



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **Verity Firth**

**Minister for Women  
Minister for Science and Medical Research  
Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)  
Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water**

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EMBARGOED until 5am on Friday, 14 December 2007

### **GREEN LIGHT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING IN WESTERN SYDNEY**

The NSW Government has committed to investing half a billion dollars to protect at least an additional 3,800 hectares – or 7,600 football fields – of native bushland throughout Western Sydney, an important step in the release of land for 181,000 new homes.

Assistant Environment Minister Verity Firth said the unprecedented ‘green fund’ will not only help protect the region’s unique plants and animals for future generations, but is also a crucial part of the Government’s major land release program in the ‘Growth Centres’ of Sydney’s north-west and south-west (**see attached map**).

“For the first time since Governor Arthur Phillip set out west in search of farmland to feed the new colony, we have a road map for the permanent protection of Western Sydney’s remaining bushland,” said Ms Firth.

“This clear vision and big-picture approach to conservation means I have granted ‘biodiversity certification’ to the State Environmental Planning Policy (Sydney Region Growth Centres) 2006 in recognition that it will ‘maintain or improve’ biodiversity outcomes.”

The money, totalling \$530 million, will be generated from the infrastructure levy on all future land releases within the Growth Centres and used to purchase land for reserves or national parks, or to fund conservation agreements with private landowners.

“Half a billion dollars will go a long way when it comes to buying and protecting land for both conservation and recreational purposes – both inside and outside the Growth Centres,” said Ms Firth.

Planning Minister Frank Sartor said the plan will slash red tape by protecting biodiversity more effectively on a region-wide basis, rather than looking at each block of land in isolation.

“This approach is a win for families, landowners and the environment,” said Mr Sartor.

“It gives greater certainty to conservation protection in the Growth Centres and will allow future generations to enjoy more open space and protected reserves.

“The green fund will build on another major environmental asset established by the NSW Government – the 27 kilometre Western Sydney Parklands stretching from Blacktown to Liverpool.

“It shows we are committed to releasing land matched with important social infrastructure – including open space – and offering a healthy lifestyle for families.”

It is estimated the \$530 million will contribute to the protection of at least an additional 3,800 hectares of native bushland – 2,000 hectares within the Growth Centres and at least a minimum of 1,800 hectares outside.

This is the first plan in NSW to receive biodiversity certification and is a major step forward in planning for Sydney’s future.

It follows one of the most comprehensive assessments of an area’s biodiversity values ever undertaken in the Sydney region.

Ms Firth said biodiversity certification:

- Commits \$530 million to the purchase of high-conservation value bushland for a string of reserves and national parks or conservation agreements with owners, within and outside of the Growth Centres;
- Contributes to the protection of 2,000 hectares of high quality bushland within the Growth Centres – an area the size of 4,000 football fields or 10 times the size of Centennial Park;
- Provides a ‘green tick’ for the release of new land to market, with the first stage of releases to provide nearly 40,000 new homes; and
- Cuts red tape for new homeowners in the Growth Centres by ensuring biodiversity issues are addressed up-front instead of block-by-block.

“After more than 200 years of intensive clearing and development, the plants and animals of Western Sydney’s Cumberland Plain are among the most threatened in Australia, with just 13 per cent still surviving,” said Ms Firth.

“The \$530 million will compensate for the vegetation which will be lost as we provide housing and infrastructure for Sydney’s growing population.

“The money will first and foremost target the largest, most intact remnants of Cumberland Plain areas for permanent protection – either as new public reserves or through perpetual conservation agreements between private landowners and the Environment Department.”

It will not be used to compulsorily acquire private land.

In early 2007 a draft conservation plan was exhibited, identifying areas of native vegetation in the Growth Centres which need to be retained as well as those areas where unavoidable losses can be offset through the protection of land with similar ecological significance outside the Growth Centres.

The green fund will be spent over the next thirty years, or as development occurs. The money will be administered by the Environmental Trust.

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