

Save The Plateau!



Photo: Wyn Jones

Say “No!” to any development on Elphinstone Plateau (Radiata Plateau) (28 Pulpit Hill Rd, Katoomba NSW 2780).

Note: Elphinstone Plateau commemorates a man who contributed significantly to the conservation of the Blue Mountains National Park, henceforth Radiata Plateau will be referred to as to Elphinstone Plateau in the remainder of this document.

The SAVE the PLATEAU GROUP (SPG) wishes to object to the recent submission to Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) by the owners of Elphinstone Plateau (The Transcendental Meditation organisation’s offshoot known as “Maharishi’s Global Administration through Natural Law”) who wish to change the proposed rezoning of the area that was determined by Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) under the Draft Local Environment Plan 2013 (28 Pulpit Hill Rd, Katoomba NSW 2780).

Their submission was sent to BMCC on the 4th March 2014 by their representative Max Fragar (*Principal Consultant*) of Tragar *Planning & Development*.

The owners want to change the proposed rezoning in order to increase the development potential on Elphinstone Plateau. If this happens, then all the beauty & solitude of the plateau (which is only 3 kms from Katoomba) will be lost forever.

The owners have indicated they will shortly be forwarding a firm statement to BMCC on their development proposal in regards to 3 separate developments on Elphinstone Plateau

Their proposal will include:

- a spa retreat
- an eco-tourism lodge
- a boutique residential conference facility.

Each of these development sites would require a vegetation clearance (from 30 to 100metres) as an Asset Protection Zone in case of bushfire.

All roads leading to the sites would have to be sealed with a minimum carriage-way of 8 metres to cater for fire fighting trucks. Car parking areas (sealed) along with a plethora of associated infrastructure (such as water tanks, lighting etc) would also be required.

Previous attempts to develop Elphinstone Plateau have resulted in massive public opposition.

A BRIEF *BUT* SIGNIFICANT HISTORY OF ELPHINSTONE PLATEAU

Organizations that have previously supported NO DEVELOPMENT of Elphinstone Plateau include:

The Upper Mountains Conservation Society (*they felt so strongly about this issue that they offered their land fund capital as a significant contribution to the purchasing of Elphinstone Plateau*)

Lower Blue Mountains Conservation Society

Australian Conservation Foundation

The National Parks Association

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW

The Total Environment Centre

The Colong Foundation for the Wilderness

Illawarra Environment Centre

Sydney Bushwalking Club

Save Radiata Plateau Group

Catholic Bushwalking Club

The National Trust

In addition and more significantly:

the **National Parks & Wildlife Service NSW (Blue Mountains District)** opposed the development of Elphinstone Plateau:

In the National Parks & Wildlife Service Blue Mountains District submission to BMCC in regards to development on Elphinstone Plateau (30/3/1990) they quote that "Commissioner Simpson correctly identified that escarpment protection involves protection of not just the area immediately adjacent to the cliff line but also the entire area above the cliff line. Escarpment preservation is an important objective of the Environmental Management Plan"

Also the National Parks & Wildlife Service Blue Mountains District Report on the Natural and Cultural Heritage Values of Elphinstone Plateau (July 1992) states "the District's preference is that *no development or small scale development take place on this site* due to considerations of protection of escarpment values, water quality and rare and endangered plant species.

Former Labor Senator Jim McClelland (Diamond Jim) felt so strongly about this issue that he readily spoke and handed out leaflets supporting NO development of Elphinstone Plateau to fellow politicians at the Ministerial gathering at the Fairmont Resort in 1991.

We also had a rare situation where 100% of local residents in Explorers & Pulpit Hill Rd opposed previous development of Elphinstone Plateau.

Significantly, the **Building Trades Group of Unions of the Trades and Labor Council of NSW** supported the demand for a full and proper Independent Environmental Impact Statement on Elphinstone Plateau and instigated an interim Green Ban on any development of the area.

In addition to these organizations and more importantly it should be noted that:

Blue Mountains City Council initially opposed any development. Their own report (EMP Environmental Study Stage1, p55) recognizes that Elphinstone Plateau was a “major and crucial omission in the publicly owned escarpment protection system”. This report goes on to claim “retention of the lands under private ownership alienates recreational resource from public use and enjoyment, while all natural and cultural resources remain vulnerable to degradation.”

The same report (p56) claims strongly that Elphinstone Plateau meets Department of Planning criteria for Regional Open Space acquisition in all respects and recognizes the visual and tourism value of this resource base and other on-going benefits to the City of the Blue Mountains.

Further: The 305 hectares of privately owned plateau is a significant part of the Blue Mountains Escarpment which is described in BMCC’s Environmental Management Plan (EMP1) as *“the city’s most significant asset because of its value as a unique natural environment and as a recreation and tourism base.”*

In BMCCs’ **Acquisition Submission to the Department of Environment and Conservation** they stated that “Given the strategic value of the site, this is a rare opportunity to link the Blue Mountains National Park as a wildlife corridor stretching from the Southern Escarpment to the Western Escarpment of the Blue Mountains.”

Blue Mountains City Council also acknowledged when the first development proposal was submitted by the TM organisation that *“Due to the environmental significance of the property, it would be preferable to have no extension of the urban/bushland interface beyond the current development in Pulpit Hill Road”.*

Further; BMCC provided a submission to the State Government requesting an Interim Protection Order be placed on Elphinstone Plateau and “the subject sites are acquired in public ownership, through the Catchment Management Authority and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, for incorporation within the National Parks System”(Minute No.458)

In 1991 the future Premier of NSW Bob Carr personally acknowledged in the Blue Mountains Gazette (whilst conducting his NSW election campaign) Elphinstone Plateau’s importance to the Blue Mountains community. He said “that a Labor Government would investigate the possibility of having Radiata Plateau (*read Elphinstone Plateau*) acquired as open space (BMG 15/5/91)”.

Further, “Shadow Minister Ms. Pam Allen, after a visit to Radiata Plateau (*read Elphinstone Plateau*), said a Labor Government would create Radiata Plateau (*read Elphinstone Plateau*) as open space” (BMG 1991)

Conclusion:

The fragmentation of Elphinstone Plateau by ANY development would result in the loss of its high conservation value. It would necessarily reduce public accessibility for recreational

(bushwalking, cycling, rockclimbing & swimming etc) and educational purposes, impinge on the green belt between Katoomba & Medlow Bath townships and increase the probability of polluted stream catchments. Rare plants (*e.g. microstrobis fitzgeraldii*) and endangered fauna (*e.g. spotted quoll*) would be seriously threatened. Historical values (*e.g. Black's Ladders-a pass by which Gundungurra Aborigines and white settlers traversed from Megalong Valley into Katoomba. This pass is considered to be of Rare Regional Significance in the NSW Walking Track Heritage Study, due to the long continuity of usage by locals*) would also be compromised.

The SAVE the PLATEAU GROUP (SPG) kindly asks that you please consider all the above in your deliberations in regards to the submission by the owners of 28 Pulpit Hill Rd Katoomba NSW 2780 (i.e. MGANL Ltd as represented by Max Fragar of Tragar Planning & Development) in response to the Draft Local Environment Plan 2013 (28 Pulpit Hill Rd, Katoomba NSW 2780).

We implore you to REJECT outright their submission to change the proposed rezoning of the area (that was determined by Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) under the Draft Local Environment Plan 2013 (28 Pulpit Hill Rd, Katoomba NSW 2780) in order to increase the development potential on Elphinstone Plateau.

Any development of this area violates the many objectives of the Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) Environment Management Plan with regards to the Blue Mountains Ridgeline- specifically, "To maintain and enhance the natural bushland buffer zones between towns"

The undeveloped nature of the plateau reveals its magnificence when viewed from Shipley Plateau, from Kedumba, Jamieson or Megalong Valleys, or from Kings Tableland, Kanagra and beyond.

Further: Some of the most flagrant symptoms of environmental destruction are acknowledged as serious problems in the Blue Mountains only when they have assumed such epidemic proportions that they appear to defy solution. The plethora of escarpment development and extension of development into green space between towns are cases in point.

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Bob
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