

**Subject: Fire on Beecroft Peninsula, NSW, October 6, 2016**

To: the Hon Senator Marice Payne

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the membership of Birdlife Shoalhaven (BLS), a branch of BirdLife Australia, to express our disappointment about the recent fire (October 6th 2016) on the Beecroft Peninsula on Defence Force land as a result of Defence Department actions. This is the second wildfire in less than 12 months, the other being in November 2015 which was started by weapons firing on a Total Fire Ban day. Although the hazard reduction burn in October may have been caused by contractors, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Defence Department - as has been indicated in a public statement by local Navy personnel.

Beecroft Peninsula is classed internationally as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) due to the presence of significant numbers of the Eastern Bristlebird (*Dasyornis brachypterus*), which is listed as an "Endangered Threatened Species" under the "Commonwealth Environment, Protection, Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999". This species is listed as one of eight for "Priority Conservation" in the Australian Threatened Species Strategy of July 2015. The total Jervis Bay population is in the order of only 700 birds in a NSW population of 2000. Thus the local population is quite significant given that it is at a higher threat of extinction. This bird is essentially flightless and thus vulnerable to fire, particularly uncontrolled wildfires.

A small population of 50 birds was trans-located to Beecroft Peninsula from Booderee National Park in 2003-2005 to help conserve the species in the event of a fire or other catastrophe on the Bherwerre Peninsula. By 2012 monitoring indicated the population had grown to 94 birds. BirdLife Australia has "guardians" for KBAs throughout Australia - local people who report annually to BirdLife Australia on the health and threats to their KBA. Karen Davis - a BirdLife Shoalhaven committee member - is the guardian for the Jervis Bay KBA and will be including our concerns about this event, and the contents of this email in her next report to BirdLife Australia.

Fortunately, the October fire was in a different area of heathland to last November's fire, so although some birds were undoubtedly killed, and nests and eggs destroyed, the colony as a whole should have survived. Too frequent burnings of the same area can adversely impact the heathland ecology rendering it unsuitable habitat for the Eastern Bristlebird. As there is limited habitat on the South Coast suitable for this bird, any loss is of concern.

The fire on October 6 occurred in the middle of the Eastern Bristlebird breeding season which takes place from August to January. We would like to request that the planning of any future burn activity on the Beecroft Peninsula takes into consideration the threat to the Eastern Bristlebird and its critical heathland habitat.

We would also appreciate it if you could let us know what actions you will be taking to pass on our concerns to the relevant managers of the Beecroft Peninsula land?

I have copied this email to Ann Sudmalis (our local member), Golo Maurer (the BirdLife Australia KBA Program Manager), Chris McGregor (an ecologist with the ANU involved in Bristlebird conservation on the Beecroft Peninsula), and David Bain (who was involved in the original trans-location of the Bristlebirds from Booderee NP to the Beecroft Peninsula) who may all be interested in this issue and in your response.

Yours sincerely,

Brett Davis (on behalf of Karen Davis - Guardian Jervis Bay Key Biodiversity Area – BirdLife Australia)

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