

30 August 2019

Office of the Mayor

Reference File: F03928 / 19/189144

New South Wales Department of Industry – Crown Lands
Attention: Scott Mullen
GPO Box 5477
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Via email: airfield.submissions@crowland.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

SUBJECT **Submission: Proposed Lease of Katoomba Airfield**
Crown Lands Reference: 602686

On behalf of the Council and residents of the City of the Blue Mountains, I make the following submission to the New South Wales Department of Industry – Crown Lands in relation to the proposed lease of the Katoomba Airfield (Lot 550 DP 751627) to Fly Blue Management Pty Ltd.

Blue Mountains City Council would like to thank and acknowledge the Department in granting an extension for Council to make its submission on the proposed lease until August 30, 2019.

At the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on 27 August 2019, it was resolved, in part:

- 1. That the Council notes that the proposed Lease of the Katoomba Airfield in Medlow Bath by The NSW Department of Industry - Crown Lands for commercial use, has given rise to community concern;*
- 2. That the Council make a submission on the proposed Katoomba Airfield Lease based on information within this report, in response to information published by Crown Lands during the community consultation, and taking into account the views and concerns raised and expressed by the local community;*
- 3. That the Council's submission to Crown Lands object to the proposed lease of Katoomba Airfield for the reasons set out in this report.*

[Minute No. 275]

Councils Preferred Option for Use

Blue Mountains City Council has had a long standing position in relation to the Katoomba Airfield. Council has, since 1999, consistently advocated that the land upon which Katoomba Airfield is situated should be incorporated into the Blue Mountains National Park, and be retained for emergency use only. Council restated this position in both 2008 and 2019.

Strategic planning for the site

Council has been involved in the strategic planning for the Katoomba Airfield site since Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 1991 was prepared and gazetted. The gazettal of Blue Mountains LEP 1991 prohibited land uses of this type. Since then, the environmental planning instrument applying to the land has changed to LEP 2015, which maintains this position by prohibiting 'airport', 'airstrip', 'helipad' and 'helipad'.

In making LEP 2015, Council engaged in significant community consultation, which confirmed both the zoning (Environmental Management), and the adopted principles for the future use of the Katoomba Airfield site. The plan making process reconfirmed that the strategic objectives of the Katoomba Airfield site does not involve commercial aviation. It is noted that during the period of making LEP 2015, Crown Lands did not make representations to Council requesting alteration to the zoning of the site. Council believes that the granting of a lease for a prohibited use under the Environmental Management zoning would be in direct conflict with the community endorsed strategic vision for the site, which has been agreed to by the State government, as expressed in LEP 2015.

As the proposed use is prohibited, it would need to rely on 'existing use rights' for permissibility. Under the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act), existing use rights are designed to permit continuation of a use of land that is otherwise prohibited. It needs to be established whether the site enjoys the benefit of existing use rights for the use proposed under the proposed lease. The efficacy of granting a lease for a use that does not have a clear pathway for permissibility appears questionable.

The rationale for existing use rights is that it is unjust to deprive an owner of the right to use land for an existing purpose. However, the site is Crown land and no private property rights would be impacted by upholding the strategic intent of LEP 2015 and denying the application for a lease

Managing potential impacts of use

Assuming the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment grants a lease for the proposed use, and that existing use rights can be demonstrated to apply to the land, any development works to the site will still require development approval.

Although details of the intended use have not been provided, "designated development" provisions under the EP&A Act may be triggered, requiring high level environmental impact assessment. The consent authority for such an approval may be the Sydney West Regional Planning Panel or the Blue Mountains Local Planning Panel if relevant thresholds are triggered.

In considering a development application for such an approval, it would be necessary to consider a range of issues, including:

- that the site is within proximity of residential areas and is surrounded by the Blue Mountains National Park which enjoys high-level protection;
- once a development consent is issued (and secured through physical commencement) the consent remains in place in perpetuity, despite the potential for land ownership to change or the transfer of a lease from one party to another; and
- the proposal is relatively unique in that there are no other similar operations within the Blue Mountains local government area.

Any development consent would, therefore, be conditioned in an attempt to regulate and limit the impacts on residential amenity and the unique and sensitive location. However, sole reliance cannot be placed on conditions to manage impact, and consideration of impacts needs to inform the decision to issue a lease.

In this context, the nature and extent of control required in such a consent would place an unreasonable regulatory burden on the Council. Monitoring and enforcement of conditions of consent may be impractical. This means that the expectation of residents, being that Council would be able to control impacts on residential amenity through enforcement of conditions of consent, may not be able to be realised.

This position is informed by regulator responses to the past management of this site. The Council has worked with authorities to create fly neighbourly agreements to minimise impacts on the Blue Mountains in relation to this site. As noted above, in 1993 the NSW Government, through the EPA, responded to operation of the site by issuing a license which restricted or prevented joy flights over the National Park, sought to limit noise impacts and restricted hours of operation. It is difficult to reconcile this intervention by the State government, informed by acknowledged impacts on the National Park and residential amenity, with the current proposal to permit a commercial operation.

It is unclear whether sufficient controls can be imposed to protect residential amenity and the values associated with the site's sensitive location. It is also not clear that an appropriately resourced, rigorous and independent monitoring and enforcement regime will be in place for the proposed use.

Community Concerns

During the public consultation period conducted by Crown Lands, the Council received copies of a number of submissions made by residents and businesses within the Blue Mountains. These submissions raised a number of consistent themes and concerns for the local Community in relation to the proposed lease. In advocating on behalf of Blue Mountains residents, Council provides the following summary of issues raised by its residents in relation to the proposed lease:

Impacts to Residents

- Impacts on local residential amenity from aircraft noise from fixed wing and helicopter operations;
- Higher impacts to the residents of the township of Medlow Bath, much of Blackheath and North Katoomba, which are all within 5 km radius of the airfield and will be more greatly affected by noise as the aircraft arrive and depart the airfield;
- A lack of an effective mechanism to enforce the Fly Neighbourly Agreement; and
- An increase in vehicular traffic, particularly the transport of aviation fuel on an unpaved, narrow residential road leading to the airfield site. This road also travels across parts of the National Park.

Impacts to Flora and Fauna

- There is a growing body of evidence on the impact of aircraft and aircraft noise on natural areas, particularly on bird species. Changes in avian species composition can create additional impacts on floral composition and general biodiversity;
- The impact on birds and fauna of increased air and road traffic; and
- Long term impacts on wildlife, in particular disruption to bird migrations and on fauna reliant on hearing for feeding, mating and caring of young.

Impacts to the National Park and World Heritage Area

- The enjoyment of visitor wilderness experience, whether active or passive, will be impacted by any introduction of noise into this space;
- Lack of regulation of airspace over World Heritage Areas, and inadequacy of self-regulation of Fly Neighbourly Agreements; and
- Potential impact on the status of the World Heritage Area if commercial development proceeds.

Impacts to Business and Tourism

- Impacts on natural and nature area tourism and local businesses of aircraft noise which will disrupt the tranquility and detract from the natural quiet of local bushland experiences; and
- The possibility of any upscaling of development over time are real concerns for local businesses.

Process Issues and Concerns

- Lack of community consultation before the issue of the current 3 year licence to a private business; and
- Very little information on flight paths to and from the Katoomba Airfield for fixed wing aircraft and helicopters.

Preferred Future uses of the Site

- The overall concern of all residents is that the airfield is maintained for emergency use; and
- The land should be incorporated into the surrounding National Park, and that NPWS maintain the Airfield for community use including fire fighting and general aviation safety.

Objection to the proposed lease by Blue Mountains City Council

As noted above, Blue Mountains City Council has consistently held the position that:

1. This site be incorporated into the Blue Mountains National Park. This has consistently been the Council's position on this issue since 1999, and is reinforced by subsequent resolutions in relation to the site in 2008 and 2019; and
2. The airstrip be made available for emergency use by helicopters during natural disasters (such as bushfire) for the operation of emergency services such as the New South Wales Rural Fire Service.

As a result, Blue Mountains City Council objects to the proposed lease to Fly Blue Management Pty Ltd for Katoomba Airfield, and advocates for the incorporation of this area into the Blue Mountains National Park.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Mr Andy Turner, Acting Director, Economy, Place and Infrastructure Tel. No. 4780 5000.

Yours faithfully



MARK GREENHILL OAM
Mayor

Cc Rob Stokes MP, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
Stuart Ayres MP, Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney
Shelley Hancock MP, Minister for Local Government
Melinda Pavey MP, Minister for Water, Property and Housing
Trish Doyle MP, Member for the Blue Mountains

22 July 2019

The Secretary
Department of Industry (Crown Lands)
PO Box 2155
Dangar
NSW 2309



Dear Sir/Madam,

Objection to proposed use Katoomba Airfield for commercial purposes

I am writing to object to the granting by your Department of a license for the commercial use of the Katoomba Airfield (the old airfield at Medlow Bath) for tourist purposes.

I am a resident of beautiful Blackheath and the reason I enjoy the Blue Mountains so much is its quiet and unspoilt environment. The proposed leasing of the airfield in the adjacent town of Medlow Bath will lead to excessive noise pollution on a daily basis as tourists make fixed wing and helicopter joy flights over some of the most beautiful national parks in the world.

The value of the Blue Mountains National Park is that it can be quietly enjoyed by all, whether simply spending time at a lookout or walking on the spectacular tracks. Such activities are open to all at no cost. It will be the wealthy who can afford an expensive joy flight and the mere fact that people would spend time and money on such an activity indicates that they have no respect for or interest in the local environment. The joy flights over the Park and adjacent residential areas including Blackheath will cause excessive noise and severely affect the amenity of the upper Blue Mountains so that it can no longer be quietly enjoyed by local residents and the hundreds of thousands of local and international tourists.

The proposed commercial use of the Airfield is totally unacceptable, and approval should not be granted by the Department.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted signature block]

[Redacted contact information]



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24th June 2019

Airfield Submissions
airfield.submissions@crowland.nsw.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern,

Ref: LX 602686
Support for Katoomba Airfield

I am writing to confirm my support towards the long-term lease to FLYBLUE Management Pty Ltd for the Katoomba Airfield at Medlow Bath.

As Managing Director of Scenic World, I have a strong commitment towards tourism and visitor numbers to Katoomba and the Blue Mountains region. Significant infrastructure upgrades such as this will actively encourage the growth of tourism to the area by increasing rates of regional overnight stays, dining and retail spending.

I believe that FLYBLUE Management Pty Ltd's investment into Katoomba Airfield will provide long term benefit to the Blue Mountains economy and community.

If you have any questions regarding to my support to this matter, please feel free to contact me directly.

Kind regards,

Anthea Hammon
Managing Director

1 August 2019

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

To Whom it May Concern,

Re: LX602686 - Katoomba Airfield, Medlow Bath

I write this submission regarding the Katoomba Airfield site in Medlow Bath, located in my electorate, after months of consultation with a large volume of concerned individuals, Blue Mountains Conservation Society, Katoomba Airfield Community Group and Katoomba Airfield interim lease holders, Derek and Floyd Larsen.

Earlier this year, I contacted the (then) NSW Department of Industry, Crown Lands and Water, seeking a response to a series of questions about the community consultation process and further, more complex questions regarding the proposed future use of the airfield.

The response I received at the time was completely inadequate. I was also disappointed that once the long overdue community consultations were scheduled to take place, I was not notified by the Department but rather informed by my constituents. As the local member and representative for a community that has expressed grave concerns over the planned commercialisation of the airfield, I would expect a notification of any community consultation process.

I understand that the Department will be inundated with a myriad of questions about this proposal. I won't attempt to cover all the concerns brought to me by my constituents but rather will summarise those most strongly expressed. I make this submission with the expectation that the Department will actually respond to my constituents concerns herewith:

- There has been much scepticism expressed by the local community about the interim lease holder selection process. This also extends to a feeling of mistrust relating to how things unfold from here. The community consultation sessions themselves were set up as a closed one-on-one question and answer style format rather than the open forum residents were anticipating. The Department representatives at these sessions did respond positively to altering the format when requested, however it is reasonable to understand how the structuring of the community engagement process has led to general feelings of community mistrust of the Department and their procedures. It is my hope that the Department learns from this experience and demonstrates transparency by ensuring that community views are accurately reflected in the outcomes and findings of community consultation. Further to this I trust that the information shared from this point forward is comprehensive and accessible.

- After the granting of an interim lease or licence what reassurances, if any, are the Department willing to make in terms of the preservation of our World Heritage values should the commercialisation of the airfield proceed? What evidence can be shown to support the considerations given to the protection of the Blue Mountains environmental integrity and wilderness quality? The community needs to see that any environmental protections offered will be measured, monitored and enforced.
- We live in a unique and diverse World Heritage National Park. Our local economy relies on carefully managed tourism that allows the enjoyment and celebration of our beautiful environment without the destruction of the qualities that attract visitors here – most notably the pristine bushland and peace and quiet. There is a strong feeling within the community that commercialising the airfield will serve to benefit few at the detriment of many. Currently there does not seem to be a compelling argument to support the suggestion by Fly Blue that they will “grow the visitor economy in a sustainable manner” nor how helicopter flights will improve the experience for those living here in the Blue Mountains or those visiting as ground-based tourists.

According to a survey released by Destination NSW, with information current up to December 2018, 448 000 people go bushwalking in the Blue Mountains annually. Surely much of the appeal attached to that activity centres around the presence of peace and quiet.

- It is clear that current indications show the Blue Mountains Community are primarily opposed to Fly Blue’s proposal. Is the Department willing to explore and support alternative options, such as the possibility of the area being adequately maintained for the use of emergency services in the absence of a lessee?
- The battle against commercialisation of the airfield has been fought before by this community. There is confusion amongst local residents about why this battle must be fought again when the same considerations remain, particularly in regard to environmental impact.

To date I have received over 120 submissions opposed to the commercialisation of the airfield and by contrast only seven constituents have expressed their support of the Fly Blue proposal. I have also been presented with a petition in excess of 10,000 signatures, which is to be debated in NSW Parliament on August 1st.

I believe these figures to be an accurate reflection of the community feeling around the airfield proposal and I urge the Department to take this into consideration as it proceeds with its deliberation process.

We have a very precious and unique natural asset here in the Blue Mountains which I believe we are all duty bound to protect and preserve.

Yours sincerely,



Trish Doyle MP
Member for Blue Mountains

KATOOMBA AIRFIELD -

PROPOSED LEASING OF CROWN LAND

A SUBMISSION FROM [REDACTED]

As a resident of Megalong Valley, I am resolutely opposed to granting a 50-year leasehold over the Katoomba Airfield, Medlow Bath, in favour of a private company, to enable the commercial use of helicopters and fixed-winged aircraft. Katoomba Airfield was established in 1965, and has functioned successfully since that time as a facility for emergency services operations, recreational flying and, occasionally, tourism. That the airfield runway is now partly degraded, and unsuitable for many fixed-winged aircraft, does not compromise these usages.

Katoomba Airfield, today, is an important regional facility, and a public asset, and must remain so.

Department of Industry argues that a lengthy leasehold period is necessary to enable the lessee to commit significant funding in the property to sustain an investment. Significant funding is not necessary to maintain Katoomba Airfield as an operational asset. (See later, "THE WAY AHEAD"). If Katoomba Airfield were let for 50-years it would effectively be lost to the community as an asset. The community, through DoI, would have no influence on the maintenance or operation of the airfield.

Worse, if the successful lessee's company were structured as a corporate trust, for example, the company's operation and ownership would be removed altogether from overview of the community and DoI. Such a business structure would deny transparency, effectively removing company activities from the gaze of the State's corporate authorities.

I look forward to discussing privatisation of our public asset with the Department of Industry when a detailed business proposal is available.

BLUE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK:

There can never be justification for locating an activity as socially and environmentally intrusive as a commercial airfield adjacent to the Blue Mountains National Park, a world heritage area.

As NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service notes, "the globally-recognised UNESCO World Heritage List contains some of the most important examples of natural and cultural heritage in the world ... The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is a million hectares of ancient and spectacular national park and wilderness ... (supporting an) ... exceptional biodiversity including a number of rare plants ... highly valued for its aboriginal heritage and its outstanding geological features ... visitors can take in the scenic views from lookouts or explore the wilderness via walking tracks or cycling trails".¹

Enthusiasm for Blue Mountains National Park is shared by Destination NSW, a division of DoI. Its visitnsw.com website, the US version, confirms for prospective American visitors the international renown of its "remarkable geographic, botanic and cultural values ... (and protected) ... sites of Aboriginal cultural significance ... (where) ... views from the park's lookouts are magnificent; you'll look over hazy blue forests, waterfalls and rock formations ... take a picnic lunch or thermos ... so you can stop for a while to admire the view ... This Eco certified park boasts more than 140 kilometres of trails and walking tracks and there are great places to go camping" ² The website promotes passive recreation and enjoyment offered by this World Heritage Area. There is no reference on this site to the co-location of a commercial airfield, or the impact that "dozens and dozens" of aircraft, a DoI estimate of 19 June 2019, flying overhead daily will have on passive enjoyment.

¹ www.national.nsw.gov.au

² www.visitnsw.com

Blue Mountains National Park is protected and managed jointly under Commonwealth and NSW legislation. Where a heritage location is identified, complementary legislation provides for the preparation of a management plan which sets out the significant heritage aspects of that location and how the values of the site will be managed. In 2007, BMNP was added to the National Heritage List, in recognition of its national heritage significance, with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage assuming responsibility for managing the area. A Strategic Plan for the property provides the framework for its integrated management, protection, interpretation and monitoring.

The major management challenge identified in the BMNP Strategic Plan, by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, is “***inappropriate recreation and tourism activities, including the development of tourism infrastructure, due to increasing Australian and overseas visitor pressure and commercial ventures***”.³ The key management objectives set out in the Strategic Plan provides the philosophical basis for the management of the area and guidance for operational strategies, in accordance with requirements of the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines.

I find myself in unqualified agreement with the position taken by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy, and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage. Undue pressure to introduce inappropriate, environmentally and socially damaging, commercial ventures into this unique world heritage location, is to be resisted absolutely. The ultimate cost to the national park, and the community, would be incalculable.

THE COMMERCIAL PROPOSAL:

Dol officials are unable, or not prepared, to advise the Community of the proponent’s actual business plan. On 19 June 2019 Dol advised a public gathering at Katoomba that we “only have an application ... the information provided is fairly limited, it doesn’t include a detailed business plan or flight number projections”.

At this time the Megalong Valley community is aware only that it is proposed to conduct ‘hub and spoke’ tourism-related air travel using an upgraded Katoomba Airfield as the base. No other detail has been made available. Dol embarked on a Community Engagement process without providing details of the proposed commercial use of this public asset. This much has been conceded by Dol, although one official anticipates “dozens and dozens” of flights per day. (19 June 2019)

The community is aware only that the proponent has been granted a license to use Katoomba Airfield, and now seeks a fifty-year, lease of the site. Dol has received a ‘business case’ supporting the proposal, but apparently no detailed business plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT:

A clear concern of the privatised operation of Katoomba Airfield is the potential to contaminate the adjacent Lake Medlow and Cascade Dams, the source of domestic water for the middle and upper Blue Mountains. The nearby villages of Medlow Bath and Blackheath comprise more than 5,000 residents, in addition to as many as 500 guests and staff at the Hydro Majestic Resort. These people, and many more to the east of Katoomba Airfield, rely on Medlow Bath as the source of potable drinking and household water, unadulterated by fuel-loss and spoilage generated by uncontrolled air traffic.

Similarly, single lane, one-road in/one-road out access to Katoomba Airfield presents an unsustainable level of risk to the public from the frequent movement of large tanker-trucks carrying aviation fuel and other highly-combustible industry essentials. Access to the airfield constitutes more than four-kilometres of totally degraded road through a rural residential area, then through pristine national park. Who will be responsible for upgrading this road to a minimum standard of public safety, and maintaining the road at that acceptable standard? The successful

³ www.environment.nsw.gov.au / Greater BM World Heritage Area Strategic Plan Addendum 2016

private company, or the NSW taxpayer? Who will assume responsibility in the event of an unthinkable disaster?

The “YKAT - OUTBOUND and INBOUND PROCEDURES” produced show that ALL helicopter movement from Katoomba Airfield to the west, south and north will travel over Megalong Valley; all inbound helicopter movement from the west and south will travel over Megalong Valley. In addition, there could be ‘local’, say 30-minute, sightseeing packages which will also include travel (lower than 500 ft?) over Megalong Valley. I understand that a small helicopter travelling at the permitted 500 ft generates a ground noise in the region of 70dB; a medium to large helicopter at similar height generates 80 to 90dB ground noise, or four times the volume. These noise levels can be amplified by cliff and valley terrain. This extreme noise intrusion will have an intolerable impact on the quiet enjoyment of a world heritage area. Please note the example from Victoria’s Great Ocean Road cited below re the impact on quiet enjoyment, and the potential detrimental effect, of unregulated helicopter movement on tourism.

As other environmental issues are associated with the privatisation of Katoomba Airfield, it is essential that the independently-prepared Environmental Impact Study be made available for public review before Dol’s proposal proceeds further.

REGIONAL TOURISM BENEFITS / JOB CREATION:

Regional tourism expenditure has been nominated by Dol as the beneficial outcome from privatisation of Katoomba Airfield. It would be interesting to cite an Economic Impact Assessment prepared in conjunction with this proposal. In the case of Megalong Valley, the community most affected by a massive increase in air traffic, there are minimal to no economic benefits that will accrue - and the impact on this locality’s capacity to generate employment could be negative.

Megalong Valley’s significant tourism driver is the short-stay/weekend holiday letting market. There are approximately fifty holiday cabins/houses currently available for short rental in Megalong, and business is generally buoyant. Passive on-ground tourism, with a customer base seeking quietude from an urban rat-race, and in the locality for several days, generates the most significant local tourism income. Typically, these visitors are looking for the serenity that a world heritage area offers, almost certainly using their cabin as a base to travel and explore Blue Mountains National Park and the historic Six-Foot Track. The unpleasant noise, and disturbance, generated by a constant stream of overhead air traffic is incongruous with Megalong’s pristine environment, and can only compromise local tourism income generated by these visitors.

An other particular strength of Megalong Valley’s tourism economy is the number of activities associated with horses. These range from breeding, recreational riding, riding schools, agistment and the local pony club. The 2018 Megalong Valley Regional Bush Gymkhana, held in November, attracted about 300 visitors to our community. All of these activities attract short-term and day visits to Megalong Valley, generating income, and in several instances full-time employment. Unacceptable noise disturbance and commotion are totally anathema to any equine animal, and the introduction of such would almost certainly compromise what is currently a quite lucrative horse “industry” relatively unique to our rural community.

The impact of excessive helicopter traffic in an otherwise pristine world heritage area was colourfully illustrated by Californian tourists visiting Victoria’s Great Ocean Road in 2015. Of their Australian experience: “... we explored unbelievably beautiful walks and waterfall treks all around the Otways, and then decided to spend a day exploring the famous coastal sights, including the Twelve Apostles ... As we climbed down the steps to the beach, we became immediately aware of the helicopters grinding and thundering noisily directly overhead every few minutes. The noise was thoroughly obnoxious and out of place in an otherwise beautiful natural location, and it detracted significantly from our enjoyment of the area ...”.⁴

Similar comments to the above can be easily ascertained re Uluru, August 2018; Kings Canyon, May 2017; Franz Josef Glacier, NZ, December 2016; Waimea Canyon, USA, January 2017; Gold

⁴ www.tripadvisor.com.au / Twelve Apostles / 9 July 2015

Coast, Qld, December 2018; Seattle, USA, June 2017; Cape Town, South Africa, August 2018; and Plainfield, USA, February 2013. Megalong Valley does not wish to join this growing list of international locations where “helicopter blades are nowadays the noise that thunders above ...”.

MONITORING LEASEHOLD CONDITIONS:

Dol officials advise the Community, perhaps heroically, that any leasehold agreement will include “binding activity conditions”. These conditions will include, at the least, the maximum number of flights permitted daily, flight paths, minimum altitudes and other leaseholder behaviour.

None of these factors are consistent with common business practice. An entrepreneur endeavours to maximise commercial advantage, to maximise economic return on a business investment. A successful business person will seek to ‘push the envelope’, to maximise, perhaps exceed, contracted allowances, in order to increase economic return. This approach would be even more possible in a ‘blue sky’ situation, where a lessor’s activities are difficult or, more realistically, impossible, to monitor. The Megalong Valley community’s disappointment can only be imagined when a Dol official conceded, on 19 June, that monitoring “of flights would be too expensive for the department to enforce”.

It is been suggested that a *Fly Neighbourly* policy be included in the lessee’s Conditions of Use agreement. In what sense does this inclusion make the conditions more enforceable? Even with the best intent by Dol and the lessee to monitor air traffic movement, the *Fly Neighbourly* concept remains a voluntary code of practice negotiated between an aircraft operator and an affected community. *Fly Neighbourly* is meaningless and unenforceable. In truth, Dol does not have the capacity and will not monitor height, frequency and areas of aircraft movement

Dol states that a successful lessor would be prohibited from undertaking activities including short-duration joy flights and circuit training out of Katoomba Airfield. Will the department please define “short-duration joy flights” in this instance, and advise what compliance structures and processes it intends to establish at Katoomba to ensure observance of these prohibitions. At this time it is not apparent that monitoring the lessor’s compliance of commercial requirements is within Dol’s capacity, or its organisational remit.

THE WAY AHEAD:

Reference has been made to the degraded state of Katoomba Airfield’s runway, and the need for private sector investment and rehabilitation. This point has been greatly overstated. The runway has been in poor state for more than 20 years. Nominal investment is required to upgrade the landing strip to ensure its continued suitability for purpose.

There are any number of machine operators located in the Blue Mountains with acknowledged expertise in grading and finishing earthworks in the required professional manner. If this work were undertaken on the existing landing strip, it would then simply be a matter of ongoing maintenance, perhaps on a 12-monthly basis. Slashing the landing strip’s grass surrounds would be a simple adjunct to grading work. The monetary investment in this maintenance exercise does not justify the offer of a 50-year lease of a public asset to conduct a commercial operation. And public funding is readily available.

In February 2019 the NSW Premier, Miss Berejiklian, announced “a \$150 million investment ... in national parks ... including ... Blue Mountains World Heritage Area ...”.⁵ Much of this funding has been earmarked for upgraded walking tracks and better visitor infrastructure and facilities. It is clear to the Megalong community that only a notional amount of this \$150 million need be set aside to maintain the Katoomba Airfield landing strip - a vital piece of emergency services infrastructure for visitors to this world heritage area.

⁵ www.nsw.gov.au /A new National Park for NSW / 4 February 2019

Another logical funding option is the NSW Bush Fire Risk Mitigation and Resilience Program, administered by the NSW Rural Fire Service. The program assists public land managers undertake bush fire mitigation works, to provide access for fire fighting and deliver projects that increase the resilience of NSW communities to bush fire. State Government agencies (and local government) are eligible to apply for grants under this program.⁶ Blue Mountains National Park is not only a world heritage area, it is the most bush fire prone community in Australia - a potential that is exacerbated by the often uninformed or careless behaviour of the many thousands of visitors, domestic and international, passing through annually.

The NSW Department of Industry should assume responsibility for Katoomba Airfield. This is not unique in NSW. Tibooburra Airport, which has a sealed and an unsealed runway, is managed and maintained, in the absence of a licensee, by DoI, perhaps because of the geographic isolation of this essential infrastructure. Similar special circumstances apply to Katoomba Airfield - it is essential infrastructure within a world heritage area. For this reason, the airfield should be managed and maintained by NSW Department of Industry.

⁶ www.rfs.nsw.gov.au /Fire Risk Mitigation and Resilience Programme

Department of Crown Land
PO Box 2155
DANGAR NSW 2309

19 July 2019

Dear Minister,

Re: Objection to proposed lease of Katoomba Airfield (ref: 602686)

I moved to the Blue Mountains for its clear blue skies, the quiet surroundings and the serene environment. I go for bush-walks often and I meditate regularly at the Vipassana Meditation Centre, Blackheath. I also work in mental health and eco-therapy plays an important therapeutic role in the work that I do.

The unique qualities of the Blue Mountains are recognised by its status as a World Heritage Area. The Blue Mountains National Park's magnificent landform, the grandeur of their canyons, the variety of flora and fauna and birds, combined with the scenery, peace, and silence, make it a delight for residents and visitors alike. Flights overhead, or even nearby, would shatter all this.

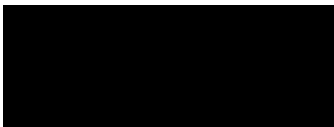
Presently, the Katoomba airfield is used only for emergency services, however, the noise of commercial flights taking off and landing, and flying overhead from a commercial airfield would negatively impact the silence and privacy.

Here is a [sample of helicopter noise](#) in the mountains. I have also attached an appendix regarding more issues.

Additionally, as a mental health worker, I see first hand the impact that noise from low flying aircraft has on people with disabilities, in particular those experiencing PTSD and autism. Many of the people I work live in the Blue Mountains specifically for the peace and quiet, as the additional noise is over-stimulating and stress inducing. I do not believe this aspect has been considered to date and I request that this be taken into account when considering the proposed lease.

In summary, I strongly object to the public land being used for a commercial lease which negatively impacts the community. The crown land should be transferred to the national parks, which should receive additional funds to clean up and regenerate the land so it can be easily managed. The existing dirt strip should continue to be used for emergency services. I believe that by using public land for a commercial lease, we are not meeting our obligation to protect the integrity of the World Heritage area. Let's make sure our beautiful Blue Mountains does not become the subject of global shame.

Yours sincerely,



Appendix

Katoomba Airfield Issues

In the 1960's Katoomba Airfield was excised from the Blue Mountains National Park on the basis that it would be returned in 1988. However this never happened. In 1999 the Council objected to the renewal of its lease, requesting that it be returned to the National Park. Recently its main use has been for bushfire fighting and medical evacuations.

2000 and 2008 NSW state Department of Land and Water Conservation undertook two assessments involving community consultations on the long-term future of the site. The Department concluded, supported by Blue Mountains City Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, that the land should not be commercially leased and that the site be incorporated into the Blue Mountains National Park on the expiry of the existing lease in 2008 and used only for emergency and bushfire air operations. The current commercial lease process is in direct contradiction of the land assessments and consultations carried out in the past.

On February 1st 2018 the Department granted a flying licence to Flyblue after a tender process which has never been made public. There was no public consultation.

The Blue Mountains National Park (BMNP) is a World Heritage Area. The UNESCO criteria include:

- to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
- to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

BMNP fulfils all of these. Any use of the airfield that will have or is likely to have a significant impact on its World Heritage values would breach the (Commonwealth) Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. It would require a full Environmental Impact study and the approval of the federal Minister for the Environment. No such study has been done, nor any such approval given.

The major impact would be noise, especially from helicopters and low-flying aircraft. This not only affects all those who wish to enjoy the park in all its grandeur and spectacular scenery, but also the wildlife. The park protects a large number of threatened, rare and restricted species. Australian record on extinction is very poor.

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The airfield is within 10 kilometres of the townships of Katoomba, Medlow Bath and Blackheath, all of which would be affected. No detailed flight plans have been made public, and the operator simply states that they would not offer short trips (under 15 minutes) nor fly at night (except in an emergency). No undertaking is given as to the frequency of flights, or flight paths. There is no formal regulation to cover this, only an unenforceable voluntary agreement.

The BMNP is described in its plan of management as:

of particular importance because of its spectacular scenery, the diversity of natural features and environments and its role in contributing to a comprehensive, adequate and representative conservation reserve system within the Sydney Basin bioregion and its importance in contributing to the corridor of natural lands along the Great Escarpment (Ollier, 1982). The park protects an unusually wide range of plant and animal species and communities, as well as a large number of threatened, rare and restricted species.

Other conservation values of the park include the range of Aboriginal sites and historic places protected in a natural environment. Blue Mountains National Park is also of importance as a major water catchment area for Sydney.

The park is a major focus for domestic and international tourism as well as for many types of recreation in a natural environment. These range from the passive enjoyment of the park's scenery from easily accessible cliff-top lookouts, to more active wilderness experiences in the park's many canyons and gorges. The large remote areas of the park are of special significance in offering opportunities for both the maintenance of natural processes and self-reliant recreation. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/publications-search/blue-mountains-national-park-plan-of-management>

The Department has a community engagement policy, but this process has been deeply flawed. Public drop-in sessions have been held, but the rooms were too small, and the public's comments were not recorded as they should have been. The department's submission form is misleading.

The airfield property is zoned E3 (environmental conservation under the Blue Mountains Local Environment Plan) and an aerodrome is not a permitted use.

Proposed Action

The Katoomba Airfield should be merged into National Park as should have happened in 2008. It could still be used for emergency purposes

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Proposed Action

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NSW 2782

airfield.submissions@crowland.nsw.gov.au

Reference No 602686 – Katoomba Airfield lease

At the outset we say **NO** to commercialisation of the Katoomba Airfield.

We express our concerns about a proposed long term lease of Katoomba Airfield.

Our concerns are as follows:

Flight paths

No flight paths have been published or available generally – it is impossible to know what impact over flight will have at any location even a short distance from the airfield. The Flight Blue proposal mentions its intention to implement a Fly Neighbourly program – this an entirely voluntary arrangement and is not enforceable – it can be flouted at any time without recourse. It is further not applicable to aircraft arriving from other airports.

Flight Frequency

No information is available on the number flights proposed by the licensee – to be realistic this is to be a commercial operation and as such for profit – it can be envisaged that the need to generate a profit will require a large number of flights to be viable and drive flight numbers higher over time – potentially to levels unbearable to residents overflown properties. It is also very likely that the amenity of the Blue Mountains National Park and World Heritage status will be threatened by high levels of noise.

Function Creep

Once a lease is granted other possible uses for the site will become apparent to the lessee. It could be expected that these will be dealt with by the department “in house” without triggering a full public disclosure. Additionally it will be difficult to impose additional conditions after a lease has been granted.

Nature of the tourism attracted

It is very likely that helicopter arrivals in the Blue Mountains will lead to flyin and flyout tourism with corrosive effects to local businesses – limited expenditure or expenditure in a very limited range of accommodation and tourism businesses populated by high net worth individuals.

Preferred land use

The current crown land comprising the the Katoomba Airfield is almost surrounded on by the Blue Mountains National Park and as such should be transferred to National Park control – this has been previously recommended in government reports. The airfield should be maintained for use by National Parks and emergency services

How did we get here?

The process that has been applied to the proposed lease seems to put the cart before the horse – a license has been issued and now we are asking for submissions on a lease

proposal. It would seem that a more reasonable way to proceed would be to call for public submissions about possible use before and expression of interest is sought. Seems very like the way public land at Barangaroo is now a hotel and Casino.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.



Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre

ABN: 11 005 353 218

25 Rutland Rd
Medlow Bath NSW 2780

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E: office@bmimc.org.au

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29th July 2019

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
airfield.submissions@crowland.nsw.gov.au

SUBMISSION RE PROPOSED LEASE OF KATOOMBA AIRFIELD - LX 602686

The Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre is a non-profit religious organisation that has operated a Buddhist meditation centre at 25 Rutland Road, Medlow Bath since 1993. The Centre offers residential courses in Buddhist meditation throughout the year. These courses are held in silence and are usually fully booked with a waiting list for places.

The peaceful community of Medlow Bath was selected as the site to establish our Centre because of its quiet location away from traffic and other sources of invasive noise. The proposal to issue a new lease of Katoomba Airfield to a commercial operator is of concern to us for the following reasons.

1. Traffic flow - all vehicles travelling to and from the airfield must drive through the village of Medlow Bath and past the Meditation Centre. If the joy flight business is successful, there will be a significant increase in the number of vehicles (including buses?) travelling back and forth through currently quiet residential streets. As our Centre faces the only access road to the airfield these increased traffic flows could be a major source of disruption to the peaceful environment of Medlow Bath and our meditation centre.

We note the statement in the Department's FAQ that "Local traffic is managed at a local council level. This may be a consideration for Blue Mountains City Council." This statement seems to be at odds with the Department's statement that it wants to consult with the community because "... it's important for you to be involved in making the decisions on how land is enjoyed and managed." Surely addressing community concern about traffic flows must be an integral part of the consultation process and not simply dismissed as a matter for local council to deal with if the Department decides to issue the lease.

2. Aircraft Noise - the airfield is located less than 4 km from our Meditation Centre and even if flights do not pass directly over the properties in Medlow Bath the noise from helicopters and other aircraft could still have a significant impact on the Centre's ability to continue offering silent meditation retreats to the general public.

In relation to the impact of noise we note the Department's FAQ state that "FlyBlue has drafted a Fly Neighbourly policy that addresses the issue." On reading this document I note that it has the word "Draft" across each page. It is written in technical language and does not provide any meaningful information in relation to noise levels in different parts of Medlow Bath. It also fails to address the impact of wind and weather conditions on noise levels.

What status does the Department give the Fly Neighbourly policy and to what extent is it relying on the information about noise and flight paths outlined in this document when making a decision in relation to the lease? Surely there must be some independent

assessment made in relation to proposed flight paths and associated noise levels before a decision can be made in relation to the lease proposal.

3. Unspecified activity levels - the proposal provides for an unspecified (and apparently unlimited) number of flights to and from the airfield. Without this information it is impossible for the local community to feel confident that any negative effects of aircraft noise and increased traffic flows will not increase in frequency over time.

This concern is highlighted by the fact that a lease of 50 years has been requested. Given the rapid changes in technology and the recent trial of “air-taxis” by Uber Air in Melbourne it would be reckless to offer a commercial operator a transferrable, long term lease of an airfield in a quiet residential area with no activity restrictions. If air-taxis become a common mode of transport in the decade ahead then the airfield lease may well be considered for acquisition by companies like Uber Air.

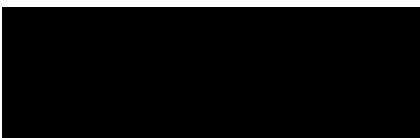
4. Unchanged purpose of lease – we note that the Department’s FAQ indicate that the purpose of the new lease and the previous lease dating back to the 1960s will be the same, with an added purpose of “land management”. However, we also note that under the previous lease usage of the airfield was at low levels and quite different to the type and scale of usage proposed by FlyBlue. During the last 50 years the village of Medlow Bath (including the Meditation Centre) has developed in the context of a low use airfield with associated low noise and low traffic flows.

Therefore, a decision on the future use of the airfield needs to be made in the context of the local community’s current expectations - not simply based on a continuation of the type of legal arrangement that was used in the 1960s. Air travel is much more affordable and available than it was 50 years ago. As a result, the environmental impact of leasing the airfield to a commercial operator will be substantially different to the situation 50 years ago. If the proposed lease is approved the use of the airfield will be very different to the way that it has been used since the 1960s – a change that we submit is out of step with the expectations of the community that has evolved in Medlow Bath during those 50 years.

5. Involvement of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) - we note the Department’s FAQ indicate that it regards NPWS as a key stakeholder and that consultation occurred in June 2019 with discussions continuing as part of the lease application assessment process. It would be helpful to know the nature of these discussions and whether the option of NPWS taking over management of the airfield has been seriously considered as an option.

During the over 25 years the Centre has been in Medlow Bath we have been supportive of Katoomba Airfield and its use for emergency situations. We continue to support this use and would like to see the airfield included into the Blue Mountains National Park with funding from NPWS to manage it as an emergency airfield.

Yours faithfully,



Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre
per Graham Wheeler - Public Officer

KATOOMBA AIRFIELD SUBMISSION Reference: 602686

Medlow Bath Residents Association (MBRA) has 75 members. Since December 2018 our organisation has provided information and opportunities for discussion to our community, whenever these were available, regarding the proposed commercial lease of Katoomba Airfield.

The executive of MBRA felt it was timely and important that we are able to represent members views as accurately as possible and so a vote was held at our meeting on 25/5/19. Eighteen members were in favour of the commercial lease, 39 members were against the commercial lease.

The overall concern of all residents is that the airfield is maintained for emergency use. Residents have no objections for the use of Katoomba Airfield for situations of fire and emergencies.

Many residents feel confused about the commercial lease as there has been so little factual information given about the details of the lease, such as number of flights per day and the options for this increasing over time as the business expands. Members have attended community engagement sessions and met other helicopter business operators who are also planning on using the airfield and details of the extent of these operations are also unavailable.

There also seems to be a lack of clarity about the length of the lease despite the information about this in FAQs. The licensees say that Crown Lands has offered them a 50 year lease (if successful), and Crown Lands says that this is at the request of the licensees. Residents also have concerns about the on-selling of this lease and what happens at the end of the 50 years.

Why has there not been more detailed information about the commercial lease given to the community?

While an Environmental Impact statement may not be part of what Crown Lands normally undertakes, in the special circumstances of an aerodrome in the middle of a national park, in a small village, we request that Crown Lands requires an EIS of the impact on residents and on flora and fauna, of a commercial lease of the airfield before any lease is granted.

Verbal concerns from residents include:

- * helicopter noise on a regular basis - but details of how regular have not been given, so it is a valid concern
- * increased traffic (large and small vehicles) on small village roads, some of which are dirt and in National Park. The roads of our village are used by walkers and cyclists and are not safe for both. Dirt, dust and pollution created by increased traffic is also an issue of concern.

- * the transport of aviation fuel on residential roads which are narrow, go through national park and are in places unpaved. This is a high bushfire risk area and allowing fuel to be transported in our village and to an airfield bordered by national park, is putting the lives of many people of the upper mountains at risk.
- * the noise and impact of increased traffic both around the village and on the road to the airfield.
- * the unknown impact on birds and fauna of increased air and road traffic.

Several members of MBRA are members of the Aviation Club and so are in favour of the lease as their club uses the airfield and they feel if the lease is not granted, their use of the airfield might be jeopardised.

In summary, residents choose to live in Medlow Bath as they like the small community, the peace and quiet, the bush, the birds and animals. There are distinct concerns that a commercial lease of Katoomba Airfield will seriously detract from the quality of life of those who call Medlow Bath home, and thus should not be granted.

Debra Brown
President, Medlow Bath Residents Association
On behalf of members of MBRA

1 August 2019

E: [REDACTED]

Katoomba Airfield Lease Consultation
Crown Lands
PO Box 2155
DANGAR NSW 2309
E: airfield.submissions@crowland.nsw.gov.au

Submission in response to proposed Katoomba Airfield Lease

I am writing in response to the call for submissions on the proposal to grant a lease to allow for commercial flights from Katoomba Airfield.

This proposal raises four serious issues concerning the future safety and wellbeing of both people and native plants and animals, and the nature of conditions the government will impose on the lessees as follows.

Issue 1: Risk of contamination of Sydney and Katoomba's water supply

The Blue Mountains National Park and special areas form part of both Sydney and Upper Blue Mountain's water catchment. The release of particulate matter from aircraft exhaust and its consequences on human and environmental health are well established. Has this issue been considered and what conditions will be imposed on the lessees and aircraft operators taking off and landing from the airfield to prevent particulate matter polluting Sydney and the Upper Blue Mountain's water supply?

Issue 2: Risk of wildfire resulting from an aircraft crash

Global heating is increasing wildfires in natural areas. The Springwood and State Mine fires in 2013 demonstrate the challenges and consequences of fire in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Take-off and landing are the two most dangerous part of an aircraft's flight. There is a risk that aircraft taking off or landing may crash and cause a fire in the National Park abutting the Katoomba airfield. Has this issue been considered and will the lessee be required to have fully staffed fire-fighting equipment on site to respond to an aircraft crash and mitigate the risk of an uncontrolled fire in the National Park?

Issues 3 and 4: Risk of a crash due to adverse weather conditions, and the risk of aircraft straying into airspace reserved for planes taking off from other airports

The Upper Blue Mountains regularly experiences sudden mist, cloud and fog which creates a hazard for aircraft using Katoomba airfield. There is also a risk of aircraft using the airfield drifting into the airspace of flights departing from Sydney Airport

and that regularly fly over the Upper Blue Mountains. Have these issues been considered and what conditions will be imposed on the lessee and aircraft operating out of Katoomba airfield to mitigate the risk of aircraft crashes arising from these issues? Will the lessee be required to provide radio-controlled airspace for all flights departing and landing at the airfield?

I look forward to the consideration of this submission and a prompt reply to my questions.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

29/7/19

Mr. Mark Maloney
Projects Manager,
NSW Department of Industry – Crown Lands and Water
PO Box 2155, Dangar, NSW 2309
via email: airfield.submissions@crownland.nsw.gov.au

3 August 2019

Reference: **602686**

Dear Sir,

I write as a local resident who will be impacted by the proposed commercial development of the Katoomba airfield at Medlow Bath. I am strongly opposed to the proposal to grant a lease for the commercial operation and development of the Katoomba airfield, on Crown land that is within the Blue Mountains National Park and Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. My concerns are:

1. Commercial airport operations with negative environmental impacts on public land in a World Heritage Area

The land in question was excised from the Blue Mountains National Park in the 1960's, with an expectation that it would be returned to the National Park when that original lease expired in 1988. Subsequently the NSW and Australian Governments successfully proposed that the National Park be upgraded to a World Heritage Area. The Governments have stated:

“The wild and rugged landscapes, diverse flora and fauna, and opportunities for solitude and quiet reflection are attributes that promote inspiration, serenity and rejuvenation of the human mind and spirit. Such feelings are valued by individuals and society, and lead to contributions in the fields of philosophy, painting, literature, music and photography. The GBMWHHA has inspired such contributions and these have promoted a sense of place for all Australians who then want such places protected. Existence values derive from the community's pleasure from simply knowing that places such as the GBMWHHA exist and are protected, even though they may never visit them”.

Source: *Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area - Strategic Plan* - January 2009. NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change; and Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Australian Government.

The Governments are to be applauded for their foresight and success in that step forward. Now it is time to sustain those sentiments and protect the park and World Heritage Area.

Since the original intention was to return said land to the National Park, it is not right to proceed with commercial developments. Such will have extensive environmental impacts on the Blue Mountains National Park, comprising: noise pollution, chemical pollution, visual pollution, increased bushfire risk, and impact on the wildlife.

CASA is more careful in framing their views of the effects of aircraft operations on wildlife.

“Impacts on bird populations may occur, for example, when aircraft operations interfere with their habitats, breeding cycles, migratory patterns or feeding patterns. These impacts are most likely to occur in the vicinity of an active airport or where low level operations disturb nesting or roosting birds. Sightseeing and training operations in the vicinity of nature reserves and in coastal areas are of concern to conservation authorities. There is also concern that increased noise levels could interfere with echolocation of bats and marine mammals. This would interfere with their ability to navigate, communicate, breed and locate food.”

Source: CASA: Office of Airspace Regulation *Environmental implications guidelines*, form 1289 Draft 1.0 page 5.

The Greater Blue Mountains Area is protected and managed under legislation of both the Commonwealth (Department of the Environment and Energy) and the state (Office of Environment and Heritage, NSW) legislation. To wit:

“If you are proposing to take an action that will have, or is likely to have a significant impact on the national heritage values of a national heritage place and/or any other nationally protected matter, you must refer that action to the Australian environment minister.”

Source: National Heritage Laws webpage, Australia Government – Department of the Environment and Energy.

That a license was granted already to FlyBlue without prior consultation indicates a failure of due process, in breach of the written policies of both State and Federal governments.

2. Noise pollution

Many residents moved here for the peace and quiet of the Blue Mountains. Having many planes and helicopters landing, taking off and flying within 1000 m of the townships, as per proposed flight paths, will impact my life, my neighbours' life and thousands of other residents and visitors. Tourism and visitors to the Blue Mountain and tourism are a basic component of the Blue Mountains local economy. The risk to the local economy is that people will avoid visiting the WHA if commercial flights are overhead.

State and Federal governments stated in the *2009 Strategic Plan for Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area* that:

“Potential threats to the appreciation of the area’s aesthetic values include inappropriate lighting as well as overflights by helicopters, low-flying jets and other aircraft. A Fly Neighbourly program has previously been established in the Blue Mountains National Park to minimise impacts of aircraft but this needs to be reviewed and stronger and more extensive controls applied.”

Excerpt from the *Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area - Strategic Plan* - January 2009 – page 33. NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change; and Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Australian Government.

Blue Mountains City Council commissioned a report (by Marshall Day Acoustics, July 2017) entitled *Guidelines for minimising aircraft overflight impacts*. While that report addresses the noise that will be associated with the Badgery Creek development, it has a relevant review on the impact of aircraft noise in National Parks in Europe, USA and New Zealand. The FlyBlue proposal has no noise impact assessment on the National Park and the residents of the Blue Mountains - in light of these prior studies and reports, this again indicates a failure of due process.

3. Increased risk of air crash and bushfire

Commercial airplanes and helicopter flights increase the risk of a crash in the Blue Mountains, which in turn increases the risk of bushfire for the residents and the Park. Turbulence and wind shear are common at Katoomba airfield for winds in excess of 15 knots, or 28 km/h. The power lines at the start of runways 06 and 28 and the ravines at the end makes it a tricky airfield for pilots.

For regional comparison, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) website lists the following incident reports for Bathurst and Orange airports:

- Bathurst: 37 investigations from 1974 to 2018; including 9 investigations in the last 10 years (2009-18).
- Orange: 19 investigations from 1971 to 2018; including 6 investigations in the last 10 years (2009-18).

That was an average of 0.82 formally investigated incidents per annum around Bathurst airport over the past 45 years, rising to 0.9 per annum in the last 10 years. Similarly over the last 48 years the average was 0.34 investigated incident per annum in the Orange area. In the last 10 years, this number has increased to 0.6 investigated incident per annum. This suggests that increased aircraft movement at the more difficult Katoomba airfield will lead to at least one incident around the Blue Mountains airfield once every 12 to 18 months. Inevitably one such crash will start a bushfire in the nearby remote, rugged bushland. That would bring a very large cost to the local community and emergency services, as well as the State government.

In the event of such a fire, consider the following impacts of the October 2013 Blue Mountains bushfires:

“The Insurance Council of Australia estimates claims will top \$94 million.” (Damien Murphy “Lucky Country”, SMH – 26 Oct 2013.

“Tourism operators in the Blue Mountains estimate they have now lost nearly \$30 million from cancellations and visitors avoiding the area after the recent bushfires.” (Sarah Hawke: “Tourism losses hit \$30m after Blue Mountains bushfires” – ABC 14 November 2013).

Such costs exceed any revenue that the State government will raise from the airport lease. In addition, the State Government may be exposed to liabilities for losses from such a bushfire.

4. Increased risk of aviation chemical and fuel pollution

This proposal also will provide a hub to central west NSW: transiting aircraft will require refuelling. Thus, the Katoomba airport operations will require large fuel tankers to operate at the airfield and travel through neighbouring streets in Medlow Bath. There is a risk of fuel spills and of fugitive vapour emissions into the atmosphere. Any incident will require a full HazMat response. The large HazMat crews and equipment are located at St Marys, more than an hour away. And such accidents do happen – in the last six months two major incidents involving fuel tankers occurred in nearby regions. On 3 January 2019, a fuel tanker burst into flames near Wollongong, requiring 100 FRNSW firefighters to control the blaze. On 19 February 2019, a petrol tanker burst into flames between Bathurst and Orange.

Airplanes and helicopters use chemicals including avgas which contains lead and jet fuel. Fuel and chemical spills will flow into the neighbouring hanging swamps and find their way in the catchment of Katoomba and Greaves creeks and into the Blue Mountains National Park. These chemical risks are inconsistent with the status of the nearby World Heritage area.

5. Economic Costs:

5.1 Decrease in House values:

Nobody wants to live near airports and under flight paths, primary because of the noise and air pollution. Houses that are near the airfield and proposed flight paths will lose value. For nearby Blackheath the median house price is \$577,500. A conservative estimate of the loss in value due to airport operations would be a 10% decrease in value, or \$57,750. That would be multiplied by many hundreds of houses affected. Such losses exceed any revenue that the State government will raise from the airport lease.

5.2 Loss of revenue for businesses that offer tourist accommodation and outdoors activities.

Nobody wants to holiday in a place where airplanes and helicopters fly all day long, from first light to sunset (the proposed hours of operations). People come to the Blue Mountains for the natural beauty, peace and quiet. Tourism is one of the main economic activities in this region. Any decrease in visits will have a widespread impact on local businesses, causing a loss of revenue and employment.

6. Lack of Transparency of the Process

Some of the key findings from Performance Audit *“Sale and lease of Crown land”* by the New South Wales Auditor-General’s Report (8 September 2006) bear on the current Crown Land process:

- *“Limited oversight of leasing and sale decisions and tenant compliance;*
- *Opportunities for community involvement in Crown land decisions are limited;*
- *Decision-making about Crown land is not transparent;*
- *Strategy for Crown land could be better balanced;*

However, economic and financial outcomes are more prominent than social and environmental outcomes in the Department’s business plan”.

For the local residents the process regarding the License and the Lease has been opaque. The State Government chose to contact a limited range of parties in 2017 to formulate options for the future of this land. However there was no consultation the public or local residents until now, which is almost after the fact.

Winning the tender in 2017 allowed the licensees (previously Blackbird Aviation, currently trading as FlyBlue Management) to submit a proposal to run a commercial airport on public land, apparently without any competitive process. The only document we, the public, have is a PDF of a powerpoint presentation from FlyBlue Management and a FAQ from the Department of Industry. There is no environmental impact statement, no noise assessment, nor risk assessment for the airport.

The Department of Industry, Crown Land has not made public the terms of the current license, and the annual license fee. It did not made public the three other non-commercial, but unsuccessful, proposals. Finally one of the Director of Blackbird Aviation and FlyBlue Management was previously employed by the

NSW government, constituting a conflict of interest. All of this does not reflect well on the NSW State Government and may be brought to bear in subsequent actions.

We are now in a consultation phase for a proposal with no documents to assess, with the exception of a marketing document and a FAQ. Building a house in the Blue Mountains requires more paperwork, that is publicly available, than developing an airport located on public land surrounded by a World Heritage site.

7. Flyblue “vision”: a poor document

No substantive proposal has been made available to the residents of the Blue Mountains. All that has been made available is a powerpoint presentation, essentially a marketing document. To their credit FlyBlue did at least make this publicly available. I trust that Flyblue Management provided a professional proposal to the NSW Department of Industry because the Info Pack is not professional and is misleading. Examples are:

- page 13 features three photographs of the 2018 California wildfires that are used without crediting the original professional photographers: Noah Berger and Ringo Chiu (finalists for the 2019 Pulitzer Prize) and Mike Eliason.
- page 15 shows photographs of RFS and Parks personnel who have not given consent to be featured in a commercial website and proposal.
- page 16 features the photograph of a chain-link fence from *Cactus Fence and Construction* in Houston Texas. It seems that FlyBlue could not take a photograph of the local airport fence. Instead they copied a poor-quality photograph from the internet.
- page 17 shows a photograph of bushwalkers taken from the NSW Parks website without attribution to NSW National Parks.
- page 25 is directly copied from the *Lake Macquarie Airport Operating Procedures* without crediting Lake Macquarie Airport. FlyBlue did not customise the Macquarie Lake operating procedures to suit Katoomba airport.
- page 26: “*Formation of a Stakeholder Group to provide input into new “Fly Neighbourly” policy & “General Conditions of Use” for all aircraft using Katoomba Airfield, addressing flight paths, curfews etc.*”. FlyBlue has already proposed flight paths and airport hours of operations, curfews, etc without consulting the Blue Mountains community.
- pages 27 - 32 list ten so-called “*heli-charter operators*”, suggesting that there is demand for the airfield and sufficient potential users. In fact, Red Balloon, Viator, Everything Australia, Experience Oz, Get Your Guide, Tours to Go, Helicopters Tours and Cloud 9 are not heli-charter operators: they do not have a fleet. They are middlemen who on-sell tickets via their websites, just like Airbnb. In fact a quick search shows that there are only a local few charter operators: Sydney Helitours, Blue Sky Helicopters Sydney Helicopters, Helix Tours.
- pages 11 & 12: “*introduction of a responsible & ongoing carbon offset program*” and “*FLYBLUE has committed to donate one native tree for every flight into and out of Katoomba Airfield. This will contribute to offsetting the carbon emissions associated with each flight and will directly support native reforestation projects across Australia*”. This is a trivial gesture and suggests that the proponents are not serious about protecting the environment. Planting one tree per landing or take off, independent of aircraft size or distance flown does not reflect the carbon footprint of the aircraft activity. Even worse they do not propose to do this themselves: they will “partner” with a charity, Greenfleet, who would do it.
- page 18 quotes the *Blue Mountains Destination Management Plan* (page 6): “*....grow the visitor economy in a sustainable manner, focusing on growing visitor yield rather than visitor numbers...*”. This quote is taken out of context and does not relate to Katoomba airfield, rather it refers to 42 opportunities separately identified by local Council, of which the Katoomba airfield is not one.

However on page 3, silence is listed as a local feature that attracts and inspires visitors: “*The Blue Mountains continues to attract and inspire visitors through food, art, adventure, landscape, street life, vistas, atmosphere, fresh air, and silence, giving expression to our identity as a “cultural haven in a breathtaking landscape. ... This Destination Management Plan supports and guides the development of offerings which reflect this identity, and capture and embody what we*

value as a community, and share with the world". (Excerpt from *Blue Mountains Destination Management Plan*, August 2017). Commercial airport operations are not consistent with that Plan.

- page 34: another vague statement: "*New Fly Neighbourly Agreements and airfield conditions of use protocols will be enforced*". I doubt that would, or indeed can, happen. Who will enforce them, and how? Already there are uncontrolled operations above Katoomba airport, as we witness. How is Flyblue Management proposing to police these skies?
- Page 34 states: "*Provides an air "Safety Ramp" for General Aviation*". In case of an emergency any flat, treeless land will do: a field in Megalong Valley, or a local golf course;
- Proposed flight paths: Air Services Australia is responsible for airspace management and flight paths. In unrestricted airspace (class G) there are no specified or enforced flight paths, only altitude restrictions: aircraft can fly anywhere. It does not seem credible that Flyblue Management can influence the airspace management and introduce flight paths, or decide where general aviation can fly.
- page 14: "*.....an asset of strategic value for training & real-life emergencies, mass casualty events, natural disasters, acts of terrorism & the like...*" Emergency services – RFS, Police, etc – do not require the existence of Katoomba airfield as evidenced by this statement from the Dept of Industry, Crown Land.

"Dept of Industry, Crown Lands have been advised that the site is *not required for support of emergency services training and operations*". (Correspondence from Jeremy Corke, Dept of Industry, Crown Land to the Regional Airspace and Procedures Advisory Committee (RAPAC) – Office of Airspace Regulation, 23 February 2017).

These examples indicate that the proponents already have cut corners to progress their proposal and have ignored relevant government policies and procedures. This does not bode well for future operations, and our safety.

Need for Katoomba airfield?

In 2017, Crown Land was considering transferring the land back to National Parks and Wildlife Service, and stated:

"...transfer of the land to the present day NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (National Parks and Wildlife Service) remains an option under consideration."

Correspondence from Jeremy Corke, Dept of Industry, Crown Land to the Regional Airspace and Procedures Advisory Committee (RAPAC) – Office of Airspace Regulation (23 February 2017).

The airfield has fallen into disuse and disrepair over the last decades and there has been little commercial operation from the airfield for many years. The local pilot community seems to have done little to maintain the airfield over the last decades. The airfield is not required by emergency services.

Maintaining the operation of the existing airfield was not a priority, as stated in the Department's *Katoomba Airfield Call for Expressions of Interest* (17-0569):

"The Department proposes to offer tenure to the property by lease or licence. The invitation to participate in this EOI is extended to all individuals and organisations with a bona fide interest in making use of the subject Crown land, regardless of whether this includes maintenance and operation of the existing Airfield."

There is no need for this airport. The profit motive of a company operated two individuals is not sufficient justification. Please return it to the Blue Mountains National Park as was originally planned.

Yours Sincerely



[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
25 July 2780

**OBJECTION TO PROPOSED COMMERCIAL LEASE FOR KATOOMBA
AIRFIELD ref no: 602686**

Dear sir or madam,

I am writing regarding the proposal to award a commercial lease over Katoomba Airfield.

I object to the awarding of a commercial lease over Katoomba Airfield for the reasons set out below:

I object to public land being leased to allow a private commercial company to operate the airfield. The Katoomba Airfield is currently on crown land "reserved for a future public purpose". A commercial operation which aims to sell flights using helicopters or other small aircraft will only service a small number of people and, more importantly, benefit the lessor and any other companies providing similar services out of the airfield. However, these operations will seriously affect the enjoyment of the many people living in the area including surrounding upper mountains towns or people visiting the area, particularly the adjacent world heritage national park. The commercial lease and the proposed use of the land by businesses which the lease will lead to is in no way a "public purpose".

The Airfield public land should be added to the surrounding national park

I support the statements made by Crown Lands in two previous assessments of the use of the airfield land, that is, that the airfield parcel of land should be added to the surrounding Blue Mountains National Park, The current reservation status of the public land containing the airfield is consistent with Crown Lands' earlier assessments. Reservation as national park would protect the Airfield land and prevent pollution, noise and ecological damage to the surrounding world heritage national park.

Lack of publicly available information or assessment of the impacts of awarding a commercial lease

There is no information on the number, scale and type of flights which will be run from this site so awarding a commercial lease will be done without any publicly available details of its proposed use and without any prior transparent assessment of the environmental impacts of the lease. It is understood that the preferred lessor has provided the Dept of Industry with a business plan but that is not made available to the public including the people who will be impacted by this ramping up of operations. This secretive process is not consistent with development proposals under the planning system where the impacts have to be assessed and made public before a decision is

made. The commercial lease could be up to 50 years so it is way too late to find out the extent of the airfield operations after the commercial lease has been awarded.

Lack of consultation and advice to the public including the residents and visitors to the surrounding national park.

It is shameful that this proposal to award a commercial lease on public land which has been reserved for “a future public purpose”, progressed to the point of selecting a preferred potential lessee WITHOUT advising or consulting with residents and visitors to the area. An ad on a NSW government e-tendering site is not going to come to the general public's attention. It was only after the Blue Mountains Conservation Society wrote to the government department that the public was alerted to the fact that a licence over the airfield had already been awarded and the next step was considering awarding a commercial lease. This was despite two assessments by the Lands part of Department of Industry which found that the best use of the land was adding it to surrounding national park. It is also surprising given the controversy surrounding joy flights from Katoomba Airfield in the mid 1990s because of the excessive noise and intrusive flights.

There was no consultation with affected people as to what was the most appropriate use of the airfield land prior to awarding the licence. The licence holder had an expectation of receiving a commercial lease and the public's views had been disregarded to pursue a financial return to private operators and a greater return to a government department (because a commercial lease should require a market price by the lessee.). The Crown land legislation should be amended to require public consultation before the government agency proceeds down the path of commercialising public land.

I support the airstrip being retained as an emergency landing area (which is more of a public purpose than any commercial lease)

Impacts on Blue Mountains World Heritage National Parks

The experience in the 1990s of tourist flights from the airfield over parts of Blue Mountains National Park was hugely controversial. The flights were finally closed after years of protest. Since then helicopter tourism has significantly increased (such as in Northern Territory) and would have a far greater impact than what occurred in the 1990s. Helicopters are also bigger and the demand would be greater.

The much loved Blue Mountains National Park is the most popular park in Australia with 5.2 million visitors in 2016¹. According to OEH figures, four years earlier, in 2012, there were 3.1 million visitors. So in four years visitors increased by over 2 million or by 66 per cent!

¹ <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/our-science-and-research/our-research/social-and-economic/social/domestic-visitation>

Many people come to the Blue Mountains to enjoy the spectacular vistas and to walk in the national park trails. The airfield is not only surrounded by national park, it is very close to the declared Grose Wilderness area. Loud and intrusive helicopter flight taking off, landing and flying over park and wilderness will significantly decrease people's enjoyment of the natural environment away from the noise of Sydney. The upper Blue Mountains, which is the heart of Blue Mountains tourism, will no longer be able to provide that contrast from our massively increasing urban areas. This will degrade the beauty and serenity that our national parks offer and affect visitors and local businesses servicing visitors and walkers.

The Minister for Lands should decide not to award this proposed commercial lease over Katoomba Airfield.

Yours

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Attn: Department of Industry (Crown Lands)

Re: Submission in relation to Katoomba Airfield Ref: LX 602686

Background

The Blue Mountains have been a special place to my family for over 30 years, and will continue to be.

My wife and I reside in both [REDACTED] and hope to permanently relocate to Medlow Bath in the next few years.

From time to time we hear helicopters. These are very loud and constant. However, when they are near it tells us someone is in trouble and we are glad to know help is at hand. This is one of the wonders of being part of the Blue Mountains community.

This does not mean we would welcome the regular sound of commercial helicopter 'joy flights' intruding into our peaceful mountain life.

Our home in Medlow Bath would be directly impacted by flights paths heading West, North and South of the airport.

Summary of objections

1. I object to the use of Katoomba airport for commercial purposes.
2. Proper and responsible management of this land requires it to be transferred to the National Park so that it is preserved forever
3. The best use of the airport is to be preserved for emergency use only

Reasons for objections

Detrimental effects on the Local Tourism Industry

The Blue Mountains is famous for its natural environment and the outdoor experiences that it offers both visitors and locals.

An estimated 1.25 million people undertake bushwalks in the Blue Mountains each year.

Landing tourist helicopters and fixed winged aircraft within World Heritage-listed national park could jeopardise the Blue Mountains experience by:

1. Impacting the reputation of the Blue Mountains as a quiet and peaceful escape
2. Increasing noise and reducing amenity for hikers, climbers and canyoners
3. Concentrating tourist dollars in fewer hands. Tourists that arrive or depart by helicopter are much more likely to be dependent on a few operators for transport and accommodation. i.e. There is benefit to a small few and a significant detriment to the greater good.
4. A decrease in reputation or 'wilderness experience' will logically result in fewer visits, meaning less spent at local cafes, pubs, shops and retail outlets or spent on supporting local culture and events.

The Environment

Katoomba Airfield is completely surrounded by the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Within 5km of the airfield there are over 3000 native species, including those listed as endangered.

1. The Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is up for review later this year. It's status may be effected by the proposed OVER USE.
2. Damage to rare hanging swamp habitat caused by runoff and erosion from increased traffic on the unsealed section of Grand Canyon Road and the tarmacing of the runway
3. The potential impact of Helicopters on Blue Mountains Wildlife and other World Heritage Values

Lifestyle and amenity

The livability of upper Blue Mountains towns and villages is likely to be impacted by:

1. An increase in helicopters and associated noise pollution—we already have issues with scenic flights over the area conducted by other operators. However, those helicopters do not land in or take off from within the World Heritage Area.
2. Helicopter noise can travel long distances in an acoustically-sensitive environment dominated by cliffs and canyons, potentially affecting parts of North Katoomba, Medlow Bath and Blackheath and other areas in earshot of the flight paths.
3. Any Fly Neighbourly Policy is self-regulated. The policy does not, at the admission of the lease applicant, include aircraft that do not originate from Katoomba Airfield, so that would include many arrivals.
4. Increased traffic along the route to the airfield (including fuel tankers and airport runway building equipment) on a narrow local road and walking path. The road is not designed for large vehicles (Station Street, Rutland Road and Grand Canyon Road).

Concerns about the bureaucratic process

Numerous government reports have recommended or anticipated the site should be returned to the National Park yet this recommendation has been ignored.

1. The scale of the proposed helicopter tourism operation is unknown, preventing proper community consultation. The NSW State Government has refused to release the numbers of flights and their frequency to the general public.
2. Flight paths have only been displayed at "drop-in" sessions at Hotel Blue (on weekdays only). These do not include intended pathways beyond the immediate vicinity of the airfield. The proposed "hub and spoke" model means flights will head to the Central West. We do not know the flight paths. This model may also bring in other operators further increasing activity.
3. There has been **no proper due diligence or transparency in the tender process**. The community was not consulted by the NSW State Government about what kind of use was appropriate for such a sensitive site before releasing a tender for a licence by direct negotiation. The licence was awarded to a high-impact helicopter tourism business. I understand community groups also applied.
4. The airport is public land, used by the Rural Fire Service during fire fighting operations, however it has now been licensed to a private operator to manage primarily for profit rather than for the benefit of the community?

Cc: Gladys Berejiklian Member for Willoughby

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SUBMISSION

PROPOSED KATOOMBA AIRFIELD LEASE

REF No 602686

I am opposed to the granting of a further lease of the Katoomba Airfield by the NSW Department of Industry (Crown Lands) to applicants.

- I am concerned about the impact that any lease and subsequent aircraft noise or other disturbance caused by an aviation lease may have on the World Heritage Area and the review and continuation of its listing.
- There may be community advantages involved in the granting of the lease but these are considerably offset by the fact that use of the airfield, and the attendant adverse impacts of that use, would increase considerably.
- Although FlyBlue have stated that they will not fly over sensitive sites and are prohibited from engaging in joy flights, the fact of the matter is that their proposed 30 minute flights, will, over a long-term period, have a considerably negative impact on the enjoyment that tens of thousands of residents and millions of visitors derive from their homes, short stay accommodation and the World Heritage Area, due to the pervasive noise emitted by helicopter flights, a noise which can last for minutes at a time.
- Many residents and visitors value the World Heritage Area not only for its environmental values but also for its amenity values: peace, solitude, serenity, contemplation of its beauty. These values will be considerably adversely impacted upon by the intrusive noise of regular helicopter flights.
- There is a risk that this noise factor, over time, may have a considerable negative impact upon commercial tourism operations in the Blue Mountains and the overall tourism product and industry, as much of this product is based on activities focused on quality individual and small group participation and experiences, and negative word of mouth experience is a significant tourism market influencer.
- The potential for weed and sediment spread from the Airfield site into the surrounding World Heritage Area is enormous. The Katoomba Airfield is located on crown land and as much as possible of this crown land should be environmentally restored and returned to full public use and full management by NPWS/OEH, and not be constantly subjected to the vagaries of commercial management or only partial environmental restoration that may have adverse implications for the surrounding areas of natural environment.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

To: airfield.submissions@crowland.nsw.gov.au

Crown Land at Medlow Bath known Katoomba Airfield -LX 602686

I object to the proposal to grant a commercial lease of Katoomba airfield.

I was raised in and around the mountains and have returned here to start my own family after completing my studies in other areas. One of the main reasons I chose to return to the blue mountains is the peaceful and unique nature found here.

I obtained my commercial pilots licence at Bathurst aerodrome and have flown over the blue mountains area various times within my training. I appreciate the need for and joy of aviation as both commercial and private practices. As such I am in full support of the airfield remaining an emergency use airfield, however I don't believe that commercial practice would be suitable for the area.

Before I discuss why I object to this proposal, it should be noted that I can only object to the information available to me. There are many details about the proposal that are not available, such as the number of flights proposed per day etc. In order to make a proper assessment of the lease as a viable option for the area these and other details would need to be made available.

My reasons for objecting to a commercial lease of Katoomba airfield are as follows:

Effect of commercial airfield practice on current tourism economy:

The proposal of a commercial airfield to bring high tier tourists to the area sounds like it would bring tourism and funding to the area. I disagree with this sentiment as the blue mountains tourism industry revolves around the natural beauty and peace of the wilderness. This peace and to an extent the diversity and beauty of the area would be damaged by increased noise from commercial flight practices over and within the very natural areas that bring the majority of tourists to the area. In turn this will lead to a decline in the draw of the blue mountains and a decline in the number of tourists that currently visit.

I believe that the number of tourists that would be lost (and their spending power) would not be made up for with the new tourists, even though they are higher spenders. Top

tier tourists have specific tastes and ways of travelling. These tourists will not be using the vast majority of businesses that thrive on our current tourism industry. As such businesses all through the Blue mountains will suffer and the area will lose it's diversity, further damaging the areas reputation.

Effect on the blue mountains natural environment:

Aircraft noise is known to affect a variety of animals that live in the Australian bush such as the birds of prey that live in the areas surrounding the airfield. These animals live in a complex ecosystem that will be negatively affected or lost if disturbed too much. Regardless of how aircraft will arrive at the airfield, they will have to land there. The sound from the airfield will affect are wide area including the Grand Canyon walking track (a major drawing card for tourists and an area of extreme natural beauty).

Increased traffic on the airfield has the potential to increase the introduction of damaging substances into the natural environment (including unique hanging swamp environments) from runoff.

Effect on local residents:

The vast majority of local residents of the Blue Mountains live here because of its natural beauty and peaceful environment. The areas surrounding the airport are made up of canyons and cliffs which lead to amplification and reverberation of sounds. Any increase in air traffic in the area would lead to increased noise for a large area of the Blue Mountains as sound travels long distances.

For people living in the specific area of the airfield (currently a very quiet small community) the traffic and noise of the area would increase dramatically.

Why I believe that the airfield would be best transferred to national parks:

National parks would manage the area so that the environment is protected while ensuring the airfield is available for emergency use. I also believe that the airfield is not suitable for emergency landing of many aircraft as the airfield is short and surrounded by tall wooded areas. As a pilot we are trained to land in open areas such as fields for safety.

This area should never be available for commercial use and such should be transferred from crown lands to national parks.

Regards,





11 July 2019.

airfield.submissions@crowland.nsw.gov.au

re: Katoomba Airport

Dear NSW Crown Land,

I would like to write in support of the leasee of the Katoomba Airport, Derek and Floyd Larsen.

I submit that the continued operation and availability of the airport is of great importance to the people of NSW, and to the people of the Blue Mountains in particular.

The airport is of great strategic importance in terms of the provision of emergency services, particularly fire services. It provides a suitable site for the safe operation of heavy lift helicopters. The runway clear areas provide for much higher payload lifts than hover only sites. It also provides emergency service site provision for access to the Great Western Highway for the upper Blue Mountain area.

The airport site is also important for the provision of an emergency landing area for air traffic serving the Central West from Sydney.

Katoomba is the only suitable field before Bathurst, to the West, that provides relief from unforecast adverse weather events on the range.

Camden and Richmond airfields, to the East, are some 50 km distance from Katoomba airfield.

The airport also has the potential to provide for the vibrant tourism industry that is so important to the economy of the Blue Mountains.

Modern light aircraft are quiet and efficient and great strides are being made toward electric powered aeroplanes. It would be of economic benefit to the economy of the Blue Mountains to have a viable and modern Aviation hub reestablished at Katoomba airfield.

Yours faithfully,



14th June, 2019

Crown Land
Department of Industry
PO Box 2155
Dangar NSW 2309

airfield.submissions@crownland.nsw.gov.au

Attention Mark Maloney

Dear Mark

Reference LX 602686

Proposed Long Term Commercial Lease, Katoomba Airfield, Lot 550 DP 751627, Grand Canyon Road, Medlow Bath

As Blackheath residents we are very concerned by, and object to, the proposal to grant a long-term commercial lease over Katoomba Airfield, especially for the operation of helicopter and fixed wing joy flights.

Our [REDACTED], faces east and south-east, overlooking swamplands and the Popes Glen reserve, near the edge of the protected Grose Wilderness.

We have a **Conservation Agreement with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust**, [REDACTED]. The majority of our property – 3 hectares – comprises diverse endemic ecologies and habitat, including threatened hanging swamps. Many diverse bird species inhabit our land including Black Cockatoos, rare Gang Gang Cockatoos and the endangered Powerful Owl. Moreover, our land is considered a bird migration route, which would be seriously impacted by low flying aircraft.

In particular:

1. We object to the lack of community consultation to prior to February 2018, when a licence was granted to Derek and Floyd Larsen for Aerodrome and Land Management on the site, and the fact that community consultation is only occurring after the decision to enter into long-term commercial lease negotiations was made by the NSW Department of Industry – Crown Land.
2. We support, instead, the inclusion of Katoomba Airfield being incorporated into the Blue Mountains National Park, to be managed as an emergency airfield, with specific funding provided to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for management from existing government programs/budgets, such as the Bushfire Risk Mitigation and Resilience Program managed by NSW Treasury. This incorporation proposal by was mooted by the then Department of Crown Lands in 2000, and again in 2008. And precedence exists, with the NPWS already managing airfields at Mutawintji and Sturt National Parks for such operations.
3. We are very concerned about the impact on native fauna and loss of amenity to locals through the current lessee's stated intention to run "high end heli-tours to Mudgee, Rylstone, Orange and other wineries and tourism venues" and their hope to have fixed wing aircraft landing at the airfield within two years:

Ref: B.C Lewis, 'Husband and wife Hereford cattle breeders Derek and Floyd Larsen from the Capertee Valley have been granted a licence at the Katoomba Airfield' Blue Mountains Gazette, 14 December 2018

<https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/5810825/katoomba-airfield-licensees-meet-with-medlow-bathers/> (accessed 26 February 2019)

4. We are very concerned about the stated intention of the newly appointed lessees precisely because pre-existing honour arrangements under the Blue Mountains Fly Neighbourly Agreement (BMFNA) for flight path controls are already being abused by joy flight operators and other pilots diverting from official flight paths.
5. We can personally attest to witnessing days-on-end over the 2018-2019 spring/summer when helicopters could be seen – and not just heard – traversing this airspace many times throughout each day, and at low levels, when there was no official or community record of bushfires, back-burning operations, rescues or other possible reason for aircraft to be in that airspace.

There are three areas of helicopter activity that we believe are already contravening logged flight paths and ignoring the BMFNA:

- Joy flights from Sydney – are not meant to traverse this airspace, but head along the Jamieson River instead; there is no public record of their flight paths and therefore no means to track the actual path taken.
 - Helicopters operated by the 5-Star Wolgan Valley Resort that ferry wealthy guests back and forth.
 - Electricity providers: there has been community conjecture that some helicopters exhibiting this behaviour may have been hired by electricity providers, to monitor tree canopy near power lines in built-up areas, in which case the cowboy pilots are drifting off course for a scenic tour on purpose and certainly without regard to the BMFNA; it is doubtful they would even know of its existence.
6. With respect to points 3 and 4, we are very concerned about the ineffectiveness of the *voluntary nature* of the current Blue Mountains Fly Neighbourly Agreement (BMFNA), and believe that any extant or proposed commercial lease arrangement must be subject to enforceable controls.


The voluntary nature of BMFNA:

- In response to community concerns, the Blue Mountains Fly Neighbourly Agreement (BMFNA) agreement was developed in 1994 between aircraft operators and the community to reduce the disturbance caused by aircraft, particularly joy flights, within the Blue Mountains.
- Under the BMFNA, aircraft operators agree to operate in a certain manner, which includes limits on operating heights in areas identified as environmentally sensitive, as well as the frequency of operations.
- As it is a *voluntary agreement*, there is no compliance monitoring or enforcement, and no avenues for residents to pursue when breaches occur. As a consequence, the BMFNA is totally ineffective in managing the impacts of commercial joy flights within the Blue Mountains.

Please continue to list us as key stakeholders in the community consultation process. We will attend the drop-in information session at Hotel Blue, Katoomba. **We also wish to be notified of any meetings to be held with community interest groups**, which we will definitely attend.

Kind regards

[Redacted signature block]



1/08/2019

Estate Management – Crown Lands
PO Box 2185
Dangar NSW 2309

To whom it may concern.

I'm writing to support the proposal to grant a lease for the ongoing operation of the Katoomba airfield and facilities.

There are a number of reasons I would suggest for supporting this:

- Fixed wing planes and helicopters are a legal and publicly available form of transport and already heavily regulated. Whilst it may be argued that some noise is generated by flying activities, I'd observe that most forms of transport will create some nuisance noise. This would include buses, cars, trucks, motor bikes, trains or planes. However, we live together in a society and the very significant advantages to the wider community (of a diverse transportation network) generally far outweigh the minor inconvenience to a few.
- Helicopters already operate frequently in the mountains. Often for rescue purposes which will involve circling and hovering for extended periods. And often after dark. I'm not aware of any significant community objections to these activities.
- The airfield at Katoomba has been available for many years during emergencies such as bushfires. The ongoing maintenance of an airport here will allow a vital support service to continue.
- Many local residents have taken advantage of the lower cost facilities and had their first flying lessons at Katoomba airfield. An operating airfield may allow that to continue.
- The local area depends heavily on tourism for employment. Options for maintaining and enhancing the Blue Mountains as a premier tourist destination are important for sustaining the local community. I believe that the proposal to upgrade the airfield will assist in this.
- I have operated and worked in businesses in the Katoomba area. Which often involved travelling to regional areas. At times, small planes have allowed for urgent and efficient travel to remote locations. Some of my family and colleagues have utilized the Katoomba airstrip for this purpose from time to time. Although I would add that the current state of the strip probably means this isn't an option at present. A revitalized operation would be welcome.

I have often observed community members in this local area rallying to stop progress, generally for reasons that are ill founded or self-centered. However, this is not a valid enough argument to deny the current leaseholders from continuing with their business venture.

Sincerely yours




[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

31/07/2019

The Department of Industry (Crown Lands)
PO BOX 2155
Dangar NSW

SUBMISSION for Katoomba Airfield Ref No: 602686

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to object to the proposal to grant a long-term lease for old airfield in Medlow Bath (Crown Land) to be used for commercial purposes. I am concerned for my well being, the well being of my community and for visitors of this UNESCO world heritage area who seek peace, serenity and healing in the Blue Mountains, both in villages and within the natural surroundings.

I am a survivor of sexual violence who in May 2018 moved to the Blue Mountains to assist my recovery from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Loud noises, such as those of helicopter flights, trigger my medical condition. Since I have moved to Blackheath my panic attacks that were being caused by loud noises in Sydney have stopped and my health has been improving. After three and a half years I have finally returned back to work and study as of July 2019. Being in a quiet community where I have also been able to learn and practice Vipassana meditation (a silent practice) at Dhamma Bhumi in Blackheath have been the main contributing factors to my current space of wellness.

Therefore, I hope you can understand the fears I have for my health and the health of others living and visiting my community with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental health conditions. The rate of suicide is much higher in individuals such as myself and I am seriously concerned for the potential loss of life that could occur as a result of having mental health conditions provoked by noise pollution. I do not want residents to relocate and disengage from their community support systems because of the effect of loud triggering sounds. I write as an ambassador for all such people as well as for those who visit the Blue Mountains for meditation retreats and quiet experiences in nature such as bushwalking.

The Department of Industry (Crown Lands)

31/07/2019

Page 2

The noise pollution caused by helicopter flights will cause harm and suffering for all such people, affecting their health and wellbeing alike.

Are the tradeoffs to wellbeing and the possible loss of life resulting from mental health deterioration really what we want to make? I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

1 August 2019

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

RE: Opposition to the Commercial Lease of Katoomba Airfield

I have written this letter to oppose the granting of a commercial lease over Katoomba Airfield, for both the likely detrimental effect of helicopter noise on the threatened species present (see below) and also for the future loss of quiet enjoyment of the World Heritage-listed Grand Canyon walking track for me, other local residents and visitors to the Blue Mountains, that **will result** from the granting of the commercial lease to a helicopter tourism operator. I am both a property owner and part-time resident of Blackheath. I have frequently walked the Grand Canyon track for over 30 years and it holds a very special place in my heart, including for the reasons outlined below.

On a walk through the Grand Canyon from Neate's Glen to Evan's Lookout on Friday 3 March 2000, **three** truly memorable experiences happened to me. First, on descending to the grove of massive Coachwood trees just before the track passes through the small tunnel, I saw a **Powerful Owl**, Australia's largest nocturnal bird of prey. The 65cm tall owl was perched at my eye level and only a few metres away, giving me my best ever view of this elusive species that is listed as Vulnerable in New South Wales.

Later, I ate lunch at the rock where my family had traditionally eaten lunch on our Grand Canyon walks since my early teenage years. This lunch rock is just off the main track and beside a large clear pool in which red Giant Spiny Crayfish can usually be seen. It is at an idyllic spot, surrounded by high cliffs, lush green ferns and tall warm temperate rainforest. I now have been eating my lunch on this rock on Grand Canyon walks for over 30 years.


On that particular day while eating lunch on this rock, my second truly memorable experience occurred. A **Spotted-tail Quoll**, mainland Australia's largest marsupial predator, sauntered past during broad daylight. This species is also listed as Vulnerable under New South Wales legislation and to see one in the wild is incredibly rare. I have only seen two others in a lifetime of wildlife watching.

On that day, I was accompanied on the walk by a friend. **By the end of the walk**, having enjoyed the beautiful scenery, quiet conversation and witnessed the Powerful Owl and Spotted-tail Quoll together, **we had entered a relationship**, and we are still partners 19 years later. A third truly memorable experience!

The Powerful Owl sighting, the Spotted-tail Quoll sighting and the lunch spot where my relationship started, were all almost exactly **one kilometre** from the Katoomba Airfield. One kilometre may seem like a reasonable distance, but when it comes to helicopter noise and the unique topography of the Blue Mountains, it is far too close. The sheer sandstone cliffs in the Blue Mountains, such as in the Grand Canyon, reverberate and magnify helicopter noise. During my cousin's cliff top wedding at Allview Escape in Blackheath, a helicopter rescue occurred at Acacia Flat in the Grose Valley, which is three kilometres away. The noise from the helicopter during their vows was distracting and intrusive, to the point that the groom turned around to look at the helicopter rather than look at his bride.

A distant helicopter in the city is just part of the background noise, but in a wild natural area, where often the only sounds are the birds and the wind, helicopter noise is attention grabbing and severely detrimental to quiet enjoyment. When the natural area is World Heritage listed, I believe such intrusive noise should be kept to an absolute minimum (such as from emergency services). Behaviour of wildlife, including these threatened species, can also be detrimentally affected by such noise.

The track through the Grand Canyon is a premier walking track in the Blue Mountains, expensively upgraded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. Most visitors to the Blue Mountains come to enjoy the views and nature and would have their quiet enjoyment reduced by intrusive helicopter noise. The fact that there are currently over 12000 signatures on the Katoomba Airfield community petition gives an idea of the strong local opposition to this proposed commercial lease.

The Grand Canyon is one of my favourite places on earth, which is why I helped set up an Instagram account on 24 May 2018, documenting the natural world in the Grand Canyon and an adjacent bush property in Blackheath 

I strongly oppose the granting of a commercial lease over the Katoomba Airfield for helicopter tourism and request this land be put into the Blue Mountains National Park and reserved for emergency use only.

Often the only sound that can be heard on a Grand Canyon walk is the distant call of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos or the amazing vocal mimicry of a calling Superb Lyrebird. Therefore, please carefully consider your decision on whether to allow intrusive and echoing helicopter noise in this very special area.

Yours sincerely,



REF: LX 602686

To Whom It May Be Concern

I would like to raise my concern about the development of the Katoomba Airfield. I moved to Blackheath for the peace and quiet, proximity to the Blue Mountains National Park and abundance of walking tracks, camp sites and climbing crags. My friends and family from overseas love visiting for the same reasons.

Having planes and helicopters flying overhead will significantly and negatively impact the enjoyment of living here and the above-mentioned outdoor activities. I can understand and accept opening the airfield for the purposes of NP maintenance and bush fire activities, not for joy flights.

I trust you will take my concern into consideration.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

RE: LX602686 - Submission objecting to proposed lease of Katoomba Airfield

[REDACTED]
I am a Blue Mountains resident and local business owner, and I wish to express strong objection to the granting of a commercial lease over Katoomba Airfield

This land should not be used for commercial purposes, and especially not for business that will negatively impact not only the residents of the region but also vital industries in the Blue Mountains including tourism, creative industries, healthcare and education

There has been an ongoing local assessment performed to determine the impacts of the local environment. These areas, such as the Old Post Road, that have active helicopter tourism businesses, have experienced a strong backlash from residents, businesses and visitors, for very little economic gain

Helicopter tourism is completely inappropriate for our region that has based much of its economic and lifestyle on nature, peace and serenity

There are also serious concerns about impacts on native wildlife and the threat it presents to the region's World Heritage status, following concerns about the raising of the barrier wall and flights out of the Westgate Airport

The noise, pollution and disruption of helicopter jobs flights will destroy what makes this region special for generations to come

I strongly believe the land should become part of the National Park, protected and preserving this World Heritage area for future generations, with the dirt airstrip maintained for emergency use only

I thank you for your consideration

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
30 July 2019

Submission: Ref LX 602686 - Proposed lease of Katoomba airfield.

I submit my objection to the granting of a commercial lease of Katoomba Airfield under the terms currently proposed.

There are several critical issues relating to the lease of the airfield, which have not been adequately addressed. A long-term lease should not be granted until these issues have been properly assessed and resolved.

The airfield is within the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. This justifies a rigorous evaluation process. No development should be permitted unless there is an extremely high level of confidence that any adverse consequences are few, acceptable and manageable.

Is there any need for a commercial airfield?

Two public interest arguments have been advanced to support the development of a commercial airfield. These can be summarised as providing a 'safety ramp' for emergency landings and providing a gateway for people continuing to other destinations. No evidence is available to support these assertions. From a lay perspective it is not credible that there would be no other viable landing options in an emergency and that modern aircraft would need a gateway so close to Sydney. These assertions need to be independently and professionally reviewed.

Alternative - NPWS to manage the airfield

The feasibility of incorporating the airfield into the national park, and the airfield managed for emergency and safety purposes by NPWS, should be explicitly reviewed and evaluated. Several stakeholders have suggested this option and cited previous reviews recommending it. The lease applicant, FlyBlue, has responded that this is not within the NPWS mandate and would not be cost effective.

A review should include an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the airfield being managed by NPWS versus the airfield being managed by a private operator. This analysis should include the viability of both options to facilitate emergency and safety operations.

The evaluation and report should be publicly available and with a period for comment from the public.

Noise management and intrusiveness

It is inevitable that there will be some noise impact from the proposed lease because aircraft are intrinsically noisy. In addition to noise levels, the intrusiveness of the proposal will be affected by the number of flights in a given time period.

The applicant makes several mentions of intending to make the airfield a 'hub'. The discussion of the 'Fly Neighbourly' policy implies that commercial operators, other than SkyBlue, will be using the airfield. These points suggest a significant number of arrivals and departures could be expected.

The applicant has outlined a set of 'Fly Neighbourly' policies to minimise noise and intrusiveness through the application of enforceable 'conditions of use'. These proposals cover approach and departure flightpaths which are intended to minimise the noise impact on populated areas. The applicant has also proposed a

set of noise abatement procedures, which cover points such as time restraints and minimum flight altitudes. These and any other proposals should be evaluated by competent, independent professionals before any decisions are made.

The applicant has not addressed the following points:

- The number of arrivals and departures at the airfield that could be expected in any given time period.
- The number of helicopter charter flights in a given time period.
- The proposed routes of the helicopter charter-flights.
- The impact on remote and unpopulated areas of the national park, which could have a detrimental effect on many visitors' enjoying a 'wilderness' or remote experience.
- The effect of increased air traffic and noise on property values.

Without this information, it is not possible to evaluate the noise impact and intrusiveness of the proposal. If these issues have not been evaluated the lease should not be granted.

There are conflicting opinions on the ability of NPWS to control flights over the national park. The powers and policies of NPWS related to this issue need to be determined and explained.

The applicant intends to establish a consultative stakeholder group. The mechanics of the group's operations need to be detailed, for example, selection of community representatives and frequency of meetings.

Environmental Impact

There has not been an adequate review of the environmental impact of the airfield proposal. Several environmental concerns have been raised by stakeholders. These relate to the impact of increased aircraft traffic and the operation of the airfield. The review process should identify and evaluate these concerns to determine, with adequate explanation, if they are valid. Where a concern is identified as valid, the review should determine if it is acceptable and manageable, with reasonable details on how the determination was decided.

Economic benefits

The proposal suggests attracting high value visitors will make a significant contribution to the Blue Mountains' economy. There is no detail on how this aim will be achieved and measured or of any lease consequences if it is not achieved.

A business plan is required which would provide a more comprehensive explanation of the net benefit to the local community and specific proposals on how this will be achieved.

The lease should not be granted unless the applicant can provide a convincing business case that the economic benefits to the region significantly outweigh the negative impact of greater noise and intrusiveness and any environmental impact.

Community Consultation

Community consultation has been inadequate. As far as I can determine there was no community consultation prior to the granting of an interim lease. The consultation process and public information so far provided in relation to a long-term lease has been insufficient.

Crown Lands - Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

3rd August 2019

LX602686 - Proposed Lease of katoomba Airfield

As a local resident, the proposal to lease the Katoomba Airfield for commercial purposes is alarming and I am strongly opposed to it. Given the airfield is surrounded by National Park, it ideally belongs under National Park control, for emergency use only. Allowing a commercial operator will benefit only a few will cause significant negative impacts with respect to the local environment, economy, society and culture.

Many of the issues are interrelated and overlapping within the quadruple bottom line and hence are presented individually to support my opposition. Furthermore, the bureaucratic process has lacked transparency and was flawed in several ways. This flawed and possibly biased process should not form the basis for any long term use of the area.

Noise Impact

The most obvious impact relating to this proposal is the inevitable increase in noise from both helicopters or fixed wing aircraft. Even if aircraft become much quieter in future, there will still be unacceptable noise and it will still be audible and distressing considering the normally very low ambient noise levels surrounding the airfield.

Without a doubt, helicopters are the worst in terms of absolute noise levels and should only be operating under emergency situations or limited other uses relating to land management. For helicopters to operate low over a residential area, World Heritage National Park and wilderness area for the sake of a few tourists is arrogant, rude and obnoxious.

Light fixed wing aircraft are not quite as noisy as helicopters, however they are still extremely noisy over and above ambient noise levels. This is certainly the case now where delightful silence is frequently disturbed by the grinding mechanical growl of yet another air plane. On some days there are dozens of flights directly overhead residential areas and a local air operation will surely only add to this misery.

Perhaps we can suppose that we are on the cusp of some revolution in air travel whereby 'quiet' and 'clean' electric aircraft will whisk people up to the top of the hill. It may seem this will be a solution to all the issues, however due to the potential lower cost per km, the frequency of flights will skyrocket and the quiet, natural soundscape will be replaced with the constant din of whirling rotors.

Visual Impact

Regardless of noise, the visual impact of aircraft is quite out of touch with the local environment. It is not what residents here want to see, nor is it what tourists want to experience when visiting the Blue Mountains. The sight smell and sound of machinery is not what the region is about.

The published flight paths are interesting because they demonstrate it is not possible to operate from YKAT without flying over and around populated and sensitive areas. The airfield is surrounded by a populated area and is situated directly on and within a sensitive area, therefore neither the proposed flight paths nor the base of operation (YKAT) can achieve what the lessees claim. Further to this, the flight paths will not be enforceable and any deviation will result in increased impact to many of the Blue Mountains villages.

Privacy Impact

It is unnerving and downright creepy to have aircraft flying low and slow over your home all day. This has increased drastically over the past year and it is a significant on-going irritant. Within these aircraft will often be tourists gawking out the window, taking photos and delighting in the scenery. However, it is rude and intrusive and will surely get much worse with a local operation.

It would appear there has been a campaign to slowly accustom the residents to increased air traffic through the period of considering the lease. This increase has been very noticeable to local residents and will continue to be a sore point so long as there are any tourist aircraft operating regularly in the region. Therefore, if a lease is granted the community is sure to continue to loudly object into the foreseeable future to the airfield operation.

Bushfire Risk

Increased risk to residents is posed by several factors associated with flying over and landing aircraft within a tinderbox of bushland. Fuel will no doubt be delivered to and stored at the site. Granting this lease seems like quite an unacceptable risk for DPIE should there be a catastrophe in future - many questions will be asked with regards to how and why a lease was allowed to go ahead in such a location.

The bushfire risk is exasperated, not just by the aviation fuel, and the bush but there is also a 132kV and 66kV power supply as well as a power substation immediately adjacent to the runway. Indeed, any 'accident' related to this commercial venture will look far too obvious in hindsight.

It seems emergency services do not require any facility at this location in order to carry out operations in and around the Blue Mountains. There are many alternative locations that can be used, therefore there is no real increase to risk associated with rehabilitating most if not all of the site and incorporating into the park. If a large area was left without tree cover and was slashed a couple times a year, it seems this would be more than sufficient for emergency services. This would not pose any significant cost for any agency to manage.

Pollution - Airborne

A locally operating airfield will obviously result in an increase of airborne pollution, both from fuel vapour and from the engines which includes more un-burnt fuel, NOx and CO. These pollutants will most affect local residents along with tourists visiting the Blackheath area including the Grand Canyon which is an iconic and world renowned walking track. I suspect that many tourists will be terribly disappointed in their experience and they will share their views publicly and tourist numbers will decline.

Further to this, The city of Sidney has declared an climate emergency along with many other cities and regions in the world. As a society we need to be reducing our carbon footprint by undertaking activities that are *truly low impact*. Aircraft are the epitome of high impact tourism and planting a tree for each flight can only be described as green washing.

Pollution - Ground and Water

Fuel supplies, fire retardants and aircraft exhaust will inevitably find their way onto and into the ground. The airfield lies immediately next to the special areas comprising the Greaves creek dams and the cascade dams which supply drinking water to blue mountains residents. Although not formally declared in the catchment for the Hawkesbury / Nepean system, the airfield also does technically sit in the headwaters of the water catchment which supplies North Richmond. Greaves creek and Katoomba creek would be fed in part from water falling on the airfield, and that water will find its way to the Grouse and onto the Hawkesbury River. Should contaminants be detected at the north Richmond WTP in future, again I'm sure some questions might be asked about the logic of having a commercial airfield operating at the top of the mountains. Is this venture really worth contaminating drinking water supplies along with local creeks?

Local Businesses

Many local business within the mountains attract clientele because of the natural environment on offer here. There are many local businesses that oppose the development, and it can only be expected that DPIE has conducted significant due diligence in conjunction with local business chambers and perhaps BMEE. It is also expected that these local business representatives have consulted closely with all businesses to understand the potential downsides as well as upsides. It will not be a good look if investment goes ahead for the commercial airfield and there is a net loss in economic activity in the mountains. Is this venture really worth the risk to existing businesses?

Residential Property Value

It is plausible that 1000 or more residential property values could be negatively affected due to the various local impacts. If those homes average \$500k and they each loose only 5% the net loss is \$25M. Will this business venture compensate for that with more than \$25M in increased economic activity? If it does, that will be a significant number of flights, which will reduce values further.

In reality it may be very difficult to ascertain impacts on property prices, however the point being that home value will be yet another potential downside for local residents. Is it worth risking a loss in residential property value when there is absolutely no upside?

World Heritage and Wilderness Values

The Airfield is located completely within a World Heritage listed National Park and is located immediately next the the Grouse wilderness. This airfield is a relic of a bygone era and if it were to be proposed from scratch today it would be laughed away. It is a totally inappropriate facility for the location, completely out of context with the local surrounds and it is not even required for emergency use. In fact it defies belief that it has not simply been incorporated into the park long ago. Perhaps people today are so immersed in all facets of man made reality that this proposal seems quite OK, but it is not - it is another step in the

wrong direction. Generations to come will be quite thankful when the space is rehabilitated and incorporated into the park, the only sensible option.

Bureaucratic Process

There were a number of issues with the entire process of community consultation. The first issue relates to insufficient information available for the public to make a decision. For a decision such as a commercial air operation to go ahead there really needs to be significant due diligence conducted by all affected parties. Considering it is public land, the public should be privy to all this information including full business plans of the potential lessee. Such plans were requested but never provided. The details that were provided only fuelled speculation and anger in the community and as such was not helpful to the process.

The second issue relates to the public meetings held, which seem to have been very intentionally designed to minimise any actual consultation on the issue. The space was loud and disorganised and the department officials dug their heels in as long as possible to maintain the two individual tables. It was not possible for many to hear what was said, including those seated directly adjacent to the officials. The excuse given was that this was a new process and the department were learning as they go. However there are hundreds of years of experience to draw on with respect to consulting and dealing with public. This is not a new process and there is no reason why a much more suitable venue could have been found along with facilities such as microphone along with the much more transparent town hall style consultation. It is difficult to understand what may have been behind the desire to force the situation in a particular unproductive and undemocratic way.

A third relates to innumerable questions that were not answered and even more that were not even able to be asked. Most of these questions relate to risk, and it is also interesting to note that the department indicated that no risk process has been carried out thus far. The fact that the community has identified innumerable issues (risks), it would seem that at this stage a comprehensive and publicly available risk analysis could have been provided which would have clarified many of the questions and concerns held by the public. A risk assessment would be considered best practice as part of any significant due diligence process so it is surprising this did not happen in this case.

Overall the process was very poor and forms a weak basis for proceeding with any lease arrangements, particularly those with such wide ranging impacts.

Summary

A commercial air operation based at the Katoomba airfield is completely inconsistent with the local environment, economy and society and culture. It simply does not stack up when the all risks and impacts are fully considered. It is difficult to understand why any government agency would take the risk of signing off on this considering the myriad risks. The process has also lacked transparency with significant details kept from public view - this aspect is troubling and very disappointing. In summary, I strongly oppose the commercialisation of the airfield and the solution to the future of the Katoomba airfield is to have it managed by National Parks strictly as an emergency landing space.



Department of Industry,
Crown Lands
PO Box 2155
DANGAR NSW. 2309

Submission: Reference No. 602686 Lot 550 DP 751627 Katoomba Airfield

Thank for you for the opportunity for community members to be consulted on the proposed lease of Lot 550 DP 751627 (Katoomba Airfield).

I am opposed to a lease being granted for commercial use due to the high impact on the environment and enjoyment of people living and visiting the Blue Mountains world heritage region. In my opinion the proposed helicopter tours do not provide a significant benefit to the general public nor comply with public interest in conservation and appropriate management of lands within or adjacent to national parks and water catchment areas.

In addition I oppose the granting of leases of Crown Lands where the lease is a negotiable commodity that can be sold on to other parties, including foreign investors, rather than returned to the Crown Lands department for re-lease.

Therefore:

1. I object to any commercial lease for this public land
2. Agree that Crown Lands should be managed consistently with, and in a way that facilitates and furthers the objects and purposes of the Aboriginal Lands Rights Act 1983 (NSW)
3. Recognise that 'the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 is beneficial and remedial legislation designed to address past dispossession of, and injustice to, Aboriginal people'¹
4. Request the license granted to Fly Blue Pty Ltd be terminated according to Licensing of Crown Land Guidelines that permit 'licenses be terminated when an Aboriginal Land Claim has been made over the land'²
5. Propose that the land be transferred to Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council, Aboriginal Land Claim no. 49068 registered on 1 July, 2019 with the condition that the airfield is maintained by the Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council and available for emergency use only.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted address line 1]

[Redacted address line 2]

[Redacted address line 3]

¹ *Minister for Natural Resources v NSW Aboriginal Land Council (1987) 9 NSWLR 154 per Kirby P at 157; Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council v Minister Administering the Crown Lands Act (2011) NSWLEC 95 per Pain J at [6].*

² *NSW Department of Industry, Licensing of Crown Land Guidelines*, July 2018, p.6
<https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/165213/Licensing-of-Crown-land-guidelines.pdf> accessed 29/07/2019

From: [REDACTED]

Reference Number: LX 602686 Proposed lease of Katoomba Airfield

I oppose the proposed commercial development of Katoomba airfield. An airstrip that caters for commercial activities, particularly joy flights, is not appropriate in a World Heritage listed area.

The Blue Mountains is an iconic place, popular with visitors and locals who enjoy its quiet beauty. It is a place where people can undertake simple, minimal-impact activities, such as hiking. Promoting such non-obtrusive activities should be supported and protected.

For those who enjoy quiet, passive activities and the wealth of lovely scenic spots in this area, the airfield proposal presents more negatives than positives.

Helicopters are noisy, and for that reason, it is likely that nature-lovers attracted to this part of the Blue Mountains will vanish. Who will replace them? Only those who are money-rich and time-poor would think it reasonable to have a short, expensive flyover in this iconic region.

The first consideration is whether there is any need for a working airfield now that the previous lease has expired. This basic question needs a comprehensive and transparent evaluation.

The kind of lease that would be the most acceptable is one that operates with a restricted brief, i.e. expected to provide auxillary services in emergencies. The current facility can be brought to this standard without the need to upgrade it to a commercial level.

The lease applicants claim there are benefits to catering for high-end tourists, but it is not known if this claim has been evaluated, and if so, what criteria has been used.

The lease applicants have yet to provide substantial details about their plans, current and long-term. E.g., some information has been provided on the approach and departure flight-paths. But **no information** has been provided on the proposed number of plane arrivals and departures. There are also no details about a suggested and capped number of scenic flights, plus their proposed routes and flight durations.

There is little detail about the Fly Neighbourly policy—its purpose, activities, and its oversight if there are problems. It would be optimal to establish a professional and independent panel to assess the policy and any other matters relevant to this issue.

Another area where there is little detail is how the chosen lessee will provide sufficient and representative involvement with the local community. It is important that those involved also publicise the discussions and outcomes to the community.

In summary:

- Just because there has been an airfield in this World Heritage area does not mean it has to continue.
- The current proposal to add private air flights is intrusive to the many people who enjoy this region for its peace and quiet. It disadvantages the many for the benefit of a select few.

The 19th century American philosopher and naturalist, Henry David Thoreau, stressed the need for people to keep wild places wild: *In the wilderness is the preservation of the world*. His words are still relevant today, and joy flights in a World Heritage Area are unneeded intrusions, going directly against preserving wilderness for the growing numbers of people who value this special region for its quietness, natural beauty, and remoteness. Can we still have that if there are helicopters and planes offering flights? I don't think so.

The Department of Industry (Crown Lands)

PO BOX 2155
DANGAR
NSW 2309

SUBMISSION for Katoomba Airfield Ref No: 602686

To whom it may concern,

I object to the proposal of granting a long-term lease for the use of crown land (the old airfield at Medlow Bath) for commercial purposes. I am deeply concerned for the health and protection of the Blue Mountains.

There are many reasons why the long-term commercial lease should not go ahead:

1. UNESCO Heritage Listing could be lost meaning Australia would lose one of its iconic natural wonders and protection for land and animals, gone. Currently four of the UNESCO criteria are met by the World Heritage Listed Blue Mountains National Park.
2. Noise impact on wildlife and environment. The park “protects an unusually wide range of plant and animal species and communities, as well as a large number of threatened, rare and restricted species.” (BMNP Plan of Management)
3. Noise impact on people. The residents of three townships, Katoomba, Medlow Bath and Blackheath are within 10kms of the airfield and would be affected. The Vipassana Centre, Dhamma Bhumi, in Blackheath supports and positively effects the mental health of 1000’s of people per year seeking inner peace travelling from near and far.
4. The park includes a range of Aboriginal sites and historic places which are of high significance to the traditional custodians who should be consulted.
5. No undertaking has been given for the frequency of flights or flight paths.
6. This piece of Crown Land was removed from National Park in the 1960’s on the basis that it would be returned in 1988. It was not. The Department did not honour the commitment but instead proposed a commercial lease.

Please hear my voice for the land, animals and other people who cannot speak as I can.

Yours Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

LYTTLETON STORES

Cooperative
make · grow · learn · share

Department of Industry,
Crown Lands
PO Box 2155
DANGAR NSW. 2309

2 August 2019

We appreciate the opportunity to be consulted on the proposed lease of Lot 550 DP 751627 (Katoomba Airfield).

We are opposed to a lease being granted for commercial profit because of the impact on the environment and enjoyment of people living in and visiting the Blue Mountains World Heritage Listed National Park. We believe the proposed helicopter tours will not be of significant benefit to the general public and are not compatible with public interest in conservation and appropriate management of lands within or adjacent to national parks and water catchment areas.

In addition we object to the granting of leases of Crown Lands where the lease is a negotiable commodity that can be sold on to other parties, including foreign investors, rather than returned to the Crown Lands department for re-lease.

We believe that Crown Lands should be managed consistently with, and in a way that facilitates and furthers the objects and purposes of the Aboriginal Lands Rights Act 1983 (NSW). We recognise that 'the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 is beneficial and remedial legislation designed to address past dispossession of, and injustice to, Aboriginal people'[1].

We request the license granted to Fly Blue Pty Ltd be terminated according to Licensing of Crown Land Guidelines that permit 'licenses be terminated when an Aboriginal Land Claim has been made over the land'[2]

We also propose that the land be transferred to Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council, Aboriginal Land Claim no. 49068 registered on 1 July, 2019 with the condition that the airfield is maintained by the Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council and available for emergency use only.

Yours sincerely,


(Director Lyttleton Stores Co-operative)

[1] Minister for Natural Resources v NSW Aboriginal Land Council (1987) 9 NSWLR 154 per Kirby P at 157; Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council v Minister Administering the Crown Lands Act (2011) NSWLEC 95 per Pain J at [6].

[2] NSW Department of Industry, Licensing of Crown Land Guidelines, July 2018, p.6<https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/165213/Licensing-of-Crown-land-guidelines.pdf> accessed 29/07/2019



Dhamma Bhumi

Vipassana Meditation Centre

PO Box 103 Blackheath NSW 2785 Tel: (02) 4787 3600 Fax: (02) 4787 7221
www.dhamma.org info@bhumi.dhamma.org

Crown Land
PO Box 2155
Dangar NSW 2309

RE: LX 602686

To whom it may concern,

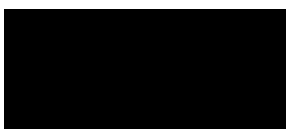
Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the proposed lease at Katoomba airfield. The Vipassana Meditation Centre (VMC) in Blackheath, NSW is formally opposed to the commercial proposal. VMC would kindly ask the Department to reject the proposal and merge Katoomba airfield to the Blue Mountains National park, restricting air traffic to emergency purposes only.

VMC is a non-profit charity that has been holding regular 10-day residential meditation courses since 1983. Many thousands of students have gained benefit attending a silent meditation retreat in this peaceful location in the Blue Mountains National Park. The quietness engendered by the local environment was a primary reason in selection of the Centre's location.

While assurances have been made by the commercial operator regarding flight path, duration and height, these are generally thought to be unenforceable through exceptions such as safety. Noise from above, as from a helicopter, is very penetrating and past experience has shown such noise to have significant impact on a person's ability to practice silent meditation retreats. VMC has taken steps to reduce existing traffic noise via a large earth wall sound barrier.

VMC is strongly of the view that approving such a lease disproportionately advantages a very small number of people, namely the commercial operator and associated business partners. Residents and visitors would have to contend with helicopter noise echoing through the canyons. Tourists visiting local lookouts would rarely enjoy a quiet moment between flights. Finally, thousands of future meditation students would encounter one more obstacle in their efforts to gain a brief experience of calm and stillness.

Sincerely,



David Ferguson
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Vipassana Meditation Centre

THE PROPOSAL TO ISSUE A COMMERCIAL LEASE TO OPERATE KATOOMBA AIRFIELD

As a concerned citizen of the Blue Mountains I object that a Commercial Lease be issued to any privately-operated aviation company for use of Katoomba airfield, a small area adjacent to the National Park - a World Heritage area.

The following are my concerns:

World Heritage Area

Katoomba airfield is Crown land, a public asset, within a World Heritage area. I suspect that the proposed commercial usage would be against the spirit of a World Heritage area. There is NO good reason why this important public land be leased for 50 years to a private company. At very little cost, it could be repaired and maintained for emergency use. The Government has funds available.

Application

The application is for a 50 year lease, provided that *Flyblue* make promised investments in the first 5 years. In this scenario, it is hard to imagine the airfield ever reverting to non-commercial status. Down the track it could be sold to any interested party, possibly even becoming an adjunct to Sydney airport now being built at Badgerys Creek.

Noise

The primary danger of the development of the Katoomba airfield by *Flyblue* is the dramatic increase in noise pollution from a multiple of helicopters that could use the upgraded airfield as a base for frequent tourist flights out over the escarpment and national park and into the rural valleys to visit local tourist attractions such as wineries, gardens, etc. What *Flyblue* call "hub-&-spoke model acting as a gateway for tourism to central west." The problem with this development is we risk getting more and more helicopters, and consequently more and more noise.

Australian aviation law limits normal minimum helicopter flight altitudes to only 500ft (152m) outside of populated areas. (See of <https://www.nap.edu/read/23609/chapter/15#72> from the Helicopter Association International figure 4) which suggests that even small helicopters at 500ft generate over 70dB, 16 times louder than 30dB for a "quiet rural area". Medium to large helicopters at 500ft produce 80-90dB (2-4 times louder again). From my experience in the Megalong Valley, even if helicopters fly at 500ft they are still frightfully noisy. I am afraid the pilots would do the same thing they often do now, fly low over our farms, and around the escarpments, etc, because that is what their passengers expect. As the noise from helicopters rebounds from the escarpments in Megalong and the upper Grose canyons, the nature of cliffs and weather intensifies the echo. These 30 minute flights could theoretically operate from dawn to half hour before sunset. Any residents living under that route would be bombarded by bedlam!

A few years ago, helicopter joy-flights (sometimes 3 or 4 times a day) reverberated over the Valley, hovering low around (our and our neighbours') houses, creating havoc with stock and degrading the quality of life for residents and visitors. The intensity of clatter from these machines and echo from the nearby escarpment was quite distressing!

In rural areas, such as Megalong and Kanimbla, cattle and horses are part of the livelihood of many residents. With helicopters using the valleys as a "hub-&-spoke" to the Central West, I am concerned about the safety of stock, riders and the children from the Megalong Pony Club, who meet fortnightly on weekends, principal days for tourism.

Tourism

The Blue Mountains, famous for its spectacular scenery, beauty, diversity, wildlife and peacefulness, is one of Australia's most visited tourist attractions — 5,000,000 visitors per year. People come here to escape the noisy city; overseas tourists to visit a World Heritage area. This is a massive tourist industry.

I have no objection to visiting helicopters flying over Megalong or landing in a safe place - they do so now. I object strongly to a private company being granted a 50 year commercial lease of Katoomba airfield for constant travel, spoiling the pristine peacefulness and ambience of the Valley and escarpments.

The risk that massive increased air traffic would degrade the enjoyment of people coming to the mountains seeking a quiet natural escape from the cities, could lead to tourism rates falling, affecting hotels, b&bs, cottage rentals and complementary services. Megalong Valley experiences large numbers of tourists who stay in the many accommodation facilities the valley has to offer - an important industry for a small community.

Ultimately, I believe the more *Flyblue* is successful, the more the people of the Blue Mountains would suffer broad downside consequences. The only potential upside is the tourist dollar for some travel operators, however I am concerned that the noise pollution would keep large numbers of visitors away.

Water security

There has been NO study to determine the threat to Blackheath and Medlow Bath's water security in relation to the airport's proximity and flights to and from it. Over 5,000 residents' drinking water is supplied from Medlow and Cascade dams. *Flyblue*'s proposed flight plans show every aircraft movement into and from Megalong Valley to be crossing those dams.

Roads

Medlow Bath's narrow road leading from the Great Western Highway through residential area to the airport will need to be widened, certainly repaired and upgraded to accommodate more vehicle traffic. Would ratepayers be forced to pay these costs?

Increased Fire Risk

Large tankers carrying aviation fuel, would be travelling along narrow residential roads from the Great Western Highway at Medlow, through the Blue Mountains National Park to the airfield, a small speck surrounded by the most fire-prone area in Australia. The landscape of canyons, escarpment and combustable vegetation would make fire fighting horrendous.

Lack of information and transparency

There is little information about the proposed number of flights of fixed wing aircraft and helicopters, and no confirmed flight paths. I understand the curfew hours would be from 30 minutes before dark to first light. I presume the airfield would eventually be operating 7 days a week.

Flyblue have not given the Department of Industry (DoI) firm proposals. On 18 June at a public meeting I attended, a map was displayed for the first time, however DoI state that the operators acknowledge this is not the final plan. This map shows helicopter and fixed wing aircraft proposed routes over Megalong, a quiet rural valley.

Department of Industry (DoI) public meetings 18 June 2019

DoI say there have been NO reports supplied to them by *Flyblue*.

DoI say they have been given NO information about number of flights initially proposed OR projected.

There has been NO projected number of likely aircrafts and helicopters to use the airfield.

DoI have NOT been given definite air routes or proposed operating hours.

DoI have NOT been supplied with information about targets, or investment size. *Flyblue* claim “commercial in confidence”. The public (who own the airfield) have a **right** to know!

DoI stated that they could stop *Flyblue* from subleasing to other companies, but when questioned said they **could not control *Flyblue* charging fees for other companies to use the airfield.** At a public meeting at Katoomba on 19 June, Scott Mullins from DoI agreed with a point that for *Flyblue* to be successful, they would expect to be supporting “**dozens and dozens**” of flights per day.

My big fear is **we don't know the scope and limitations of the proposal** and once approved the venture could grow and be unstoppable. If other small private commercial airfields are an indicator, the impacts can be significant.

Flyblue

The development appears to be aimed to support heli-tourism. *Flyblue* state in their information packet (<https://flyblue.com.au/>) "Blue Mountains tourism meaning more than just a destination point but can become a true “hub-&-spoke” model acting as a gateway for tourism to central west with heliflights to wineries, gardens, caves, fishing activities & more..." Further, *Flyblue* state "Today there are MANY heli-charter operators offering Joy Flights over the Blue Mountains, coming from airports outside of the Blue Mountains". They reference advertisements to 9 different helicopter companies currently providing these services. By **creating a home base for *Flyblue* helicopters, and maybe those from other companies with potential for refuelling, etc, right in the middle of the Blue Mountains, the number of helicopter flights over our area would be expected to multiply.** *Flyblue* would likely collect a fee for each flight, and so would have an **incentive to support as many flights as possible.**

If *Flyblue* gets the go ahead, it appears that there **would be no legally binding meaningful limit to the number of helicopter flights to and from the airport.** CASA only regulates to ensure safety, ie, you can have as many flight movements you want so long as they are safe. CASA also said that under Australian law, airspace is considered a public good, that every Australian has a right to use it, implying once we have helicopters in the air above us, they can go basically wherever they want (down to 500ft in normal flight). There is a suggestion that BMCC might be in a position to impose limits on use though even then CASA has stated the limits would not necessarily be enforceable. The DoI have stated they will NOT be monitoring movements of air traffic.

Flyblue have promised a Fly Neighbourly policy but CASA explicitly states that is a voluntary code - refer to <https://www.casa.gov.au/sites/default/files/arasm.pdf> pages 38 & 39 "Fly Neighbourly Advice (FNA) is a voluntary code of practice” and “Although a FNA must have the concurrence of relevant aviation authorities, it cannot be enforced under aviation law”. Even if the community got a FNA that it liked, I am not convinced we could rely on it being followed religiously.

DoI report that to date they have **NOT** received *Flyblue*'s full proposal.

Use of airfield for emergency services

The airfield must be maintained for emergency services, ideally incorporated back into the National Park as had been the (BMCC, National Parks, Crownlands) agreed plan about 20 years ago.

The NSW Premier, Miss Berejiklian, announced in February 2019 “a \$150 million investment... in national parks...including... Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.” The Katoomba Airstrip could easily be repaired and maintained as a vital piece of emergency services infrastructure in this World Heritage Area. The NSW DoI could assume responsibility for Katoomba Airfield, as it does with Tibooburra Airfield.

NSW Office of Environment and Heritage

The major management challenge of the Blue Mountains (identified in the Greater Blue Mountains Heritage Area Strategic Plan Addendum 2016, by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage) is **“inappropriate recreation and tourism activities, including the development of tourism infrastructure, due to increasing Australian and overseas visitor pressure and commercial ventures”**.

Blue Mountains objectors

The fact is that more than 12,000 people who live or work on this narrow strip of stunningly beautiful country surrounded by a World Heritage area, feel they will be detrimentally affected by the proposed commercial lease and signed a petition against allowing Katoomba airfield to become commercial. **12,000 signatures is a major factor to deny *Flyblue* a commercial lease.**

I wish that my contact details be treated as confidential.

[REDACTED]

Jakob Anderhandt

Author

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To the
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[REDACTED]
Katoomba, NSW 2780
AUSTRALIA

**Submission re “Proposed Lease and Revitalization of Katoomba Airfield”
Ref.: #602686**

Preliminary Note

In Section 1, my submission lists five steps to be taken by the *Department of Industry of New South Wales* (“Department”) in regard to the “Proposed Lease and Revitalization of Katoomba Airfield” at Medlow Bath (“Proposal”).

In Section 2, my submission lists twenty reasons to support the steps mentioned in Section 1. These reasons fall into five categories: Environmental, Community, Commercial, Administrative, and Historical Reasons.

In Section 3, my submission draws a Conclusion from Section 2.

In Section 4, my submission gives Information in regard to its Privacy.

In Section 5, my submission provides References for statements made or quoted in Section 2.

The submission aims to be detailed and deals with the subject extensively. This was recommended by a representative of the Department during a “Drop in Session” at Hotel Blue, Katoomba NSW, to make a submission effective.

Section 1 : Steps to be taken by the Department in regard to the Proposal

I. Terminate the existing interim lease (also: “license”) for the Katoomba Airfield (“Airfield”) to Mr and Mrs Derek and Floyd Larsen (“Applicants”) on a notice as short as legally practical.

II. Render all further agreements with the Applicants related to the proposed lease and/or the Proposal null and void to the extent legally practical. Do so in a reasonable period of time.

III. Refrain from any further negotiations with the Applicants in regard to a future lease of the Airfield to them or any representatives of them (corporate and/or private).

IV. Take immediate, comprehensive and effective steps to prohibit any use of the Airfield for any type of plane, helicopter and any other type of other aircraft from now on and forever, except for emergency reasons. Make such steps public as soon as they are taken.

[REDACTED]

V. Take up negotiations with National Park and Wildlife Service ("NPWS") to integrate the Airfield into the Blue Mountains National Park and to become and remain part of this Park in perpetuity. To achieve this, make any concessions to NPWS that are appropriate. Actively initiate and support this process with any means that are within the capacities of the Department and/or its dependencies. Seek for assistance from other government agencies to speed up and smoothen the process.

Section 2: Reasons to take the Steps mentioned in Section 1

Environmental Reasons

The Airfield is fully surrounded by the Blue Mountains National Park ("Park"). Approving the proposal would have an intolerable negative impact on the park, its native fauna and a large share of its visitors, especially bushwalkers.

1. Noise from planes and helicopters has a severe and negative impact on wildlife, especially on native birds. Such birds are resident in close proximity of the Airfield, including at least four vulnerable species. Accepting the Proposal will significantly disturb these species (amongst others) and most likely destroy their habitat. Especially in the breeding season (but not limited to it) birds depend on an universal absence of fabricated noise in their habitat.

2. Noise from planes is destructive to natural sounds as a key feature of Nature Parks. Recent literature highlights the soundscape of a Nature Park as an integral part of the Park's character and natural heritage. Protecting the Blue Mountains National Park as a Nature Park includes protecting its historic natural soundscape. Granting the Proposal will negatively impact, if not destroy, the soundscape in a considerable part of the Park. It will do so regardless of which type of aircraft will be allowed to use the Airfield and where the flightpaths for the Airfield will be situated.

3. Noise from planes and especially helicopters will destroy the bushwalking experience on popular tracks of the Park, including the Great Canyon Walk which is an internationally known highlight. The specific acoustic situation in the vicinity of these walks causes sound to travel deep into the Canyon and to spread into the valley that leads from the Canyon to Junction Rock. Amplified by the surrounding cliffs and walls, visitors' cooeing at Evans Lookout can be heard down in the Canyon and valley at several locations when walking from Grand Canyon to Junction Rock. Intrusive noise of planes and helicopters starting and landing at the Airfield will be heard in the Canyon and the connecting valley to a much larger extent and at many more locations when using the proposed flight paths (but not limited to that).

The proposed flightpath from Mount Flat Top to Bell is situated directly above the popular walk to Lockleys Pylon. Any aircraft using this path will be seen by walkers from the point of time of turning up above them until vanishing on the horizon. Its sound will be heard unobstructedly along the whole walk. Hence, the experience of natural soundscape in this area will be totally suffocated. The pristine walk down from Lockleys Pylon to Acacia Flat and the popular walk down from Perrys Lookdown to the Flat will be affected in a similar way.

4. Any effort to mitigate the negative impacts mentioned under 2. to 3. by restricting/moving the proposed flight paths will be fruitless. Noise from aircraft using flightpaths to and from the Airfield will always be heard in the surrounding areas of the Park, no matter of how these paths will be situated. This alone will spoil the experience of natural soundscape. Recent literature on the subject supports this:

a) "... noise impacts in national park or tranquil areas are not determined solely by the level of the noise and are likely to relate to: ... Increased awareness and sensitivity to noise intrusion in areas of the park which are valued for their tranquillity and natural soundscapes ..."¹

b) "Background sound levels do not provide a measure of the intrinsic value of a soundscape that is composed entirely of natural sound sources."²

Due to a) it would be inappropriate to classify the acoustic impact of the proposal as low in recurring to stating that fabricated noise by aircraft using the Airfield could be heard in the park only at low level.

Due to b) it would not either be appropriate to classify the acoustic impact of the proposal as low in recurring to stating that noise fabricated by aircraft using the Airfield would be “Background sound” by quality only.

5. Any effort to mitigate the negative effects mentioned under reasons 2 and 3 by limiting flights from and to the Airfield to a certain number and/or hours a day will also be fruitless. This is because temporary intrusion of noise into tranquil areas causes visitors to feel that the natural soundscape has been reduced to uncertain periods of “spare time” (i.e. periods free from intrusive noise that cannot be anticipated/predicted by when they appear and for how long they will last). Such a feeling in itself already spoils the experience of tranquillity, and it explicitly does so outside the periods of intrusive noise. – It goes even further: While doing the walk to Lockleys Pylon three weeks ago, I could not really enjoy myself and the area anymore because of my fear that with the proposed flightpath above me I might not have this unspoiled experience in the future again and again.

6. All aircraft using the flight path between the Airfield, Mount Flat Top and onwards to Bell in one or the other direction will be clearly seen from Evans Lookout. This airborne traffic will disrupt the serenity of the view from the Lookout towards the magnificent Walls above Grand Canyon, as well as the whole view to the outstanding plateau opposite the lookout, starting at Mount Flat Top, going on to Lockleys Pylon and continuing further to the North. The optic experience at one of the landmarks of the Blue Mountains will be impacted in a negative way. A similar effect will occur at the lookout of Pulpit Rock with the airborne traffic over the closest ridge to the left (i.e. the plateau at Lockleys Pylon).

7. The statement in the proposal that the Applicants will assist in “opening up” parts of the Airfield to bushwalking activity is an appeasement. Due to reasons 3 to 5, bushwalkers will avoid the proposed “Walk Blue” areas, because these will be even more affected by intrusive plane and helicopter noise than the surrounding areas within the Park. If the Proposal is approved, these areas will in fact be *shut down* for bushwalkers.

Community Reasons

8. Large parts of the communities of Medlow Bath, Katoomba and other towns of the Blue Mountains area are opposed to the Proposal. Resentment has peaked at an informal “Drop in Session”, arranged by the Department in Hotel Blue, Katoomba. On the morning of 19 June 2019, this session turned into a protest rally by more than one hundred participants from the local area.³

9. Opposition against the proposal is not limited to residents of the Blue Mountains. Visitors, interviewed at e.g. Evans Lookout, have clearly indicated their rejection. A petition against the proposal with more than 12,000 (twelve-thousand) signatures has been handed to MP Trish Doyle to be debated in Parliament. A second petition on *change.org*, promoting to “Say No To Helicopter Noise” and “No Commercialization of Katoomba Airfield” has attracted another 5,600 (five-thousand-six-hundred) signatories.⁴ In contrast to this, a counter-petition on the same website to “Support the Redevelopment of Katoomba Airfield” has attracted 29 (twenty-nine) signatories.⁵

10. The towns of the Blue Mountains are known for their integrity and their strong sense of community. Contrary to the statement on the Applicants’ website, saying they would contribute to these communities,⁶ they so far have not actively tried to explain their case to any broader group of these communities. The Applicants were said to be present in person at the informal “Drop-in” sessions at Hotel Blue, Katoomba, to reply to questions about the Proposal. However, they seem to have pulled out on short notice and with no reason given. In the *Blue Mountains Gazette* they have described their vision and stated their case only twice: a first time in an introductory article describing their proposal.

a second time in a published readers' letter to the editor.⁷ They have denied providing any detailed information about the Proposal to the communities until shortly before the first "Drop-in" session at Hotel Blue (i.e. up to 15th June 2019 approximately). To justify this, they have referred to rights of privacy for their business. This has led to the impression that the Applicants are not essentially interested in building a sound relationship with the people of the Blue Mountains. Instead they are seen as wanting to intrude, "doing their thing", "making their profits" and "taking the money elsewhere". Coming from this, it seems doubtful, if and how the Applicants will benefit the communities of the Blue Mountains, in case the Proposal should be approved.

Commercial Reasons

11. The Proposal informs only very generally on how the Applicants think to provide commercial benefits through their enterprise. It neither states if or how many jobs the "revitalization" of the Airfield will create, nor for how long these jobs will exist, nor which professions will be beneficiaries. If the proposal is approved, there might be a number of temporary jobs for the construction industry in removing old structures from the Airfield, erecting new ones and sealing one of the runways, as intended. Beyond this it is questionable if and to what extent the "revitalized" Airfield will employ staff on the ground and on what basis. The two "Walk Blue" areas next to the runways can hardly be seen as creating any significant income to staff at the Airfield or members of the community. Neither is there sound information of how many new jobs for (local) pilots and crew would be created through a "revitalization" of the Airfield.

12. In regard its supposed promotional role for local tourism, the proposal contradicts itself. On the one hand it states that the future Airfield is to attract specifically such groups of tourists that will stay in the Blue Mountains for at least one night.⁸ On the other hand it announces the Airfield to be transformed into a "hub-and-spoke model acting as a gateway for tourism to the Central West".⁹ It is clear, however, that the proposal can and will result in a promotion of "high end" tourism only, if approved. Under these circumstances it is not to be expected that any smaller local businesses and industries such as bed & breakfasts, smaller retreats, restaurants and local shops—who are the main enterprises in need of growth—will receive any additional revenue. On estimation, the main growth of income created by additional overnight stays from tourists from and to the Airfield will go to "high end" ventures like The Hydro Majestic (which neither needs more revenue to grow nor is employing staff locally, nor is a local business) and the Imperial Hotel in Mount Victoria (which will be operated by Radisson, after being refurbished). Worst case scenario, the Airfield will develop into a transit location for airborne tourists from Sydney to the Central West and back. This will just and only create additional traffic on ground by transporting such "transit tourists" to a number of scenic highlights in the central Blue Mountains and returning them to the Airfield within a couple of hours. A commercial profit for the region under this scenario will be zero at best, but more likely be negative. The proposal lacks any comment on how the Applicants will manage avoiding such a scenario and instead bring sustainable commercial gain to the region, as they intend.

13. Home owners and hospitality business in proximity to the Airfield will experience substantial economic losses if the Proposal is approved. Residents of the Blue Mountains as well as people from outside the Mountains see the region as a peaceful, quiet and unspoiled area, surrounded by National Park as guarantor for keeping these characteristics. Additional noise and pollution from an operating airfield will therefore have a more than average negative impact on real estate and its commercial value. Contrary to what the proposal outlines,¹⁰ at least one of the intended flight paths is situated directly above an area with residential property.¹¹ Retreats in the vicinity of the Airfield may well suffer a reduction or even a ruin of their business for the same reason.¹²

Administrative Reasons

There is indication that the Department of Industry is not the appropriate agency to satisfactorily decide over a long-term future use of the Katoomba Airfield in recent times.

14. Preliminary actions of the Department that led to the interim lease (“license”) granted to the Applicants are marked by procedural errors. In particular, the Department has been criticized for not consulting the affected communities *before* asking for Expressions of Interest (EoI) for a future lease of the Airfield in 2017. During the “Drop-in” session at Hotel Blue in Katoomba in the afternoon of 19 June 2019, a representative of the Department admitted that this was a mistake and that the Department apologized for it. Asked of how the Department would make good on the mistake, the representative replied evasively: “... you can have your say now ...”

15. During the “Drop in” session referred to under 14., a representative of the Department explained that the Department had received several EoIs for a future lease at the time. Most had intended using the Airfield as an airfield, but not all. Asked why the Department did not consult the affected communities/the public about which type of use they would prefer before making its decision to grant the interim lease to the Applicants and to reject the competing EoIs, the representative did not reply. NPWS was not invited to submit an EoI at the time, though it had informed the Department of interest accordingly.

16. Based on the interim lease granted by the Department, the Applicants started preliminary work on the Airfield for its future “revitalization”. They cleared the land from debris and installed a number of features such as CCTV cameras and windvanes, doing this at their own costs. Granting the interim lease and encouraging such actions stands in stark contrast to a process with an open outcome as described by Dennis Buttigieg, director of commercial services for the Department and project manager for the lease. Up to July 2019, Mr. Buttigieg assured that the Department had formed no view about whether a lease of the Airfield should be granted to the Applicants or not.¹³ It might be for this reason that the interim lease was played down by the Department in (re)terming it a “license”. Granting the interim lease has put the Applicants in an awkward position, and the public as well. In regard to the former, it lulled them in a false sense of security. In regard to the latter, it indicated the public’s role to be confined to bless a process that would go ahead anyway. In consequence, the Department has been operating with double standards by its words and actions. It has damaged its reputation and shattered trust in that it is the right agency to manage a public property as sensitive as the Katoomba Airfield surrounded by Blue Mountains National Park.

17. During the “Drop-in” session at Hotel Blue in Katoomba in the morning of 19 June 2019, a representative stated that the Department would clearly rule out “joy flights” from and to the Airfield. When asked about the meaning of the term “joy flight”, the representative had to admit that the Department was short of a definition.¹⁴ During the “Drop-in” session at Hotel Blue in Katoomba the same day in the evening it was shown to a representative of the Department that the Applicants were actually using the term “joy flight” in their “info-pack” to promote the Proposal.¹⁵ This representative did neither reply nor comment by words, but only shrugged his shoulders.

Historical Reasons

18. It has been a long term vision that the Katoomba Airfield be incorporated in Blue Mountains National Park. This vision would have become reality no later than 2008, if the Department had not repeatedly obstructed the process and dishonored mutual arrangements with other institutions that favored the vision.

After putting the Airfield into operation in the 1960ies, NPWS consented to exclude the Airfield from land to be added to the National Park at that time. Mutual consent with the Department was reached to incorporate the Airfield in the National Park when the current lease of that time had expired, i.e. in 1988.

However, a consecutive lease was granted by the Department in 1988. The only known reason why the Department deviated from the consensus with NPWS was that the Airfield was now considered as ‘important to the region’ (by the Department). In 2000, NPWS suggested the Airfield be incorporated into the Park after the recent lease had expired, i.e. in 2008. The Blue Mountains City Council (“BMCC”) supported this suggestion. The Department did not follow this suggestion either, but put the Airfield up for sale. On the occasion, the BMCC confirmed that it still supported NPWS’s sug-

gestion of year 2000. NPWS themselves confirmed the same to the Department in 2016. Despite this, NPWS was not invited by the Department to submit an EoI in September 2017.¹⁶

19. During the 1988-2008 lease, helicopter joy flights from and to the Airfield commenced in 1992. Due to a community campaign these flights had to cease totally in 1995/96. From a historical perspective, this was a significant step towards fulfilling the vision of incorporating the Airfield in National Park by firstly de-commercializing it.

20. Opposition of BMCC in 2008 against the proposed sale of the Airfield (commercialization associated) and the recent public opposition against the Proposal, combined with various recommendations to include the Airfield into National Park, demonstrate that the vision of incorporating the Airfield in the Park is recently more widely shared and supported than ever before. The trend favors a de-commercialization of the Airfield and a management and care-taking arrangement under non-profit principles by a suitable agency or institution. As this trend is long-lasting and growing, it indicates that the Airfield must be de-commercialized in the near future and in perpetuity.

Section 3: Conclusion

The proposal is irreconcilable with preserving native wildlife habitat (1.) and other key-features (2.-6.) of the Blue Mountains National Park as a Nature Park. It does not either contribute to an experience of undisturbed nature by opening up areas hitherto closed to the public (7.). It has met wide opposition in the communities of the Blue Mountains (8.) and elsewhere (9.). Based on their recent conduct, the Applicants are not likely to contribute to the communities of the Blue Mountains in a beneficial way (10.). The economic gain for the region will be marginal at best, but rather negative (11.-13.). From an administrative point of view and historically speaking, the proposal is a mistake in principle. It insinuates that offering the Airfield for another lease—with the public, other institutions and agencies consulted on the conditions—is a process that is universally approved by a majority of the relevant stakeholders. This however is biased in regard to the role the Department can legitimately play after loosing public trust to be the appropriate agency to manage this (14.-17.), and it also ignores a long lasting and widely shared vision about the preferred future of the Airfield (18.-20.).

Section 4: Privacy

My submission may be published in full, giving my name and township of residence, but not my address (neither email nor residential). Quoting in part is only permissible after seeking and receiving approval for the part to be quoted. This is to avoid misrepresentation by being quoted out of context.

Section 5. References

¹ <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/GuidelinesForMinimisingAircraftOverflightImpacts.pdf>, p. 8, last accessed in July 2019.

² <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/GuidelinesForMinimisingAircraftOverflightImpacts.pdf>, p. 10, last accessed in July 2019.

³ This has been reported to me by an eye-witness who wants to remain private, cf. publicly:

<https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/6227670/airfield-meeting-attracts-big-audience/>

⁴ <https://www.change.org/p/department-of-industry-crown-lands-and-water-save-our-skies-no-commercialisation-of-katoomba-airfield>, last accessed on 19. July 2019.

⁵ <https://www.change.org/p/i-support-katoomba-airfield-re-development-by-flyblue>, accessed on 19 July 2019.

⁶ <https://flyblue.com.au/>, see section “Community”, last accessed on 19 July 2019.

⁷ <https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/5810825/katoomba-airfield-licensees-meet-with-medlow-bathers/> and „Airfield Plans“, Letter to the Editor, *Blue Mountains Gazette*, 20th March, 2019.

⁸ <https://flyblue.com.au/>, see section „Economic“, here: „... will promote the Blue Mountains as being more than just a day visitor destination ...“. last accessed on 19 July, 2019.

⁹ <https://flyblue.com.au/>, see section „Economic“, last accessed on 19 July 2019.

¹⁰ <https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/6227670/airfield-meeting-attracts-big-audience/>, see picture: „A Medlow Bath resident points to where her house is in relation to the proposed flight paths“ and the areas above and below the flight path marked in green that insinuate residential property belonging to Medlow Bath and/or Katoomba is only located within these marked areas, but not between/outside them.

¹¹ <https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/6227670/airfield-meeting-attracts-big-audience/>, see picture: „A Medlow Bath resident points to where her house is in relation to the proposed flight paths“, last accessed on 19 July 2019.

¹² cf. the statements of Amanda Kaye, owner of Rough Track Cabins: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEUgHh8wISA>, last accessed on 19 July 2019.

¹³ see *Blue Mountains Gazette*, 24th July, 2019, p. 11.

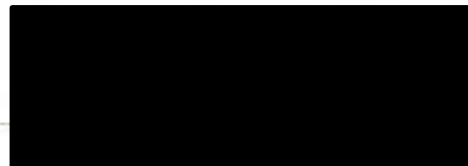
¹⁴ <https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/6227670/airfield-meeting-attracts-big-audience/>

¹⁵ <https://flyblue.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Katoomba-Airfield-Info-Pack.pdf>, p. 27, last accessed on 19 July 2019.

¹⁶ <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/documents/campaigns/katoomba-airfield/katoomba-airfield-history-and-background-v11.pdf>, p. 8.

I herewith declare that I have written this submission independently. Facts/Events that are stated, I have either experienced in person as an eye-witness, or I have carefully researched and checked their reliability as far as this was in my power.

Katoomba, Blue Mountains, 30th July, 2019



Jakob Anderhandt