



# Hunter Bird Observers Club

*Affiliated with BirdLife Australia*

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## **Re: DA 181146 – 158 lot Torrens Title Residential Subdivision in Three (3) Stages**

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) objects to these residential developments at Chisholm where the long-term breeding territory of a pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* has existed for more than eighteen years. Eight other threatened species have been identified on site including four avian species and four bat species. Two Endangered Ecological Communities – Lower Hunter Spotted Gum – Ironbark Forest and Hunter Lowland Redgum Forest occur. Many remnant trees are mature and provide hollows some large enough for Forest Owls.

Since 2001 members of Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) have been observing the nests of White-bellied Sea-Eagles adjacent to the proposed developments. This breeding territory has been constantly occupied by a pair of adult birds over these eighteen years. The original nest was abandoned and a new nest has been built in the same area. It is known that the nest has produced young in most years since 2001 as both nestlings and fledged young have been frequently observed. The foraging territory includes Four Mile Creek and Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works where both adults and immature birds have been observed hunting. The birds regularly use particular trees in the Treatment Works as observation posts. So far as is known there is no other breeding territory of this species in the Morpeth/Chisholm/Thornton areas.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle is listed as Vulnerable under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* and is declining in numbers. Breeding habitat consists of mature tall open forest and they build large nests on emergent eucalypts. They prefer large trees to be nearby which are used as guard roosts. They do not commence breeding until c. six years of age and if they survive fledgling period, they may live as long as thirty years.

Land clearing, which reduces the amount of suitable habitat forcing them into sub-optimal habitats, is one of the main threats to the survival of this species.

The other main threat revolves around their ability to breed successfully. White-bellied Sea-Eagle is sensitive to disturbance when nesting and may desert nest and young if confronted by humans or exposed to human activity. Residential development has been implicated in the abandonment of nest sites. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=20322>

According to the Department of Environment and Energy website [http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon\\_id=943](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=943) protection of habitat especially nest sites is essential to their survival.

According to the Thornton North Master Plan, most land above the flood plain in this general area is to be developed. This will push White-bellied Sea-Eagle breeding effort into unsuitable areas most likely further towards the flood plain where no tall/emergent trees exist leading to the local extinction of a species already listed as Vulnerable.

The majority of remnant vegetation (mostly Endangered Ecological Communities) within the site is proposed to be cleared which will leave no large emergent trees for roosting or observing. Only a 250 m buffer is to be left around the nest site and even so this buffer will not exclude development. Disturbance will occur within this 250 metres.

The Biodiversity Assessment Report calculated that Ecosystem and Species Credit Requirements have been generated according to the Biodiversity Assessment Method Order tool (2017). These Credits will however do absolutely nothing to protect the long-term nest site or surrounding Endangered Ecological Communities used as foraging and breeding habitat for other threatened species. Lower Hunter Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest in particular, is important habitat for a range of threatened woodland bird species and serves as habitat for critically endangered species such as the Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot, which are known to forage in this community in the area and has been recognised in federally-funded planning studies to be of utmost importance to these species (Roderick et. al. 2013). The Chisholm area represents one of the largest intact remnants of this forest type in the Maitland LGA; a region with one of the highest proportion of clearing of native vegetation in Australia.

HBOC asks that Maitland Council rejects development applications in their current form as the White-bellied Sea-Eagle breeding requirements are not sufficiently addressed to ensure survival.

HBOC requests that further studies of the breeding White-bellied Sea-Eagles be made and habitat which will assure their survival be set aside. This would necessarily include a larger buffer zone around the nest site which will not be impacted by development as well as supporting vegetation including emergent trees. We further request that Endangered Ecological Communities are conserved.

Submission prepared by A. Lindsey 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019.

## **References**

Anderson Environment and Planning, Biodiversity Development Assessment Report for Proposed Residential Subdivision of 239 & 321-329 McFarlanes Road "Waterford", Chisholm, NSW.

ADW Johnson Pty Limited, Statement of Environmental Effects Staged Residential Subdivision (Waterford Stages, 29, 38 & 39)

Roderick, M., Ingwersen, D.A. and Tzaros, C.L. (2013). Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters in the Lower Hunter Region of New South Wales: an assessment of status, identification of high priority habitats and recommendations for conservation. Report for Sustainable Regional Development Program. Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. BirdLife Australia, Melbourne.

Thornton North Master Plan 2003.