



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Planning Proposal - 505 Minmi Road Fletcher

We thank DCCEEW for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Biodiversity Certification Assessment Report for this proposed development.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. strongly objects to the proposed rezoning for development of this small but significant piece of woodland which provides a vital piece in the biodiversity corridor linking Blackbutt Reserve to Sugarloaf SCA and intersecting with the Watagans to Stockton Link. There is robust support for the permanent retention of this site as part of a green corridor.

This woodland may also form part of the migration corridor used by juvenile honeyeaters of several species, pardalotes and silvereyes which move northwards each March and April. Tens of thousands of birds migrate north through the Blue Mountains National Park, Watagans NP, Sugarloaf SCA, Seahampton and across the Hunter Wetlands NP.

All the remaining natural areas of Newcastle LGA are under threat with the New Lambton to Jesmond Bypass, Winten's Minmi Estate, the proposed Eden Estates Link Road development and the John Hunter Hospital and Innovation Precinct consuming the last remaining biodiversity areas of the LGA. The likely realisation of these projects shows that this government has little interest in the conservation of representative biodiversity in the Lower Hunter.

Strangely DPHI which incorporates requirements for green corridors in Hunter Regional Plans seems in a rush to approve the destruction of the last areas of woodland in the Newcastle LGA forming green corridors.

The decline of species in this state is being aided by planning decisions which focus only on threatened species and threatened ecological communities and which ignore the broader needs of biodiversity such as movement through a natural landscape and the opportunity for genetic interchange. Whilst consecutive Hunter Regional Plans have incorporated requirements to "secure biodiversity corridors" areas suitable as interconnecting links continue to be approved for housing, mining or other developments.

Biodiversity Certification Assessment Report

This site is tiny in relation to the state needs for housing yet is significantly important in the context of conserved green spaces in Newcastle LGA and even more so as a portion of the green corridor running from Blackbutt Reserve to Mount Sugarloaf linking with the North/ South green corridor. The strategic value of this site linking two green corridors appears not to have been considered in the BCAR. Likewise the fragmentation of the site increasing the edge effect, heightening of the risk of predation or consideration of the creation of human hostile barriers to biodiversity movement created by the development of housing and associated infrastructure.

Threatened Species

We do not agree with the BCAR's assessment of the following species.

Regent Honeyeater

Table 7 Species Credit Species Habitat Assessment advises :-

"The subject land comprises suitable winter foraging habitat such as Corymbia maculata, E. fibrosa and stringybark species, however the subject land is not located within Important Mapped Areas for this species. Six records occur within the OEH Bionet 10 km search area."

This seems contradictory when an active breeding colony was established with both wild and captive bred birds approximately 15 kms away in the Weston/ Richmond Vale area over the last few years.

There are numerous Regent Honeyeater records from within the vicinity of this site - see Birdata

https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/explore#map=-32.8777148_151.5167341_11®ion_id=20&species_id=603

Swift Parrot

Table 7 Species Credit Species Habitat Assessment advises :-

"The subject land comprises suitable winter foraging habitat such as Corymbia maculata, E. fibrosa and stringybark species, however the subject land is not located within Important Mapped Areas for this species. Six records occur within the OEH Bionet 10 km search area."

There are numerous records of Swift Parrots both East & West of this proposed development with regular and long term use of habitat only 22km away in the Pelaw Main –Elrington areas. - see

Birdata https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/explore#map=-32.8586947_151.5546733_12®ion_id=20&species_id=309

This is a highly mobile migratory species which forages wherever blossom or lerp is available.

Gang-gang Cockatoo

Table 7 Species Credit Species Habitat Assessment advises :-

"The subject land comprises marginal suitable foraging habitat in the form of open eucalypt forests and woodlands and hollows suitable for breeding (>10 cm) exist within the site. Furthermore, 11 records exist within the OEH BioNet 10 km search area. No individuals were detected during targeted surveys; therefore no further assessment is required."

There are numerous records from within the vicinity of this site - see Birddata https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/explore#map=-32.8829564_151.5253332_12®ion_id=20&species_id=268

Little Lorikeet

Table 7 Species Credit Species Habitat Assessment

Not assessed

There are numerous records from within the vicinity of this site - see Birddata https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/explore#map=-32.9030009_151.5942426_12®ion_id=20&species_id=260

There is a high probability that all the above species have foraged along the green corridor from Newcastle to Mount Sugarloaf. The lack of observations from within the proposed development site may be due to its tenure as private land.

Proposed Conservation Lands

The conservation land proposed for the site is not of sufficient size to serve as habitat for anything except adaptable and aggressive bird species, such as Noisy Miners, which are known to exclude other woodland birds from their home ranges. The Invasive Species Council nominated Noisy Miners as a “Key Threatening Process” and here we have a planning system and a Biodiversity Certification Assessment Report encouraging that Key Threatening Process.

Fragmented and narrow conservation lands do little for the preservation of biodiversity. Fragmentation also creates pathways for non-endemic, feral and invasive species and significantly increases the “edge effect”. All these impact on and degrade the value of the proposed “conservation” portions of the proposal.

Many species of birds will not tolerate human activity or disturbance within certain distances and will abandon territories. Unfortunately these tend to be the species most at risk. *“European and Australian birds with declining populations are less tolerant to an approaching human than birds with increasing populations”* Mikula et al April 2023.

Further fragmentation of the conservation lands by services infrastructure and connection requirements will be likely. Lack of management and degradation by residents over time will devalue any biodiversity values present at the time of development therefore negating usefulness as a corridor.

The area proposed as C2 Environmental Conservation is the portion of the site bordering a “1st order ephemeral stream” with steeply contoured sides. Once again we see the environmental conservation areas of proposed developments seemingly being selected by their unsuitability for development not for habitat or biodiversity reasons.

A search of the *“Lake Macquarie City Council Draft Plan of Management of Community Land 2023”* maps shows around 90% of the areas reserved and categorised as “Natural Area –Bushland” are watercourses which were unsuitable for development. These areas are scattered across the LGA and lack linkages with other reserved “natural areas” creating nature negative zones. This shows a real lack of government interest in ensuring that significant viable areas with environmental value are being conserved despite constant requirements being included in Hunter Regional Plans.

Biodiversity Certification Strategy

The BCAR advises *“The current method to retire credits for the proposal is likely to be via payment into the Biodiversity Conservation Fund or retirement of credits available on the market.”*

Time and time again we see the use of the Biodiversity Conservation Fund as the only option. Where is the “like for like” option explored or considered in this BCAR.

Back in 2022 the New South Wales Auditor-General found the biodiversity offset scheme ineffective for a number of reasons yet we still see it being used as first option. Similarly a 2022 parliamentary inquiry found significant issues with the scheme including that it encourages biodiversity loss.

The foreshadowed reform of the Biodiversity Conservation Fund will come too late to save this vital parcel of land at 505 Minmi Road.

Conclusion

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. fully supports the maintenance of an environmental zoning, preferably the strongest environmental zoning, and refusal of this development proposal for 505 Minmi Road.

Submission prepared by T. Kendall for the Conservation Sub-Committee

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. 22 May 2024

About the Hunter Bird Observers Club

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was established in 1976 and currently has a membership in excess of 400 members. Although the Club is based in Newcastle NSW membership includes members from other areas in NSW and from interstate.

Aims of HBOC

to encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat;
and

to encourage bird observing as a leisure-time activity.

Activities include monthly regular outings, evening meetings, camps and field studies. HBOC promotes systematic field studies which include regular surveys by volunteers from the membership.

All data gathered from field studies are entered into the national bird record database administered by BirdLife Australia; Birddata <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/>. Data are used to underpin conservation issues and HBOC promotes systematic surveys and data collection.

HBOC has a long history of working in collaboration with local councils, national parks and other state agencies, industry and schools.

For more information go to www.hboc.org.au