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Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow



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General Manager

Lithgow City Council

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To whom it may concern,

Submission on the draft Seven Valleys Destination Action Plan 2024-2030 (DAP)

Executive Summary

Specific priority actions should be identified in the executive summary.

The summary is laden with jargon and doesn't explain a brand or vision for the Local Government Area (LGA). Its remarks and advice are motherhood statements that apply to any local government area seeking to place itself in a tourism market.

The observation made in the summary that the LGA has below average length of overnight stays is well known. The executive summary should instead state what must be done to increase overnight stays, as this seems to be the primary task of the DAP.

Introduction and Guiding Principles

Regarding the guiding principle of inclusivity, Wilderness Australia and Blue Mountains Conservation Society are leaders in the development of *Destination Pagoda* and should

have been specifically invited to make comment on this draft DAP. There also appears to have been no specific efforts to engage with the Wiradjuri Nation.

Regarding existing tourism strengths, one of the LGA's greatest tourist assets is the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The World Heritage Area is not mentioned once. A glaring omission as the DAP should relate to it.

The draft DAP omits details of the significant Aboriginal cultural assets in the LGA, such as the Maiyingu Marragu Aboriginal Place and the Bilingarra Indigenous Art and Culture centre at Bowenfels on the highway. Aboriginal destination resources should be included as additional game-changer projects, and integrated with heritage interpretation of areas such as the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area and also the LGA's arts programs. It is appropriate, then, that the draft DAP also has a proposal for a specialist program for encouraging the development of new or enhancing existing Aboriginal cultural experiences (page 28).

Regarding fostering collaboration, proposals to build regional local government networks would assist the LGA build its tourism economy. There should be a specific DAP proposal to facilitate a regional tourism taskforce. The adjoining Blue Mountains City has a mature tourism economy and could assist in development of the Lithgow Region's tourism economy.

Situation Analysis

The situation analysis seems to contain errors by not adequately considering the economy, and its impact on families in the Greater Sydney region. Most of these six million potential visitors to the Lithgow Region have four weeks annual leave but very limited spending money due to the burdens of cost of living and particularly accommodation costs. This omission seems to be a major error in the analysis.

Lithgow is ideally situated to offer holiday accommodation to families in the Sydney region that have little money to spend. The variety of offers in Lithgow can engage this huge market, provided there is sufficient low-cost accommodation capacity developed. The DAP does not consider or target this market, that is the majority of 6 million people in the Greater Sydney region.

The only future accommodation offered for this suddenly large market is the Family Forest Camp in the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area. Other camps, such as those in Wolgan Valley, are currently not available. Blue Mountains City Council has free camps at Mt Wilson (open) and Megalong Valley (closed). They are always full, and LCC could consider making free camping available for major weekend annual events, for example Ironfest.

The question that the DAP needs to answer is what tourism offerings are available for families from the Sydney Region with limited means to attract them to the Lithgow Region?

Destination Pagoda sought to address this need. The NPWS and LCC have placed a tourism focus on adventure activities like mountain biking and a hero walk, the Gardens of Stone Walk, that is too challenging for most families. In consequence, most of the capital works for visitor facilities for the new reserve is going into these sectors of the market. Short walks in nature on gentle terrain for families are not adequately catered for, and the result is that suitable existing facilities, like the Glowworm Tunnel Walk, are heavily used. The upgrade of this facility will be at capacity from the day it opens.

The focus in the Gardens of Stone SCA on thrill and spills mountain biking and hero walks provides for the physically fit, not families with limited financial means with grandparents or young children in tow. The LGA is missing out, by focusing on the above sectional interests with bikes and hard walks, as it has forgotten the missing majority of potential visitors that are struggling to make ends meet.

LCC should support the original intent on *Destination Pagoda* and ensure visitor use of the new reserve is for families to engage with nature.

Game-changer projects page 44

The proposed development of the mountain bike trail network and facilities in the State Mine Heritage Park completely overlooks the contingent outcome of this initiative.

The State Mine bike trail network shall bring visitors to the Lithgow State Mine Heritage Park and make investment in this museum worthwhile.

The museum is not just about coal but also trade unionism. Lithgow would be ideally suited to offer a museum dedicated to the history and evolving story of trade unionism. The Lithgow State Mine Heritage Park could be enlivened by curated stories behind its collection of 19th century union banners it displays. These trade union banners are priceless assets and should be drawcards.

Extension visitor “passes” to Zig Zag railway customers could be offered so that visits to the Lithgow State Mine Heritage Park, the Blast Furnace Park and Small Arms Museum are encouraged.

A downside of many museum stories is that they are often bland. For example, the Blast Furnace Park makes no reference to James Rutherford’s 1875 blast furnace which he blew up in 1882 in protest over cheap imports. A future State Mine Museum should present controversies like the Lithgow Dole Riot, the 1949 coal strike that saw mine leaders in Long Bay Goal to enliven the narrative.

The State Mine could also become the starting point for LGA oil shale tours. An oil shale self-guided tour is possible through the LGA, as are self-guided bird tours and bike gravel tours, and pagoda landscape adventures. It is even possible to present the City’s transition from coal to renewable energy as a self-guided tour. Such initiatives would extend visitor stays.

Brand: Page 14

The cachet of internationally significant pagoda landscapes is unique to Lithgow. Tasteful billboards and social media have promoted this must see destination. The timing of these promotions was, however, too early, as the visitor facilities in the Gardens of Stone SCA will not be ready for another two years.

The Wild Bush Luxury Experience cabin lease proposal will trash this brand by building among pagodas. The coal mining industry would not develop built facilities on the edge of a cliff among pagodas. The sites are too pristine and visually prominent for the coal industry to consider doing so, and neither should the tourism industry.

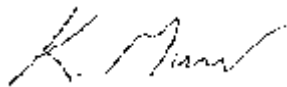
The proposal disrespects the NPWS reserve primary value, stone gardens. The proposed cabins set a dreadful precedent for future accommodation development in the most sensitive parts of parks and reserves in NSW.

This proposal will attract negative media and public comments. The LGA risks a perception of being seen as undertaking damaging “tourism mining” of its primary natural asset.

One of the key risks to your Brand is the LGA being considered as a degraded, dirty landscape, with poor governance and poor regard for the natural environment. The coal industry steps towards being less environmentally damaging will be cancelled if Wild Bush Luxury Experience cabin lease proposal is approved for development in amongst pagodas.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft DAP.

Yours sincerely,



Keith Muir
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Wilderness Australian



Annette Cam
President
Blue Mountains Conservation Society