



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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The Hon. Matt Kean MP
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000
Email to: office@kean.minister.nsw.gov.au

Re: Sale of Ellalong Lagoon and adjacent forest

Dear Minister Kean,

Hunter Bird Observers Club is calling on the NSW Government and the National Parks and Wildlife Service to prioritise acquisition of the property at 39 Congewai Road, Congewai in the Lower Hunter Valley for the benefit of our unique biodiversity, threatened species and the local community.

This 406-hectare property includes Ellalong Lagoon which is listed on the Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia and is one of the best-known wetlands in the Hunter Region. The property also includes a forest of approximately 200 ha with a continuous canopy and completely intact lower strata. It is also unfragmented; a rarity on the floor of the Hunter Valley where most woodland has been cleared. According to T. Peake 2006:

“76% of woodland and forest from the Hunter Valley floor have been cleared leaving only 19% of fragmented remnant vegetation. A mere 0.8% of this remnant vegetation is in protected ownership - national parks, which are situated on poorer soils and have lower bird abundance and diversity.”

The BirdLife Australia atlas database (Birddata) lists 189 species as having been recorded on this parcel of land, approximately 31% of species in NSW.

The forested land is vital habitat for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot both of which are in imminent danger of becoming extinct. The conservation of parcels such as this is crucial for the ongoing survival of threatened species, including those captive-bred Regent Honeyeaters which you helped release back in June 2020. Many other woodland-dependent species are present in this forest. Woodland-dependent bird species are in severe decline in most of NSW, including in the Hunter Valley, due to habitat loss. Many species such as Brown Treecreeper, Speckled Warbler, Grey-crowned Babbler, Black-chinned Honeyeater and Glossy Black Cockatoo are of particular concern and are present in this forest. In all, seventeen threatened species have been recorded.

This forest with its intact canopy will also maintain an important wildlife corridor linking Watagans National Park to Werakata National Park and State Conservation Area.

This property is currently being sold by Port Waratah Coal Services (PWCS) through an Expression of Interest process and it is at risk of being sold to property developers. It was originally purchased by PWCS in 2012 to partly offset the loss of Deep Pond on Kooragang Island through the ill-fated fourth

coal-loader (“T4”) project in the Hunter Estuary – see:
www.nbnnews.com.au/2021/04/14/development-feared-as-wildlife-corridor-put-up-for-sale/

At the time PWCS CEO Hennie du Plooy stated that Ellalong Lagoon has been “locked away from developers forever”, and that the land could ultimately be transferred to public ownership, by being turned into a National Park. This commitment is on the public record – see:
www.cessnockadvertiser.com.au/story/173601/ellalong-lagoon-made-safe-for-future

This is not the first time Hunter Bird Observers Club has written letters asking for the inclusion of this parcel of habitat into the national estate. It continues to be an ongoing battle to gain protection for this land and I attach letters previously written as a matter of interest.

We commend you on the ambitious target of adding 400,000 hectares to our National Park estate by 2022 and ask that as part of this target that you urgently negotiate with PWCS for the purchase and reservation of this land with its remarkable birdlife and conservation attributes.

Yours faithfully,



Ann Lindsey – conservation co-ordinator for Hunter Bird Observers Club

18 April, 2021

Reference

Peake, T.C. 2006. The Vegetation of The central Hunter Valley NSW. A Report on the findings of the Hunter Remnant Vegetation Project. Hunter – Central Rivers CMA.

Birddata portal accessed 18 April 2021