

# Hooded Plover

# Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act Nomination

## The Director

Marine and Freshwater Species Conservation Section  
Wildlife, Heritage and Marine Division  
Department of the Environment

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SUBMISSION

The Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) welcomes the opportunity to present a submission on the eligibility of *Thinornis rubricollis rubricollis* (hooded plover (eastern)) for inclusion on the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) threatened species list and the necessary conservation actions required for this species.

**The VNPA strongly supports the nomination of the hooded plover (eastern sub-species) to the schedule of threatened species under the EPBC Act and we have provided supporting information in this submission.**

The VNPA is an independent, non-profit, membership-based group of around 3000 Victorians, which exists to protect Victoria's unique natural environment and biodiversity through the establishment and effective management of both marine and terrestrial national parks, conservation reserves and other measures.

This submission addresses the questions outlined in the 'Consultation Document on Listing Eligibility and Conservation Actions', however we are unable to answer the questions to stakeholders with respect to areas outside Victoria as our organisation only works within Victoria.

**Question 3 & 4 – Adequacy of survey effort and population estimates.**

Within Victoria the hooded plover is restricted to open ocean beaches and does not venture inland or even significantly into the larger bays and inlets. This species is distinctive and easy to identify with the probability of misidentification low given that most surveyors would already be familiar with the species. The habitat of this species is systematically surveyed by volunteers and it is our understanding that the great majority of potential habitat is surveyed thus resulting in reliable population estimates.

**Question 9 – Eligibility for inclusion on the threatened species list.**

The data drawn upon by the proponent is the best available data for this species and has been collected over a number of years. It consists of both systematic data of high reliability for much of the species' range as well as opportunistic records which would pick up individuals outside the regular survey areas. This species has also been the subject of intensive research, particularly in Victoria. The data that has been collected shows that the species is declining over much of its Victorian range.

Based on what is known for Victoria we would support its listing under the EPBC Act.

**Question 10 – Have the threats been identified correctly.**

Yes, the threats have been identified correctly.

Introduced weeds are serious conservation issue and widely colonise dunes making potential nest sites unsuitable. This is a particular problem along the Victorian coast where many suitable beaches are backed by farmland or urban developments.

Those beaches in close proximity to urban areas are also subject to high levels of recreational use which causes disturbance to nesting birds and ultimately failure to raise chicks to fledging. This disturbance takes the form of dogs chasing birds and sometimes destroying nest and eggs, people disturbing the birds leading to predation of eggs or young and people walking on nests destroying the eggs.

Along much of the Victorian coast, volunteers guard the nests during the breeding season which overlaps with the peak recreational time. This is a very costly exercise in terms of the time required of volunteers as it requires someone to be present every day during daylight hours talking to people and asking them to keep away from the nest and to keep their dogs on a leash.

It should also be pointed out that for parts of the Victorian coast, even being within a national park is not sufficient to prevent these threats as dogs are still allowed on the beaches within some parks.

The threat from anthropogenic global warming and associated sea level rise is a long-term threat that will continue to squeeze the coastal habitat suitable for these birds. The amount of built infrastructure immediately behind the beach means that coastal retreat in response to sea level rise will be resisted thus making the coastal zone even narrower.

Introduced predators such as foxes and feral cats also present a threat to nesting birds and chicks while still flightless.

#### **Question 11 – Impact of identified threats in the future.**

Everything points to the impact of the major threats increasing rather than decreasing. Increased population in coastal areas will result in increased disturbance of nesting birds and greater probability of breeding failure.

Inadequate coastal planning for coastal developments and the failure of governments to plan for predicted sea level rise means that the amount of available habitat for these birds will be reduced over time.

Feral predators will continue to be a threat in all areas including protected areas such as national parks.

Breeding success in many areas is already very low and further pressure may mean that existing populations may be unable to maintain their numbers.

**Question 13 – Management advice for the future.**

- *What individuals or organisations are currently, or need to be, involved in planning to abate threats and any other relevant planning issues?*
  - At the highest level it is important that planning for threat abatement includes the relevant government department (Department of Environment and Primary Industries & Parks Victoria in Victoria) as well as those organisations involved in research into this bird (Birdlife Australia & researchers at universities – Deakin University is particularly strong in this area).
  - Planning should also involve local government where their agencies are responsible for beach management, and community volunteers who put in enormous hours helping to protect the nesting birds.
- *What threats are impacting on different populations, how variable are the threats and what is the relative importance of the different populations?*
  - The main threats along much of the Victorian coast come from human disturbance. The largest impact is from dog walkers on the beaches where the hooded plover are nesting. Dogs disturb and may even kill birds and their young. All forms of disturbance, however, have an impact on the birds. This may be interruption to feeding (adults and chicks) or increased predation when the adults are unable to guard their nest or chicks.
- *What recovery actions are currently in place, and can you suggest other actions that would help recover the species? Please provide evidence and background information?*
  - Recovery actions already taking place include restrictions on dog walking on some beaches during the breeding season. However, this action is very much dependant on the local council managing the beach and does not apply in all areas. Also community volunteers guard the nesting birds from the time of nest establishment until the chicks fledge and are able to fly. This is very time consuming and requires an enormous volunteer effort to achieve a small increase in breeding success.
  - Unfortunately the restrictions on dog walking near nesting birds are generally not enforced and rely on the volunteers explaining the issue to dog walkers and asking them to keep their dog on a leash while in the vicinity of the nest. Not all dog walkers agree to this and disturbance by dogs can still take place.
  - It would help if all councils consistently enforced restrictions on dog walking on the beaches where hooded plover nest during the breeding season.
  - A significant issue in Victoria is that dog walking on beaches within the Mornington Peninsular National Park is permitted in spite of this being inconsistent with the regulations governing national parks. There is a significant population of hooded plover on the

beaches within this national park, however, in recent years there has been little or no successful breeding – largely as a result of disturbance. If the Victorian authorities consistently banned dog walking on beaches within national parks and other conservation areas this would help reduce levels of disturbance to these birds.

- Improved planning of developments within the coastal zone would also make a major contribution to this species survival. In many areas the suitable nesting beaches are backed by increasing levels of urban development. This increases pressure on the birds and reduces the area that they have available for nesting. Also, with the long-term impacts of climate change and increasing sea levels the narrow coastal zone is being squeezed ever narrower. Planning for a retreat from the coast in the face of sea level rise is not only cheaper but better for all inhabitants of the coastal environment.
- The VNPA recently published a comprehensive and independent report that provides options for better management, protection and extension of coastal nature along Victoria's entire 2000 kilometre coastline. This report, 'The Coast is Unclear' can be downloaded from our website <http://vnpa.org.au/page/publications/reports/the-coast-is-unclear--an-uncertain-future-for-nature-along-the-victorian-coast>