



HASTINGS BIRDWATCHERS

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Submission on the Proposed Expansion of the Sancrox Quarry near Port Macquarie.

Hastings Birdwatchers is a community group interested in birds and their conservation and an affiliate of BirdLife Australia, the largest bird conservation group in Australia with over 145,000 members and supporters.

We are writing in opposition to the proposed expansion of the Sancrox Quarry near Port Macquarie. The expansion will lead to the clearing of more than 43 hectares of native forest. This proposed clearing of native vegetation would come at a time when hundreds of thousands of hectares have been burnt in the recent bushfires on the mid north coast. This includes Lake Innes Nature Reserve, which had a large and healthy population of koalas, plus many threatened birds. Some of this vegetation proposed to be cleared here is Subtropical Coastal Floodplain Forest, a Threatened Ecological Community. In this habitat is *Eucalyptus teriticornis*, Forest Red Gum, an important feed and forage tree for the Critically Endangered Swift Parrot. There is also 11 hectares of Spotted Gum-Grey Ironbark Open Forest which would be cleared. Spotted Gum, *Corymbia maculata*, has the potential to provide winter nectar for the Swift Parrot and the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater. These trees do not occur widely in the Hastings Valley. It should be noted that the fauna surveys, conducted as part of the Biodiversity Assessment Report (DA, Annex C) were conducted in November to December 2015 and would have missed the presence of the parrots as they would have been on their way back to, or in Tasmania to breed. Likewise, the surveys would have missed any Regent Honeyeaters feeding there. The rest of the habitat proposed to be cleared is still important habitat to native bird and other species, especially in the light of the very large amount of habitat recently burnt.

The Biodiversity Assessment Report downplays the importance of corridors in the area to be cleared. However, Port Macquarie Hastings Council (PMHC), identifies the area as being part of a sub-regional Wildlife Corridor. Corridors are important for the dispersal of koalas, especially at the moment. Koalas will be looking for new habitats, as much of their previous habitat has been burnt. They are also important to the movement of birds. Many birds will not cross open habitats above a certain threshold size.

The proposed offsets also present problems. Offsets still result in a net loss of native habitat. The offset is not largely “like for like”, as only one vegetation community in the offset site is also represented in the proposed quarry site. And the 49 hectares that constitute the proposed offset for the quarry expansion, as shown in the Biodiversity Assessment Report, has a very large area of cleared habitat, with seemingly no plan to replant it. Even if it is replanted, it will not provide food resources for the two critically endangered birds for decades. And there is always the option for the developer to simply pay into the Biodiversity Conservation Fund, which may not protect local biodiversity at all.

The loss of hollow-bearing trees, a Key Threatening Process, leads to the steady decline of species which use the hollows for roosting and nesting. These include many bird species, such as forests owls, Glossy Black Cockatoos and many other parrots. Many gliders and possums also use hollows for the same purpose. The Biodiversity Assessment Report notes that there are hollow bearing trees in the proposed site. This is the “death by a thousand cuts”, the cumulative effects of the steady loss of habitat for native fauna. This has resulted in the decline of bird species and bird numbers. The loss of mammal species is even more concerning.

The Greater Sancroix Area Structure Plan (Port Macquarie Hastings Council, 2014), identifies the land to be cleared as medium to high activity koala habitat. The Draft Coastal Koala Plan of Management 2018 also identifies the area as core koala habitat. Given these designations and the enormous area of habitat burnt recently, all such habitats should now be protected as a matter of urgency. At the very least, field surveys should be redone, given that it is 4 years since they were completed and much has changed since that time. As well, as the habitat burnt since then, several species have been added to the threatened species list in NSW. Port Macquarie Hastings Council has similar concerns about this development, to the extent that they recently voted to ask the NSW Government to put a pause on the extension of the quarry.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this development.

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