

Hon Morris Iemma  
Premier of NSW

Hon Frank Sartor  
Minister for Planning

**NSW PLANNING REFORMS – LISTEN TO THE COMMUNITY**  
**An open letter from 52 community groups**

The NSW Government is about to embark on another round of reforms to the planning and environmental assessment system. So far its record has been abysmal.

Over the past couple of years there has been a fundamental shift – in both form and substance – away from public involvement, as well as from sound decision-making frameworks. The effectiveness of environmental assessment has also been impacted.

Community involvement was a hallmark of the planning system and is one of the objects of the planning legislation: see section 5(c) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* which is “to provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment”. This is now mere tokenism or completely absent.

The involvement of the community can ensure that good decisions are made, based on the best possible information. It also gives legitimacy to planning decisions and “buy-in” of the community.

Part 3A turns away from a community-based approach to one where a great deal of unfettered discretion is given to the Minister to make decisions on major projects. This discretionary model cuts away at public participation, leaving decisions about the level of involvement of the community with the Department and the Minister.

Moreover, there is no real environmental framework within which decisions can be made. The Minister has still not published guidelines for environmental assessment requirements nearly two years after Part 3A commenced. Second, the notion of a concept plan – and approval of such - is inconsistent with good environmental decision-making. Proper assessment of environmental impacts cannot occur in the abstract – detailed information is required about the specifics of a project: its location, size, operating output and the activities to be conducted.

Furthermore there are no merit appeals where an Independent Hearing & Assessment Panel is constituted, nor for concept plans or critical infrastructure projects.

The power to make decisions over planning for major projects has also been centralised in the Planning Minister’s hands. The need to get approvals from other agencies has been taken away. For example, the Department of

Environment and Climate Change can no longer refuse a licence to prevent pollution, where an approval has been given.

The government has done little to integrate natural resource management – upon which the health of our catchments and native vegetation relies – into the planning system. Rather it seeks to centralise decisions into one department and as a consequence marginalise key environmental issues.

It's time to get back to the fundamentals – community involvement and environment protection – upon which a sustainable economy and strong community depend.

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**Signatory groups:**

Total Environment Centre  
Nature Conservation Council of NSW  
National Parks Association of NSW  
Sydney Coastal Councils Group  
The Wilderness Society  
Colong Foundation for Wilderness  
Climate Change Action Network  
Friends of Tumblebee Inc  
Hunter Community Environment Centre  
Parks and Playground Movement Inc  
Sutherland Shire Environment Centre  
Blue Mountains Conservation Society  
Swan Lake Environment Protection Association  
Hunter Community Environment Centre  
Great Lakes Environment Association  
Residents' Action Network  
Save Water Alliance  
Coffs Harbour Jetty Action Group  
Rivers SOS  
Nepean Action Group  
Coastwatchers Assoc Inc  
United Residents Group for the Environment of Lake Macquarie  
Myall Koala and Environmental Support Group Inc  
Bonny Hills Progress Association  
Avoca Beach Community Association  
Bulbararing Bushcare Group  
Central Coast Community Environment Network  
Tweed Landcare Inc  
Clarence Valley Branch of the National Parks Association

Surfrider Foundation Australia  
Byron Environmental and Conservation Organisation (BEACON)  
Big Scrub Environment Centre  
North Coast Environment Council  
Corindi Beach Resident's Group  
Conservation Ecologists Association  
Lake Wollumboola Protection Association Inc  
Healthy Cities Illawarra  
Vincentia Ratepayers and Residents Association  
NPA Clarence Valley Branch  
NPA Three Valleys Branch  
Conservation Ecologists Association  
Our Green Corridor  
Smiths Lake Village Assoc  
Friends of the Koala, Inc.  
NSW Wildlife Council Inc.  
Peninsula Dunecare Group  
Redhead Community Action Group  
Illawarra & Community Environment Connection  
Rainforest Information Centre  
Lake Macquarie Coastal and Wetlands Alliance  
Friends of South West Rocks  
Cavanbah Action Group