



Councillor Sonya Phillips

Mayor of Baulkham Hills Shire



MEDIA RELEASE

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AGRI-TOURISM MUST SURVIVE PLANNING CHANGE

Mayor Sonya Phillips appealed today for more agriculture and tourist linked development to be preserved in Baulkham Hills Shire as the Department of Planning begins finalisation of the North-West subregional planning strategy.

“Urbanisation and security of arable land are uneasy bedfellows, but our community has until March 28 to make submissions and let the Government know we want to preserve the rural character of our Shire, and to do that we must be allowed to grow viable industries related to agriculture and tourism,” she said.

The Government’s planning strategies will be finalised by mid-2008 and will define the future of urban growth centres like Castle Hill, Norwest and Rouse hill.

But the study will also set development controls on land use and land release throughout the Shire.

“It is important that we all send a message that we support the concept of argi-tourism and agri-businesses to strengthen the North-West subregional plan,” she said.

The value of agricultural produce in the Sydney Basin is worth one billion dollars and employs 11,000 people, with Baulkham Hills Shire contribution amounting to \$132 million value with 637 employees earning wages worth \$23 million, according to the 2006 Census.

The Shire receives 190,000 tourists annually, and based on national projections that tourism accounts for 4.3 per cent of GDP, the Shire’s tourism industry is worth \$560 million annually.

“The documentation for the current planning changes indicate the Government is clearly saying our rural and resources lands are not to be curved up for urban development.

“We have a chance now to argue for preservation of lands that we can utilise productively, and identify opportunities for agriculture based on linkages with tourism and other related agricultural businesses.

“In Britain, it is cool to adapt to ‘slow food’ that is grown and prepared for local consumption, instead of fast food’ which has to be transported thousands of kilometres to its market adding to our greenhouse gas emissions.

“It is also untrue to believe that as our Shire develops into a service and knowledge economy, that agriculture will die out.

“Agriculture in our region needs to evolve as a lifestyle choice for our landholders and our visitors alike.

“Our Farm Gate trail, expansion of opportunities for Hawkesbury Harvest, combined with our Heritage Trail and the attraction of our parks, reserves and Hawkesbury resorts, can be a springboard to new agri-businesses,” Mayor Phillips said.

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For further information about this media release, contact Michael Ross, Baulkham Hills Shire Council's Senior Communications Consultant on 0416 406 960