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PlanSA

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15 August 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

## **RE: Stirling/Mt Lofty Golf Resort Proposal – Opposition**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Walking SA represents all forms of walking in South Australia, including walking for recreation, transport and health. As the peak body, Walking SA, represents over 5000 members and 25,000 supporters, and gives voice to the wider active walking community of approximately 700,000 South Australians.

Walking SA holds a view that this area of the Mt Lofty Ranges is a critical biodiversity environment, forming part of any already diminished native vegetation cover of the Mt Lofty Ranges. The Proposal fails to appropriately respond to the sensitivities and amenity value of its location.

Walking SA strongly opposes the Mt Lofty Golf Resort Proposal (the Proposal) on the following grounds:

### **1. The Proposal is inappropriate to the sensitivities of its location**

The Proposal is neither sensitive to the critical nature of its environment or of a scale appropriate to the location. Instead, the Proposal deals with the location as a distinct parcel of land by arguing the negative impacts of the development are somehow offset by the attributes of the adjoining Mt George Conservation Park. In doing so, the Proposal fails to recognise the critical nature of contiguous parcels of land for the preservation of biodiversity. It is not reasonable to maintain that the limited parcel of protected land that makes up the Mt George Conservation Park can be the counter for the removal of adjacent native bushland.

The scale of the Proposal diminishes the high value natural environment of the site. Arguably, a resort that includes a hotel, pods, clubhouse, pro-shop and administration areas, along with an update to golf course and 200+ car spaces does not respond appropriately to the intrinsic value and sensitivities of the site.

### **2. The Proposal negatively impacts the remaining native vegetation cover**

Since European settlement, the Mount Lofty Ranges has been cleared of its indigenous vegetation at increasingly alarming rates. Now, less than 13% of the original vegetation cover remains. This is a death by a thousand cuts to the limited native vegetation cover. Rather than develop on its current footprint, the Proposal expands the built form further into the natural environment. A better proposal would maintain the buildings on the current footprint and develop in a way that adds to the native vegetation cover rather than continuing to deplete it.

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Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing

### 3. The Proposal negatively impacts on threatened flora and fauna

The proposed area of development is a known habitat for a range of threatened species including the Nationally Endangered Bassian Thrush. In addition, Manna gums, the main floral species to be cleared under this development proposal, are listed as rare under the National Parks and Wildlife Act SA (1972).

The proposed clearance of land consequently reduces the natural habitat, and would negatively impact an already fragile environ for threatened flora and fauna in this location.

### 4. Walker visitation and amenity

The Proposal recognises that the Heysen Trail, a premier walking trail, passes through the golf course. It also recognises its high volume of walkers. This section of the trail also crisscrosses with the National Trust's Pioneer Women's Trail (not referenced in the Proposal) and is part of the larger trail network. The Pioneer Women's Trail honours the early Europeans who settled in Hahndorf, and supplied Adelaide with fresh produce at a time when most foodstuffs had to be imported into South Australia. Within weeks of their arrival in 1839, 'the women and girls were walking the rough bush track to Adelaide, 35km away. They left the village at midnight, carrying baskets of vegetables and dairy products on their backs or on yokes across their shoulders.'<sup>i</sup>

The amenity of the Mt George Conservation Park and its surrounds, including this section of the Heysen and Pioneer Women's Trail, holds special significance for the South Australian community. Many people use the trail network on a daily basis and others participate in the annual pilgrimage to trace the steps of our women pioneers. Research supports the prevalence of walkers as an unrivalled 89% of all park visitors.<sup>ii</sup> Despite this, the Proposal generally addresses the trail as an access issue without regard to the amenity of the bushland setting forming an integral part of the trail experience. As a result, the Proposal fails to address the *Statewide Trails Strategy* intended to utilise trail experiences as a means to put South Australia on the tourism destination map, ultimately, as "a leading destination for trail experiences"<sup>iii</sup>. The Trails Strategy seeks to align with a series of existing Government Policy including *Parks 2025 Strategy*, Department for Environment and Water; *Regional Development Strategy*, PIRSA, and *Regional Visitor Strategy 2025*, SA Tourism Commission. The Proposal should respond appropriately to the impact of the development on these walking trails and the trail experience.

## Conclusion

Walking SA would be happy to clarify or expand on any aspect of this submission.

Yours faithfully,

Sharon Kelsey  
Executive Director  
Walking SA

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<sup>i</sup> See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/hahndorf-pioneer-womens-trail-history/>

<sup>ii</sup> Statewide Trails Strategy 2022-2032

<sup>iii</sup> Statewide Trails Strategy