



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Planning Proposal - 505 Minmi Road Fletcher

We thank Newcastle City Council for the opportunity to provide feedback on this proposed development.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. strongly objects to the proposed rezoning for development of this small but significant piece of woodland which provides a vital piece in the biodiversity corridor linking Blackbutt Reserve to Sugarloaf SCA and intersecting with the Watagans to Stockton Link. There is robust support for the permanent retention of this site and zoning under an Environmental Conservation category.

All the remaining natural areas of Newcastle LGA are under threat with the New Lambton to Jesmond Bypass, Winten's Minmi Estate, the proposed Eden Estates Link Road development and the the John Hunter Hospital and Innovation Precinct consuming the last remaining biodiversity areas of the LGA. The likely realisation of these projects shows that this government via DPHI has little interest in the conservation of representative biodiversity in the Lower Hunter.

Species decline in this state is being driven by planning decisions which focus only on threatened species and threatened ecological communities and which ignore the broader needs of biodiversity such as movement through a natural landscape and the opportunity for genetic interchange. Whilst consecutive Hunter Regional Plans have incorporated requirements to "secure biodiversity corridors" areas suitable as interconnecting links continue to be approved for housing, mining or other developments.

For instance a search of the "*Lake Macquarie City Council Draft Plan of Management of Community Land 2023*" maps shows around 90% of the areas reserved and categorised as "Natural Area – Bushland" are watercourses which are unsuitable for development. These areas are scattered across the LGA and lack linkages with other reserved "natural areas" creating nature negative zones. This shows a real lack of government interest in ensuring that significant viable areas with environmental value are being conserved despite constant requirements being included in Hunter Regional Plans.

A strong feeling pervades that this is reflective of all LGA's in NSW due to the failure of current planning laws in ensuring significant representative habitat for biodiversity is set aside in developments and the over reliance on payment into the Biodiversity Conservation Fund.

Newcastle 2030 Community Strategic Plan

In the Community Strategic Plan responses to State and Regional Plans regarding environmental requirements are shown as :-

- **Hunter Regional Plan – Priorities – Biodiversity rich natural environment**
- **Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan - Priorities - Enhance environment**
- **Newcastle 2030 Community Strategic Plan - Objective - Our unique natural environment is maintained, enhanced and connected**

Action in realising these statements appears to be stifled by government planning decisions favouring development and ignoring the diminishing natural environment and biodiversity.

Hunter Regional Plan 2041

The Gateway Determination for this proposal directed “assessment against the Hunter Regional Plan 2041”.

We draw attention to the following extracts from HRP 2041 relating to our support for environmental zoning of this portion of land and incorporation into the national parks estate.

Page 67 - *“Large areas of remnant vegetation in the Hunter, such as national parks, state forests, council reserves, floodplains, foreshores and riparian vegetation can be connected to secure biodiversity corridors.”*

Page 68

Strategy 6.1

- maintaining and enhancing areas of high environmental value
- recognising areas of high environmental value in local environmental plans
- considering opportunities for biodiversity
- minimising potential development impacts on areas of high environmental value and biodiversity corridors by implementing the ‘avoid, minimise and offset’ hierarchy
- implementing appropriate measures to conserve areas of high environmental value
- identify, map and avoid, where possible, areas of high environmental value that occur within urban growth ‘investigation’ areas of this regional plan and local strategic plans.

Page 95 - Proposed achievements - *“enhancing the blue and green grid and urban tree canopy”*

We have concerns that the HCCRPP in determining “merit” for the destruction of this woodland did not consider “merit” for retention as part of a green corridor to provide for the needs of biodiversity. Merit it seems has only been applied to development.

Proposed Conservation lands

The conservation land proposed for the site is not of a sufficient size to serve as habitat for anything except adaptable and aggressive bird species, such as Noisy Miners, which are known to exclude other woodland birds from their home ranges.

Fragmented and narrow conservation lands do little for the preservation of biodiversity. Fragmentation also creates pathways for non-endemic, feral and invasive species and significantly increases the “edge effect”. All these impact on and degrade the value of the “conservation” portions of the proposal.

Many species of birds will not tolerate human activity or disturbance within certain distances and will abandon territories. Unfortunately these tend to be the species most at risk. *“European and Australian birds with declining populations are less tolerant to an approaching human than birds with increasing populations”* Mikula et al April 2023.

Further fragmentation of the conservation lands by services infrastructure and connection requirements will be likely. Lack of management and degradation by residents over time will devalue any biodiversity values present at the time of development therefore negating usefulness as a corridor.

We note Section 2.1.3 of the BDAR for this proposal advises:-

“The hydrology of the subject land is typified by a single ephemeral 1st order stream. The stream runs in a south-north direction near the northern boundary of the subject land which eventually connects with Back Creek in the southern section of Hexham Swamp.”

The area proposed as C2 Environmental Conservation is the portion of this site bordering this ephemeral stream with steeply contoured sides. Once again we see the environmental conservation areas of proposed developments being selected by their unsuitability for development not for habitat or biodiversity reasons.

Conclusion

Unlike many greenfield developments in the state, Newcastle City Council's urban planning for the prior western corridor was exemplary with an assurance that all necessary community facilities were planned before development took place. This included a deliberate attempt to draw a balance between the provision of housing and green space, and preserving natural corridors. It would be a disservice to the residents if the council were to negate all this careful planning in a rush to meet imposed housing targets. Newcastle City has already done so much to add to the state's housing supply whilst attempting to preserve some of the city's biodiversity.

Newcastle City Council is to be commended for resisting the ill-considered push by DPHI to destroy the last remaining woodlands in the Newcastle LGA.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. fully supports the maintenance of an environmental zoning, preferably the strongest environmental zoning, and refusal of this development proposal for 505 Minmi Road. Incorporation into the national parks estate should have been enacted when suggested over 20 years ago.

Submission prepared by T. Kendall for the Conservation Sub-Committee

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. 19 May 2024

About the Hunter Bird Observers Club

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was established in 1976 and currently has a membership in excess 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