



# Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

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**Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow**

3 July 2019

The Hon Matt Kean, MP  
Minister for Energy and Environment  
GPO Box 5341  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

sent via:

[www.nsw.gov.au/your-government/ministers/minister-for-energy-and-environment/](http://www.nsw.gov.au/your-government/ministers/minister-for-energy-and-environment/)

Dear Minister Kean

## **URGENT Purchase of Radiata Plateau – the missing piece in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area**

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society (BMCS) is a community based volunteer organisation with over 800 members. It is the oldest continuing environmental organisation in the Blue Mountains. The goal of the Society is to promote the conservation of the environment in the Greater Blue Mountains region.

**The Society and the Blue Mountains community is calling on you Minister Kean to make a landmark conservation decision as newly appointed Minister for the Environment and purchase Radiata Plateau for inclusion in the Blue Mountains National Park. The Plateau is privately owned and has just been listed for sale on the open market. Urgent action is required - the time to act is now before the opportunity to purchase the Plateau is lost forever.**

### *Conservation significance of the Plateau*

Radiata Plateau is accessed via Pulpit Hill Road, Katoomba, and forms part of the southern Blue Mountains escarpment. It is approximately 300 ha in size, and is currently undeveloped and covered in natural bushland (though there is some evidence of previous forestry activity on the site including remnants of a Radiata Pine plantation).

The Society has exhaustively documented the natural and cultural heritage values of the Plateau (see attached documents). The Plateau is unique and highly significant because:

- It is the last remaining undeveloped peninsula Plateau in the Upper Blue Mountains, and provides important bushland and wildlife corridor linkages with existing parts of the Blue National Park to the east and Crown reserves in the Megalong Valley to the south.
- The Plateau has unprecedented scenic values. Its dramatic cliff lines can be enjoyed from many of the key tourism lookouts in the upper Mountains and from the Megalong Valley. Easily accessed lookouts on the Plateau itself enable visitors to enjoy stunning views towards Katoomba of the iconic Blue Mountains southern escarpment
- The Plateau contains nationally and state significant biodiversity values, including the presence of rare Blue Mountain Swamps, a nationally listed threatened ecological

- community.
- The area is also home to many threatened animals, such as the Spotted-tailed Quoll and Greater Glider.
  - The Plateau is only one of ten places where the highly endangered Dwarf Mountain Pine and the shrub *Leionema lachnaeoides* grow, and is a stronghold for these critically endangered species.
  - The Plateau includes an extensive network of walking tracks used by local residents, bushwalkers and birdwatchers. Unusually for the Blue Mountains the walking track network is relatively flat and accessible, as it is along the top of the escarpment. The area is also internationally recognised for its rockclimbing crags and walls, and is regularly use by climbers.
  - The area has significant Aboriginal heritage values, including the State heritage listed “Blacks Ladder”, a traditional and historic pathway down into the Megalong Valley.

More information about the Plateau including short videos highlighting its values can be found on the Society’s campaign website:

<https://bluemountains.org.au/leaveradiataplateauwild>

### *Thirty five year community campaign*

The community, including the Society, has been actively campaigning for over 35 years for the Plateau to be protected and purchased by the NSW Government to become part of the Blue Mountains National Park.

To demonstrate the community’s commitment to the conservation of the Plateau, the Blue Mountains Conservation Society co-ordinated a full page Open Letter (copy attached, see page 5) addressed to the previous NSW Minister for Environment, published in the Blue Mountains Gazette in December 2018.

The Open Letter asked the NSW Government to commit to purchasing the Plateau for inclusion in the Blue Mountains National Park and, ultimately, incorporation into the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Signatories included local environmental, heritage and Aboriginal groups, local community leaders and statewide environmental groups (including the NSW Nature Conservation Council, Colong Foundation for Wilderness, Total Environment Centre, and National Parks Association).

The coming together of such a diverse range of local community groups and leaders was historic and unprecedented. It clearly demonstrates the widespread and sustained community support for this valuable part of the Blue Mountains to be protected forever. The Blue Mountains City Council have also consistently supported the campaign, with all Councillors - Liberal, Labor, Independent and Greens – voting in August 2017 to support acquisition and inclusion of the Plateau into the Blue Mountains National Park.

### *Plateau under threat*

The transcendental mediation group - Maharishi’s Global Administration Through Natural Law – has owned the Plateau since the early 1980s. Major developments, including a large resort and conference centre, were proposed by the current owner in the past (in the 1990s), but ultimately did not proceed.

In 2016, a number of development applications were lodged by the current owner for three new buildings on the Plateau. The development went before the Land and Environment Court for approval. Residents and the Blue Mountains Conservation Society campaigned and made appearances at Court objecting to the developments, and the Court ultimately refused two out of the three buildings. One building was approved, but so far construction works have not commenced. Since the decision of the Court, the current owners have been pursuing other options for re-development, including purchasing part of a neighbouring lot to build a 30-40 bed meditation retreat. These plans did not proceed and the Maharishi Board has now decided to sell the property on the open market.

While the majority of the Plateau is zoned environment protection, which prohibits intensive development such as residential housing and tourism, some areas are zoned to allow these types of developments. The Society strongly argues that any development on the Plateau threatens its values, including loss and fragmentation of native bushland, and will limit ongoing public access. The Plateau remaining in private hands would also leave it vulnerable to re-zoning applications by speculative developers to allow more intensive development.

*Minister Upton makes a commitment to investigate acquisition*

In February 2019 Hon Gabrielle Upton as the previous Minister for the Environment met with Society and community representatives on-site to discuss the future of the Plateau. Throughout our campaign the Society has been in contact with the current owners, canvassing options to conserve the Plateau's biodiversity and heritage values. Just prior to the Minister's visit the Maharishi Board expressed to the Society an interest in selling the property to the NSW Government and were open to private negotiations. We conveyed this information to the Minister at the time of her visit. As a result, the Minister committed to asking the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to undertake a conservation assessment of the site to ascertain whether it was worthy of addition to the national park system.

The Society subsequently met with senior representatives of the NPWS and presented comprehensive documentation of the site's biodiversity, heritage, scenic and recreation values, and how the Plateau meets the national parks acquisition priorities as articulated in the NPWS's *NSW National Park Establishment Plan 2008* (see attached). NPWS also sought a market valuation for the property, a necessary precursor to any offer for purchase. We also understand that NPWS staff have been liaising with the Maharishi Board.

The NPWS recently advised us that their conservation assessment concluded that the Plateau contains significant conservation values and was a worthy addition to the national parks system. However, NPWS further advised that they had a limited acquisition budget and that Radiata Plateau did not meet the benchmark in terms of a statewide acquisition priority. NPWS advised that

*NPWS are actively considering other properties across the state with higher conservation significance or which deliver improved management outcomes. In addition, ... the valuation we have received for the property is less than the vendor's asking price... Notwithstanding, we intend further negotiating with the vendor and concurrently continue to explore other acquisition options.*

We understand that the NPWS have not, to date, provided a firm offer to purchase and as a consequence the Maharishi Board have decided to sell the property on the open market.

We note in the NSW Government's most recent budget, released in June, specific funding was announced for increasing green and open spaces following an election commitment to create well-connected communities with quality local environments. The Planning and Public Spaces Minister Rob Stokes announced, "green and open spaces are a big winner in the NSW Government's 2019-20 Budget", with \$162 million allocated "to upgrade existing government-owned land and buy new land for public parklands". The Society believes there is an opportunity to access this newly announced green and open space funding to acquire the Plateau.

**The Society and the Blue Mountains community are making an urgent plea that you as Minister for the Environment use your discretion to prioritise the purchase of Radiata Plateau. The Plateau is available to purchase now, and there is a willing vendor whose preference it to sell to the NSW Government for the area to be reserved for conservation. This maybe the last chance to acquire the Plateau – we urge you to make a defining and landmark conservation decision and leave a lasting legacy for the NSW community.**

**We request an urgent meeting with you to discuss the Plateau and its future. Please contact me on the number below to arrange a meeting.**

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lachlan Garland', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lachlan Garland  
President  
Blue Mountains Conservation Society  
mobile 0415 317 078 or email [president@bluemountains.org.au](mailto:president@bluemountains.org.au)

## OPEN LETTER TO THE NSW MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT &amp; HERITAGE

# RADIATA PLATEAU

## A MISSING LINK IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE AREA

The Hon. Gabrielle Upton, MP  
NSW Minister for Environment and Heritage

Dear Minister

**Radiata Plateau – home to rare species and threatened ecological communities - is at risk.**

Towering high above the rolling Megalong Valley, Radiata Plateau (Elphinstone) is the last remaining undeveloped peninsula-plateau in the upper Blue Mountains, yet it remains unprotected.

Several ancient plant species inhabit the Plateau's complex and convoluted cliffs, heath, shrublands and swamps. It is one of only ten places globally where the highly-endangered Dwarf Mountain Pine and shrub *Leionema lachnaeoides* grow and it is home to many threatened animals, including the Spotted-tailed Quoll and Greater Glider.

An invaluable bushland and fauna corridor between Medlow Bath and Katoomba, the Plateau is a missing link in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. It is the last remaining unprotected stretch of undisturbed southern escarpment.

Popular with local residents, bushwalkers and birdwatchers, the Plateau's extensive network of walking tracks and heritage passes are used daily. It is also the site of internationally recognised rock-climbing crags.

Distinctive and prominent, the Plateau holds significance to the local Aboriginal people, being a traditional pathway into the Megalong Valley.

The Plateau's future has been in the balance for over two decades. Held in private hands, major developments have been proposed in the past but did not proceed due to strong community opposition. However, just last year a development proposal was approved by the Land and Environment Court.

The integrity of the Plateau depends on it remaining untouched. While in private hands, future development threatens its ecological significance and will, most likely, curb public access.

Local residents and the Society have long argued that the Plateau should be purchased by the State and Commonwealth Governments for inclusion in the Blue Mountains National Park.

We find it incomprehensible that an area of such outstanding environmental importance remains unprotected. It deserves ongoing permanent protection. Incorporation into the Blue Mountains National Park will ensure this.

**We therefore ask you, Hon. Gabrielle Upton, Minister for the Environment, Local Government and Heritage, to urgently recognise the ecological and heritage significance of Radiata Plateau (Elphinstone) and its valuable place within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, by seeking to have the Plateau acquired by the NSW Government for incorporation into the Blue Mountains National Park.**



### WE CALL ON MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

to email Ms Upton  
[info@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@environment.nsw.gov.au) and  
support us with our plea to protect this  
valuable area.

Send copies of your email to the  
Society at  
[leaveradiataplatauwild@bluemountains.org.au](mailto:leaveradiataplatauwild@bluemountains.org.au)

Yours sincerely,

Aunty Sharyn Halls  
Blue Mountains Bird Observers Inc.  
Blue Mountains Bushcare Network  
Blue Mountains climbers: Simon Carter,  
Ben Cossey, Lee Cossey, Monique Forestier,  
Andrea Hah, Tom O'Halloran and Amanda Watts  
Blue Mountains Conservation Society  
Blue Mountains Historical Society  
Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute  
Colong Foundation for Wilderness  
Dr Haydn Washington

Blue Mountains City Council Mayor,  
Cr Mark Greenhill  
Cr Darryl Bowling  
Cr Kerry Brown  
Cr Mick Fell  
Cr Brent Hoare  
Cr Ramola Hollywood  
Cr Don McGregor  
Cr Daniel Myles  
Cr Shae Foenander  
Dr Peter Smith and Dr Judy Smith, ecologists

Emeritus Professor Dexter Dunphy  
Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association Inc.  
National Parks Association (NSW)  
National Trust of Australia (NSW),  
Blue Mountains Branch  
Nature Conservation Council (NSW)  
Pulpit Hill Road residents: Rodney Mathew, Glenn  
Humphreys, Emil Mandyczewsky and Melissa White  
Springwood Bushwalking Group  
Total Environment Centre  
Wyn Jones



**LEAVE  
RADIATA  
PLATEAU  
WILD**

For more information go to the Leave Radiata Plateau Wild website  
at [www.bluemountains.org.au/leaveradiataplatauwild](http://www.bluemountains.org.au/leaveradiataplatauwild)

Sponsored by Blue Mountains Conservation Society [www.bluemountains.org.au](http://www.bluemountains.org.au)  
We also thank our campaign supporters Jules Booth, Kamil Sustiak Adventure  
Photography and Nathan Smith.

We recognise that the Darug and Gundungurra people are the traditional custodians  
of the Blue Mountains, and we pay our respects to Elders both past and present.

Photographs: © Kamil Sustiak Adventure Photography