



Lithgow Environment Group Inc.

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Preserving the Balance of Nature

The Hon. Chris Minns, MP

GPO Box 5341

SYDNEY NSW 2001

19 September 2024

Re: Lithgow Environment Group reject outright proposed Gardens of Stone SCA private leases

The current proposal of private leases in the Gardens of Stone SCA must be rejected, as it removes equal opportunities for all to access publicly-owned land, for exclusive use of a select few. The cabin developments will not benefit the greater Lithgow community. The wealthy few will stay in luxury at the selected sites while excluding the general public from high scenic and conservation value areas, and damage scientifically important and internationally rare natural values of the Reserve.

The leased accommodation will also create a new precedent in NSW for allowing long term private exclusive use of public lands in National Parks and Reserves. The public expectation is that the NSW Premier and Minister for the Environment will protect the Gardens of Stone SCA from damaging and inappropriate development and degradation of its natural values from these proposed leases.

The lease locations are within the recognised pagoda landscape, which are a significant landform. This proposal will degrade the appearance of these internationally recognised significant landscapes and expose them to overuse and damage.

As well as the above, the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area is a *public resource* with very high natural and cultural conservation values. Australia is in the middle of an extinction crisis. At least 100 flora and fauna species have become extinct in Australia since 1788.

Significant natural values of the Gardens of Stone SCA are its high elevation and large altitudinal range where Sydney Basin, South-eastern Highlands, and New South Western Slopes Bioregion's overlap. Consequently, it is likely to become increasingly important as a refuge from Climate Change Flora and Fauna species responding to a warming climate and associated extreme climatic events, already being experienced in the Lithgow area. Elevation-restricted montane ecosystems (as occur in the SCA) are considered one of the most vulnerable ecosystems in Australia to climate-induced "tipping points." This means that modest environmental changes can cause disproportionately large changes in ecosystem properties. For these reasons it needs strong protection.

We urge the Premier to remove the private leases, and listen to your constituents who are saying luxury cabins will not benefit the greater Lithgow community. Instead invest in key areas identified in the *Destination Pagoda* proposal, and support existing accommodation surrounding the Reserve. Reassure Lithgow that the NPWS focus is on protection of high conservation-value landscapes.

Yours respectfully on Behalf of Lithgow Environment Group Inc.

Julie Favell

Natural Areas Officer.