

# Questions For Candidates

## 2022 Federal Election

### Macquarie Electorate



The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is providing a set of questions to candidates in the 2022 Federal Election for the seat of Macquarie.

The answers to these questions will be published.

Questions have been deliberately framed to provide a “yes” or “no” answer. Please add a brief comment if required.

<b>Candidate's Name:</b>	Tony Hickey
<b>Candidate's Party:</b>	The Greens

## The Questionnaire

### Preamble

- A common acronym in this document is GBMWHA - Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.
- Each question includes an estimate of its financial impact. This should be considered in light of the estimated Federal government receipts in FY 2021-22 of \$532 billion.
- References are at the end of the document. NB. The links and the text are unprotected. That is, any changes can invalidate the links.

## Q.1 Climate change and sustainability action

**Question:** Will you commit to meaningful climate action for the Macquarie electorate through:

- a stronger 2030 national emission reduction target (the current 2030 target is 26-28% below 2005 levels)<sup>1</sup>;

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<p>Of course. The more we do, and the sooner we do it, the better our chances are of saving the planet.</p> <p>Australian Greens policy is for a 75% reduction by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2035: our targets can be found here:</p> <p><a href="#">2030 Targets Now   Australian Greens</a></p>
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**Question:** Will you commit to meaningful climate action for the Macquarie electorate through:

- financial support to transition Macquarie electorate communities from gas to renewable energy through incentives to make homes more energy efficient, facilitating electric modes of transport and funding local councils to convert community building and facilities to use renewable energy;

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<p>The Greens plan includes financial support for households and businesses in Macquarie and throughout Australia to switch from coal and gas power to reliable renewables. The federal government is better resourced to provide this support than state and local governments. Our policy to make choosing clean, green energy easier can be found here:</p> <p><a href="#">Tackling The Climate Crisis   Policies   Australian Greens</a></p> <p>The Greens also have detailed policies on assisting people to convert to electric vehicles and to ensure conversion of the government fleet to electric:</p> <p><a href="#">Tackling The Climate Crisis   Policies   Australian Greens</a></p>
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**Question:** Will you commit to meaningful climate action for the Macquarie electorate through:

- recognising that we are in a climate emergency and supporting the urgent development of climate action policies which focus on emissions reduction, equity and justice, and effective climate change adaptation?

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<p>I am totally committed to meaningful climate action in Macquarie. We can see clearly that people living in Macquarie are already directly experiencing the effects of the climate crisis through repeated extreme bushfires, flooding and storm events. The Greens have a cohesive plan for Australia to take the action it owes Australians and the World to tackle the crisis.</p> <p>'Our Fight For The Future' plan is for a fairer and safer Australia and can be found here:</p> <p><a href="#">Fight for the future   Australian Greens</a></p>
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**Financial impact:** The Australian, NSW and Victorian government report Pathways to scale: Retrofitting One Million+ homes<sup>2</sup> found that retrofitting Australian homes across five years could:

- Reduce average home energy use by up to 9,000kWh per year;

- Reduce average home emissions by up to 5.8 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> eg per year;
- Reduce pressure on the electricity grid;
- Create economic activity and job growth;
- Create an up to \$55 billion private finance investment opportunity;
- Improve household health and wellbeing.

**Background:** According to the 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, increased heatwaves, droughts and floods are already exceeding plants' and animals' tolerance thresholds, driving mass mortalities in species such as trees and corals. These weather extremes are occurring simultaneously, causing cascading impacts that are increasingly difficult to manage.

The impact of climate change is affecting Australians now. In the past two years alone, the Macquarie electorate has been devastated by unprecedented bushfires and floods.

## Q.2 Warragamba Dam

**Question:** Will you advocate for the refusal of Commonwealth approval of raising the Warragamba Dam wall?

yes

The Greens have consistently opposed the NSW Government plan to raise the dam wall. I have been part of the campaign for several years. The higher wall is unnecessary, and would wreak irreversible damage on the indigenous heritage of the area and the habitat of local wildlife species.

**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the federal Dept. of Agriculture, Water and Environment.

**Background:** The NSW Government's proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall 14 metres to reduce and manage flood risk on the Hawkesbury River will destroy 65 kilometres of wilderness rivers and inundate 4,700 hectares of the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park. Significant aboriginal cultural heritage sites will also be destroyed. Raising the dam wall will enable unsustainable housing development on flood-prone land in Western Sydney.

The current Environmental Impact Statement for the project has been considered as inadequate by a number of experts, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature, who consider the impacts on the World Heritage Area so significant that they could potentially lead to the area being de-listed or identified as being at risk.

Raising the dam wall would not actually solve the problem of flooding in Western Sydney. It would have only a moderate effect even in a 1 in 500-year flood event<sup>3</sup> and other catchments could still cause significant flooding in the valley. And that is without further housing built on the flood plain. Climate change will make these flood events more common, just like fires.

## Q.3 Extend the boundaries of the GBMWHA

**Question:** Will you actively support the extension of the existing GBMWHA to include all additions to the national parks and reserves since the listing of the GBMWHA in 2000?

yes

Of course. This would afford greater protection for the natural heritage against the threats of irresponsible development.

**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the federal Dept. of Agriculture, Water and Environment

**Background:** Ecologists have found that -

*"Increasing scientific knowledge of the natural biodiversity in and around the Greater Blue Mountains, awareness of increasing threatening processes and the potential impact of climate change, all indicate that long-term conservation effectiveness will be improved with targeted boundary changes."<sup>4</sup>*

The World Heritage Area should be extended to include all additions (over 30,000 ha) to the national park and reserves since World Heritage status was secured in 2000 and adjacent significant natural areas which would improve the GBMWHA's biodiversity.

## Q.4 Support additional values criteria for GBMWHA listing

**Question:** Will you actively support the nomination of additional values including cultural, scenic and geomorphological for the GBMWHA?

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	The indigenous cultural heritage of the Blue Mountains is one of the oldest in the world. Anyone from around the world who has visited the Blue Mountains will attest to its spectacular beauty and the people who live here appreciate that beauty every day. The geodiversity is apparent even to a layperson. These additional criteria would afford extra protections against the ravages of overdevelopment.
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**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the federal Dept. of Agriculture, Water and Environment

**Background:** The Greater Blue Mountains was granted World Heritage listing for its biodiversity and for the diversity of Eucalypt species. The additional criteria of cultural, geodiversity and scenic splendour are currently not officially recognised and are thus not protected<sup>5</sup>. A current example of this is the proposed flooding of the Burragorang Valley by raising the Warragamba Dam wall. This will destroy significant aboriginal cultural heritage sites which are not recognised under the current listing of the GBMWHA.

## Q.5 Limit aircraft flights over the GBMWHA wilderness areas

**Question:** Would you initiate a process to ban low-flying **non-essential** helicopter flights (e.g., joy and recreational flights) over wilderness areas in the GBMWHA?

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	Definitely. The beauty of the Blue Mountains is best appreciated from the surface. The beauty and tranquility must not be destroyed by the racket and pollution caused by unnecessary air traffic. I support the Blue Mountains City Council's move to transfer responsibility for the Katoomba Airfield to National Parks.
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**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

**Background:** There are five declared wilderness areas which together amount to two-thirds of the GBMWHA. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) has the power to regulate aircraft flights for environmental reasons. There is ample scientific evidence of the environmental impacts of low flying helicopters over natural areas, including noise and aircraft movements impacting wildlife. Wilderness areas within the GBMWHA deserve protection against this threat, as do people walking in these and nearby areas.

## Q.6 GBMWHA eucalypt baseline research

**Question:** Will you actively and publicly advocate for adequate funding for research to establish baseline data on health and status of the GBMWHA Eucalypts in order to establish a creditable monitoring regime for these eucalypts and the effect of climate change on them?

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	Yes. This research will help us to protect the species of the Blue Mountains against extinction.
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**Financial impact:** Medium – new research grant funding is required.

**Background:** The GBMWHA was declared on the basis of its biodiversity and eucalypts, of which there are 99 identified species. Restoring the GBMWHA to its original state before the 2019-2020 bushfires, and

tracking future changes due to climate change, requires baseline data on the current health and status of the eucalypts. This research is now urgent so that we are prepared for future climate change induced impacts.

## **Q.7 Establish an active and stronger role for federal government in environmental protection**

**Question:** Will you advocate for an active federal role in legislated environmental protection and, in particular, for retaining the federal Minister's independent approval role under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*?

yes

Rather than rely on the federal Minister to oversee environmental protection on an ad hoc basis, we want to strengthen the Act and create an independent watchdog to ensure compliance. The Australian Greens plan to protect the environment is here:

[Protecting the Environment and Animals | Australian Greens](#)

**Financial impact:** Minimal – can be covered by existing budget of the federal Dept. of Agriculture, Water and Environment.

**Background:** World heritage and climate change are two policy areas where national responsibility is essential. Leadership and active engagement with environmental protection is needed so that failure or absence of state government commitment, if it occurs, can be overcome. For example, Australia's national environment laws are currently failing to protect nationally listed swamps and the wildlife they support from permanent destruction from underground coal mining in the Lithgow area.

Our environmental laws need to properly protect nationally recognised threatened species and ecological communities. As well, the Federal government should continue its independent approval role under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* and not agree to refer this role to the state government.

## Q.8 Political integrity, donations & transparency

**Question:** Will you actively work towards the introduction of the following four measures to reduce corporate influence and restore balance to politics?

- a. Limit the size of donations to political parties and politicians.

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	The Greens support limits on political donations and a ban on donations from for-profit organisations. Government needs to look after the interests of the people, not profits.
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- b. Real time disclosure of all political donations.

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	The Greens want continuous and comprehensive disclosure of all donations, published on a publicly funded and administered website.
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- c. Limit the amount individuals or an organisation can spend on election campaigns.

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	The Greens will push for caps on electoral expenditure for individuals, political parties and third parties.
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- d. Create a federal Integrity Commission with powers to investigate allegations of corruption and ensure accountability.

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	The Greens have been pushing for a federal ICAC since 2009 and have presented 5 bills to Parliament only to be thwarted by the combined efforts of Labor and the Coalition. A federal ICAC must have at least the same powers as the NSW ICAC.  Our plan to clean up politics can be found here:  <a href="#">cleaning up politics, reviving democracy</a>
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**Financial impact:** An Australian Federal Integrity Commission and Commonwealth Parliamentary Standards Commissioner would cost approximately \$200 million over four years to establish and operate (Parliamentary Budget Office advice to Helen Haines MP 16 October 2020<sup>6</sup>).

**Background:** Our political system works best when the people we elect represent the values and concerns of the community. However, right now weak laws allow powerful industries, such as coal and mining, to exploit democratic processes by employing lobbyists and through large donations to political parties. In contrast, community environment or human rights groups often have difficulty accessing Ministers and key decision makers.

## Q.9 Western Sydney Airport

**Question:**

- a. Will you commit to a comprehensive and genuine community consultation for the proposed flight paths for the Western Sydney Airport?

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	Yes. The concerns of Western Sydney residents have been arrogantly ignored in the planning process so far.
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**Question:**

- b. Will you commit to including the option of a curfew as part of the flight path community consultation process?

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	Yes. A 24-hour airport is not needed, and certainly not wanted by Western Sydney. Air traffic would be drastically reduced if there was a high-speed rail option between Sydney and Melbourne.
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**Financial impact:** Minimal – The Commonwealth government has committed to a public consultation process.

**Background:** Western Sydney (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport is currently being constructed at Badgerys Creek and is due to commence operations in 2026. To date, detailed information on flight paths, including those over the electorate of Macquarie, has not been released.

Detailed planning for flight paths started in 2017 and, according to the website for the airport, will not be finalised until 2024. The airport website also states that there will be community consultation on the proposed flight paths. Currently, the Western Sydney Airport is designed to be a 24-hour no-curfew airport, unlike Kingsford Smith Airport which operates under a night-time curfew.

## Q.10 Personal conservation goals

**Question:**

If elected, what will you do for the environment? Outline one or more projects/issues that you intend to work on – limit 100 words.

I want to see powerful environmental legislation in place that offers permanent and irrevocable protection to our natural and cultural heritage. Preserving our environment should not be a constant battle against narrow commercial interests that seek to destroy it.

## References

NB. The following is unprotected text. Any changes can invalidate the links

- 1 (Q1) The Australian Conservation Foundation, the [Climate Council](#) and the [Nature Conservation Council](#) have a greenhouse gas emission reduction target of 75% below 2005 levels by 2030.
- 2 (Q1) Pathways to scale: [Retrofitting One Million+ homes](#)
- 3 (Q2) [Leaked charts published in the Sydney Morning Herald](#)
- 4 (Q3) D Benson & J Smith, Protecting biodiversity values in response to long-term impacts. In [Values for a new generation – Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area](#) published by the GBMWHA Advisory Committee.
- 5 (Q6) For more detail see [Values for a new generation – Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area](#) published by the GBMWHA Advisory Committee
- 6 (Q8) [Parliamentary Budget Office advice to Helen Haines MP](#)