

Submission
No 66

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING SYSTEM AND THE IMPACTS
OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND
COMMUNITIES**

Organisation: Cumberland Bird Observers Club

Date Received: 3 November 2023

This submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into the planning system and the impact of climate change on the environment and communities is on behalf of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club (CBOC). Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry.

CBOC has over 400 members from throughout the Sydney region. Its objectives include:

- To encourage knowledge and enjoyment of native birds
- To actively promote the protection and conservation of native birds and their habitat.

This submission focuses especially on the Inquiry's Terms of Reference (a) (iii) and (b) (iii).

Threatened ecological communities and threatened species are particularly at risk from climate change impacts and changing landscapes because they lack the strength in numbers to be able to resist these impacts and then to recover from them. Birds are especially vulnerable to the impacts because they need large areas of habitat and their survival can be threatened by any loss of habitat, no matter how small, resulting from events such as bushfires and drought which are caused or at the very least exacerbated by climate change.

Quite clearly the current planning system is not adequately protecting threatened ecological communities and species as Australia and NSW are experiencing biodiversity loss and an escalating extinction crisis. This must not be allowed to continue.

People and the natural and built environment can be protected from climate change impacts and changing landscapes by ensuring that the consideration of the needs of all ecological communities and all species, in particular threatened ones, is central to the operation of the planning system in particular in the assessment of development proposals. The needs of the environment must be considered first not after all other matters have been taken into account. In order to make this consideration, a proper study and assessment of the ecological communities and species in the area of the proposed development must be undertaken. CBOC's belief that this approach is vital has been confirmed by the failure of The Hills Shire Council to follow this approach in formulating a plan for the development of Fred Caterson Reserve (a favourite place for CBOC outings) with the result that a significant amount of bushland will be destroyed, unless community opposition is sufficient to cause the Council to withdraw the plan. It should not be necessary for the community to take action to try to stop this type of development after local councils have already adopted development plans. If the planning system operates effectively, and the needs of the environment are considered first, developments of this kind should not get past first base.

The default position in the assessment of development proposals must be that all habitat is retained especially where there are threatened ecological communities and species. Damage to habitat must be minimised and only allowed in exceptional circumstances. Development approvals must not be enabled by offsets for loss of habitat because offsets may not replace the lost habitat (eg where habitat used as an offset already exists) or they provide little compensation for the lost habitat (eg where trees will take years or even decades to grow to a significant height).