



Coastwatchers

Eurobodalla's voice for nature

**PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL
TUESDAY 14 AUGUST 2018
NOM18/010 RURAL LANDS STRATEGY**

Good morning Councillors.

My name is Reina Hill and I am speaking on behalf of The Coastwatchers Association, in support of Councillor Mayne's Motion.

That, in the first instance that council defer voting on the Draft Rural Lands Strategy, and that Councillors and Council staff meet with the relevant NSW Government Departments that are objecting to the Strategy, to try and satisfy their objections.

Our Association is appalled that Council has dismissed significant objections to the proposals by State agencies including the Rural Fire Service, the South East Local Land Services, the Department of Environment and Heritage, Department of Primary Industries - Water & Fisheries. Many of Council's changes are inconsistent with both advice from the agencies and Directions from the Minister for Planning.

Despite detailed advice provided by these agencies, in particular the Office of Environment and Heritage and the Rural Fire Service, Council appears oblivious to the environmental consequences of ignoring it.

So many regional and local studies have also been undertaken, identifying and detailing management objectives for areas of significant environmental values and hazards, but these too seem to have been disregarded.

One such study, *Rural Opportunities and Constraints*" prepared by RMCG, Consultants for Business, Communities and Environment, includes a detailed assessment prepared by the Office of Environment and Heritage, which lists environmental assets on rural lands in the Eurobodalla and summarises the number of threatened and endangered fauna and flora species.

It also lists the area of coastal wetlands protected under SEPP 14, coastal lakes listed

as Important Coastal Lakes, and wetlands included in the Directory of Important Wetlands. Verification of these areas of high conservation value were mapped and verified by OEH to improve accuracy at a local scale. There is an accompanying table which is a regional summary of the key threats to areas of high conservation value.

In their 2016 submission to the Rural lands Strategy OEH suggested changes, none of which were adopted. These same objections are retained in their submission to the current RLS Planning Proposal. Among other comments and objections, they are requesting a full review of all the zoning and lot sizes proposed and limit their objections to those areas with known threatened species habitat, complete vegetation cover, and the presence of endangered ecological communities, using Council's latest mapping.

As stated in their accompanying letter to Council, This mapping forms the basis of many of their objections, as any impact on the Swift Parrot is likely to result in a serious and irreversible impact (SAIL) . Any development subject to a SAIL is required under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 to reject that development and could result in additional costs to landholders due to mandatory biodiversity assessment and offsetting.

Coastwatchers has a high regard for the expert advice provided by OEH. In particular, that the objectives of the environmental zones are never permitted to be undermined by the addition of incompatible land uses. We strongly oppose grazing in E2 zones, as we believe it would seriously compromise the integrity of important wetlands, rivers and lakes.

OEH registered their concern about the high fire risk of many areas, that also has implications for biodiversity, as the need for asset protection would require large areas to be cleared for that purpose.

This was also raised by the Rural Fire Service in their letter to Council in December 2015 and stated, *The Draft Rural Lands Strategy seeks an increase in subdivision potential, some of which the RFS are of the opinion are highly constrained and may be identified as isolated rural locations. Constraints are steep slopes, heavily timbered land, have limited access (one way in and one way out) and areas of high conservation values, which should not be subject to increased densities without first undertaking a thorough investigation of the likely impacts, including matters of bushfire protection.*

As council is aware, providing a suitable suite of bushfire protection measures for development usually includes the creation of asset protection zones and access roads, which in vegetated areas may require a significant amount of vegetation modification works...

Why is Council disregarding such important advice from these agencies? And why are they showing so little regard for the environmental concerns expressed by so many residents and local environmental groups?

This current impasse needs to be resolved to ensure the Shire's rural lands are protected from inappropriate subdivision and development that would irreversibly change the environmental, economic and social landscape of this shire.

For the reasons stated above Coastwatchers strongly urges Councillors to support Councillor Mayne's Motion to defer voting on the Draft Rural Lands Strategy until discussions with the OEH and other NSW Government departments can take place and their objections are satisfied.

Thank you.

Reina Hill
Vice President
The Coastwatchers Association Inc.