

Ms Robyn Stevens
CEO Shoalhaven City Council
P.O. Box 42 Nowra NSW 2541

C.c.
Mayor Amanda Findley
Ward 2 Councillors - Clr. Christen, Clr. Ell, Clr. Kotlash & Clr. Watson
Ben Coddington, Environmental Planning and Assessment Team Leader

13 May 2024

Dear Ms. Stevens

**APPROVAL TO CONSTRUCT A NESTING PLATFORM FOR OSPREYS ON THE BHERWERRE
WETLAND AT SANCTUARY POINT**

Introduction

BirdLife Shoalhaven (BLS) is a branch of BirdLife Australia and has over 1,200 members and supporters in the local area.

We are seeking the approval of Shoalhaven City Council to construct a nesting platform for Ospreys to be installed on the Bherwerre Wetland at Sanctuary Point and clarification on Council's process in this regard.



Eastern Osprey status, behaviour and local nesting attempts

The Eastern Osprey (*Pandion cristatus*) is listed as Vulnerable under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.

Ospreys are found in the Bay and Basin area, including the Bherwerre Wetland and the near vicinity. They feed on fish taken from St Georges Basin and use adjacent sites for roosting, feeding and nesting. Ospreys breed through the winter with fledglings leaving the nest around August.

The NSW Department of Planning & Environment states that disturbance or removal of large trees near the coast are a major threat to their nesting attempts. This has been recognised with the construction of artificial nesting platforms by several other Councils in NSW.

This threat explains why Osprey's nests on the South Coast are usually positioned on the top of artificial structures, which provide 360-degree views and unhindered flight approach. There have been several sightings of the bird recorded on national bird databases, but importantly there have only been two successful nesting events recorded locally.

In the Bay & Basin area all attempts have been on artificial structures.

- Three chicks were reared in two seasons in 2015 and 2016 on top of a transmission tower at Basin View. The nest was abandoned the following year.
- A pair failed in attempts on the Telstra Telecommunications Tower on Sanctuary Point Road, adjacent to Bherwerre Wetland, over the last four seasons from 2020 to 2023. The site between the tower and an antennae dish was unsuitable and the nest failed to hold in each season.
- Another pair also built a nest in 2023 on a platform on a light pole at the rear of shops in Sanctuary Point. Monitoring indicated this was almost certainly a different pair to those using the Telstra tower site 1km. away, but the birds later abandoned the nest.



Key reasons why the project should be approved

Based on the comments above, BLS considers that this proposed project would be a very worthwhile conservation action and that the Bherwerre Wetland is the ideal site. There are several reasons for this:

- The Bherwerre Wetland has been identified as a key conservation project and Council have already invested in a section of boardwalk and signage.
- The Basin Villages Forum & Basin Community Resources Council Steering Committee continues to be involved in the development of the wetland as a conservation and recreation natural area for the Sanctuary Point community.

- The Bherwerre Wetland is near St Georges Basin, with its clear and open water providing a readily available food source for Ospreys.
- The recent breeding attempts in Sanctuary Point suggest there are two pairs of Ospreys both requiring suitable nesting sites.
- The Bay and Basin is close to the southern end of the Osprey's breeding range, so sightings of nesting activity in the area are rare. This has led to increased awareness and interest in these threatened birds in the local and wider birding community.
- Many local residents have expressed a keen interest in the bird life using the wetlands.
- The proposed location of the nesting platform should have little impact on nearby residents.
- The proposed project will have minimal cost for Council.

Progress to date

In 2022 Telstra decided they would not install a nesting platform on the Telstra Communications Tower at Sanctuary Point Road. The tower was the obvious location, given the attempts made there by a pair over four years as mentioned above.

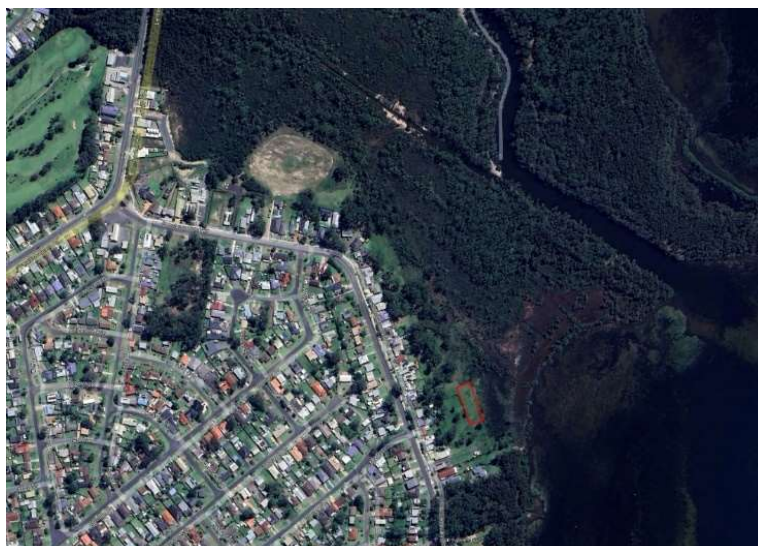
This led us to look at how we could progress the project ourselves.

- We visited the Tweed last year to inspect several nesting platforms installed by the Tweed Shire Council and learnt about their successful breeding results. Their staff have provided us with their designs for the nesting platforms and other information, which we have incorporated into the proposed project.
- The Endeavour Energy Nowra depot have agreed to provide a 10m, untreated pole, which they will deliver to the site at no cost.
- We have obtained the commitment of local suppliers and community groups to build the nesting platform, install it on top of the pole and place the pole in the ground.
- The Basin Villages Forum CCB has given their support to the project after being briefed at a recent meeting.
- The project has also received a great response from BLS members and supporters and we would look to fundraise for any incidental project costs.

Given this level of support from local business and the community, the project can be completed at a minimal cost to Council.

Project overview

The approximate location of the nesting platform on Bherwerre Wetland is shown below. The site is in an open grass area with truck access.





The main stages in the construction and installation of the nesting platform would be as follows:

- The 10m pole provided by Endeavour Energy would be placed at a depth of 1.8m into the ground with above and in-ground support, if required, due to the wet nature of the ground in the wetland.
- On top of the pole will be a 1.2m square nesting platform made of aluminium or light galvanised steel. This platform would be constructed and affixed on metal supports above the top of the pole by local groups and suppliers. Below the nest on the pole will be two cross beams to be provided by a local supplier.
- Reynolds & Rigg Contracting from Sanctuary Point would dig the hole and erect the nesting platform.



Conclusion

This project will help the conservation of a threatened bird species. It is a community project with wide local support and will raise awareness of the natural area of the Bherwerre Wetland. The project would be delivered at minimal cost to Council.

BirdLife Shoalhaven is now seeking Council's support for this initiative.

As a next step, we would like to meet with Council to understand the next stage in the process. Could you please contact Karen Davis and Chris Grounds, BLS members and Bay and Basin residents, who have been developing the project over the last few years. You can contact Karen on 0487 208 427 & karen@brettdavis.com.au or Chris on 0401 137 158 & at solum306@gmail.com.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Dunn', is written over a faint, dotted grid background.

Rob Dunn

President

president@birdlifeshoalhaven.org