

# Rally turns up heat on State Government



**Making a stand:** Protesters unfurl the 'not another suburb of Sydney' banner over the pedestrian bridge at Faulconbridge on Sunday.

By Damien Madigan

The Blue Mountains community has upped the ante in its fight against state government planning proposals that critics say could lead to 7000 new dwellings in the Lower Mountains.

Deputy Mayor Mark Greenhill led the charge against the draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney at a public rally at Faulconbridge on Sunday.

"As far as I'm concerned those state bureaucrats who think this a good idea can take it and shove it where the sun doesn't shine because it is absolutely not a good idea," he told the Blue Mountains Conservation Society-organised protest.

"It will undermine our world heritage listing, it will change fundamentally the community in which we live, it will damage the Nepean River, and it will ultimately put in place an alteration to our city which we can never, ever reverse."

The draft strategy identifies the Lower Mountains — from Faulconbridge to Lapstone — as a "metropolitan urban area... which will be a focus of Sydney's growth over the next 20 years".

Clr Greenhill believes this could lead to 7000 new dwellings in the Lower Mountains.

"Our understanding as a local council is we would be looking at accommodating at least 7000 homes in our LGA (local government area). When you consider the hue and cry that occurred when they were looking to develop the ADI site

in Penrith — which was for 8000 homes in the Penrith region — think about the possibility of 7000 homes in the Lower Blue Mountains," he said.

But Blue Mountains MP Roza Sage urged against "fear-mongering" in the debate, saying it was too early to be talking about specific figures.

"The suggestion the draft Metropolitan Strategy would force anything upon the people of the Blue Mountains is utterly false," she said on Monday.

"Any numbers settled on in the finalised strategy will be worked through over the next couple of years in partnership with Blue Mountains City Council and the community as part of the sub-regional delivery process."

Blue Mountains Conservation Society president Peter Ridgeway told the rally the draft strategy treats the Blue Mountains "as if we are just another suburb of Sydney".

"The Blue Mountains is unique, given the surrounding world heritage area, our tourism economy and our current small scale urban development. The Blue Mountains is not like other areas of Sydney, and we believe that the draft Metropolitan Strategy directly threatens the environment, character and way of life of Blue Mountains residents," he said.

Mrs Sage said the community's concerns about the draft strategy were being noted by the government.

"I can inform the conservation society that at the [community consultation] information ses-

sion I attended, the boundaries of the Metropolitan Urban Area (MUA) were an important topic of discussion. It was made clear that community opposition to the inclusion of the Lower Mountains in the MUA had been noted and consideration would be given to moving the boundary closer to the foot of the Mountains in the final strategy," she said.

"This is clear evidence that true community consultation has been held on this matter and it is important this process is allowed to run its course before fear-mongering dominates the local discussion."

NSW planning minister Brad Hazard reiterated these points in a committee hearing in parliament on Friday, August 16.

"At this stage I would say that the issue is under consideration. It is not locked in concrete. It is not locked in one way or the other. I am happy to look at it," he said in response to questioning from Upper House Labor MP Helen Westwood and Opposition Environment and Planning Minister Luke Foley.

Sunday's rally also heard about conservation society fears over a new state planning bill being introduced into parliament next month. Mr Ridgeway said the bill will "reduce people's rights to comment or object in terms of new development".

The rally ended with local residents placing a temporary banner over the Great Western Highway at Faulconbridge stating the 'Blue Mountains — not another suburb of Sydney'.



**Come out swinging:** Deputy mayor Mark Greenhill at Sunday's rally against proposed state government planning changes.