



Director Regions, Northern
Department of Planning and Environment
Locked Bag 9022
GRAFTON NSW 2460

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re: Draft North Coast Regional Plan

Introduction

Valla Beach Community Association (VBCA) submits the following comments, expressing our community's vision of desired planning outcomes into the next twenty years, to be administered at State government level by your Department.

VBCA is a community organisation that represents the people of both Valla Rural and Valla Beach situated in the north of the local government area of Nambucca Shire. We run bi-monthly community markets and use these funds to enhance local amenities. Our recent endeavours include a children's playground and shade sails for same. We maintain a web site (vallabeachmarkets.org.au) and a Facebook presence (<http://facebook.com/vallabeachmarkets>). We collaborate productively with the Nambucca Shire Council to win grants for community projects.

We hold regular meetings, well attended by community members, Council staff and elected officers. Our two principal aims are to:

1. Manage the Valla Beach Community Hall, and
2. Promote and foster activities which will be of benefit to all age groups.

With reference to the Draft North Coast Regional Plan, VBCA firmly believes that planning for the future needs to be sustainable. That is: "Forms of progress that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (*World Commission on environment and development*).

Key concerns

The Valla community is a diverse group of people. There are a large number of retirees in the area, some attracted to seaside living and others to the rural lifestyle. Valla has a reputation as a community with a diverse culture of agricultural businesses and tourism ventures of small to medium size. Many of these agricultural businesses are organic and all of them are dependent upon the protection of our natural environment, our soils and most particularly, our waterways. The diversity of activities and lifestyles within the Valla area are what affords our area its considerable level of cohesiveness.

Valla Beach, in particular, has seen considerable growth in the past ten years with new housing and families attracted to our area by its natural unspoiled environment.

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Also, Valla Rural has seen the development of a vibrant macadamia nut industry over the past twenty years.

The introduction of the NBN, and the impending opening of the upgraded Pacific Highway, make the Valla area even more attractive for both living and working. We would like to preserve the elements of Valla that have attracted people in the first place and to discourage inappropriate development that would degrade our area.

The Nambucca Valley 'Growth and prosperity document 2015' highlights the Nambucca Shire offering 'a coastal and hinterland holiday experience; a relaxed lifestyle the visitor can immerse themselves in, with a broad range of accommodation options to meet varied budgets.'

Valla residents are no different to other community members in their values and visions as outlined in this document.

We take this approach in addressing our key concerns.

Sustainable enterprises

The proposal of *Action 1.2.1 (Investigate complementary activities in rural zones)* is a positive proposal that will see a ready uptake in the Valla area. Valla contains many small farms and many 1-to-5 Ha rural-residential blocks. With access to fixed wireless broadband and the Pacific Highway upgrade, these farms are able to run multifaceted enterprises, previously not possible.

While a focus of the Draft Plan is to consolidate housing into regional centres, many people have a preference for rural-residential blocks. VBCA believes that enabling complementary activities (such as farm-stay accommodation, organic produce stalls, garden tours, organic farming education tours, pop-up cafes, etc.) contribute to a dynamic social and economic community.

Nambucca Shire Council has plans for an Urban Growth Area in Valla. There are a number of issues with this development (Aboriginal heritage areas, old mine sites, flood plain area). However, the idea of containing urban growth in this area is generally supported. A major land use conflict for this Urban Growth Area exists because it is fully contained within the area marked on the relevant plan as Potential Mineral Resource. This conflict needs to be resolved between the appropriate government departments, so that the Urban Growth Area can be properly developed without creating future land use conflicts.

Aboriginal heritage

The Valla area is rich in local Aboriginal sites and culture, which need to be protected. There is great potential for tourism, to expose the wider population to local Aboriginal stories and culture, and connection to Land. Such endeavours can build a mutual respect and understanding, as well as providing 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 Local Aboriginal Lands Councils.

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Expansion of mining

VBCA is deeply concerned that the whole of the Valla area has been designated as a Potential Mineral Resource.

We believe 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 – macadamia farms, mangoes, avocados, mixed crops and cattle production. These industries employ large numbers of local people, providing independence and agency. Many of these local 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, and we believe the Draft Plan's description of mining as 'sustainable' (*Direction 1.5*) is incorrect.

Further to our earlier comments relating to *Action 1.2.1*, we reiterate the problem of Valla being designated as a Potential Mineral Resource, because such designation conflicts with existing Council plans for the Valla Urban Growth Area on the eastern side of Mt England. Existing rural and rural-residential development within the Potential Mineral Resource area means that the development of any mining will create land use conflicts.

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)*.

VBCA strongly believes that the designation of Valla as a Potential Mineral Resource should be removed so that existing and future residents can feel confident that mining will not adversely impact upon their future. Residents want some security in the Plan and not be held hostage to long running exploration licences. We would like to see the mining exploration licence, EL-6702, revoked.

Protection of waterways

The main waterway in Valla is Deep Creek and its tributaries. As a significant ICOLL, protection of this waterway, outlined in *Direction 1.3*, is critical to safeguard fish stocks, as well as productive farmland, flora and fauna all of which make Valla a highly desirable place to live, as well as being integral to the tourist industry, fishing, boating, water recreation, and visitor experience. Any threat to health of our waterways needs to be taken seriously, be it from mining, forestry, 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. The activities we undertake, such as the markets, and the facilities that we push to build, such as children's playgrounds, are as much aimed at visitors as at residents.

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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.

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 believe, 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 Valla's 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 has known growth restrictions. However, relative lack of services is generally seen as an asset, because the lack of commercialisation in Valla Beach is what ensures its natural seaside character and appeal. Similarly, Valla Rural has no shops. This is what gives it its attractive rural character, along with the Valla Hall, which serves as the hub of social cohesion. 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.

Fortunately we 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

VBCA is generally supportive of the Plan with certain caveats: we urge protection of the rural character of Valla and the seaside village atmosphere of Valla Beach. We ask that the threat of mining be removed, because the designation of Valla as a Potential Mineral Resource creates undue uncertainty and conflicts with many of the Goals and Directions in your Department's Draft North Coast Regional Plan.

We trust the points we raise will be taken into account in the formulation of the twenty year Plan.

On behalf of the Valla Beach Community Association

John Windmill (President)

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