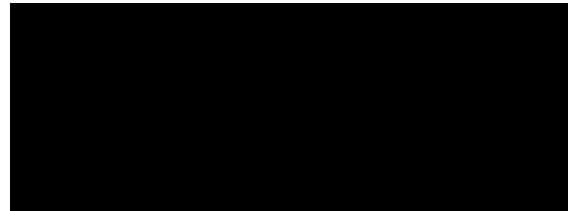


**Peter Ridgeway**



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## **Submission - Greater Macarthur Preliminary Strategy (additions to Sydney Region Growth Centres) – Biodiversity Impacts**

The planning for the Greater Macarthur Preliminary Strategy extends some of the identified failures of Planning & Environment NSW in determining a future for Western Sydney. It is disappointing to see yet more inappropriately located, inadequately serviced development on such a vast scale. There is no escaping this is a plan (and government) intent on destroying the cultural and natural landscape and prospects of western Sydney.

This aside I provide the following productive comments on opportunities to improve planning of the strategy within the scope of development proposed.

### **Derived native grasslands & biodiversity constraints map**

My recollection of these properties is that substantial areas of 'paddock' are derived native grasslands constituting good condition Cumberland Plain Woodland as defined under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 and Environmental Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

The current constraints map for the GMPS is effectively a desktop-assessment map of tree canopy cover.

Yet it has been used to present a map to developers/landowner showing areas of 'Low/Nil Biodiversity Constraint'. This is *de facto* a political license for these landowners to clear these areas, regardless of what may be found when an actual biodiversity survey is conducted.

It is highly inappropriate to proceed to the present stage (public exhibition) without any real knowledge of the distribution of biodiversity assets in the area.

Working in the industry I am fully aware that all meaningful land use decisions have *de facto* been locked in well before public consultation. Releasing a map labeled 'Low/Nil Biodiversity Constraint' virtually guarantees future development of the area so mapped – even though the P&E NSW presently hold virtually no meaningful data regarding its actual biodiversity value.

P&E NSW continue to develop proposals for vast developments on the basis of desktop biodiversity assessments. Deferring biodiversity assessment to after the decisions have been made is not in the interests of good planning. It would serve E&P NSW well to gather this information at an appropriate planning stage and avoid complications later. This should be done for the GMPS and a new series of constraints maps released.

### **Brown Treecreeper**

The subject area contains the last known Cumberland Plain Woodland population of the Vulnerable bird Brown Treecreeper.

This species preferred habitat on the site aligns closer to the areas mapped as 'Low/Nil Biodiversity Constraint' than to those identified as biodiversity constraints; being an open woodland specialist.

Tragically the Brown Treecreeper only persists in this landscape as being one of the last truly large, peaceful & undisturbed portion of structurally open Cumberland Plain Woodland/Grasslands. The species has not persisted in any areas where urban development has encroached the rural matrix across its range.

The development of this area is not compatible with the survival of this species locally, regardless of the details of development footprint. This is a tragic outcome.

The subject area is ideally suited to retention under its current land uses and it is tragic that the current proposal will finally silence of this species in our Critically Endangered Woodlands.

It is not a little cogent that this most significant species and its fate do not even rate a mention in the Biodiversity Assessment.

## Koala

The desktop assessment similarly dismisses the koala and dedicates just two lines to the 'potential' (or lack thereof) of the species in this precinct.

If an even cursory attempt at biodiversity assessment had been made it would rapidly surface that koalas are regularly sighted in the strategy area.

By example bush regeneration contractors have begun work in the Beulah biobank site which is typical of the context and vegetation of the strategy area. These contractors report koala sightings there and nearby on an almost weekly basis.

Abandoning 36 square kilometers of western Sydney to a sea of houses with nominal creekline 'corridors' wedged between on the basis of such little biodiversity data is a tragic reflection of the attitudes of P&E NSW.

## SUMMARY

It is sad to reflect how little actual planning is now put into the development of western Sydney. While community repeatedly object to the 'power' of planning in our region, the reality is that almost no actual planning is conducted as areas are abandoned to blanket development.

The proposal to map constraints and opportunities in this region without even the most basic data is highly disappointing. I hope (against experience) that the department will actually consider community feedback in relation to this Strategy and undertake a more appropriate planning process for this region.