

Submission
No 233

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING SYSTEM AND THE IMPACTS
OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND
COMMUNITIES**

Organisation: Grevillea Waters Retirement Village Yamba

Date Received: 8 April 2024

Inquiry into Planning System and the Impacts of Climate Change on the Environment and Communities

The residents of Grevillea Waters Retirement Village at 36 Golding Street, Yamba have lodged an objection to a proposed residential development, adjacent to the Village, due to the very negative impact, heavy flooding will impose on the health, welfare, and safety of over 200 Village residents whose average age is mid 70's.

The identification of the land as flood plain is not in dispute, even the Flood Risk Management Plan submitted by the developer identifies the land as over 93% flood prone and it acts as a natural water catchment basin in all times of heavy rainfall. Also, the Biodiversity Assessment Report shows in numerous diagrams the local natural water course flowing across the centre of the proposed Lot 2, which becomes an active waterway every time there is period of heavy rainfall, not just during flood events.

With the build-up of the land for the proposed development, (by up to 1 metre) it will mean the floodwater that naturally sits in the water catchment basin of the flood plain will be directed to neighbours' land, including Grevillea Waters Village. Grevillea Waters Village homes have never suffered any floodwater damage over the past 30 years (based on personal histories of residents) but is very likely to suffer some form of floodwater inundation due to the catchment basin being filled and the land level on the northern boundary of the village being raised by 1 metre.

Based on recent events, flood waters filled the channel and lagoon that surrounds Grevillea Waters and then flowed and collected in the natural flood basin located at 30 Golding Street. The recent flood event had water lapping under floorboards of some Grevillea Waters homes requiring specialised drying to minimise damage to homes and ensure growth of mould was prevented. The waters sat, where the proposed houses are to be built, until the water infiltrated the ground over a number of days, not allowing entry or exit of Grevillea Waters residents unless the tidal variations assisted. This floodwater will now be directed towards Grevillea Waters Village entryway when the kerb and guttering is constructed, as shown in the Civil Engineering Plan. This will prevent Grevillea Waters residents, Health Carers (vital daily visits) and Emergency Vehicles (ambulances, etc.) from entering or leaving our community not only due to tidal water movements but also increased water level across the front entryway.

We have attached a reprint of a newspaper article from the Canberra Times dated 3rd November 2023. This news article confirms the following:

- A precedent has been set to shelve a flood plain development by the NSW State Government
- NSW State Government Report declared there would be a "risk to life" in the event of mass evacuation
- The NSW State Government is considering extending the scaling back of any dangerous flood plain area developments – by intervention if necessary
- The article specifically mentions Clarence Valley as one of those 'flood plain' regions
- The NSW State Minister for Planning, Hon. Paul Scully was quoted as saying "We absolutely won't put lives unnecessarily at risk by building on dangerous flood lines"

- Mr Scully said if housing developments did not go ahead, the land could be used in alternative ways.

All the homes in Grevillea Waters village are prefabricated homes manufactured from lightweight materials and not designed to last forever. Any serious inundation of our homes would render them uninhabitable and economically unrepairable. As a result, over 200+ aged residents would become homeless in Yamba because of a flood. None of the village residents have flood insurance on their homes as all the insurance companies label this area as a flood plain and therefore very prone to flooding. So, it makes it financially prohibitive (\$8,000 per year upwards) to insure your home against a flood event and that is if the insurance company will even cover for flood insurance.

Given the overwhelming evidence of the existing flood plain danger to the safety and welfare of the 200+ aged residents of the Grevillea Waters Village, this development should not proceed. Anyone who approves this proposed development or stands back and allows it to happen, must take full responsibility for any tragic circumstances due to permitting housing developments to be built on flood plains.

Summary

A 2020 Flood Plain review by IAG Insurance, listed Clarence Valley in the top 10 highest risk flood plain regions in Australia.

In addition, the 2022 floods here in Yamba caused serious flood inundation in West Yamba – which is almost completely flood plain and is where the Grevillea Waters Village is located.

Despite that, the construction of massive West Yamba residential development projects has been approved by the Clarence Valley Council. Some 700 homes approved and a further 500 homes on the drawing board. As part of this development - much of the flood plain has been filled to a height of up to 3 metres – which will result in a huge displacement of water in the event of a flood similar to the 2022 inundation. Further Development Approvals are proceeding with indecent haste.

Our concern is that Clarence Valley Council seems to ignore the growing flood risks associated with the massive building program they are allowing in West Yamba.

It seems that Yamba is the next Lismore!

Have we learnt nothing from the Lismore / Nepean experiences?

The State Government (see Canberra News article above) claims that it is considering the scaling back of any flood plain area developments – especially where there is a “risk to life” in the event of a mass evacuation. Also that they “absolutely won’t put lives unnecessarily at risk by building on dangerous flood plains.”

There is absolutely no doubt that the proposed residential development adjacent to the Grevillea Waters Retirement Village will definitely cause a “risk to life” and will absolutely “put lives at risk by building on a dangerous flood plain.” Any mass evacuation of 200+ elderly people, many with ongoing medical conditions – would require military grade evacuation planning and execution.

There is no doubt that building homes on dangerous flood plains – is one of the greatest dangers to life in Yamba and NSW.