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National Threatened Species Day - Proposed prison site further threatens threatened species

National Threatened Species day commemorates the death of the last Thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger) in captivity on 7 September 1936.

On National Threatened Species Day in 2019 Premier Peter Gutwein (then Minister for the Environment) issued a media release in which he wrote: "... Tasmania's unique wildlife is one of our greatest assets, and the Hodgman majority Liberal Government is committed to protecting our threatened species to maintain the health of our ecosystem."

What meaningless and hypocritical statement can we expect this year given their lack of 'due diligence' when selecting the Westbury Reserve on Birralee Road as the site for their high security Northern Prison?

The Right to Information documents released on 24 August 2020 about the Westbury Reserve clearly show that the land was bought by the State Government with Commonwealth Government money in 1999 for the National Reserve Estate because of the presence of the blue pincushion (*Brunonia australis*), black peppermint (*Eucalyptus amygdalina*) dominated forest and a healthy population of Tasmanian Bettong (*Bettongia gaimardi*). This is a region of Tasmania which is under-reserved, and the land was considered to be significant in a regional context.

In other words, this site was bought for its high conservation significance to this region even before anyone knew about the eagle's nest on Brushy Rivulet. That wasn't 'discovered' until 2005.

Minister Archer repeatedly states that "A preliminary investigation has been conducted by DPIPWE and it is understood there are no eagle nests, covenants or records of threatened wildlife." Her use of the word "wildlife" is circumspect. Any thorough "preliminary investigation" would have found records of two rare plant species: Handsome Hooksedge (*Uncinia elegans*) and Blue Pincushion.

A subsequent investigation of any worth would reveal that two birds (both endemic sub species) observed at the site are legally protected under the federal Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999, including the Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax fleayi* (Endangered), and Masked Owl *Tyto novaehollandiae castanops* (Vulnerable). These species, as well as the Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae*, are listed as endangered on the Tasmania's Threatened Species Protection Act (TSPA) 1995. The green and gold frog *Litoria raniformis* is listed as Vulnerable on both the EPBC and TSPA.

Minister Archer is correct to say there is no eagle's nest on the Reserve. However, once again the preliminary investigation would have shown that there is an eagle's nest on an adjoining property just 40 metres from boundary of this land. A prison being built at this site will undoubtedly lead to the abandonment of this nest. Nest disturbance is one of the greatest threats to this already endangered species.

As at National Threatened species Day 2020, the Westbury Reserve is still listed by the Commonwealth as part of the National Reserve Estate. The black peppermints are still there, as are blue pincushions, and signs of bettong activity. The Wedge-tailed Eagle and the Green and Gold Frog (at the very least) can now also be added.

On Sunday 6 September 2020 members of the Central North Field Naturalists will be visiting Westbury Reserve to add to our list of flora and fauna species recorded there. We will also map the distribution of the rare Blue Pincushion whose population happens to be concentrated on the 'development footprint'.

It is sheer vandalism to destroy native habitat with such a high number of rare and threatened species for a prison. The Central North Field Naturalists Inc. call on the State Government to honour its commitment to the Commonwealth Government and formalise the gazettal of this part of the National Reserve Estate.

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http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/national_threatened_species_day2



Photos of Green and Gold Frog, Blue Pincushion and Tasmanian Masked Owl by H. Staubmann, P. Milner and S. Lloyd