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BirdLife Shoalhaven is a branch of BirdLife Australia Limited ABN 75 149 124 774

August 27 2019

SUBMISSION

to

**SHOALHAVEN TREE & VEGETATION VANDALISM & MANAGEMENT PREVENTION
POLICY DRAFT 61751E**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Dunn".

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Birdlife Shoalhaven acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the Shoalhaven, their care of country, birds and habitat and pays respects to all Elders.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.10 BirdLife Shoalhaven [BLS] acknowledges the draft policy document as a necessary and valuable step forward in the management of “tree vandalism” in the Shoalhaven.

1.20 Broadly speaking, BLS acknowledges and agrees with the principles espoused and intended outcomes in the draft policy.

1.30 Whilst it appears that with appropriate submissions and adjustments a good basic policy should result it is just as clear that the implementation with supervision, policing and education will be the real test though the policy draft suggests that is realized.

1.40 BLS, its members and supporters are very conscious of the fact that ‘tree and vegetation vandalism’ is now a longer term, entrenched and continuing situation and challenge for Shoalhaven Council and the community, which involves many areas of the Shoalhaven. Many of our members are well of the extreme vandalism that has plagued Collingwood beach, but this is just one example. Vandalism has and is increasingly taking place in coastal areas and elsewhere on public places throughout the Shoalhaven. Most of our committee recognize it as an unresolved, decade long issue.

1.50 For BLS the focus element is that the vegetation vandalized represents serious habitat destruction, which impacts the biodiversity and the individual and collective health of the birds and species that would utilize such habitat.

1.60 BLS recognizes the importance of trees on private land and the concern that exists across the Shoalhaven with the demise of so many tree and vegetation clusters across the Shoalhaven as population expands and development occurs. Shoalhaven Council’s Tree Management procedures have contributed to the unnecessary loss of so many ‘urban trees’ on private land, road verges, parks and community property. This happening in the context of a recognized ‘climate emergency’ and the nationally recognized critical status of Threatened Species simply introduces more urgency to the success of this policy.

2.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.10 The policy, whilst mentioning habitat, needs to expand on that concept and it is BLS experience that birds can be the least confronting, most appealing and educational way to do that.

2.11 Sections 2.20 and 2.30 provide suggestions and some guidance in this task.

2.20 Given that tree and vegetation vandalism has such a significant impact of birds the actual profile birds in the Shoalhaven needs to be recognized as part of the education theme of the policy.

2.21 There are approximately 350 recorded native bird species in the Shoalhaven and this includes an extensive range of different types of birds, e.g. pigeons and doves, parrots and cockatoos, ducks, raptors, etc. The variety of Shoalhaven habitats is clearly connected to this profile.

2.22 There are no less than 62 Threatened Species in this population, seventeen of which are listed on both Commonwealth and NSW Listings with four known to be Critically Endangered in the Shoalhaven.

2.23 Among the species not on these lists there are still concerns with declining numbers in a number of other species and this relates strongly to continuing loss of habitat, which does include habitat within urban and peri-urban areas which feature in the Shoalhaven.

2.24 There is very strong and significant seasonal presence within the range of bird types and species.

2.25 The existence of birds in urban and peri-urban areas, in coastal locations adds to the value of these living areas and to the well-being of both residents and visitors.

2.30 The contribution to habitat in all its contexts must be recognized as part of the management of everything from a single tree or plant to communities of such trees and plants in policy if it is to be effective.

2.31 The draft policy appears to recognize the habitat importance of a single plant but must comment beyond this. Surely this is meant to be a policy that covers all trees and vegetation.

2.32 The species of particular trees is quite important as the contribution to habitat, especially feed, roosting and protection between species.

2.33 So too is the context of native plants in the seasonal calendar as the importance of a native plant will vary throughout the year but if sacrificed to vandalism a valuable component of the annual habitat is lost. For example, the flowering calendar of eucalypts and banksia in the Shoalhaven illustrates the importance of Grey Ironbark, Swamp Mahogeny and Coast Banksia in the winter months and the influx of honeyeaters at that time.

2.34 Policy comment must also recognize the importance of the 'plant collective or community' in the integrity of habitat. For example, a tree taken out in a collective of say three trees close to each other will more severely impact the smaller bird species as the distance from tree to tree is increased.

2.35 Recognizing and incorporating these principles is vital to adequate supervision that policy and associated education will provide for in the Shoalhaven.

2.40 BLS supports the draft policy recognition of "Education" as a major component of progress through the policy but BLS is compelled to comment that it will have to be tailored to what could be called "Vandal Effective Adult Learning". This would necessarily involve structured, inter-related and sequenced strategies rather than a package of seemingly appropriate actions.

2.41 The behaviour of 'tree vandals' has been unrelenting, wilful and quite confronting over a number of years, bringing into question the effectiveness of education to this point. BLS recognizes the draft policy inclusion of education strategies but these may have to be even more targeted.

2.42 Such behaviour has generated community anger that such behaviour occurs, damages as it does and appears to go unpunished. It has contributed to a serious community divide such that conflict resolution is a necessary a technique for council in its management.

2.43 This has contributed to a significant polarisation within the community and this has been evidenced in the outcome of community engagements such as "Our Coast Our Lifestyle" where there is clear and overwhelming opposition to tree vandalism and destruction of environment within urban areas.

2.44 As the draft policy recognizes, tree vandalism is related to "Views", regarded as so sacrosanct by some property owners who include property investors in the growing tourist rental market whose clients care nought for anything but the view to embellish their temporary experience.