

Towards a More Sustainable Future



A Summary of Trends Issues and Key Ideas

Paper No 14e
Blue Mountains Our Future

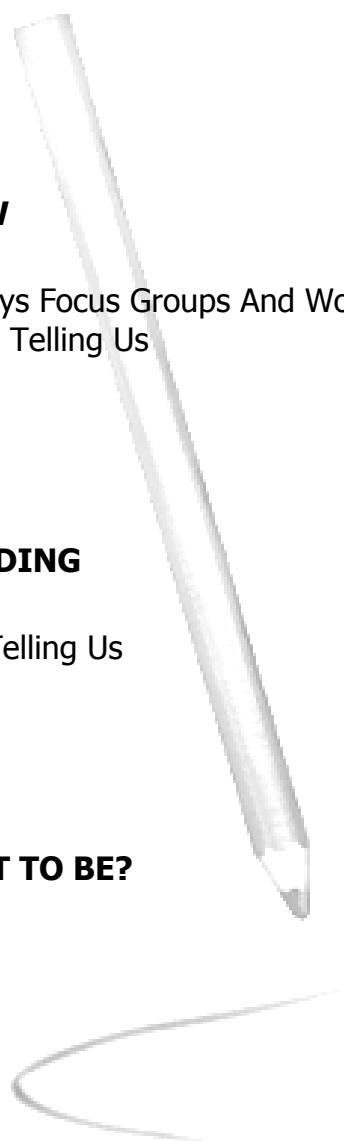


March 2002



Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
WHERE WE ARE NOW	5
What You Said In Surveys Focus Groups And Workshops	5
What Other Research Is Telling Us	6
WHERE WE ARE HEADING	7
What The Research Is Telling Us	7
WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?	8
Your Key Ideas	8
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	9





Introduction

The wider context

The centres of economic growth in Australia are the large cities. Researchers suggest that these growth centres, having been established for a range of historical and geographical reasons, develop cumulative advantages so that the gap between their prosperity and the rest of the nation widens.

The result of this centralisation trend is the decreasing strength of rural and regional communities, greater distances for people to travel for employment and the consequent pressure on communities economically and socially as they become more reliant on distant centres.

An emerging theme in the literature is that positive economic growth is both a civic process and a business process. The cultural strength of communities is often an untapped resource in developing sustainable economic growth. Tapping this resource has real potential for building strong, involved and self-reliant communities.

In the Blue Mountains

As an area on the fringe of Sydney the Blue Mountains people face similar challenges to many regional communities in Australia.

The Blue Mountains economy has traditionally relied on the changing fortunes of the tourist industry. Currently the Blue Mountains attracts up to three million visitors each year, making it one of the top three tourist destinations in Australia, besides Cairns and Uluru.

The manufacturing industry in the Blue Mountains is comparatively small, heavy industry is non-existent and there is minimal light industry.

Small businesses employing generally less than 10 people dominate the economy. One in four of these businesses are also home based. Health and Community Services and Education are the largest employment industries in the Mountains (ABS, 1996).

Lower Mountains residents have higher incomes, but do much of their spending outside the Local Government Area. There is a significant leakage of retail spending to Penrith.

Local work opportunities are limited. At least 57% of our workforce commute to employment outside the area. Unemployment is highest in the Upper Mountains. Youth unemployment is particularly high.

While the Blue Mountains currently has a higher than average unemployment rate, its unique environment, lifestyle and position on the edge of Sydney provides opportunities to attract clean industries.

Information technology appears to be a growing industry within the Mountains, the potential of which needs to be better understood. Over 90% of businesses in the Mountains have at least one piece of IT equipment, higher than the national average.

The Blue Mountains area has a rich indigenous Aboriginal heritage and possesses a wealth of remarkable cultural and artistic resources. It contains examples of the works of many of the most prominent engineers, architects, landscape gardeners, artists and artisans who have lived in Australia.

How can we build capacity in our communities through positive economic growth?



Where we are now

What you said in surveys focus groups and workshops

- Promoting local employment is your second highest priority for future planning
- There is a need to encourage more “service” businesses to set up in the Blue Mountains
- You want to ensure environmental protection while fostering and developing a climate for local economic growth
- Council could do more to encourage business growth
- Promotion of the Blue Mountains unique identity is a key to success
- There is a need to utilise technology to create more local work opportunities
- Commercial and bureaucratic hurdles limit business growth
- The Blue Mountains should be promoted as a destination rather than as a transport corridor people move through
- You want to increase the range of local post school educational opportunities available
- Customer service and management skills are needed to improve our businesses and service delivery to tourists
- The environment is a key resource and World Heritage listing an advantage for the Blue Mountains



What other research is telling us

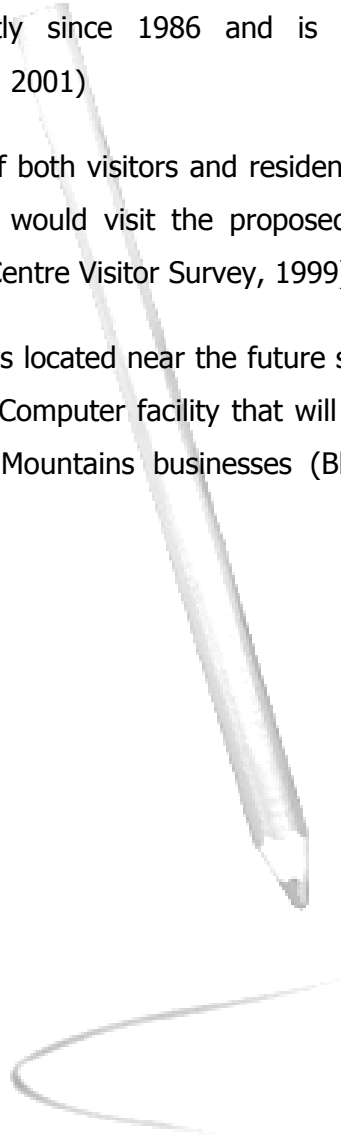
- The Blue Mountains has a well educated and highly skilled population. At least 60% of the labour force have either skilled vocational qualifications or bachelor degrees (ABS, 1996)
- At least 57% of the Blue Mountains workforce commute outside the local Government Area to work (ABS, 1996)
- 35% of employed Blue Mountains residents work part time compared to 30% for the Sydney metropolitan area (ABS, 1996)
- Unemployment in the Blue Mountains was slightly higher than in NSW in 2000 (6.8% compared to 5%) (Blue Mountains Business Information Package, 2001)
- 90% of all businesses in the Blue Mountains are small businesses (generally less than 20 employees) (Blue Mountains Business Information Package, 2001)
- Over 90% of businesses have at least one piece of IT equipment. This is higher than the national average for IT equipment ownership (Blue Mountains Business Information Package, 2001)
- 60% of land zoned for industrial purposes in the Local Government Area is not currently being utilised for that purpose (BMCC, Background Information, Draft LEP 2002)
- Tourism provides opportunities to all businesses in the Blue Mountains through increased spending and increased awareness of the local area (Blue Mountains Business Information Package, 2001)
- Spending by Blue Mountains overnight tourists has increased significantly over the past two years, approaching similar levels to Sydney metropolitan area (Blue Mountains Business Information Package, 2001)
- Katoomba is the largest commercial centre with 29% of all commercial land followed by Springwood with 12% and Blaxland with 10%. Springwood has the largest area of developed light industrial land in use (14 ha) (Blue Mountains Business Information Package, 2001)



Where we are heading

What the research is telling us

- More people are opting to work from home and establish home based businesses in the Blue Mountains
- The number of visitor enquiries at Blue Mountains Visitor Information Centres has increased significantly since 1986 and is growing (Blue Mountains Business Information Package, 2001)
- An estimated 76% of both visitors and residents of the Blue Mountains surveyed in 1999 indicated they would visit the proposed Blue Mountains Cultural Centre at Katoomba (Cultural Centre Visitor Survey, 1999)
- The Blue Mountains is located near the future site (Penrith) of an intelligent node of a High Performance Computer facility that will allow for the growth in advanced IT usage among Blue Mountains businesses (Blue Mountains Business Information Package, 2001)

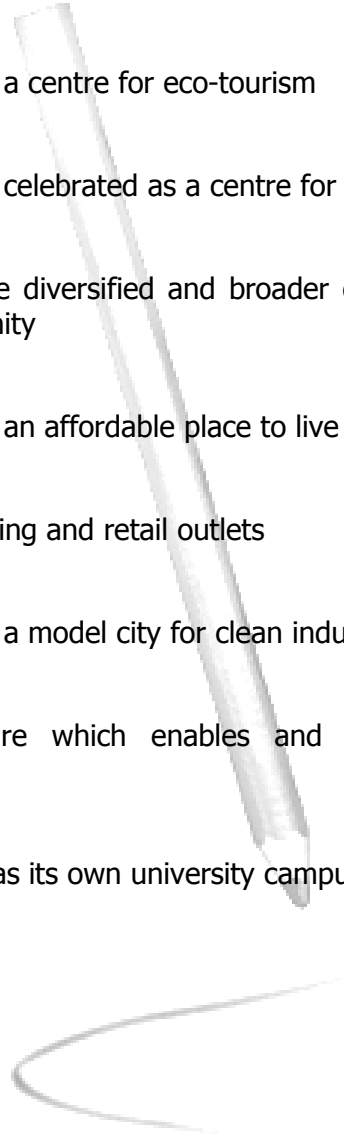


Where do we want to be?



Your key ideas

- Significantly more local employment opportunities particularly for young people
- The Blue Mountains is a centre for eco-tourism
- The Blue Mountains is celebrated as a centre for arts and culture
- There is a much more diversified and broader economic base supporting the local economy and community
- The Blue Mountains is an affordable place to live
- There are more shopping and retail outlets
- The Blue Mountains is a model city for clean industries
- There is infrastructure which enables and supports flourishing home based businesses
- The Blue Mountains has its own university campus





Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- There has been an over reliance on the tourism industry making the area vulnerable to economic ups and downs
- The expansion of Sydney as a major economic growth centre is at the expense of regional and rural areas
- Not every type of industry is suited to an area surrounded by a World Heritage National Park
- A relatively small population does not provide sufficient market size for many businesses
- While Blue Mountains residents on average are more educated and skilled than Sydney residents there are few local opportunities for work and study

Opportunities

- Clean industries: the natural setting provides a perfect environment for the development of clean energies, clean building techniques, and environmental research centres
- Creative industries: the Blue Mountains has always been host to a variety of artists, actors and writers inspired by the landscape
- IT: Blue Mountains residents and businesses have a higher proportion of IT usage - the development of IT infrastructure may increase the already significant numbers of home-based businesses operating within the Blue Mountains
- Education: the natural environment is a unique setting for research and learning