Hunter Bird Observers Club
Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Re: Hydro Aluminium Kurri Kurri Biodiversity Certification Assessment Report

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. believes that the offset for Serious and Irreversible Impacts on Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor* and Regent Honeyeater *Anthochaera phrygia* whilst significant under normal circumstances, is not sufficient to counter the threats to the survival of these species.

Both species are listed as Critically Endangered (a species facing extremely high risk of extinction in the wild) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999*. It is estimated that there is a 31% likelihood of Swift Parrot becoming extinct over the next 20 years and that only between 250 and 350 Regent Honeyeaters are left in the wild. Clearly, unless rigorous, uncompromising and substantial measures are undertaken to ensure the survival of Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot, they will disappear from our landscape.

Swift Parrot is a migratory species which spends the breeding season in Tasmania and migrates to the mainland for the winter period. As with all migratory species its demise can be immediate if habitat is not available for instant foraging and shelter when it arrives at its chosen destination.

HBOC's request for an increase in the offset proposed for Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot is based on the body of scientific evidence about these species and about the general state of our environment e.g. the most recent State of the Environment 2021.

The State of the Environment 2022 report found that:

Biodiversity is essential to human survival, wellbeing and economic prosperity.

It found declining biodiversity, increasing number of threatened species, habitat destruction and degradation and the negative impacts of invasive species; all of which pose a threat to the wellbeing of humanity.

The National Environmental Science Program Threatened Bird Index indicates significant declines in abundance of threatened birds for which monitoring data are available. Between 1985 and 2017, the relative abundance of threatened birds decreased by an average of more than 60%.

The Hunter Region has been subject to and continues to be subject to high levels of land clearance which results in habitat loss for all species and is undoubtedly the greatest threat to biodiversity. Peake (2006) found that that 76% of vegetation had been removed from the central Hunter Valley over the past 200 years and that 87% of remnants were less than 10 ha in size. This makes remnant vegetation of high conservation value especially lots larger than 10 ha.

The destruction of 84.1 ha of Swift Parrot habitat and 50.3 ha of Regent Honeyeater habitat at Hydro Aluminium adds to the cumulative impacts of habitat loss for these Critically Endangered species. The

reservation of 607.25 ha whilst laudable does not **increase** habitat availability. Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot habitat will still be destroyed.

HBOC believes that the offset of 607.25 ha for two Critically Endangered species is insufficient in view of the deleterious state of vegetation cover in the Hunter Region.

HBOC requests that:

- Because these species forage widely and/or are migratory, additional suitable land with mature eucalypts in the vicinity should be sought and set aside as an offset for these Critically Endangered species. Foraging studies show:

  Regent Honeyeaters need extensive areas for foraging as they show significant variation in their foraging patterns between years and at different times of the day. They require different types of food – nectar, lerps, insects – and a broad range of plants particularly mature eucalypts and mistletoe species (Damon 2000). In addition, habitat changes may have allowed large aggressive honeyeaters, such as miners to increase so that they now interfere with the ability of Regent Honeyeaters to gain access to rich nectar sources and to breed (Ford *et al*.1993).

  As nectarivores, Swift Parrots are dependent on tree species that provide rich sources of carbohydrate, such as nectar from flowers or lerps (sugary secretions from psyllid insects on leaves). These food resources occur scattered over vast areas and are highly variable in timing and abundance depending on each tree species' unique and variable flowering phenology. East Coast region flowering periodicity and intensity are highly variable between tree species and sites, ranging from annual to no flowering over a 10-year period
  (Saunders *et al*. 2010).

  It is clear that both of these species require extensive areas of habitat in order to survive.

- that funding should be provided to complement and expand the Regent Honeyeater captive and release program
- that an increase in funding be allocated under the Save our Species program for Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater

Submission prepared by Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. conservation sub-committee 17/09/2022

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References

Damon L. Oliver (2000) Foraging Behaviour and Resource Selection of the Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* in Northern New South Wales, *Emu - Austral Ornithology*, 100:1, 12-30, DOI: 10.1071/MU9837

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Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was established in 1976 and currently has a membership over 350 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:

Surveys of waterbirds in the Hunter River estuary, Port Stephens and Lake Macquarie
Surveys for woodland birds in the Hunter Valley and Manning Valley
Surveys of Broughton Island off the coast of Port Stephens
Surveys of Worimi Conservation Lands

All data gathered from field studies are entered into the national database, Birdata, administered by BirdLife Australia. Data are used to underpin conservation issues.

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

HBOC major publications include:

an annual journal, *The Whistler*, of which there are now 14 volumes. It provides a platform for regionally significant observations and findings.
an annual bird report which summarises the status of avifauna in the Hunter Region of NSW. This publication is now in its 26th year.
brochures which show self-guided birding routes of which there are now fourteen covering most of the Hunter Region.

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