



# Hunter Bird Observers Club

*Affiliated with BirdLife Australia*

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc  
PO Box 24, New Lambton, NSW 2305  
[www.hboc.org.au](http://www.hboc.org.au)  
ABN 62 415 889 446

Lake Macquarie City Council

Speers Point, NSW

Attention: Head of Development and Planning

## **RE: Proposed BlackRock Motor Park, Rhondda Road, Wakefield/Teralba, DA 1556-2017**

Dear Fiona,

The Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) is the largest bird interest group in the Hunter Region, with a membership base of 400 members. HBOC is affiliated with Australia's peak bird interest organisation, BirdLife Australia, which has a membership of over 12,000 and a supporter base of over 70,000.

The Club's aims are to:

- To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat; and
- To encourage bird observing as a leisure time activity.

We wrote to Lake Macquarie City Council on 18 September 2018 to voice our concerns about the proposed BlackRock Motor Park at Rhondda Road, Wakefield/Teralba. In particular, we were concerned about the acoustic impacts to local birdlife likely to be generated by the motor park. Since then, we have become aware of the **Vegetation and Fauna Management Plan** Version 3 of February 2023 (**VFMP**) prepared by MJD Environmental. The relevant section of this plan (**Section 3.7.2 Large Forest Owls**) failed to address our concerns.

We commend the VFMP for identifying two (2) known threatened species of large owl that operate within the site, *Ninox strenua* (Powerful Owl) and *Tyto novaehollandiae* (Masked Owl). However, the management plan demonstrates limited knowledge of the nature and requirements of these species and will lead to their local extinction and the inevitable death of birds, especially young birds.

The following management processes proposed in the VFMP will prove to be inadequate:

*Strict operational times of the development will be implemented to reduce any potential impacts on the species with all motorsport activity to occur diurnally, outside the active period of forest owls. This is to prevent disruptions during key times for hunting and breeding.*

This indicates that the authors of the VFMP are fully aware that constant noisy disturbance has a negative impact on birdlife, and there is no scientific evidence that constant diurnal noise disturbance does **not** have a serious impact on roosting nocturnal birds, especially during breeding time. Len Robinson in *Australian Birdwatcher* has produced evidence that Powerful Owls do hunt during daylight hours. There will also likely be some activity generating noise at

the site even outside of daylight hours (e.g. building and track maintenance, preparation, cleaning etc) which has not been considered. Nor has the effect of light pollution from eventual accommodation facilities been considered. The review of the noise control measures conducted by RCA Acoustics is concerned only with surrounding residential areas (and even there concedes there will be considerable 'challenges' in implementing it), and does not consider the effect on wildlife currently within the development area.

*Monitoring will involve call playback and nocturnal spotlighting of the Biodiversity Offset Area.*

This will be a patently pointless exercise as far as large owls are concerned as the Biodiversity Offset Area as indicated in **Figure 1 Site Location** is totally inadequate for large owls. The offset area is 29.36 ha but the breeding territory of powerful owls is large. Even when food is abundant, territories are at least 800 to 1,000 ha. When food is scarce, territories tend to be larger. Typically, nests of breeding pairs are spread from 5 to 20 km apart.

*Nest boxes will also be monitored annually.*

Nest boxes are rarely successful for large owls.

Foremost local expert on Hunter region owls, Paul van Gaal, provides the following anecdotal evidence about Powerful Owls, especially in the Lake Macquarie area, that reinforces our concerns about the inadequacy of the VFMP:

***Carey Bay** Owls left the nest area. Telstra and the Water Board were doing extensive tower and tank work near the nest tree. They have not returned since. The last nesting the one surviving Owlet was hit crossing a road and passed away, owls have not returned.*

***Whitebridge** Owls left their nest area as Motor bikes were using a creek crossing near the nest tree, the owls returned 2 years later, as the area they migrated to had a housing development progressing. They may yet fail as the motor bikes still use the creek crossing at times, incredible noise.*

*Another housing estate stopped right next to a nest tree the owls moved onto, with 3 owl deaths in that area to follow. The surrounding area had a total of 7 deaths in two years.*

***Glenrock reserve**, building a mountain bike jump under the nest tree, owls have not returned, a bird found dead on the track and another on the main road.*

*From my experience I see that the owls do put up with some human visitation, but do not like noise, chainsaws, motor bikes and extreme vehicle noise.*

*Reduction of hunting areas, taking out hollow bearing trees (food supply) makes the owls travel further crossing roads to hunt (main cause of their deaths).*

*I think that the noise generated would push the owls out of the area, the illegal after-hours noise which would be uncontrollable, the construction phase and then the car racing, I would imagine that it's not just weekend racing but also week day practice.*

*I do not see owls putting up with the noise and thus having to move on. The owls try to sleep days and hunt at night, but with demanding owlets they get little sleep.*

*Keep in mind a family of owls need some 200+ meals a year, made up of mainly possums and some birds, chasing away the food supply will not help.*

Paul Van Gaal, June 2023  
0414543901

HBOC still maintains that the scale and potentially relentless nature of the acoustic impacts will have a profound effect on the local birdlife in the Wakefield/Teralba area. In addition, the management plan does not take into

account the cumulative impact upon the vast majority of bird/fauna species that inhabit the area and how it will affect the overall diversity of species there and nearby.

The VFMP does not alter our opposition to this development. At the very least, we recommend that Lake Macquarie City Council impose a much larger offset area as a condition of this development.

Please address replies to [secretary@hbc.org.au](mailto:secretary@hbc.org.au)

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'S'.

Robert Stewart

On behalf of HBOC Conservation Sub-committee

26 July 2023

Sent by email to [council@lakemac.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@lakemac.nsw.gov.au)