

Submission - Restoring nature and enhancing value for landholders Review



Hunter Wildlife Rescue (NATF)



27 April 2025

Hunter Wildlife Rescue (registered as Native Animal Trust Fund, NATF) – Submission in relation to restoring nature and enhancing value for landholders

Hunter Wildlife Rescue (registered as Native Animal Trust Fund, NATF)

Hunter Wildlife Rescue (HWR) is a not-for-profit incorporated association, licensed under the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage to hold protected Australian fauna.

For almost 45 years, and with a current membership of around 320 around the Hunter region, our dedicated group of volunteers has worked tirelessly to rescue, rehabilitate and release injured, sick, orphaned, displaced and distressed native animals back into the wild as the first volunteer wildlife rescue group to operate in NSW.

In addition, we provide emergency response services and support to government agencies (e.g. NSW Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) and National Parks and Wildlife Services). Examples include an oil spill response in the Hunter River in 2011, NSW bushfires in 2019/2020 and more recently in 2025 a lightning strike at Singleton and a mass bird poisoning in inner city Newcastle.

For her foundational and continuing work over this time, our previous President Audrey Koosmen was awarded the Order of Australia in 2024.

We operate rescue activities throughout the Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock, Singleton and Maitland local government areas. This encompasses urban and regional landscapes of all types.

Our Objective

The main objective of HWR is to return all native fauna back to its wildlife habitat when fit to fend for itself in order to preserve the integrity of our ecosystems and protect the unique diversity of species that call our area home.

Consistent with this objective is our advocacy to protect the habitats to which we can return native wildlife. Increasingly these habitats are under threat from new developments such as housing and energy as well as continuing shrinkage of available habitat on private lands.

Submission - Restoring nature and enhancing value for landholders Review

Operation

All members of Hunter Wildlife Rescue are volunteers and there are no paid staff. Members contribute in a variety of ways as rescuers, transporters, rehabilitators/carers or through administrative roles.

We work in collaboration with WIRES (NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service) and attend approximately 6000 callouts per annum.

[Hunter Wildlife Rescue \(NATF\)](#) employs a comprehensive Training program to uphold the highest standards of education and care. Hunter Wildlife Rescue works to all NSW Codes of Practice in relation to wildlife.

HWR Response to Questions – Restoring nature and enhancing value for shareholders

1. What do you consider is the most significant action(s) we can undertake to protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystem function on private lands?

- Move with a sense of urgency. Bring forward the date for completion of the final report from March 2026.
- Identify and provide as accurate as possible mapping of regional areas in NSW that are and are predicted to become critical to biodiversity and ecosystem function, including as linkages and corridors between protected areas. An example of resources includes the [Barrington to Hawkesbury Climate Corridors Flora and Fauna reports](#).
- Provide an independent, transparent, consistent and evidence-based assessment process to determine a biodiversity and ecosystem function value of nature on any individual's private lands. This should not be a landholder funded process.
- Provide an equivalence process between this assessed value and the value of alternative uses of the lands specific to the landholder. (May not be needed as the landholder is likely to understand the value of alternative uses of their lands, however may need to be quantified/demonstrated for any approval process.)
- Provide an incentive system for private landholders to retain biodiversity and ecosystem function based on the assessed value of nature on their lands. This could be monetary, services, or other direct or indirect individual or community benefit options that are of value to the specific landholder.
- Provide an incentive system for private landholders to regenerate biodiversity and ecosystem function on previously degraded lands.
- In all of the above, include consultation with First Nations groups, landholders of various types, community groups, environment groups and Non Government Organisations, and specialist ecologists. Ideally from each of the 11 regions defined under the Local Land Services Act (LLS) 2013.
- Identify areas of the LLS and the Biodiversity Conservation Act (BCA) 2016 where the above can be integrated.

Submission - Restoring nature and enhancing value for landholders Review

- Identify if the processes above can be integrated/cross-referenced with other areas of development e.g. renewable energy, housing etc to minimise the administrative load on any involved parties.

2. How can we further improve soil, water and vegetation management to protect and restore biodiversity while delivering sustainable economic outcomes?

HWR does not purport to be an expert in this topic, however we offer the following for consideration:

- Engage and consult with knowledgeable indigenous peoples to recover historical effective local land management practices.
- Include a cumulative approach that makes an assessment of aggregated events and their impact on the whole biodiversity function of a regional area, not merely a case-by-case assessment against standards (e.g. clearing of bushland in a riparian area by one landholder can have impacts on soil, water and vegetation management downstream).

3. What do you consider is the most effective way to further support and enable landholders to deliver sustainable land management and production outcomes?

- Consult with landholders in a meaningful way to understand their specific needs and constraints.
- As per Question 1, provide incentive frameworks that provide sustainability for the landholder equally with sustainability of the biodiversity function. The emphasis in legislation has traditionally been a punitive approach for breaching legislation, which has proven as a minimum difficult to manage with Government resources and at worst deadly. Balance this with processes that will inherently encourage landholders to seek out and willingly consider sustainable land management as a viable economic pathway.

4. Is there any other information about this topic you would like to share with us?

- HWR experiences a broad range of responses from landholders in our activities as rescuers. To some, native wildlife is viewed as a pest and an inhibitor to their operations. To others, they are viewed as precious and landholders are willing to provide refuges and release areas.
- Hunter Wildlife Rescue has a unique perspective having serviced the Hunter region's wildlife for over 40 years and we are acutely aware of the cumulative impact of developments in the region on wildlife. Increased residential and commercial developments, road infrastructure and other projects, as well as clearing by private landholders have carved up increasingly smaller pockets of refuge for wildlife as well as corridors that link them. All encroachments must be addressed.

Summary

*Hunter Wildlife Rescue recognises the need for landholders to maintain a viable living from their land. However, **no longer should this come at significant cost that compromises our already struggling native habitats and the wildlife they support.** We know we are in the midst of an extinction crisis in NSW. The mistakes of the past associated with private land clearing should not continue.*

Submission - Restoring nature and enhancing value for landholders Review