

Submission regarding Grenfell Poultry Breeder Farm by Dr Miranda Coulson

I am extremely concerned about the proposal to build a chicken farm for 570,000 birds in 40 sheds at 1130 Gooloogong Road, Grenfell. I do not support this proposal.

Location

The proposed site is set within the south-west slopes Key Biodiversity Area for Birds and attracts regular biodiversity surveys¹. It is rich with birdlife and native plants. The location is also within the Cowra Woodlands area which has been the site of the Cowra Woodlands Bird Program devoted to the management of birds in their woodland habitats². This program has been running for 15 years to encourage the preservation of local native birds in critically endangered Box Gum woodland habitat. A significant amount of tourism is drawn to the area because of the richness of native birdlife locally. They are drawn to bird trails which surround the area where the development is proposed to be located¹. Moreover, many species are threatened and are declining due to the clearance of lowland grassy woodlands, which also contain many threatened plants³.

The proposal is completely unacceptable for an area which is renowned for its natural heritage and has a clean and green image.

Water Use

The proposal is set to require huge amounts of water, in the region of 1 million litres of water per day from the Gooloogong-Grenfell pipeline. Water security is a significant issue for the Catchment Management Authority to preserve the water supply to local towns. The diversion of this much water is not a sustainable management of a critical resource.

Water Contamination

Poultry farms are associated with environmental contamination of surface water, groundwater, and the soil⁴. The habitat of this area is dependent on the maintenance of pristine local creeks and streams.

Poultry manure contains nitrogen, phosphorus, and other excreted substances such as hormones, antibiotics, pathogens, and heavy metals, such as arsenic, which are introduced through feed.

Leaching and runoff of these substances has the well documented potential to result in contamination of surface water and groundwater resources⁵.

Manure also contains pathogens such as cryptosporidium and giardia species which can easily spread from manure to water supplies⁴. Notably, poultry manure is not treated to remove these pathogens.

Soil contamination

This is also inevitable due to the leaching of drug residues such as antibiotics and hormones and heavy metals from feed⁴. It is also unclear how dead chickens will be disposed of and leaching of these substances directly from carcasses will contribute to contamination.

Pest Animals

The inevitable proliferation of rats and flies will lead to use of control measures such as baiting and organophosphate containing insecticides with consequential impact on nutrient-sensitive ecosystems, resulting in biodiversity losses⁴.

Effect on Waterways

The waterways and aquifers of the Lachlan catchment are important water resources for agriculture, mining, tourism and towns. They also support threatened and iconic species such as: purple spotted gudgeon, silver perch, Murray cod, Macquarie perch, trout cod, southern pygmy perch, flathead galaxias, freshwater catfish and olive perchlet, glossy ibis, blue-billed ducks, freckled ducks, straw-necked ibis, Australasian bittern and the largest, regularly used breeding colony of pelicans in NSW. There are eight wetlands in the Lachlan catchment that are listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia, including the Booligal Wetlands, Lachlan Swamp and Great Cumbung Swamp (Department of Environment and Energy 2018). An additional nine wetlands are identified as regionally significant (Lachlan CMA). The aquatic ecological community in the natural drainage system of the lower Lachlan River is also listed as an endangered ecological community in NSW⁶.

Such communities require protection, not thoughtless acceptance of a massive enterprise with a high likelihood of resulting environmental degradation.

Risk of Avian Influenza outbreak

The cramming together of thousands of birds into an unnaturally small space draws the risk of disease outbreak such as the Avian Influenza Virus⁷. The consequences for the local bird species are grim but the inevitable slaughtering of 570,000 birds draws the question of the disposal of the bodies without risk to the environment or people. This has clearly not been considered adequately. The risk of spread of such a zoonosis is well documented and given the current pandemic is a grossly under-considered issue.

Clearing native vegetation

Box Gum woodlands are critically endangered ecosystems which are remnant habitats for threatened species. Clearing of this type is no longer acceptable as it is not 'maintaining and enhancing the natural resource base', as stated within the Weddin Local Environmental Plan 2011⁸. Clearing of any area of native vegetation, including areas less than 2 hectares in extent, may have significant impacts on biological diversity².

Aesthetic considerations

The visual impact of 40 sheds is entirely out of keeping with the beauty of the area and would diminish the value of its natural heritage and biodiversity which we should be endeavouring to maintain and improve. This proposal would entirely undermine a goal for attractive and sustainable development.

The Reputation of Baiada

A trail of poor publicity has followed this company. It was taken to court in 2013 by the ACCC for misleading the public on packaging and advertising⁹. In 2016 the company was found guilty of wage fraud¹⁰. In 2019 a video of savage cruelty towards chickens revealed the smashing of birds against metal railings, punching them in the head and repeatedly tearing birds' heads off by Baiada workers¹¹.

A company of this type is not interested in anything other than profit, will have no interest in the environment surrounding Grenfell, and will have no care for the birds which it will farm in monstrous proportions.

This proposed development cannot be acceptable to an area which prides itself on preservation of natural heritage and maintenance of sustainable and thoughtful industry.

1. <https://www.grenfell.org.au/attractions/bird-watching-and-bird-trails>
2. <https://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/cowra-woodland-birds-program>
3. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/nsw-threatened-species-scientific-committee/determinations/final-determinations/2000-2003/clearing-of-native-vegetation-key-threatening-process-listing>
4. https://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/home/events/bangkok2007/docs/part2/2_2.pdf
5. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969720329764>
6. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Water/Water-for-the-environment/lachlan-catchment-and-long-term-water-plan-180590.pdf?la=en&hash=F9C1DA6200D2ED8A86D483E6BE0D6D268534E9FA>
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/18/factory-farms-of-disease-how-industrial-chicken-production-is-breeding-the-next-pandemic>
8. <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/epi-2011-0622>
9. <https://animalsaustralia.org/latest-news/accc-takes-chicken-industry-to-court/>
10. <https://www.abc.net.au/lateline/chicken-company-worker-exploitation/6554688>
11. <https://www.peta.org.au/action/baiada-chicken-cruelty/>