



Recreational Motor Vehicles and Threatened Coastal Birds

Position Statement (July 2022).

Background

Disturbance to threatened birds on beaches by motor vehicles¹ has been an issue in South Australia for decades⁽¹⁾. In addition to the impact on birds, concerns about motor vehicles on beaches have also been raised in relation to public safety and amenity, and damage to protected areas and the natural environment⁽²⁾⁽³⁾.

In spite of the many discussions and recommendations developed since 1977, very little has been achieved in addressing the negative consequences of vehicles on beaches⁽²⁾.

In March 2009, the South Australian LGA (Local Government Association) Executive Committee passed a motion requesting the LGA Secretariat organise a strategic workshop of key stakeholders on off-road vehicle (ORV) use. A State-wide forum was formed in July 2009 which examined the differing roles and involvement of respective organisations in assisting Councils in vehicle management on land under the care and control of Local Government. The LGA considered land access management and the legislative framework governing vehicles on public land.

Subsequently, a Local Government Land Access working group was established to address ORV access, consisting of Council representatives, South Australia Police, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Natural Resources Management Boards, user groups and the Local Government Mutual Liability Scheme. A paper was produced by the LGA that identified issues arising from off-road access, including issues relating to overlapping jurisdictions making it difficult to establish any single solution that Local Government could adopt⁽⁴⁾.

The LGA State Executive Committee, at a meeting held on 19 July 2012, formed the view that:

1. Any resolution to this problem would need to be with Councils and State Government Agencies working collaboratively. Discussions between regional NRM boards, road vehicle representatives and Councils would also be beneficial, particularly on ways to establish local use codes of conduct;
2. Councils are still best to work through issues specific to each area of land in their care, control and management to resolve the issues they are experiencing; and
3. The LGA would provide a copy of the paper to Councils as a resource to assist in dealing with local issues.

¹ *Motor-vehicles* in this context are intended to cover 4WD vehicles, 2WD vehicles such as sedan cars and wagons, campervans, trail bikes, quad bikes, and dune buggies.

In 2019, the SA Minister for the Environment, David Speirs, initiated an Inquiry into the Use of ORVs in South Australia by the Natural Resources Committee of State Parliament and its recommendations were tabled in Parliament in June 2020⁽³⁾.

In 2021 Birds SA released a documentary video entitled “On the Right Track” which graphically demonstrated the problems of off-road vehicles in coastal areas.

Policy Principles and Recommendations

The Birds SA Vehicles on Beaches Policy is intended to clarify the position of the Association on the matter of recreational vehicle impacts on threatened coastal birds and to provide impetus for implementing the actions that are required to protect people and the coastal environment.

The following principles and recommendations are intended to guide the achievement of acceptable outcomes for birds on beaches and for beachgoers in South Australia.

Birds SA opposes:

1. Recreational activity with motor-vehicles on beaches and in other coastal areas that disrupts the roosting, food supplies, breeding or feeding sites of Endangered, Vulnerable or Rare birds. This principle applies to the whole State of South Australia.
2. The use of vehicles on dunes and other fragile coastal habitats.

Birds SA supports:

1. Public education and community engagement aimed at avoiding and minimising the impacts on Endangered, Vulnerable and Rare bird populations by recreational activities on beaches and other coastal areas.
2. The principle that the safety of beachgoers on foot and the amenity of beaches and associated coastal areas takes primacy over the use of these areas for recreational vehicle activity.
3. The development of appropriate policy, regulations, access restrictions and activity guidelines to minimise disturbance to Endangered, Vulnerable and Rare bird populations by recreational vehicles.

Policy Recommendation.

Birds SA calls for the introduction of a strictly-controlled permit-based system to manage the environmental impact of recreational vehicles on beaches, underpinned by clear State Government regulation and enforcement.

With particular reference to threatened coastal birds, this system should:

1. Exclude motor-vehicles used for recreational activities on a seasonal or permanent basis from coastal areas where feeding, breeding or roosting by birds listed as Rare, Vulnerable or Endangered under the SA National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Act 1972 occurs (Schedules 7, 8 and 9 in the Act)².

² Birds occurring in coastal areas that satisfy these criteria are:

- a. **Endangered** – White-bellied Sea Eagle, Lesser Sand Plover, Little Tern, Fairy Tern, Eastern Osprey, Red Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Great Knot, Far Eastern Curlew
- b. **Vulnerable** – Hooded Plover, Banded Stilt
- c. **Rare** – Cape Barren Goose, Pacific Reef Heron, Pacific Golden Plover, Greater Sand Plover, Sooty Oystercatcher, Pied Oystercatcher, Kelp Gull, Common Tern, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Common Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Pectoral Sandpiper, Ruff, Long-toed Stint, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Grey-tailed Tattler, Wood Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper

2. Be designed, not only to control access to particular locations on environmental grounds, but also to limit the total volume of vehicles using these locations over a period of time to ecologically sustainable levels.

Birds SA also recommends that in order to support sustainable recreational use of beaches:

3. Councils provide nearby off-beach parking areas to discourage use of vehicles on beaches, whilst still providing access for recreational activities.
4. For beaches where large numbers of people are allowed for recreational activities, councils provide adequate toilet facilities off the beach nearby.

References

- 1) Andrew M. Buick & David C. Paton (1989) Impact of Off-road Vehicles on the Nesting Success of Hooded Plovers *Charadrius rubricollis* in the Coorong Region of South Australia, *Emu - Austral Ornithology*, 89:3, 159-172, DOI: 10.1071/MU9890159
- 2) Australian Government (1977) Off-Road Vehicles Impact on the Australian Environment - Third Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Conservation March 1977
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- 3) Parliament of South Australia (2020). An Inquiry into the Use of Off-road Vehicles in South Australia, Fifth Report of the Natural Resources Committee.
<file:///C:/Users/ray/Downloads/NRC%20ORV%20Final%20Report.pdf>
- 4) Local Government Association of South Australia (December 2011). Management Of Off Road Recreation Vehicles in South Australia. Discussion Paper
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