



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Submission objecting to the Northbank Enterprise Hub, Industrial and Business Park MP10_01 85

The Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) objects to this development for two reasons: firstly, no account has been taken with regard to expected sea level rise and secondly, it is not acceptable to put at risk of extinction the Eastern Grass Owl *Tyto longimembris* currently using the site.

Sea-level rise

Much has been written about the impact of sea-level rise on coast lines around the world.

“Sea-level rise has been identified as a major threat to coastal habitats and communities worldwide” and “Sea-level rise has both biophysical and socioeconomic impacts, threatening coastal landscapes, their ecosystem services, and coastal populations. The primary biophysical impacts of sea-level rise include inundation and displacement of wetlands and low-lying land, increased coastal erosion, increased coastal flooding, and saltwater intrusion into estuaries, deltas, and aquifers” (McLeod et al. 2010).

Apart from the impact on human populations, sea-level rise will impact particularly on migratory shorebirds as many species depend on mudflats for their survival. The Hunter Estuary is the most important site in NSW for migratory shorebirds and will be impacted by sea-level rise, with potential loss of intertidal mudflats.

It is also believed that habitat will adapt to the change in sea level by moving landwards if planning strategies are put in place:

“However, coastal wetlands may be able to adapt by growing upward or landward if sea-level rise occurs slowly enough, if adequate expansion space exists, and if other environmental conditions are met (e.g., adequate sediment for vertical accretion). The ability of wetlands to migrate landward may be constrained by local conditions (e.g., roads, agricultural fields, dikes, urbanization, seawalls, and shipping channels) and topography (e.g., steep slopes, cliffs). Wetlands with an adequate sediment supply where coastal development and topography do not prevent landward migration are likely to be less vulnerable to increases in sea level.” (McLeod et al. 2010).

The Northbank Enterprise Hub land is adjacent to the Hunter Wetlands National Park Ramsar site and to land purchased by Port Waratah Coal Services for the purposes of restoration of shorebird habitat as an offset for the proposed Terminal 4 coal loader.

In view of predicted sea-level rise, it is hard to believe that the NSW Planning Department would allow any land at Tomago which has no infrastructure at present to be developed. The Northbank Enterprise Hub site is already subject to flooding and will necessitate the importation of 3.7 million cubic metres of fill to meet the 1:100 year flood level. To allow this defies reason.

The infilling of land close to a large shorebird restoration site (the T4 offset project) and close to the Hunter Wetlands National Park (HWNP) Ramsar site is inappropriate and shows a lack strategic planning with regard to sea-level rise. Any undeveloped land in the Hunter Estuary must be left to allow for future changes in the coastline and for the landward migration of wetlands including saltmarsh, an Endangered Ecological Community, which is habitat for migratory shorebirds. This would be in keeping with the many

recommendations made by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change in 2009 some of which are quoted here in part:

Recommendation 27

-focus on high biodiversity coastal habitat, including more effective off-reserve coastal zone conservation and expanded coastal reserves that provide larger buffer zones.

Recommendation 31

- require that all Ramsar listed wetlands have effective and operational management plans and that resources are allocated by governments to monitor the implementation of these plans
- increase the number of coastal wetlands classified as Ramsar sites, particularly those classified as Nationally Important wetlands

Recommendation 32

- work through the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council and in consultation with Birds Australia and other stakeholders to implement a National Shorebirds Protection Strategy. The strategy should focus on tightening restrictions on beach driving and access to bird breeding habitat, preserving habitat, **identifying suitable buffer zones for migration of coastal bird habitat**, managing pest animals and increased public education

Recommendation 33

- ensure appropriate infrastructure planning and that land is made available to allow for the migration of coastal ecosystems

The presence of the Eastern Grass Owl

In view of the acknowledged 'Vulnerable' status of the Eastern Grass Owl, it is not acceptable to lose an established population. Only seven owls were found over 40 sites surveyed and only five of these were found on protected land. If the Northbank Enterprise Hub development is implemented, another population of this threatened species will be lost. In view of the changes to the HWNP with regard to Green and Golden Bellfrog habitat creation and the reinstatement of tidal flow to the HWNP Ramsar site and Hexham Swamp, it is likely that more habitat will become unsuitable for Grass Owls leading to further losses. The Northbank Enterprise Hub land is considered prime foraging habitat and should not be destroyed.

Submission prepared for Hunter Bird Observers Club by A. Lindsey, 25 October, 2012

References

McLeod, E., Poulter, B., Hinkel, J., Reyes, E. and Salm, R. (2012). Sea-level rise impact models and environmental conservation: A review of models and their applications 2010. *Ocean and Coastal Management* **53** (9): 507-517. Published by Elsevier.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts. (2009). Managing our coastal zone in a changing climate. The time to act is now.