

SUBMISSION TO NSW DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT

RE: DRAFT NORTH COAST REGIONAL PLAN

23-05-2016

Introduction

My name is Alex Walker and I live in Valla in the Nambucca Shire. I am a registered nurse working at Coffs Harbour Health Campus, and I live on a 5 acre block in Valla Rural. I choose to live in this area for its natural beauty and relaxed lifestyle. I am involved in the local karate club in Nambucca and attend several community led activities in our shire.

I love this area because of its rural character, its beautiful waterways and forests, and the strong communities of Valla, comprising both Valla rural and Valla Beach. I have most of my family living within a 50km radius of this area and have been coming here since I was about 9yr old.

Key concerns

Expansion of mining

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

I 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, giving these people independence and agency. Many of these industries are certified organic meaning that they are truly sustainable. Mining is, by its very nature, an extractive industry that can never be described as sustainable. I believe it is wrong to describe mining as sustainable in Direction 1.5.

Mining 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).

Sustainable enterprises

The proposal of Action 1.2.1 (Investigate complementary activities) in rural zones is in alignment with my vision of the Valla area. Valla contains many small farms and many one to five hectare 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 centres it must be understood that a lot of people prefer to live on rural-residential blocks. In the past the Council has imposed impediments to enterprising activities in the form of excessive Section 94 contributions. Enabling complementary activities (such as accommodation, produce stalls, popup cafes, garden tours, organic farming and education tours as a small example of such activities) will contribute to a dynamic social and economic community.

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 endeavours can build a mutual respect and understanding and provide employment for local people who have traditionally been marginalised. To this end the actions in Direction 1.1 should be a priority and be conducted in consultation with the local Land Councils.

Protection of waterways

The main waterway in Valla is Deep Creek and its tributaries. 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. The waterways are an important part of the tourist industry. Fishing, boating and water recreation are an integral part of the visitor experience. Residents utilise these waterways for both recreation and livelihood. 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

The Valla community and the natural environment that surrounds it are important to my family and I. 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-Ens 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.

I 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 will provide opportunities for long term employment and income for local residents and their children. The protection of our natural environment, our forests and waterways, 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.

In direct conflict with this is the however is the development of mining in the Valla area. 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. Resident's appreciate the small locally owned shops as an asset rather than a liability. For example, there is no commercial shopping centre in Valla Beach, however there is developing interest in a community hub. The nearest commercial shopping centre is at Nambucca Heads which is a ten minute drive away. T

This lack of commercialisation in Valla Beach is what adds to its seaside character. There are a couple of cafes that do a very good trade to locals and visitors. *According to the Nambucca visitor guide 2013/14* "Valla beach is the fastest growing area in the Shire.....popular with holidaymakers...also a popular retirement location. The areas relaxed, no-stress lifestyle and immense natural beauty pull like magnets- while Valla rural, on the other side of the pacific highway is vaunted as the best small acreage land in the valley."

Valla Rural currently has no shops, however there is room for regional growth with provision of locally grown, organic and non- organic produce in locally owned and run enterprises. Growing and consuming produce within the region reduces food miles and compliments the common philosophy of the community. The Valla Hall represents the historic lifestyle of the area with regular activities taking place here including Yoga, functions and dances. 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.

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

On the whole I support this draft plan but there are aspects that cause serious concern.

I live and work in this area because of the rural/seaside town character and the strong Valla community.

The designation of Valla as a Potential Mineral Resource threatens the very nature of the community I live within and love. It creates uncertainty and conflicts with many of the Goals and Directions in the Plan.

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