

**Submission on the Amended State Significant Development Application:
SSD-6334 - Sutton Forest Sand Quarry**

Dear Independent Planning Commission Members

BirdLife Southern NSW is the largest branch of BirdLife Australia in this state and covers most of the state's coastline, central regions and southern regions. Our parent organisation, BirdLife Australia, is an independent, not-for-profit and has over 360,000 supporters nationally.

We of course, along with so many others, absolutely oppose the proposed quarry.

The first point we wish to make is to respectfully ask you to critically consider the features of this proposal that objectively warrant its categorisation as a "State Significant Development". While you are of course obliged as commissioners to assess the proposal as something the government deems to be significant for the state, when considering whether the many objections outweigh the benefits, it is important that you attach a value to the degree of significance this development truly has. A view developed in government that the sandmine is *significant* for the state does not necessarily make it so, and in this case in our view, it certainly doesn't.

Our submission to you is that, but for the \$44 million capital investment valuation attached to it, this sand quarry has very low significance in terms of the needs of the people of NSW, even the people of Sydney. Sand is not coal, or silver, or iron ore, or lithium. Sand is not in short supply and locations in which it can be mined within the intended market are plentiful. What is not plentiful is a site for a quarry that is large enough to bring economies of scale at a land price the proponent is willing to pay or that communities are willing to tolerate.

The proponent has a large piece of cheap land formerly used as a farm and wants to use it to dominate and reduce competition in the Sydney sand market, with likely consequences for other smaller quarries closer to Sydney. It's anticompetitive. Only to that extent, is it significant. And when that consideration is weighed against the social and environmental objections, it would be surprising for most citizens to understand how the quarry might be considered to be a net benefit to the economy of NSW.

The second point we wish to emphasise is that the location of the development is on a zone known as the Great Western Wildlife Corridor, a key corridor in the Great Eastern Ranges located between Bullio and Bungonia which links the southern Blue Mountains with Morton National Park. That corridor is at its narrowest along the Hume Highway at the site of the proposed quarry which will cut across 13% of it. Regent Honeyeaters migrate along this corridor on their annual migration from Victoria to their breeding grounds in the Burragorang, Hunter and Capertee Valleys. They need to have winter-flowering gum trees along their route. Fragmentation of habitat along their migration route is a key reason this species is now critically endangered (less than 300 in the wild). We say that the critically endangered status of the Regent Honeyeater along with other threatened species found on the site has a value that cannot be diminished merely because it may thwart the proponent's plans for its place in the Sydney sand market.

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The third point to be repeated is that the proponent's own assessment admits that "it is our opinion that the removal of 63.2 ha of native vegetation, that includes known and potential habitat for threatened species as well as hollow-bearing trees and dead wood or dead trees, would exacerbate existing key threatening processes." The proponent now says that it will reduce the cleared area by just 10 hectares. That's not listening to the objections made earlier. It's an attempt to bargain its way into getting your approval – once they get what they want, they can apply for an extended area of extraction later.

From the beginning, the proponent has assumed that it will be forgiven for the damage it will wreak by paying money compensation under the biodiversity offsets mechanism. We say all experts agree that, notwithstanding what the current Biodiversity Conservation Act and other planning legislation may permit, a critically endangered species cannot be saved by the promise that substitute habitat will be found for them someday, somewhere else.

Furthermore, the new state government has foreshadowed an intention to urgently reform the Biodiversity Conservation Act and other laws that will prevent the existing provisions being used to continue the high levels of native bushland clearing that the people of NSW have been forced to endure for decades. We say that in light of the inevitable turning of this tide in the name of dealing with climate change and the extinction crisis, it would be unconscionable for independent planning commissions in 2023 to continue discounting the value of environmental considerations when compared with the relatively trivial plans of a sand miner.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Barry Walsh'.

Barry Walsh
Conservation Subcommittee, BirdLife Southern NSW

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