

World Heritage values and Sydney's drinking water quality under threat

Over the past two La Niña summers, residents of the Blue Mountains have no doubt become more aware of stormwater and its impacts.

As rainwater runs across different surfaces – roofs, paved surfaces and saturated ground – it picks up various types of pollutants including oil and grease from driveways and roads, leaves and animal droppings that collect in gutters, weeds and chemicals from lawns and gardens, and sediment from washed out or exposed soil. But where does this pollution-laden stormwater go? One way or another it finds its way into waterways which flow into the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park and, from the southern and western sides of the highway in the upper Blue Mountains, into Sydney's drinking water catchment.

Since 2005, Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) and Development Control Plans (DCPs) have required new developments to incorporate best practice stormwater controls. These controls are designed to avoid the adverse impacts of stormwater on the site, adjoining properties, bushland and waterways running into the national park. Best practice measures include water sensitive urban design, onsite detention of stormwater and natural stormwater purification systems. In areas within Sydney's drinking water catchment, new developments are required to also have a 'neutral or beneficial effect' on water quality (NorBE) under the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021*.

But with the recent introduction of the state-wide Low Rise Housing Diversity Code (the Low Rise Code), medium density housing developments built under this Code bypass Council approval and therefore do not have to comply with LEP development standards and stormwater controls. This is highly problematic, given that these more intensive developments – with their increased impervious areas (roofs, driveways, internal roads) – create a higher level of stormwater volume and velocity. There is no requirement for a certifier approving this kind of development to consider stormwater quality and quantity or LEP stormwater controls. And there is no requirement for development under the Code in the Sydney drinking water catchment to meet the 'NorBE' test. This compromised protection of the environment, Sydney's drinking water catchment and World Heritage values is clearly unacceptable.

The Blue Mountains City Council is currently attempting to mitigate the adverse impact of the Low Rise Code in the Blue Mountains through proposing amendments to the Code. These amendments would restore environmental protections by applying key LEP development standards and stormwater controls to development under the Code.

The Society supports Council's actions and is calling on the state government to accept these proposed amendments to the Code. The Society also calls for the provisions of the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021* protecting Sydney's drinking water catchment to be applied to development under the Code.



Canberra St Wentworth Falls Stormwater Biofilter (Paul Vale)

Blue Mountains Conservation Society's Land Use Subcommittee

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