

Considered objections to Residential Flat Buildings, Serviced Apartments, Restaurant and Associated Works at Nos. 142-150 Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba.

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Introduction

I strongly object to the proposed residential flats, apartments, restaurant and associated building works, proposed for Narrow-Neck Road Katoomba.

I am a Blue Mountains ratepayer and resident, a biologist and naturalist, with a PhD in aquatic biology and over 50 research publications. I have lived in the mountains for 25 years.

I have examined the EIS and attachments.

I am concerned that this project seeks to eclipse the carefully considered limits set in the Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and Development Control Plan (DCP) for the Blue Mountains.

The Blue Mountains National Park is world-heritage listed because of the unique and inestimable qualities of its landscapes, flora, fauna, and geology, in which the mountains villages are embedded.

The LEP (developed over 30 years of careful consideration) and DCP exist to ensure environmental protection of the majestic landscapes and wilderness qualities of the mountains, and to regulate the impact of human activities whilst retaining the established character of the mountains towns.

The proposal claims to be a State Significant Development, yet it risks sabotaging the State and National Significance of the Blue Mountains National park and its townships. It flies in the face of the LEP.

Too large, out of character, it is a resort rather than residential housing

The proposal is for a massive development, nine buildings, four to five storeys in height, comprising residential flats, 3 restaurants, a 'wellness hub' and art gallery, and substantial onsite parking - a total of 218 dwellings and 52 serviced apartments (EIS, p.3). It involves 'excavation for basement parking siteworks, subdivision and tree and landscaping works'.

In fact, the description is that of a resort. This is a resort clothed as a residential development.

Rather than any attempt to alleviate the housing crisis, which one must assume is the reason for the SSD categorisation, it bypasses the Council's careful LEP under the Housing Delivery Authority, with the promise of some residences, which are in fact embedded within a resort.

From my understanding of the documents provided, of the 270 dwellings, 30 of the apartments are 'affordable' (according to an out-of-date survey, conducted in 2019) and 52 for 'short term rental', with associated traffic and noise that is incommensurate with the qualities of this area. Residents are a minority, whilst short-term visitors/tourists can expect stunning views of the escarpment, and restaurant meals/art experiences to complement their stayovers. The "short term rental accommodation" market has expanded over the last decade, as any resident of the mountains can attest.

The claim is made that the development is carefully designed "to ensure a built form that is not dominant within the streetscape or landscaped setting of the locality" (EIS p.3). This claim is disingenuous, for this resort of nine 4-5 story buildings including tourist hubs (wellness, arts, 3 restaurants) plus onsite parking will in fact dominate the landscape and existing streetscapes.

Bushfire Risks- More Traffic Impedes Evacuation and Emergency Vehicles

The EIS repeatedly states that this area is located outside bushfire-prone land. Yet the fires themselves are not the only issue. As a resident of the Blue Mountains, I have experienced the 2013 fires and those of 2019/2020. A major issue is the flood of traffic attempting to evacuate as fires encroach, and resultant traffic jams on the M4. Although, for some unidentifiable reason, this part of Narrow-Neck Road is not regarded as 'bush-fire prone' (EIS p.16), the massive development will add at least an extra 200+ vehicles to the mountain's roads during bushfires, further adding to congestion, panic and difficulty of access for fire-engines and emergency vehicles. For example, there was a fire at Cahill's lookout, in proximity to this development, that could potentially cause a stampede of tourists from these buildings.

Why would the development introduce so many cars to the roads during a fire event? Tourists and the few residents are unlikely to walk from the station to this location. It would take 30-40 minutes for a person with reasonable fitness to do so. If they are carrying luggage, even longer.

The EIS includes no information about the time frame for "a dedicated Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP)" (EIS p.53) to be introduced, and no details about how this will alleviate the traffic issues inevitably associated with a project of this scale.

Imposition of a domineering 4-5 story complex on the adjacent World-Heritage listed landscape.

Despite claims of the attractiveness of this construction, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. The plan is to build an intrusive resort that harvests exceptional and awe-inspiring views of the escarpment mostly for the benefit of short-term visitors. The nine 4-5 story buildings are utterly out of character in this area and will change its existing low-rise qualities and subtle human imprint irreparably.

Potential Damage to Aquatic Habitat Inadequately Assessed

The mitigation measures proposed in the EIS (stormwater retention, ecological buffer zones, EIS p.53) to deal with inevitable impacts of runoff on aquatic systems, given the location of the development, are vague. The impacts of **any** runoff from this industrial scale resort/residential complex, with its 3 restaurants, are significant. Impacts can occur far from the site itself, beyond the jurisdiction of the resort/development, entering creeks and swamps inhabited by endangered and sensitive species unique to the Blue Mountains. These include the Blue Mountains Water Skink, the Giant Dragonfly (endangered), Spiny Crayfish and the Red-Crowned Toadlet. The risks of further endangering aquatic habitats with a development of this scale are unacceptable in a World Heritage Area.

Conclusion

In my opinion, with its 3 restaurants, arts hub and wellness centre, and substantial parking facilities, this is a resort masquerading as a residential development. In fact, a minority of its structures are devoted to long-term residential use. If the proposal was for a resort of this size and capacity it would not be permitted due to the Council's LEP. However, by claiming to provide much needed housing, it is justified by social benefits that are unlikely to accrue, due to its true nature, and at the same time risks damaging the unique environmental qualities of the Blue Mountains that the LEP has carefully sought to protect, over 30 years.