



Draft Hunter Regional Plan  
& Hunter City  
**2015**

# **THE GREEN CORRIDOR**

Stockton Bight to the Watagans and beyond

## **SUBMISSION**

Supporter of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative

**The Green Corridor Coalition Inc.**

Supported by over 50 Community and Conservation Groups





# GREEN CORRIDOR COALITION

(Supported by over 50 Conservation and Community Groups)

**PO Box 343,**

**WALLSEND 2287**

**NSW Department of Planning & Environment  
PO Box 1226,  
Newcastle NSW 2300**

**23<sup>th</sup> March 2016**

## **Submission to 2015 Draft Hunter Strategy & Draft Hunter City.**

This submission is to be read in conjunction with the accompanying CD.

### *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

**Quote 1** *"In earlier centuries, however, the capacity to do irreparable damage was restricted by the lack of machinery, industry and fuel energy. Today, capacities are such that major construction can be accomplished quickly".*

**Quote 2** *"It is in such technologically advanced countries as Canada, Australia and Russia that the greatest range of options is available. Because these areas have yet to undergo dramatic environmental change, the need for local and regional environmentally orientated planning for resources and land use is most urgent."*

**Quote 3** *"For all his intelligence, man in communities behaves with a lack of respect for his environment, which is both short-sighted and potentially suicidal."*

These quotes are from the 2001 edition and it is now one and a half decades into the new century since then.

Unfortunately the current draft documents show planning in the Hunter is continuing on the short-sighted path of unsustainable economic growth when the NSW planning department needs to take a far more balanced approach and heed the warnings to follow the path of ecological sustainable growth. This will benefit the future for this generation and those that come after us.

### **Role of the Lower Hunter green corridor:**

Past civilisations have been remembered by the ruins of what they built but our current technological civilisation, with its exploding human population and other species collapsing populations, will not be remembered by what it built but for the natural environment it saved and protected, this being in small part the Green Corridor Lower Hunter National Parks campaign's objective.

This includes the corridor's connectivity role in climate change. Human-induced global warming is the most intensely studied global problem in modern science. This is now beyond any reasonable doubt, with 195 countries signing the Paris agreement. At the 2013 discussion paper briefings it was stressed by departmental officers that climate change would be a major issue in the draft Strategy, but it was almost completely omitted by the state government. This omission however clearly shows developers and the coal industry dominates the draft plan's direction.

### **Ecological inadequacies of draft regional plan.**

It has come to the stage in the Hunter where we are only considering conserving connected green spaces for our wildlife and urban buffers. There are many overseas examples where governments with foresight set up development no-go zones, such as Paris, and it is now up to us if we have the same respect for areas of high environmental and social significance in this region.

The signs are not good as the progressively downgraded wording of regional strategies over the past ten years shows. The latest 2015 draft strategy shows the sharp deterioration in wording and now even the green corridor is called a "link". For relevant wording from the various strategies see Section A – 1. This concern has been discussed in meetings with the planning department and the Green Corridor Coalition's (GCC) position for the reinstatement of strong wording in the final strategy document is now known to the department.

The GCC also has great concerns about the removal of the sustainability criteria lands (SCL) category from the regional plan, as stated in our submission to the 2013 discussion paper (refer Section A - 2). It is an internationally recognised scientific fact that without compatible land use "buffer zones", fauna and flora corridors have little chance of retaining their long-term ecological values. This was recognised by planners in the 2006 Strategy when the department set up the SCL.

### **Environmental offsets**

The green corridor coalition rejects any offsets for development that are not "like for like" ecosystems and in remote locations. All environmental offsets in the current 2006 regional strategy fulfilled these two criteria. The proposed changes will eventually see the destruction of high environmental value lands in the Hunter as identified in the draft plan, with high value areas having already been zoned for high impact development.

### **Green Corridor Campaign History**

This documented record has previously been supplied to the department in hard copy and electronic form but an edited electronic copy is supplied with this submission. Refer Section A – 3 Also PowerPoint presentations and slide words are included. Refer Section A – 4 & 5.

Also included is the submission to 2015 Natural Heritage Awards at which the Green Corridor campaign won the Natural Heritage Advocacy award. Refer Section A – 6.

### **Green Corridor formation**

Note, the green corridor was not proposed in the 2006 Lower Hunter Regional Strategy as claimed in the current Draft Hunter Regional Plan. It was proposed in the 2005 Draft Lower Hunter Regional Strategy and after two years of lobbying was "established" in the final 2006 regional strategy by the most capable environment minister this state has ever had; and assisted by the then planning minister and the Premier.

The whole corridor was an offset for much of the development elsewhere in the Lower Hunter and forms the backbone of the 2008 Regional Conservation Plan. It would appear the State planning department has forgotten this?

### **Identification of stepping stone corridors.**

There is a public misconception about what is meant by stepping stone corridors that the planning department must correct.

It has taken fifteen (15) years, but the Lower Hunter biodiversity corridor is now a “continuous” tract of 22,000 hectares of National Parks Estate lands stretching from Stockton Bight to the Watagan Ranges. See green corridor mapping B – 1.

Stepping stone corridors are only viable in the Lower Hunter because of this major continuous corridor that interconnects them. Refer to pictorial view of the green corridor (Section B – 2) that shows seven (7) such stepping stone corridors dotted in orange.

The draft plan’s “desktop modelling” of the Weakleys Drive to Tomago stepping stone corridor is not feasible when zoning and land ownership mapping is overlayed on the existing vegetation. Refer to blue dotted line on strategy comparison map (Section B – 3) which shows the vegetation that will be bulldozed in the supposed stepping stone corridor, with more development to come. This includes the M1 motorway extension to Heatherbrae.

On the other hand, the green dotted line at the bottom shows continuous government owned lands that are part of the recognised core green corridor and revegetation must be concentrated in this crucial section of the corridor; very limited funds would only be wasted at Weakleys Drive. Revegetation is already well advanced or planned on NPWS reserves at Ash Island, Hexham Swamp and the Tank Paddock. There are also other government lands in this section of the corridor currently being revegetated with grant money.

Overdevelopment is turning the Weakleys Drive stepping stone corridor into an industrial and transport infrastructure hellhole. The identification of this stepping stone shows a lack of proper research and local knowledge.

### **Outstanding issue in the core green corridor**

This submission now confines its concerns to the previously identified issues in the core corridor that have now remained unresolved for ten (10) years. Note three issues in the corridor have been resolved with very successful outcomes. Refer blue letters A, B & C)

The following unresolved issues are on the Green Corridor “priority” list. Refer red numbers on outstanding issues mapping Section C – 1.

Information on all these priority issues is contained in Section C – 2 but only a very limited amount is included in this submission. Addition information can be supplied on request.

### **Number 2 - Mulbring Landscape Conservation Area. [Cessnock LGA]**

An important area of Sugarloaf forests between Mt Vincent and Brunkerville has not been included in the new Sugarloaf State Conservation Area despite much of it falling within the “Mulbring Landscape Conservation Area” as designated by the National Trust of Australia in 1984. Mt Vincent is also an area of special meaning and significance for the descendants of the Awabakal Tribe.

This is the only logging compartment (No. 264) left in the Sugarloaf range. Refer Sugarloaf forestry zoning map C - 2 - #2. All others are now in National Parks.

### **Number 3 - West Wallsend Ex-BHP Lands [Lake Macquarie LGA]**

The ex-BHP lands west of the F3 Freeway is now in the ownership of the Hunter Development Corporation (HDC) and was the conservation offset for development rights signed with the government in 2006; map shown in section C – 2 - #3 – 1 is from that agreement. These core corridor offset lands are shown in the “Lower Hunter Regional Conservation Plan (RCP) 2008” map C – 2 - #3 – 3, the “Newcastle - Lake Macquarie Western Corridor Strategy 2010” map C – 2 - #3 – 4 and the “Lower Hunter new conservation reserves 2006” map C – 2 - #3 – 5. The ex-BHP lands offset was identified as a priority in the RCP.

Any future route for rail infrastructure must be located on HDC industrial land on the eastern side of the M1 motorway and run parallel with the motorway. For this and other route options refer to mapping in section C – 2 - #9 – 2 – 13.

### **Number 6 - Blue Gum Hills Regional Park Corridor [Newcastle LGA]**

Almost the entire bushland around the Blue Gum Hills Regional Park have been rezoned for housing development by the State government under Part 3A and the proposed rezoning of 505 Minmi Rd. Fletcher would completely isolate the Regional Park. The chronology for this twelve (12) year-long issue is contained in C - 2 - #6 – 1 – 2. This is a regional planning issue but the rezoning is being processed by Newcastle City Council.

The residential rezoning of this corridor has come to Newcastle City Council three times and at the last attempt on 8 December 2015 council voted to refuse the rezoning.

This rezoning must now discontinue and action taken by the NSW government to retain this last vegetated connection between the Blue Gum Hills Regional Park and the Stockton to Watagans Regional Corridor. Options must be pursued to acquire this corridor and urban buffer and protected under the National Park and Wildlife Act 1974.

### **Number 7 - Minmi Hunter Water Wetlands [Newcastle LGA]**

The Hunter Water wetlands at Minmi must be protected in the National parks reserve system, this being in the narrowest part of the corridor. The fate of this key parcel of land, directly abutting the Tank Paddock and 505 Minmi Rd. (refer corridor map), has remained unresolved for 10 years despite many guarantees being given to transfer this land to National Parks. Refer to documentation, mapping and photos in Section C – 2 - #7.

### **Number 9 - Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) [Newcastle & Cessnock LGA]**

The Richmond Vale Rail Trail utilises the same route of the old Richmond Vale railway established in 1856 and closed in 1973. This old rail line is owned by Coal & Allied who is promoting the RVRT, with most of the old Richmond Vale rail easement being transferred to NPWS under the offset Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA) between the government and Coal & Allied. This easement's alignment is in the advance design stage for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail regional cycleway, which also runs through the Tank Paddock and Pambalong Nature Reserve. GCC has actively engaged in the establishment of the RVRT, as has many other organisations. Refer C – 2 - #9 – 2 & 3. This has had extensive media coverage.

Government recognition by the planning department of this major tourism and health promoting cycleway must be in the final regional plan, including the route mapping. Funds have been committed to this visionary project by local councils, academic institutes and private companies



but it will also require funding from both the State and Federal governments to convert this 28 kilometer-long rail line into a regional cycleway that will connect to other planned cycleways.

### Infrastructure route planning

Mapping by the Hunter Business Chamber and freight rail company Aurizon show the route of heavy freight rail by-pass on the same alignment as the RVRT at the eastern end for up to nine kilometres across Hexham Swamp.

The RTA has re-routed the yet to be built M1 extension to Heatherbrae by removing it from the north end of Hexham Swamp because of this wetland's high environmental values. The easement of the disused Richmond Vale rail line dissects Hexham Swamp and runs the full length of this nationally significant wetland. Its use as a high impact transport corridor would have far more impact than the rejected route of the M1, so the transport department must follow the lead of the RTA and use another route for this rail infrastructure.

GCC has identified routes for the rail by-pass that conform to the following criteria.

- *Minimal impact on public conservation lands.*
- *Minimal impact on urban and rural population.*
- *Maximise rail infrastructure for all Lower Hunter public and commercial usage.*
- *Constructed using tunnels (where terrain requires).*
- *Constructed parallel to existing major road infrastructure.*
- *Constructed on flood-free land.*

State and Federal government "Regional Development Australia" has made written indorsement of this criteria. C – 2 - #9 – 2 – 6.

Preliminary mapping for the 2006 Lower Hunter Regional Strategy showed the rail by-pass route running parallel with the M1 but a cabinet decision was made not to include any infrastructure in the final document.

### Number 13 - Harness Racing Club [Newcastle LGA]

The Green Corridor Coalition strongly objects to the clearing of this key bushland site located east of the M1 motorway on the fringe of Hexham Swamp. Objection is also made in the strongest terms to the use of green corridor mapping by the Newcastle Harness Racing Club to promote the urban development of Lot 1011 DP847024 at Black Hill.

Green Corridor mapping never represented the extent of the corridor and has been progressively updated as new national parks lands are added to the core corridor. It was the NSW planning department that identified the extent of the corridor "buffer lands", both in the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy 2006 and the Newcastle-Lake Macquarie Western Corridor Planning Strategy 2010.

The planning department's attention is drawn to the 2003 Thornton to Killingworth Sub-regional Strategy media release that stated.

**Protection of the last remaining remnant vegetation areas on the fringe of Hexham Swamp.**

Since that time almost all of wetland fringe remnant vegetation have been destroyed by the use of the state government Part 3A planning laws. When is the government going to stick to its planning strategies and draw a permanent line between conservation and development?

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and the Green Corridor Coalition trusts we have contributed to the department producing a balanced regional plan for the Hunter.

Yours Faithfully,

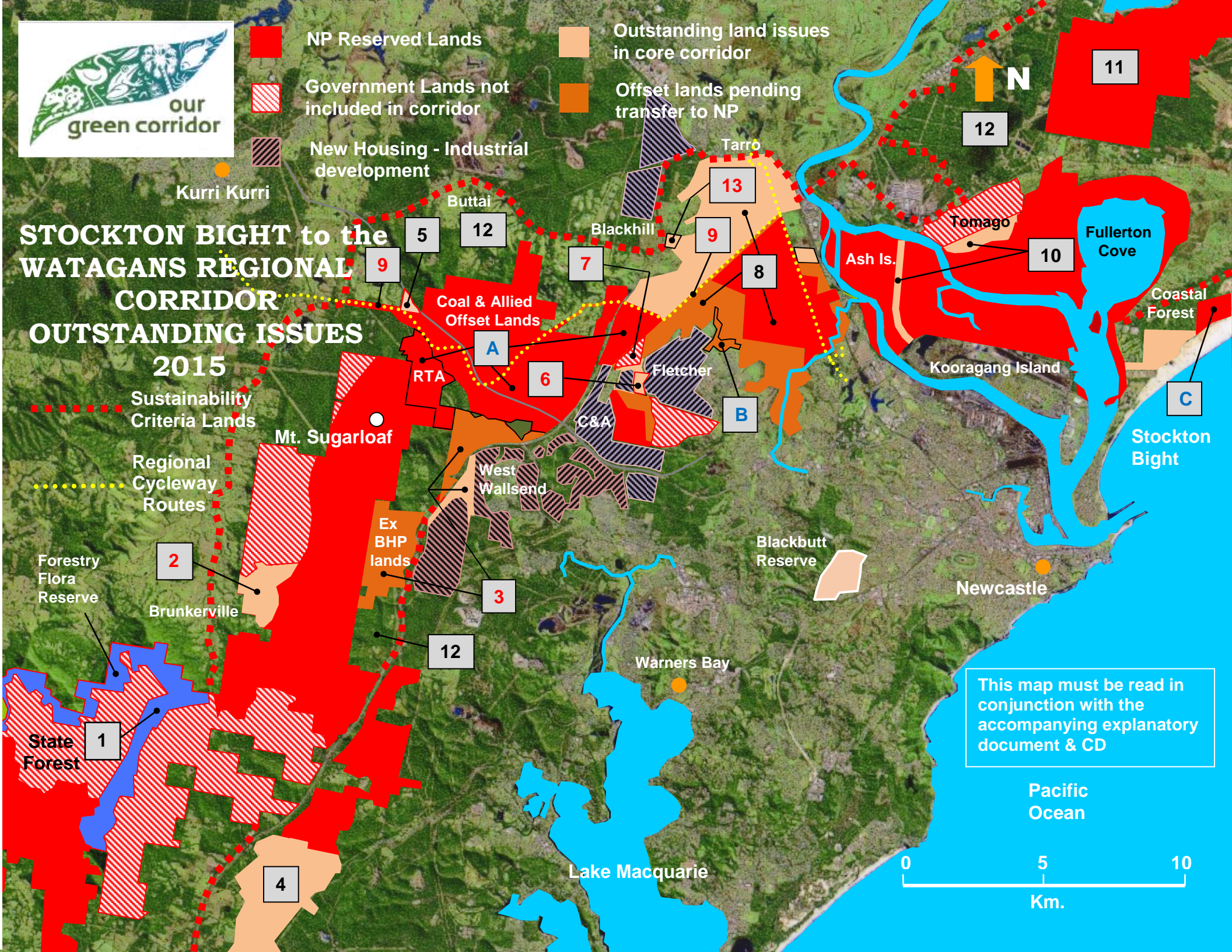
Coordinator secretary  
Green Corridor Coalition Inc.



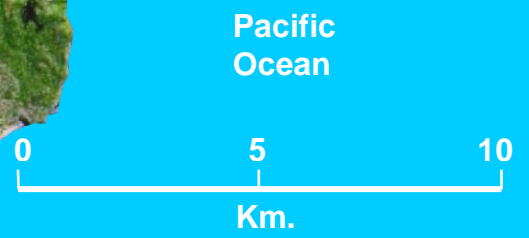


- NP Reserved Lands
- Government Lands not included in corridor
- New Housing - Industrial development
- Outstanding land issues in core corridor
- Offset lands pending transfer to NP

# STOCKTON BIGHT to the WATAGANS REGIONAL CORRIDOR OUTSTANDING ISSUES 2015



This map must be read in conjunction with the accompanying explanatory document & CD





# protect our green corridors





# STEPPING STONE CORRIDOR STRATEGY COMPARISION

