Hunter Local Land Services
Private Bag 2010
Paterson NSW 2421
Tel: 02 4948 4900
www.lls.nsw.gov.au/hunter
CM9 Ref: DOC21/154288

27 August 2021

Mr Daniel Gorgioski
Director – Transport Assessments
Planning and Assessment
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Locked Bag 5022
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124
daniel.gorgioski@planning.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Gorgioski

Re: *M1 Pacific Highway extension to Raymond Terrace – Environmental Impact Statement: SSI-7319*

I am writing on behalf of Hunter Local Land Services (LLS) as the NSW Government agency with responsibilities for natural resource management, Hunter Catchment Contributions program, biosecurity, emergency management and sustainable agriculture.

Attached please find the Hunter LLS submission for the public exhibition of the environmental impact statement for the M1 Pacific Highway extension to Raymond Terrace, with reference to sections Chapters 9 Biodiversity, Chapter 10 Hydrology and Flooding, Appendix I Biodiversity Assessment Report (and Appendix 1 Biodiversity Offset Strategy).

Please contact me by email on clare.macdougal@lls.nsw.gov.au or mobile on 0417 578236 if you require further information.

Kind regards,

Clare MacDougal
Manager Healthy Landscapes
Hunter Local Land Services

M1 Pacific Highway extension to Raymond Terrace – Environmental Impact Statement: SSI-7319

Hunter Local Land Services Response

Hunter Local Land Services (LLS) welcomes the opportunity to review the EIS for the proposal for the M1 Pacific Highway extension to Raymond Terrace (SSI-7319).

Regarding offsetting options for aquatic habitats (9.6.2), Hunter LLS prefers prioritising remediation works over monetary compensation, including ecological restoration, improved tidal flows, floodplain management and establishment of a climate change adaptation corridor on key floodplain properties purchased as part of the extension project. Specifically, Hunter LLS would welcome further discussion regarding options for the ecological restoration of properties adjacent to the Hunter River which have been purchased by the NSW Government for this project. These properties are located at a crucial point in the lower Hunter River estuary as the next site for an integrated, multi-agency collaborative ecological restoration project as well as for conveyance of flood water and serving as a climate change adaptation corridor.

These key properties have significant value for the following reasons:

- Identified by multiple Government agencies (including Local Land Services, DPI Fisheries and DPIE Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Scheme), industry and key research organisations as a high value site for coastal wetland restoration for improved ecosystem function and habitat for numerous threatened species;
- Identified as high value by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service for maintaining ecological character of the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar site in the face of climate change and sea level rise;
- Identified as high value at the Hunter Estuary Vegetation Migration Workshop (2017) attended by scientists, agency staff, industry and community representatives as a priority site for a significant potential retreat pathway for coastal saltmarsh (PCT 1746) migration and regeneration as saltmarsh elsewhere in the estuary is impacted by current and predicted sea level rise;
- Identified as high priority site for restoration of tidal flows and sustainable floodplain management by the review of the Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Scheme (NSW DPIE, in prep) and the Tidal Floodgate Assessment of Inundation Risk and Opportunities (WRL, 2021);
- Identified as a priority site in the Hunter Estuary, Worimi Conservation Lands, Port Stephens Shorebird and Manning River Estuary Action Plan (BirdLife Australia, 2020) for migratory shorebird habitat restoration due to proximity and line of sight to the river and its position in a climate change adaptation corridor;
- Position and size make the site ideal for an integrated, multi-agency restoration plan that could deliver biodiversity offsets for a number of migratory shorebirds and threatened species and endangered floodplain ecological communities including federally listed Eastern Curlew, migratory shorebirds, Australasian Bittern, Coastal Swamp Oak Forest and Coastal Saltmarsh;
- Floodplain wetlands at this site could be considered by Hunter Water Corporation for improved management to help achieve better water quality in the Hunter River; and
- Public ownership of this site provides a unique opportunity to develop and implement a collaborative project that could deliver outcomes for the NSW government, local industry and special interest groups.

Hunter LLS has extensive expertise from current and past work on similar rehabilitation projects within the Hunter River estuary including the Ramsar wetlands which would be highly relevant to these sites. We would therefore welcome the opportunity to work with other agencies and specialists to investigate the feasibility of improving water flow and connectivity for better water quality, fish habitat, biodiversity, flood management and water quality in the floodplain section of the corridor to avoid and mitigate impacts of the extension project and identify restoration actions for offset lands.

In addition, given Hunter LLS' responsibilities for conserving Aboriginal cultural heritage, managing natural resources, Hunter Catchment Contributions and in part for the Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Scheme, we would like to be included in on-going discussions about remediation options and management of the floodplain properties.

Opportunities exist for a multi-stakeholder partnership between Transport for NSW and numerous NSW Government agencies to develop a site restoration plan for these properties, and Hunter LLS advises that further consultation with the key agencies takes place to identify opportunities for future site restoration and potential future land ownership by the relevant public land administrator.