

MEDIA ALERT

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Panel Pans Catherine Hill Bay Development

An independent Panel set up by the government to assess the development proposal at Catherine Hill Bay has sent it back to the drawing board, saying the project is still not "consistent" coastal policy and sound planning principles.

In a report to the Minister for Planning, Frank Sartor, the Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel recommended that the Minister "defer consideration of the submitted project" until significant changes have been made to the plan.

The Panel was critical of the proposed development on the headland and the scale of the commercial precinct. It also cited the lack of public access, bushfire risk and the scale and density of one section of the proposed development as areas of concern.

This is the second time the Panel has criticised the proposal by the Rose Property Group to build more than 600 houses in the former mining town of Catherine Hill Bay on the Central Coast. In April 2007 the Panel handed down an interim report on the development, saying it was "unacceptable" as it failed to meet the government coastal policy and design guidelines.

Sue Whyte, president of the Catherine Hill Bay Progress Association, welcomes the Panel's report, saying it highlights the controversial nature of development on land that has been zoned for conservation and valued for its heritage.

"Everyone recognised that Catherine Hill Bay is a special place that should be protected for a host of reasons," she says. "The independent panel's report confirms this."

"We urge the government will take into account the independent panel's fair and objective report and consider its recommendations that the proposed development be revised in accordance with sound planning principles."

The Panel submitted its report to the Minister in December last year, but has only been made public in a Parliamentary call for papers on proposed developments at Catherine Hill Bay. Until recently the government has refused to release the report despite FOI requests from the Catherine Hill Bay community.

"It is puzzling that the government has kept this report secret for five months and has only released it because it is under pressure for signing deals with developers who have made significant donations to the NSW Labor Party," Ms Whyte says.

Two developers - Rose Property Group and Coal & Allied - independently plan to develop a total of 900 homes - increasing the population of the 140-year-old former mining village by up to tenfold. The development was included in a controversial land swap deal between landholders and the government as part of its Lower Hunter Regional Strategy.

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