

Victoria Wensley – Biodiversity

I wish to speak on Loreto's submission to the Department of Planning regarding the removal of trees in this plan, and other effects on the biodiversity of the area. Please note that there are some significant objections by residents and indeed Hornsby Council that have not been appropriately addressed.

Loreto's decision to remove 105 trees from the local landscape, **primarily from the stand on Mt Pleasant Avenue**, will have consequences not just on the human residents but also on the native wildlife that calls this area home. In section 4.4.9 the report notes that "Despite the presence of native vegetation, no threatened species were recorded within the study area during the targeted surveys on the site". This may in fact be true as **the length of time of the "targeted surveys" are not specified, nor was it determined whether the surveys were conducted diurnally or nocturnally**. There are however many native species accessing the site including **at least two threatened species**.

At the end of Mt Pleasant Avenue approximately 400m from the site where the trees are to be removed under this proposal are **a pair of permanent resident Powerful Owls classified as a threatened species**. This pair of owls has nested here for over ten years producing just six chicks in that time and returning to the same nest sites every year. They are a regular feature in the trees at night where their distinctive call can be heard as they hunt including in the stands of trees whose survival is in question.

Powerful Owls are landscape managers, roosting away from their nest and hunting across a 2 km radius at night, requiring this biodiversity and range to survive. Medium and tall trees are important for their success as they harbour the smaller birds possums and sugar gliders (along with rodents) that make up their diet. Needless to say, the loss of so many native trees would have a significant impact on the owls. In the report please note **that Hornsby Council objected to the "loss of high retention trees on the site" calling it "concerning"**. As a local resident who has avidly observed the native fauna in this area for over twenty years I agree with their concerns as do many other residents. The Powerful Owls are apex predators and play an important part in this ecosystem as well as being treasured by the locals.

The bushland where the Powerful Owls nest is the Wahroonga Estate, which is the bushland property managed by the Seventh Day Adventists. They employ staff there to manage the environment and encourage biodiversity, including using wildlife cameras and regular spotlighting to keep statistics on the wildlife population. A list of some but not all the other birds that live and feed in the area, including in the Loreto bushland are as follows:

- Boobook owls
- Eastern Rosellas
- Dollar Birds
- Magpies
- Butcher Birds
- Kookaburras
- Sulphur Crested Cockatoos
- Galahs
- Rainbow Lorikeets
- Corellas
- Whip Birds
- Eastern Spinebills
- Currawongs
- Golden Whistlers
- Tawny Frogmouths
- Red Browed Firetails
- King Parrots
- and of course the Channel Bill Cuckoos as they migrate through.

Many of the birds listed here **have been witnessed by residents of our street feeding and nesting, over many years, in the trees within the stand on Mt Pleasant Avenue that Loreto wishes to destroy** in order to build such a large project.

Other local residents are the variety of bats that inhabit this area. There are four varieties of bats that live in the valley including the Southern myotis (“micro bats”) the grey headed flying foxes that feed through this corridor regularly, and the Gould’s Wattled Bat. **The most significant bat however is the Eastern False Pipistrelle bat** with a status similar to the Powerful Owl in terms of **conservation vulnerability**. Their colony is situated close by - just over

the other side of Fox Valley Road- but like the birds are a landscape species so feed in our area including Loreto and the trees in question. **I can see NO mention of this particular bat in the report. This issue needs further research.**

Any stand of mature native trees provides habitat connectivity for native fauna. With the urban landscape steadily increasing, and with so many species resident in this area, it is a harsh proposal to remove so much habitat. **Hornsby Council has noted too that “no significant trees should be removed”**. Not only are food sources and nesting sites removed but the increase in artificial light further disturbs the nocturnal species mentioned

Increase in human activity always reduces wildlife activity. Jayden Streitfeild, the Environmental Officer at The Wahroonga Estate, has noted that on the advent of Covid lockdown and with significantly increased foot traffic through the bush areas, many of the species are exhibiting a drop in sightings. With the increase in foot traffic from so many extra student-boarders and commuters-trooping through the local areas this trend is sure to continue.

In conclusion I ask for the Committee to please reconsider the unconvincing and minimal detail paid to protecting our local biodiversity and indeed our local community. In Section 4:5:7 the Report states that the Objects of the EP&A Act are “to promote the social and economic welfare of the community and a better environment by the proper management development and conservation of the State’s natural and other resources”.

Currently this project looks instead to bring greatly increased foot traffic, school and traffic noise, gridlocked traffic, excessive light pollution and commuter chaos What it removes though, is the natural beauty of a tree lined avenue, accessible roads, sunlight in the afternoons for those blanketed by the five-storey building in a low density housing area. natural filtered shade, greenery and the treasured and protected members our native fauna.

I request that further studies take place to ascertain the dangers this project places on the native flora and fauna, and that strict ongoing controls be placed on Loreto regarding any lighting on buildings, pathways, gates, carparks ovals or fences such that any development that proceeds does not distribute light pollution throughout the neighbourhood. A five-storey building with boarders will be asking for “safety” and therefore lights everywhere and this matter

needs clarification now before any building should commence- for a massive high rise lit up all night is simply untenable.

This project is too extreme. It is ecologically damaging and reduces all aspects of quality of life for residents; humans and animals alike. **The five-storey boarding house must be scrapped.** There is no clear plan here limiting excessive light pollution or explaining just how the replanting offered provides adequate recompense for the loss sustained for native fauna and residents.

The report does not make clear just how the re planting will occur, or where, the types of natives planted and where they will be sourcing aged trees from.

Trees planted as biocredits hundreds of kilometres away are of no use to us. It is simply disingenuous to remove 105 aged trees and replace them with saplings and claim due diligence to the environment and the community has been paid.

I ask that this proposal be rejected.