



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Hunter Bird Observers Club Conservation Report 2013

1. Introduction – The Good

HBOC continued to work with the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority, NPWS, Ausgrid, NCIG, PWCS and Newcastle City Council in order to promote the welfare of birdlife in the Hunter Region.

HBOC now has a member, P. Baird, on the NCIG Consultative Board which meets a few times during the year to discuss the coal loader project which impacts on Deep and Swan Ponds. C. Herbert continues to sit on the committee for the Draft Plan of Management for Hunter Wetlands National Park (HWNP) which may be completed in 2014. Chris also attends the Coastal Technical Working Group. A. Lindsey continues to sit on the steering committee for Hexham Swamp and Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Projects.

All the tidal gates on Ironbark Creek at Hexham are now open allowing tidal water into Hexham Swamp which has resulted in improved wetland function and its attributes and the return of many hundreds of birds including migratory shorebirds. The Tomago site of HWNP continues to receive tidal water resulting in an increase in saltmarsh and the return of many hundreds of birds including migratory shorebirds.

A bird viewing platform and educational signage has been installed at Walka Waterworks thanks to the persistent efforts of P. Baird, J. Smart, L. Mee.

The Warkworth Extension open cut mine was rejected by the Land and Environment Court. This was a significant win for the environment. However, the NSW government and Rio Tinto have lodged an appeal in the Supreme Court.

It is imperative that HBOC's conservation work continues and in order for this to happen a new conservation officer is urgently needed. HBOC has a very good name in both industrial and government circles and avifauna welfare is now on most agendas. It has been a hard slog to reach this point and if HBOC wants to keep bird conservation in the forefront we need to keep up the momentum. We all like to go birdwatching but if we want to see birds, then we need to make every effort to preserve their habitat. One of the main jobs of the conservation officer is to keep track of correspondence. As you will see below, other members are prepared to write submissions and letters. Conservation effort is the responsibility of every member of the Club.

2. More Detailed Account of Activities

Hexham Relief Roads Project

HBOC submission made December 2012. There were ca. 33 objections including HBOC's. Hexham Relief Roads Project impacting the north eastern end on Hexham Wetland was approved and work to construct five additional rail tracks commenced in October 2013. The project will take at least 15 months. Two offset sites were proposed in the original EA: the Swamp Oak forest to the north west and the wetland to the south beyond the old coal washery site. The Upper Hunter Valley Alliance formed out of ARTC has enabled access along Woodlands Close and has been most helpful. AL

Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Threatened Species and Ecological Communities' Protection in Australia

In January 2013 M. Newman prepared a submission on The Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Threatened Species and Ecological Communities' Protection in Australia by the Australian Government – Senate – Standing Committee on Environment and Communications. HBOC is mentioned several times in the published report produced in August 2013.

Greenpeace visit

M.Roderick attended a meeting with Greenpeace March 2013 to raise awareness of impacts of coal industry on the Hunter Valley. Positive media came out of the event.

Ramsar additions

AL attended the first meeting convened by M. Osborne to discuss possible Ramsar-listing for wetlands in the Hunter Estuary not already listed, 25/03/2013. No further action to date.

Warkworth

April 2013: Warkworth Extension open cut coal mine was rejected by the Land and Environment Court. The Chief Judge (Preston) wrote:

“Balancing these significant adverse environmental and social impacts against the material economic and social benefits of the Project, I consider the Project has not been established to be justified on environmental, social and economic grounds. Warkworth's project application therefore should be refused. As a consequence, the Minister's decision to approve the Project is now replaced by the Court's decision to disapprove the carrying out of the Project. The Warkworth mine now will need to be confined to and operate in accordance with the 2003 development consent alone”.

Since then the Government has changed the 2003 Deed of Agreement and the matter is before the Supreme Court.

PWCS Terminal 4

March 2013 many members of HBOC attended the protest rally against PWCS Terminal 4 coal loader.

PWCS Terminal 4 coal loader was put on hold in April 2013. PWCS made a new application, Preferred Project Report, in which no changes were made to the impacts on Swan Pond. HBOC made a submission against the project November 2013. AL, MR. This project will go before the Planning Assessment Commission.

Capital Strategic Dredging Project – South Arm of the Hunter River

May 2013 submission Capital Strategic Dredging Project – South Arm of the Hunter River, C. Herbert

Management of Public Lands in NSW

May 2013, Report released on the Management of Public Lands in NSW. Many objections to the content of this report. HBOC submission made in August 2013. AL

Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater report (BirdLife Australia)

May 2013: M. Roderick *et al* wrote, on behalf of BirdLife Australia, a report titled *Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters in the Lower Hunter Region, an Assessment of Status, Identification of High Priority Habitats and Recommendations for Conservation*. This is not strictly speaking a HBOC matter, but it concerns the Hunter Region.

Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network

June 2013: M. Roderick accompanied James Whelan (HCEC) with the Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network to show T4 etc issues and for potential philanthropic contributions to Hunter Estuary projects.

‘White Paper’

June 2013: HBOC submission on the New Planning laws for NSW (White Paper). J. Smart and G. Brosie.

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act

July, 2013, K. Peters wrote a submission against the weakening of Australia’s environmental laws. 18 July 2013 the Federal Environment Minister, Mark Butler, announced that the federal government would retain environment approval powers at the federal level resisting pressure from big business and state governments. Despite widespread opposition, the way this Act is administered has changed. There is now a “one stop shop” for environmental approvals, October 2013. The MOU and the Bilateral Agreement have been signed off by the NSW Government and other state governments.

“The Australian Government is committed to delivering a 'one stop shop' for environmental approvals that will accredit state planning systems under national environmental law, to create a single environmental assessment and approval process. The one stop shop policy aims to simplify the approvals process for businesses, lead to swifter decisions and improve Australia's investment climate, while maintaining high environmental standards.”

Changes to the Biobanking scheme to the detriment of the environment.

In July 2013, Ms Parker has announced changes to the BioBanking scheme through the creation of a 'slush fund'. Under this scheme developers will no longer need to find an offset before clearing, instead just paying a levy into a funding pool. The key changes are:

- There will no longer be a need to specify an offset for a development. Once a fee has been paid a developer can clear immediately. OEH will later find an offset of their choice
- There will be discounts for projects with economic benefit – i.e. a reduced offset requirement
- Offsets will no longer need to be native habitat. For example, funds can be used to cover the costs to revegetate spoil piles after operations, funding research, etc.

For now, the proposal is for State Significant Development and State Significant Infrastructure only, with plans to later extend to all developments. This is another step towards OEHs goal of moving all land clearing assessments into the BioBanking scheme.

Leard State Forest

October 2013 submission against clearing of Leard State Forest for the expansion of Maules Creek and Boggabri coal mines (MR). Many other bird clubs in NSW have written submissions against these projects.

No Shooting in National Parks in NSW

No Shooting in National Parks campaign was supported by many members of HBOC, other bird clubs in NSW and the general public. Phil Hansbro attended a meeting with T. Owen, state member for Newcastle. 24/02/2013 submission written by J. Smart to R. Parker objecting to shooting in national parks. April 2013: To Minister for Environment, Ms Parker, against Shooting in National Parks. M. Newman. The Game Council, the regulatory body, fell into disrepute and was disbanded (announcement 4/07/2013) and shooting was banned in national parks and state forests.

The new arrangements were:

- Transfer the licensing, regulatory, enforcement, education and policy functions into the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI); and
- Establish an advisory Game Board that will undertake stakeholder engagement and representation, advocate hunting, advise on research priorities and commission research, and provide independent advice to Government.

Since then new conditions have been put in place and there will be shooting in national parks under the auspices of NPWS.

Game and Feral Animal Control

Native species, ducks, quail and pigeons, were listed as game birds in 2012. HBOC and other bird clubs have been campaigning to have these species removed from the *Game and Feral Animal Control Further Amendment Bill 2012* with no success to date.

Walka Waterworks

Maitland City Council has funded, designed and is constructing a viewing deck and education space for the observation of native birdlife, by the public, at Walka Reserve. The functionality of this facility is totally dependent on quality interpretive signage. This HBOC project proposes the installation of site specific interpretive signage at the bird viewing deck. This signage is an integral part of a broad MCC management plan for the interpretation of this Heritage listed and environmentally significant reserve. The signage will place freshwater wetlands in a general context, interpret the Walka Lake as a culturally and ecologically significant wetland in the local and regional context, and interpret the diversity of bird life present.

Newcastle Coal and Infrastructure Group

HBOC made submission, 2012, against the Rail Flyover Modification by Newcastle Coal and Infrastructure Group. The modification was approved and works commenced in November 2013. AL spoke at the Planning Assessment Commission public meeting, May 2013. HBOC was invited to attend a meeting to discuss proposed Compensatory Habitat Package at Fish Fry Flats, Ash Island. AL, M. Newman, L.Crawford attended, June 2013. July 2013, M. Newman compiled a response to their Compensatory Habitat Proposal.

HBOC has asked Ausgrid and NCIG to put bird diverting devices on the relocated power lines on Swan Pond. A list of dead or injured birds on Ash Island sent to Ausgrid, R. Coombes 15/03/2013 and to NCIG in 2014.

Newcastle Wetlands Reserve and Market Swamp

A letter was sent to NCC in November 2013 asking for update on the Wetland Action Plan. HBOC has been asking for improvements to these wetlands for over ten years now. NWR functions as a dam and Market Swamp is choked with weeds. They were formerly excellent habitat for Latham's Snipe.

Draft Plan of Management for Worimi Conservation Lands

In December 2013 HBOC made a submission to the Draft Plan of Management for Worimi Conservation Lands. AL

3. Summary of Submissions

January 2013: The Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Threatened Species and Ecological Communities' Protection in Australia M. Newman

February 2013: Shooting in National Parks J. Smart

April 2013: To Minister for Environment, Ms Parker, against Shooting in National Parks. M. Newman

May 2013: Newcastle Port Corporation's Capital Strategic Dredging Project South Arm Hunter River. C. Herbert

June 2013: New Planning laws for NSW (White Paper). J. Smart and G. Brosie.

July 2013: weakening of Australia's environmental laws. K. Peters

October 2013: clearing of Leard State Forest for the expansion of Maules Creek and Boggabri coal mines. M. Roderick

November 2013: PWCS Terminal 4 AL

Native birds designated as game animals AL

Letter to Newcastle City Council inquiring about Market Swamp and Newcastle Wetland Reserve AL

December 2013: Draft Plan of Management for Worimi Conservation Lands. AL

Report prepared by Ann Lindsey, 24 January 2014