

Questions For Penrith Candidates at the 2019 NSW State Election



The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is providing a set of questions to candidates from the major parties for the seat of Penrith in the March 2019 State Election.

The answers to these questions will be published.

Most questions have both a “yes/no” answer and a request for more detail.

Please answer each question in the blue shaded box and limit your answers to 100 words.

We would like you to complete this MS Word document, save it as a pdf and email it back to us. [Word can save documents as a pdf.]

Please refer all queries to Alan Page – webmaster@bluemountains.org.au

Candidate's Name:

Nicholas Best

Candidate's Party:

Greens NSW

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Q1. Protect Our World Heritage National Parks

Q1.1 The National Parks and Wildlife Service Budget

Background: The Blue Mountains is a city surrounded by world heritage national parks so the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) plays an important role in our community and region. With increased tourism and climate change impacts we need, more than ever, an expert and well-resourced NPWS managing our world famous national parks.

The NPWS was once ranked among the top-five park-protection agencies in the world, but funding cuts and the loss of many experienced staff with decades of experience have harmed the organisation's prestige and hampered its effectiveness. Some key positions in the Blue Mountains remain unfilled.

The NSW Government must invest substantially to revive the capacity of the Service to ensure the precious natural landscapes it administers are properly protected and maintained. We support the NSW Nature Conservation Council's call for NPWS funding to be increased by at least \$150 million over three years. This will restore what has been lost over the last three years. This increased funding should be aimed at strengthening the Service's core function, that is, nature conservation.

Additional funding for the Blue Mountains region should focus on

- restoring adequate day-to-day management of the area;
- allowing NPWS to properly manage the biodiversity of the Blue Mountains National Park and the whole Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWhA);
- increasing feral and invasive species control and including working with council along the park boundaries; and
- creating a strong and well-resourced team of naturalists and wildlife researchers based in the GBMWhA area.

Question: Do you support increasing the National Parks and Wildlife Service budget by \$150 Million by 2022?

Yes

If elected what steps will you take to achieve this?

- **Legislate for an historic increase in the operating budget of NPWS by a minimum \$150m by 2022.**
- **Advocate for the increase in all areas including parliament, community and media.**
- **Stop the legislation that would raise the Warragamba Dam wall.**
- **Working with Environment groups such as the NCC develop a funded strategy to achieve protection for 17% of the state in**

Answer:

line with AICHI targets

- **Legislate against high impact activities in wilderness areas including horse riding, logging, and hunting.**
- **Finalise wilderness declarations under the Wilderness Act 1987**

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) manages more than 870 protected areas in NSW, covering over 7 million hectares and representing approx. 9% of the land area of the state. The Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, Blue Mountains National Parks plus the 18 National Parks on the Cumberland Plain have taken savage funding cuts under this government. Staff restructures have seen experienced staff leave the parks, some replaced by inexperienced new rangers with little experience. With the threats to biodiversity, the addition of new Parks across Greater Western Sydney and the staff shortages the NPWS an increase in operations funding should targe the staff shortages, replanting, pest and weed management.

Q1.2 Threatened Species in the GBMWhA

Background: There are 423 fauna species in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area of which 69 are classified as threatened species. Of the 2,296 flora species, 95 are threatened.

See - [Fauna of the GBMWhA](#)

See - [Flora of the GBMWhA](#)

Question: In regard to threatened species in the GBMWhA, would you commit to the following goals?

- Ensure that biodiversity within the GBMWhA is maintained

yes

- Ensure that no threatened species becomes extinct within the GBMWhA

yes

- Ensure that no non-threatened species becomes threatened within the GBMWhA

yes

If elected, what actions would you take?

Answer:

- **Legislate to end logging in public native forests and expand the National Parks estate**
- **End deforestation and excessive land clearing**
- **Legislate to establish a land and biodiversity fund**
- **Increase funding to the Save our Species programme to ensure that all threatened species are funded on a landscape level**
- **Maintain and increase urban tree cover**
- **Put limits on biodiversity offsetting**
- **Improve funding for invasive species management**

Q1.3 Inappropriate Development in our National Parks

Background: Tourism is increasing in the Blue Mountains and our national parks are part of the attraction for visitors. Echo Point is the second most visited location in NSW after the Sydney Opera House.

A 2017 proposal for 'chalets' in the national park at Govetts Leap was, thankfully, rejected. [Refer to the [Blue Mountains Destination Management Plan](#).] However, we need to remain vigilant especially when government agencies like the National Parks and Wildlife Service are under pressure to increase their revenue through tourism because of budget cuts.

More than ever our national parks need to be protected from development that is inappropriate.

Question: If elected will you work to ensure that inappropriate tourism development – such as large scale up-market accommodation – does not occur within our national parks?

yes

Explain how you will do this.

Answer:

- **Ensure transparency in all applications through parliament and media**
- **Ensure all proposals have extensive community engagement (no backdoor deals)**
- **Ensure areas of wilderness are protected from inappropriate tourism development**

Q1.4 Horse Riding within Wilderness Areas

Background: Plans of Management for a number of national parks in the south of NSW are being amended to allow horse riding within declared wilderness areas.

Horse riding degrades wilderness areas and undermines the conservation objectives of these areas.

Question: If elected will you work to ensure these amendments are reversed?

yes

Additionally will you work to ensure that horse riding is never allowed in any declared wilderness areas in NSW?

yes

Explain how you will do this.

Answer:

- **Call and campaign for a complete ban on horseriding in all national parks and wilderness areas**
- **Campaign and ensure that the impacts on biodiversity of both flora and fauna are front and centre in all legislative proposals**

Q1.5 Raising Warragamba Dam

Background: A project is currently underway to raise Warragamba Dam by 14 metres. If this goes ahead large areas of world heritage national parks and wild rivers will be inundated. This flooding will seriously and permanently impact on the incredible biodiversity and many threatened species that contribute to the Blue Mountains National Park's world heritage listing. It will also destroy significant cultural heritage sites of the Gundungurra people, including artwork, camps and ceremonial sites.

See the [Save the Blue Mountains Wild Rivers Campaign](#)

Question: Do you support this project?

no

If you don't support it, and if elected, what steps will you take to prevent this from happening?

Answer:

- **Work with Justin Field MLC, The Colong Foundation and their Give A Dam campaign, the BMCS, The Gundungurra peoples, and other community groups to block the project and voice objection to the project on environmental and cultural heritage grounds.**
- **Support and promote, through media and Parliament, any direct actions, campaigning and submission writing in the lead up to the Environmental Impact Statement and project approval phases.**
- **Use parliament and the media to pressure state and federal government and opposition parties, highlighting the impacts on world heritage, local ecology and cultural heritage.**
- **Work with local networks including on the Cumberland Plain and Hawkesbury area and assist with events to raise awareness of the project and grow local opposition.**

Q1.6 Western Sydney Airport – Not Needed or Wanted.

Background: Blue Mountains Conservation Society is firmly opposed to the construction of Western Sydney Airport.

Impacts on the World Heritage Area will be severe and unacceptable.

See our [Campaign Against Western Sydney Airport](#)

Question: Do you oppose Western Sydney Airport?

yes

If elected, what would you do to influence the abandonment of this project?

Answer:

- **The WSA is unnecessary and increased Public Transport is needed – increase investment in public transport in Western Sydney**
- **Focus on longer term transport policies especially High Speed Rail development from Sydney to Melbourne, which would completely obviate the need for an airport in Western Sydney**
- **Force public commitments from both Major parties on emissions, flight paths, noise protection and waste water runoff from the WSA.**

Q1.7 Western Sydney Airport – Flights Over Wilderness Areas.

Background: Wilderness areas are protected at the highest level in NSW, where nature can continue to evolve, and where humans can seek refuge from a noisy modern life. These places are sacrosanct. They must not be impacted by noisy aircraft.

In the USA, over-flight of the Grand Canyon wilderness is limited to flights above 13,000 feet so on-the-ground noise is minimised.

Question: Do you support not allowing flights below 13,000 feet above the ground over declared Wilderness Areas?

yes

If elected, what would you do to influence this?

Answer:

- Ensure that noise monitoring within the BMWHA is extensive under proposed flightpaths
- Monitor closely and ensure transparency of legislation associated with the flight paths
- Ensure community is aware of all impacts, including noise impacts over Wilderness areas through local community meetings

Q2. Expand Our National Parks

Q2.1 Gardens of Stone

Background: Additions and expansions to the national park estate have stalled across NSW in recent years and need to be accelerated.

The spectacular Gardens of Stone landscape in the western plateau and escarpment of the Blue Mountains contains dramatic sandstone landforms, internationally significant rock pagodas, high cliffs, flowering peat swamps and a multitude of threatened plants and animals.

The Gardens of Stone Stage 2 area is the last unprotected part of the original 1930s Greater Blue Mountains conservation proposal.

See the Society's [Gardens of Stone Campaign webpage](#).

Question: Do you support the protection of the 39,000 hectare Gardens of Stone Stage 2 area as a state conservation area?

yes

If yes, and if elected, what steps will you take to achieve this?

Answer:

- **As part of the Greens plan to expand the National Estate, The Gardens of Stone will become part of the NPWS and be preserved in perpetuity.**
- **Fight against coal mining in the region including in Newnes Plateau**

Q2.2 Strategic Additions to the Blue Mountains National Park

Background: Besides the Gardens of Stone (see Questions 2.1), there are areas of private or Crown land which would enhance and protect the Blue Mountains National Park and the GBMWhA if added to the national park estate. The Society has identified the following strategic addition:

- West Glenbrook (private land);

See Society's [Proposed Strategic Additions webpage](#)

Question: Do you support the acquisition of this strategic addition to the Blue Mountains National Park?

TBA

If so, and if elected, what steps will you take to further this?

Answer:

- We understand that negotiations are currently underway with the Deerubbin Aboriginal Land Council for ownership and protection of this land. We fully support the protection of this important piece of bushland and understand its strategic value in terms of the National Park. We support the ownership and protection of its cultural and environment values by the Aboriginal Community.

Q3. Appropriate Local Development

Q3.1 Residential Character Conservation Zone (R6)

Background: As part of the development of the Blue Mountains LEP 2015, Council proposed a new zone (the R6 Residential Character Conservation Zone) to protect the large-lot 'leafy green streets' character of residential areas adjoining the village centres.

This zone was designed to prevent subdivision and medium density housing developments despoiling those areas. But because R6 is not a 'standard' zone in the NSW planning regime, the Department and Minister for Planning delayed progress on its implementation and have since indicated that it will not go ahead.

Question: Do you support the immediate inclusion of the R6 Residential character conservation zone in the Blue Mountains LEP 2015?

yes

If elected what steps will you take to achieve this?

Answer:

- Work with the Member for Blue Mountains and the BMCC to ensure we are all speaking from the same songsheet
- Represent the community with the Minister for Planning and the DPE to advocate for the retention of this Conservation Zone and ensure transparency and community engagement

Q3.2 Deforestation and Excessive Land Clearing

Background: NSW needs stronger laws that stop the destruction of important native bushland and wildlife habitat.

In particular, laws must be amended to -

- conserve and enhance biodiversity;
- protect remnant and high-conservation-value regrowth native vegetation from clearing across all sectors (agriculture, urban development, infrastructure and mining);
- ensure true environmental impacts are assessed in accordance with an objective scientific methodology, with clear thresholds for rejecting clearing applications;
- restrict code-based tree clearing;
- close loopholes that allow the clearing of trees in urban areas; and
- provide support for effective monitoring and reporting.

Deforestation causes the emission of a significant percentage of NSW's total greenhouse gas emissions. This role should also be recognised in legislation. See [Review of Native Vegetation Act by NSW Environmental Defenders Office](#)

In 2014 the [Rural Fires Act 1997](#) was amended to include the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Scheme. This allowed for the clearing of -

- a. any vegetation, including trees or parts of trees, within 10 metres
- b. any vegetation excepting trees or parts of trees, within 50 metres

without any requirement for assessment or approval.

Question: Do you support a review of the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Scheme specifically with a view of conserving native vegetation?

yes

Do you support an end to deforestation and excessive land clearing?

yes

If elected what steps will you take to achieve this?

Answer:

- **Legislate to repeal the Liberals' landclearing laws and protect existing tree cover across the state.**
- **Ensure the protection of existing canopies and expand tree planting at street level and in parks and reserves**
- **Increase funding for compliance activities**

Q3.3 Control Invasive Species

Background: The Blue Mountains' natural values are being threatened by invasive species such as weeds and feral animals such as foxes.

Strong intervention is required to reduce the impact of new and widespread invasive species on the environment.

The NSW Government must prevent harmful new invaders –

- by phasing in a “safe list” approach;
- implementing an eradication program identifying and systematically targeting the highest priority eradicable species; and
- establishing an innovation fund for developing better methods for mitigating the environmental harm caused by the worst invasive species, including new methods for controlling feral deer.

Question: Do you support tackling invasive as described above?

yes

If elected what steps will you take to achieve this?

Answer:

- **The establishment of a \$5 million High Risk Incursion Response Fund**
- **The introduction of 3 yearly State of Biosecurity reporting**
- **The adoption of a ‘permitted list’ approach to the sale of plants**
- **The establishment of an Independent, statutory State Biosecurity Committee**
- **Joint responsibility for biosecurity to be given to both the Agriculture and Environment Ministers**
- Set up a community and schools education campaign to raise awareness and response to new and aggressive pest incursions such as fire ant, African Love Grass etc
- Work to increase funding from OEH to both Landcare and Local Land Services to tackle pest control measures

Q3.4 Medium Density Housing Code

Background: The Low Rise Medium Density Housing Code was introduced by the NSW Government in 2018. This code allows the building of medium density housing in residential zoned areas without council approval or input from neighbouring residents.

Many councils, including the Blue Mountains City Council, were granted a deferred commencement of the code until after the 2019 NSW state election. The Council and BMCS do not support the application of the code in the Blue Mountains and are seeking a permanent exemption.

Question: Do you support a permanent exemption from the Medium Density Housing Code for the Blue Mountains?

yes

If elected what steps will you take to achieve this?

Answer:

- This code undermines WHA status as well as local democracy; removes local planning knowledge and expertise. This is particularly egregious in an LGA that is surrounded by National Parks and a World Heritage Area
- Work with the Blue Mountains MP and the BMCC to ensure that the risks of Medium Density Housing in the Blue Mountains are well understood – especially the fire and environmental impacts on fragile ecosystems.

Q3.5 Lapstone Railway Tunnel

Background: The disused Lapstone Railway Tunnel was constructed in the 1890s. The tunnel is located in the Lower Blue Mountains in bushland directly adjacent to the Blue Mountains National Park. The western end, which is the main entry point, is located near the boundary of Knapsack Reserve. The tunnel is also listed on the State Heritage Register due to its heritage significance.

The tunnel and the surrounding land is Crown Land managed by the Department of Industries-Land, and was leased for a number of years for mushroom growing. The immediate past leaseholder vacated the site in 2015. When the site was vacated, the tunnel and surrounding land was left in a disastrous state, with dilapidated sheds, buildings and old machinery left in situ, as well as considerable waste from compost growing remaining in the tunnel. The area was also over-run with weeds.

Since 2016 the Department of Lands has done some clean up, remediation and weed control on the land surrounding the tunnel but very limited remediation work has occurred within the tunnel itself. Public access to the tunnel is prohibited due to public health risks, but illegal access is an ongoing issue.

The Society believes that there are ongoing risks to the environment and public safety while the clean-up remains uncompleted. The Society has been campaigning to have the tunnel and surrounding land urgently remediated and cleaned up, and ongoing weed control and bush regeneration implemented.

Question: Do you support as a matter of urgency the complete remediation and clean-up of the Lapstone Railway Tunnel and surrounding land, including implementation of ongoing weed control and bush regeneration, as well as urgent management works on the historic tunnel itself.

yes

If elected what steps will you take to achieve this?

Answer:

- The tunnel and access routes are dominated by invasive weed species which spill over into the Nepean River and the lowlands. It is used by locals as a walking track and has great recreational value. I personally walk it regularly.
- Work with BMCC to set up a bushcare group and establish a 10 year plan of management for urgent remediation and replanting.
- Increase signage at the entrance to the tunnel and improve track maintenance.

Q4. Climate Change And Coal Mining

Q4.1 Climate Change

Background: Climate change is real and its effects are evident in increased number of extreme weather events, an extended bushfire season, record high temperatures and the current almost unprecedented drying out of South Eastern Australia. Seven of the ten hottest years on record in Australia have happened since 2005.

An independent review of the state of Australia's environment, the Commonwealth's State of the Environment Report of 2017, concluded that climate change is one of the main pressures on the environment. The impacts of climate change are increasing and some of the changes could be irreversible.

Here in the Blue Mountains, the impacts of rapid climate change on biodiversity are happening now; they are not something that will happen in the future. For instance, a recent published study of the iconic Greater Gliders in Blue Mountains LGA concluded that their numbers have decreased significantly at lower elevations because of the increase in temperature that has already occurred in the area. The Blue Mountains, with its elevational and climatic range, is a good location to investigate such trends. What has happened to the Greater Glider is also likely to be happening to other animals and plants.

We know that people want government to take substantive actions to address climate change.

Question: Do you accept that anthropogenic* climate change is real and severe?

yes

[* anthropogenic - caused by humans or their activities.]

What steps will your party take towards addressing climate change?

Answer:

- **Greens NSW and the Australian Greens have an active and ongoing campaign to stop climate change**
- **Policies to enact this cover banning of coal mining, government support for renewable energy, reduction of carbon emissions this decade is now critical, rapid phase out of fossil fuel emissions from vehicles, end subsidies to all mining and all actions to be based on the precautionary principle.**

Q4.2 Coal Mining Exploration Licences and Mining Leases

Background: Open cut coal mining destroys the natural environment. Subsidence from underground mining can also destroy fragile ecosystems by draining swamps. The burning of coal contributes significantly to global warming and renewable sources of energy can replace coal.

Question: Do you support no more issuing of new coal exploration licences and coal mining leases?

yes

If elected what steps will you take to achieve this?

Answer:

The Greens NSW policy actually goes further and is for a 10 year planned phase out of existing coal mines, as well as a ban on all new coal and gas licenses.

Q4.3 Phasing Out Fossil Fuels And Support Affected Communities

Background: On 8 October 2018 the UN released a landmark report that warns of significant global climate consequences unless carbon emissions are cut to zero by 2050. Yet, just hours after the release of this report, the NSW Planning Department released its report saying a new coal mine at Bylong, adjoining the north-western edge of the GBMWA, was “approvable”. (This proposal is still being assessed).

The next NSW government needs to

- Take concrete action to set binding targets to ensure our electricity comes from clean, reliable renewables by 100% in 2030;
- Legislating a binding target of net zero emissions by 2040 and a plan to how this will be met; and
- Undertake an orderly, funded transition for communities with coal-dependent local economies in NSW including the Lithgow area.

Question: Do you support these actions?

yes

What would you do to ensure your party take these actions, if elected?

Answer:

Greens NSW and the Australian Greens have long standing and active campaigns underway to phase our Fossil Fuel use and support affected communities such as re-skilling of workers in the coal industry. Jobs in renewable energy and the construction of renewable energy generation and storage are all part of the plan.

Q4.4 Independent Planning Commission Members

Background: The Independent Planning Commission (IPC) -

- determines State significant development applications, such as new coal mines or their extension, where there is significant community opposition. (An example is the proposed new Bylong Mine).
- conducts public hearings for development applications.
- provides advice to the Minister on request.

While the NSW planning legislation says that panel members may have expertise in “the environment” amongst other areas, none of the 25 current commissioners are specialist terrestrial or aquatic ecologists.

Australia is facing major faunal extinction, as highlighted by the current Senate enquiry, and major projects often destroy animals' habitat. Considering this and the IPC's stated values to “build the community's confidence and trust in the Commission's independence”, the state government should ensure that IPC includes commissioners with ecology or biodiversity expertise.

Question: Do you support ensuring IPC panels include people with suitable environmental qualifications, in particular terrestrial or aquatic ecology, when assessing developments which impact on threatened species and communities?

yes

If elected what steps will you take to achieve this?

Answer:

- **Put forward legislation to ensure that all IPCs include an expert in environmental management and for the expert to have an environment qualification relevant to the Development that they are reviewing – marine, biodiversity, terrestrial, forests**
- **To ensure that Climate Change impacts form part of every IPC decision**
- **Increase transparency of the IPC's and their decisions**
- **Implement a planning inquiry with Terms of Reference to review IPC assessment processes on species, communities, climate change and biodiversity.**

Q5. Waste And Recycling

Q5.1 Single-Use Plastic Bags and Products Containing Microbeads.

Background: Plastic and other consumer wastes are polluting the ocean and our waterways at an alarming rate and increasing our reliance on dirty landfills.

In Australia, an estimated 600 billion pieces of plastic infest our waters and kill marine life.

A ban on single-use plastic bags should apply to all wholesalers, importers and retailers (including all small businesses) who provide these products to their customers both in shops and online. The ban should include 'biodegradable and degradable' bags up to 70 microns.

Microbeads pose an environmental hazard when disposed of in wastewater.

Despite the voluntary industry program, there are loopholes that need to be closed through legislation. The use of microbeads should be banned in cosmetics, sunscreens, personal care products, laundry detergents, cleaning products and paint.

Question: Do you support a ban on single-use plastic bags?

yes

Do you support a ban on products containing microbeads.?

yes

If elected, what would you do to influence this?

Answer:

- **Support a ban on all single use plastics, not just plastic bags**
- **Overhall the waste management system in NSW and invest in recycling at the state level**
- **Support the refuse, reduce, recycle campaigns across the region**
- **Set up a local educational campaign for schools and community on identifying and removing microplastics from the environment, their impact on waterways and marine species.**