

Save Centennial Glen  
PO Box 152  
Blackheath NSW, 2785  
16 December 2019

Mr Alistair Lunn  
Director  
Western Region  
Roads and Maritime Services  
Department of Transport  
By email: [gwhd@rms.nsw.gov.au](mailto:gwhd@rms.nsw.gov.au)  
Cc: The Hon Paul Toole MP  
Minister for Regional Transport and Roads

Dear Mr Lunn

**Submission re Great Western Highway Upgrade Program (Katoomba to Lithgow)**

This is a submission on behalf of the Save Centennial Glen (SCG) group in relation to the RMS' public consultation regarding the proposed Great Western Highway Upgrade Program (Katoomba to Lithgow). The SCG group was established on 23 November 2019 in direct response to the RMS' proposed Upgrade Program and the potential impacts on the areas of Centennial Glen, Shipley Road, Porters Pass and Fort Rock. SCG comprises a diverse group of local residents, stakeholder groups and concerned citizens, as reflected in our Facebook group that has grown to over 750 members since inception.

The aim of this submission is to voice our position in relation to the options being considered by the RMS, namely "an outer bypass with bridges over Shipley Road, Centennial Pass and Porters Pass Track" and "a western bypass". Our submission addresses five issues:

1. Natural environment
2. Heritage
3. Recreation
4. Safety
5. Social impact.

We also make supplementary comments on another option proposed by the RMS regarding a long tunnel or short tunnel bypass (both beneath the town), as well as the potential acquisition and demolition of houses on Station Street.

**1. Position**

We strongly oppose the construction of an outer bypass or western bypass that would traverse, and irrevocably damage, the areas of Centennial Glen, Shipley Road, Porters Pass and Fort Rock.

We recognise that the RMS is committed to upgrading the Great Western Highway in order to facilitate the movement of traffic between Western NSW and Sydney.

We do not endorse any of the options being considered by the RMS to achieve this outcome and are disappointed that a rail option, which we would fully support, has not been put forward.

Nevertheless, in a spirit of pragmatism, from SCG's perspective the least worst possible option proposed by the RMS is a tunnel that follows the existing road/rail corridor, does not go under any homes, and has entry and exit points and ventilation points away from people's homes such that they are not directly impacted by tunnel emissions. Any such tunnel would need extensive cultural and environmental investigation to ensure that there would be absolutely no impact on subterranean water flows.

We also oppose a duplication of the highway on the western side of the train tracks, and the acquisition and demolition of houses on Station Street, Blackheath.

## 2. Issues

### 2.1 Natural environment

We understand that the outer bypass and western bypass routes would directly cross Crown Land, as indicated by Figure 1 below. As noted by the Department of Industry, "Protecting and enhancing Crown land is essential for business, tourism, recreation, well-being and the biodiversity of the state. Crown land has significant spiritual, social, cultural and economic importance to the Aboriginal people of NSW"<sup>1</sup>. The proposed bypasses would cause irreparable damage to Crown Land and in particular, pristine Australian bush which is home to diverse, endangered and vulnerable flora and fauna. This area of land is supported by a fragile water ecosystem and a wildlife corridor which provides habitat and access to water and food.

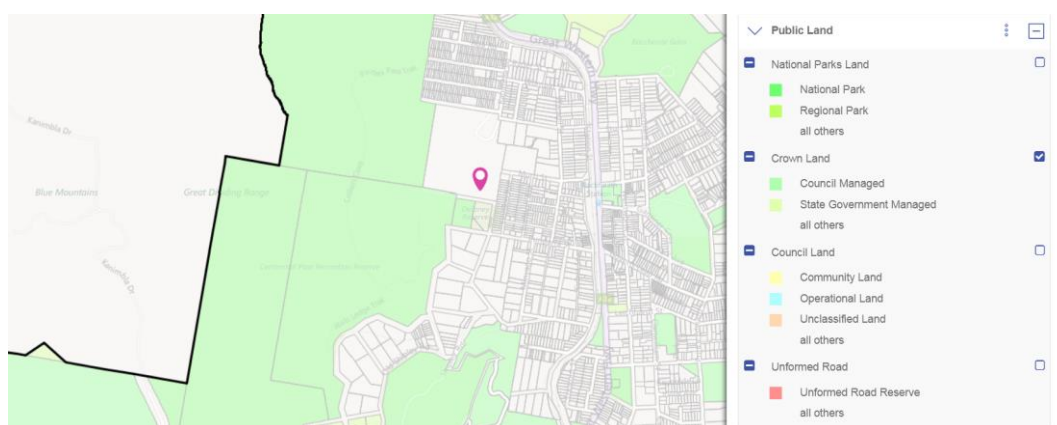


Figure 1: Crown Land<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Flora

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/lands> retrieved 14 December 2019.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/development/developing-land/property-search> retrieved 7 December 2019.

The proposed route would cut across several vegetation communities (see Figure 2)<sup>3</sup>, including Blue Mountains Heath and Scrub (5A), Blue Mountains Swamps (5B), Eucalyptus sieberi E.piperita Open Forest (11A) C.gummifera E.sieberi Open Forest Woodland (11E), E.oreades Tall Open-forest (2G) and E.gullickii Alluvial Woodland (4A).

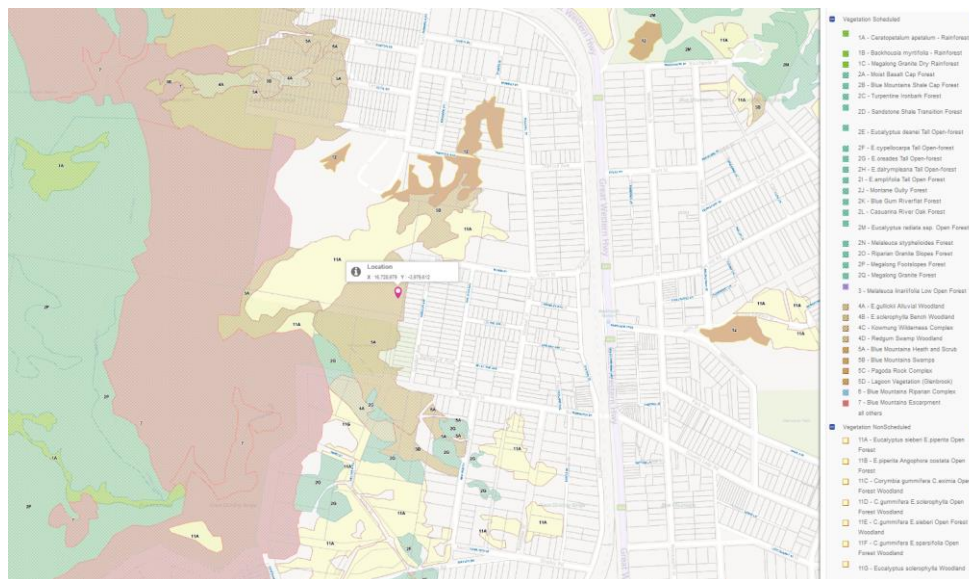


Figure 2: Vegetation communities



Wyn Jones, former Senior Naturalist National Parks and Wildlife Services, advises that *Peersoonia acerosa* is located at Porters Pass<sup>4</sup>. *Peersoonia acerosa* is listed as a vulnerable species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW)* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*<sup>5</sup>. *Adenochilus nortonii* is located between Centennial Glen and Porters Pass and is very rare<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, Jones advises<sup>7</sup> that *Asterolasia buxifolia* (listed as an endangered species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW)*)<sup>8</sup> is likely to occur in this area along with *Xanthosia*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/development/developing-land/property-search> retrieved 7 December 2019.

<sup>4</sup> The Atlas of Living Australia.

<sup>5</sup> Sighting by Wyn Jones communicated to Juliet Bourke on 14 December 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Sighting by Wyn Jones communicated to Juliet Bourke on 14 December 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Advised by Wyn Jones to Juliet Bourke on 16 December 2019.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedSpeciesApp/profile.aspx?id=10071> retrieved 16 December 2019.

scopulicola (listed as a vulnerable species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW)), *Carex klaphakei* (listed as an endangered species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW)), *Lastreopsis hispida* (listed as an endangered species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW)), *Epacris hamiltonii* (listed as an endangered species under both the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth)), *Epacris purpurascens* (listed as a vulnerable species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW)), *Acacia baueri* ssp. *aspera* (listed as a vulnerable species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW)), *Acacia bynoeana* (listed as an endangered species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and a vulnerable species under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth)), *Acacia clunies-rossiae* (listed as a vulnerable species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW)), *Acacia gordonii* (listed as an endangered species under both the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth)), *Euphrasia bowdeniae* (listed as a vulnerable species under both the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth)), *Leionema lachnaeoides* (listed as an endangered species under both the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth)) and *Zieria covenyi* (listed as an endangered species under both the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth)).

In 2005 hanging swamps in the Blue Mountains were listed as a vulnerable ecological community pursuant the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (NSW).<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1.2 Fauna

Between Centennial Glen and Porters Pass the following wildlife can be found: the grey kangaroo, the swamp wallaby, wombats, echidna, and spiny crayfish as well as the Giant Dragonfly (which is listed as an endangered species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW)) and the Blue Mountains Swamp Skink<sup>10</sup> (which is listed as endangered under both the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth)).

In addition, the following birds inhabit or migrate through this area, and these are listed as vulnerable species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW): the Yellow-bellied Glider, Sooty Owl, Masked Owl, Powerful Owl, Gang-gang Cockatoo, Glossy Black-Cockatoo, Little Lorikeet, Varied Sittella, Dusky Woodswallow, Flame and Scarlet Robin, Square-tailed Kite and Little Eagle<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, this area includes Greater Gliders (which are recognised under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) as vulnerable populations in areas outside Blackheath) and the iconic Feather-tailed Glider which was featured on the 1 cent coin.

Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters travel through this area on migration, or even apart from the migration, and a Regent Honeyeater was seen at the Vipassana meditation centre in Blackheath in early March 2019. The Regent Honeyeater is listed as critically endangered under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth). Swift Parrots are listed as a critically endangered species under the *Environment Protection and*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/nsw-threatened-species-scientific-committee/determinations/final-determinations/2011-2012/blue-mountains-swamps-in-the-sydney-basin-bioregion-minor-amendment-determination> retrieved 14 December 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Sighting by Wyn Jones communicated to Juliet Bourke on 14 December 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Sightings of Powerful Owls, Masked Owls, Yellow-bellied Gliders, and Sooty Owls by Wyn Jones communicated to Juliet Bourke on 14 December 2019. Sightings of Gang-gang Cockatoos, Glossy Black-Cockatoos, Little Lorikeets, Sooty Owls, Varied Sittellas, Dusky Woodswallows, Flame and Scarlet Robins, Square-tailed Kites and Little Eagles by Blue Mountains Bird Observers communicated to Ian Bourke on 10 December 2019.



*Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) and an endangered species under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW). The Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot are listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature “red list” as a critically endangered species, with loss of habitat being a major threat to the Regent Honeyeater.

The Blue Mountains Bird Observers (BMBO) has advised that “the top of Blackheath Glen at Shipley Road is the number one bottleneck for the honeyeater migration in the mountains in terms of numbers of birds. We know that the migration is affected by major roads - we see the disruption of their flight paths when they reach the highway/railway corridor here in the mountains, and in the Hunter Valley there is marked evidence of the motorway affecting the migration route”<sup>12</sup>. By way of example of the number of birds which migrate through this area, the BMBO has also advised that “from the last week in March to almost the end of May each year there is a migration of mostly Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters from South to North (Victoria to Queensland). BMBO monitors this event and the survey site at Helvetia Rd has recorded over 12,000 birds per hour moving through on some days”<sup>13</sup>.

### 2.1.3 Water

The area between Centennial Glen and Porters Pass comprises a fragile ecosystem of groundwater, creeks, hanging swamps (which require a drainage upstream and downstream) and waterfalls that sustain the local flora and fauna. The photos below were taken on 14 December 2019 during the current unprecedented drought and show a creek fully flowing and lush grass at the creek source, ie supported by an aquifer which filters and purifies water, with slow release during dry periods. The Blue Mountains City Council has observed that aquifers in the Blue Mountains should be protected.<sup>14</sup>



Centennial Creek



Source of Centennial Glen Creek

The proposed bypasses would cross several critical and protected areas of water courses and riparian land (Figure 3).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Private email to Ian Bourke on 10 December 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/residents/waste-water-management/protecting-ground-water-and-public-health> retrieved 15 December 2019.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/development/developing-land/property-search> retrieved 7 December 2019.

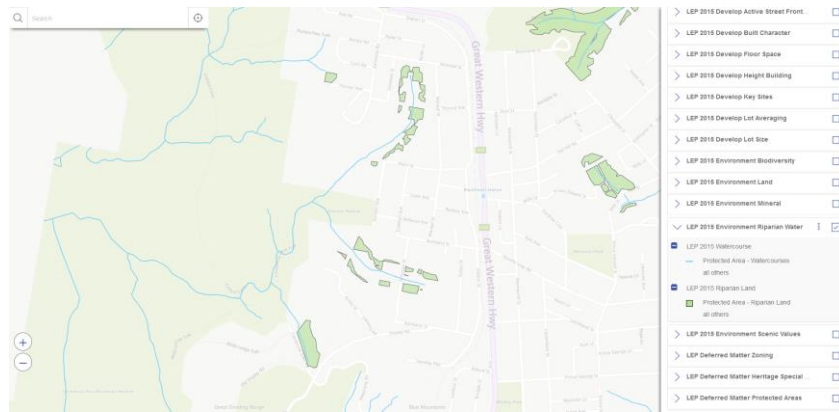


Figure 3: Watercourses

The 2015 Environment Biodiversity study shows all three areas of biodiversity would be at extreme risk with any western bypass, namely the Protected Area - Ecological Buffer Area, Protected Area - Vegetation Constraint Area and Fauna Corridor (Figure 4).<sup>16</sup>

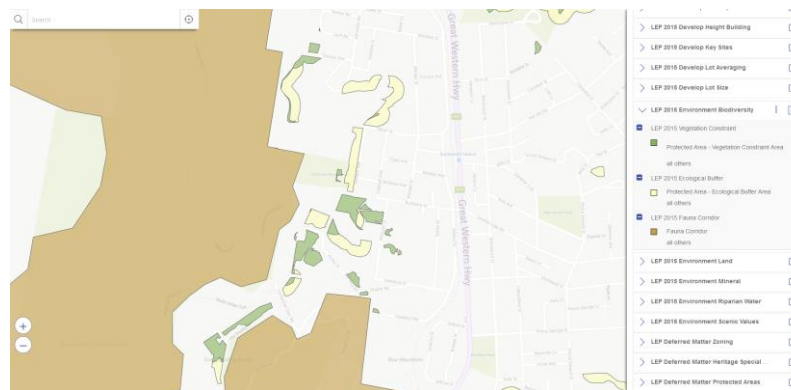


Figure 4: Biodiversity buffers

As observed by the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Energy - “wildlife corridors are connections across the landscape that link up areas of habitat. They support natural processes that occur in a healthy environment, including the movement of species to find resources, such as food and water. Corridors can contribute to the resilience of the landscape in a changing climate and help to reduce future greenhouse gas emissions by storing carbon in native vegetation”.<sup>17</sup>

The former NSW Department of Environment and Conservation recognised that “Habitat loss and fragmentation are the two main contributors to continuing biodiversity decline across the landscape”.<sup>18</sup> SCG observes that the fragility of the habitat between Shipley Road and Porters Pass is currently under threat from visitor thoroughfare, drought and bushfires. The addition of a major development, such as a bypass or tunnel, would irreparably fragment and damage the area and is likely to cause the extinction of vulnerable and endangered species.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/development/developing-land/property-search> retrieved 7 December 2019.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.environment.gov.au/topics/biodiversity/biodiversity-conservation/wildlife-corridors/what-are-wildlife-corridors> retrieved 14 December 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) Wildlife corridors. Natural Resource Management Advisory Series: Note 15.

## 2.2\_Heritage

The area between Shipley Road and Porters Pass has significance to both the Gundungurra nation as well as European settlers.

Wayne Brennan, Senior Archeologist, Burramoko Archaeological Services advises that “Aboriginal cultural sites exist through a cultural landscape, they are not just dots on a map that are separate or can be dealt with in isolation They are intrinsically connected and form a story that still is relevant today to contemporary Aboriginal people. Groups from the Kanimbla and Megalong mobs would access the plateau from the current Megalong Valley Rd and further out on Shipley Rd near Logan Brae Orchard. Not far off the road is an art site that depicts bird feet of both lyre bird and emu and these images are repeated almost exactly at an engraving site near Hat Hill in the Blue Mountains National Park. The nexus of these two routes from the valley is precisely at the narrowest part of the Shipley plateau which happens to be at Centennial Glen. A rock art shelter site also exists with hand stencils in red ochre very close to this point just up from what is known as the Mermaid’s cave. There are also lots of wet areas which would have provided foods and medicines for these groups moving through country. These sites are connected and extremely important. Leaving the tangible cultural heritage sites aside, there is still the intangible cultural features that do not necessarily have physical evidence. These are stories and song-lines, and landscape features such as Fort Rock. These stories we may never understand or be revealed. These intangible cultural features are difficult to quantify and qualify but must be considered in the mix. There is also the larger picture and how the cultural landscape connects with other sites along the escarpment and plateau”<sup>19</sup>.

In terms of European history, according to the Blue Mountains Heritage Register<sup>20</sup>, Porters Pass is one of the oldest walking tracks in the Blue Mountains, with local usage by European settlers dating from the mid-1880s<sup>21</sup>. Named after local resident Timothy Porter who discovered the Pass to the Kanimbla valley and cut the first steps, the Pass was gazetted on 13 April 1888. Simultaneously, Centennial Glen Reserve was also gazetted and the development of the first section of the Centennial Glen walking track commenced in the 1890s. A significant feature of the Centennial Glen walk is Walls Ledge, named after Captain James Wall, a Sights Trustee. By 1894 Centennial Glen was listed as one of the sights of Blackheath in the Mountaineer Newspaper. Ben McAlpine, Glad Ingram, Horrace Herrod, Trix Roughley, Madge McDonald and Nev Herrod, visitors from Paddington, left their inscriptions on the rock face at Centennial Glen on 21 August 1914, just weeks before the start of World War I<sup>22</sup>. The Centennial Glen track was completed in 1936, including a side track to Fort Rock, a grotto and Cleopatra’s Bath.



Engraved names at Centennial Glen  
1914



Walking track to Centennial  
Glen and Porters Pass



Side track to Fort Rock

<sup>19</sup> Private email to Juliet Bourke on 15 December 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Blue Mountains Heritage Register (undated), Centennial Pass and Porters Pass Reserves, SHI 1170923. Heritage Inventory Study.

<sup>21</sup> Stuart, V., (2006) Blue Mountains Best Bushwalks, Woodslane.

<sup>22</sup> Painter, K., (2009) Centennial Glen and Porters Pass. Pocket Pal. Mountain Mist Books

This area is not modern but steeped in its ancient and settler history. The trails through Shipley Road, Centennial Glen, Fort Rock and Porters Pass enable locals and visitors to connect with some of Australia's heritage in a visceral way.

### 2.3 Recreation

Destination NSW recognises Centennial Glen as an idyllic tourist destination with “a cool glen with small waterfalls, ferns and impressive sandstone overhangs and provides excellent views of Kanimbla Valley. The Glen is also a popular site for rock climbers”.<sup>23</sup> More than just a destination for rock climbers, the area between Shipley Road, Centennial Glen, Fort Rock and Porters Pass is also well used by bushwalkers, birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts, as well as hang-gliders and paragliders who regularly launch from Mt Blackheath. The Blue Mountains City Council has used track counters placed on the Centennial track over the last three years to estimate that 30,000 people walk the tracks in Centennial Glen every year<sup>24</sup>.

According to the thecrag.com (Australia's premier climbing website), three of the top five most popular outdoor climbs in NSW are based in Centennial Glen (and two of the top 10 in Australia).<sup>25</sup> In December 2019 SCG conducted two preliminary quantitative studies of the climbing community to understand the use of the area by climbers.<sup>26</sup> By using the data from these studies, along with data of ascents recorded on thecrag.com, SCG estimates that climbers make 59,000 ascents per annum in the Centennial Glen area, and the number of individual climbing days is 11,000<sup>27</sup>, indicating that this is an area highly used by climbers.



Climbing in Centennial Glen

The SCG study at the climbing crags that would be impacted show that 13% of climbers live in Blackheath, 81% of the climbers are domestic visitors (with a mix of visitors from other suburbs in the

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.visitnsw.com/destinations/blue-mountains/katoomba-area/blackheath/attractions/centennial-glen> retrieved 14 December 2019

<sup>24</sup> Private email to Adam Darragh 10 December 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Thecrag.com retrieved 10 December 2019.

<sup>26</sup> The preliminary quantitative study conducted by SCG was designed by professional market and social researchers with 20 years' experience in social and market research including leading projects with federal and state agencies and tourism and sporting bodies. The face-to-face climber survey had a sample size of 112, providing a margin of error at a 95% confidence level of 0-10%. While the general online community climbing survey (which was utilised for the purposes of understanding the prevalence of logging climbs on thecrag.com) had a sample of 107 participants, providing a margin of error at a 95% confidence level of 0-10%.

<sup>27</sup> This figure was calculated by taking the total number of ascents and dividing it by the average number of ascents per person per day.



Blue Mountains, Sydney, and interstate visitors from QLD, ACT, VIC, WA) and 6% are visitors from outside Australia (eg North America and Europe).

In addition to climbing enhancing personal well-being and social connectivity (ie the SCG studies show that climbing parties usually comprise three people), climbers engage in social activities that have a positive impact on the economy of Blackheath. The SCG study showed that per day 84% of visitors (ie climbers who live outside of Blackheath) have been to, or intend to, visit a local café, restaurant, pub, bakery or supermarket in Blackheath and spend on average \$37 per person per day in such establishments. Further, 37% of visitors (ie climbers who live outside of Blackheath) reported staying in Blackheath overnight in paid accommodation, with an average stay of 12 nights per person. The average length of climbers' stays highlights the significance of Centennial Glen to the local economy.

Finally, with climbing becoming a sport at the 2020 Olympics, there are a number of Olympic athletes who are using the Blue Mountains for training<sup>28</sup>, enhancing Centennial Glen's international reputation.

The development of bypasses across Centennial Glen, Porters Pass, Fort Rock and Shipley Road would undermine the area's recreational value, thus having a negative flow-on effect to individuals, social groups and the broader Blackheath community.

## 2.4 Safety

Centennial Glen and surrounds are subject to unique environmental conditions that would pose risks to new motor traffic sites in this area. These environmental conditions, including high wind, mist, and fire render it an unsuitable location for the proposed bypasses.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BMO) records that over the past ten years, maximum wind speeds have ranged (on average) from 34.3 to 49.7km/h every month. Notably these are average maximum speeds, not maximum speeds per se, with the highest windspeed of 139km/h recorded on 5 July 2011. The BMO does not record days of mist, however by way of proxy, the BMO does record cloud coverage (as measured by oktas). The range for oktas is between 0-8 (sky completely cloudy) and on average Blackheath's oktas reading is 6 (Figure 5)<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/i-just-persisted-15-year-old-blue-mountains-girl-climbing-her-way-to-the-olympics-20191115-p53av7.html> retrieved 15 December 2019.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.willyweather.com.au/climate/weather-stations/nsw/greater-western-sydney/mount-boyce.html?superGraph=plots:cloud,grain:yearly,startDate:1989-12-14,endDate:2019-12-14&climateRecords=period:all-time&longTermGraph=plots:wind-speed,period:10-year,month:all&windRose=period:5-year,month:all-months> retrieved 15 December 2019

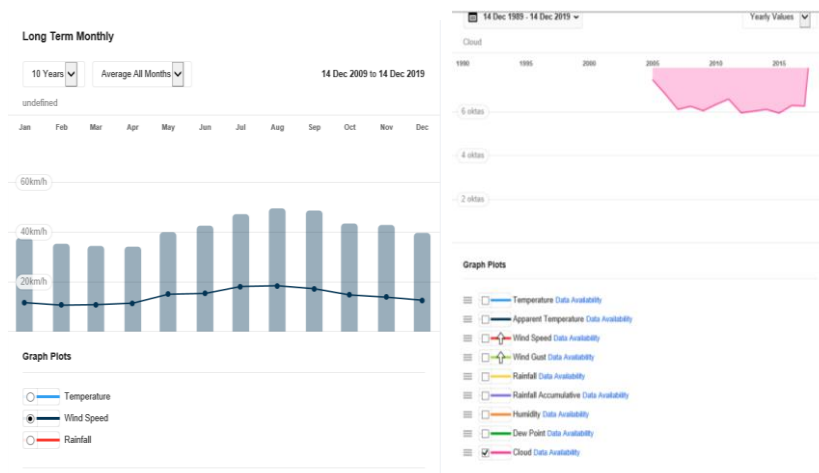


Figure 5: Average wind speed and Oktas readings

In relation to fire, the proposed bypasses would cut across bushfire prone land (Figure 6), with vegetation in red indicating a high level of combustibility.<sup>30</sup> As noted above, this combustible vegetation includes Blue Mountains Heath and Scrub, Blue Mountains Swamps, Eucalyptus sieberi E.piperita Open Forest, C.gummifera E.sieberi Open Forest Woodland, E.oreades Tall Open-forest and E.gullickii Alluvial Woodland. Given the prevailing strong westerly winds and the difficulty of accessing the gullies immediately to the west of populated residential areas, this land is a significant bushfire risk.

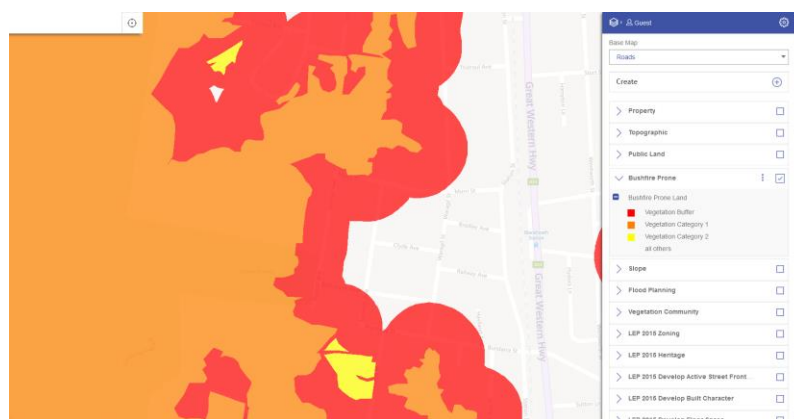


Figure 6: Bush fire prone land

The CSIRO’s “bushfire basics” further illustrates why the Centennial Glen, Fort Rock, Shipley Road and Porters Pass area is marked as “vegetation category 1”, connoting the highest risk level by the RFS<sup>31,32</sup> The area has three key elements that are catastrophic when it comes to ignition. First, the topography of the area is filled with steep inclines, “The rule of thumb is that the rate of forward spread of a fire on a slope will double the equivalent rate of spread on flat ground for every ten degrees of slope,” says Dr Andrew Sullivan, bushfire behaviour expert at CSIRO Land and Water. Second, the shrub

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/4412/Guideline-for-Councils-to-Bushfire-Prone-Area-Land-Mapping.pdf](https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/4412/Guideline-for-Councils-to-Bushfire-Prone-Area-Land-Mapping.pdf) retrieved 7 December 2019

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/4412/Guideline-for-Councils-to-Bushfire-Prone-Area-Land-Mapping.pdf](https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/4412/Guideline-for-Councils-to-Bushfire-Prone-Area-Land-Mapping.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> <https://blog.csiro.au/bushfire-basics/>

heath, which has lower moisture content for ignition, sits closer to highly combustible grassland than slower burning woodlands. Third, high winds (as noted above) are a feature of this area, helping to fan flames. These three factors, in combination with record drought conditions, mean that Centennial Glen and surrounding areas are at high risk of a bushfire.<sup>33</sup>

The RMS has indicated that one of its six design principles guiding the GWH Upgrade Program is to “improve safety”. This evidence adduced in this section suggests that far from a bypass improving safety it would put motorists at risk through exposure to extreme weather elements and bushfire prone conditions. In addition, a bypass is likely to enhance risks associated with fire given that some motorists who smoke have a propensity to throw cigarette butts from vehicles, making the likelihood of a fire being started by motorists entirely probable.<sup>34</sup> With strong gusting westerly winds, any cigarette started fire would race up the slopes, causing devastation to motorists and the local Blackheath community. Embers fanned by high winds would also threaten the Blue Mountains heritage area in eastern Blackheath and the broader mountains.

The combination of high winds, dense mists and the potential for bushfire amounts to an untenable risk for motorists who would travel through this area. In contrast, the current road through Blackheath (Figure 6) is not located in a bushfire prone zone.

## **2.5 Social impact**

The Blackheath community comprises locals who live here during the week and on weekends, as well as climbers, walkers and nature enthusiasts. While the community hosts regular markets and festivals (including the annual Rhododendron Festival), appreciation for the bush is a unifying focus for these groups as well as tourists more broadly. As a sign of commitment to the bush, locals and others volunteer their time to maintain and build tracks, in collaboration with the Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC).

Cragcare is an initiative of local climbers and has been in operation for 12-15 years. It comprises a voluntary representative who liaises with the BMCC to conduct four track work days a year. These have been focused on the Centennial Glen area for that time. They have worked with organisations like the Sydney Rockclimbing club, other climbers and Council to also achieve other initiatives like crag clean ups and education campaigns (re littering, vegetation, ethical climbing etc). Another local initiative has been the installation of the rather unique ‘log starts’ to the Upper Shipley climbs (initiated and provided by a local climber Mitch Warren) that has resulted in the protection of the under cliff rare and endangered vegetation. Cragcare estimates that since 2005 over 800 volunteers have contributed 7,500 hours to move 150,000kg of stone with a BMCC investment of \$500,000. The track in Centennial Glen leading to the Cascades is currently being repaired and upgraded (see photo below taken 14 December 2019)<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Extreme-Events/Bushfire/Bushfire-research>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/page.php?id=327> retrieved 14 December 2019

<sup>35</sup> Thecrag.com

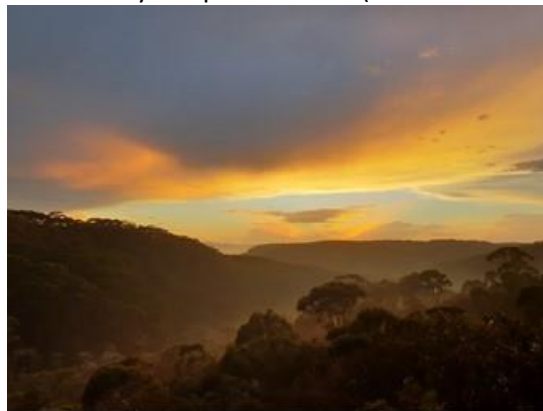


Track maintenance in near the Cascades



Cragcare track maintenance volunteers

A second indication of the importance of the bush to the economic prosperity of the community relates to tourism and accommodation. As at December 2018, Blackheath was ranked second in Airbnb's list of top 10 trending destinations in Australia<sup>36</sup>, and Centennial Glen, Porters Pass, Fort Rock and Shipley Road feature prominently as destinations of interest to the area. Put simply, this area is breathtakingly beautiful as indicated by the photo below (taken from Gordon Ave, Blackheath).



Centennial Glen and Fort Rock

Finally, as noted by the Commonwealth Department of Health, people who live near or visit nature reserves, have been found to exhibit lower levels of stress, anxiety, depression and better sleep. Further that people living with a feeling of being constantly annoyed by a high level of noise pollution, report higher levels of stress.<sup>37</sup> It is for these reasons that locals and visitors stay in and around Centennial Glen, Porters Pass and Shipley Road, including at the local mediation centre. A bypass

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.bluemountaingazette.com.au/story/5803548/airbnb-reveals-its-trending-locations-of-the-year-and-blackheath-is-one-of-the-most-popular/> retrieved 15 December 2019.

<sup>37</sup> <https://headtohealth.gov.au/meaningful-life/connectedness/environment>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4204431/>

<http://www.noiseandhealth.org/article.asp?issn=1463-1741;year=2010;volume=12;issue=46;spage=7;epage=16;aualast=schreckenber>



through this area would significantly diminish its aesthetic value, as well as its positive impact on mental well-being.

### **Supplementary comments**

We oppose the duplication of the current GWH on the Western side of Blackheath and the acquisition and demolition of houses on Station Street, Blackheath. We recognise that the RMS is committed to upgrading the Great Western Highway in order to improve the movement of traffic between Western NSW and Sydney. We do not endorse any of the options being considered by the RMS to achieve this outcome and are disappointed that a rail option, which we would fully support, has not been put forward. Nevertheless, in a spirit of pragmatism, from SCG's perspective the least worst possible option proposed by the RMS is a tunnel but only if:

1. the RMS can ascertain, following extensive environmental investigation, that amongst other criteria relating to flora and fauna, there would be absolutely no impact on subterranean water flows; and
2. the tunnel follows the existing road/rail corridor and does not involve tunnelling under the areas of Centennial Glen, Shipley Road, Porters Pass and Fort Rock, nor tunnelling under homes in Blackheath; and
3. the tunnel's exit/entry points and ventilation points are away from people's homes such that they are not directly impacted by tunnel emissions.

Should you have any queries about our submission please contact Juliet Bourke on 0414 426 939.

Yours faithfully

Handwritten signatures of Juliet Bourke, Ian Krawitz, and David Wright. Juliet Bourke's signature is in blue ink, while the others are in black ink.

Juliet Bourke, Ian Krawitz and David Wright

Save Centennial Glen Founders