

Dr. Eric Woehler – Birds Tasmania

“Thank you everyone! You’ve heard a lot about the Walker spin on the bird issues at Lauderdale, and on your seats there is a single sheet of paper that gives you some information. I would urge you, everyone in this room today, to make a submission – if you care about the birds, if you care about the habitat they need, write to the RPDC; there is enough information here that you can use. We’ve been told by Walker Corporation that the birds that are being displaced by this development will simply go somewhere else – well that’s not the case. It’s not, it doesn’t work that way. The oystercatchers that we have down there at Lauderdale, there are, we’ve had in excess of 700 counted in the same day in one week at the one location – that is 7% of the Australian population in one place at one time. Even Walker admits that the area is internationally important for Pied Oystercatchers and says to solve the problem they’ll just go somewhere else. Remarkably, Walker can only find half the oystercatchers that Birds Tasmania can find – we can find 700, they can only find two or three hundred. What happened to the rest of the birds? This is definitely a place of international importance, they know it’s important, we know it’s important. The oystercatchers need Ralphs Bay intact; they need the intertidal mudflat that moves back and forth with the tides for the birds to feed, for the birds to rest, for the birds to nest there. Its typical habitat for the oystercatcher and it’s the second most important site for oystercatchers in Australia – so that’s how important the oystercatcher population is down at Lauderdale.

applause

The important thing about the oystercatchers is that they are present every day of the year – they don’t go somewhere else, they don’t migrate somewhere to other parts of the world, they need to make their living everyday here; at Lauderdale. Pied Oystercatchers can live for 30 years; there are birds down at South Arm at the moment that are 33 years old and still breeding. They’ll never be able to go anywhere else if they’re pushed out by this development. So pushing these birds out of this habitat is essentially the same as putting a shotgun to their heads and shooting them because the end result is the same: the birds are going to die, they can’t go somewhere else. Sorry Mister Walker you’re wrong there. There are also birds that use other parts of Lauderdale, other parts of the Derwent Estuary, other parts of South East Tasmania. They fly between Siberia and Tasmania. There are birds that travel 15 000 kilometres from Siberia to spend 6 months down here feeding during the summer months and then they turn around and fly back to Siberia to breed. Some of these birds only weigh 15 grams; that’s half an ounce if you’re used to the old measurements. So they’ll fit comfortably in the palm of your hand, and they fly from

Tasmania to Siberia in six weeks, they turn around, then they'll breed up in Siberia, and then they'll come back to Tasmania. These birds have been travelling between Siberia and Tasmania for thousands of generations. All this time, just for a stupid development like this to wreck it. The birds were here first.

applause

Some of these migratory birds live for 20 years and when you work out how far they travel each year times the twenty years lifetime, some of these birds are flying farther than the distance between the earth and the moon – by a bird that fits in the palm of my hand! That's how remarkable the story is and that's how remarkable the bird issues are, and that's why it's so important to protect this habitat. We know that the area is important feeding area for these birds; Walker has done a lot of work on that – on the feeding birds in the area. And they've simply said that the birds will go somewhere else – it doesn't work that way in biology. There are birds in habitat all around southeast Tasmania they're not going to allow all these oystercatchers displaced by this development to just move into their neighbourhood. The birds that are displaced aren't going to make it – they're not going to survive the development period, they're not going to survive the loss of habitat that they've been using for thousands of generations. Walker has talked about creating habitat – that's strange, him thinking that he's God and that with a flash of the hand he can just create new habitat for the birds! They're talking about flooding, the best habitat, sorry, the best option that they're proposing in terms of new habitat for the oystercatchers is to flood Racecourse Flats, move the birds and turn that whole area into an intertidal feeding area. But the area involved in Racecourse Flats is less than half the area that would be destroyed by this development and there's not a single guarantee that the "habitat" that they're going to create, for the birds will actually be functional, that will have any value to the birds. So the end result is – we're going to destroy parts of a Conservation Area, we're going to trash part of an area that's on the Register of the National Estate, in the hope that it might create feeding habitat for the birds. It's a band-aid on top of a bit of plaster on a bit of sticky tape to try and hold this whole thing together. It's not going to work, the birds are not going to survive, we can't afford to lose Ralphs Bay - the birds will be the biggest sufferers. Thankyou."