The Smiths Road Community’s Submission

to the

Cooma-Monaro Settlements Strategy 2016-2036 Discussion Paper

## Summary of the Smiths Road (SR) Community’s views

* The SR Community supports a small amount of managed population growth to increase the total resident population to 200-250. This reflects the Community’s desire to create lots:
	+ with dwelling entitlement to allow their children to build⎯children who were raised in the area and now wish to return to live with their families and support their ageing parents;
	+ that would attract additional community members to fulfill civic roles, including RFS functions and management of the SR community building and fire shed;
	+ that would attract community-minded residents who would assist their neighbours and facilitate social connection and support; and
	+ that would be of a suitable size to preserve the natural and scenic environment and allow for manageable acreage for the proper control of weeds and feral animals.
* The SR Community would welcome the development of a joint strategy between Council and the ACT government for the area. The SR Community undertakes to support and contribute to the development of such a strategy.
* The SR Community does not support the construction of a road to the south linking Smiths Road to Michelago due to the considerable expense and likely low usage.
* The SR Community contends that s94 contributions from new development in the area could more usefully be expended improving and sealing sections of Smiths Road where the majority of development exists, and where residents most commonly travel to access work, health, education and retail services.
* The SR Community supports a reduction in the minimum lot size applying to the northern end of Smiths Road (north of the ‘locked gate’) to 16 hectares and rezoning of this area to E4 or RU5.
* The SR Community supports the re-introduction of lot averaging to allow for development that is sympathetic to the natural environment, improves amenity and minimises costs to developers and purchasers, such as for roads and infrastructure.
* The SR Community supports the retention of the E3 zone in the southern portion of Smiths Road (south of the ‘locked gate’).

Introduction

This submission was developed by residents of Smiths Road and the associated roads⎯Hugs Lane, Contour Road, Applebox Road, Kullaroo Road and Yellowbox Road⎯who live in the localities of The Angle and Clear Range (the SR Community) in the Cooma-Monaro Shire (the Shire) to the Cooma-Monaro Settlements Strategy 2016-2036 discussion paper. It presents the majority view of Smiths Road landowners following a meeting on   1 February 2016 and subsequent consultation with landowners who were unable to be present at the face to face meeting.

This submission does not provide comment on the scenario’s posed in the discussion paper, but offers:

* factual information about the SR Community, some of which is contrary to information presented in the discussion paper;
* a response to the questions posed in the discussion paper; and
* some analysis of the current development pattern, and potential for development in the area based on a reduced minimum lot size of 16 hectares in the northern end of Smiths Road.

Firstly, members of the SR Community wish to acknowledge the effort of the Shire in preparing the discussion paper. As you are aware, the SR Community has been waiting for a strategic review since the late 1990’s.

We also bring to your attention previous statements of the Shire that capture the overarching aspirations of the community in planning for its future:

*“...to encourage healthy, vibrant communities that value and retain the unique social and natural environment while promoting growth and responding to the needs and aspirations of the community*.”

Our response to issues raised in the discussion paper

As stated in the discussion paper, the Shire recognises the active participation of the SR Community in strategic planning. However, we are disappointed that many of the issues we have raised continuously since the Shire took over the administration of our land in 2004 have been ignored. In preparing this submission, are hopeful that the information provided here will be objectively considered when developing the draft Settlement Strategic Plan.

We agree with the discussion paper that the proximity of the area to the ACT is a significant driver of price and demand for land in the area. However, the Shire should acknowledge that many of the residents seeking development in the Smiths Raod area are not driven by economic factors, but rather social and environmental aims, including a desire to create lots for their children and carers as they age, the need for more residents to undertake necessary civic duties and to allow for improved land management.

To avoid misinformation and confusion, it would be useful for any further planning documents to discuss the zone in two parts to reflect relevant information pertaining to the largely cleared farmland and populated area on the northern portion of Smiths road, as against the sparsely populated and more environmentally sensitive area to the south.

As we have previously stated in submissions and a community petition, the assignment of E3 zoning to the whole Smiths Road area is inconsistent with land use zoning in the rest of the Shire, creating inequity and confusion about planning rules. The current E3 zoning and development standards do not recognise the current development pattern, nor acknowledge the publicly stated needs and desires of the community. It does not recognise the distinct differences in the land use, geology, topography and ecology between the southern and northern parts of Smiths Road.

Future strategic planning documents could also give more attention to the small business and future economic enterprises that could be encouraged in the area. For example, the area’s close proximity to tourist attractions in the ACT (such as Tidbinbilla) and its proximity to the Murrumbidgee River which creates opportunities for eco-tourism and public recreation. The Shire could also consider other development standards that should be expanded to allow for a small amount of managed economic activity consistent with historical uses of land in the area.

In considering Smiths Road as uniform environment, the discussion paper overly focuses on the sensitivity of the environment and bushfire risk in the northern part of Smiths Road, attention that is not similarly focused on other Shire settlements to the east that exist with the same ecology and frontage to the Murrumbidgee river (such as the Silver Brumby estate, Bredbo, and Michelago).

Response to discussion points (page 67)

## What is a sustainable population level for Smiths Road?

In ongoing communications with the Shire, the SR Community has continuously called for planning controls which support population growth.

In the attached spreadsheet, we have provided information that shows that the current resident population is around 125 people. Under current zoning there is potential for another 30 residents if (in the unlikely event) every nonresident landowner applies for development on lots that have existing building entitlement.

Residents consider the current population to be too small to be sustainable, yet further development is limited due to the restrictive zoning which continued with the application of the E3 zone to this area. At its current size, the SR Community it is too small to maintain its civic leadership roles and local volunteer functions such as maintaining the Smiths Road community building and fire shed.

This view is supported by research evidence that postulates a population size of 200-250 people as the minimum number of people needed to sustain a healthy and vibrant community.

Residents of Smiths Road who are ageing or work in the ACT struggle with the significant effort and cost needed to manage the weeds and feral animals on lots of 80 hectares or more. As such, the SR community supports a reduction in the minimum lot size to 16 hectares to facilitate population growth, allow for more manageable sized lots and reflect the rural lifestyle preferences of the majority of landowners.

It is extremely unlikely that a reduced minimum lot size to 16 hectares will result in an increase in the population to 300-400 people as stated in the discussion paper. For example, based on a desktop assessment, an 80 hectare lot could be divided into 5 lots of 16 hectares each. In reality, the topography, limited potential house sites, road access and landowner prerogatives would significantly reduce that number.

* The SR Community supports a moderate amount of managed population growth to increase the total resident population to 200-250. This reflects the Community’s desire to create lots:
	+ with dwelling entitlement to allow their children to build⎯children who were raised in the area and now wish to return to live with their families and support their ageing parents;
	+ that would attract additional community members to fulfill civic roles, including RFS and management of the SR community building and fire shed;
	+ that would attract community minded residents who would assist their neighbours and facilitate social connection and support; and
	+ that would be of a sufficiently small size to preserve the natural and scenic environment, but allow for manageable acreage for the proper control of weeds and feral animals.

## Is there a possibility of a combined strategy for the area in conjunction with the ACT?

The SR Community would welcome a stronger relationship and combined strategy between the Shire and the ACT government. While such an agreement seemingly exists on paper, our experience is that the bulk of consultation with the ACT Government occurs at our community level. For example, when flood damage in 2010 and 2012 to the Gudgenby Bridge on Smiths Road isolated the community, our Community Committee and the Smiths Road Rural Fire Brigade worked closely with ACT Emergency Services and with Territory and Municipal Services as the ACT Government’s emergency and long-term responses were developed and implemented. For its own part, our community has also been quick to respond to fire emergencies in the ACT, working alongside the ACT’s professional and volunteer fire fighters.

In the past few months, the SR Community became aware of an application by the ACT Light Car Club (LCC) that was being considered by the ACT government. The LCC was applying for a licence to operate at a permanent site on a government lot on the southern boundary of the ACT on Smiths Road, close to the northernmost residents of Smiths Road. The lack of consultation with residents and the Shire, and resulting community angst, could have been averted if regular cross border meetings were held between the Shire and the ACT government.

The ACT government has also commenced a long-term plan for sealing the ACT portion of Smiths Road, with substantial road improvement and 1km of sealing occurring in the past 12 months. There may be opportunities for the Shire to develop a joint strategy for upgrading and paving for the entire of Smiths Road.

Other issues that could be explored include regular road maintenance, rubbish collection, and consistency in the application of development principles and land uses. The Shire could contribute to the upgrading of Angle Crossing Road as a more cost effective way of giving residents all weather access to the Monaro highway and, as a result, the services of the Shire.

The SR Community would welcome the development of a joint strategy between the Shire and the ACT government for the Smiths Rd area. The SR Community undertakes to support and contribute to the development of such a strategy.

## Would reduction in the isolation of Smiths Road by construction of a new road linking it to Michelago in the south justify the cost? When would the opportune time for this to happen?

The majority of landowners from the SR Community do not support the construction of a road to the south linking the community with Michelago. As shown in the attached spreadsheet, any revenue raised through s94 contributions would fall significantly short of the millions it would require to construct such a road. While such a road may be useful in the rare event of a significant bushfire, at other times it is unlikely the road would be utilised to any great extent.

As stated in previous submissions, road usage to the north is driven by transit to the more closely located employment, health services and shopping in the ACT (particularly Tuggeranong and Lanyon, and not Hume and the airport as stated in the discussion paper). This would be unlikely to change with the development of a very expensive southern linkage road. Further, our community is well equipped to respond to bushfire, with a rural fire service and an existing Neighbourhood Safer Place (Community Hall and Fire Shed) that could be expanded at a low cost to the Shire, if necessary, over time as the community grows. If the Shire wished to provide an alternative route for residents who wished to evacuate in the event of a serious bushfire, some of the existing fire trails could be upgraded at significantly lower cost than creating a link road and bridge to Michelago.

The SR Community does not support the construction of a road to the south linking Smiths Road to Michelago due to the considerable expense a likely low usage.

The SR Community contends that s94 contributions from new development in the area could more usefully be expended improving and sealing the northern end of Smiths Road where the majority of development exists, and where residents most commonly travel to access work, health, education and retail services.

## What is an appropriate minimum lot size for an expanded Smiths Rd? Where should the boundaries of this area be?

In line with the numerous submissions residents have previously made to the Shire on appropriate planning controls, the SR Community supports a reduction in the minimum lot size to 16 hectares for the northern portion of Smiths Road and rezoning of this area to E4 or RU5. The SR Community supports the retention of the E3 zone in the more environmentally sensitive southern portion of Smiths Road past the ‘locked gate’.

We do not support the boundary suggested in the discussion paper as this does not fit with the current development pattern, natural environment, land use pattern or social catchment of the area. The SR Community proposes that the southern boundary of the rezoned area with a minimum lot size of 16 hectares be defined to the south by the ‘locked’ gate which reflects the end of the Shire maintained portion of the road and where lots of around 16 hectares with dwellings already exist.

Further, the SR Community supports the re-introduction of lot averaging provisions that would allow new subdivisions to take account of the natural environment, increase amenity and minimise costs to landowners and future residents.

The SR Community supports a reduction in the minimum lot size applying to the northern end of Smiths Road from the ‘locked gate’ to 16 hectares and rezoning of this area to E4 or RU5.

The SR Community supports the re-introduction of lot averaging to allow for development that is sympathetic to the natural environment and minimises costs to developers and purchasers, such as for roads and infrastructure.

The SR Community supports the retention of the E3 zone in the southern portion of Smiths Road as bounded by the ‘locked gate’.