



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Planning Assessment Commission Determinations Warkworth Continuation Project (SSD 6464) and Mt Thorley continuation Project (SSD 6465) Final opportunity to comment

Having read the recommended conditions as set out in the consent document, the Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) continues to strongly object to the Warkworth Continuation Project.

Despite having set out our objections on several previous occasions, we will reiterate; our objections continue to revolve around the clearing of land and resultant loss of habitat for biodiversity and in particular for the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater. An excerpt from the Scientific Committee's Final Determination to list the Regent Honeyeater as Critically Endangered is copied below.

“The Regent Honeyeater Anthochaera phrygia (Shaw, 1794) is eligible to be listed as a Critically Endangered species as, in the opinion of the Scientific Committee, it is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in New South Wales in the immediate future as determined in accordance with the following criteria as prescribed by the Threatened Species Conservation Regulation 2002.”

It is relevant to note that the Australian Government has recently made an interim proposal to list the species as Critically Endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act), which would bring it into line with its conservation status in NSW, the Action Plan for Australian Birds and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. It is clear that this species is on a trajectory for extinction unless action is taken now.

HBOC does not consider that measures for rehabilitation and/or offsets as set out environment impact statement and in the Recommended Conditions will provide immediate support for this species. The very eucalypt woodland, “Central Hunter Valley eucalypt forest and woodland ecological community”, on which this species depends at certain periods of its life cycle, has itself been listed as Critically Endangered under the EPBC Act as of April 2015 (excerpt from the listing copied below).

“The ecological community can be particularly valuable as a source of winter-flowering eucalypts for transient threatened species such as Anthochaera phrygia (regent honeyeater) and Lathamus discolor (swift parrot).”

Reasons for listing Central Hunter Valley woodlands as Critically Endangered include:

“Substantial clearing, severe fragmentation, urbanisation, weed invasion, inappropriate fire and grazing regimes, and associated changes to vegetation structure and loss of faunal components have substantially reduced the integrity of the ecological community. These losses may be compounded by climate change. The nature of the ongoing threats to this ecological community limits the likelihood of recovery. The reduction in integrity experienced by the ecological community across most of its geographic distribution is severe, as indicated by severe degradation of the community and its habitat. Therefore, the ecological community is eligible for listing as endangered under this criterion.”

Yet, it is proposed to exacerbate this already critical situation by clearing even more of this ecological community. Questions of time lag between destruction and rehabilitation have not been addressed; adjacent offset land is fragmented and dual purpose; other offset land is remote from the destruction site; eleven other threatened avian species many of which are sedentary inhabit the destruction site. When these species die, recruitment capability will be further compromised and local extinction is more likely to occur. In a Valley where more than 80% of the habitat has already been destroyed local extinction is already occurring at an alarming rate. With the prospects of climate change revealing itself, governments should be placing a ban on land clearance in the lowland forests of the Hunter Valley.

HBOC expects that state and federal environmental laws protecting threatened species and woodlands will be upheld. The Warkworth Continuation Project must not be approved as it destroys Critically Endangered woodlands which are habitat for a Critically Endangered species.

Prepared by A. Lindsey for the Hunter Bird Observers Club

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