



Mt Barker & District Residents' Association Inc

PO Box 494 Mount Barker, South Australia 5251

For the Community

20 March 2016

Chief Executive Officer
Mt Barker District Council
PO Box 54 Mt Barker

RE: Submission to Rural DPA

Background

The initiative to protect rural land in the Mt Barker District is to be applauded. **We strongly support this initiative.**

The MDPA 2010 rezoned 1300 ha of prime agricultural land which will possibly accommodate some 45,000 extra people - nearly 200% of what was intended from the original SA 30 Year Plan. Over 500 local residents wrote lengthy and passionate submissions saying 'no' to the size of this expansion and suggested land with poorer soils near to Mount Barker be used for housing. Approximately 130 people presented at the DPAC hearings which had to be spread over 5 nights which was unprecedented. The Mount Barker 2010 MDPA was perhaps the most unpopular and most-resisted MDPA so far. However, the community's protests were ignored and the Government re-zoned the land anyway.

We must do everything in our power to ensure this does not happen again.

Declaration of interest: Several members own properties in the DPA area.

This Rural DPA should retain the following elements:

Retention of Rural Character

Many South Australians enjoy the Hills for trips out. Events such as the Classic Car Rally and the Down Under cycling event are set against the picturesque rolling hills around Mount Barker. The hills with their many attractions are a big tourist attraction bringing in millions of dollars to the State. They are a national icon akin to Tuscany in Italy and must be protected.

The rural setting surrounding Mount Barker must be protected from continued urban sprawl. Just like the Adelaide parklands and Flinders Ranges need to be preserved for all, so does the countryside within the Mount Barker District. The UNESCO World Heritage submission aims to achieve this. As Council and this Association are members of the working group aiming for UNESCO listing, we should be doing anything to gain this international standing.

Food Security

The requirement for food production is a constant, with ever increasing demand. With increased population the state and district will require more food. Mt Barker has an abundance of fertile land, on which there is good rainfall. This can become a priceless commodity in future years as Mt Barker could be placed as 'The Food Bowl' of South Australia. As it was historically known as the 'Cream Bowl' of the State, this is a perfect transition. The Council could consider placing its scarce resources for marketing on this focus rather than supporting the developer's dream.

The current urban boundary needs to be maintained within this DPA to ensure the retention of our agricultural food production lands. Each step in urban sprawl compounds the problem. As urbanisation spreads, (which should never happen on these lands again) the impact on agricultural potential, diversity and production increases, driving farmers to areas of lower capital cost systems. These areas create a bigger carbon footprint due to higher transport and input costs (a separate issue to land values).

The challenge for the agricultural industry will be to provide food at the lowest cost and to fit with available resources, coping with complex, seasonal variability, fluctuating demand (economic issues etc.) and storage capacity. This DPA addresses some of these elements and takes a forward thinking approach.

All this will most likely create and develop totally different farm systems from those we know today the opportunity should be seized now. The farming systems that will apply here in 25 years time probably have not even been invented yet. The coming universal famine is posing a serious threat on our communities. Coupled with ongoing Chinese purchase of Australia's lands, there is a real threat that we will not have sufficient land to feed the increasing masses.

Employment Objectives

Because of high land prices traditional farmers are migrating away from areas close to development. This DPA will provide a mechanism for farmers to remain on their properties by allowing many 'value add' activities as described in the DPA. This will help to create produce, outputs and employment opportunities. It will support generational succession planning as the successors will be able to develop innovative opportunities on the farm land which were previously excluded. It will provide entrepreneurial opportunities and could be the catalyst for many small businesses.

If greater employment opportunities can be opened up in the District, by value-adding industries, it will help to reduce the traffic to and from the city. This in turn will increase spending in the District thereby creating an economic cycle that benefits the community rather than the city.

Strengthen Land Class in zoning

The PIRSA maps classify the soils of this land as class 1 and 2 - the best. This DPA has identified these classes and created four zones but we believe this can be improved in the DPA. Specifically PIRSA land 'Area 1' should be strengthened. Areas 2 to 5 are not as fertile but Area 1 is high quality. PIRSA Area 1 should be modified to create another category or class to ensure this land is well protected from any challenges in the future and any potential loss to developers in the future. We also question whether the boundaries have been realigned to take into account the non-productive lands.

There are several borders on the maps which are not logical. We can point these out to you. One example is the triangle on Williams Road has been classed 'Broadacre' yet is it highly productive land. We question the accuracy of several other zone boundaries.

Increase and strengthen buffers between towns

This DPA needs to ensure the buffers between towns are retained, extended and strengthened. The Littlehampton/Nairne/Mt Barker buffers are under threat from urban sprawl. The land east of Bald Hills Road should be retained as food production land. No further development in Blakiston should occur as this is blurring the boundary between Nairne and Littlehampton. Development in this area has completely destroyed the previous 'English countryside' ambience of the area.

The DPA provides for a 40m buffer between farming and the urban zones. We question whether this is sufficient and whether it should be wider and include specific requirements such as intensity of tree growth or other? The British Columbia model may have some best practices examples.

The buffers between residential and rural could be developed as Peri-Urban and classified as such. Increases of these all around the district could enable the development and promotion of specific food growing areas.

Reconsideration of non-complying items

This DPA creates a situation that could be problematic in the future with regards the non-complying items list. The list is not exhaustive and nor could it be. But by creating such a list the DPA allows for easy challenges. An example would be – could someone open a local history museum on their property? If so, what size? What would be the impact on the area? Has traffic and other infrastructure items been considered? Further to this, would the Mt Barker Caravan Park be non-complying on Stephenson's Land? We ask that this list be reconsidered.

Conservation of native vegetation areas

The incorporation of environmental policies and constraints to better protect biodiversity is excellent. The buffers for high conservation lands is commendable. There are several specific areas that have been noted in the DPA. However, there are hundreds of patches of native vegetation throughout the district identified on the maps. How are these protected? More importantly, as they die out, how will they be replaced and revegetated? Can the DPA provide support for the regrowth requirements of these 'remnant bush' areas? We believe fencing these off so that tress can seed and re-grow naturally protected from grazing stock would be an excellent strategy.

These could also form an important and essential network of connected bush to create corridors for wildlife to be retained. There are gaps in the rural protection zones. If these (native vegetation areas) were joined up they would create a distinct linked corridor for protection of wildlife.

Hahndorf Zone

This Association has chosen to not comment on this as the Hahndorf Community will ensure the appropriate protections are implemented.

Accommodation on properties

There are some aspects of the accommodation rules that are not consistent. For example a house built on a property for aged or infirm parents or farm managers, all need to be taken away at the conclusion of their use but the seasonal workers accommodation seem to be able to stay forever (see 21.e). There may be a plethora of additional and temporary dwellings built on site but we question how compliance of this requirement will be achieved when it seems Council only has one Compliance officer who only is reactive not proactive.

Independent Assessment

We find it difficult to navigate the hundreds of pages of detailed information in the DPA itself and it is probable that the 'devil is in the detail'. We believe the general community would feel similarly. We would welcome Council's appointment of an objective and independent consultant to review this DPA prior to sending it to the Minister to ensure there are no potential 'gaps' to enable developers to squeeze in more housing. The intent of this DPA is sound and welcomed, but if developers can still create 'niche' opportunities within the zones then the purpose of the DPA is weakened.

Conclusion

We are pleased that the release of this Rural DPA may bring some protection to our prime agricultural lands. We look forward to contributing to the ongoing dialogue about any matters within this submission with your officers.

YES: we wish to speak at the 11 April meeting

Yours sincerely

D E van Eck

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