

THE BLUE MOUNTAINS – NOT ANOTHER SUBURB OF SYDNEY

Dear Hon. Chris Minns MP, Premier of NSW

We are an alliance of community groups and organisations representing a variety of sectors in the Blue Mountains. We are writing to urge you to reconsider your government's proposed 'one size fits all' reforms to deliver additional housing, as outlined in the NSW Government's *Explanation of Intended Effect: Changes to create low- and mid-rise housing*. **We request that you exclude the Blue Mountains Local Government Area from these proposed reforms.**

Any new housing in the Blue Mountains has to be sustainable and environmentally responsible and meet local residents' needs. More affordable and social housing is required, and greater housing diversity. Planning to achieve this we believe must be 'place-based' in response to local environmental conditions and be undertaken by the local council in partnership with the community, not imposed top down by the State Government.

The Blue Mountains is not another suburb of Sydney. The proposed housing reforms are completely inappropriate for a city within a World Heritage Area. The Blue Mountains consists of a string of small towns and villages spread across nearly 100 kms of narrow ridgetops along the Great Western Highway from Lapstone to Mount Victoria as well as the villages of Bell, Mount Tomah, Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine. Surrounding the urban development on the ridgetops is the internationally significant World Heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park.

The Blue Mountains is known for its spectacular natural environment and scenic values, the heritage character of its villages and outdoor recreation opportunities making the Blue Mountains a popular domestic and international visitor destination. The city is also located within the Ngurra (Country) of the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples, and the area is of great cultural significance to Aboriginal people.

The proposed reforms, we believe, threaten the environment and heritage of the Blue Mountains, and thus our visitor economy. Of most concern is the intended overriding of local planning controls, specifically aimed at protecting the environment. Housing intensification in the Blue Mountains will create more stormwater runoff into the World Heritage Area at increased volumes, velocity and pollution levels, leading to the spread of invasive weeds and the degradation of waterways. The proposed areas targeted for increased mid- and low-rise housing under the reforms in some instances include, or are adjacent to, areas of significant bushland, including endangered ecological communities. This will inevitably degrade or destroy native vegetation and fauna habitat, including potentially damaging the nationally significant Blue Mountains Swamps and endangered lower Blue Mountains forests.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to exclude the Blue Mountains from the reforms is bushfire risk. The Blue Mountains is one of, if not the most,

bushfire prone areas in Australia. During the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires almost every village in the mid and upper Blue Mountains was at some point under threat. Recent research has predicted that by 2090, 90% of homes in the Blue Mountains will be exposed to high bushfire risk due to climate change compared to 26% today. In its submission on the reforms, the Blue Mountains City Council stated "to house more people in areas at risk from bushfire is reckless and dangerous".

The stated aim of the housing reforms is to provide new low- and mid-rise housing close to efficient public transport, as well as services and amenities. The Blue Mountains has a very limited intercity railway service. Due to its dispersed settlement pattern and inadequate public transport, the Blue Mountains is already highly car dependent, and these reforms we believe will only increase car dependency. Infrastructure, such as water, sewer and electricity, are also at or near capacity and cannot sustainably or environmentally support a significant increase in population.

The unique circumstances of the Blue Mountains LGA and the significant constraints on development are recognised by its designation as a Metropolitan Rural Area in the Greater Sydney Regional Plan. These areas are regarded as unsuitable for urban expansion. Spreading housing into the fringes of Sydney is also contrary to the NSW current housing policy to "build up, not out".

We ask you again that the Blue Mountains is excluded from the low- and mid-rise housing reforms, or that the proposal be withdrawn altogether and your government reconsider its approach.

Yours faithfully,

To find out more go to the Society website where you will find the Society's submission opposing the housing reforms www.bluemountains.org.au

What you can do - we want people to write to the Premier expressing their concerns and demanding that the Blue Mountains is excluded from the reforms. Your letter can be lodged online at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/premier-of-nsw/contact-premier> or mail to Hon Chris Minns, GPO Box 5341 Sydney NSW 2001

Better Planning Network
Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre
Blue Mountains Association of Cultural Heritage Organisations
Blue Mountains Bird Observers Inc
Blue Mountains Bushcare Network
Blue Mountains Community Land Trust
Blue Mountains Conservation Society
Blue Mountains Greens
Blue Mountains Historical Society

Cr. Mark Greenhill OAM, Mayor, City of Blue Mountains
Cr. Romola Hollywood, Deputy Mayor
Cr. Brent Hoare
Cr. Claire West
Cr. Daniel Myles
Cr. Mick Fell
Cr. Nyree Fisher
Cr. Sarah Redshaw

Cr. Suzie van Opdorp
Bushwalking NSW Inc
Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment Inc
Medlow Bath Residents Association
National Trust of Australia (NSW), Blue Mountains Branch
Springwood Bushwalking Club
Total Environment Centre
Wilderness Australia

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society recognises that the Blue Mountains is located within the Country of the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples. We recognise that the Dharug and Gundungurra Traditional Owners have a continuous and deep connection to their Country, which is of great cultural significance to Aboriginal people.

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