

## 5. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS, VALUES AND ASPIRATIONS

### 5.01 Local residents

Questionnaires were distributed by an essentially random procedure to 65 residents living close to the public land to obtain information about (1) their present use of the area, (2) their views on its environmental problems, and (3) their views on its future use. Details of the random distribution procedure and the questionnaire form are given in Section 18.01 of Part 2.

Tables 7 and 8 summarise the responses to questions about the present use and problems of the public land. Also shown in these tables are the responses of a separate sample of the Friends of Katoomba Falls Valley to the same questions. Assuming the first set of responses is representative of the local residents in general, the main conclusions from Table 7 are:

- a) More than 90 percent of local residents use part of the public land for purposes such as walking, jogging or family outings.
- b) About 61 percent of local residents use the area for the above purposes at least ten times per year.
- c) More than 20 percent of local residents attend motor trials or other organised events on Catalina Circuit.

The main conclusions from Table 8 are:

- a) About 94 percent of local residents consider the public lands are subject to significant environmental problems.
- b) The most frequently recognised environmental problems are rubbish dumping, water pollution, fire hazard and weeds.
- c) Other problems recognised by a number of residents are soil erosion, vermin (rats etc), feral cats and foxes, noise from motor races, overgrazing by horses, litter, abandoned tyres and the unsightly appearance of some areas.

A wide range of remedial measures for the above problems were suggested (see Section 18 of Part 2). The most commonly suggested measures were to implement a programme of weed removal and bush regeneration, and to have more frequent inspections and maintenance by the relevant authorities. Other measures recommended by a number of residents were to take stronger legal action against vandals and rubbish dumpers, and to have more frequent burning of scrub to reduce the fire hazard.

Residents' views on future uses of the public land were also diverse. In this regard, two of the most important issues are:

- 1) Should the public land be left in a relatively natural condition, or should it be developed for commercial or economic uses ?
- 2) Should motor racing continue on Catalina Circuit ?

Although the above were not asked directly in the questionnaire, the respondents' attitudes towards the issues may be inferred from their comments, suggestions and answers to other

questions. On the first issue, as shown in Table 9, a large majority of residents wanted the public land left in a relatively natural condition, and many of these insisted that it must not be alienated from the public. On the second issue the data in Table 9 suggest residents are strongly divided in their attitudes towards motor sports on Catalina Circuit. This particular item will be examined in more detail in 6.03.

**TABLE 7** **QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES ON PRESENT USE**  
**OF PUBLIC LAND**

PRESENT USE OF PUBLIC LAND	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	
	RANDOM SAMPLE	FRIENDS SAMPLE
walking or jogging	24	23
family outings	16	18
organised events on Racing Circuit	7	5
other uses a		
cycling	5	5
walking dog	2	1
nature studies *	2	10
picnicking	2	2
other	2 b	5 c
Totals *	60	69
FREQUENCY OF USE OF PUBLIC LAND		
more than 10 times per year	19	21
2 to 10 times per year	5	2
less than 2 times per year	2	1
never	2	0
Number of questionnaires distributed	65	30
Number of questionnaires returned	33	24
Response percentage	51	80

**Notes**

- a These items were not specified on the form and therefore the response rates would tend to be lower than for previous items
- b Ball games, cross country running
- c Painting, orienteering, meditation, studying rock art, feeding ducks
- \* Difference between Friends' and random sample response is statistically significant.



TABLE 8

# QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC LAND

PERCEIVED PROBLEM	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	
	RANDOM SAMPLE	FRIENDS SAMPLE
rubbish dumping	18	23
vermin (rats etc)	6	10
fire hazard	10	7
sewer overflows	12	15
other problems a		
weeds	6	8
abandoned tyres *	2	7
soil erosion	3	5
urban runoff	3	5
feral cats/dogs/foxes *	2	6
noise from motor races	2	5
unsightly appearance	3	2
overgrazing by horses	2	2
oil/petrol spills *	0	4
building encroachments	2	1
other	4 b	2 c
no significant problems	2	0
totals *	77	102

## Notes

a These items were not specified on the form and therefore the response rates would tend to be lower than for previous items.

b litter (2), trail bikes, vandals

c trail bikes, mosquitoes.

\* Difference between Friends' and random sample response is statistically significant.

TABLE 9

# COMMUNITY OPINIONS ON TWO MAJOR ISSUES

OPINION EXPRESSED OR INFERRED	NUMBER APPARENTLY AGREEING WITH THIS OPINION	
	RANDOM SAMPLE	FRIENDS SAMPLE
1 That the public land should remain in a relatively natural condition	21	24
2 That the public land should be developed particularly for economic gain *	4	0
3 No opinion expressed on either 1 or 2 *	8	0
4 That motor sports are not acceptable on Catalina Racing Circuit *	6	13
5 That motor sports are acceptable on Catalina Racing Circuit	7	1
6 No opinion expressed on either 4 or 5	20	10

\* Difference between Friends' and random sample response is statistically significant





**PLATE 15** Blackberry, as shown here, is one of at least 12 weed species in the area (see Section 2.06). Many local residents reported weeds as a serious environmental problem in their questionnaire responses.

About 25 percent of local residents suggested in their questionnaire responses that Catalina Circuit should have a wider range of uses. They considered that relatively minor construction work would improve its accessibility and suitability for activities such as walking for the elderly and disabled, jogging and running, rollerblading, skate board riding and learner cycling.

About 15 percent of residents suggested the establishment of a good quality walking track right along the valley from near Katoomba Station to the Falls. This would be for the benefit of both residents and tourists. The same idea was popular with respondents from environmental groups as outlined in 5.02. In contrast, 12 percent of residents indicated they wanted the public land left as it is, and several of these stated that more walkways and better access are undesirable.

About 15 percent of respondents expressed recognition of the importance of the swamps for maintaining streamflow, and most stressed the need for better protection of these natural features. Four respondents commented that the area has many observable species of birds.

Many other suggestions and comments were made in the responses to the questionnaire, as listed in 18.01 to 18.04. A number of these referred to the need for new or upgraded amenities in the Frank Walford Park area, including tennis and squash courts, children's play equipment, accessible toilets, more picnic tables, barbecues and shelter sheds. Some residents also considered that part of the public land should be used for an environment/ecotourism centre, convention centre, exhibition hall and botanic gardens.



## 5.02 The Friends and other environmental groups

Most of the Friends of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley live close to the public land and would be regarded as local residents. It was considered necessary to treat them as a special interest group, however, with possibly different views to local residents in general. Statistical tests of the differences, as described in 18.03, show that the views and perceptions of the two groups are closer than might have been expected. The Friends make more overall use of the public land, participate more in nature studies and perceive more environmental problems than local residents in general. As shown in Tables 7 and 8, their responses to most other questionnaire items do not differ statistically from those of other residents.

An important difference between the Friends and others is shown in Table 9. Opposition to motor racing on Catalina Circuit was expressed by 52 percent of The Friends and this was a significantly greater degree of opposition than that of the residents in general.

Many of the suggestions in the Friends' questionnaire responses were similar to those of other local residents, particularly with regard to the desirability of a wider range of uses for Catalina Circuit, better access to the Circuit for pedestrians, a good walking track through the public land, and upgrading of recreational facilities in Frank Walford Park. A comprehensive list of these suggestions is given in 18.04.

Letters were sent to several other environmental groups in the Blue Mountains inviting them to comment on the problems and future use of the public land. Replies were received from the Upper Blue Mountains Conservation Society and the Coast & Mountain Walkers of NSW both of whom stressed the need to protect the natural vegetation and flows of water in the public land. Both also supported the construction of a walking track from near Katoomba Station to the Falls.

One of the above two environmental groups expressed opposition to continued motor racing on Catalina Circuit while the other group suggested this matter should be decided by the local community.

## 5.03 Views of the wider community

Articles on the study were published in the local newspaper, the *Blue Mountains Gazette*, on the 7th and 15th of July 1992 (see 18.08). The latter article included a request for comments from anyone with interests in the study area. Opinions from the wider community were also sought through:

- a) letters to about 60 selected organisations and individuals inviting their comments on the problems and future of the area,
- b) scanning recent issues of the *Blue Mountains Gazette* for other articles relevant to the study, and
- c) informal interviews with more than 20 people having various types of interest in, or knowledge of the study area.

In response to the newspaper request for comments, written submissions were received from eight residents of the Blue Mountains, as summarised in 18.06. Although four of these were from Katoomba, all were regarded as representatives of the wider community. Seven of the submissions were concerned with a range of items while the eighth was concerned mainly with the importance of the public land for cycling.

Most comments and suggestions in the above submissions were similar to those of the local residents. All considered that the public land should remain accessible to the public. Three commented on the poor access to Frank Walford Park from the northern section and another



three mentioned the Aboriginal and/or historical significance of the area. Two referred to the need for a walking or cycling track right through the valley.

The submission on cycling stated that the "preservation of this circuit (i.e. Catalina) is important to recreational cycling in the Blue Mountains." It also mentioned the potential of Frank Walford Park for mountain bike riding and included a document showing the park as one of the features in a proposed "Katoomba Lookouts Tourist Cyclerule".

Seventeen other submissions were received from various clubs and organisations with interests in the public land. Nine of these were from the following:

- Blue Mountains Cricket Association
- First Leura Scout Group
- Girl Guides Association (Greater Blue Mountains Region)
- YMCA of Lithgow
- Regional Army Cadet Unit, Katoomba
- St Canices Primary School, Katoomba
- Katoomba Public School
- Katoomba High School
- Hazelbrook Public School.

The other eight submissions were mainly from motor clubs and stressed the importance of Catalina Circuit for smaller clubs, as discussed in more detail in 6.03.

Two of the nine organisations listed above reported matters requiring attention at the sporting ovals in Katoomba Park. These include poor toilet facilities (especially female), the lack of wet weather shelter, inadequate garbage bins, poor drainage, the need for better fencing around the ovals and the need for practice nets.

Five of the other organisations mentioned matters requiring attention at Frank Walford Park, namely toilet facilities, access to the Racing Circuit, derelict buildings, and the desirability of heating the public swimming pool. Three organisations stressed the need to protect the natural environment. One of these stated that the staff of his school regarded the area as a potentially valuable resource for both education and recreation. They did not want the Racing Circuit closed down, but "would prefer to see options for the area expanded rather than reduced." Four of the nine organisations listed above use the Catalina Circuit once or twice per year for organised events including cross country running carnivals, a billy cart derby and bicycle rallies. One organisation pointed out that the Circuit is "the only traffic-free area of bitumen" in the district.

Two or three Blue Mountains schools, other than those listed above, use various parts of the public land from time to time for nature study and similar educational purposes (according to information from local residents). The Katoomba TAFE College also conducts field excursions and practical classes in environmental science and related tertiary courses in Frank Walford Park (J. Smith, pers comm).

As may be seen in 18.08, several recent newspaper cuttings provided further insight to wider community views on related items. One article from the *Blue Mountains Gazette* of 8/7/92 reported a vote by BMCC aldermen to formally acknowledge the significance of previous Aboriginal communities in settling the Blue Mountains. This, and at least four comments in the questionnaire responses about the former Aboriginal occupation of the study area confirm the growing community awareness of Aboriginal culture and heritage.

Two recent press articles were noted on the moves to seek World Heritage Listing for the Blue Mountains. It seems clear that the majority of Blue Mountains residents now appreciate the natural features of the area and recognise the need to protect these features by controlling and restricting development. However, some newspaper articles suggest there are still significant numbers of residents who believe there is too much emphasis on the natural environment and who resent being told what to do on their own property.

During the distribution of questionnaires, informal interviews were held with members of the Friends of Katoomba Falls Valley, and with other local residents. Discussions were also arranged with a number of people having special knowledge of various aspects of the study, including the following:

K. Allenby (BMCC)	H. Hammon ( businessman)
V. Bear (BMCC)	H. Halliwell (BMCC)
M. Brennan (BMCC)	K. Muir (Colong Foundation)
M. Eades (BMCC)	C. Oxley (Water Board)
T. Farmer (Water Board)	B. Riley (BMCC)
A. Fidler (BMCC)	G. Smith (Design Collaborative)
M. Fragar (BMCC)	N. Stuart (Botanist)
R. Giason (BMCC)	J. Tolhurst (BMCC)
G. Green (BMCC)	R. Wickham (Water Board)
R. Lemire (businessman)	P. Wiggan (Water Board).

Telephone discussions were carried out with other people having special knowledge of relevant aspects, namely

I. Brown (NPWS)	N. Pavan (Soil Cons. Service)
R. Corringham (conservationist)	D. Rhodes (Water Board)
I. Danziger (Katoomba landowner)	M. Skinn (BMCC)
M. Johnson (Department of Lands)	P. Swanson (Water Board)
H. Lloyds (BMCC)	M. Wheen (Water Board).

In general, the range and diversity of opinions expressed by the above were much the same as those of the other individuals and groups surveyed. Each of the following points was made by two or more of these people:

- a) The public land should be retained in a relatively natural condition and it should not be alienated from the community.
- b) A substantial programme of maintenance and restoration work is needed to redress the environmental problems in the area.
- c) Maintaining the quality and quantity of dry weather flows over Katoomba Falls is important to tourism.
- d) A good walking track along the valley via Frank Walford Park would increase the value of the public land for tourism; frequent use of this track should assist in preventing the area being neglected in the future.



#### 5.04 Perceived threats and opportunities

The potential of the public land and other parts of the study area for various types of economic use have lead to a number of recent development applications and proposals, many of which were mentioned in the questionnaire responses and interviews. These include:

- Highmark Festival Village in Frank Walford Park (see Milemark Ltd, 1987)
- Cable Hang Gliding development in Frank Walford Park
- Redevelopment of Katoomba Falls Kiosk area
- Parking area off Gates Avenue
- Extension of caravan park
- Cascade Street medical centre
- Katoomba Golf and Spa Resort
- Residential subdivision between Wellington and Stuarts Roads
- Residential subdivision between Wellington Road and Farnells Road
- Further work on sewerage system by Water Board in the public land
- State Emergency Services Centre in north-western corner of study area
- New Water Board reservoir in Valley Road.

The locations of most of the above proposed developments are shown in Figure 10. It is understood that the last four have all been given approval and are either proceeding or are likely to proceed. Of the remainder, some have been approved and either shelved or abandoned, some are awaiting approval and others have not yet advanced beyond the conceptual stage (as at March 1993).

In general, local residents and environmental groups perceived most of the above proposals as threats to environmental and community objectives. Their main reasons for disapproval were (a) many of the proposals would effectively alienate public land, (b) there would be damage to natural vegetation and swamps, (c) there would be more noise, water pollution and traffic problems, and (d) scenic qualities of the landscape would be spoilt. These fears are not without justification. There is little doubt that all the proposals are likely to have adverse environmental impacts and in a number of cases the impacts may well outweigh the benefits.

The proposed parking area development off Gates Avenue (No. 12 in Figure 10) is one of the above proposals that may seem relatively harmless but could be quite detrimental to important qualities of the valley. The proposed development would damage the stand of trees currently on the site and this would cause a substantial break in the continuity of the tree canopy extending through the valley. A consequent reduction in the habitat value of the green corridor could reduce the diversity of bird species and the high potential of the area for birdwatching.

Another proposal that seems very enterprising but could possibly contribute to environmental problems is the Katoomba Golf and Spa development. Various aspects of this scheme have been discussed with BMCC staff and with Mr G. Smith of Design Collaborative Pty Ltd who were engaged to carry out an environmental study of the area directly affected. The proposal involves the construction of a tourist hotel and residential lodges on part of the golf course, and the consequent relocation of several existing fairways. Although the details had not been finalised at the time of the discussions, a preliminary plan suggested that partial clearing of a steep slope and disturbance of a hanging swamp may be required. Both of these actions, if carried out, would have adverse impacts on local vegetation and soil and also on flows in Katoomba Falls Creek.







The promoters and supporters of most of the above proposals have presented their schemes as opportunities for increased economic wealth and employment for Katoomba, and also as opportunities to "clean up" some of the environmental problem areas of the public land. A few promoters and supporters of the schemes were amongst the people interviewed in the wider community surveys (see 5.03).

Some of the proposals that do not alienate public land should be closely examined as possible opportunities for co-operative or compensatory work to assist environmental management and rehabilitation. Through such work BMCC may be able to recover some of the costs of environmental management and still avoid significant adverse impacts. Examples that could be considered are:

- a) Construction of public steps and access track to Frank Walford Park from Cascade street as part of the medical centre or hang gliding proposals.
- b) Extension of the caravan park to provide low-cost self-contained tourist accommodation and good quality tent sites (see 7.09).
- c) Possible co-operation of the Water Board in the general environmental rehabilitation of the public land. This could be readily justified on the grounds of the Board's recent extensive disturbance of McRaes Paddock and their proposed additional work in the area. Furthermore, Katoomba Falls Creek contributes to Sydney's drinking water and the Board has the prime responsibility for safeguarding its quality (see 6.05, 7.03 and 7.04).
- d) Reconstruction of the drainage system in the north-western corner of Frank Walford Park to be carried out as part of the State Emergency Service's Centre site development. This would be well justified because the collapsed drain referred to in 2.03 (location 1 in Table 1) is just downslope of the site and increased runoff from the development will exacerbate the problem.

### **5.05 Community priorities**

According to the questionnaire responses, local residents and The Friends of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley would evidently give high priorities to the following actions:

- a programme of weed eradication and bush regeneration
- minor works to enable a wider range of uses of Catalina Circuit
- action to eliminate rubbish and tyre dumping
- construction of a walking track through the valley
- better pedestrian access to the northern section of Frank Walford Park.

Management priorities should be influenced by community priorities but should not necessarily be the same. Other matters also need to be taken into account such as the cost constraints and technical or scientific information not readily available to the general community. Consultants F & J Bell & Associates would give higher priority than local residents to protecting the swamps and attending to some active areas of soil erosion. The scheme adopted in this study to allocate priorities in the recommended management plan is outlined in 6.07.



Attention must also be given to the likely priorities of the wider community and BMCC. It should be recognised that there are about ten other valley areas on the Blue Mountains plateau with problems and characteristics similar to those of Katoomba Falls Creek. All have partly urbanised catchment areas of 1 to 4 km<sup>2</sup> and suffer environmental degradation through water pollution, weeds, rubbish dumping and soil erosion. Catchment development on several is adversely affecting important waterfalls (such as Wentworth Falls). All areas probably require similar programmes of restoration and maintenance, and protection from further damage in the future.

It might be argued that the problems of Katoomba Falls Creek deserve particular attention because of (a) the proximity of the public land to the centre of Katoomba, (b) the continuing pressures for various types of development of the public land, (c) the tourist value of the Falls, (d) the Aboriginal and European significance of the area and its potential for birdwatching, and (e) the special longstanding problems of Catalina Circuit. All these points may have to be emphasised by local residents and their representatives if BMCC is to give priority to Katoomba Falls Valley over other areas of similar need.

#### **5.06 Summary of main conclusions from community surveys**

1. More than 90 percent of local residents use the public land for passive recreation. A large majority want it retained in a relatively natural condition and do not want it alienated from the public.
2. Most local residents regard the public land as having significant environmental problems. Rubbish dumping, water pollution, weeds and fire hazard are the most commonly recognised problems.
3. Local residents have varying views on desirable changes in the public land. Many would like to see better pedestrian access, a good walking track right along the valley, and Catalina Circuit modified for a wider range of uses.
4. Local residents are divided on whether motor sports should be continued on Catalina Circuit.
5. Environmental groups have generally similar views to the majority of local residents but are more strongly opposed to motor sports and place greater emphasis on the need to protect the natural environment.
6. Interested members of the wider community are concerned with specific items such as sports facilities, potential for cycling and maintaining motor sports on the Circuit. However, most also want the natural environment of the area protected.
7. Although most of the proposed developments on the public land would have adverse environmental impacts, several of the proposals could be considered as possible opportunities for the cost recovery of environmental restoration and management.
8. Environmental management priorities should be influenced by apparent community priorities but should not necessarily be the same. Other matters such as cost constraints and technical or scientific advice on particular items also have to be considered.