concern, the current interim licence over the airfield was issued by the Department of Industry - Crown Lands without any community consultation. It is understood that only **some** government agencies were consulted but not community members such as potentially affected residents or visitors to the national parks or community groups with a known interest in the airfield's use and management.

The Department of Industry - Crown Lands have had an application for a longer term lease of the site in their possession since January 2019. The Department has still not commenced any community consultation nor released any details of the proposal.

We are concerned that any consultation associated with this application will not canvass an alternate future for the site appropriate to its surrounding WHA location, despite the previous reports calling for its inclusion in the National Park - an option that should be fully explored.

We would appreciate your involvement in this matter and would be pleased to supply you with any further information that you require.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lachlan Garland', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lachlan Garland
President
Blue Mountains Conservation Society
mobile 0415 317 078 or email president@bluemountains.org.au