

Nelson Bay. NSW. 2315
10th July 2021

To the Minister,

My name is Carol Ridgway Bissett. I am a traditional custodian and knowledge holder of the Maiangal people of the Worimi Nation. I live in Port Stephens. The theme for NAIDOC Week this year was *Heal Country*. It is a call for greater protections for lands, waters, sacred sites and cultural heritage from exploitation, desecration, and destruction. I am writing to you because of my concern for the care and maintenance of Wanda Wetlands.

In 1994 Wanda Wetlands was registered with the National Parks & Wildlife Service. Five years later Port Stephens Shire council entered an agreement with the NPWS for the preservation of the land called Wanda Wetlands. Under this agreement Council was obligated to develop a Plan of Management and begin investigations into the Wetlands as a place of heritage significance. The community began their fight to save the wetlands from development in 1991 and 30 years later we have not progressed in our recognition of Wanda Wetlands as a significant and special site.

There is still no Plan of Management. My question is how long will the community have to wait? Is there a statutory time by which these Plans of Management must be completed?

Wanda Wetlands is a 13ha parcel of land between Wanda Ave and Soldier's Point Road in Salamander Bay. In 1997 after a 7 year battle to save it from being a housing subdivision, Wanda Wetlands was declared a place of special significance to the Worimi people.

The Newcastle Herald stated in March 1997 - "The wetlands is an aboriginal sacred site and was used by the Worimi people for birthing and burial purposes. It is also a significant wildlife corridor and is home to one of the Tomaree Peninsula's most significant colonies of koalas."

It is the only remaining ecosystem of its type on the Tomaree Peninsula, being wetland forest with old growth in excess of 120 years. Wanda provides a rich habitat and sanctuary for a variety of wildlife including several endangered species. These include the Greater Broad Nosed Bat, the Little Bent Wing Bat, the koala, squirrel glider and Wallum froglet.

Instead of a 50m buffer zone, which is supposed to protect all its borders, recent road and drainage works have pushed into the wetlands on Soldier's Point Road, Salamander Bay. Undergrowth has been cleared unnecessarily and a drain under the road feeds water and rubbish directly into the wetlands. On the wetlands northern border with Salamander Oval, fishbone fern has grown rampant and many pathways are overgrown and impenetrable.

Port Stephens Council should honour its responsibility to care for this Reserve. Council needs to develop a Plan of Management. It is long overdue considering the agreement with National parks was made in 1994 and that it is registered as a Women's Heritage site. This is a sensitive eco system that would be better protected if a Plan of Management were in place.

I am asking that you use your powers as a Minister to have Port Stephens Council honour its obligations.

Sincerely,

Carol Ridgway-Bassett
Maiangal Knowledge holder and Custodian
Worimi nation