

ADI Residents Action Group
PO Box 4134
WERRINGTON NSW 2747

Sunday, 3 September 2006

Hon Bob Debus
Minister for the Environment
Level 36 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
Sydney NSW 2000

RE: Acquiring former Air Services Australia site Cranebrook for conservation

Dear Minister,

It is very pleasing to be told by Raymond Fowke of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) that DEC are totally opposed to the development and rezoning of the 181 hectare former Air Services Australia Site which is located in the Penrith LGA at the Northern Rd, Cranebrook.

The Cranebrook site, as you would know, was a former Commonwealth site disposed of cheaply to a developer, IFC Capital Ltd, with minimal environmental assessment undertaken prior to its sale. IFC Capital Ltd purchased the site for \$16.5 million GST inclusive. Senator Ian Campbell at the time of the sale told the Sydney media that the site had no conservation values worth protecting.

As we all know this is far from the truth. The Cranebrook site is in fact of enormous conservation significance and it is great that DEC is on top of this issue recognising the site as a crucial link in a corridor of bush remnants north of the ADI Site.

The concern though is that Penrith Council may allow IFC Capital Ltd a rezoning of the site to facilitate urban development. IFC and Council Planners have been collaborating for over 12 months on a rezoning proposal that allows 85 ha of the site to be used for urban development with the remainder left for conservation. It is believed a levy will be collected from the land sales to bankroll a conservation fund with the landowners using those funds to manage the bushland in perpetuity. It sounds nonsensical.

What is of equal concern is that despite DEC writing to Council urging the entire site be rezoned for conservation not housing, Penrith Councillors have ignored this advice and agreed to continue to work with the developer to seek a negotiated outcome. This information is contained in a memo to all Councillors leaked to ADI RAG (attached)

The entire Cranebrook site should be protected. It is one of many western Sydney sites with immense conservation value that the NSW Government should acquire using the promised Conservation Fund administered by the Growth Centres Commission. Once the land is returned to public ownership it should be put into DEC management with a proper Plan of Management drawn up to allow passive recreation uses for local residents.

Minister we urge you to swiftly intervene in this matter to persuade Penrith Council to rezone the entire site for nature conservation. We urge that the NSW Government put a proposal to Council

that immediately after the entire site is rezoned for conservation the land will be acquired, compulsorily if necessary, so that it becomes part of the NSW National Parks Reserve System.

You would know of the many problems facing unmanaged bush remnants around the State. Where there is unrestricted public access, as is the case at Cranebrook, there is illegal activity such as rubbish dumping, 4WD, trail bikes, firewood collecting and arson. Everyday that this site sits unfenced and unmanaged means more damage to the sites biodiversity. That is why there is an urgent need to act.

We are opposed to Biodiversity Banking. This is not an option for getting a conservation outcome for this site. Biodiversity Banking may never be implemented, if it does become legislated it may take many years to take effect. Still there are no guarantees that IFC would be made to look after the site if became a Biodiversity Banking site. We can't wait for an outcome based on the hypothetical this site needs urgent protection.

I am sure many residents would sign up as volunteers to help DEC out with bush regeneration and land care on the site. Saving this land would create a great deal of goodwill in the local area for DEC and Council as well.

We commend DEC on its stance to oppose the rezoning of the site but we urge you to seek the support of the NSW Government to acquire this site for the sake of the people and environment of NSW. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further discussion.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geoff Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Geoff Brown
Convenor
ADI Residents Action Group
0431 222602

Attachments:

Penrith Council Memo

Report by renowned western Sydney Botanist Teresa James – claims developers flora and fauna survey is flawed