

Bathurst go-kart track will not go ahead on Mt Panorama's sacred Indigenous site

Federal environment minister Sussan Ley listens to 'passionate community debate' and determines the area is culturally significant



A proposed go-kart atop Mount Panorama in Bathurst NSW will not be built after the federal environment minister, SussanLey, intervened to protect the sacred Indigenous site.

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A contentious go-kart track will not be built atop Mount Panorama in Bathurst after the federal government intervened to protect a sacred Indigenous site.

The federal environment minister, Sussan Ley, temporarily halted the plans in March, three days before construction was to begin at the motor racing site in regional New South Wales.

In 2019 the Wiradyuri Traditional Owners Central West Aboriginal Corporation lodged a protection application over concerns a sacred women's site and endangered flora would be destroyed.

Four local councillors also opposed the proposed location for the track, and last year launched an unsuccessful bid to overturn the council's approval.

After a visit to the site and hearing "passionate community debate", Ley agreed it was culturally significant.

The roughly triangular area protected is adjacent to McPhillamy Park, which until 2015 formed part of a campsite on the mountain.

The declaration under section 10 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act safeguards the public use of the area as well as its heritage value, Ley said.

Major earthworks, vegetation clearing constructing buildings within the area have been banned, with protections to last 10 years.

The decision was significant for all First Nations people, the corporation's public officer, Yanhadarrambal Jade, said.

"Logic has prevailed," he said.

Protection of the site is also a win for motorsport lovers, he said, because it paved the way for camping to resume.

"We encourage and embrace car racing at Mount Panorama/Wahluu," he said. "When they go camping, sit around their fires, yarn up or catch up and look at the stars, they're doing exactly what our people have done for tens of thousands of years in some of those areas."

Ley also dispelled claims the applicants sought to prevent existing motor racing and recreational activities on the whole mountain.

"[The declaration] does not, and nor did the applicant seek to, prevent existing motor racing, existing sporting and recreational activities or other public activities on the mountain," she said.

"I strongly hope that the Bathurst regional council can continue to explore options for a go-kart track which seems to have significant support if it were to be placed at another location than the top of the mountain."

Jade hoped the corporation could work on building a positive and viable relationship with the council.

"We hope that the Bathurst regional council will abide by the promise that the mayor made when he said that they would accept the referee's decision," he said.

However, general manager David Sherley said: "Council is seeking advice to investigate the full ramifications of the section 10 [declaration]. While council is disappointed in the decision, we will abide by that ruling at this time.

"Council notes that neither our own commissioned reports or the minister's commissioned report indicated that a section 10 should be placed on the site."