



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Maitland City Council,

<https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/maitland-your-say/engagements/draft-destination-management-plan>

Re: Draft Destination Management Plan

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. is alarmed by the plans for Walka Water Works outlined in Maitland City Council's Draft Destination Plan 2020. We accept that tourism can generate income both directly and indirectly but many of the plans for Walka Water Works will destroy the natural assets of this reserve. The plans for the water reservoir/lake and wider spotted gum ironbark forest would totally destroy the site as a wildlife reserve. The 112 hectares of park, lake and bush land is the only sizable nature reserve in Maitland LGA and should be preserved as such. Maitland has some excellent tourism destinations that can directly exploit the visitor economy but as ecotourism becomes more popular the council must preserve this reserve in its natural state.

Maitland Council's Walka Waterworks brochure describes the site as a recreation and wildlife reserve. Yet the draft Destination Management Plan does not acknowledge the site's high conservation value or its wildlife reserve status. Birdwatchers flock to the city of Maitland to visit Walka which is located within a few minutes of the city centre. It is one of the few remaining areas in NSW where over 200 species of birds (Source - BirdLife Australia Birdata) can potentially be seen in such a small area. This is approximately 40% of NSW's list of native bird species. This avian diversity is indicative of the high conservation value of the different habitats on the site.

The calm waters of the lake range in depth from very shallow with muddy edges to quite deep thus offering a variety of habitats for forty-six species of waterbirds and fifteen species of waterfowl. Fifteen (75%) out of Australia's twenty duck species, two of which - Blue-billed Duck and Freckled Duck- are listed as Vulnerable species - are either resident or visitors especially during periods of drought as are two waterbird species listed as Endangered - Australasian Bittern and Black-necked Stork.

Walka is one of two places in the Hunter Region where the iconic Great Crested Grebe breeds and can be reliably observed performing its extraordinary courtship dance.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=great+crested+grebe+australia&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi68cK43OnqAhVlWysKHR1uAwkQ7AkoAXoECAsQCw&biw=1920&bih=1089>

Five species of crakes and rails, shy, elusive birds, a view of which is much sort after by the birdwatching community, are common on the muddy edges.

The bush land is largely comprised of the *Endangered Ecological community (EEC)* Lower Hunter Spotted Gum-Ironbark Forest. The criteria for this listing are as follows:

"Lower Hunter Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest in the Sydney Basin and NSW North Coast Bioregions is eligible to be listed as an Endangered Ecological Community as, in the opinion of the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee, it is facing a very high risk of extinction in New South Wales in the near future, as determined in accordance with the following criteria prescribed by the Biodiversity Conservation Regulation 2017:"

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Animals-and-plants/Scientific-Committee/Determinations/2019/lower-hunter-spotted-gum-ironbark-forest-final-determination-EEC.pdf?la=en&hash=45284937A71F0175AF94955070E93778C784AA0F>

This bush land attracts seven additional threatened species, no fewer than 23 species of honeyeaters and 18 species of birds of prey, a significant number of these cohorts.

Total list of threatened species

Common Name	Scientific Name	<i>Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016</i>	<i>Environment Protection & Biodiversity Act 1999</i>
Blue-billed Duck	<i>Oxyura australis</i>	Vulnerable	
Freckled Duck	<i>Stictonetta naevosa</i>	Vulnerable	
Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	Endangered	
Australasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus poiciloptilus</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Vulnerable	
Square-tailed Kite	<i>Lophoictinia isura</i>	Vulnerable	
Little Eagle	<i>Hieraetus morphnoides</i>	Vulnerable	
Spotted Harrier	<i>Circus assimilis</i>	Vulnerable	
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	<i>Calyptorhynchus lathami</i>	Vulnerable	
Little Lorikeet	<i>Glossopsitta pusilla</i>	Vulnerable	
Grey-crowned Babbler	<i>Pomatostomus temporalis</i>	Vulnerable	

The list of “opportunities for consideration” in the Destination Management Plan show a considerable depth of ignorance of the Heritage and conservation values of Walka Waterworks.

In addition, the Destination Management Plan 2020 is incompatible with previously documented council plans, policies and projects for Walka Water Works, such as:

1. Maitland City Council was appointed the Reserve Trust Manager in August 2007 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NSW Department of Lands and, by entering into the MOU, Council envisaged that Walka Water Works would be more strategically integrated into Council’s *passive open space system* (our italics).

2. Walka Water Works was listed on the [New South Wales State Heritage Register](#) on 2 April 1999 having satisfied the following criteria:

‘The place is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in New South Wales’.

‘The entire site has been largely unmarred by the construction of any other unsympathetic developments.’
<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5045638>

3. **Walka Water Works Interpretation Plan** has Ecology as one of its 3 main focuses:

‘6.3.2 Ecology Synopsis: Exploring the flora and fauna of Walka and drawing contemporary lessons from them:

- *Conserving flora and fauna*
- *Conserving water*
- *Changing ecology*
- *Ways of seeing nature’*

Reference: <https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/maitland-your-say/engagements/walka-water-works-interpretation>

[This focus on ecology would be seriously compromised if the overdevelopment advocated in the Destination Management Plan 2020 were allowed to go ahead.](#)

4. Walka Water Works brochure describes it as Walka Recreation and **Wildlife Reserve**: *‘Welcome to Walka Recreation and Wildlife Reserve. Offering 112 hectares of park, lake and bush land surrounding the historic Walka Water Works.’*

<https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/facilities/walka-water-works>

[This attraction of the site as a wildlife reserve would be seriously compromised if the overdevelopment advocated in the Destination Management Plan 2020 were allowed to go ahead.](#)

5. The site has been promoted by the council as an important **educational resource**:

‘Walka is a valuable asset which can be used by schools for programs seeking local sites and experiences to support Stage 2 and 3 curriculum outcomes in Science, History and Geography’

A Resource Kit for Schools has been developed through Our Sense of Place: Improving environmental attitudes and behaviours, a pilot project of Maitland Region Landcare with assistance from the New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust. The Our Sense of Place project extended from February 2002 to May 2003. In part, it was motivated by the results of a local school survey in October 2001 that highlighted the kind of support and resourcing schools needed to improve environmental education. It included resources for teachers, a Young Explorers Walk around the lake’s edge and interpretive signage.

Reference: <https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/our-services/community/education-programs/heritage-education-programs/walka-water-works-education-programs>

[This outstanding educational program for the youth of Maitland would be of little value if the site is degraded and the Young Explorers Walk would be useless if there was tourist accommodation on the lake front. The excellent Walka Bird App would be of limited value if the important bird species could no longer be observed on the site.](#)

6. Walka was recognised with a **National Award of Excellence by Interpretation Australia in 2018** for a new project called ‘Explore Walka’.

‘Explore Walka celebrates the rich ecology and birdlife of Walka Water Works and was completed in December 2017. It is the first stage of the Walka Water Works Interpretation Plan.

Council’s Heritage Officer Clare James says, ‘This project seeks to reimagine how the site could offer new experiences for the local community, raise the profile of Walka Ecology, along with promoting the value of the site to an education audience.’

*‘The heritage value of Walka extends well beyond the bricks and mortar of the former pumping station and reservoir. The place has outstanding landscape beauty and has **ecological significance** and that has been reiterated by the award.’*

The Ecology Viewing Platform set on the lake’s edge, represents the centre of the program of interpretation works, and has been developed as a destination in the project’s Walka Ecology Walk. It features information panels and also provides a new seating area for small groups.’

*‘The Walka Bird App has been developed as a starter’s guide into birdlife at Walka. It was generated from information relating to habitat, bird descriptions, behaviour, food and photography, and is specifically designed to focus on improving observation skills. Eye catching imagery provided by the **Hunter Bird Observer’s Club** has been used in all components of the project. Bird poles have also been positioned around the Lake Trail Circuit which mark sheltered and expansive viewing areas.’*

‘A curriculum resource development guide for Walka has also been prepared by education consultant Helen Doust, which supports teaching of History, Science and Geography. Project resources can be found on Council’s website along with more information about visiting Walka Water Works by searching for ‘Heritage Education Programs’.

<https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/news/walka-recognised-with-national-award>

In conclusion, all the above planning and outstanding projects it gave rise to would be rendered useless if the short-sighted plans proposed in the Destination Management Plan 2020 for Walka Water Works were implemented.

Recommendations

- Maintain the site for passive recreation and preserve it as one of the best wildlife reserves and Heritage sites in the Hunter Valley.
- Avoid any development that compromises its heritage and ecological value. There are other sites in Maitland LGA that can more directly exploit the visitor economy.
- Care for and increase native vegetation. Plant indigenous species that will sustain birdlife.
- Enhance the Heritage value of the site by not allowing unsympathetic development and enhance the ‘village green’ ambience of the surrounding area.
- Improve water quality
- Maintain vegetation on the edges of the water body for biodiversity.
- Employ a ranger, even part time, to maintain and preserve the site as a wildlife reserve. There are examples of this in surrounding local government areas.

For further discussion, please contact A. Lindsey – ann.lindsey@bigpond.com

Yours sincerely

Ann Lindsey 29 July, 2020

Conservation Co-ordinator for Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.