

SUBMISSION TO NSW DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT

RE: DRAFT NORTH COAST REGIONAL PLAN

25-May-2016

Introduction

My name is Laura McGrath and I live in Valla in the Nambucca Shire. My husband and I currently own and operate a successful tree pruning and removal business on the Mid North Coast and Central Coast and we live on five acres at Valla that we purchased over five years ago. We have just invested in a second acreage property in Valla with the view to start a small scale horticulture business and in the future B&B style accommodation for farmstayers and travellers. I grew up in Sydney and Hong Kong and then moved to Valla as I consider it the ideal place to raise a young family. There is no place like it. My family and I choose to live in the area for the AMAZING community, its natural beauty, relaxed lifestyle, close proximity to Coffs Harbour, world class unadulterated beaches/waterways and potential to become a truly iconic destination on the NSW tourism trail.

We are members of the Urunga Surf Life Saving Club. My husband and I have just completed our Bronze Medallions and will start patrolling at Hungry Head beach when the season resumes in September and volunteer as age managers for the Nippers during summer. Our children are involved in many local sporting and music groups and most significantly a childrens choir in Valla run by two world-renowned composers that also call Valla home.

My background is in Tourism. I have a Business Degree in Tourism and spent the early part of my career working with a tourism association in Sydney. I partnered with Tourism Australia, state tourism bodies, inbound tour operators and tourist operations nation wide. I also provided support on a national backpacker tourism advisory panel. I know the significance of the tourism dollar. With that in mind, I also appreciate the need for balance with industry... including our need for minerals and resources in our ever growing society. Getting the balance right is crucial.

Below is an outline of concerns I have in response to the draft plan that has been established for the north coast region. Most of this information has been sourced from my fellow community members but are points I wholeheartedly and passionately agree with. I have kept it in their words as they have succinctly communicated the concerns of us all.

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.

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. We live on the western side of Mt England and our residence is only 730m from the Valla Quarry that undertakes blasting. This is across a valley so there is no topography between us and the quarry.

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. We live here for the natural beauty and would like to get back the tranquility that exists without the quarry.

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

I am excited by the proposal of Action 1.2.1 (Investigate complementary activities in rural zones). This is what I see as the future of the Valla area. 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 centres it has to be realised 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. 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.

As I said earlier, I have plans to invest in this second property to provide accommodation services. Being halfway between Sydney and Brisbane we are ideally situated to capitalise on the growing local tourist industry. However, while the quarry exists and mining is a real possibility we have had to put these plans on hold.

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.

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. My house is on one of these blocks. 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 for twenty years now.

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 I 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. The waterways are also an important part of the tourist industry. Fishing, boating and water recreation are a big part of the visitor experience. Residents also value these things highly.

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

I/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-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/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.

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

I feel that the designation of Valla as a Potential Mineral Resource threatens the very nature of the community I love. It creates uncertainty and conflicts with many of the Goals and Directions in the Plan. I, amongst many are ready to invest in sustainable and productive enterprise in this area.

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and

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Here are some other thoughts and words, and a few references, that may be useful.

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.”

Inland Pacific Property Group Ltd, Independent Valuers and Consultants, commissioned by Nambucca Shire Council in their final report 1 November 2015 notes:

“Valla Beach had shown marked increases in both sales volume and value levels throughout 2013/14 with sales volume increase by 100% resulting in value levels of approximately 10%.....The market for large lots of Residential land.....Areas have remained stable, with those closer to the coastline towns of Nambucca Heads, Valla and Scotts Head showing some increases in value levels of 3%-5%.”

Valla, if you like, is a “Brand” that represents nature at it best. Endless clean beaches, an iconic Australian seaside village, idyllic rural landscapes, and productive farmlands. Valla is a connected community from the beach to the farm, nestled between Nunguu Mirral (Mt Picket), the national park of the Bollandas, Mt England with Deep creek forking it’s way between the landscape to reach the sea. Valla is one of only a few townships along Australia’s eastern seaboard where the mountains meet the sea.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) from census data 2011, Valla households are:

7.8% Nut Farmers

7.2% Teachers

4.5% Care workers

4.2% Beef Cattle and grain Farming

4.2% Retail

15.3% Managers

18.4% Professionals

17.3% Technicians

13.6% Labourers

24.4% of Valla residents do voluntary work in an organisation or association. The Valla community manage and maintain two Halls and run a community market

* No percentages given in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but at 2011 Census 24 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people resided at Valla.

Where are the jobs at Nambucca Shire Council?

ABS statistics of Census 2011 document:

717 jobs in Health Care and Social assistance

685	jobs in Retail trade
496	jobs in Accommodation and food
324	Agriculture
544	Education and training
296	Construction
156	Transport, postal and warehousing
179	Professional, scientific and technical services
384	Manufacturing
69	Arts and Recreational
15	Mining

Nambucca Shire council “Destination Management Plan September 2013” identifies tourism as a major economic driver promoting the growth of local tourism. “The vision of Council and the people it represents is based around living and enjoying the natural environment, growing industries that support the vision, with one of those industries being sustainable tourism.” “The brand “Nambucca Valley” has now had 12 years of investment by Council and the Community with many of the community supportive of this brand....The Shire has experienced a steady population growth since 2011...however areas such as Valla in the North experienced greater growth than the rest of the Shire.”

The NSC Strategic Plan 2023, 5.1, highlights the “Importance of the environment reinforced by resident satisfaction surveys undertaken in 2007 and 2010, two surveys were directly related to councils environmental role. They were estuary management and environmental monitoring.....providing more walking tracks and cycling tracks and providing incentives for solar.”

The Hot Rod Show “Drag-ens” will be celebrating 40 years this year (2016) of coming to Valla for their annual meet.
Valla has a long history hosting the “VW (Volkswagon) Spectacular”.

The Nambucca Valley is located in an expanding population region between Port Macquarie and Coffs harbour.

Valla is sited alongside the Pacific Highway.
Access to National Broadband Network
Only 30 minutes to Coffs harbour and Airport
10 minutes to Nambucca Heads

Valla is proposed in Draft North Coast Regional Plan and Nambucca Shire Council as a **“Priority urban development zone”** in **contradiction** to future mining which would negate all other economic activities that rely on the natural environment such as farming, tourism, and accommodation. According to the *Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census*, mining accounted for 15 jobs between two quarries in the Shire. It is obvious the jobs for our community **do not** lie with mining. Mining will impact negatively on all agricultural and tourist activities at Valla and the whole Shire.

Goal 1 1.2 Protect and enhance productive Farmland.

Valla has a productive and vibrant farming community which to date has existed in an ecological sustainable way with the local environment.

Valla is home to award winning Macadamia nut farmers who contribute 8 million dollars into the local economy annually. Macadamias have been grown in this area for 60,000 years! Now if that isn't ecologically sustainable I don't know what is! How long will mining last?....Once.

Valla is home to some farmers producing organically grown macadamia nuts, which prove to promote heavier nuts with increased oils, making them a premium product. *Sue Jenvey, Organic macadamia grower*

Australia is now the world's largest producer of macadamia nuts and supply to 40 countries around the world and leads the way in research and development. Valla Macadamias have developed a strong reputation of producing the world's finest. *The Coffs Harbour Advocate, "Going Nuts for Macas," 9th May 2014.*

Valla also has garlic growers, avocado growers, cattle farmers, grain growers, bee keepers, tree growers, blueberry farms.

It is worth mentioning the ways in which you have improved the Land since you have lived on your property. Maybe you have adopted organic farming methods, rehabilitated around creeks and waterways bordering your property. Maybe you have invested substantial amounts of money in your farm. Let them know in your submission.

We welcome action 1.2.1-Investigate complementary activities in rural zones.

Nambucca Shire Council Amended its Local Environment Plan (LEP)2010, to allow secondary dwellings on rural lands. Valla rural residents have taken this up in gusto. The Air B&B website registers 22 B&B's at Valla, not including the already established accommodation services at Valla, for example the "Sacred Mountain retreat, and the Valla Tourist Park"

Valla residents have already invested in some of these 'emerging' economies and are actively seeking opportunities in niche markets. Future exploration of agri-tourism, eco-tourism, farm tours, cafes, nurseries, etc would be welcomed. Earlier attempts at tourist activities in the region were met with prohibitive regulations. For example the "Worm farm" ceased due to excessive section 94 contributions because a bus would pull up once a week.

Valla possesses high environmental and cultural heritage value due to:

- The Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal peoples have a strong connection to Valla-Valla beach, Deep Creek Estuary, Nunguu Mirral (Mt Picket), and surrounding country. The Gumbaynggirr people have used the area for traditional cultural practices and as a source of traditional foods for millennia.
- Valla possess key areas of Koala Habitat. Koalas are listed as "vulnerable species under state and federal legislation". *NSW Office of the Environment and Heritage*
- Valla is home to other threatened species including but not limited to:

Glossy Black Cockatoo, Ospreys, Little Bentwing bat, Little Lorikeet, Wompoo Fruit Dove, and Southern Myotis.

- Valla rural is an important part of the Deep Creek Estuary system. Valla possess high value waterways and important groundwater reserves which has served the community well.
- *Letcho, Telfer, Ticehurst & Merritt - The Deep Creek Sustainability Assessment Report May 2007 notes the* “Deep Creek Estuary has important environmental, social and economic values. The Estuary contains extensive areas of seagrass beds, mangroves, saltmarsh, and wetlands. Some areas of Native vegetation are of high conservation value including candidate ecological communities. SEPP 14 Wetlands and SEPP 26 Rainforest.

Mining is not Ecologically sustainable. You can farm for thousands of years, but you can only mine once but the impact is forever.