

OBJECTION TO STATE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION SSD-86456706 142–150 Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba.

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I am writing to formally object to the proposed development at 142-150 Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba, and to request that the application be refused. I am a resident of Sydney with a long personal connection to Katoomba and the Blue Mountains generally. I have been visiting regularly since I was a child to bushwalk and canyon, attend the Blue Mountains Music Festival and, on countless occasions besides.

I am not a local resident, but I am part of a community of people for whom Katoomba is more than just a destination but a meaningful place, an identity, a place of heritage and of beauty. Its character—the town's relationship to the escarpment, the scale of the streets, the ubiquity of the bush—is exactly what draws thousands like me back year after year.

It is in that spirit that I write this objection.

1. The site is in one of the most significant cultural landscapes on the planet and the EIS does not treat it as such.

The Blue Mountains is a World Heritage Site. Katoomba is, as the mayor noted, only one of two cities in the world contained entirely within the boundary of the World Heritage listing. This status comes with responsibilities that go beyond simple local amenity.

The EIS states, quite flatly, that the site "is not of heritage significance." While it may not be individually heritage listed, that doesn't mean that the site is not a contributing part of an area of World Heritage significance. The question isn't whether the site itself is heritage listed; it is whether the introduction of nine buildings, predominantly four storeys but rising to five in places, on the edge of the escarpment will detract from and undermine the landscape's international heritage status, both from within and without the site. In my view, it will.

The mayor described the proposal as "blighting the landscape from almost every vantage point in Katoomba." I agree. From the walking tracks on Narrow Neck, from Echo Point and indeed, from all of the approaches to the town, the visual intrusion of nine buildings of this scale onto a currently treed and low-rise site immediately adjacent to the escarpment, will be overwhelming and permanent.

2. The proposal is out of scale with Katoomba's current urban form.

Nine buildings, ranging from four storeys in some places up to five, providing 218 dwellings and 52 serviced apartments on a 1.16-hectare site is not incremental infill. It's a total redevelopment of a site that, through its current scale and the substantial canopy covering it, contributes significantly to the character of the area and to the sense of approach to Katoomba from several directions.

The claim made in the EIS that the development has been "carefully designed to ensure a built form that is not dominant within the streetscape or landscaped setting of the locality" is simply not believable, in my view. Removing 134 of the existing 206 trees, or nearly two-thirds of the existing canopy cover, is not respecting the "landscaped setting." A planned landscape is not the same as an

established mature canopy that contributes significantly to the sense of place; nor should it be seen as an acceptable replacement.

Also, in relation to the EIS stating that the site has been "reclassified as non-bushfire prone", I find this deeply disturbing in light of reporting that the reclassification occurred the day after the assessment of the site began. The Blue Mountains Conservation Society has rightly called this a dangerous precedent and the residents of the Narrow Neck area have expressed serious concerns about evacuations given the narrow, two-lane road network.

3. The assessment process has been flawed, and community consultation was insufficient.

This application is reportedly undergoing assessment via an unauthorised AI tool being used by HDA executives, forcing the council to ask for it to be re-assessed. While the Department states the tool has only been used to 'collate' information, full transparency to the community about the role of this tool is missing. The council has rightly asked that documentation related to this tool be provided.

I strongly support the council's request. An application of this magnitude, in this highly sensitive landscape, that affects an established area's character and will set a precedent for future HDA applications in the Blue Mountains, must not only be subject to rigorous development review but also a process of unquestionable integrity. This process has not achieved that.

Council has also encouraged submissions raising concerns about pre-lodgement community consultation, which I feel was woefully inadequate. I was not consulted, nor were others I know who visit the Blue Mountains regularly. I am certain this applies to many more. The local community extends far beyond those who live immediately adjacent.

Conclusion

I am not inherently opposed to additional housing. I understand the state government's pressure to achieve greater dwelling numbers, and I recognise that the Blue Mountains, and Katoomba in particular, are attractive places that will attract new residents and investment. But policy does not justify building whatever, wherever, or however just to tick boxes; that is merely abdication of sound planning principles.

The Blue Mountains is a World Heritage Area, and Katoomba is a town whose character and scale and its relationship to the landscape have defined it and are the key to its appeal and economy.

This proposal, at its present scale and with the manner in which it has been assessed, is inappropriate for this site. I ask that the application be refused.

Dr Benjamin Ticehurst, 28th April 2026.