Awabakal Descendants Traditional
Owners Aboriginal Corporation
PO BOX 137
Budegewoi
NSW 2262

20 July 2026

Ian McKenzie and Charmian Eckersley

Link Road Forest Campaign

RE - Eden Estate Project Consultation and Link Road Forest

Dear Ian and Charmian,

Thank you for including us in the consultation on the Eden Estate Project. I write on behalf of the Directors of the Awabakal Descendants Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation who met on the 20th June and discussed the Eden Estate proposal for a housing development in the Link Road Forest on our traditional lands.

The letter below is sets out our position. Please note that we haven't provided any formal response on your Connecting with County work.

Who we are

The Awabakal Descendents Aboriginal Corporation (the Descendents) is an Awabakal family group descended from our apical ancestor Mahrahkah, who was recorded as an Awabakal woman living on the lands between Lake Macquarie (Awaba), the Hunter River (Coquun), the mountains and coast of modern-day Newcastle (Mulloobinbah). The Awabakal people were significantly diminished in the early days of the colony, but our family group continues to grow, and our passion and love for our Country have never waned.

Losing Parrai-Country

Our family group has persisted in this area through mass displacement and successive waves of conflict over land and resources: initially shells for lime, cedar and timber, then coal, and later fertile farming lands. We are now witnessing another significant wave of loss sweeping over our traditional lands, taking with it remnants of our precious artefacts, sacred places and bushland that we have so carefully protected and nurtured. Urban sprawl continues to cut west and south into bushland that is so integral to the physical, human and spiritual realms of Country.

These realms of Country are almost completely lost under the structures and concrete of urban sprawl. While Country that has been scarred by logging, mining and agriculture has the potential to speak and sing again, Country beneath cities and houses is silenced and it becomes locked away from us and other Novocastrians. These remnant pockets of bush are not simply stands of trees ready to be bulldozed for new developments, houses and roads. This is true across Australia, but it is ever more immediate for Awabakal people. Every year, the remnant forests surrounding our Lake and mountains are cut, hacked and gutted to make way for new housing projects that could instead be located in any number of other

landscapes in the Lower Hunter that are not as important as the remnant forests and the waterways they feed.

Why Link Road Forest should be preserved

The loss of our Country mirrors the story of the powerful owl (wontiwonti) and the koala (koalawaine), whose numbers are dwindling at a terrifying rate. We are reminded of this tragedy every time we see the number of koalas killed on our roads, catch a glimpse of shrinking forests in aerial photographs, drive through sprawling housing estates that extend towards our sacred Mount Sugar Loaf (Kepa Kepa). We've long witnessed the mutilation of sacred places; Nobbys Island (Whibayganba) and the South Newcastle cliffs (Yirrinulli), the placement of structures on Kepa Kepa and the 'removal' of the petrified forest at Fennell Bay (Kurrur Kurran). Australia's rich history does not exist only at Uluru or in the Top End; it is here under our feet, but it is slowly being cut away, silenced or erased. We must stop the death-by-a-thousand-cuts now and preserve what is left.

Our connection to our Country cannot be measured by the number of artefacts recorded in a government database. There are many reasons why the Link Road Forest is important to Awabakal people. These intangible cultural values can be broadly grouped into three categories: human (societal), physical and spiritual. They can be further divided into some fifty reasons that explain why an area is culturally important and what it embodies for Awabakal people. We invite you to consider this and to apply your own cultural lens when thinking about what cultural significance means in the context of your own hometown or childhood home, church, hall, park or monument.

Housing is important but bushland is more important

We therefore oppose the view that the Link Road Forest is marginal land. It is very much alive, waiting to be cared for again, and full of stories for everyone, especially the Awabakal.

We want affordable housing for Novocastrians, but we recognise a real shortage of quality forest for future Novocastrians to enjoy. We have no shortage of suitable land in the Lower Hunter, and we must prioritise the use of highly degraded land for housing while preserving bushland for recreation and what has come to be called 'ecosystem services'.

How Link Road Forest must be preserved and managed

We welcome and support the recommendation to save the Link Road Forest and protect it as a publicly owned recreational park, whether as a national park or state park. We strongly encourage the government to acquire this land in the public interest and reserve it for its highest public benefit: as a place for all to enjoy. Houses alone will not spare us from the mental health issues and struggles of modern life, but connecting with Country always has and always will offer this green respite for everyone, non-Indigenous and Awabakal people alike.

We call for a combined approach to bushland management that incorporates cool burns, modern science and traditional spractice. This will protect people and property from devastating bushfires and support the entire structure of the natural web of species that live in the Link Road Forest—from native yams (talowai) to towering gums (marparing), and from humble ants (borintoor) to wedge-tailed eagles (biraban).

We believe that a business case could be developed and tabled to support a funded bush management or ranger program that would protect this habitat and the surrounding suburbs from catastrophic fires.

We support the reservation of land for habitat protection and cultural purposes, with these areas maintained as connected landscapes rather than fragmented pockets of bushland. Wildlife corridors should be actively protected, rehabilitated and cared for through an Awabakal ranger program that creates opportunities for our community, particularly our young people, to learn, work on and care for Country. It is not enough to dismiss this land as degraded or disturbed because of previous colonial

activities. Through sustained care, cultural knowledge and ecological rehabilitation, this bushland has the capacity to regenerate and thrive. We advocate for an approach to land management that is neither passive nor destructive, but centred on care, reciprocity and responsibility. This approach continues millennia of Awabakal cultural connection and recognises that Country can recover when our people are supported to actively care for it.

Most importantly, we call for Awabakal descendants to participate actively in land management and to have a voice in how Country is managed. This is especially important for reinstating our rightful place on our traditional lands and restoring our cultural birthright to our youth and senior women. The active management of our forests by our people has been disrupted by colonial forces for the past 200 years, despite records showing our occupation of the ancient lands now called the Sydney Basin for 50,000 years. Over this time, we have witnessed the steady loss of our species and the so-far ineffective attempts to protect koalas while maintaining a blinkered, business-as-usual approach to systematically removing forests that could provide their habitat.

Closing

We are using our voice (palii) here and now to join with the voices of the Save Link Road Forest Campaign and other Novocastrians, to stop the death-by-a-thousand-cuts of Country (parrai) and recognise the value of this forest above the value of another soul less subdivision.

Kind regards,

Peter Gillam

Director

Awabakal Descendants Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation