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The Hon John Howard MP
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

2007 Election commitment – Cumberland Conservation Corridor

Dear Prime Minister,

The Western Sydney Conservation Alliance Inc (WSCA) is seeking a written commitment and public announcement from the Federal Government prior to the Federal Election that it will transfer ownership of two key Commonwealth properties to the NSW Government so that they can become part of the NSW National Parks Reserve System. These two properties are the key sites needed to establish the Cumberland Conservation Corridor (CCC). The CCC is a conservation initiative that if established will protect and manage a continuous 30 km area of bushland and open space which is crucial for the survival of Western Sydney's endangered flora and fauna species.

The commitment will also state that one hundred million dollars (\$100,000,000) in funding will be made available by the Federal Government for the purposes of establishing and managing the CCC. The funding will have no strings attached and be made available to the NSW Government and local Councils for the acquisition of other lands needed to form the CCC and for its ongoing management.

The two Commonwealth properties are the Orchard Hills Defence Establishment and the Air Services Australia Llandilo site (also known as the Shanes Park site). Orchard Hills is 1970 hectares in total and 1370 hectares of this site is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List. We seek ownership of a minimum of 1370 hectares transferred to the NSW Government. The Air Services Australia site Llandilo is 558 hectares in total and 415 hectares is also Commonwealth Heritage Listed. We seek ownership of the entire 558 hectare site transferred to the NSW Government.

In 2002 the Federal Government released the *Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment* (attached) and it put Western Sydney's biodiversity in the highest stress class. It alarmingly stated that: "... *The threatened communities [of Western Sydney] are inadequately reserved and it is unlikely, recognising the pressures and alternate values, that recovery of biodiversity values will occur.*"

Western Sydney residents have demonstrated in recent Federal Elections that they are prepared to forgo traditional voting habits for a political party committed to meeting their needs and aspirations. Yet they have seen their natural environment treated by government bodies as little more than something to be covered with commercial and residential development. A dollar value for land in Western Sydney has prevailed at the expense of ecological and natural heritage value. All the while Western Sydney residents have seen the Federal and State governments work in concert to bestow on inner city

residents of Sydney an expansive vegetative stand of natural heritage around Sydney Harbour foreshores. The time has come, at the eleventh hour, to commit to conserving, on the Cumberland Plain, a corridor of flora and fauna habitat that residents can enjoy, be proud of, and pass on to our descendants.

The Commitment

I John Howard the Prime Minister of Australia commit the Federal Government to providing land and funding to create the Cumberland Conservation Corridor. This lasting conservation legacy for Western Sydney will be achieved by:

- Transferring ownership of the 1370 hectare Commonwealth Heritage Listed area of the Orchard Hills Defence Establishment to the NSW Government so that it can be added to the NSW National Parks Reserve System
- Transferring ownership of the entire 558 hectare Air Services Australia site Llandilo to the NSW Government so that it can be added to the NSW National Parks Reserve System
- Providing immediate funding of one hundred million dollars for the purpose of acquiring additional conservation land needed to establish the CCC and for the ongoing management and protection of the conservation values contained within the CCC.
- Funding will be on a no strings attached basis meaning it can be accessed by the NSW Government and Local Councils upon application for specific purposes such as land acquisition and management of the CCC
- Making a public announcement prior to the election announcing this commitment to the people of Western Sydney
- Putting this commitment in writing to the Western Sydney Conservation Alliance Inc prior to the election.

Prime Minister on behalf of the Western Sydney Conservation Alliance Inc I thank you for your consideration of this commitment request.

Yours truly,



Geoff Brown
President
WSCA

Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment 2002

Case Study - Cumberland Plain (Sydney Basin 8) Highest stress class

The Cumberland Plain is amongst the most threatened regions in NSW, with only 13% of the native vegetation cover remaining. Another 12% contains scattered trees with some native understorey. Several ecological communities are listed as endangered by the NSW Scientific Committee under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. Two of these ecological communities have also been listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Much of the remaining vegetation is still under threat from rural, urban and industrial expansion.

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has identified and gazetted 10 endangered ecological communities. It is thought that all endangered ecological communities that occur on shale and alluvium derived soils are endemic to the area. There are 85 species listed under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* as endangered or vulnerable. The Commonwealth lists 35 species as endangered or vulnerable.

The largest threat to the ecosystems of the Cumberland Plain is urbanisation. Threats associated with the encroaching rural, residential, and industrial development are:

- clearing of remnant vegetation;
- further fragmentation of larger areas; and
- and exotic species, both plant and animal.

There is also considerable and growing pressure for access to bushland patches for formal and informal recreational purposes even where tree canopy is retained. Much of the perceived value of urban bush remnants is for sport - as green usable spaces, as opposed to conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services *per se*.

In addition to two national parks, there are 9 nature reserves and 1 state recreation area, giving a total of 1.5% reserved area. Other areas of reservation include regional parks and public lands managed by local councils and the Commonwealth Government, including defence lands and local parks. The ecosystems of the Cumberland Plain are endemic, implying no possibilities for reservation outside the subregion. The potential to increase reservation is minimal because of the lack of remaining suitable land. Land that is suitable for formal reservation is often valued for other purposes and highly cost-prohibitive. **The threatened communities are inadequately reserved and it is unlikely, recognising the pressures and alternate values, that recovery of biodiversity values will occur.**

Source:

http://audit.deh.gov.au/ANRA/vegetation/docs/biodiversity/bio_assess_cumberland.cfm

Commonwealth of Australia – National Land and Water Resources Audit