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June 19 2013

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise submission: *White Paper – A new planning system for NSW*

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise's (BMEE) mission is 'to stimulate economic development in the Blue Mountains through advocacy, investment and job creation, consistent with our competitive advantages.'

BMEE's vision is an expression of how the mission will unfold and is stated as:

By 2018, BMEE will be the recognised economic development organisation for the Blue Mountains, delivering significant and measurable contributions to the economy through:

- Encouraging and supporting appropriate investment
- Opening the city for business
- Creating a sustainable and diversified business community

To achieve this ambitious vision, the Board has identified four key strategic pillars which will be the focus of the organisation's activity over the next three years. The pillars are:

- Health and well-being (including aged care and disabilities)
- Creative industries
- Education
- World-Heritage Industry Development (including tourism)

BMEE is funded by Blue Mountains City Council but is operated by an independent Board.

Through BMEE's strategic planning process, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act has been identified as restrictive and prescriptive. The legislative criteria and detail that the Act prescribes to be satisfied through the Development Application (DA) process is identified as being too onerous for the majority of applications and also allows for third party Class 4 appeals for all development that makes Councils and their assessing officers risk averse. The legislation needs to promote an environment that sets the standards, facilitates certainty for applicants and protects good decision making by assessors in the interest of everyone but in particular for economic growth. The Board has acknowledged the delicate balance that exists between stimulating strong economic growth and development and maintaining one of the region's key competitive advantages; its World-Heritage environment.

The Blue Mountains City Council's Community Strategic Plan, "Sustainable Blue Mountains 2025" "identifies *retaining the strengths of the Blue Mountains Local Environment Management Plan in order to protect the unique environmental and cultural values of the Blue Mountains, given its conversion to a 'standard Instrument'*" as an emerging issue.

The Community Strategic Plan also lists "Strengthening the economic base of the City through increasing the range of sustainable industries" and "Improving interface with developers on development applications – increase facilitation of economic development in the Local Environment Plan".

It is the view of the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise Board that a more consistent and simplified planning framework that has community buy in as proposed by the White Paper is a means of addressing the dichotomy that exists in the Blue Mountains.

While the BMEE Board aims to position the Blue Mountains as a city 'open for business', the strategy must maintain the inherent competitiveness of the region. The key economic driver of tourism relies on the maintenance of the World-Heritage listed wilderness and environment-base tourism products.

From our business sector's experience the consensus is that the system is so complex that most developments require a professional planner engaged to navigate the system. It is no wonder that the town planners themselves do not often agree on the provisions and they also need detailed legal advice for interpretation of many provisions. This is surely proof that the system needs a new approach.

BMEE supports the White Paper's indicative zones provided they preserve the unique character and environment of the Blue Mountains. The BMEE is looking for greater clarity and certainty for potential developers and investors and a potentially simplified method of examining feasibility that is not available under the current framework.

BMEE is in favour of the method of five assessment pathways that reflect the size and complexity of the development applications, proposed in the White Paper and would encourage the allocation of key enterprise zones within the Blue Mountains area (example, Blue Mountains Business Park) to allow for appropriate development to be approved through the complying and code pathway. This would speed up development applications and allow pockets of economic development to occur in a targeted, appropriate and sustainable way.

The proposed one-stop-shop for developments that require NSW Government agencies would greatly improve the application process for large and complex developments.

BMEE recommends that the White Paper maintain community input from the outset and enables Development Applications to be processed quickly if they comply.

We welcome the opportunity to provide further information if required.

Yours sincerely,



Donald Luscombe FSMA FCA
Chairman
Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise