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Thousands of hectares of land in the Hunter Region have been cleared for urban development infrastructure in recent years



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Thousands of hectares gone: Hunter's landscape disappearing fast

Singleton and Muswellbrook local government areas have had the highest rates of land clearing in the Hunter for urban development and related infrastructure in recent years.

[Department of Planning and Environment data](#) shows Singleton LGA lost 863 hectares of land and Muswellbrook LGA lost 655 hectares between 2015 and 2019, the most recent data available.

The next closest was Lake Macquarie LGA with 312 hectares, Port Stephens 244, Upper Hunter 236 and Newcastle 49.

In addition to clearing land for infrastructure, Hundreds of hectares of land has been lost for agriculture and forestry.

The Upper Hunter LGA lost 367 hectares for agriculture, followed by Singleton 180 hectares and Muswellbrook 65 hectares.

The land clearing data does not include the impact of mining. Statewide data shows an average of 750 hectares was on average cleared for mining 2015 and 2019.

Tab 4 - Rates of woody vegetation loss (hectares/year) by local government area (LGA) boundaries.

LGA name	Landcover class	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Previous years average	All years average	Total***
Lake Macquarie City Council	Agriculture	1	2	-	3	-	2	1	6
	Forestry	-	-	8	4	2	3	3	15
	Infrastructure	68	93	82	44	25	72	62	312
Muswellbrook Shire Council	Agriculture	6	10	31	8	10	14	13	65
	Forestry	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	3
	Infrastructure	116	122	167	145	105	137	131	655
Newcastle City Council	Agriculture	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
	Forestry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Infrastructure	1	25	11	10	3	12	10	49
Port Stephens Council	Agriculture	-	14	16	10	1	10	8	42
	Forestry	-	-	-	-	19	-	4	20
	Infrastructure	31	115	43	27	28	54	49	244
Singleton Shire Council	Agriculture	25	53	36	20	45	34	36	180
	Forestry	15	11	5	11	9	11	11	53
	Infrastructure	140	150	245	196	132	183	173	863
Upper Hunter Shire Council	Agriculture	42	52	151	66	55	78	73	367
	Forestry	456	348	12	4	124	205	189	945
	Infrastructure	5	14	117	79	21	54	47	236
Total***		907	1,010	926	627	579	870	811	4,056

Local government area boundaries as of 2017

Data clarification key

*Spot-5-Sentinel-2 change: For the 2015 and 2016 reporting periods, the change detection algorithm was run across the 2-year period instead of individual 2015 and 2016 periods. The 2-year change analysis includes both SPOT-5 imagery and Sentinel-2 imagery. The change analysis for these two periods was done at 5-metre resolution, which is the same as all other SPOT analysis since 2009. The year the change occurred was attributed by spatial analysts based on the change image created from the image closest to 1 January 2015 and the image closest to 1 January 2017 and visual interpretation of a SPOT-6 image closest to 1 January 2016.

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The figures have alarmed conservationists who warn that ongoing clearing will have major impacts on the region's biodiversity.

"It will also exacerbate our deforestation and extinction crisis, which is already spiralling out of control," Nature Conservation



"At the COP26 climate conference Australia committed to end deforestation by 2030. These figures show we have no hope of meeting that commitment without a change in law. The only proven carbon sequestration technology is a tree. It seems pretty obvious that we should stop ripping them down."

Pressure to clear more land for housing in the Lower Hunter will increase in coming years.

The Hunter Green Corridor Alliance has warned that new developments will significantly impact on the viability of the 'Green Corridor' project that extends from the Watagans to Stockton Bight.

Tensions are also rising over the proposed 592 hectare Eden Estates project that spans the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie local government areas. It takes in parts of Glendale, Edgeworth, Cameron Park, Elermore Vale and Wallsend.

It is estimated 3000-4000 homes could be built on the land if the project proceeds.

Save Link Road Forest group says the site contains habitat suitable for over 50 threatened flora and fauna species, 16 of which had been identified in the area.

"Climate change is already wreaking havoc on biodiversity and driving extinction. If we are to ensure the survival of our threatened species we must protect habitat now in preparation for worsening impacts in the coming years," Hunter Community Environment Centre coordinator Jo Lynch said.

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