



# Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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## Forestry Industry Action Plan

We thank the Panel for the opportunity to make a submission during the stakeholder consultation process.

### Introduction

In 2021, the Australian Government joined the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People and committed to its target to protect 30% of the earth's lands and seas by 2030 (30 × 30 protection target). The purpose of this commitment was to achieve long-term conservation of nature.

The realisation of that 30% target we assume will in part be dependent upon maintenance of the network of existing state forests within each state. Already the federal government is investigating the use of "Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures" (OECMs) to supplement permanently protected areas. To continue clear felling and intensive logging of state forests will be counter to the ambitions and commitments made in 2021 and the aspirations for a network of OECM's.

### Hunter Valley

According to T. Peake 2006: *"76% of woodland and forest from the Hunter Valley floor have been cleared leaving only 19% of fragmented remnant vegetation. A mere 0.8% of this remnant vegetation is in protected ownership - national parks, which are situated on poorer soils and have lower bird abundance and diversity."*

There is no doubt that the 19% remnant vegetation has diminished significantly since the time of this statement due to continuing coal mine approvals, agriculture, housing estates and light industrial subdivisions.

Those national parks on the valley shoulders to the North and South of the valley floor are in some areas supplemented by adjoining state forests. The maintenance of the state forests in good condition increases the biological value of the national parks by providing buffer zones, expanded animal territories plus biological and genetic interchange corridors.

These areas are also critical to the maintenance of the nation's avian populations. Many woodland bird species migrate seasonally each year for various reasons. Others are nomadic following the forest flowering cycles across the state and more widely. Destruction of the state's forests disrupts these passages and ultimately must impact on the sustainability of those species. Two critically endangered species the Regent Honeyeater and the Swift Parrot are at risk because of clearing of forests. The forests also lose their pollinating agents and in the case of the Swift Parrot a psyllid control agent (BMAD).

In some areas the state forests are the only representative remnant vegetation and biodiversity pools left in the Hunter Region. Yet these are under threat by logging and associated access roads, the Hunter Transmission Project corridor, gifting to the CSG industry for fracking projects (e.g. 95,000 Ha of Pilliga State Forest), gifting to the quarry industry (e.g. Wallaroo State Forest), inappropriate timing of hazard reduction burns and increasing bushfires due to climate change.

### **Avian Impacts**

Each year HBOC produces an Annual Bird Report which presents a summary of the status of bird species within the Hunter Region of NSW. Of the 298 woodland and wetland species recorded in the Hunter Region during 2019 the Annual Bird Report shows 62 species with long term trends suggesting the population is in decline or potential decline. For almost 21% of species in the Hunter Region to be potentially declining shows our planning system is not effective and management of the state's environment is failing.

This long term trend would have been considerably worse had there not been a patchwork of national parks and state forests bordering the valley floor.

The continuation of logging of old growth and native forests would seem counter to the good management of the remaining natural environment of this state.

### **Planning in NSW and Forestry**

There is a sense that had the planning authorities in this state been real planning authorities and not "approval with conditions" authorities there may have been sufficient woodlands and forests left so that timber extraction and environmental needs or protected areas may have been able to co-exist. Instead now every bit of woodland and forest is critical to maintaining ecosystem services and the rapidly diminishing biodiversity. Continuation of the current planning system will put further pressure on natural systems, biodiversity and ecosystem services until critical tipping points may be reached.

## **Submission Topics**

### **1. Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW**

Logging of old growth forest, native forest and non-plantation State Forest is by its very nature unsustainable. Once it is logged that resource is depleted. Declining yields show that trend and highlight the lack of sustainability of the current system.

The native forest hardwood division of the Forestry Corporation operates at a loss and additionally receives millions of dollars in regular equity injections from government. Current funding should be transferred to creating plantations for local use saw logs and the export of wood chips should cease. There is hope that the digital economy is gradually displacing the need for and production of paper records and that environmental awareness of waste will in time reduce the current practice of over packaging of products and the addition of wasteful advertising packaging. A decline in the need for wood chips should follow.

The future needs to be secured by increasing plantations but not by clear felling of native forest or private forests to provide the plantation sites.

### **2. Environmental and cultural values of forests, including threatened species and Aboriginal cultural heritage values**

Forests provide the inhabitants of this planet with oxygen, water, food and shelter. Part of the current climate issue is the continuing large scale destruction of the planets forests. Historically NSW has a very poor record in relation to deforestation. This has impacted on the biodiversity such that almost 1000 animal and plant species are at risk of extinction in NSW.

Surely this highlights the environmental values of maintaining large and representative tracts of native forest.

Logging of native forests has been shown to increase the intensity and threat of bushfires. (Lindenmayer et al 2022). Logging and associated roads impact waterways through pollution and erosion, allow weed penetration and encourage aggressive species such as Noisy Miners through increased "edge effect".

The patchwork of state forests also acts as corridors for migrating honeyeater species and the annual influx of rainforest species such as the monarchs from more northern areas.

### **3. Demand for timber products, particularly as it relates to NSW housing, construction, mining, transport and retail**

Native forest logging and logging of old growth forests should be banned especially where the timber is used for wood chips. In addition plantation timber use as wood chips for export should be banned as this is a misuse of the resource.

Also, there are alternative products which can be used in housing construction in NSW e.g. insulated concrete forms, structural insulated panels, cold formed steel and light gauge steel framing.

#### **4. The future of softwood and hardwood plantations and the continuation of Private Native Forestry in helping meet timber supply needs**

Current costs in running the Forestry Corporation's native forest hardwood division could be transferred to establishing a network of plantations of differing timber types to sustain demand into the future. These plantations should be established on degraded farmlands or mining sites not by destroying existing public forests or forests on private land.

#### **5. The role of State Forests in maximising the delivery of a range of environmental, economic and social outcomes and options for diverse management, including Aboriginal forest management models**

State forests currently provide ecosystem services such as increasing water quality, reducing evaporation, and supporting biodiversity. They also provide tourism opportunities, camping locations and reduce the human impact on protected areas such as national parks.

#### **6. Opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits and support carbon and biodiversity markets, and mitigate and adapt to climate change risks, including the greenhouse gas emission impacts of different uses of forests and assessment of climate change risks to forests**

A reduction in logging of high quality native and old growth forests coupled with an expansion of timber plantations would increase the carbon capture and retention, increase oxygen production and CO<sub>2</sub> absorption with positive benefits for climate change.

#### **References**

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Submission prepared by T. Kendall for the Conservation Sub-Committee Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. 13 October 2024

## **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.

### **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; Birddata <https://birddata.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](http://www.hboc.org.au)