

Growth threat to rare species

By Alicia Bowie

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THE State Government has been accused of abrogating its responsibility to the environment after it announced it would overrule threatened species legislation when assessing development in the state's growth centres.

The move will mean site-by-site impact studies on threatened fauna and flora will not have to be carried out when development of the South West Growth Centre, that includes the northern section of Camden, goes ahead.

Assistant Environment Minister Verity Firth has granted the growth centres "biodiversity certification" suspending the Threatened Species Conservation Act in favour of "protecting biodiversity more effectively on a region-wide basis".

As a result about 1800 hectares of native vegetation, including the endangered Cumberland Plain woodland, will be lost.

In return \$530 million will be spent on conserving 3800 hectares of native vegetation as reserves or National Park, either by buying it or entering into a perpetual conservation agreement with private landowners.

"For the first time since Governor Arthur Phillip set out west in search of farmland to feed the new colony, we have a road map for the permanent protection of western Sydney's remaining bushland," Ms Firth said.

A spokesman for Ms Firth said the Government's approach would lock up 3800 hectares of vegetation from ever being developed in the future, making it a "compensation package for the environment". He said there was similar vegetation in the Camden local government area to what the Government was looking to conserve.

But Leonie Kelly from Macarthur Greens said only about 6per cent of the 107,000 hectares of Cumberland Plain woodland that existed in 1788, still survived today.

"The Government has abrogated responsibility for small remnant areas of Cumberland Plain woodland even though such areas may house threatened species," she said.

"There is one such area in Narellan which has a highly significant population of *Pimelea spicata*, a threatened species of plant."

Ms Kelly said clearing of the vegetation would lead directly to the loss of threatened flora species and the fauna that rely on the plants for habitat.

"I imagine the developers will welcome the removal of red tape that would otherwise slow them down," she said.

"However, the Cumberland Plain woodland community is so endangered that on-the-ground assessment of precincts prior to development is the only ecologically responsible option."

The NSW Urban Taskforce, a development lobby group, welcomed the announcement. Its chief executive, Aaron Gadiel told the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

"This decision means quicker planning decisions and more affordable homes."