

NEWS

Greens back Perth hills protection

Jenelle Carter

LOCAL action group Save Perth Hills Inc has gained key support from the Western Australian Greens party in its bid to have the Darling Ranges protected from widespread development under rare legislation.

The 150-member group, which made its name through a successful bumper sticker campaign, wants legal protection for a swath of land from Chittering to Serpentine, based on a 1995 Act which guides land use planning and development in the Swan Valley region.

The focus of the group is a development proposal for a 160-unit resort hotel complex on rural-zoned land at Araluen in Roleystone, currently being considered by the Western Australian Planning Commission.

Save Perth Hills claim the project proposed by owners of Araluen Golf Club, Enchanted Valley development Pty Ltd, would create excessive

visual, noise and environmental pollution.

Greens MLC Giz Watson said she planned to work with the group and community representatives over the course of the year to draft a bill, which would seek a more unified and consistent approach to planning in the region, similar to that afforded to the Swan Valley, Leeuwin Naturaliste Ridge and the Adelaide Hills in South Australia.

"We'll be looking at those models and seeing which one works best, but our first task will be to take a logical approach to setting the boundaries of the proposal," she said.

"From preliminary discussions, I think we'll look at catchment areas and decide how far we go eastward."

Ms Watson said she decided to get on board after fielding community concerns about a range of development proposals coming up in the hills, which potentially posed a threat to the area's idyllic environment.

"I think the bill will have a reasonable chance of getting up.

The Government has already been enthusiastic about the Swan Valley Planning Act. It's clear that it is a way of enhancing the community and maintaining values, heritage, lifestyle and a sense of identity," she said.

"The government made this argument for the Swan Valley, so I think they'll see the advantage in this for the hills."

Save Perth Hills chairman and Mundaring resident Mike Davies said the group was not anti-development, rather it supported "appropriate" and sustainable development in the hills.

"The whole [planning] system is far more supportive of development than it is the environment. I think the government should pay more attention to planning sensible infill on the coastal plain, rather than expanding Perth's boundaries," he said.

The group is seeking in-principle support for its proposal from local governments in the area, and is understood to have received unanimous support from the Shire of Chittering.



GREEN PUSH: The greater Perth hills region is under the spotlight from developers and local residents.

Photo: Courtesy Tourism WA