



**BLUE MOUNTAINS  
OUR FUTURE**

**Blue Mountains City Council**

**COMMUNITY SURVEY**

**Resident Opinions about Council Performance and Planning for the  
Future**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF  
FINAL REPORT**

**PREPARED BY IRIS RESEARCH LTD**

**Paper No 3  
Supporting Documentation for  
*Blue Mountains Our Future***

**May 2001**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IRIS Research was commissioned by the City of Blue Mountains in November 2000 to conduct a telephone survey among City residents. The broad aim of the survey was to involve the community in planning for the future and to evaluate Council's performance over a period of time in relation to a range of key services and facilities.

The survey was conducted on the IRIS CATI system during November and December 2000. To qualify for an interview, respondents had to have been a resident in the Council area for at least the last 6 months and aged 16 or older. A total of 1032 completed interviews were conducted, with equal proportions coming from each of five Council designated Community Planning Areas. The results presented in this report have been weighted by the actual Census age and area distributions for the Blue Mountains, as this provides the most accurate reflection of overall resident opinions.

The key results from each section of this report are summarised below.

### **Council Services and Facilities**

- Attributes achieving higher importance scores were: 'bush fire prevention and rural fire brigades', 'clean creeks and waterways', 'litter control', 'protection of natural bushland', 'garbage collection', 'street cleaning', 'maintenance of public toilets' and 'generating local employment opportunities'.
- Attributes achieving higher satisfaction scores were: 'litter control', 'bush fire prevention and rural fire brigades', 'availability of lookouts and walking trails', 'maintenance of swimming pools', 'pedestrian access generally around shops & community facilities' and 'library services'.
- Attributes achieving relatively lower satisfaction scores were: 'youth services & facilities', 'maintenance of public toilets', 'generating local employment opportunities', 'provision of public toilets', 'weed control' and 'consultation with the community'.
- Areas where council appears to be meeting residents' needs are (in order of importance):
  - ⇒ Bush fire prevention & rural fire brigades
  - ⇒ Litter control
  - ⇒ Protection of natural bushland
  - ⇒ Street cleaning
  - ⇒ Lighting of public areas
  - ⇒ Bush regeneration



- ⇒ Pedestrian access at shopping centres & community facilities
- ⇒ Footpaths around shopping centres & community facilities
- ⇒ Services & facilities for older people
- ⇒ Town centre & village atmosphere
- ⇒ Recycling
- ⇒ Maintenance of parks & playgrounds
- ⇒ Maintenance of swimming pools
- ⇒ Maintenance of lookouts & walking trails
- ⇒ Protection of heritage values & buildings
  
- Areas identified as priorities for attention are (in rank order):
  - ⇒ Maintenance of public toilets
  - ⇒ Clean creeks and waterways
  - ⇒ Generating local employment opportunities
  - ⇒ Youth services & facilities
  - ⇒ Provision of public toilets
  - ⇒ Weed control
  - ⇒ Sealed road maintenance
  - ⇒ Consultation with the community
  - ⇒ Managing residential development
  - ⇒ Garbage collection
  - ⇒ Facilities & services for people with a disability
  - ⇒ Parking for shoppers
  - ⇒ Animal control

### **Overall Council Performance**

- Respondents were also asked to rate their 'overall' satisfaction with the performance of council. Satisfaction with council's overall performance was in the moderate range, with a score of 3.1 out of 5.
- Overall satisfaction scores were consistent across the five planning areas measured. However, there was evidence that people aged between 35 and 49 were more likely to be dissatisfied with council than people in other age groups.
- Those respondents who said they were 'very dissatisfied' with the overall performance of council (62 people, or 6% of sample) were asked what the main reason was for their discontent. The main reasons given were: poor provision of



facilities and services (39%); council staff issues (23%); and perceived inequities in council's treatment of different community groups (16%).

### **Staff Performance**

- Residents who have had an interaction with council staff were found to be more likely to have a favourable impression of their performance.
- Nearly three quarters (72.8%) of residents who had an encounter with council staff agreed that they were courteous and helpful (compared to 57.2% of those who had no contact).
- Similarly, residents having experienced an interaction with council staff were more likely to be satisfied with their overall performance than those who had no contact.
- Over half (54.7%) of those who had a service encounter with council staff rated their level of satisfaction in the high range, compared to 41.5% of those who had no encounter.

### **Major Issues of Concern**

- According to residents, the biggest issues currently facing the Blue Mountains overall are 'development control', 'nature preservation', 'youth issues' and 'roads'.
- The most common issues of concern at a neighbourhood level are 'roads and pedestrian access', 'development control', 'crime' and 'youth issues'.

### **Living in the Blue Mountains**

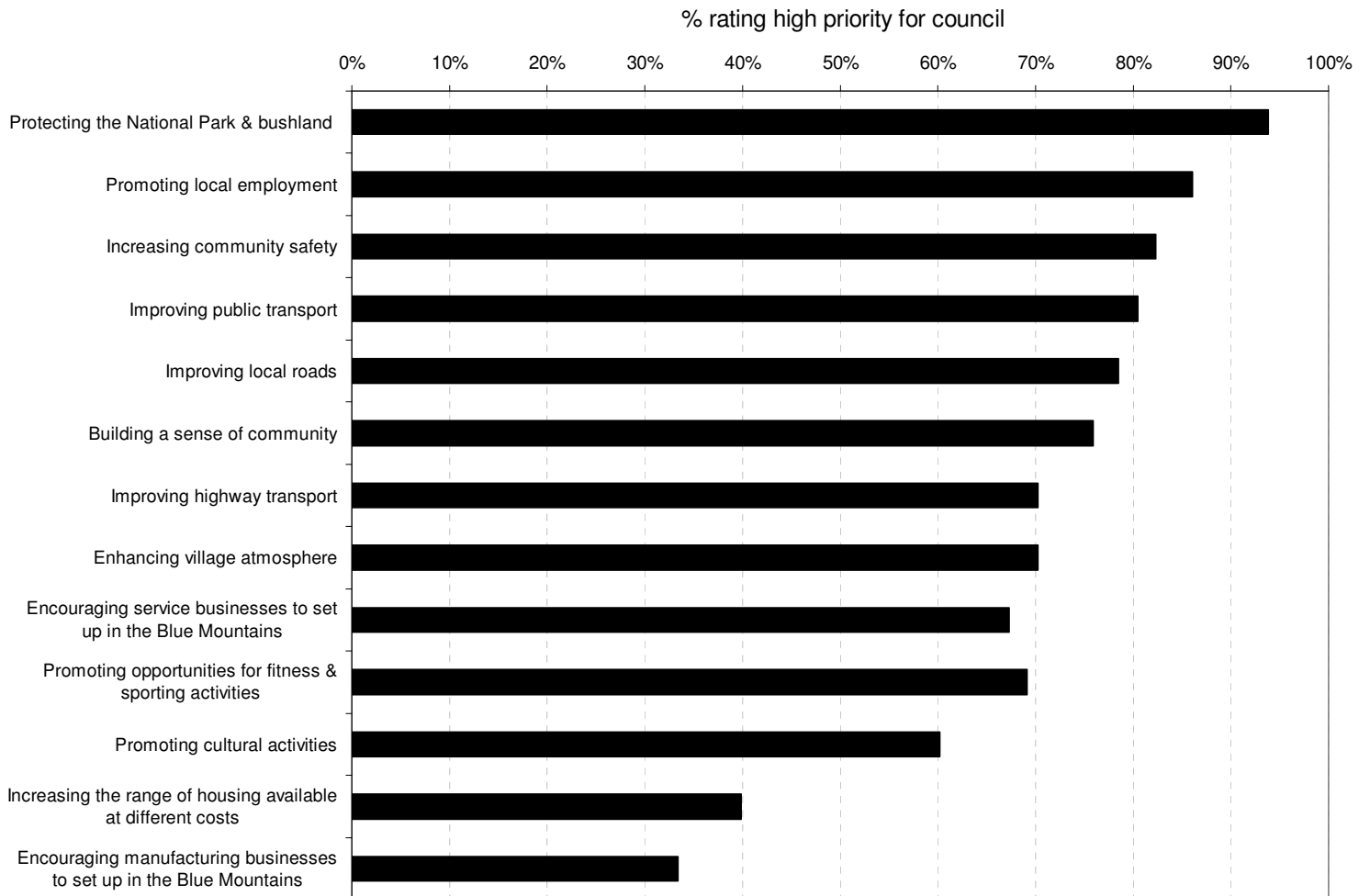
- The things people like 'most' about living in the Blue Mountains generally relate to its unique natural setting, sense of space and relaxed lifestyle.
- The things people like 'least' about living in the Blue Mountains generally relate to a lack of services and facilities, social issues and perceptions of overdevelopment.
- When asked to describe the communities that make up the Blue Mountains, the overall response was very positive.
- 43% of respondents described the people of the Blue Mountains as "friendly" or "courteous".
- Other prominent descriptions included "multi-cultural" or "diverse" (25.2%), "environmentally aware" (19.9%), "caring" (18.6%), "elderly" or "retired" (16.6%), "alternative" (12.2%), "community-minded" (11%) and "relaxed" (10.8%).



## Planning for the Future

- When asked to prioritise the importance of 13 key areas of council's planning for the future, respondents rated them as follows:

### LONG TERM COUNCIL PRIORITIES



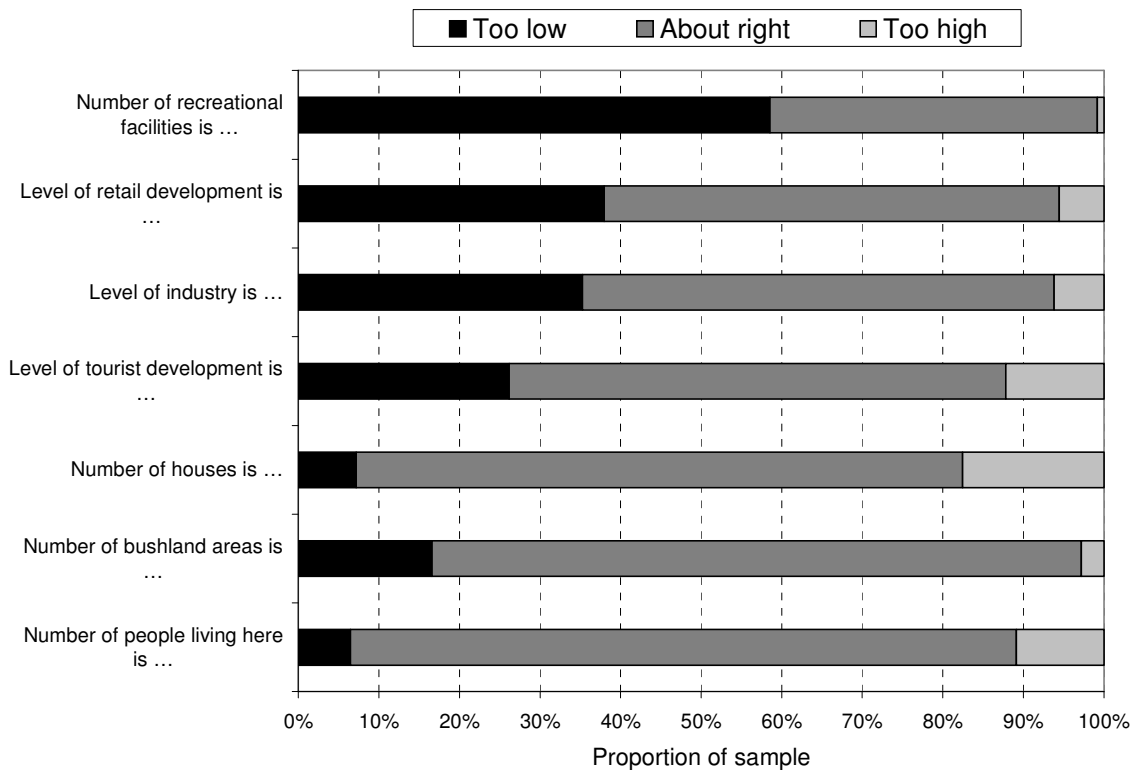
- Other unprompted priorities included 'youth boredom', 'overdevelopment' and 'council performance'.



## Mix of Community Environment and Business

- Respondents were also asked about various aspects of the current mix of community, environment and business and whether these aspects were ‘too low’, ‘too high’ or ‘about right’.
- As the chart below shows, residents see a need for more recreation and shopping facilities in particular. There was also a significant proportion that felt the current housing level is already ‘too high’. There was general consensus that the population level was ‘about right’.

**BALANCE OF NEEDS FOR THE BLUE MOUNTAINS COMMUNITY**





## **Benchmark Comparisons**

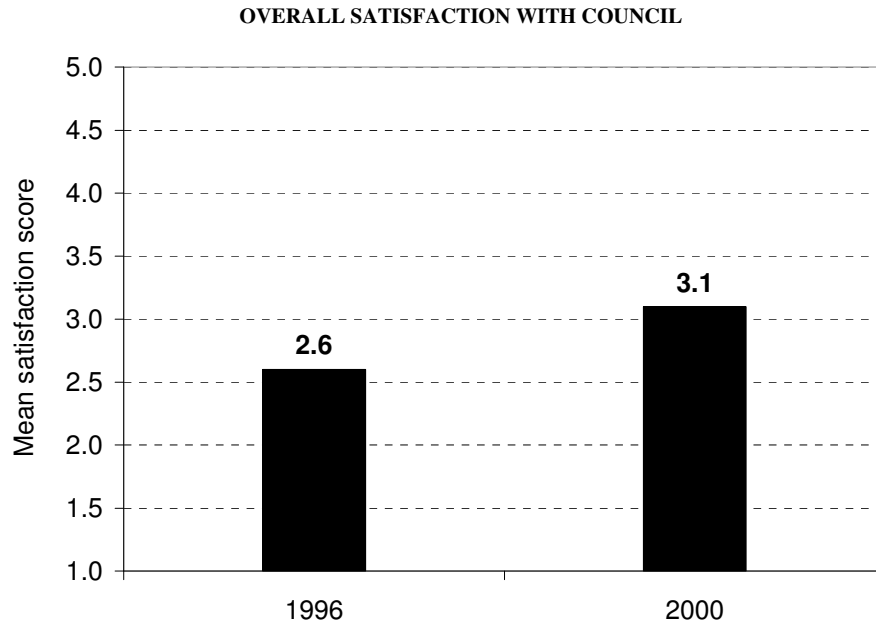
Where comparisons were possible between the results of the current survey and the previous two surveys, they have been highlighted in Section 4.8. The key comparisons are summarised below.

- Comparisons of service and facility ratings between the current survey and the 1996 community survey were possible in some instances\*. They show that council performance appears to have improved significantly in the following areas:
  - ⇒ Pedestrian access generally around shops & community centres
  - ⇒ Footpaths around shopping centres & community facilities
  - ⇒ Litter control
  - ⇒ Maintenance of swimming pools
  - ⇒ Animal control
  - ⇒ Provision of swimming pools
  - ⇒ Protection of natural bushland
  - ⇒ Maintenance of commuter carparks
  - ⇒ Information of Council services
  - ⇒ Provision of community centres & community halls
  - ⇒ Maintenance of community centres & community halls
  
- There was a sharp decline in satisfaction with garbage collection, particularly in area 2 (i.e. Katoomba, Leura, Medlow Bath and Wentworth Falls). Other services and facilities showing a decline in satisfaction compared to the 1996 results included:
  - ⇒ Recycling
  - ⇒ Clean creeks and waterways
  - ⇒ Maintenance & availability of parks and playgrounds
  - ⇒ Library services
  - ⇒ Managing residential development

*\* As stated in the body of the report, precise comparisons with past benchmarks was only possible for a small number of the services and facilities. However, for the sake of providing Council with some indication of comparative performance, indicative comparisons have been made where possible.*



- Encouragingly, benchmark comparisons show that ‘overall satisfaction’ with council has improved since the 1996 measure. The mean satisfaction score of 3.1 for the current survey represented a significant increase on the score of 2.6 recorded in the 1996 survey.



### **Major Issues of Concern**

- Respondents were asked to name major issues of concern, both locally and citywide, in all three surveys.
- A comparison of the results showed that ‘development control’ has increased significantly as an issue of concern at both the citywide and local levels.
- ‘Youth problems’ was identified as another area that appeared to have escalated as an issue of concern both locally and for the entire City.