



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

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Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

09 July 2019

The Hon Shayne Mallard, MLC
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Via email: shayne.mallard@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Mallard

URGENT Purchase of Radiata Plateau – the missing piece in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society (BMCS) is a community based volunteer organisation with over 800 members. It is the oldest continuing environmental organisation in the Blue Mountains. The goal of the Society is to promote the conservation of the environment in the Greater Blue Mountains region.

As you know the Plateau is privately owned and has just been listed for sale on the open market. The Society and the Blue Mountains community are calling on the NSW Minister for Energy and Environment, Matt Kean to make a landmark conservation decision and purchase Radiata Plateau for inclusion in the Blue Mountains National Park. A copy of the letter to Minister Kean is attached. Urgent action is required - the time to act is now before the opportunity to purchase the Plateau is lost forever.

Prior to the state election, in February 2019 Hon Gabrielle Upton as the previous Minister for the Environment met with yourself and Society and community representatives on-site to discuss the future of the Plateau. Throughout our campaign the Society has been in contact with the current owners, canvassing options to conserve the Plateau's biodiversity and heritage values. Just prior to the Minister's visit the Maharishi Board expressed to the Society an interest in selling the property to the NSW Government and were open to private negotiations. We conveyed this information to the Minister at the time of her visit. As a result, the Minister committed to asking the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to undertake a conservation assessment of the site to ascertain whether it was worthy of addition to the national park system.

The Society subsequently met with senior representatives of the NPWS and presented comprehensive documentation of the site's biodiversity, heritage, scenic and recreation values, and how the Plateau meets the national parks acquisition priorities as articulated in the NPWS's *NSW National Park Establishment Plan 2008* (see attached). NPWS also sought a market valuation for the property, a necessary precursor to any offer for purchase. We also understand that NPWS staff have been liaising with the Maharishi Board.

The NPWS recently advised us that their conservation assessment concluded that the Plateau contains significant conservation values and was a worthy addition to the national parks system. However, NPWS further advised that they had a limited acquisition budget and that Radiata Plateau did not meet the benchmark in terms of a statewide acquisition priority. NPWS advised that

NPWS are actively considering other properties across the state with higher conservation significance or which deliver improved management outcomes. In addition, ... the valuation we have received for the property is less than the vendor's asking price... Notwithstanding, we intend further negotiating with the vendor and concurrently continue to explore other acquisition options.

We understand that the NPWS have not, to date, provided a firm offer to purchase and as a consequence the Maharishi Board have decided to sell the property on the open market.

We note in the NSW Government's most recent budget, released in June, specific funding was announced for increasing green and open spaces following an election commitment to create well-connected communities with quality local environments. The Planning and Public Spaces Minister Rob Stokes announced, "green and open spaces are a big winner in the NSW Government's 2019-20 Budget", with \$162 million allocated "to upgrade existing government-owned land and buy new land for public parklands". The Society believes there is an opportunity to access this newly announced green and open space funding to acquire the Plateau.

You were instrumental in assisting us in getting a meeting with Minister Upton and we have much appreciated your support to date in terms of liaison with NPWS and the previous Minister. We are asking you to again represent the interests of the Blue Mountains community. The Society is making an urgent plea that you help us to conserve the Plateau, including making representations on the community's behalf to Minister Kean. The Plateau is available to purchase now, and there is a willing vendor whose preference is to sell to the NSW Government for the area to be reserved for conservation. This maybe the last chance to acquire the Plateau – we urge you to assist us in ensuring a lasting legacy for the NSW community.

We request an urgent meeting with you to discuss the Plateau and its future. Please contact me on the number below to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely



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