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The fight is on to save our LEPs

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society has launched a community campaign to ensure our current Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) are not downgraded through the adoption of a NSW Government mandated "one size fits all" standard LEP.

There are currently two LEPs operating in the Blue Mountains that are the major determinant of development in the Blue Mountains and were developed through extensive community consultation. The LEPs outline what type of development can occur and where, what needs to be considered when development is proposed such as impacts on the environment and heritage, and minimum development standards.

Both LEP 1991 and LEP 2005 are now under threat as the NSW Government has issued a directive that all LEPs must be changed to conform to a mandatory Standard Instrument LEP (SILEP). It argues the aim of the LEP program is to provide greater consistency in the format and language of LEPs across NSW.

Planning Minister Brad Hazzard has written to Blue Mountains City Council requiring council to convert both LEP 1991 and LEP 2005 into the SILEP format by the end of this year.

Lachlan Garland, the president of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society, said the unrealistic deadline did not allow for any serious or meaningful community consultation or input.

"We do not believe the community is aware of what a serious threat the adoption of the SILEP is to the Blue Mountains environment," Mr Garland said.

"We all love our leafy heritage streets, the escarpment views, the bushland interface and our unique world heritage national parks.

"The environmental planning outcomes that our current LEPs deliver, which underpin our tourist-based economy and World Heritage status, are potentially all under threat if the SILEP is forced on us by the NSW government.

"Our current LEPs are widely recognised as among the best — why change when they obviously deliver environmental outcomes as well as allowing well planned appropriate development?"

Blue Mountains City Council staff and councillors have been lobbying the government for an exemption or some flexibility in its adoption.

"The society is launching a community campaign to save our LEPs," said Mr Garland.

"The campaign will be kicked off shortly by a public meeting so everyone can be better informed about the SILEP and what it means for all of us. The public meeting will be promoted through the society's websitewww.bluemountains.org.au and through advertisements in the Gazette. We are also aiming to involve the community in the campaign through letter writing and other action."

A spokesman for Planning NSW said Blue Mountains City Council is one of only two councils in NSW which are yet to initiate preparation of standard template LEPs.

The SILEP would still allow the adoption of local provisions in response to specific local needs, he said.

"Councils may adopt their own standards for issues such as height, floor space ratios, lot sizes etc; a suite of permitted and prohibited uses in each zone; and a range of provisions on local matters such as: biodiversity and conservation; flooding; additional permitted uses; regulation of sex services premises etc.

"However, the LEP must be consistent with the statewide template.

"Planning and infrastructure minister Brad Hazzard is happy to work with council on its Local Environmental Plan," the spokesman said.