



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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The General Manager,
Lake Macquarie City Council,
126-138 Main Road,
Speers Point, NSW.
Attn. Mr. D. Pavitt

Sent to: council@lakemac.nsw.gov.au

RE: RAMSGATE ESTATE DP 1596, WYEE POINT

FOR THE PROPOSED RECONFIGURATION OF THE RAMSGATE ESTATE PAPER SUBDIVISION AT WYEE POINT INVOLVING THE EXCISION AND CONSOLIDATION OF PARTS OF THE ESTATE TO CREATE TWO DEVELOPMENT LOTS, THE CLEARING OF THOSE DEVELOPMENT LOTS AND PROVISION FOR CONSERVATION OFFSET LAND

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. objects to the configuration of the proposed consolidation of Ramsgate Estate at Wyee Point.

Although the land set aside for the environment looks attractive on paper, the reality is that there are aspects which greatly reduce its conservation value. There is no doubt that the area as a whole is of high conservation value and that it is a biodiversity hotspot with at least twenty threatened species having been recorded there including thirteen species of birds. Few areas, and especially such a small area, can boast twenty threatened species. Although comments here are limited to only a few species, we acknowledge the presence of many other species and their importance in the ecosystem.

Two species, Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot are Critically Endangered (which means they are in imminent danger of becoming extinct) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999*. The Regent Honeyeater is also listed critically endangered under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, with the Swift Parrot endangered under the same legislation. These species can no longer afford to lose any more habitat. There are several records of these species on the site and nearby and they are known to return to the same areas although this may not be every year. Their numbers continue to decrease.

The site is a critical feeding area for Glossy Black-Cockatoo as it supports species of *Allocasuarina*. The Wyee area has been one of the most regularly used areas for them anywhere in Lake Macquarie (per HBOC records). The following excerpt explains why this habitat is critical to this species.

“Glossy Black-Cockatoos are among the most diet-specialised birds in the world. They feed almost solely on the seeds of casuarina trees in the genus Allocasuarina, not the more familiar river casuarinas such as Casuarina cunninghamiana. Allocasuarina trees are dioecious, meaning that male and female trees are separate individual trees. The seeds that Glossies eat are produced only by female trees. The birds spend hours every day extracting the seeds from the closed valves of these cones. Allocasuarina trees take ten years or more to produce cones and even longer to have branches thick enough to support the weight of a Glossy trying to feed” (Ecos, CSIRO).

Habitat trees (Swamp Mahogany and Swamp Oak) and four Endangered Ecological Communities are also on site. (Species Impact Statement). The proposed removal of 49 Swamp Mahogany and 16 Forest Red Gum trees is unacceptable.

There are up to 333 tree hollows in various size classes - vital habitat for all hollow nesting and roosting species, forest owls, cockatoos. Hollows across the region have been lost at an alarming rate and this is not ecologically sustainable.

Some reasons which reduce the value of the Conservation Area are outlined below.

The proposed Conservation Area is adjacent to a proposed 141 dwellings (Statement of Environmental Effects SEE). This will lead to human impacts on the area which may be as ostensibly harmless as over visitation. However, HBOC is more concerned about the long-term problem of illegal and environmentally destructive activity that regularly occurs throughout the proposed offset area, and questions how this activity will allow the proposed vegetation restoration and maintenance to occur in the short and long term. This activity includes, but is not limited to, trail biking and 4 wheel driving, including the creation of new trails that tramples and clears vegetation, rubbish dumping, and firewood collection. Since the applicant has acknowledged these serious issues and proposes unconventional and expensive mitigation methods such as private security, the offset area appears highly unlikely to be practical to manage to the detailed level outlined in the Vegetation Management Plan and to that expected of a conservation area.

A further undesirable characteristic of the Conservation Area is that it is highly fragmented which means that the land is reduced to small patches with many edges.

The developable land, Lot 3 (6.8 ha) and Lot 2 (10.23 ha) take out the centre/heart of the area as a whole. The proposed Allen Vogan Conservation Area lies to the north of the two Lots and includes a narrow “environmentally sensitive” (SEE Fig. 33) corridor between the two Lots. This corridor is only between c. 80 m and 130 m wide is further bisected by a road joining the two Lots. The edges contiguous with the Conservation Area are c. 3.06 km long. The triangular section of the offset land is 153 m wide at its widest point and its edges add up to 2.158 km. The length of the edges of the offset area make it impractical to fence and gate as a way to prevent determined access by vehicles. Clearly these long edges are going to affect the quality of the conservation patches exposing them to incursions by weeds, feral animals including predators such as domestic cats, Noisy Miner – an aggressive honeyeater listed as a key threatening process, for instance. It is well-known that edge effects have a negative impact on species diversity.

“At the population level, the influence of altered spatial configuration of habitat through fragmentation on the abundance and distribution of individual organisms underpins the theoretical framework of metapopulation ecology (Hanski, 1998). When patch size decreases, reproductive success of the population decreases, colonization rates are reduced, resources become limited, and ultimately, the maximum population size is inherently restricted. Natural disasters, decreased genetic diversity, and demographic and environmental stochasticity are all components that underly this relationship between patch area and its resulting influences on populations (Hanski and Gaggiotti, 2004). “Extinction vortices” can result when these mechanisms work in conjunction (Gilpin and Soulé, 1986). In extreme instances, this places populations at an increased risk of local extinction (Hanski and Ovaskainen, 2000).”

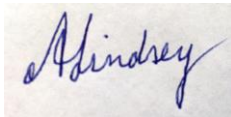
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/edge-effects>

In view of the serious environmental limitations of the proposal it is difficult for HBOC to comprehend the statement made in the Species Impact Statement that:

“The proposed R2 Low Density Residential and E4 Environmental Living subdivision development, inclusive of access roads, stormwater management areas and asset protection zones for the proposed Ramsgate Estate area within DP 1596, Wye Point, is unlikely to result in a significant impact on any threatened species, populations or EECs or their habitats.”

HBOC is of the opinion that this highly inappropriate proposal should be rejected and that the whole area be purchased and set aside as a conservation area. A perusal of the map of Lake Macquarie reveals that, apart from some areas in the southern section, its shores and hinterland are already highly developed. In view of the prospect of ongoing climate change and sea level rise, shoreline land needs to be set aside for future open space. Unlike councils in metropolitan areas – Sydney and Newcastle for instance, Lake Macquarie Council still has the opportunity to ensure that such valuable conservation lands are protected in perpetuity.

We ask you that you consider our submission and we look forward to your response.



Ann Lindsey

Conservation Coordinator – Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

About the Hunter Bird Observers Club

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

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; Birdata <https://birdata.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