

Blackheath Community Joins Battle against Commercialisation of Katoomba Airfield

At a lively community meeting held on 13 March at the New Ivanhoe Hotel, Blackheath residents added their voice to mounting community concern about a future commercial lease of Katoomba Airfield in Medlow Bath.

Katoomba Airfield is on Crown Land and is managed by the NSW Government through the Department of Industry. A temporary license has been issued and a long-term commercial lease is being considered for the licensees, with a decision expected to be made by the government in July.

The airfield is the long-term home of the Blue Mountains Aviators Club, which has operated from the airfield since 1968. Since then it has been used for light private, commercial, and military aviation, but has only ever had limited periods of commercial tourism operation, such as joy flights from 1992 to 1995. It is also surrounded by Blue Mountains national park.

“Due to its location on the edge of the Grose Valley any helicopter tourism operations could affect both it and local communities,” President of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society, Madi Maclean, has said. “Despite this, the lease process has commenced without community consultation about what should actually happen to this land and how it should be used.”

These concerns were backed by resident, Stephen Cannings, who spoke at the meeting.

“I’m gobsmacked that an EOI [Expression of Interest] was released by the Department of Industry with no guidance to its use—a commercial aerodrome and a world heritage national park are so obviously incompatible.”

“The noise could drive away many visitors and ruin the reputation the mountains have as a tranquil getaway, resulting in a net negative effect on tourism”.

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society and Katoomba Airfield Community Group (KACG) support the incorporation of the airfield into the Blue Mountains National Park, with provision for its continued use by emergency services.

The temporary licence holders attended the meeting but declined to answer questions.

So far, KACG has collected over 2000 signatures against the commercialisation of the airfield as part of its campaign.

“It’s exciting to see the community come together this way,” said Blackheath resident, Malin Hoepfner, who signed the petition. “I really feel that we need to be aware of the privilege we have to be living in the midst of a world heritage area—we have a responsibility to look after that.”

The Katoomba Airfield Community Group (KACG) is made up of residents and small business from Medlow Bath and Katoomba. In the wake of the support expressed at the Ivanhoe meeting, KACG will set up a new Blackheath group to give that town's residents a voice in the campaign.



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