



Objection to West Culburra Concept Proposal (SSD 3846)

Dear Commission Members,

Illawarra Birders Inc. highly recommend that the Independent Planning Commission refuse the West Culburra Concept Proposal (SSD 3846).

We are a birding group with over 100 members based in the Illawarra Region of NSW. The boundaries of our birding area include Lake Wollomboola.

We highly value the natural environment and spaces where we can observe birds and other wildlife in their natural habitats. Lake Wollomboola is a treasured area and the lake and the surrounding areas of Culburra, Orient Point and the Shoalhaven-Crookhaven Estuaries are considered by us to be significant birding areas. Much of this area is internationally recognised as significant wetland habitat for many bird species including migratory birds.

Recently one of our members visiting Lake Wollomboola recognised a very special bird amongst a flock of other birds. The reports of this bird to NSW Birdline resulted in an influx of birders to the lake foreshore and several high powered spotting scopes being focused on the flock as birders excitedly looked for it. Many of our members reported spending many hours happily looking for then watching the Banded Stilt as it fed and roosted in the shallow waters of the lake foreshores. A very windy day meant that several members investigated other sections of the lake looking for sheltered inlets where birds could be seen roosting.

Many of these visiting birders spent money in the local shops – eating lunch in the cafes at Culburra, buying petrol, groceries then moving onto other birding areas close by. Seeing this ONE bird led to at least 25 of our members visiting the lake and a pop-up club walk being scheduled so that people had an opportunity to look at the birds. Several people reported bumping into birders who had seen the reports and had come to the area from Sydney or other places.

As a result of this ONE bird being seen other birders noticed ANOTHER rare bird was at the lake which drew even more people to the area to see this one too. A Hudsonian Godwit is a very rare bird for Australia and several other unusual birds were also found at the lake. Several of our members told us they had made more than one trip to the lake to look for these special birds. Two members saw yet another special bird, a Little Bittern, as they drove into Culburra.

Lake Wollomboola consistently is an area where rare birds for Australia not just NSW turn up. In the past few years we have met many birders from interstate who have come to this one lake drawn by the birds that have been sighted here. When a Shorebird Course was conducted in the Shoalhaven area two years ago the Birdlife Australia representatives running the course visited Lake Wollomboola the day before the course and took photos of at least three species of rare shorebirds that were used in the presentation the next day.

ANY development in this area that impacts the density of housing or the natural appeal of the region would have a severe impact upon birding tourism. Birders treasure Lake Wollomboola and the precious species of birds it attracts. Our club would be absolutely against ANY development that may impact the lake and its catchments. Water quality is particularly important to our birds and it is a reflection on the current quality of the lake waters that so many birds are using the area.



We strongly oppose the following features of the development proposal:

- Any extensive urban development in both the Lake Wollumboola and Crookhaven catchments as this would be ignoring expert advice and NSW Government policies. The Lake Wollumboola area should be zoned for “Environment Protection” with the Crookhaven catchment considered suitable for “limited” development only.
- 650 mainly medium density dwellings in the Crookhaven River catchment as these will spoil the attractiveness of the area and the impacts of people as well as vehicular traffic would severely impact the natural environment especially the important wetland areas and Aboriginal cultural sites that are found here. This would include the 46 small medium density apartments, including 4-storey south of Culburra Rd in the lake catchment as we feel that this is major over-development and would negatively impact wildlife.
- We absolutely OBJECT to the clearing of any areas of coastal forest and development in wetlands, resulting in loss of threatened species habitat and environmental degradation.
- We are very concerned that the proposal fails to show that the Crookhaven River, wetlands, fish nursery and the oyster leases would not suffer significant deterioration due to polluted runoff resulting in environmental and economic loss.
- The failure to assess surface and ground water impacts on Lake Wollumboola and its ecosystem despite expert advice that its internationally significant birdlife, including at least 23 species listed as threatened under NSW and Australian Government legislation, would be threatened by polluted runoff from development. Any run-off from this development would also be to the detriment of species that utilise the lake areas for breeding such as Black Swan, Chestnut Teal, Pied Oystercatcher and Australian Swamphen. Our members have consistently commented on the beauty of some of the more common birds found at the lake and have enjoyed watching birds like the Black Swan as their numbers are so numerous.
- Incremental damage over the years to the environment and Aboriginal cultural heritage would be significant, reducing potential for nature and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage tourism opportunities and for visiting birders who travel to this area in significant numbers and utilise the surrounding facilities and services bringing tourism dollars to the region.

The Halloran Planning Proposal process offers a greater potential to resolve future environment protection and development.

Yours sincerely,
Illawarra Birders Inc