



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

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Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

Ms Melanie Hawes
Deputy Secretary
Crown Lands Division
P O Box 2185
Dangar NSW 2039

Sent by email: cl.enquiries@crowland.nsw.gov.au

9 March 2022

Dear Ms Hawes

KATOOMBA AIRFIELD - Lot 550 DP 751627, Grand Canyon Road, Medlow Bath

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society (the Society) is a community-based volunteer organisation with around 900 members. Our mission is to help protect, conserve and advocate for the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains. In fulfilling its mission, the Society advocates for the protection of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWhA). In particular, we have actively supported transferring the Katoomba Airfield land into the surrounding Blue Mountains National Park for many years

As you will be aware, after a lengthy process, Crown Lands refused an application for a commercial lease over Katoomba Airfield, Grand Canyon Road, Medlow Bath on 22 October 2021. As it is now over four months since this decision was made, the Society is seeking an update on the current position regarding returning the land to the national park and the future of the airfield site.

Previous assessments and commitments

The Airfield land has been designated for incorporation into the national park since the 1960's. Assessments more recently (2000 and 2016) have consistently recommended that it be added to the Blue Mountains National Park while still used for emergency and bushfire air operations only.

During 1999-2000 the then Department of Land and Water Conservation (DLWC) undertook a formal Land Assessment process for the site. The Draft Document on public exhibition March – May 2000 referred to:

- National Parks and Wildlife Service's interest in adding the site to the Blue Mountains National Park;
- the Environment Protection Authority's concerns about increased aircraft use;
- DLWC's conclusion that 'expansion of operations at the airfield is clearly inconsistent with the findings of this land assessment'; and
- the importance of groundwater contamination risks with increased use as an airfield due to fuel storage.

This assessment recommended site rehabilitation and continued availability for bushfire and other emergency purposes, based on its 'land capability, significance and suitability ratings'.

As one of the contributors to this process, the Society received a letter (dated 2 November 2000) in which the Department stated that it *"proposed to add the area to the Blue Mountains National Park upon expiry of the current lease subject to discussions yet to be held between the relevant stakeholders....upon addition of the area to the National Park it is proposed that those facilities required for bushfire surveillance and suppression including emergency use of the airfield and any infrastructure will be maintained by agreement of the relevant authorities. The areas of the site not required will be returned to natural bushland."*

In 2008, the then Department of Lands undertook a further assessment of the site and invited Blue Mountains City Council to participate in a consultation process for the future use and management of the site. Council's submission objected to the sale of the land or the reissuing of a private lease. Council's preferred option was, again, that the site be limited to emergency use and be incorporated into the Blue Mountains National Park.

The Society strongly supported the recommendations of Council and the relevant state government agencies in 1999, 2000 and 2008 which were that the land should not be privately leased and that the site be incorporated into the Blue Mountains National Park and used for emergency and bushfire air operations only. The considerable community and broader public support for this outcome was demonstrated more recently when over 12,000 people signed a petition, presented to NSW Parliament on 1 August 2019, *"to incorporate the Katoomba Airfield into the GBMWSHA to be managed by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service..."*

As one of the last remaining inholdings on the Blue Mountains ridgeline, any commercial use of the site has consequences for the surrounding World Heritage national park. World Heritage listing is the highest level of international recognition that an area can gain. The Greater Blue Mountains was granted World Heritage listing in 2000 for its outstanding biodiversity and for the diversity and evolution of its Eucalypt species. Incorporation of the airfield land into the Park will ensure appropriate management and adherence to UNESCO expectations.

The Society has a long interest in the future of the Airfield. We would appreciate your advice as to the current position on achieving the above commitments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. Cameron". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

Tara Cameron
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