



# Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

ABN 38 686 119 087

PO Box 29 Wentworth Falls NSW 2782

Phone: (02) 4757 1872

E-Mail: [bmcs@bluemountains.org.au](mailto:bmcs@bluemountains.org.au) Web Site: [www.bluemountains.org.au](http://www.bluemountains.org.au)

## Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

30<sup>th</sup> May 2017

Mr Robert Greenwood  
General Manager  
Blue Mountains City Council  
Locked Bag 1005  
Katoomba NSW 2780

Dear Mr Greenwood,

### **Submission in regard to the Blue Mountains Community Strategic Plan 2035, Delivery Program 2017-2021 and Operational Plan 2017-2018**

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a community based volunteer organisation with over 850 members. The goal of the Society is to promote the conservation of the environment in the Greater Blue Mountains region. The Society would like to make a submission in relation to the Blue Mountains Community Strategic Plan 2035 and the accompanying Delivery Program 2017-2021 and Operational Plan 2017-2018.

#### *KD 1 - Lead*

The Society supports all the objectives, strategies and actions under this theme, particularly Objective 1.2, and Strategies 1.2a and 1.2b, as well as Objective 1.4 and Strategies 1.4b. The Society strongly supports 1.4c (climate change initiatives).

In terms of the Delivery Program 2017-2021 for Strategies 1.2b and 1.4b as they relate to community involvement and consultation the Society would like to see the following:

- **More active public notification of when public consultation processes commence.** This would include display advertisements in the Gazette (a small paragraph on the Council's already crowded Gazette page is not adequate). In certain instances postcard alerts sent to all residents (similar to what Council did for the draft LEP exhibition) are warranted. A more modern webpage design with a changing headline banner on what is on public exhibition would also assist (we note that Council intends to replace its website). Direct and timely notification to key groups who Council knows have an interest in an issue, as well as large and inviting display posters and notices where the issue is site specific, should also be utilised.
- **Extension of public consultation periods.** Four weeks is nowhere near adequate for members of the public to respond to lengthy and complex documents (the Strategic Plan 2035 and the accompanying Delivery Program

2017-2021 and Operational Plan 2017-2018 is a case in point), especially when the public notice of exhibition is not adequate. Six weeks should be the standard and in some instances 8 or 12 weeks should be adopted, with the public consultation period increasing depending on the significance and complexity of the issue.

- **Public feedback sessions and community workshops.** Council needs to consistently adopt more open-ended consultative processes where members of the public don't just respond to what is presented but are involved in defining the issues and how they can be resolved. This approach was used to develop the Community Strategic Plan and is strongly supported.
- **A re-think of where material is available to the public and where Council holds workshop/information sessions.** On-site meetings and workshops provide a more informative way to engage with community members. Having maps and other material available in the libraries is not adequate to reach out to members of the public. Display boards in town squares or in shopping malls will have a much bigger reach and will engage more residents. The Society's experience with our street stalls during the draft LEP process were more effective and reached more residents than the briefing sessions held by Council staff in the libraries.
- **More frequent use of on-site surveys of community members and users of assets.** We understand that this community consultation mechanism is proposed for the Scenic Eastern Escarpment Plan development and will get much better engagement from the community, as well as a stronger evidence base for decision-making.
- **Scenario-based community consultations in certain situations,** which can both better inform the community of issues and again lead to a stronger evidence base for decision-making. Council's survey on the rate rise is one example of scenario-based consultations – Council consulted on not only the decision to be made but the resulting implications. Such an approach is useful for consultations in terms of strategic planning purposes where the options are complex and the implications of what is being consulted on are hard to discern, complex and difficult to communicate.
- **Strengthening the use of social media, as Council intends,** but this should be to engage with and inform the community rather than just general promotion.
- Given the above, the Society therefore would like **Council to include in the Strategic Plan a comprehensive review of its current community consultation and engagement approach** and adopt a suite of best practice community engagement and consultation strategies which would lead to "transparent, fair and accountable civic leadership and governance".
- In addition to the performance measures listed, **Council could also develop some data-driven performance measures around community engagement and consultations,** for instance web page hits, the number of submissions received on particular issues and so on.
- **Standing community steering committees or community working groups should be used by Council** for ongoing community engagement and consultations. These could be site specific or issue based. Council's Aboriginal Advisory Council is a good example of this and this model should be expanded.

Lastly, Strategy 1.4c on climate change does not appear to have any priority 4 year actions listed. Given the importance of this issue this is a major oversight.

In terms of Objective 1.2, financial reporting of the environmental budget has been an ongoing issue for the Society. The Society has previously engaged with Council on this issue as Council has previously committed (when the Environmental Levy was first introduced) to publicly report on the environmental budget in terms of expenditure based on consistent program areas, as well as report the previous five year budgets again based on program areas. An example of Council's previous reporting of the environmental budget is attached which has been taken from 2010-2013 Delivery Program p.37. The table clearly shows what was spent in terms of the environmental budget, on what programs (14 programs are listed) over a six year period. It is this level of financial reporting and budget transparency the community want. Compare this to the financial information in the Delivery Program 2017-2021 (p.60) which outlines just three program areas and a one year budget (2017/2018). How do community members know if the environmental budget is going up or down in total or as a percentage of the Council's total budget? What is intended to be spent on Bushcare? Or flora and fauna? The level of budget and financial information provided is not sufficient or useful for the community and does not provide "transparent, fair and accountable civic leadership and governance".

### KD 2 - Protect

The Society supports the listed objectives, strategies and actions listed under this theme.

In terms of the performance measures outlined on p.31 of the Strategic Plan and p.62 of the Delivery Plan, the Society recommends that:

- **A waste avoidance indicator should be adopted**, which would measure the outcomes of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy.
- **More environmental performance measures should be adopted**, rather than the heavy reliance on community perception of environmental performance (p.62). A performance measure of bushland integrity or condition should be developed. This could be done, for instance, through a simple and accessible monitoring program at a range of sites which would assess key indicators such as native vegetation complexity, native vegetation coverage and disturbance (e.g. weeds).
- **More clarity is needed on how the performance measure "Condition of Natural Areas" will be monitored**, as the Priority Actions do not identify a bushland or vegetation monitoring program as described above (unlike the waterway/water resources program area which identifies a number of monitoring and reporting activities). Similarly, how will Council know that it has "restored High Priority Conservation Areas" or achieved "habitat restoration" which are both key Priority Actions.

The Society would like to see the following additional Priority Actions incorporated into the Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Program under Protect.

- **That Council develops and implements a Council Land Encroachment Policy** to address degradation of bushland reserves caused by encroachment by neighbouring private landholders. The Society included the development of such a policy in its 2016 Vote for the Environment Candidate Election Survey, and it was overwhelming supported by all elected Councillors (go to <http://www.bmce16.info/index.shtml>). We also understand that a number of

Bushcare groups have recently written or contacted Council with concerns about long term and extensive encroachment by adjacent landholders into public bushland reserves actively managed by Bushcare groups. The Society also understands that the development of an Encroachment Policy was also raised by community members at the community workshop to develop the community strategic plan.

- **That Council employs specialist environmental enforcement staff** suitably trained in environmental matters to increase the level and effectiveness of enforcement of environmental regulations, including conditions associated with development consents. Again this idea was included in the 2016 Vote for the Environment Candidate Election Survey, and was supported by the majority of elected Councillors.
- **Finalisation and implementation of the new Enforcement Policy.** Council has recently reviewed its Enforcement Policy. The finalisation and implementation of the new Enforcement Policy is not included in the Plan.
- In relation to the BM LEP 2015, under 2.3a the following additional actions should be included:
  - **Complete the review of Council vegetation mapping** to ensure consistent and high quality vegetation mapping across the City.
  - **Increase enforcement and monitoring of environmental conditions imposed on developments**, including preventing development encroachment into E2 zones.
- The Society believes under 2.1a there should be a clear commitment to **support and enhance the Bushcare network**, including providing better communication and support to Bushcare volunteers.

### KD 3 - Care

On p.85 the list of open space and recreational visitor facilities upgrades in high risk areas does not include the construction of toilets or an upgrade of the board walk through the swamp at Minnie Ha Ha Reserve Katoomba. The Society believes this should be included as a priority project.

In terms of Objective 3.3c the Society believes that Council should not only participate in the Resilient Sydney initiative but should also develop as a priority a Blue Mountains Resilience Strategy to ensure the community can plan, adapt and be resilient in the face of natural disasters, especially given natural disasters are likely to increase in severity and frequency due to climate change.

### KD 4 - Live

The Society supports all the objectives, strategies and actions listed under this theme.

In terms of the actions, the Society recommends the following additions:

- Under Strategy 4.3c (existing and new development to apply sustainable and efficient use of resources), the Society recommends an action related to encouraging sustainable building design including increasing energy and water efficiency in new and existing houses, adoption of passive solar design principles and encouraging new housing to be smaller. This could be achieved via educational events or workshops, through strengthening the BM Development

Control Plan and by lobbying the NSW government to increase the requirements of BASIX.

- Under Strategy 4.3a as highlighted above, Council should include completing the review of Council vegetation mapping to ensure consistent and high quality vegetation mapping across the City.
- Under 4.3c streamlining of the development application process is identified. The Society does NOT support this action if it results in a less thorough environmental assessment of development applications or results in reduced public participation in the development assessment process. Any streamlining of development applications which results in the above is also not consistent with “transparent, fair and accountable civic leadership and governance”. The Society instead recommends an action which aims to enhance the level of environmental assessment, including input from specialist staff, in the development application process.
- Under 4.3b, given the high environmental risk of septic tanks, the Society questions why the review of the Sewage Strategy is not programmed to commence in 2017/2018.
- Under 4.3b, the goal for Council’s Part 5 environmental assessment should include “to a high quality, professional standard and which meets all legislative requirements”. In relation to smart forms, these should not merely be a “tick a box and flick” assessment process, which has been found by the Land and Environment Court not to meet legislative requirements.
- Under 4.3a and 4.3b, improved enforcement of the BM LEP 2015 appears to be a missing action. This is a key issue for the Society. The community has campaigned long and hard for an environmentally strong BM LEP 2015, which protects the World Heritage Values of the Blue Mountains. Effective and comprehensive enforcement is required to ensure Objective 4.3 (“The impact of development on the natural and built environment is well managed”).

In terms of performance measures (p.102), again there appears to be a heavy reliance on community perception of environmental performance rather than data-led or evidence-based planning or environmental performance measures. Evidence/data-based and mapping-based performance measures should be developed to measure Objectives such as 4.3 and 4.4.

#### KD 5 - Move

The Society supports Objective 5.4a but questions whether the budget allocated will achieve the priority actions listed.

#### KD 6 - Thrive

In terms of Objective 6.1 the Society believes this should be amended to read “diverse, vibrant, strong and *environmentally sustainable*”. Priority actions should include educational activities and incentives for businesses to become more environmentally sustainable.

In terms of Objective 6.1 and 6.2, the Society believes that some of the strategies proposed by the Society in its submission to the Draft West District Plan should be adopted into some of the existing priority actions or be included as new priority actions. These include:

- Given the population profile of the Blue Mountains LGA, Council should consider investing in developing 'smart jobs', 'smart hubs' and 'smart industries' in the Blue Mountains, as outlined in our submission to the Draft West District Plan.
- Council should encourage and support the establishment of university campuses in the Blue Mountains. This would build on already existing partnerships between hotel schools and universities but the new campuses could specialise in environmental science, sustainability studies and sustainable tourism.
- Council, in partnership with the Greater Sydney Commission, should undertake a feasibility study for the Blue Mountains becoming a sustainable Green City along the lines of Freiburg, Germany.

In terms of Strategies 6.2d, 6.4a, 6.4b and 6.4d there is heavy reliance on the Destination Management Plan (DMP) in terms of Priority Actions. This plan is still in draft, is still undergoing public consultation and consultation with key agencies and, as a result, requires further community consultation, further review and then finalisation. These are the key actions for the DMP that should be included in the Plan. The Society has major and serious concerns in regard to the DMP and opposes some key recommendations, as outlined in our submissions to the draft DMP. The Plan should not assume the DMP is a fait accompli.

In terms of the Strategy 6.3a again the reference to the Scenic Southern and Eastern Escarpment Plans assumes these plans are finalised. Given these plans are still in development and have yet to undergo public consultations and consultation with key agencies, the Strategy and Delivery Program should identify that the Scenic Plans require development, community consultation, then review and finalisation. Advice so far on the Eastern Escarpment Plan is that the plan's emphasis is to maintain and upgrade existing tourism infrastructure not develop major new tourism and visitation infrastructure which seems contrary to the actions under 6.3a.

In terms of the performance measures (p.131), once again there appears to be a heavy reliance on community perception of sustainability performance rather than sustainability or environmental performance measures. Evidence- or data-based performance measures should be adopted to measure Objectives such as 6.3a and 6.4a

The Society thanks Council for the opportunity to make a submission to the Blue Mountains Community Strategic Plan 2035 and the accompanying Delivery Program 2017-2021 and Operational Plan 2017-2018. If you have queries in regard to this submission raised in this letter please contact me.

Yours sincerely



Madi Maclean  
 President  
 Blue Mountains Conservation Society  
 mobile 0412 428 202 or email [president@bluemountains.org.au](mailto:president@bluemountains.org.au)