**Royal Geographical Society of South Australia**

**URBANIZATION OF THE MT LOFTY RANGES**

* **Adelaide Hills under pressure**

**SEMINAR PROGRAM**

**1 – 5 pm, 25 August, 2023**

**Hetzel Theatre, Institute Building, State Library of SA**

Good afternoon and welcome to this seminar looking at the many challenges around increasing urbanisation of the Mt Lofty Ranges, brought to you by the Royal Geographical Society of SA

May I acknowledge that we meet on the traditional land of the Kaurna people and that we respectfully acknowledge their leaders of past, present and emerging.

My name is Leigh Radford and I’m the current President RGSSA … and the reason we’re here is because our Society is keenly interested in exploring contemporary issues which affect our state – and today’s topic touches on so many areas of Geography and other disciplines. I want to stress that RGSSA has no position on today’s subject and simply wishes to facilitate and promote public discussion on the issues. We’ve assembled an impressive panel of well credentialled people today to do that …and I’d like to thank Dr Andrew Lothian for his leading role in bringing this forum together.

Just a few practicalities first – toilets are out the door, downstairs and keep going!

We’re giving all speakers 20 minutes to convey their perspectives and priorities. If there’s time, I’ll allow some questions to each before we move on.

Towards 3pm we’ll take a break for afternoon tea.

At the end of presentations, we’ll bring everybody back for some group discussion and to allow questions from the floor.

So to briefly set the scene, the Mt Lofty Ranges (or the Adelaide Hills) are absolutely unique in the Australian context. Within half an hour’s drive from the city, you enter a completely different physical environment – it’s cooler, has double the rainfall of Adelaide and has some of the best (and almost only) high rainfall agricultural land in the state. It’s highly productive …but we’re steadily covering it in concrete …and that’s partly because it’s a fabulous place to live. But it’s also because of urban pressures in Adelaide and the need for urban expansion.

From my perspective, I’m keenly interested in today’s discussion. In fact over four decades ago, I explored similar themes as part of my Year 12 Geography Field elective – in what was then the more confined area of the old Stirling District Council. I went on to do Honours in Biogeography at the University of Adelaide and am keenly interested in these issues in the hills. And I am also a lifetime resident of the ranges!

It is abundantly clear to anyone that the Mt Lofty Ranges are under pressure. Less than 10% of the original vegetation remains. It’s highly fragmented and continues to be made more so. Bird species have disappeared, some wildlife has disappeared, and some has proliferated as we’ve changed the landscape. There also now striking examples of how climate change is affecting the hills – something which is very obvious in the native vegetation, which is experiencing less rainfall, longer periods of lower rainfall and higher temperatures – all contributing to elevated risk of devasting fire. Feral animals and noxious weeds are a huge problem. And then on top of all of this, is the pressure of urbanisation. When I was a boy, the towns of the hills had distinct boundaries, farms were more prevalent and there were **far fewer** **people**. Today the towns of Crafers, Stirling, Aldgate and Bridgewater are a sprawling urban conurbation without distinctive separation.

Mt Barker – well that has changed enormously – from a country town to now an ever-growing suburb of Adelaide. And as Transport Minister Tom Koutsantonis conceded on Radio just yesterday, the phenomenal growth of Mt Barker and surrounding areas, is still in the early stages of the expansion envisaged by a previous Labor Government. The pressures are enormous in this area, but they ripple out and radiate across the entire ranges.

How many other hills towns could I also mention – all the way to Murray Bridge in the east, towards the Eden Valley, possibly Clare in the north, or another sprawling suburb in the south, which stretches from Goolwa to Victor Harbour – all once small towns and such different areas.

The hills are changing before our very eyes and without concerted action, the Mt Lofty Ranges we bequeath to our children and grandchildren will be vastly different again from what we’ve known. So what legacy will we leave?

I hope that today’s speakers will shed light on all these many pressures and help navigate a path to a sustainable, less pressured environment …where competing priorities can find sensible balance. Do we have the will and resolve?

Well now to the first of our speakers…..