

Blue Mountains Residents Come Together to Support Incorporation of Katoomba Airfield into National Park

Katoomba Airfield Community Group will be presenting the petition to local state member, Trish Doyle, on Friday 10 May in Medlow Bath.

In a little over 10 weeks, over 10,000 signatures have been collected by a coalition of concerned residents, small businesses and environmentalists against the long-term lease of Katoomba Airfield by a helicopter tourism operator.

The airfield is located on the edge of the Grose Valley wilderness in Medlow Bath and is completely surrounded by World Heritage listed national park. It is also only 3km as the crow flies from residential areas in North Katoomba, Medlow Bath and Blackheath.

The petition has been an eye-opening experience for many signature gatherers.

“I’ve met so many great people through this and they really care about the airfield, they care about the environment and they care about having a say in how we manage tourism into the future,” said Joanne Day, from Wentworth Falls.

“Being a part of the team collecting these signatures has helped me realise that we do all have a say in what happens within our community and that we can make a difference,” said Erin Cater, 23, from Medlow Bath.

Katoomba Airfield is currently a dirt airstrip occasionally used by emergency services, but a new commercial operator wants to take on the lease. Their proposal involves tarmacking the east-west runway and installing a heliport.

“Obviously this is a significant economic outlay, and will require an increase in flights into and out of the airfield for the proponents to get a return on their investment,” said Katoomba Airfield Community Group spokesperson Stephen Cannings.

The proponents have thus far refused to release information about the number or frequency of helicopter flights into and out of the airfield.

“This is a concern. As community consultation will likely occur in May or June, the community needs that information in order to engage properly with the process.”

While passionately opposed to the commercialisation of the airfield himself, Mr Cannings also acknowledged the complexity of the issue.

“Ultimately, the way you feel about this will depend on what you think is most important. I personally believe that helicopter tourism and world heritage values don’t mix. We risk shooting the goose that laid the golden egg in terms of our tourism economy if we destroy the peace and serenity that many come to the mountains to experience—especially the hundreds of thousands of people who undertake a bushwalk here each and every year.”

“Katoomba Airfield Community Group encourages concerned residents to get involved in the consultation process. We’re as much about engaging Blue Mountains residents in these important decisions as anything else. To find out more about our position visit ourblueys.org,” he said.

The Department of Industry has indicated that community consultation will be held from May to June 2019.

An additional 2,850 online signatures against the commercialisation of Katoomba Airfield have been gathered on Change.org.

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The Katoomba Airfield Community Group (KACG) is made up of residents and small business from Medlow Bath, Katoomba, Blackheath and Wentworth Falls.

ourblueys.org

<https://www.facebook.com/KatoombaAirfieldCommunityGroup/>

Change.org petition <http://chnq.it/9trCXkZGk4>