



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc
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The Commissioners,
Independent Planning Commission,
Level 3, 201 Elizabeth Street,
Sydney, NSW 2000
Sent by email to pac@pac.nsw.gov.au

Re: Santos Coal Seam Gas Project Narrabri NSW

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) objects to the approval and development of the coal seam gas field in the Pilliga forest south west of Narrabri.

The proposal includes the clearing of c. 1000 ha of woodlands. Woodland bird species are among Australia's most threatened fauna and land clearance is the greatest threat to their survival. Thirty-two bird species listed under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* or the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* have been determined to have "the likelihood of occurrence" and eighteen of these are present on the site. The Pilliga forests are a known stronghold for Glossy Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami*. As a result of the disastrous bushfires in NSW which has led to food supplies being destroyed there has been a massive and unfortunate dispersal of this species from its former territories. The destruction of woodlands or fragmentation of woodlands which constitute the habitat of threatened species will result in extinction. The destruction of habitat will also result in the local extinction of bird species not as yet listed as threatened. According to BirdLife Australia's atlas of Australian birds database, Birddata, 202 species have been recorded in the coal seam gas study area. This represents c. 45% of bird species in NSW. In NSW in some areas, particularly agricultural areas 80 to 90% of native vegetation has already been cleared.

We ask the Commissioners to also take into account that considerably more woodland will be destroyed to make way for the proposed Melbourne/Brisbane Inland Rail. Perusal of a map of NSW will reveal the scale of existing land clearance in this state with the tiny dark-coloured woodlands of Pilliga a haven of continuous native vegetation.

The loss of hollow-bearing trees is a Key Threatening Process in NSW. A total of 10,143 hollow-bearing trees will potentially be removed as a result of the project. Given that c. 15% of Australian birds (114 species) depend on hollows for breeding or shelter their destruction will directly affect the survival rate of these species. It takes up to or more than 100-150 years for a hollow to become suitable for large forest owls such as Barking Owl present on the site.

Although offset measures may look adequate on paper, they will not ultimately result in benefits for local or state avifauna. The result will be the loss of many, many individual birds and bird species from the area thus decreasing biodiversity. In the minds of members of HBOC it is inconceivable that woodland continues to be destroyed when so little remains.

It has been established that the greater the biodiversity the healthier the environment for human beings. Why is biodiversity being destroyed so relentlessly in Australia?

HBOC asks the Commissioners to take our objection into consideration and to stop this project from going ahead.

Thank you,

Ann Lindsey – Conservation Coordinator for Hunter Bird Observers Club. 30th June 2020

References

Declining woodland birds – is our science making a difference? Andrew F. Bennett A and David M. Watson B A Emu, 2011, 111, i–vi

Loss of Hollow-bearing trees

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=20079>

Santos Environmental Impact Statement and other documents

BirdLife Australia Birdata

World Health Organisation – Biodiversity and Health

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/biodiversity-and-health>

About Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was established in 1976 and currently has a membership over 350 members. Although the Club is based in Newcastle NSW membership includes members from other areas in NSW and from interstate.

Aims of HBOC:

to encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat and
to encourage bird observing as a leisure-time activity.

Activities include monthly regular outings, evening meetings, camps and field studies. HBOC promotes systematic field studies which include regular surveys by volunteers from the membership:

Surveys of waterbirds in the Hunter River estuary, Port Stephens and Lake Macquarie
Surveys for woodland birds in the Hunter Valley and Manning Valley
Surveys of Broughton Island off the coast of Port Stephens
Surveys of Worimi Conservation Lands

All data gathered from field studies are entered into the national database, Birdata, administered by Birdlife Australia. Data are used to underpin conservation issues.

HBOC has a long history of working in collaboration with local councils, national parks, industry and schools.

HBOC major publications include:

an annual journal, *The Whistler*, of which there are now 13 volumes. It provides a platform for regionally significant observations and findings.

an annual bird report which summarises the status of avifauna in the Hunter Region of NSW. This publication is now in its 26th year.

brochures which show self-guided birding routes of which there are now fourteen covering most of the Hunter Region.

For more information about HBOC go to www.hboc.org.au