

ILLAWARRA REGIONAL BUSINESS PARK

WETLAND ANALYSIS

November 2007

1 INTRODUCTION

The site of the proposed Illawarra Regional Business Park (IRBP), located to the west of the main (north-south) runway of the Albion Park airport, has long been used for cattle grazing and other agricultural pursuits.

The subject site and the proposed development upon it have been considered in detail in dedicated *Reports* regarding ecological issues and wetland and riparian issues (InSites 2007a, b, c). In particular, the relative values of the two wetlands and patches of vegetation on the site have been considered (InSites 2007b), noting the highly disturbed and modified nature of the northern wetland.

This *Supplementary Report* considers the ecological values of the two wetlands present (in part) on the subject site (as discussed below), and considers appropriateness (or otherwise) of protecting the northern wetland.

2 WETLANDS & WATERCOURSES

The subject site at Albion Park (Figure 1) contains parts of Frazers Creek (in the southwestern corner and along the western side of the property). The site also supports the whole of one wetland associated with Frazers Creek (in the central western part of the site) and part of an additional wetland (on the northeastern boundary).

Much of Frazers Creek within the subject site has been significantly modified from its original condition, as indicated by mounds of earth along parts of the watercourse in the southern part of the site and the formed channel within which Frazers Creek is confined in the western parts of the site.

The southern of the two wetlands on the subject site at Albion Park has been designated a "Coastal Wetland" pursuant to *State Environmental Planning Policy No. 14 - Coastal Wetlands* (SEPP 14). The northern of the two wetlands was not so dedicated, nor it should be noted were other significant wetlands located to the southwest of the subject site on adjoining lands (Figure 1).

Both of the wetlands on the subject site (and that part of the northern wetland on the adjoining land to the northeast) have been affected by ongoing cattle grazing and by the effects of increased nutrient loads (as a result both of fertilizer use on the adjoining agricultural lands and of the depositing of cattle faeces) and also by weed infestation.

The southern of the two wetlands on the subject site at Albion Park is considerably larger than (approximately twice the size) the northern wetland, including both that portion on the subject site and that on the adjoining land on the northeast.

In addition, the southern wetland is in considerably better condition than the northern wetland, notwithstanding the effects of cattle access and grazing over a long period. In this regard:

- the northern wetland in addition to the impacts of cattle grazing, has been significantly adversely affected by earthworks involving the excavation and stockpiling of soil in the centre of the wetland; and

- contains a much higher density of introduced weed species than is the case in the southern wetland.

It should be noted that other wetlands in the immediate vicinity (eg those to the southwest of the subject site) are in considerably better condition than the northern wetland on the subject site. Whilst also doubtless affected by agricultural activities, these wetlands appear to be less disturbed by earthworks and excavation than the northern wetland on the subject site.

3 SEPP 14 EVALUATION

An issue has been raised with respect to the *Concept Plan* and environmental assessment of the proposed Illawarra Regional Business Park (IRBP) that it might be appropriate to designate the northern wetland on the subject site as an SEPP 14 Wetland. The rationale which has been proposed is that because the southern wetland has been designated a “*coastal wetland*” pursuant to SEPP 14, it may be appropriate to similarly designate the northern wetland as a SEPP 14 Wetland.

However, the northern wetland is not of the same conservation value or condition as the southern wetland on the subject site at Albion Park. The designation of the northern wetland as a SEPP 14 Wetland would appear (on the face of it) to establish a precedent under which all artificial and/or highly modified and degraded depressions in the general coastal landscape could be designated as SEPP 14 Wetlands. There are, for example, many artificial farm dams that are larger than the northern wetland on the subject site, and which support habitats and features of similar or better quality.

Designation of the northern wetland as a SEPP 14 Wetland, therefore, does not appear warranted given:

- its relatively small size compared to the designated SEPP 14 Wetland on the subject site;
- its division over two landholdings and the adverse effects of the boundary fence which bisects the wetland;
- the substantially higher density of weeds in the northern wetland (as compared to the southern wetland on the subject site); and
- the impacts of earthworks within the wetland, which has involved the excavation of a pond in the centre of the wetland and the deposition of excavated soil into the centre of the wetland.

Given those circumstances, and noting the highly artificial nature of that wetland, it is not appropriate to designate the northern wetland on the subject site at Albion Park as a “*coastal wetland*” pursuant to SEPP 14.

It is also to be noted that management of the northern wetland is more difficult than the southern wetland because it occurs across two individual landholdings. The potential for future management of that artificial wetland for environmental and/or biodiversity conservation purposes would be considerably more problematic, and there is a significant possibility of one half of the wetland being managed for biodiversity conservation purposes while the other half is being used for the grazing of cattle. There is consequently less likelihood of an environmental benefit to be derived from designation of that area as an SEPP 14 Wetland.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Whilst the southern of the two wetlands on (or in the case of the northern wetland, partly on) the subject site at Albion Park has been designated as a SEPP 14 Coastal Wetland, the northern wetland has not been so designated (despite the 23 year history of SEPP 14).

There are important differences between the northern and southern wetlands on the subject site at Albion Park which distinguish the two wetlands and their values or potential relevance with respect to *State Environmental Planning Policy No. 14 – Coastal Wetlands* (SEPP 14). Important differences include:

- the substantially larger size of the southern wetland;
- the relatively limited physical disturbance of the southern wetland by comparison with the northern wetland (which has been affected by the construction of a dividing fence, the excavation and the deposition of material in the centre of the wetland, and possibly by physical works around the edges);
- differences in the densities and extent of weed species (with the northern wetland being significantly more weed-affected than the southern wetland); and
- difficulties arising from the dual ownership of the northern wetland, and the “*existing use rights*” which would pertain to that wetland in respect of agricultural activities and the potential for different land use activities on each side of the dividing fence.

Given its size, the levels of disturbance and the lack of any imperative for changes to its use, there is little justification in designating the northern of the two wetlands a SEPP 14 Coastal Wetland. Indeed, such a designation has the potential to create a precedent for the designation of a very large variety of small, highly disturbed and modified, degraded and weed-infested farm dams or depressions as SEPP 14 Coastal Wetlands.

In this regard, it is noted that there are large farm dams and other artificial or modified wetlands in the immediate vicinity and in the general locality which would provide superior habitats and resources for native biota in comparison to the northern wetland on the subject site at Albion Park.