



# **Community Participation Plan for the Avondale Escarpment Resort by Avondale Escarpment Pty Ltd**

**01 March 2024**

**Prepared by Urbanised Pty Ltd**

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# 1. Introduction

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This report provides a framework for undertaking community participation in the Avondale Escarpment Resort proposed by Avondale Escarpment Pty Ltd. It is part of a State Significant Development Proposal to be submitted by Avondale Escarpment Pty Ltd to the Department of Planning and Environment.

The proposed development is centered around wellness and eco-tourism , a purpose that integrates well with the Illawarra's transition to an environmentally sustainable region. Specifically, the development will:

- provide for a sensitively designed and managed eco-tourist facility that will have minimal impact on the environment both on and off the site;
- enhance an appreciation of the environmental and cultural values of the site and area;
- promote positive environmental outcomes by rehabilitating the site, undertaking environmental management works such as weed control and facilitating bushland regeneration.

A framework for undertaking community participation is developed in this paper by:

1. Outlining the project;
2. Scoping the extent of community participation;
3. Developing a methodology for community participation;
4. Considering the methodology's relevance to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979; and
5. Identifying critical dates for key participation milestones.

The report proposes that Avondale Escarpment Pty Ltd takes responsibility for community participation and works closely with the planning authorities.

## 2. The Project

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Avondale Escarpment Resort is the first ultra luxury and wellness resort proposed in the Illawarra region. The project is a major remediation and rejuvenation initiative that will transform elements of the former Huntley and Avondale Colliery into world class tourism infrastructure for Wollongong and New South Wales.

### Site Location

- Avondale NSW, site situated on old Huntley and Avondale colliery 18 km southwest of the Wollongong CBD at the base of the Illawarra escarpment.
- Accessible from both Sydney and Wollongong.
- 80 minutes from Sydney airport.
- 15 minutes from the Wollongong Cruise Port at Port Kembla.

### Project Goals

- Repair a site with historical regional mining importance that sits within a quintessential Illawarra escarpment landscape.
- Occupy some of those parts of the site that have been significantly modified and degraded through the invasive mining operations. All the fringes of the site mining interventions are now suffering major weed infestation though lack of care and maintenance. The two significant existing buildings, a workshop shed and administration building, have been subjected to significant vandalism and weather deterioration.
- Create a true eco-tourist facility, a luxury health and wellbeing resort that indicatively comprises a main building, free standing approximately 41 studio, 1,2 and 3 bedroom villas making up 47 keys with an additional 15 Glamping Pavilions. There would also be a freestanding arrival lounge, a day spa, maintenance area and ecologically focussed recreation facilities. Re-use of an old steel portal structure would become a key restaurant/bar/lounge area. The existing road and track network would provide for all required site circulation routes.
- Integrates environmental facilities such as the recreational use of the natural systems and will include walking tracks, seating, shelters, board walks and observation decks through the landscape. Environmental protection works such as bush regeneration and weed management and existing demolition rubbish and mining debris removal works would also form part of the scheme. Some

interpretative mining elements together with associated display structures to celebrate the former use would form part of the property repair and reinvention.

The opportunities provided by this project are significant but so is community involvement and participation in the project. The site is rather isolated and does not have significant communities adjoining it. However, it does hold strong heritage significance (whether it be environmental, industrial, aboriginal or employment) for different groups within the region. By engaging with the community, the significant heritage components can be enhanced while the region can benefit from the economic opportunities generated by the project.

### 3. Community Participation

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This is an economically significant and a landmark tourism project for the region. As highlighted previously, the site does not have large communities on its boundary due to its location. It does however have environmental, aboriginal and employment heritage significance for different groups within the regional community. Community participation will need to be calibrated with these project characteristics in mind.

Avondale Escarpment Pty Ltd have been pleased with the feedback and support for the project so far and a comprehensive approach to community participation in the project has been developed to ensure that there is ongoing community engagement and participation in the project.

Avondale Escarpment Pty Ltd will introduce dedicated participation technologies to simplify community participation in the project. Traditional techniques will also be employed. This is to ensure that everyone regardless of access to technology or the ability to use technology has the ability to provide input. Techniques such as focus groups, social media and letter drops will all be used.

This project is significant but should have a “relatively” uniform level of community interest. Community participation will be arranged at the project level (as opposed to project element level). The reason for this is that the project should receive common levels of interest from the community and require consistent engagement techniques. Information and feedback will be gathered on the overall project through the technology platforms.

## 4. Community Participation Methodology

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The Avondale Escarpment Resort envisions a blend of ultra-luxury wellness facilities and a commitment to conservation in the heart of our community. This Community Engagement Plan outlines the strategy to involve the local community, stakeholders, and interested parties in the development process. By fostering transparent communication, inclusivity, and collaboration, Avondale Escarpment Pty Ltd aims to create a resort that not only enriches the lives of its guests but also contributes positively to the community and environment.

### Community Objectives

1. **Transparency** Provide accessible and accurate information about the resort's design, amenities, and conservation efforts.
2. **Inclusivity** Engage a targetted range of community members, local businesses, environmental organisations, indigenous groups, and governmental bodies.
3. **Collaboration** Incorporate valuable insights, concerns, and suggestions from stakeholders to enhance the resort's design and operation.
4. **Environmental Stewardship** Highlight the resort's commitment to conservation and sustainability, fostering support and understanding from the community.
5. **Long-Term Benefits** Ensure that the resort becomes a source of pride and prosperity for the local community.

### Engagement Strategy

#### 1. Concept Development

- **Establish a project website** Create a dedicated website outlining potential project concepts and providing the opportunity for web based feedback
- **Stakeholder Mapping** Identify key stakeholders, including local residents, business stakeholders, environmental organisations, indigenous representatives, and local government officers.

#### Activities

- Establish project website
- Set up 1800 number
- Establish stakeholder and community database
- Conduct sessions with key stakeholders

## 2. Planning and Approvals

- **Community Workshops** Organise interactive workshops to present the resort's preliminary designs and gather feedback. These workshops will focus on design elements, landscaping, and the integration of wellness and conservation features.
- **Online Platform** Launch a project-dedicated website with detailed design concepts, 3D visualisations, and a discussion forum. This platform will encourage virtual engagement and allow stakeholders to provide input at their convenience.
- **Expert Consultation** Invite environmental experts and conservationists to share their insights on the resort's environmental impact assessment. This will be conducted in collaboration with local conservation organizations.
- **Focus Group Discussions** Organise focus group discussions with representatives from indigenous communities to ensure cultural sensitivity and integration of local traditions.
- **Community Presentation** Host a public presentation to showcase the resort's final design, incorporating the feedback received during previous phases. Emphasise how the resort will contribute to the community's well-being and conservation efforts.
- **Q&A Sessions** Allow community members to ask questions and seek clarifications virtually, promoting transparency and addressing any remaining concerns.

### Activities

- One on one meetings and visits
- Phone calls
- Newsletters
- Updates on website
- Where necessary attend community meetings but host one comprehensive community presentation

## 3. Construction and Operation Phase

- **Ongoing Updates** Establish regular communication channels to keep stakeholders informed about construction progress, milestones, and any unforeseen challenges. Maintain transparency about the resort's opening and operational plans.
- **Community Partnership Programs** Develop initiatives that directly involve the community in the resort's operations, such as local employment opportunities, partnerships with nearby businesses, and wellness workshops open to residents.

### Activities

- Project website with updates, visualisations, and discussion forums



- Social media platforms for ongoing communication and engagement
- Local newspapers, radio, and TV for announcements and event promotions
- Community newsletters and bulletin boards for project updates
- Direct mail to nearby residents and stakeholders for important milestones

**Evaluation and Adaptation** Regularly assess the effectiveness of engagement activities through surveys, attendance records, and feedback analysis. Adapt the engagement strategy as needed based on input from stakeholders and changing project dynamics.

## 5. Relevance to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act

Part 2, Division 2.6, Section 2.23 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment (EP&A) Act 1979 sets out principles for community plans to be prepared by planning authorities. The community participation plans discussed in this paper are designed to meet the relatively new principles outlined in the EP&A Act. While the onus is legislatively on the relevant planning authority, it is the intention of VIG to collaborate closely with the planning authorities to ensure community participation can inform both planning and project delivery.

The table below reconciles the requirements under the EP&A Act with the detail set out in this plan.

“A planning authority to which this Division applies is required to prepare a community participation plan about how and when it will undertake community participation when exercising relevant planning functions (subject to this section).

### Table 1. Responses to the EP&A Act in Respect of Community Participation

Legislative Requirements	Response
<p>(2) A planning authority is to have regard to the following when preparing a community participation plan:</p> <p>(a) The community has a right to be informed about planning matters that affect it.</p> <p>(b) Planning authorities should encourage effective and ongoing partnerships with the community to provide meaningful opportunities for community participation in planning.</p> <p>(c) Planning information should be in plain language, easily accessible and</p>	<p>There is a comprehensive inclusive strategy for participation on matters relating to planning and the project.</p> <p>The methodology assesses various levels of engagement to deliver more effective community participation, is ongoing.</p> <p>There are traditional and new technology platforms that will improve accessibility and also promotes greater</p>

<p>in a form that facilitates community participation in planning.</p> <p>(d) The community should be given opportunities to participate in strategic planning as early as possible to enable community views to be genuinely considered.</p> <p>(e) Community participation should be inclusive and planning authorities should actively seek views that are representative of the community.</p> <p>(f) Members of the community who are affected by proposed major development should be consulted by the proponent before an application for planning approval is made.</p> <p>(g) Planning decisions should be made in an open and transparent way and the community should be provided with reasons for those decisions (including how community views have been taken into account).</p> <p>(h) Community participation methods (and the reasons given for planning decisions) should be appropriate having regard to the significance and</p>	<p>participation by the community.</p> <p>The three stages of engagement, will help with early engagement and also inform the future participation process. Documents will be able to be commented and viewed by the community in real time.</p> <p>Using participation techniques such as along with technology will ensure that participation is absolutely inclusive but also representative of the community.</p> <p>There has been a level of consultation with major regional stakeholders. However, consultation with the members of the community and groups will be undertaken once SEARS are issued. Of particular interest will be impacted indigenous groups, local environmental groups, community groups such as Wollongong Sporting Car Club, Cycling Groups and other groups as identified.</p> <p>Planning decisions are the responsibility of the relevant planning authorities however information on community views will be readily available.</p> <p>This is significant project, therefore the community participation approach that has been proposed is particularly comprehensive.</p>
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likely impact of the proposed development.	
<p>(3) For the purposes of this Division:</p> <p>(a) a community participation plan prepared by the Planning Secretary applies to the exercise of relevant planning functions by the Minister, and</p> <p>(b) a general community participation plan prepared by the Planning Secretary applies to the exercise of relevant planning functions by determining authorities under Division 5.1 (other than councils or prescribed public authorities), and</p> <p>(c) the regulations may provide that the community participation plan of a planning authority applies to the exercise of relevant planning functions by another planning authority and that the other planning authority is not required to prepare its own community participation plan.</p>	<p>This is a matter for the Secretary and the relevant planning authority.</p> <p>As above.</p> <p>To assist in this, it will be proposed that there is a level of transparency in community participation that will enable other planning authorities to have involvement in identifying the relevant elements of the project and assessing the impact in accordance with the methodology. Planning authorities and related agencies initially identified include Biodiversity Conservation and Science Group (BCS), DPI, Heritage NSW - European and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, DPE-Water, WaterNSW, Local Land Services, Rural Fire Services and the Environmental Protection Authority. These authorities and agencies will be included in pre-construction/planning consultations and new agencies will be included in the consultation as required.</p>

<p>(4) A council need not prepare a separate community participation plan if it includes all the matters required under this section in its plan and strategies under section 402 of the <a href="#"><i>Local Government Act 1993</i></a>.”</p>	<p>It is intended that there will be a close relationship with Council with respect to the development of community participation plans especially for participation plans that are assessed as having local impact.</p>
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## 6. Possible Project Timelines

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The timeframes will be dependent on when the SSD planning proposal is submitted and when the SEARS are delivered. The program cannot be specifically designed until VIG are in receipt of the SEARS. However, in the time frame between lodging the planning proposal and the release of the SEARS the community participation infrastructure will be prepared and constructed. Possible timelines with milestones are listed below. A complete project plan will be completed soon after the SEARS are delivered.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Critical Date</b>
Scoping report/request for SEARS	Include this document.	October 2023
SEARS Issued	SEARS will outline community that is affected by the development.  Hold preliminary discussions with those groups identified in SEARS.	January 2024
Initial project elements identified	With the planning authorities and being informed by the discussions held with the community affected select initial project elements.	Internal identification February 2024  Meeting with Council February 2024  Meeting with DPE March 2024
Impact Assessed	With the planning authorities and focus groups assess the impacts of the planning elements.	July 2024
Methods of Participation established	With the planning authorities, stakeholders and focus groups agree on the methods of participation.	TBC
Community Participation process	Methods of participation implemented.	TBC

commences.	Technology deployed.	
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