

NSW election 2023

NSW Coalition accused of racism and paternalism after pledge to stop controversial development

Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council proposed building 450 homes at Sydney's Lizard Rock

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The Perrotet government says rezoning at Lizard Rock will not go ahead due to public concerns about bushfires, critical infrastructure and density. Photograph: Edwina Pickles/AAP

The New South Wales Coalition has been accused of racist, paternalistic and politically expedient decision-making after it vowed to spike a proposal to build 450 homes in bushland on Sydney's northern beaches by its Indigenous proponents.

The Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council's chief executive, Nathan Moran, said the decision by the government to block its plan for the 71-hectare Lizard Rock site was an attempt to save three seats at risk from teal independents at the 25 March election.

"It appears that we've been a political football for a number, if not all, political candidates in the northern beaches," he said.

"It's akin to me to racism [and] paternalism - that people believe that they know what's best for us without speaking to us."

Moran claimed on Tuesday the government was yet to contact them about the election commitment.

"We're open to negotiating. We need someone to maybe open the door up and talk to us rather than talk about us," he said.

Planning NSW was yet to make a final determination about the site when the planning minister, Anthony Roberts, over the weekend announced rezoning would not be allowed to go ahead.

"I have always advocated for the right developments in the right place with community support, particularly in keeping with local character," Roberts said.

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A spokesperson said the Coalition had listened to the community.

"The concerns raised by the community in relation to bushfire, critical infrastructure and density of the application cannot be overlooked," the spokesperson said.

Opponents of the plan argued the development was a bushfire risk and that the site should be saved and protected.

The land council insisted it had fire mitigation plans, that the site was damaged already due to prior use and the project would be done in a way that protected biodiversity.

Federation University's professor of Indigenous studies, Dennis Foley, said the land needed protection.

"This land is so important for the ecology of the northern beaches," he said.

"It has a lot of spiritual connection not only to us, but also to the non-Indigenous families in the area. That's why they are fighting so hard to protect it."

The federal independent Mackellar MP, Sophie Scamps, also said there was overwhelming community opposition to the project.

"It wouldn't matter who is proposing this, whether it be the MLALC, a commercial property developer or a local business - the community and I would oppose it for multiple reasons," she said.

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She wants to work with the MLALC to realise a previous idea to turn the site into an Aboriginal-owned national park.

The Pittwater teal candidate Jacqui Scruby also opposes the plan.

"By pressuring the Liberal government into saving Lizard Rock weeks out from an election I was standing up for my community," she said.

Labor has vowed to work with the land council and local council "to consider suitable uses for the site".

The MLALC had argued the site would help the local government meet its housing density targets with the additional properties planned for the site.

The debate over the site comes amid a rental crisis around the state, with the opposition leader, Chris Minns, on Tuesday ruling out a cap on rent increases.

"We won't consider it - we believe our policies in relation to renters make a lot more sense," he said, noting Labor's plan to create a rental commissioner, introduce portable bonds and rebalance development.

The government has also not expressed interest in capping rents, as has been done in other countries include Norway and Turkey.

A NSW Fair Trading spokesperson said the government was working with industry to "ensure fair and equitable rental properties and conditions" across the state.

"Legislation in NSW does not limit how much rent can be increased by, but tenants can look to negotiate the proposed increase with the landlord or agent directly," the spokesperson said.

In December the government introduced a ban on soliciting rent bidding but has yet to fine any agents believed to be encouraging the practice.

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