

# Redbank Power Station Biomass Proposal



Hunter Wildlife Rescue (NATF)



18 August 2025

## **Hunter Wildlife Rescue (registered as Native Animal Trust Fund, NATF) – Opposition to the proposed Redbank Power Station Biomass project.**

### **Hunter Wildlife Rescue**

Hunter Wildlife Rescue (HWR) is a not-for-profit incorporated association, licensed under the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage to hold protected Australian fauna.

For almost 45 years, and with a current membership of over 300 around the Hunter region, including Singleton, our dedicated group of volunteers has worked around the clock to rescue, rehabilitate and release injured, sick, orphaned, displaced and distressed native animals back into the wild. HWR was the first volunteer wildlife rescue group to operate in NSW.

In addition, we provide emergency response services and support to government agencies (e.g. NSW Environmental Protection Agency (NSW EPA), Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS)). Examples include an oil spill response in the Hunter River in 2011, NSW bushfires in 2019/2020 and more recently a lightning strike at Singleton (flying foxes) and a mass bird poisoning in inner city Newcastle this year.

For her work over this time, our previous President Audrey Koosmen was awarded the Order of Australia in 2024.

We operate rescue activities throughout the Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Cessnock, Singleton, Muswellbrook and Dungog local government areas.

### **Our Objective**

The main objective of HWR is to return all native fauna back to its wildlife habitat when fit to fend for itself in order to preserve the integrity of our ecosystems and protect the unique diversity of species that call our area home.

Consistent with this objective is our advocacy to protect the habitats to which we can return native wildlife. Increasingly these habitats are under threat from development such as housing and energy.

# Redbank Power Station Biomass Proposal

## Operation

All members of Hunter Wildlife Rescue are volunteers in a variety of ways as rescuers, transporters, rehabilitators/carers or through administrative roles.

We work in collaboration with WIRES (NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service) and attend approximately 6000 callouts per annum.

Hunter Wildlife Rescue (NATF) employs a comprehensive Training program to uphold the highest standards of education and care. Hunter Wildlife Rescue works to all NSW Codes of Practice in relation to wildlife.

## Our understanding of the Redbank Project

It is our understanding that Verdant Earth Technologies proposes to recommission the Redbank Power Station near Singleton to burn native vegetation for fuel. They will burn up to 700,000 tonnes of dry biomass annually, primarily from land clearing and potentially from native forests.

Native vegetation, primarily from land clearing, will provide the bulk of this in the first four years of operation.

To fuel the project long term, Verdant proposes converting up to 72,000 hectares of land to produce biomass crops.

This project threatens biodiversity, is not carbon neutral, and will ultimately undermine NSW's climate and conservation goals.

Land clearing and associated habitat fragmentation is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity in NSW.

We are aware that loopholes for the use of native forests and cleared vegetation for power generation still exist and could be utilised by future governments to allow native forests to be burned.

This proposal will provide further financial incentives for land clearing, to feed the plant for electricity generation.

Land clearing and associated habitat fragmentation is already one of the greatest threats to biodiversity in NSW, threatening endangered species and ecosystems. HWR experiences this every day through our rescue, rehabilitation and release activities.

**HWR opposes the Redbank Power Plant Biomass conversion** for the following reasons:

### 1. Unacceptable environmental and biodiversity impacts

According to the Australia Institute the environmental impact statement for this project has vastly underplayed the greenhouse gas emissions and other potential environmental impacts that the project could have, not least what providing a substantial new market for woodchips would mean for logging operations.

# Redbank Power Station Biomass Proposal

The Fuel Supply and Characterisation Study - Restart of Redbank Power Station claims “It is proposed that Redbank will be fuelled with ecologically sustainable biomass”. The clearing and burning of tens of thousands of hectares of native vegetation cannot be described as ecologically sustainable.

In particular,

- The proposal relies heavily on the clearing of “Invasive Native Species” (INS), which is poorly regulated and overseen. ‘Invasive native species’ is a non-specific term that’s been used to let farmers clear abundant native vegetation on their property with little oversight, for the purposes of increasing agricultural productivity.
- Land clearing and “INS” will provide 71% of fuel in the first year and 64% in the second year. Based on information provided by Verdant, at least 20,000 hectares of “INS” will need to be cleared to provide the required fuel levels during the project’s first year.
- This “INS” is currently home to and food for established native wildlife that would be brutally displaced at the initial land clearing events. Apart from lack of viable alternative locations, relocation itself is inherently difficult as almost all Australian wildlife is territorial. The scale of 20,000 hectares would be impossible.
- The regrowth itself on a planned basis would be mono-cultural in tendency resulting in much less biodiversity of both flora and fauna.
- Any native species that managed to repopulate the regrowth area over the proposed 3-5 year plantation growing periods would be repeatedly displaced when they are harvested.
- We have seen devastating consequences of native plantation harvesting in Victoria in 2025 with at least 700 koalas displaced into the adjacent national park and then subjected to aerial culling by Government approval. Although the planned feedstock may be different for the Redbank project, HWR knows that our native wildlife is capable of adapting and moving into atypical landscapes when pressured to do so. Mass displacement will result in their deaths.

## 2. Land Management impacts

- The proposal seeks to exploit NSW land management rules that are unequivocally failing nature and that are currently under review by the Natural Resources Commission.
- Providing a market for dead native vegetation will surely drive increases in land clearing. The demand creates the risk that “INS” is managed in an ecologically unsustainable way.
- Landholders whose intended clearing activities may have been marginal previously, may find a profitable market through the sale of cleared native vegetation as feedstock to Redbank.
- The project says they would establish biomass fuel crops to sustain the project long term. Verdant states ‘in order to meet the total required biomass demand, a total planted area of 72,000 hectares would be required’ and seeks to convert grasslands to crops. The project plan specifies it will target marginal agricultural lands. The project should only use degraded agricultural lands. It does not specify how native vegetation, like biodiverse grasslands, will be protected.

## 3. Off-site impacts

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) fails to assess off-site impacts. The EIS only considers impacts on the 18ha of land occupied by the power station itself. It neglects to address the potential biodiversity impacts from the thousands of hectares of land clearing required off-site, such as those described in Section 1 above.

# Redbank Power Station Biomass Proposal

- The unknown nature of the multiple sources of biomass feedstocks needed into the future to secure the viability of the power station necessitates safeguards to protect biodiversity impacts no matter where they are located.
- In addition, increased traffic from trucks transporting feedstock for the power plant create an additional risk for our wildlife.
- Our 2023/24 fauna data reveals that approximately 30% of the rescues we conducted were due to vehicle collisions. In particular, large animals such as kangaroos, wombats and koalas in the wider area are victims of trucks and mine-related traffic. Any addition to trucks travelling on regional roads delivering biomass feed to Redbank will result in further animals deaths.

## **4. Biodiversity and Threatened Species**

- The NSW State of the Environment Report 2024 released on 26 June 2025 includes key findings, that
  - Since the last report (from 2021), 36 more animal and plant species have been listed as threatened with extinction.
  - The fastest growing segment of threatened animals is those which are critically endangered, which grew by 35 species over the same period. This is a stark indicator of the worsening biodiversity crisis, and shows current settings to protect endangered species are not working.
  - Across the state, distribution of native land mammals continues to shrink, with fewer habitats left to offer safe refuge.
- Any native vegetation areas currently serving as habitat refugia must not be lost, but be retained. They must certainly not be converted into a marketable product to compete economically with our wildlife in the current environment.

## **5. Rehabilitated wildlife release areas**

- HWR conducts wildlife rescues across the Hunter Valley. These include koalas, possums, birds, reptiles, frogs, echidnas, macropods, native rodents, bandicoots, wombats and flying foxes. These animals rely on native flora for food and shelter. Whilst not all of these are currently endangered or threatened, many of them provide food for other threatened species such as the powerful owl.
- As available areas decrease it becomes more and more difficult to find suitable release locations for our rehabilitated wildlife that may have been in the care of volunteers for months. Much of our wildlife is territorial and cannot legally be relocated far the area from which it was rescued. Very young animals can be placed in different areas once adults, but these may become over-crowded as they compete for mating, nesting and foraging territory.

## **6. Shrinking native habitats and wildlife corridors due to developments**

- Part of HWR's advocacy is to participate in consultation processes for developments in the Hunter. We are conscious of the energy transition and the need for the renewable energy projects to replace ageing, polluting and inefficient fossil fuel supplies.
- Areas such as the unused Redbank site would be better re-purposed in our view to support renewable solar, wind or pumped hydro energy or alternatively fully rehabilitated.
- The cumulative impacts of these developments are significant.
- Every small piece retained plays a critical role as a connecting corridor.

# Redbank Power Station Biomass Proposal

## 7. Climate Change

- As the climate warms, our native wildlife is predicted to move inland from the Newcastle coastal area seeking higher and cooler environments for food and shelter.
- The Barrington to Hawkesbury Climate Corridors project conducted by the Hunter Community Environment Centre predicted drastic reductions in plant species in the Barrington to Hawkesbury corridor, and that retreating animals would require connecting refugia in order to survive in a warming world.<sup>1</sup>
- Any existing bushland, waterways and wetlands provide critical connecting pieces for animals to move to safer areas.
- Any project that further threatens these corridors into and through the upper Hunter must be rejected.

For these reasons, **HWR opposes the Redbank Power Plant Biomass proposal and urges the IPC to reject it.**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hcec.org.au/climate-corridors> Flora Extinction Report and Fauna Extinction Report, Dec 2022