

16th March, 2023

## **Greens Councillor leading the way against inappropriate agritourism changes**

Amendments to the Agritourism State Environment Planning Policy in December last year have removed local councils and communities from the decision-making process for non-agriculture related businesses in areas that are zoned for agriculture. Last-minute changes that were made to the amendments by Liberal Planning Minister Anthony Roberts go far beyond what was discussed during the eighteen-month review process and directly contradict what the Department of Planning and Environment intended the changes to achieve.

New tourism businesses that can be approved without the need for consent by local councils are wedding venues, convention centres, campgrounds and other services that are high impact and create substantial change to the local environment and community. These uses operating in rural settings and immediately adjacent to actual agricultural lands create a huge risk to the safety of people on both properties and should be governed by local councils.

The changes have added a very broad definition of agritourism as a sub-term of agriculture in the Standard Instrument Local Environment Plan that means high impact activities that are unrelated to farming activity can be given fast-track approval pathways. When these changes were first proposed in 2021, agritourism was supposed to be “ancillary to agricultural use of the land” but intervention from the Liberal Planning Minister has now enabled landholders to “earn more income from their tourism business than their primary production business”.

The Minister also doubled the number of visitors allowed to attend farm gate activities at any one time from 50 to 100 and the maximum building size from 100 sqm to 200 sqm. The number of events that would be allowed per annum was also increased from 10 to 52, essentially meaning farm experiences with convention centre style developments could hold an event every week of the year.

**Greens Councillor and candidate for Kiama Tonia Gray said** “The removal of councils from the planning process for significant agritourism businesses is a serious attack on regional areas that contribute significantly to the necessary production of agricultural output.

“The NSW Coalition Government’s claims that these changes were a result of extensive consultation with councils, landholders and organisations is simply not true, they only ever made cursory attempts to speak with affected groups and the feedback they received seems to have been completely ignored.

“I have moved two Notices of Motion through the Shoalhaven Council since these proposed changes were first raised, to call on the Government to allow councils to have a say in what kind of developments are suitable in our communities.

“The Greens across the South Coast have serious concerns about the consequences for our agricultural industries if massively profitable agritourism businesses are allowed to supplant genuine primary producers. We have been fighting these planning changes with the support of some councillors and we will keep on pushing for the NSW Government to reverse these undemocratic and poorly considered plans.

**Greens MP Sue Higginson and spokesperson for agriculture said** “Greens on council all up and down the East Coast of NSW have been ringing the alarm bells about these changes to how agritourism businesses are approved.

“Tonia Gray has been leading the charge on this issue by engaging in discussion with landholders, through her position on Council and via community forums. I have seen and heard from the community at events that she has organised that they are not happy about what the Government wants to open up for development on agricultural land.

“We know that there have been critical issues raised with the agritourism changes by the NSW Farmers who see the potential for land use conflicts and a reduction in the available area that can be used for agricultural purposes. Local Government NSW have also raised alarm about the lack of adequate consultation on the major changes to the policy at the 11th hour of the process.

“The Greens in the NSW Parliament are committed to driving legislative change that will ensure councils and communities are not removed from the planning process for changes in land use that have the potential of significant impacts on the community. We will be putting it to the next Government that the development standards for agritourism must be restored to a minimal impact approach and that agritourism must be ancillary to the core business of farmers.

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