

Comments on the Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan

The draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP) has many issues that demonstrate it to be rushed legislation that has good intentions, but poor implementation. The fact that existing local residents are not considered key stakeholders in the plan is mind boggling. As the people most affected by the CPCP, local residents' voices should not have been ignored and swept aside during the process.

For a plan with such significant impacts for existing residents, the broad stroke, desktop-based approach to mapping supposed 'important' regions for conservation is insufficient. Without ground-truthing the areas designated for conservation the plan is liable to fail to achieve its objectives. Further, the fact that areas where current development applications are under consideration have been excluded from this plan highlights the hypocrisy of the plan.

Our property, along with our neighbours' properties, has been chosen for re-zoning to E2. This decision is completely illogical, and baffling, especially considering that E4 was considered sufficient for similar properties along the Nepean corridor at Pheasant's Nest. Furthermore, land across the gorge in Tahmoor, where property boundaries run to the river (not just the top of the gorge like our property) and includes the area named as the Nepean corridor is also not being considered for re-zoning from RU4. Nearby land in Marcus Street (in what has been designated as West Wilton), which has similar vegetation to our property, has been zoned urban capable and designated for development. The NSW Government has also approved a mining development on 52 hectares of prime koala habitat in NSW, but have randomly decided to rezone our property where there are no koalas (and there have not been any in all 27 years that we've lived here) to the restrictive E2 zone.

There should not be one rule for developers and another rule for local residents.

There is no real basis for why our property is suddenly considered important for biodiversity. There has been no survey of our land, and large areas of our property labelled as native vegetation on the associated maps are in fact trees and bushes our family has cultivated in the 27 years we have lived here.

Our property was cleared of much of the native vegetation when the house was built in the 1970s. Since we moved into the area, we have cared for the environment and planted many of the trees that this plan has arbitrarily designated as important for biodiversity. Over the years we have run sheep and cattle in our paddocks, and now we grow fruit and vegetables. Our land only runs to the top of the gorge and the property line is marked with a 1.8m fence (to contain our dogs on the property) making it unlikely for koalas to make their way onto the property from the Nepean River gorge. There is no evidence on our property of many of the tree species necessary for koalas, that would make it reasonable for our property to be considered as 'Important Koala Habitat'. Despite what the maps associated with the CPCP suggest, our property does not include the endangered vegetation communities that are the target of the plan's conservation efforts.

It is apparent that developers have benefited from the reclassification of 250 hectares from Tx to urban in three Wilton precincts but the small parcels of land held by private owners in the West

Wilton area have been adversely affected during this process. The plan notes that the conservation areas are being put in place to offset development impacts on biodiversity. Existing local residents' land value and financial future should not be sacrificed for ongoing development. Further, it is not truly possible to substitute habitat destroyed by developers with land elsewhere, especially when that land is not protecting biodiversity as suggested, nor preserving core koala habitat.

There is no clear reason noted in the draft CPCP for why the residential land covered by the plan needs to be rezoned E2 rather than E4, which would achieve the same outcome but without adversely affecting current residents and their future.

The CPCP in its current form needs to be revised.

For our property in particular, further consideration should be given to the fact that the proposed rezoning to E2 places an unconscionable burden on the existing landholders. The proposed E2 zoning will significantly reduce existing property values and the pool of interested buyers whilst imposing the heavy burden of land maintenance. Given this, the lands mapped for conservation (and rezoning to E2) should, at the very least, be surveyed with on-site inspections and the owners consulted before any rezoning is seriously considered.