

## CURRAWONG BEACH SITE SALE

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**Mr ROB STOKES** (Pittwater) [6.09 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a very sad matter I have become aware of in the last half an hour: Unions New South Wales has, by virtue of a joint venture agreement, sold Currawong Beach, in Pittwater—that beautiful, unique, heritage bushland site—to property developer Eco Villages Australia. This event is appalling for the people of Pittwater. It demonstrates a complete failure on the part of the New South Wales Government to show leadership by taking the opportunity to buy back this unique site for the people of New South Wales.

This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Government to do something really special—to buy back a site with real meaning, real heritage significance and real environmental value, surrounded as it is by a national park that has just been recognised as a Commonwealth heritage place because of its outstanding biodiversity values. A coordinated approach by the Department of Planning, the Department of Lands and Pittwater Council, together with financial support already committed by the Pittwater community and the Friends of Currawong, could have, with a bit of leadership, seen the Government step in and use its close relationship with the union movement to negotiate a purchase of the site. But it seems that Labor is too distracted with its own internal leadership woes to do something positive and visionary that would have real, tangible environmental and social benefits for the people of New South Wales.

The sale simply demonstrates why this Government will go down in history as the Government of wasted opportunities. Future generations will not thank this Government for what has transpired this afternoon. However, it puts one thing in clear focus: There is now no doubt that, whatever Unions New South Wales might have been established to do and regardless of any heritage of service to working people that Unions New South Wales might claim, Unions New South Wales has now—under the leadership of first Michael Costa, then John Robertson and now Mark Lennon—been morphed into nothing more than a property developer. Rather than being motivated by concern for the welfare of working people in New South Wales, the unions have entered into a joint venture with a property developer that has been a major donor to New South Wales Labor, using the extraordinary ministerial discretion available under the notorious part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, to seek the rezoning, subdivision and residential desecration of a unique waterfront bushland heritage site.

Unions New South Wales has become a property developer first—focused on deals with developers, not on the real needs of working people. It is now clear that the first test of the new prohibition on developer donations must be for the Premier to rule out ever again taking money from Unions New South Wales. That money is now tainted, laundered as it has been through the device of an option to purchase workers' land by a wealthy eastern suburbs developer company. If this deal has gone through on the basis of a payment of \$15 million, which is the figure talked about in the media, then something is seriously amiss. The Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel on Currawong made it abundantly clear that there is virtually no commercial value in Currawong as a development site. The geographic, infrastructure, environmental and heritage constraints of the site mean that its value must be half of that quoted in the media.

Of course, because Unions New South Wales is a private business, its records and the deal with the developer will remain hidden from public view. But I inform this House now that if \$15 million has passed hands, something is not right. And this deal should not be hidden from public view—first, because at the time the deal was considered Unions New South Wales had a representative on the New South Wales Heritage Council. Unions New South Wales has benefited from 60 years of not paying land tax on that site—a deal that would have gained Unions New South Wales millions of dollars worth of value, since it is now treating the site not as something it holds in the public interest but nothing more than a site to be flogged off to a property developer mate. Secondly, at the time this deal was negotiated the current Minister for the Environment was the head of Unions New South Wales. He was the bloke who said, "I can put D9s and chainsaws through Currawong if I want." And he is now the environment Minister of this State!

I give a word of warning to anyone who thinks they can get a greasy deal through under the radar. Will the Pittwater community and the wider community simply shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, we tried", and then go away? No, that will not happen. We will not go away. This fight is not over. It will go on and on, until Currawong is forever saved from the scourge of greed and self-interest that threatens it with dismemberment and desecration. The Pittwater community is united. They have been through many attempts to flog off this land, to the detriment of many and the benefit of a few. I will not go away, Shane Withington will not go away, and the Friends of Currawong will not go away. [*Time expired.*]