

Questions For Candidates

2023 NSW State Election

Blue Mountains Electorate



The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is providing a set of questions to candidates in the Blue Mountains electorate in the March 2023 State Election.

The answers to these questions will be published.

Please answer each question in the blue shaded box and limit your answers to 100 words.

We would like you to complete this MS Word document, save it as a pdf and email it back to us. [Word can save documents as a pdf.]

Please refer all queries to Alan Page – leuralan@hotmail.com

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

Candidate's Name:	Greg Keightley
Candidate's Party:	Animal Justice Party

Q1. NSW Government proposal to raise Warragamba Dam wall by 14 metres

Question

Will you support implementation of the alternative flood management strategies outlined below, or similar strategies, and oppose raising the Warragamba Dam wall?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>The Animal Justice Party opposes any proposal to raise Warragamba Dam Wall.</p> <p>Motivations of Government have been exposed and well documented as developer biased and not in the public interest. Independent scientific review identifies any raising of the Dam Wall to increase risk to human safety and irrecoverable damage to critical ecosystems including species, assessed as vulnerable, endangered and critically endangered within the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The devastating impact on Indigenous culture and Spirituality has also been well documented.</p> <p>Independent research also identifies sensible, alternative flood management strategies that ensure improved protection for existing residents within flood prone areas, serve to protect and enhance agricultural opportunities down stream and provide a healthier biodiversity within the river system and its environment.</p> <p>Government must engage with existing residents through a voluntary buyback scheme. It must also invest in building sensible flood proof access roads for any future evacuations.</p>
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Background

The NSW Government proposes to raise the Warragamba Dam wall by 14 metres to provide space to store flood waters originating upstream of the Dam. The proposal would have many well documented and reported adverse impacts on the native animals, plants and landscape of the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park, and on sites of significance to the Gundungurra people¹.

There are better options² to reduce the risk to existing and future residents of the north-western Sydney floodplain than raising the Warragamba Dam. These include:

1. **Stop putting people in harm's way** – by preventing any further homes being built on the floodplain.
2. **Provide alternative flood storage in Warragamba Dam** – by lowering the full storage level of the Dam by 12 metres and using existing and new desalination plants to secure Sydney's water supply³.
3. **Improve evacuation routes for the people of north-western Sydney** – through a road upgrading program to facilitate evacuation at higher flood levels⁴.

4. **Help the most flood prone residents to relocate** – through a voluntary home buy-back scheme similar to that being implemented in Lismore⁵.

These alternative flood management strategies would provide better protection for the most flood prone residents, safer roads, a more vibrant agricultural sector, more recreation opportunities, a healthier environment and improved water security.

(footnotes are at the end of the document)

Q2. Invasive Species (cats)

Question

Will you commit to amending the *Companion Animals Act 1998* to enable local governments to regulate roaming pet cats at a local level to reduce predation on wildlife, as recommended by the Local Government Association of NSW and the Invasive Species Council?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>It is well researched that domestic cats are a direct threat to wildlife, particularly diverse, significant species of the Blue Mountains.</p> <p>Amendments to the Companion Animals Act to enable Local Government to implement regulations to reduce wildlife predation are necessary, but must be contingent upon protection of both companion animal and responsible person. Enforcement of any new legislation should assess capacity of people to implement such measures, be it desexing, microchipping or any form of containment to property. Policy should be rolled out with a transition period, providing adequate support for those community members who are required to adjust their cats behaviour.</p> <p>Experience drawn from amendments to Companion Animals Act in 1998 to protect dogs, wildlife and community met considerable public opposition. New laws ultimately contributed to the well-being of dogs, their families and importantly, provided greater protection for the birds, mammals and reptiles of the Blue Mountains.</p> <p>Community Cat Programs, targeting areas of high impounding or complaints with high intensity, free desexing and microchipping programs have proven to significantly reduce numbers of unwanted kittens in peri-urban areas. Such Programs are a key solution to the problem of wandering cats, associated issues such as nuisance complaints, costs to local government and potential wildlife predation.</p>
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Background

Pet cats that are allowed to freely roam outside kill an estimated 241 million native Australian animals each year.

In the Blue Mountains, pet cats are a direct threat to wildlife, including birds, lizards and frogs, but under current NSW law the Blue Mountains City Council and other local councils are prevented from introducing cat containment policies.

These policies could protect wildlife and keep cats safe.

They could ensure cat owners keep their cats at home, whilst allowing for controlled access to the outdoors. This would be via a cat run, cat-proof fencing, or walking them with a harness and leash or similar.

Q3. Commercial Activity in the National Parks Estate

Question

Will you:

- a. ONLY support commercial activity under the proposed revised Blue Mountains National Park Plan of Management (PoM) if it can be clearly demonstrated that biodiversity and Aboriginal heritage will not be compromised?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	The Animal Justice Party asserts that the NSW National Parks system's primary purpose is the conservation of biodiversity, including landscape and habitat conservation, and the management of historic and Aboriginal cultural heritage values. My Party also asserts that the National Parks estates are owned by the people of NSW, who each contribute to public estate acquisition, management and protection through this country's income tax programme. The National Parks estate should not have to pay for itself through commercial leasing for high end accommodation and recreational activities.
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- b. support amendments to the *NPWS Act* which will ensure robust and transparent public comment on any proposals for private commercial leases?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	There is a serious question of equity that arises from commercialisation of our National Parks. Commercial uses of the National Park estate are usually concentrated at the high end of tourism. (i.e. glamping). Increasing use of the best or most remote features of the public estate has the potential to effectively privatise this 'experience' as well as compromise biosecurity with the introduction of exotic species (seed spores on boots and personal equipment and related transport of insects and microorganisms). In effect, many of these proposals privatise a public asset through either regulatory or social exclusion. In relation to any use of the public estate, a proposal by Government must be accompanied by a robust and transparent public consultative process, with adequate access and time frames to allow for public comment and independent scientific and cultural submissions. Proposals must be accompanied by comprehensive environmental impact reports. The Animal Justice Party will strive to ensure, through its two current Upper House Parliamentary seats, that the best interests of animals, people and planet are always served.
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Background

The Society believes that the NSW national parks system's primary purpose is the conservation of biodiversity, including landscape and habitat conservation, and the management of historic and Aboriginal cultural heritage values.

Increasingly NSW national parks and conservation areas are having commercial uses or activities added to the detriment of biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural values, risking open public access to all areas of these national parks and conservation areas.

The NSW Government has recently announced it will grant exclusive possession over parts of the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area for resort style accommodation and adventure theme park without providing details on the proposals for public input.

A revised Plan of Management for the Blue Mountains National Park is currently being developed. This plan will guide management of the park for the next 10 years. The Society is concerned that the new emphasis on commercial activities with our national park reserve system may influence the development of the Plan of Management.

Q4. Climate Change – Gas Phase Out

Question

Will you advocate for the introduction of planning controls which ban gas connection to new residential subdivisions and commercial developments?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>It is critically important to eliminate our reliance on fossil fuels. The production and consumption of gas is a major contributor to climate change. The production of gas destroys landscapes, ecosystems and compromises and kills our native wildlife.</p> <p>This can be addressed by the NSW Government supporting a transition away from the use of gas in NSW by implementing planning controls which ban gas connection to new residential and commercial developments.</p> <p>Further reductions can be achieved by encouraging people with existing gas connections to replace them with low cost, low impact renewable energy sources. Some innovative thinking may be required here to address residential circumstances that prohibit roof top solar panels and other conventional options, perhaps community power hubs constructed on public land.</p>
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Background

Prioritising removing gas appliances from households in NSW is the quickest and most effective way to reduce gas usage and therefore climate change-inducing pollutants from the gas industry.

It is also relieves our homes of airborne pollutants from gas appliances which increase the risk of asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

Some councils in NSW are leading the way on banning gas connections on new developments, and making roof top solar panels compulsory.

The NSW State Government should now plan a way out of gas use as a critical priority.

Q5. Stormwater Impacts on Drinking Water and the Environment

Question

Will you strongly advocate for:

- c. the Low Rise Housing Diversity Code to be amended so that the stormwater management standards under the Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan apply to developments under the Code in the Blue Mountains (as proposed by the Blue Mountains City Council)?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	This is a classic example of our government putting profit over planet. I absolutely agree and will advocate for the Low Rise Housing Development Code to be amended to ensure that the stormwater management standards under the Blue Mountains LEP apply to developments under the code.
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- d. the provisions of the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021* protecting the quality of Sydney's drinking water to be applied to development under the Code in drinking water catchment areas?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	Similarly important is the provisions of the State Environment Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021 required for the protection of Sydney's drinking water catchment areas. How in the world have we ended up having to fight for the cleanliness of our drinking water? We cannot afford to compromise on our drinking water, or the vital and pristine Blue Mountains aquatic habitat.
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Background

The *Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan 2015* (LEP) requires new developments to incorporate best practice stormwater controls to manage the quality and quantity of stormwater runoff from the site. These controls are necessary to protect the World Heritage listed national park downstream. Further, new developments in Sydney's drinking water catchment are required to also have a 'neutral or beneficial effect' on water quality (NorBE) under the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021*.

However, the recently introduced state-wide Low Rise Housing Diversity Code allows some medium density housing developments to bypass Council approval. This means they do not have to comply with LEP stormwater management standards. And there is no requirement for these developments to meet the 'NorBE' test if they are located in Sydney's drinking water catchment.

The Blue Mountains City Council is currently attempting to mitigate the adverse impact of these developments through proposing local variations to the Code. These include applying LEP stormwater management standards to development under the Code. The provisions of the Biodiversity and Conservation planning policy must also be applied to development under the Code in Sydney's drinking water catchment to ensure that a neutral or beneficial effect on water quality is achieved.

Q.6 Personal conservation goals

Question:

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

I currently manage my own conservation and wildlife refuge on the Blue Mountains escarpment, adjacent to the Gardens Of Stone. This 500 acre project began in 2006 when I realised private landholdings were integral to conservation of animals and ecosystems.

This project enabled me to learn from animals, highlighting their intrinsic role maintaining critical ecosystems. I've learned from the bush and indigenous culture. I have learned of laws that favour business over conservation and difficulty of achieving environmental outcomes.

This experience has provided me crucial knowledge and experience to publicly speak confidently to these issues and I will continue to do so.

References

- Q1-1 <https://www.giveadam.org.au/impacts>
- Q1-2 Pittock (2018), Managing flood risk in the Hawkesbury – Nepean Valley A report on the alternative flood management measures to raising Warragamba Dam wall. A submission to NSW Parliament:
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/65507/0364%20Professor%20Jamie%20Pittock-%20Attachment%201.pdf>
- Q1-3 Khan (2012), Inquiry into adequacy of water storages in NSW. A submission to NSW Parliament:
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/52166/0025%20Dr%20Stuart%20Khan.pdf>
- Q1-4 Infrastructure NSW. 2017. Resilient valley, resilient communities. Hawkesbury-Nepean valley flood risk management strategy. Infrastructure NSW, Sydney.
- Q1-5 <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/northern-rivers-voluntary-home-buy-backs-to-start>