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# HERITAGE BUY-BACK

## Landowners offered \$5000 a block

By **GLENN ELLARD**

LANDOWNERS in the controversial Heritage Estate are being offered \$5000 a block to hand their land over to form part of the Jervis Bay National Park.

People who respond quickly will be given an extra \$500, but Heritage Estate Landowners Association president June Esposito likened it to a gun being held to the owners' heads.

"I don't see much difference to dealing with the mafia," she said.

"At least they are offering something but it really is an insult to us," said Mrs Esposito,

who pointed out the approximately 1000 landowners paid an average \$20,000 for their blocks, and had since paid about \$10,000 in council rates.

The purchase offer has come from the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, which has been given \$5.4 million from the federal government.

It said any land it was able to purchase would be handed over for inclusion in Jervis Bay National Park, and the money being offered was not compensation but a purchase price to protect the environment.

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Mrs Esposito said she would be holding a meeting of landowners in coming weeks to discuss the offer, and also the possibility of a further legal challenge to the 2009 decision that blocked plans to rezone much of the estate for residential development.

Development was blocked because of the estate's environmental qualities, and Professor of Ecology and Environmental Science at Australian National University, David Lindenmayer, said those ecological values had become more important over the years.

"It's a very important place for biodiversity," said Professor Lindenmayer, who had been studying the Jervis Bay ecology for 10 years.

"It offers an amazing range of environments, often packed into a small area, and an incredible richness of species."

That included the world's most important population of eastern bristlebird, Professor Lindenmayer said.

However, parks like Booderee were also important to the local economy, he said, as Booderee had 450,000 visitors during the previous year, which was more than Uluru and Kakadu combined.

Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife chief executive officer Susanna Bradshaw said the estate's 180 hectares offered an important tract of natural

vegetation that allowed species to travel between Booderee National Park and other habitats.

"Developing it would have isolated the species within Booderee, making it a much less healthy habitat and ecosystem," she said.

Adding blocks from the Heritage estate to Jervis Bay National Park "will help protect the habitats of the 26 threatened species known to live in the area, including the endangered eastern bristlebird and the vulnerable leafless tongue-orchid", Ms Bradshaw said.

Three levels of government were coming together to protect the area, Ms Bradshaw said, with Shoalhaven City Council donating land it owned within the estate for inclusion in Jervis Bay National Park.

Shoalhaven Mayor Joanna Gash welcomed the announcement, saying it would enable landowners to sell their property, at a fixed price, through a voluntary land purchase project.

She said it would finally provide the landowners with certainty going forward, after hundreds bought blocks in the 1980s and 1990s despite the land not being zoned for residential development.

"This outcome is a great example of all levels of government working with the community to achieve a common goal and help resolve a difficult issue," Cr Gash said.



**PROTECTED:** The Heritage Estate contains important habitats rich in biodiversity. Photo CHRIS GROUNDS. Inset: Among the important species that call the Heritage Estates home is the endangered eastern bristlebird. Photo DAVID COOK.