



29-06-15  
1/23 Hopetoun Street  
WOONONA NSW 2517

Dear Council Members,

Lake Wollumboola is a very attractive area for birders. It is the largest shallow saline lagoon on the South Coast and it is continuously mentioned in historical birding records as a place where unusual or rare birds are regularly reported.

The members of Illawarra Birders Inc. made many trips to the lake in the past 12 months and have visited the site countless times over the last decade. It is a wonderful place to see many of the birds which breed here and earlier in 2015 we watched entranced as the Black Swans glided in and out of a fresh water soak to drink and bathe.

The lake is a recognised important breeding area (IBA) for Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Eurasian Coot and Black Swan. The lake has the largest population of Black Swan on the NSW coast with numbers estimated to be 14,000. In summer months Lake Wollumboola attracts large numbers of seabirds and shorebirds and in 2015 was a breeding site for both Fairy and Little Terns. It supports these birds at a critical stage of their life cycle (many are migratory) and it provides them with a place of refuge during adverse weather conditions.

Unusual birds reported at the Lake in January 2015 include – Fairy Tern (Rare), Sanderling (Rare, Schedule 2 vulnerable fauna), Broad-billed Sandpiper (Rare, Schedule 2 vulnerable fauna), White-winged Black Tern (Scarce), Lesser Sand Plover (Rare, Schedule 2 vulnerable fauna), Curlew Sandpiper (Uncommon), Common Tern (Uncommon), Grey Plover (Scarce) and Red-necked Avocet (Rare). *Status given according to 'A Handbook of Birds found in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Adjacent Tablelands' – Chris J Chafer and Chris C.P.Brandis, 2012.*

In late 2014 and early 2015 the lake again proved to be a hotspot for birders from right around Australia. A White-rumped Sandpiper had been reported. This bird is a rare vagrant to Australia and prior to this had not been seen in NSW since 1984. Birders arrived from all over Australia with many arriving from interstate. At the time our club president Terrill Nordstrom had visited the lake several times and was not only impressed by the sandpiper but was amazed at the variety of birds that were considered rare or uncommon that were also using the lake foreshore and staying there to roost and feed. He was very worried by the reports that the lake area was rumored to be the site of proposed development as this ecosystem was felt to be extremely fragile. Our club committee discussed the lake area and talked about it with our club members at several club meetings.

Terrill decided to conduct a survey of the visiting birders and asked members of the birding community that used 'Birdline' (an internet reporting facility) and had visited the lake to see the sandpiper to comment on where they had come from and what local facilities they had utilized during their visit. Results he collated are as follows:



**Number of birders between the dates of 06/01/2015 - 31/01/2015 that responded to survey = 76**

**Locations where birders came from, Sydney x 20, Adelaide x 10, Brisbane x 1, Hobart x 1, Melbourne x 9, Canberra x 8, Central Coast x 1, Blue Mountains x 7, Local x 19**

**Amount of money spent in local area by Birders between above dates: \$3765.00  
average spend \$49.53**

This would be a representative group only of all of the birders who visited Lake Wollumboola during this time. We would expect there to have been many more than this that failed to respond to the survey or who did not use Birdline. Please note that without the birds appearing at the lake these visitors would NOT have been attracted to this area. Birdwatching is a high growth tourism industry and more areas around Australia are catering to birders and advertising accommodation and facilities in places that are good for birds.

Birdwatchers usually have a low impact on the areas they visit as they are interested in wildlife and nature. They care about the environment and maintaining it for the sake of the birds. The list of birds that regularly visit Lake Wollumboola is impressive and the lake will continue to be an attraction for birders to visit. The current excellent health of the lake is demonstrated by the variety of birds that not only visit, but stay and feed over a long period of time around the lake shores. One long-time birder commented he had NEVER seen such a huge variety of rare and unusual birds in the one place at the one time before.

Our club members were also very impressed by the work done by volunteers to protect the nesting Little Terns. These dedicated people provide a constant presence at the lake and assist not only in protection of the birds but also in educating members of the public through the signage they have erected and informal chats with the people they encounter. Volunteers also contribute each year to the database of information about shorebirds and their habits, breeding, feeding, migration patterns, numbers, behaviour etc. Simply by their presence, they improve security in the area.

Ideally the lake and its foreshores should be made a part of the adjacent Jervis Bay National Park. We would like to see the lake listed under the RAMSAR convention which would ensure ongoing protection. Lake Wollumboola should be listed as a wetland of international significance. Any undeveloped private lands in the Lake Wollumboola catchment should be re-zoned for Environment Conservation.

Three independent enquiries have determined that Lake Wollumboola needs to be protected and this has been backed-up by the then State Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Brad Hazzard. We urge our state government and the local council to ensure that the lake is finally protected by law so that it can continue to be a haven for wildlife. We will send this letter to all relevant state ministers and to the local council. We will continue to write letters and emails, visit and monitor the situation at Lake Wollumboola as we are concerned about the welfare of the lake environment and the wildlife that both call the area home and utilize it throughout the year.

Yours Sincerely  
Michelle Rower  
Conservation Officer  
Illawarra Birders Inc.