

SUBMISSION TO NSW DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT

RE: DRAFT NORTH COAST REGIONAL PLAN

16-May-2016

Our names are Tracey and Gary Suter and we live in Valla in the Nambucca Shire. We have retired to Valla because of the beautiful environment, the sustainable living ethos and the wonderful community vibe that living on the mid north coast brings.

We are involved in a number of community organisations. We are members of The lions Club of Valla, The Valla Beach Community Association, The Nambucca Valley Orchid Society, The Nambucca Heads Men's Shed and The Mid north Coast Woodworkers Association.

The beautiful waterways and forests, and the strong community of Valla, comprising both Valla rural and Valla Beach are what people seek when choosing a place to live and work.

Key concerns

Expansion of mining

Our major concern is the potential threat of mining in the area. Given our experience with the Valla Quarry, the Draft Plan has created a large degree of concern, especially with the whole of the Valla area being designated as a Potential Mineral Resource.

We feel that this designation overlooks the real value of what currently exists in Valla. The real value is the primary production that occurs on top of the land – the macadamia farms, the mangoes, avocados, beans, and cattle. These industries employ a large number of people in small businesses; many of these industries are certified organic meaning that they are truly sustainable. There are also emerging industries in blueberry farming, eco tourism, farm stays and health spas.

Mining is, by its very nature, an extractive industry that can never be described as sustainable. We believe it is wrong to describe mining as sustainable in Direction 1.5.

Another problem with designating Valla as a Potential Mineral Resource is that this conflicts with existing Council plans for the Valla Urban Growth Area on the eastern side of Mt England. How much growth will occur with the threat of potential mining hanging over the land the council is asking developers, and the general populous to invest their hard earned income in.

We are resigned to living with the quarry until the current consent is exhausted but we do not want the quarry to be expanded or continue in any way after this. Leaving Valla listed as a Potential Mineral Resource area gives rise to the quarry requesting to further its activities which we point out is incompatible with Goal 1, that of protecting productive farmland.

The type of mining that is proposed in EL-6702 is for the locally occurring minerals of molybdenum, arsenic and antimony. These are very toxic minerals that are best left in the ground. Extraction and processing of this ore would pose an unacceptable risk to the natural waterways and would violate Direction 1.3 (Safeguard aquatic habitats and water catchments). Proof of what this mining causes can be seen at the Antimony Cleanup site at Urunga .

The cleanup of the soil and mangrove area has been ongoing for more than 6 months and I am sure at great costs to the Government and in turn the taxpayers.

Sustainable enterprises

We are excited by the proposal of Action 1.2.1 (Investigate complementary activities in rural zones). Valla contains many small farms and many 1 to 5 Ha rural-residential blocks. With the access to

fixed wireless broadband and the upgrade of the Pacific Highway these farms are able to run multifaceted enterprises that were not possible in the past.

While a focus of the Draft Plan is to consolidate housing into regional centers (such as the urban growth plan for Valla) it has to be realised that a lot of people prefer to live on rural and rural-residential blocks. I believe that enabling complementary activities (such as accommodation, produce stalls, popup cafes, garden tours, organic farming education tours, etc) contribute to a dynamic social and economic community.

We chose Valla as we would like to run one of those complementary activities. Our plan is to run an up cycling furniture business while also growing our own organic foods.

Aboriginal heritage

The Valla area has a very important place in Aboriginal culture. It is not only the historical assets that need to be protected. There exists a great potential for tourism that can expose the wider population to the stories and culture that have existed in this area for tens of thousands of years. Such endeavors can build a mutual respect and understanding and provide employment for local people. To this end the actions in Direction 1.1 should be a priority and be conducted in consultation with the local Land Councils.

Managing land use conflict

The Valla Quarry is an example of how poor planning by Council leads to ongoing land use conflict. In the early eighties land was sub-divided into 4.5Ha lots on the West side of Mt England and houses were built by the new owners. In 1996 the same land owner applied for, and was granted by Council, a Development Application to create a quarry within 730m of these residences. This quarry has been a source of conflict with the residence and community for twenty years.

It has led to two actions in the Land and Environment Court (2002 and 2014) as it has expanded in size and rate of extraction. The quarry repeatedly violates its Conditions of Consent. We are looking forward to this quarry closing down for good when the current DA expires. We do not want any expansion of this quarry.

With this history in mind we support Action 4.4.2 in that employment land must have suitable buffers to minimise land use conflicts.

Protection of waterways

The main waterway in Valla is Deep Creek and its tributaries. We perceive that the protection of this waterway, as outlined in Direction 1.3, is critical for safeguarding the productive farmland and the flora and fauna that makes Valla such a desirable place to live. Residents value these things highly. The waterways are also an important part of the tourist industry. Fishing, boating and water recreation are a big part of the visitor experience.

Any threat to the health of the waterways needs to be taken seriously, be it from mining, forestry, disturbance of acid- sulphate soils, or farm run-off.

Developing a prosperous economy

We love our community and the natural environment that surrounds it. It is why we live here and why we are passionate about its future. We are also very happy to share it with others. Tourism is a vital part of the economy.

Visitors often return to Valla for holidays and events. This year marks the fortieth annual Drag-Ends Hot Rod run to Valla. Each year these hot rod enthusiasts converge on Valla for a week of activities. Of similar duration is the bi-annual VW Spectacular. Both of these events attract hundreds of participants and thousands of spectators.

We would like to endorse Direction 4.1 (Expand the tourism sector) and Action 4.1.1 (Facilitate the nature-based, events and cultural tourism sectors). This is a direction that, we feel, will provide opportunities for long term employment and income for local residents. To reinforce what has been stated previously, the protection of our natural environment, our forests and waterways and our rural character and seaside village, is what will facilitate the tourism sector. The development of an Aboriginal nature/cultural tourism sector would further enhance our tourism economy.

However, the development of mining in the Valla area would conflict with this goal. Tourists come to see clean waterways, not tailing dams. They wish to see National Parks full of wildlife, not open cut pits. They want to hear the birdlife, not rock crushing plants.

Services and infrastructure

Valla Beach is a seaside village with known growth restrictions. Residents do not see the lack of services as a liability but as an asset. For example, there is no shopping centre in Valla Beach. The nearest is at Nambucca Heads, a ten minute drive away. But it is the lack of commercialisation in Valla Beach that gives the place its seaside character. There are a couple of cafes that do a very good trade to locals and visitors.

Similarly, Valla Rural has no shops. This is what gives it its attractive rural character. There is, however, the Valla Hall and the beautiful environment. These features are what make Valla such an attractive place to live and work. Over-development would ruin the very thing that makes Valla beautiful. We understand urban growth is needed in the Nambucca Shire But well planned and taking into account current environment and ego systems (Again Sustainable growth not extractive depletion).

Luckily, we now have the NBN and will soon have an upgraded Pacific Highway. We endorse the aims of the Plan to develop health and education precincts in nearby Coffs Harbour (Direction 4.2) and to plan well located employment land with suitable buffers (Direction 4.4.2) along the highway in the Valla Urban Expansion Area.

Summary

Not all villages, towns or cities should be treated the same. Each must be looked at for their diversity and what they bring to society.

We choose to live in Valla because of the rural/seaside village character, great waterways and bush lands and the strong community.

We feel that the designation of Valla as a Potential Mineral Resource threatens the very nature of the community. It creates uncertainty and conflicts with many of the Goals and Directions in the Plan.

The Potential Mineral Resource designated area should be withdrawn from the Draft Plan and any licenses, lease etc. rescinded.

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