Huntlee New Town Stage 2 - SSD-70748466

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Hunter Wildlife Rescue (registered as Native Animal Trust Fund, NATF)

Hunter Wildlife Rescue (HWR) is a not-for-profit incorporated association, licensed under the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage to hold protected Australian fauna.

For almost 45 years, and with a current membership of over 300 around the Hunter region, our dedicated group of volunteers has worked tirelessly to rescue, rehabilitate and release injured, sick, orphaned, displaced and distressed native animals back into the wild as the first volunteer wildlife rescue group to operate in NSW.

For her work over this time, our President has recently been awarded the Order of Australia.

We operate rescue activities throughout the Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock, Singleton and Maitland local government areas.

Our Objective

The main objective of HWR is to return all native fauna back to its wildlife habitat when fit to fend for itself in order to preserve the integrity of our ecosystems and protect the unique diversity of species that call our area home.

Specific to this project, our goal is to minimise the displacement, injury and death of native wildlife from activities related to construction of Huntlee New Town Stage 2.

Operation

All members of Hunter Wildlife Rescue are volunteers and there are no paid staff. Members contribute in a variety of ways as rescuers, transporters, rehabilitators/carers or through administrative roles.

We work in collaboration with WIRES (NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service) who receive calls from community members who identify and assist our injured, sick or orphaned wildlife in the first instance. Wires then contacts Hunter Wildlife Rescue for response by our volunteers. This ensures our wildlife receive the most immediate and professional veterinarian assessment available, pain relief and the development of a rehabilitation management plan for our volunteers to implement.

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Hunter Wildlife Rescue (NATF) employs a comprehensive Training program to uphold the highest standards of education and care.

Hunter Wildlife Rescue works to all NSW Codes of Practice in relation to wildlife.

Table 1 records the 117 native animals (average 2 per week) attended by HWR in the Branxton/Rothbury/Greta area in the financial year 2023/2024.

Australian Magpie	3
Australian Owlet-nightjar	2
Australian Wood Duck	6
Bare-nosed Wombat	1
BROWN GOSHAWK	1
Common Tree Snake	1
Common Wallaroo	1
Crested Pigeon	4
Eastern Blue-tongue	4
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	26
EASTERN ROSELLA	3
Eastern Snake-necked Turtle	14
Galah	3
Golden-crowned Snake	2
GREAT CORMORANT	2
Grey-headed Flying-fox	1
LAUGHING KOOKABURRA	4
Lesser Long-eared Bat	1
LITTLE CORELLA	1
LITTLE EGRET	2
Magpie-lark	3
NANKEEN KESTREL	2
Pacific Black Duck Mallard Hybrid	2
RAINBOW LORIKEET	7
Red-bellied Black Snake	3
Red-necked Wallaby	4
Sacred Kingfisher	3
Short-beaked Echidna	1
Spotted Turtle-Dove	1
Swamp Wallaby	3
Tawny Frogmouth	4
Unidentified long-necked turtle	1
WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE	1
Total	117

Table 1: HWR attendance activity in the Branxton/Rothbury/Greta area FY23/24.

Huntlee Stage 2 Project

This submission and commentary relates to the Huntlee Stage 2 State Significant Development Application defined as "The Site" within the Summary Report Huntlee New Town Stage 2, 28 June 2024.

1. Maximum retention of hollow bearing trees

HWR notes that the Ecological Assessment Report (EAR), RPS, September 2010 identifies the following in Appendix 3, Fauna Species List:

- In excess of 100 species of birds, the majority of which are native animals, are identified as (1) Species recorded during RPS surveys 2005-2010. Some of these are classified as Vulnerable and some as Endangered under the Commonwealth EPBC Act
- In excess of 20 species of native mammals identified as (1) Species recorded during RPS surveys 2005-2010. Some of these are classified as Vulnerable under the Commonwealth EPBC Act
- 9 species of reptiles identified as (1) Species recorded during RPS survey 2005-2010
- 10 species of frogs identified as (1) Species recorded during RPS survey 2005-2010

A number of additional species in each category were identified as (2) Previously recorded across the area, just not identified at the time the surveys were conducted.

A number of these species will be adversely impacted by any

- Loss of mature and hollow-bearing trees as sources of nesting, food, foraging, connectivity to travel and shelter, and:
- Process of felling of mature and hollow-bearing trees through damage to nests or animals residing within the trees/hollows at the time, displacement of animals, loss of food, loss of connectivity for travel and shelter.

Further, HWR notes the following included in the EAR at Section 6 Mitigation Measures, General, where

> *"The intent of this section is to provide the principal mitigation considerations that can be adopted at the development phase to supplement the biodiversity protection measures mentioned earlier in the report. Future phases of more detailed development assessment and design will need to provide further details in regards to the finer points of design and in situ habitat retention and management relating to direct and indirect impacts within the development and conservation lands."*

Section 6 includes the following in relation to mature and hollow-bearing trees:

- *"A tree felling protocol will need to be developed to minimize harm to all fauna species during the clearing of trees for the Proposal. The tree felling protocol should be developed by a suitably qualified and licensed ecologist with previous experience Ecological Assessment Report, September 2010 Page 71 supervising the felling of trees. The tree felling protocol should involve as a minimum the following key steps of: establishment of the best time of the year for felling (depends on the likely species to be affected), pre-felling mapping of habitat trees, inspections of trees on the day of felling, procedures for the safe removal of fauna species from trees prior to and post felling, a relocation/release protocol, leaving the tree*

overnight where it fell, and a protocol for the salvaging of tree hollows for rehabilitation works where necessary. Where possible, tree felling should be undertaken during the best time of year as identified in the tree felling protocol. All tree felling should be supervised by the ecologist that developed the tree felling protocol (and in accordance with the tree felling protocol) or by another suitably qualified and licensed ecologist;

- *Where trees are to be removed as part of the Proposal an assessment of the surrounding level of tree hollow provision should be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist. The ecologist would determine the need for local supplementing of tree hollows (using salvaged tree hollows or nest boxes) based on the number of hollows lost during felling and the surrounding provision of remaining natural hollows. If the ecologist recommends the establishment of nest-boxes to compensate for the loss of tree hollows;*
    - *One nest box should be installed for every hollow-bearing tree removed;*
    - *A range of nest box sizes and shapes should be installed to encompass the range of hollow sizes to be removed;*
    - *Nest boxes should be installed prior to the commencement of vegetation clearing;*
    - *A nest box monitoring and maintenance (repair and replacement) program should be developed and implemented for at least 10 years from commencement of construction;*
- *Mature and hollow-bearing trees should be retained wherever feasible within the site;*
- *Vegetation to be removed is to be clearly marked in the field using temporary fencing (flagging tape or similar exclusion tape) so that boundaries are clearly established and to minimise the potential for equipment to accidently enter areas to be retained;*
- *Where possible, the timing of clearing activities should be undertaken at such times to avoid removal of hollow-bearing trees during breeding season of threatened species;*
- *Regular monitoring of the vegetation within the subject site and within the offset areas is to be undertaken in order to enable effective management of the vegetation with regard to rehabilitation (planting), regeneration, watering, fencing and weed control;*
- *A Vegetation Management Plan should be developed for the site which details the rehabilitation, restoration and ongoing maintenance (including weed management) of vegetation retained within the site;*
- *Vegetation to be removed should be clearly marked in the field using temporary fencing (flagging tape or similar exclusion tape) so that boundaries are clearly established and to minimise the potential for equipment to accidentally enter areas to be retained;"*

HWR notes that the current (draft) Preliminary CMP, Northrop, June 2024 does not list a Vegetation Management Plan amongst its appendices (it is included in Definitions).

HWR makes a submission that, *as a minimum*, the Mitigation Measures for tree felling identified in the EAR be adopted as a mandatory part of the Vegetation Management Plan for the project.

2. Management of native wildlife - Design

HWR has significant concerns regarding the displacement of native wildlife and potential for injury to wildlife during the construction period of Huntlee Stage 2 as well as from ongoing threats once the suburb is complete and functioning.

Native wildlife must be given every opportunity to safely navigate through the development wherever possible to support existing populations to thrive.

HWR makes a submission that design aspects of the development focus on maximising wildlife wellbeing, including but not limited to:

- Traffic management design to minimise animal strike e.g. speed restrictors, speed limits
- Use of "electric fencing" to warn wildlife of approaching traffic at night at high risk locations
- Lighting to minimise animal strike and optimise nocturnal wellbeing
- Vegetation selection to maximise habitats and wildlife foods
- Travel corridors designed to enable safe movement e.g. culverts, overhead "netting" connections
- Adoption of new and modern methods as the project progresses over time

3. Management of native wildlife - Construction

HWR has significant concerns regarding the displacement of native wildlife and potential for injury to wildlife during the felling and clearing process across Stage 2.

HWR notes that Appendix B1 Flora and Fauna Management Sub Plan in the Preliminary CMP is not yet populated.

Native wildlife must be given every opportunity to safely relocate to the remaining corridors and the allocated conservation area to the south of Stage 2.

HWR makes a submission that a specific detailed plan is prepared for the management of displaced and injured native wildlife.

4. Hunter Wildlife Rescue project integration

Hunter Wildlife Rescue is skilled at identifying wildlife that may be present, their homes and safe methods of removal, retrieval, rehabilitation and subsequent release in other suitable areas. HWR has a network of vets, veterinary hospitals, specialist facilities out of area, rescuers, carers and rehabilitators that can maximise successful outcomes for native wildlife.

Hunter Wildlife Rescue could contribute proactively to minimising harm to native animals impacted by being integrated within the project as advisors to construction planners and ecologists. This may include for safe methods of clearing and animal retrieval/relocation, on-site and off-site advisors to ecologists during construction, and/or as first responders to retrieve displaced or injured wildlife identified during all on-site phases of the project.

HWR makes a submission that we be involved in the planning, preparation and execution of the components of the Construction Management Plan related to identification, recovery, rescue and relocation of native wildlife across Huntlee Stage 2. Specifically

- Requirement as part of contract with Principal Contractor to be consulted in the development of the Construction Environment Plan, or equivalent, in relation to native

wildlife identification, location, recovery, relocation and rescue practices to be employed during pre-construction and construction works of Huntlee Stage 2.

- Requirement as part of contract with Principal Contractor/s to be included in the Construction Environment Plan, from initial site works to commissioning, as preferred local advisor for advice, identification, location, recovery, relocation, rescue and release of native wildlife for Huntlee Stage 2.

Summary

Hunter Wildlife Rescue recognise the need for state significant projects that provide housing in the current environment. However, ***this should not come at significant cost that compromises our already struggling native habitats and the wildlife they support****. The mistakes of the past associated with development projects should not be repeated in the race to new housing.*

Hunter Wildlife Rescue has a unique perspective having serviced the Hunter region's wildlife for over 40 years and we are acutely aware of the cumulative impact of developments in the region on wildlife. Increased residential and commercial developments, road infrastructure and other projects have carved up increasingly smaller pockets of refuge for wildlife as well as corridors that link them.