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15th February 2015

The Hon. Lisa Neville
Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water
Level 17
8 Nicholson Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Minister,

Re: Proposed land swap for marina and housing development on former Cheetham Saltworks land

We write to ask that you intervene to ensure that the proposed Crown land swap with stockfeed company Ridley Corporation, as negotiated with the former Napthine government just prior to entering caretaker mode, does not proceed.

We note the proposal was brought to the Napthine government under its "unsolicited proposals" program, and that in opposition you expressed concerns about secrecy and lack of probity in the agreement your predecessors signed¹.

Paradoxically, having acquired Crown land wetlands, the developer's website claims that it would "construct" about 225 hectares of wetlands, beaches, parks and waterways. It is outrageous that publicly owned critical habitat for many wildlife species and important open space for humans could be handed to developers to cover with 4000 homes and the accompanying infrastructure, and that the adjoining waters of Corio Bay would become the exclusive domain of boat owners.

The former Cheetham saltworks has now become a "birdwatchers' paradise", however it is the habitat and refuge services provided by the land to various wildlife which should be of over-riding importance to government. The land is now an important part of the surrounding wetlands and RAMSAR listed habitats, relied upon by many protected and endangered migratory bird species.

Whilst a marina might arguably be coast dependent, housing developments clearly are not. Even so, existing marinas in and around Port Phillip Bay are plentiful, many are not full to capacity and are thus presumably marginal businesses. There is no social or economic case to build more marinas, especially ones which demand the loss of critical tracts of coastal Crown land.

We also note the growing body of research which confirms that wetlands are significantly more effective than rainforests as carbon sinks². Recent Australian research has found that biosequestration is now one of the largest opportunities for reducing CO₂ emissions in Australia³. However, the potential for wetlands as carbon sinks is compromised by the rate at which they are

¹^B*Birdwatchers object to plans for former Geelong salt works* The Age November 15, 2014

disappearing. It is elementary then that your government should see the preservation of wetlands as a critical element of its commitment to action on climate change.

So, rather than proceeding to hand the 289 hectares of Crown land to the developer, we suggest that government should resume its management of the adjoining Crown land it currently leases to Ridley, and acquire the remaining land owned by Ridley so that the entire natural wetland can be protected as part of wider wetlands.

Doing so would ensure the protection of critical habitats, preservation of an important biosequestration reserve, and demonstrate your commitment to local and global environmental issues.

Yours sincerely,



Len Warfe
President

c.c. BirdLife Australia
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²*The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital* Costanza et al. Nature Vol 387 15th May 1997

³*Wetlands better than rainforests at storing carbon, say Deakin University scientists* The Age February 15, 2015