



# Mt Barker & District Residents' Association Inc.

PO Box 19 Mount Barker, South Australia 5251

*For the Community*

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6 November 2023

To The Chairperson, Mr. Craig Holden, State Planning Commission

## **RE: Mt Barker & District Residents' Association (MBDRA) response to the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan (GARP)**

The Mt Barker & District Residents' Association (MBDRA) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan (GARP).

We are deeply concerned about the consequences of population growth given the ongoing impacts of similar growth being felt by the residents of Mount Barker. The State Government acknowledged, at its recent Country Cabinet in Mount Barker, that the development of Mount Barker is a lesson in what NOT to do.

As such we hope that there are lessons to be learnt from the Mount Barker case and remind the Commission of some of the good tenets of the original 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide in the hope that these can be embedded into the GARP: 'no more alienation of good farmland', 'no placing population growth where there is no local employment', 'no creation of growth which will greatly increase motor vehicle use'.

We would like the following comments noted by the Commission.

Kind regards

*Douglas McCarty*

**Douglas McCarty**  
**Chairperson/Spokesperson**

## **1. Rationale for Population Growth**

There is no clear rationale for why the government is proposing another population growth plan. Given the known impacts of population expansion on existing infrastructure, food, water and energy supply and the natural environment, and at a time when the climate is in crisis, it does not make any sense.

In addition, any new plan to significantly increase the population of 'Greater Adelaide' must first consider the findings of the review of the Planning Code. The public are yet to see this report.

## **2. Potential future growth of Mt Barker**

The plan indicates that though Mount Barker will not receive immediate targeted growth, the government will revisit Mount Barker later because the infrastructure will have been put in place. This is not an acceptable proposition.

We understand that future developments within the Mount Barker and Central Adelaide Hills Region are limited by the surrounding Environment Food Production Areas. These areas place limits on land division and development for residential purposes. As such we question why the State Government is making this statement.

The impact of the current development on Mount Barker residents will be inter-generational as the council battles with multi-million-dollar debt created by having to provide infrastructure for a massive population growth it neither wanted or was able to plan for. This Council, like 544 other petitioners to government, wrote a submission requesting that the residential rezoning be reduced to 400ha, rather than 1300ha. Mount Barker is a clear example of how NOT to do rezoning and residential housing development, with allotments being made smaller and smaller in response to the levies imposed by Council to pay for provision of infrastructure and services. Many new houses are so small there is no place for a tree or rainwater tank. Cost-shifting on to local government at the same time as loss of many funding programmes which supported council in the delivery of services is unworkable.

## **3. Road networks and Public Transport**

A wide-ranging traffic study must be undertaken to fully appreciate the impacts of regional population growth. The decision to target Murray Bridge, Goolwa and Victor Harbor for new population growth will place enormous pressure on the already congested road networks. The arterial roads around Mount Barker are already at capacity at peak times with many commuters seeking to get to employment outside of Mount Barker. This is also the main route for Hills dwellers to get to Goolwa, Langhorne Creek, Port Elliot and Victor Harbor. Further, increased growth at Murray Bridge will place even more pressure on the SE Freeway which becomes a virtual 'carpark' even with one minor accident or with maintenance works on the Heysen Tunnels.

There also appears no consideration at all for trees, wildlife or biodiversity loss, let alone accelerating climate change, with DIT's current manner of managing public road issues, when all traffic studies have shown that trees and road curves actually slow traffic and decrease the

likelihood of fatal accidents.

No serious consideration is given to improving public transport, through the reintroduction of passenger rail and to improving options and for safe active transport.

There is an urgent need for passenger (as well as freight) rail for all the areas targeted for growth, and in particular for Mount Barker, Murray Bridge and Nairne. Passenger rail could eventually extend to Goolwa and Victor Harbor.

Former railway engineer and current Chair of the MBDRA, Douglas McCarty has planned and costed a future passenger rail system for Mount Barker. This has been brought into sharper focus by the increasing congestion on the SE Freeway, as the rezoned residential areas have been built on and the resulting steady population growth. This plan has been presented to multiple state government inquiries into transport.

Detail can be found here:

<http://www.mtbarkeranddistrictresidents.org.au/index.php?page=guestbook-2>

Adoption of this plan would take a considerable load off the SE Freeway and extend its (useful life) capacity by decades.

#### 4. Impact on native flora and fauna

How will a targeted population growth impact on the already at-risk natural environment? The Mount Lofty Ranges was identified over a decade ago by State of Environment Reports as a biodiversity loss hotspot. We are currently experiencing loss of native flora and fauna at an alarming rate. Thousand of trees and native vegetation have already been destroyed with the expansion of Mount Barker having a devastating impact on biodiversity and wildlife.

For example, on Long Valley Road, between Wistow and Strathalbyn, over one thousand trees have been destroyed to permit a couple of passing lanes. The biodiversity loss is immense and permanent. The few remaining reserves across the district with remnant native vegetation are under enormous pressure from visitor numbers and from the impact of adjacent residential and commercial development. How will the current proposal mitigate the loss of flora and fauna as we have evidenced at Mount Barker? **MBDRA prepared a submission to DIT entitled "A Strategy for Native Vegetation Replacement" on this very problem.**

There is also a growing number of animals killed daily on the SE Freeway. Given the government's investment in tourism, of which the environment is a big part, it is ironic that still nothing has been done about avoiding the daily wildlife carnage. All other major cities with wildlife in its hinterland have koala protection fencing for 50-100km (e.g. Newcastle and Mackay) and overhead crossovers. Yet, despite the call for these over the years from many different groups and individuals, the Government has yet to respond. Why?

#### 5. Food and water security

How will food and water security be assured given the projected expansion of residential and associated commercial development? It seems nonsensical to be pushing food production out into lower rainfall and far less arable/fertile areas. Yet this is happening across the state, including at Mount Barker. Food production land should be protected for its utility and scenic/tourism value.

Why are 'greenfields' developments still given preference over adopting sensitive urban infill practice? Government advised the public that greenfields development would cease in favour of more high rise and urban infill. Clearly this is not the preference of the development and built construction industry.

The proposed plan can only result in greater loss of the already reduced stock of good farming/horticulture land and put higher pressures on food and water security.

## **6. Industrial Lands (Employment)**

Designation of 'employment lands' needs to be very carefully considered and must include rail. The employment lands identified for Mount Barker remain unutilised for any new purpose. Developers realised in hindsight that the land was steeper, less accessible and more difficult to service than some of the other 'greenfields' sites which had been acquired by them. There is also no ready access to major transport corridors or rail (without using Wellington Road) without trucks being merged with commuters. Therefore employment lands at Callington, for example, need to consider water requirements, lack of sewer and again, added pressure on the SE Freeway as well as lack of rail. Workers are attracted by existing employment, not vice versa. It should therefore be noted that the impact of jobs lost in rural enterprise at Mount Barker has had ongoing negative impacts (loss of services, mechanics, tractor dealers, livestock carriers, meat processors, shearers, veterinarians, rural contractors (hay making, professional advisers, agricultural advisers) and designating 'employment lands' does not of itself result in appropriate or adequate jobs for those moving into new housing estates due to economic circumstances. The majority of workers in Mount Barker are travelling 30-50km to and from work each day (60-100km).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion it is remarkable that States should simply and unquestioningly follow a directive from Federal Government to accept 'quotas' of new immigrants and then pass on the responsibility of accommodating that growth to local Councils ("Principle 2 - each Local Government Area will have targets to accommodate growth") which Councils typically have neither the staff, ability or finances to provide required infrastructure to undertake rapid growth. This is not the way to achieve good planning or sustainable housing. The MBDRA is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan but is disappointed at how 'Adelaide centric' it is while clearly and deliberately creating 'commuter towns' which will be forced to sacrifice their own unique character and charm to house thousands of new residents who, for the most part, will be forced to commute to work in Adelaide.

