

# Questions For Candidates

## 2022 Federal Election

### Macquarie Electorate



The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is providing a set of questions to candidates in the 2022 Federal Election for the seat of Macquarie.

The answers to these questions will be published.

Questions have been deliberately framed to provide a “yes” or “no” answer. Please add a brief comment if required.

<b>Candidate's Name:</b>	<b>Greg Keightley</b>
<b>Candidate's Party:</b>	<b>AnimalJustice Party</b>

## The Questionnaire

### Preamble

- A common acronym in this document is GBMWA - Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.
- Each question includes an estimate of its financial impact. This should be considered in light of the estimated Federal government receipts in FY 2021-22 of \$532 billion.
- References are at the end of the document. NB. The links and the text are unprotected. That is, any changes can invalidate the links.

## Q.1 Climate change and sustainability action

<b>Question:</b> Will you commit to meaningful climate action for the Macquarie electorate through: a. a stronger 2030 national emission reduction target (the current 2030 target is 26-28% below 2005 levels) <sup>1</sup> ;	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	A stronger national emission reduction target is certainly needed but importantly its implementation must be immediate. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change investigation urged a quick and drastic reduction in greenhouse emissions be made beyond those covered by policies in place worldwide at the end 2020. Without this action they predicted a catastrophic 3.2 degrees of warming over pre-industrial levels. The Panel noted that despite 30 years of international negotiations, emissions had reached an all time high over the past decade. But Australia's commitments and track record on climate action even lag the rest of the developed world. I support the Climate Council's call for Australia to at least halve our emissions by 2030, and reach net zero no later than 2035. Nothing less will prevent catastrophic climate change. Meaningful climate action will involve immediately scrapping government initiatives working against carbon reduction, e.g. approval of and subsidies to new fossil fuel ventures and such 'reduction measures' as paying landholders to not cut down trees which often weren't slated for removal anyway, while forest clearing continues unabated. The AJP, unlike other parties, emphasises the need to count the massive impact of animal agriculture on climate in terms of methane emissions, land clearing and land use. It therefore advocates phasing out sheep and cattle farming to dramatically reduce methane emissions and allow reforestation.
<b>Question:</b> Will you commit to meaningful climate action for the Macquarie electorate through: b. financial support to transition Macquarie electorate communities from gas to renewable energy through incentives to make homes more energy efficient, facilitating electric modes of transport and funding local councils to convert community building and facilities to use renewable energy;	

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>There is a double advantage in assisting Macquarie and other electorates transition from gas to renewable energy. It will have a direct impact on emissions and, the faster the demand for gas declines, so will the need for its production. I would redirect funds currently going to subsidise fossil fuels (\$10.2 billion in 2020/21) to these sorts of local projects as well as larger scale renewable energy projects. As well as putting solar panels on more roofs in Macquarie, to make the best use of that generated power I would aim to create a virtual power plant. It would involve installing and connecting solar battery storage systems in thousands of homes, businesses and public buildings in our electorate. Once linked they would create a virtual power plant. It would allow renewable energy to be channelled into the grid to address frequency and voltage imbalances and thus keep the network stable – all while reducing the need for dirty power. One such plant has been operating in South Australia very successfully and it is a model which could be adopted in many other areas without the need for massive power plant infrastructure. I would also advocate to fund the installation of power stations for electric vehicles (EVs) within the electorate. This will increase the uptake of EVs and also be a boon to tourism.</p>
<p><b>Question:</b> Will you commit to meaningful climate action for the Macquarie electorate through:</p> <p>c. recognising that we are in a climate emergency and supporting the urgent development of climate action policies which focus on emissions reduction, equity and justice, and effective climate change adaptation?</p>	

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>As I commented in Q. 1a, the need for meaningful climate action must be undertaken urgently but it must be done in an equitable fashion.</p> <p>Communities that depend on the mining of coal and gas extraction for their livelihoods will not survive the inevitable cessation of these activities unless a transition phase to other forms of employment is initiated. The market cannot be relied on to fill these gaps in a timely fashion so government intervention is required. Renewable energy zones provide one example of initiatives which can provide communities with employment at this stage of the transition as well as clean energy. The faster the transition to renewable power, the cheaper power will become, especially for lower income households.</p> <p>It is an unfortunate fact that regardless of what measures are taken, the world is undergoing climate change. The Macquarie electorate stands witness to some of the most dramatic effects in terms of fire and flood. Climate mitigation measures are urgently needed and I will push to have such measures implemented as quickly as possible. Prevention of predictable damage due to climate change is always preferable and I would work to prevent any further development on the Hawkesbury flood plains and provide federal grants to councils to buy back flood prone properties. I will push for a federally-funded fleet of firefighting aircraft to combat bushfires.</p>
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**Financial impact:** The Australian, NSW and Victorian government report Pathways to scale: Retrofitting One Million+ homes<sup>2</sup> found that retrofitting Australian homes across five years could:

- Reduce average home energy use by up to 9,000kWh per year;
- Reduce average home emissions by up to 5.8 tonnes CO2 eg per year;
- Reduce pressure on the electricity grid;
- Create economic activity and job growth;
- Create an up to \$55 billion private finance investment opportunity;
- Improve household health and wellbeing.

**Background:** According to the 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, increased heatwaves, droughts and floods are already exceeding plants' and animals' tolerance thresholds, driving mass mortalities in species such as trees and corals. These weather extremes are occurring simultaneously, causing cascading impacts that are increasingly difficult to manage.

The impact of climate change is affecting Australians now. In the past two years alone, the Macquarie electorate has been devastated by unprecedented bushfires and floods.

## Q.2 Warragamba Dam

<b>Question:</b> Will you advocate for the refusal of Commonwealth approval of raising the Warragamba Dam wall?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	If the dam wall is raised it will cause the inundation of vast areas of the Blue Mountains National Park (which UNESCO describes as having “outstanding universal value”). It simply cannot be justified. If the wall had already been raised after the recent heavy rains these areas would have been under water. As an animal rights activist and environmentalist, I simply could not condone the demise of up to half of the remaining populations of the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, 28 species of threatened animals and thousands of hectares of endangered ecological communities as a result of inundation. The proposal is especially repugnant as it won’t solve the flooding problem for communities living in the flood-prone areas of Hawkesbury-Nepean but will, in fact, allow more development to occur which many suspected was the real reason for the proposal. That suspicion gained further credibility with the NSW Planning Minister’s recent scrapping of a new planning rule that discouraged development on flood-prone land. He then announced that a new planning policy designed to put climate change at the heart of planning decisions would also be scrapped. The raising of the dam wall will no doubt be the government’s main flood mitigation project (at a cost of \$3.5 million including offsets) and no other measures are likely to be taken to protect flood plain residents.

**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the federal Dept. of Agriculture, Water and Environment.

**Background:** The NSW Government’s proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall 14 metres to reduce and manage flood risk on the Hawkesbury River will destroy 65 kilometres of wilderness rivers and inundate 4,700 hectares of the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park. Significant aboriginal cultural heritage sites will also be destroyed. Raising the dam wall will enable unsustainable housing development on flood-prone land in Western Sydney.

The current Environmental Impact Statement for the project has been considered as inadequate by a number of experts, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature, who consider the impacts on the World Heritage Area so significant that they could potentially lead to the area being de-listed or identified as being at risk.

Raising the dam wall would not actually solve the problem of flooding in Western Sydney. It would have only a moderate effect even in a 1 in 500-year flood event<sup>3</sup> and other catchments could still cause significant flooding in the valley. And that is without further housing built on the flood plain. Climate change will make these flood events more common, just like fires.

## Q.3 Extend the boundaries of the GBMWhA

<b>Question:</b> Will you actively support the extension of the existing GBMWhA to include all additions to the national parks and reserves since the listing of the GBMWhA in 2000?
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>National Parks protect native animals, plants and natural landscapes but World Heritage listing provides a very valuable extra layer of protection. The natural environment of the Blue Mountains suffered after severe drought and then about 80% of the GBMWhA was burnt in the 2019/20 fires with the loss of millions of native animals. Major rain events followed causing severe erosion. In short the Blue Mountains natural environment has suffered badly and needs protection from any human induced damage that may occur in the future.</p>
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**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the federal Dept. of Agriculture, Water and Environment

**Background:** Ecologists have found that -

*“Increasing scientific knowledge of the natural biodiversity in and around the Greater Blue Mountains, awareness of increasing threatening processes and the potential impact of climate change, all indicate that long-term conservation effectiveness will be improved with targeted boundary changes.”<sup>4</sup>*

The World Heritage Area should be extended to include all additions (over 30,000 ha) to the national park and reserves since World Heritage status was secured in 2000 and adjacent significant natural areas which would improve the GBMWhA's biodiversity.

#### Q.4 Support additional values criteria for GBMWA listing

<b>Question:</b> Will you actively support the nomination of additional values including cultural, scenic and geomorphological for the GBMWA?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>The arguments for including these additional values seem obvious. The cultural values of the area have been strongly asserted by the six different Aboriginal language groups who traditionally occupied the area. Known sites, including distinctive Aboriginal rock art, provide evidence of at least 14,000 years of occupation of the land. Its scenic values are obvious - the dramatic cliffs, waterfalls, ridges and escarpments speak for themselves. Its cliff lines, slot canyons and notably pagodas in the Gardens of Stone area are of great geomorphological importance. If these additional values can be officially recognised the GBMWA will be afforded a great deal of protection it currently lacks.</p>

**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the federal Dept. of Agriculture, Water and Environment

**Background:** The Greater Blue Mountains was granted World Heritage listing for its biodiversity and for the diversity of Eucalypt species. The additional criteria of cultural, geodiversity and scenic splendour are currently not officially recognised and are thus not protected<sup>5</sup>. A current example of this is the proposed flooding of the Burragorang Valley by raising the Warragamba Dam wall. This will destroy significant aboriginal cultural heritage sites which are not recognised under the current listing of the GBMWA.

#### Q.5 Limit aircraft flights over the GBMWA wilderness areas

<b>Question:</b> Would you initiate a process to ban low-flying <b>non-essential</b> helicopter flights (e.g. joy and recreational flights) over wilderness areas in the GBMWA?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>I opposed the Katoomba airport proposal because of its impact on the GBMWA and am opposed to the Castlereagh Helipad development for the same reason. The application as it stands allows for joy flights and tourism flights and the helipad site would be located adjacent to the GBMWA. The presence of helicopter noise in an area noted for its wilderness qualities is totally out of keeping with the area's World Heritage status. I also have great concerns for the noise impact on animals and birds in the area and the possibility of bird strike from low flying helicopters. I would therefore endeavour to have a ban imposed on all such recreational flights.</p>

**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

**Background:** There are five declared wilderness areas which together amount to two-thirds of the GBMWA. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) has the power to regulate aircraft flights for environmental reasons. There is ample scientific evidence of the environmental impacts of low flying helicopters over natural areas, including noise and aircraft movements impacting wildlife. Wilderness areas within the GBMWA deserve protection against this threat, as do people walking in these and nearby areas.

## Q.6 GBMWA eucalypt baseline research

<b>Question:</b> Will you actively and publicly advocate for adequate funding for research to establish baseline data on health and status of the GBMWA Eucalypts in order to establish a credible monitoring regime for these eucalypts and the effect of climate change on them?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	The unprecedented scale of the 2019/20 fires as well as the long drought that preceded them has had an enormous impact on the flora and fauna of the Blue Mountains but we have little understanding of the detail of these impacts and are unable to monitor their recovery or otherwise over time. For me an understanding of the impact on the 99 species of eucalypts within the GBMWA is essential as the trees provide a refuge as well as food for the many animal species that inhabit the area and are essential to their survival. As climate change progresses we need to be able to monitor changes and try to intervene where possible.

**Financial impact:** Medium – new research grant funding is required.

**Background:** The GBMWA was declared on the basis of its biodiversity and eucalypts, of which there are 99 identified species. Restoring the GBMWA to its original state before the 2019-2020 bushfires, and tracking future changes due to climate change, requires baseline data on the current health and status of the eucalypts. This research is now urgent so that we are prepared for future climate change induced impacts.



## Q.7 Establish an active and stronger role for federal government in environmental protection

<b>Question:</b> Will you advocate for an active federal role in legislated environmental protection and, in particular, for retaining the federal Minister's independent approval role under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act</i> ?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	This is a 'yes but' response because the federal oversight of applications falling under the EPBC Act has been abysmal. It has acted more to rubber stamp applications than to scrutinise them in relation to their potential for environmental damage. A National Audit Office review was scathing of the review process - <a href="https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/referrals-assessments-and-approvals-controlled-actions-under-the-epbc-act">https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/referrals-assessments-and-approvals-controlled-actions-under-the-epbc-act</a> - Since the commencement of the EPBC ACT up till 30 June 2019 it found that of 6,253 proposed actions, only 21 did not gain approval. It noted that "The department has not established a risk-based approach to its regulation, implemented effective oversight arrangements, or established appropriate performance measures." The Office made several sensible recommendations to improve the process. Soon after this review was published however, the interim report of a government commissioned review conducted by Graeme Samuel was published. It acknowledged the Act was not achieving its purpose but, instead of strengthening how it was administered, it recommended devolution of the Environmental Impact Assessments to the states, thus weakening the assessment process. So, yes, federal government oversight of applications under the Act is desirable but only if the recommendations of the National Audit Office review are implemented.

**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the federal Dept. of Agriculture, Water and Environment.

**Background:** World heritage and climate change are two policy areas where national responsibility is essential. Leadership and active engagement with environmental protection is needed so that failure or absence of state government commitment, if it occurs, can be overcome. For example, Australia's national environment laws are currently failing to protect nationally listed swamps and the wildlife they support from permanent destruction from underground coal mining in the Lithgow area.

Our environmental laws need to properly protect nationally recognised threatened species and ecological communities. As well, the Federal government should continue its independent approval role under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* and not agree to refer this role to the state government.

## Q.8 Political integrity, donations & transparency

<b>Question:</b> Will you actively work towards the introduction of the following four measures to reduce corporate influence and restore balance to politics?	
a. Limit the size of donations to political parties and politicians.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	A limit of \$1,000 per individual and no donations allowed by companies or organisations.
b. Real time disclosure of all political donations.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	Corporate donors often hope their donations are hidden by delay so as to prevent public awareness and consequent backlash.
c. Limit the amount individuals or an organisation can spend on election campaigns.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	And add “in the 6 months prior to an election.” Additionally there should be no political advertising by governments during this period if they are actually advertisements by the incumbent political party masquerading as government information. At present, the public pays for what is, in effect, party-political advertising. I find the current trend, particularly by the Liberal party, to use roll-out single-use plastic banners on Election Day personally offensive on the grounds of cost and environmental impact.
d. Create a federal Integrity Commission with powers to investigate allegations of corruption and ensure accountability.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	It should have the power to investigate corruption and improper conduct by any elected official or public servant at the federal level, including retrospectively. It should have the power to publicly compel witnesses to provide evidence under oath and compel individuals and organisations to provide documents. In addition to publicly exposing corruption, it should also refer briefs of evidence to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration of prosecution.

**Financial impact:** An Australian Federal Integrity Commission and Commonwealth Parliamentary Standards Commissioner would cost approximately \$200 million over four years to establish and operate (Parliamentary Budget Office advice to Helen Haines MP 16 October 2020<sup>6</sup>).

**Background:** Our political system works best when the people we elect represent the values and concerns of the community. However, right now weak laws allow powerful industries, such as coal and mining, to exploit democratic processes by employing lobbyists and through large donations to political parties. In contrast, community environment or human rights groups often have difficulty accessing Ministers and key decision makers.

## Q.9 Western Sydney Airport

<b>Question:</b>	
a. Will you commit to a <u>comprehensive and genuine</u> community consultation for the proposed flight paths for the Western Sydney Airport?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	And would add “and be bound by the results.”
<b>Question:</b>	
b. Will you commit to including the option of a curfew as part of the flight path community consultation process?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	I have been a strong opponent of the airport but there is little doubt now that it is a fait accompli. A curfew should be an automatic requirement for the airport’s operations. If a curfew is necessary in Sydney, it is also necessary here. However, if a consultation process whereby the government is obliged to abide by the results is the only hope of achieving a curfew then I would commit to that process.

**Financial impact:** Minimal – The Commonwealth government has committed to a public consultation process.

**Background:** Western Sydney (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport is currently being constructed at Badgerys Creek and is due to commence operations in 2026. To date, detailed information on flight paths, including those over the electorate of Macquarie, has not been released.

Detailed planning for flight paths started in 2017 and, according to the website for the airport, will not be finalised until 2024. The airport website also states that there will be community consultation on the proposed flight paths. Currently, the Western Sydney Airport is designed to be a 24-hour no-curfew airport, unlike Kingsford Smith Airport which operates under a night-time curfew.

## Q.10 Personal conservation goals

**Question:**

If elected, what will you do for the environment? Outline one or more projects/issues that you intend to work on – limit 100 words.

Further to my response to Q. 7, the EPBC Act, in my view the Act should be rewritten to give much greater significance to all animals. We should not be waiting until they reach one level of 'endangered' before they are afforded a higher level of protection. I would like to see the legal status of animals upgraded in the Act so as to acknowledge their sentience and their right to live protected from human harm in their natural habitat. I am especially aware of this because I rescue and care for wildlife on a daily basis and yet under the current legal framework the kangaroos I endeavour to save have no intrinsic value, only their commercial value to humans. Around 1.6 million kangaroos are killed annually commercially with many more dying under other circumstances at the hands of humans.

## References

**NB. The following is unprotected text. Any changes can invalidate the links**

- 1 (Q1) The Australian Conservation Foundation, the [Climate Council](#) and the [Nature Conservation Council](#) have a greenhouse gas emission reduction target of 75% below 2005 levels by 2030.
- 2 (Q1) Pathways to scale: [Retrofitting One Million+ homes](#)
- 3 (Q2) [Leaked charts published in the Sydney Morning Herald](#)
- 4 (Q3) D Benson & J Smith, Protecting biodiversity values in response to long-term impacts. In [Values for a new generation – Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area](#) published by the GBMWH A Advisory Committee.
- 5 (Q6) For more detail see [Values for a new generation – Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area](#) published by the GBMWH A Advisory Committee
- 6 (Q8) [Parliamentary Budget Office advice to Helen Haines MP](#)