

Rallies to save Northern Beaches native bushland from developers

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Regular News FEEDINGS via social + online. by locals for localsHome Latest News Rallies to save Northern Beaches native bushland from developers Some of those in attendance at the Ralston Ave rally on 13 March 2022. Photo: Alec Smart Two rallies by community groups in opposition to six proposed redevelopment schemes in the Belrose/Frenchs Forest and Oxford Falls area took place on Sunday 13 and Monday 14 March. MLALC, based in Redfern and formerly known as the Redfern Land Council, own nine sites totalling 912 hectares in the Northern Beaches Local Government Area. Of these, six sites (three in Belrose, two in Frenchs Forest, one in Oxford Falls) have been identified by NSW Dept Planning for development. Opponents of the proposals predict the NSW Minister for Planning and Homes, Lane Cove MP Anthony Roberts, will approve the scheme. At the rallies, opponents of the MLALC and Dept Planning forest clearances and redevelopment schemes aired their grievances and listed the reasons for their opposition. These included: limited infrastructure in place to cater to thousands of new residents; threats to wildlife from an increase in domestic cats and vehicular traffic; damage to native habitat from pollution run-off; fire safety risks due to limited escape routes, an electrical substation, overhead powerlines and plans to build atop a ridge (which are significantly more at risk from advancing bushfires); the loss of bush trails for cyclists and walkers; and the vulnerability of Aboriginal heritage sites. Two rallies by community groups in opposition to six proposed redevelopment schemes in the Belrose/Frenchs Forest and Oxford Falls area took place on Sunday 13 and Monday 14 March. The residents gathered at Ralston Bush Tracks on Ralston Ave, and Lizard Rock on Morgan Road, respectively, both sites in Belrose and owned by the Metropolitan Local

Aboriginal Land Council (MLALC). MLALC, based in Redfern and formerly known as the Redfern Land Council, own nine sites totalling 912 hectares in the Northern Beaches Local Government Area. Of these, six sites (three in Belrose, two in Frenchs Forest, one in Oxford Falls) have been identified by NSW Dept Planning for development. The deadline for public submissions is fast approaching. The NSW Govt draft Northern Beaches Aboriginal Land Development Delivery Plan is available to view online and comment is welcome until Monday 21 March 2022. Opponents of the proposals predict the NSW Minister for Planning and Homes, Lane Cove MP Anthony Roberts, will approve the scheme. This concern was voiced at the Ralston Ave rally, which was addressed by Aboriginal activist Jeff Lawson of the Indigenous Party of Australia; Kristyn Glanville, Northern Beaches councillor and property lawyer; Luke Murphy, administrator of the Facebook group Northern Beaches Aboriginal Land Community Discussion Group; Nicole Romain, Belrose resident, rally organiser and founder of Facebook group Save the Northern Beaches Bushlands; and Miranda Korzy, also a Northern Beaches councillor. At the rallies, opponents of the MLALC and Dept Planning forest clearances and redevelopment schemes aired their grievances and listed the reasons for their opposition. These included: limited infrastructure in place to cater to thousands of new residents; threats to wildlife from an increase in domestic cats and vehicular traffic; damage to native habitat from pollution run-off; fire safety risks due to limited escape routes, an electrical substation, overhead powerlines and plans to build atop a ridge (which are significantly more at risk from advancing bushfires); the loss of bush trails for cyclists and walkers; and the vulnerability of Aboriginal heritage sites.

Jeff Lawson of the Indigenous Party of Australia addressing the Ralston Ave rally on 13 March 2022. Photo: Alec Smart

Jeff Lawson told the rally, "I'm actually a Burramategal man from Parramatta. I've been campaigning against land councils that have the permission to come onto any country and try to take the country off the traditional owners. I'm thoroughly against that!" "I feel it's the traditional owners who should have the ultimate say on what they do in their country, not land councils. I firmly believe that land councils don't have the best interest for the country that they're trying to take over..." Lawson, who is also campaigning to save the Kariong ridgeline on the Central Coast from development applications, has previously stated: "Local Land Councils are supposed to represent all Aboriginal groups in an area, and yet this is not happening. They have too much power and can decide to develop a piece of culturally significant land against Traditional Custodians' wishes.." Of the two sites chosen for the community rallies, Ralston Ave in Belrose, was initially subjected to a 2014 MLALC application for bushland clearance to

make way for residential construction, although it was subsequently rejected. Powerlines below the Electricity sub-station at the Ralston Ave site in Belrose. A major safety risk in bushfires, they were one of the primary reasons previous applications to redevelop the land was rejected. Photo: Alec Smart

On 11 Jan 2018, one of the key reasons the Planning Assessment Commission (now the Independent Planning Commission) gave for rejecting the proposal was its vulnerability to bushfires. The Commission's report concluded : "The (development) proposal had no site-specific merit due to impact on biodiversity and threatened species, the adjoining National Park, bushfire risk, the proximity of the Sydney East Substation and financial arrangement for infrastructure provision. There remain unresolved issues with respect to stormwater and social infrastructure." Both the RFS (NSW Rural Fire Service) and Council's Bushfire Consultant conclude the proposal is inconsistent with S117 Direction 4.4 Planning for Bushfire Protecting, as it would place inappropriate development (i.e. housing) in a hazardous area. "Council cannot support the proposal in light of the serious risks to life and property."

MLALC has since resubmitted a revised proposal that the land be cleared and converted to industrial use instead. The other rally, on the 71-hectare zone encompassing Lizard Rock on Morgan Road in Belrose, is the site MLALC has chosen for a 450 home subdivision. The remaining four sites are: Forest Way, Belrose; Aquatic Drive, Frenchs Forest; Paxton Street, Frenchs Forest; and Corymbia Circuit, Oxford Falls. Land around Lizard Rock, Belrose, that has been targeted for 450 houses in a redevelopment scheme. Photo: Alec Smart

MLALC is an incorporated body constituted under the 1983 Aboriginal Lands Right Act (ALRA). ALRA was enacted in June 1983 by the NSW Govt under Labor Premier Neville Wran, to provide a way of compensating Aboriginal people for loss of their land since British colonisation of Australia in 1788. It allowed Aboriginal land councils to seek possession of empty Crown land deemed not necessary for essential public purposes as well as claim freehold title over some Aboriginal reserves. However, there was no statutory recognition of traditional ownership nor processes to claim former Aboriginal reserves. In February 2022, MLALC chief executive Nathan Moran told The Urban Developer , "This is an extremely positive step towards utilising our land to deliver economic outcomes for our community, as envisaged by the Aboriginal Land Rights Act."

Summary of the NSW Govt's proposals https://shared-drupal-s3fs.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/master-test/fapub_pdf/DDP+February+2022.pdf Map of the six sites <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/-/media/Files/DPE/Maps/Plans-for-your-area/Northern-Beaches-LGA-map—Proposed-sites-for-inclusion-in-SEPP-2022.pdf> Further information on the land redevelopment proposals

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