



The Hon. James Griffin MP
NSW Minister for Environment and Heritage
GPO Box 5341, SYDNEY NSW 2001
<https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/ministers/minister-environment-heritage>

18 January, 2022

Dear Mr Griffin

RE: Objection to lease proposals for Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area (SCA)

Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment (FOKE) wishes to express its deep concern over two proposed leases for the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area (SCA) that are due for public comment by 18 January, 2022.

FOKE has taken great interest, over many years, in the campaign to protect the Gardens of Stone and congratulates the NSW Government for protecting the area as a State Conservation Area in late 2022.

However, FOKE now has deep concerns regarding the proposed leases that will have a detrimental impact over key parts of the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area for resort accommodation and an adventure theme park. There is almost no information available on the development plans for the lease sites. It is regrettable that the lease proposal was issued at the unsuitable time during the Christmas and New Year holidays.

FOKE is concerned that these two lease proposals will establish a dangerous precedent for national parks and other protected natural areas - including those in the Ku-ring-gai local government area.

FOKE wishes to make the following comments regarding the Gardens of Stone SCA.

A lease should not be issued to the company Wild Bush Luxury because:

- the four proposed accommodation resorts will adversely impact the cultural and natural heritage of the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area;
- It is unacceptable that a for profit company be given exclusive possession of a conservation reserve;
- It is unacceptable that the process allows a lease to be granted before any development proposal has been subject to public comment and review;
- It is unacceptable that a lease be granted to a luxury resort that effectively denies public access to the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area;
- This tourism proposal effectively siphons off the highest paying tourists who might otherwise spend their money in the township of Lithgow where tourism dollars are needed as the town transitions away from coal mining.



A lease should not be issued to the company Trees Adventure Holdings because:

- it will scar one of the most spectacular sites in the Gardens of Stone SACA - the Lost City Precinct. The location is grossly unsuitable for an adventure theme park with its visually intrusive ziplines, toilets, carparks, elevated walkways/suspension bridges and possibly a food outlet;
- the proposal will undermine the economic tourism potential for Lithgow as most visitors will bypass Lithgow and enter the Lost City location via the Clarence via the Old Bells Line of Road.

FOKE urgently requests that a public hearing be convened that gives full open and transparency to the lease proposals including the details on what is proposed at the accommodation resort sites and adventure park, as well as information about the impacts to heritage values of the planned development under these lease. Information from this public hearing should then allow any person to make an informed contribution at the hearing regarding these leases.

The Gardens of Stone SCA should not be undermined by secretive lease agreements that are not in the public interest.

We trust our submission will be taken into consideration and look forward to being notified of a public hearing.

Yours faithfully,

Kathy Cowley
PRESIDENT

cc Mayor and Councillors
cc The Hon Jonathan O'Dea MP Member for Davidson
cc The Hon Alister Henskens SC MP Member for Ku-ring-gai
cc The Hon Paul Fletcher MP Member for Bradfield