



July 9 2018

From:

BirdLife Shoalhaven
per Christopher Grounds
Conservation Officer

To:

Minister for Environment & Heritage
Hon. Gabrielle Upton
Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Minister Upton

BirdLife Shoalhaven [BLS] is a branch of BirdLife Australia [BLA] and advocates for the conservation of birds and their habitats and promotes the appreciation and understanding of birds across the Shoalhaven and beyond. BLS is a branch of BirdLife Australia Limited, an independent, not-for-profit organization, which was established in 1901 and currently has over 12,000 members and 70,000 supporters.

At the most recent Ordinary Meeting of Shoalhaven City Council [June 26 2018] a proposal was passed narrowly, to reclassify a major section of a local beach, Cudmirrah Beach, to an 'Off-Leash' dog beach from an On-leash Beach [Item CL18.133].

This is of special concern to our organization and we wish to bring the decision to your attention and would seek your intervention in this development.

The beach has a known history of Hooded Plover nesting which has ceased only in recent breeding seasons when local volunteers have reported the growing presence of off-leash dogs. The known history with nesting at this beach is logged with the NPWS Shorebird Recovery Program. The beach is currently an "On-Leash" dog beach.

The Hooded Plover is a "Critically Endangered" shorebird species in NSW, which indicates it is at very high risk of extinction in the near future. This status is covered by the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The species is also involved in your government's "Save Our Species" conservation strategy. That strategy involves a specific south coast program, which operates in the Shoalhaven under the co-ordination of the NPWS. There is an entire volunteer, citizen science, observation and data recording action involving literally dozens of volunteers under NPWS supervision. Many of our BLS members are involved in this program.

The beach is also part of the critical threshold, northern distribution of the Hooded Plover in NSW. The group of beaches, Mary, Cave, Bherwerre and Cudmirrah, constitute the most northerly population distribution in NSW. Any fragmentation of this habitat-breeding zone in this threshold area will exacerbate the already highest level threat to the species.

That view is supported by BirdLife Australia and its research staff involved with Hooded Plovers. Their experience points to quite significant increases in breeding success when dogs, particularly off-leash dogs, are not on breeding beaches with fledgling rates trebling in just a few years.

The beach in question has a number of Threatened Species information signs near the surf club entry. The beach is also listed by Shoalhaven Council as a breeding-nesting site in their 2016 "Off-Leash Guide" booklet. There is a known and recognized problem on Shoalhaven beaches with dogs off-leash, even in 'Dog Prohibited' or 'Dog On-leash' sites.

BLS regards the action approved by council to be based on very poor consultation and a failure to recognize and consider key scientific issues which apply to this species, particularly in NSW and the Shoalhaven in particular.

With these considerations in mind, we seek your support for the state classification and support programs.

Yours



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