



June 28, 2021

To: Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Major Projects Submission via NSW Planning Portal

MARTINS CREEK QUARRY PROJECT SSD-6612

This submission is made by the Southern NSW Branch of BirdLife Australia. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Martins Creek Quarry Project (MCQP).

BirdLife Australia is Australia's largest bird watching, bird research and conservation organisation. For more than 100 years BirdLife has been a leading advocate for native birds and for those who value them. We are an independent not-for-profit organisation with over 190,000 supporters nationally. We have many regional Branches, Special interest Groups, Reserves and Observatories, and a single aim: creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

The Martins Creek Quarry is sited within the area overseen by the Southern NSW branch of BirdLife Australia and locally by the Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC). HBOC have already made a submission regarding the expansion of the Martins Creek Quarry, and we fully support that submission. Our submission should be read in conjunction with the HBOC submission.

For BirdLife Australia, the likely impacts on threatened bird species and their habitat are our primary concern with the MCQP. We are very concerned at the general decline in numbers of woodland bird species in NSW, to the extent that BirdLife funds a dedicated team of scientists and volunteers in the Regent Honeyeater recovery team and the Woodland Birds for Biodiversity project. In addition, BirdLife is a collaborator in the NSW government's Saving our Species conservation program.

The loss of nearly 30 hectares of woodland for the MCQP is significant. This loss of habitat that will result if the MCQP is approved is likely to cause loss of birdlife. You cannot lose around 30 hectares of woodland and not have long term loss of birds and wildlife.

The Biodiversity Assessment Report prepared by Conacher Consulting very clearly states in Appendix 4 page 4¹:

It has been identified through the EPBC Act referral process that the proposed development is likely to significantly impact the following EPBC Act (1999) listed threatened fauna species:

- *Koala (Phascolarctos cinereus) combined populations of Qld, NSW and the ACT – Vulnerable;*
- *Regent Honeyeater (Anthochaera phrygia) – Critically Endangered;*
- *Swift Parrot (Lathamus discolor) – Critically Endangered; and*
- *Spot-tailed Quoll (Dasyurus maculatus maculatus) SE mainland population – Endangered*

The surveys carried out to prepare this report may not have identified Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots on the particular days the surveys occurred, however there is little doubt that both birds utilise these woodlands. Sightings of Swift Parrots in Martins Creek have been registered on Birddata² and as recently as 2020 on ebird³ just 20kms away. Regent



Honeyeaters have been sighted by a number of observers on different occasions in 2018, just 15 kms away³. It is simply because the number of these birds has declined alarmingly that usage will only be sporadic. Both species are nomadic, moving widely through the landscape in search of food. Their status as Critically Endangered under the EPBC Act means that **no action should be approved which is likely to cause any further decline**. If Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater numbers can be increased these woodlands will likely continue to be utilised for the survival of these birds in the future, and on a more regular basis.

Great efforts continue to be made by a number of organisations to expand the population of Regent Honeyeaters into the lower Hunter region^{4,5}. Taking away almost 30 hectares of suitable habitat will in the long term hamper the effort to increase the population of these birds – this makes no sense.

There are also a number of other threatened and vulnerable woodland birds that utilise the area in question, as identified by the Biodiversity Assessment Report prepared by Conacher Consulting. We should not wait until they become endangered or critically endangered before we start thinking about them and taking their plight into consideration. We should be protecting their habitat now, so they are not moved from vulnerable and threatened status to endangered, critically endangered or extinct status.

In addition, these woodlands provide a vital ‘stepping stone’⁶ to allow the movement of woodland birds within the Hunter Valley, and to and from those areas to the north and south. Woodlands, such as those in and adjacent to the MCQP, provide a ‘stepping stone’ between the Barrington Tops Key Biodiversity Area and the Lower Hunter Valley and Hunter Estuary Key Biodiversity Areas. Key Biodiversity Area⁷ (KBA) status is an international designation for the most important environmental areas which need to be conserved. This status is not awarded lightly and reflects the importance of the region for birdlife. Without these ‘stepping stone’ and refuge areas, birds will become isolated and bird numbers will continue to fall. Genetic diversity will also suffer, reducing bird numbers even further.

Although this submission, and the HBOC submission, is focused on the plight of birdlife, the whole woodland ecosystem is important and a number of other flora and fauna species are at risk of becoming extinct, as has been identified¹.

In 2020 the NSW parliamentary inquiry found that the Koala will become extinct in NSW before 2050⁸ unless there is urgent government intervention to prevent habitat loss, which the inquiry found is the biggest threat to the survival of the species. The EPBC Referral document prepared by Conacher Consulting, which identifies that the project will require removal of more than 20 hectares of Koala habitat, predates the increased concern about Koala survival since the 2019-20 bushfires. This is an additional compelling reason for objection to the proposal.

For the reasons given we urge that the Martins Creek Quarry Expansion Project be not approved.

Yours sincerely

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References

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3. <https://ebird.org/checklist/S69059525>, <https://ebird.org/checklist/S51013129>, & <https://ebird.org/checklist/S51060485>
4. <https://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/woodland-birds-for-biodiversity/REHO-release>
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6. <http://www.habitatsteppingstones.org.au/faq>
7. <http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/sites/search>
8. The Guardian 30 June 2020