

SUBMISSION

Re. 142-150 Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba

I wish to lodge an objection to the proposed development of multi-story apartments on Narrow Neck Road in Katoomba.

My reasons are three-fold:

- 1) fire risk
- 2) tourist economy
- 3) World Heritage status

1) Fire Risk

The Blue Mountains is one of the most fire-prone environments in NSW. It is also densely populated with transport routes confined to narrow ridges. This makes the evacuation of the local population during major fires of great concern. The Narrow Neck Road is the only exit from this plateau, either onto the Great Western Highway, or at the other end, via Cliff Drive. Not only do all the side streets converge on Narrow Neck Road, but the length of the road means that a large number of residents already live along it. In the last 20 years, two major fires have burned close to this site, with the 2019-20 summer devastating much of the bushland in the valleys below the plateau. As the horrific Black Saturday fires in Victoria showed, evacuation can be one of the most dangerous aspects of a bad bushfire. In that fire, in which 173 people died, many people were trapped in their cars and perished. The prospect of people fleeing the fires along a single route, such as Narrow Neck Road, should not be dismissed lightly. For this reason, the addition of over 200 apartments, and the hundreds of new residents which this will bring, is completely wrong-headed in the context of the fire risk.

2) Tourist Economy

The economy of the Blue Mountains depends almost exclusively on tourism. Most other economic activity is sustained by local residents, many of whom commute out of the area. This leads to a certain amount of escape spending, but many residents seek to purchase their requirement locally. The main exceptions would be those in Lower Mountains shopping in Penrith and those in the Upper Mountains shopping in Lithgow. Without tourism, local employment in the Upper Mountains would be severely depressed. A major part of the tourist economy is the natural environment, the bushwalking trails and the lookouts. In the case of the plateau surrounding Narrow Neck Road, there are a number of major attractions, particularly Cahill's Lookout which is within walking distance of this proposed development. To develop multi-story apartments adjacent to these attractions is nothing less than "scenic vandalism". The great appeal of much of the cliff-lines in the Upper Mountains consists of the absence

of visible buildings. In many cases, houses are nestled beside the cliff-lines, but they are invariably single-story, modest buildings which are low-key and inoffensive from a scenic point of view. Most importantly, they do not intrude upon the scenic experience which brings tourists to the Blue Mountains. The proposed development should be rejected because of the potential damage to tourism which such developments would bring. If approved, it is likely to set a precedent, and the long-term result will see that damage multiply.

3) World Heritage status

Related to the tourism issue is the fact that the Blue Mountains has World Heritage status, something which obliges governments to take special care in how such areas are managed. For this reason alone, a multi-story development is completely out of keeping in a World Heritage area. The Blue Mountains should not be part of the Housing Delivery Authority approach to development but must be treated as a separate and distinct area. Considerations based on the World Heritage status should preclude the application of any kind of "template" developed for other purposes, such as meeting housing targets. There is plenty of scope to meet such targets in the areas immediately adjacent to the rail line and shopping precincts, particularly in the Lower Mountains, where commuting into the Sydney area is more realistic. The proposed development on Narrow Neck Road is ultimately about profits, not the housing shortage.