

**Submission  
No 71**

**INQUIRY INTO WATER NSW AMENDMENT  
(WARRAGAMBA DAM) BILL 2018**

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## **Submission to the New South Wales Legislative Council's inquiry into the Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba) Bill 2018**

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Contact:

We are ecologists and conservation biologists working on highly threatened bird species in Australia. Our aim is to obtain robust scientific data to provide evidence to inform actions to conserve Australia's biodiversity. We have a global reputation for publishing high quality research on some of the most challenging species to study. Our peer-reviewed research relevant to Regent Honeyeater conservation is listed below<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> and we are the eminent experts on contemporary factors affecting the species' ecology.

We commenced research on the Regent Honeyeater in 2015. We developed and implement a range-wide monitoring program for the Regent Honeyeater and update critical demographic parameters with contemporary information about the species. Increasing the quantity and quality of ecological data through better monitoring enhances capacity to identify threats facing the species and to implement appropriate conservation actions to prevent its extinction.

### **Summary of key issues:**

- The Regent Honeyeater is listed as Critically Endangered under the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999<sup>6</sup>.
- The Burragorang Valley is a key breeding site for the Regent Honeyeater<sup>3,7</sup>. At least 21 adult birds, 7 nests and 2 juveniles were located there in 2017<sup>3</sup>. This represents 5-10% of the estimated Global population<sup>8</sup>, 15% of all adult birds and 1 of only 4 breeding aggregations located throughout the species' range in 2017<sup>7</sup>.
- Temporary inundation of the World Heritage Area as proposed under the Water NSW amendment (Warragamba) Bill 2018 (hereafter 'The Bill') will destroy the majority of known Regent Honeyeater breeding habitat within the Burragorang Valley.
- Although Regent Honeyeaters are sighted frequently in the Burragorang valley<sup>10</sup>, targeted and standardized Regent Honeyeater survey effort in this area has historically been low due to inaccessibility. Much of the proposed inundation area remains un-surveyed, which limits current capacity to quantify the magnitude of the impact of inundation on the Regent Honeyeater population outside of those areas already surveyed.
- Nevertheless, data already obtained indicates The Bill will have a significant impact upon the survival of the Regent Honeyeater population as defined under the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999<sup>9</sup> through loss of known breeding and foraging habitat.
- Regent Honeyeaters are very restricted in their breeding locations due to their specialised habitat requirements and tendency to be displaced by larger bird species<sup>2,7,11</sup>. This means they are unable to simply 'breed somewhere else' when known breeding habitat is destroyed<sup>12</sup>.
- The Bill would undermine millions of dollars of conservation investment to develop a Regent Honeyeater captive breeding program and decades of investment in habitat restoration and conservation action elsewhere<sup>7</sup>.
- Loss of known breeding habitat is very unlikely to be offset by protecting alternative habitat elsewhere because Regent Honeyeater breeding habitat does not exist at a comparable scale in other areas<sup>7,13,14</sup>.
- The Bill would set a dangerous precedent for future biodiversity conservation issues arising as a result of state-significant infrastructure proposals.

### Conflict of interest declaration:

Ross Crates was contracted by Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation Ltd. (SMEC) to undertake Regent Honeyeater surveys in November 2017 as part of a biodiversity assessment commissioned by Water NSW. Water NSW gave written permission for the monitoring data to be incorporated into the Regent Honeyeater national monitoring program, as presented in recent published research<sup>3</sup>.

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