

Currawong Coastal Development (Proof)

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About this Item

Speakers - [Stokes Mr Rob](#)

Business - [Private Members Statements, PRIV](#)

CURRAWONG COASTAL DEVELOPMENT

Page: 79

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [5.59 p.m.]: Tonight I inform the House about the sorry saga of Currawong, which is becoming symbolic of the Government's failure to get real about coastal overdevelopment issues, and the extraordinary power of the development lobby in this State. The development plans are now on the table and, quite frankly, they are a disaster. It has always been clear that on social and cultural grounds Currawong should never be subdivided and flogged off to the uber-rich. It has always been clear that Currawong has immense value as a property of cultural and natural heritage significance. Now that the development plans are on the table it is clear that the residential subdivision of Currawong would be an environmental disaster.

As the bushfire assessment for Currawong states, "It would be expected that a fire burning within open forest vegetation on the slopes would mainly burn upslope and away from any developments precincts." In other words, any fire originating from Currawong would be likely to travel up the slope into the Ku-ring-gai National Park, placing areas of incalculable cultural, social and environmental significance to the nation at risk. The project application envisages the destruction of at least 136 mature trees, the majority being native eucalypts, casuarinas and angophoras, in part to provide for "more suitable building envelopes".

What are these building envelopes? The homes planned for this sensitive site are ginormous. On one lot the building envelope is a bloated 640 square metres, with a building height limit of eight metres. This would potentially allow construction of a mega-mansion of more than 1,000 square metres. We are not talking about small lightweight treehouses, as the proponent would have us believe. And the idea of allowing residential subdivision on a floodplain less than three metres above the Australia height datum [AHD] is grossly irresponsible. We have already inherited a pattern of development along low-lying coastal areas that will cause real problems in the face of a changing climate and the threat of rising sea levels. Why on earth would anyone in their right mind contemplate allowing a subdivision of vulnerable coastal land into multiple ownership? Who will bear liability for such a decision when rising sea levels coupled with extreme weather events and storm surges put these planned new homes at risk?

To make matters even worse, the project application envisages that homes will be built within 20 metres of a shoreline that is subject to collapse. Twenty metres is not a riparian buffer; it is a sick joke. Under legislation quietly repealed by the Government just a few months ago—the Rivers and Foreshores Improvement Act—a permit was required for any development within 40 metres of the top of the bank of any waterway. At Currawong we have a significant

watercourse with a defined channel and a permanent flow influenced by tidal waters, and the proponent argues that a 20-metre riparian buffer is appropriate. I don't think so! The proponent is proposing to restore the sand dunes on Currawong beach. The only snag is that there never have been any sand dunes on Currawong beach. Methinks the "natural" sand dunes are more intended as a dyke. Maybe Hans Brinkler will get a job as the caretaker.

Noted coastal engineer Phillip Haines presented evidence at a recent New South Wales coastal conference arguing that a vertical buffer of 3.5 metres AHD should be applied to all new development around coastal lagoons. On this basis alone, no residential development on the floodplain at Currawong should be countenanced. Not only that, but this so-called ecovillage will involve excavation of an alluvial floodplain—a mud flat—for two swimming pools less than one minute's walk to a still water beach. It just does not make sense. It is ironic that the Minister for Planning was empowered to call in the Currawong development proposal only on the basis that Currawong is a sensitive coastal location. The fact that Currawong is a sensitive coastal location is the very reason that a major residential subdivision should not even be contemplated.

The principle of intergenerational equity, which is enshrined in New South Wales law, demands that we do not make decisions that will leave environmental headaches for our descendants to sort out. Currawong is a fragile and sensitive coastal location with great potential as a place of public recreation. Residential subdivision of Currawong involves huge environmental risks over the coming decades. If it is split up into little bits with multiple owners, as envisaged by the unions and the developers, these environmental problems will be almost impossible to solve. The only sensible option for a low-lying coastal site like Currawong is for government to purchase it while it remains in sole ownership, and to put the whole site into the national park which surrounds it. That is not to mention the significance of Currawong's natural and cultural heritage, which alone provides a complete justification for its resumption.

If the part 3A process has any objectivity or merit at all, the Minister for Planning will refuse the project application for Currawong, and I urge him with all my heart to do just that. Once the project application has been refused, it will be time for this Government to get real about Currawong, and purchase it back for the people of New South Wales. It is time for the Department of Lands to put back on the table its offer to purchase Currawong in the event that, hopefully, the project application is refused on its merits, which, as I have outlined briefly, are very, very few indeed.

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