Gerry Wood, the Independent Member for Nelson, says he has no doubts that the Planning Commission is going through the motions and except for some minor changes such as mothballing the Howard Springs Forestry land for the time being, the Draft SubRegional Plan will be approved regardless of the views of rural residents.

Gerry says this is highlighted by the speed which the consultation is now happening with a meeting called in Howard Springs with 24 hours’ notice except for those who were notified by email. The Humpty Doo meeting held two days later was attended by 15 people. Many found out only through the Taminmin Library email. Rural residents don’t collect their mail from the post office every day!

He says it would have made good sense to send the subregional pamphlets out, give time for people to read and mull over them and allow residents to plan ahead for any public meetings that might happen - instead a big rush.

Gerry says he supports an expansion of Activity Centres but how many people know that the Planning Commission is proposing urban development along both the Arnhem and Stuart Highways that goes for kilometres as shown in the maps handed out? How many people know that the rural residential land shown on the new Howard Springs Activity Centre map is not the same as the present Litchfield version of rural residential?

Gerry says that for ages the Planning Commission, The Department of Planning and some powerful developers have been pushing to make the minimum rural lot size decrease from 1ha to 0.4ha. Rural residents don’t want that to change but the Planning Commission is trying to sneak the change into the subregional plan by adding a new clause which says in relation to Activity Centres locate Zone RR (Rural Residential) lots, with a minimum area of 4000 m2, as a buffer to rural lifestyle areas.

Gerry says whilst there is nothing wrong with a 4000sqm buffer within an Activity Centre residents will see this change as a sneaky way of changing the definition of the RR zone and this will only cause confusion. RR zone should stay 1ha and 4000 sqm blocks should have their distinct non rural zone called Large Urban (LU). If residents only read the pamphlet given out by the Planning Commission they will believe that where the plans show Rural Residential, the minimum lot size will be 1ha, they won’t...
know it will be 4000 sqm or 0.4ha because it is not written on the pamphlets – it’s on a more detailed version on the web site! That’s sneaky.

He says as these new plans will affect some residents directly there should be a requirement that those landowners to be notified personally. For instance, under this plan some residential land will be rezoned, some rural block owners living on a quiet local road could have that road turned into a main road, some areas presently zoned conservation will become residential or sport and recreation and some wetlands are going to ‘managed’ to allow more subdivision.

Gerry believes that the consultation process will be claimed to be a great success by the Planning Commission and the Government and the numbers of places and people contacted will be shown as a great example of consultation.

Gerry says that in the end it is the quality of the consultation that should be considered and the opportunity for people to be given a range of options to consider – that didn’t happen. The proposed urban areas of Noonamah Ridge and Noonamah/ Hughes highlights that fact - no Planning Commission’s public meetings in the area, no options, a very limited and non-conclusive survey by one of the developers. In the end the Planning Commission claimed it had consulted and they and the Minister supported the urbanisation of a large part of the rural area. The developers got what they wanted.

Gerry says the Minister should not support these changes until residents have an opportunity to be properly informed, given options and be given a chance to have a say through a less rushed process. With an election close at hand perhaps decisions should be put on hold so that the Opposition and Independents can have an opportunity to go to the polls with their version of how the rural area might be developed.

Or is it the Government’s plan to push this through before the election hence the sudden consultation process that is happening now?