

BirdLife advocacy toolkit

A guide on how to raise your local issues for change



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Introduction

At BirdLife Australia, our central mission is to protect birds forever.

We do this by conducting scientific research, practical conservation action, empowering our people, and advocating with decision-makers to improve laws and remove threats to bird species. All of these activities are dependent on people who love birds by volunteering their time and voice to ensure decision-makers listen and act.

We have a tremendous job to do, but we can change the future for our most at-risk bird species when working together with a clear campaign strategy.

At BirdLife Australia, our community of supporters is 200,000 strong, and we are lucky to have a network of branches, special interest groups and affiliates. This powerful network is bolstered by 'friends of' groups, teams of volunteers monitoring and counting birds, and action groups. Together we are all working to protect birds and their habitats.

Our job on the BirdLife Australia Campaigns team is to support you and your communities to deliver campaigns. As we work with our partners on the ground around the country, we have learnt much from you! We have pulled together these findings into a toolkit to skill up the rest of the network.

Using this toolkit as a guide, you will learn the interplay between decision-makers, influencers, stakeholders and how to have better meetings to raise your concerns. Finally, we explore tips on how to get your message out across local and social media.

Get in touch with the BirdLife Australia Campaigns team at actforbirds@birdlife.org.au.

Our values

As a team, BirdLife Australia's values guide our work. It's important to know we are non-partisan, always act lawfully, and are respectful and inclusive.

Collaboration

We embrace diversity and work in partnership with mutual respect

Integrity

Our success is based on experience, honesty, trust and fairness

Passion

We bring people together around a love of nature

Impact

We think globally, lead nationally and act locally

Leadership

We empower and inspire people to lead with courage and purpose





Beach Nesting Birds project
[www.birdlife.org.au/projects/
beach-nesting-birds](http://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/beach-nesting-birds)

GLENN EMMER

Engage:

How to get the
attention of your
local decision
- makers

Engage: How to get the attention of your local decision-makers

To start with, it's important to do your research on who you should be targeting to help raise your concerns. You elect people to represent you in three levels of government –federal, state and local government. Once you know who to target, next step is to map out where your elected representatives sit on the issues you care about. When you know the lay of the land, you can plan tactics that are strategic and effective so you can use your resources wisely.

Below is a quick explanation of how government works.

Which Elected Representative should we target? Who are they?

Federal – Broad national issues – defence, the economy, laws to protect the environment, leads the way on clean energy and climate change.

Members of Parliament – Every Australian is represented by one member who sits in the House of Representatives (Lower House). The Lower House represents you, they debate proposed laws and issues of public concern, they make new laws and change existing ones, receive petitions from constituents and raise citizen concerns. Elections are won in the Lower House; this is where parties need a majority to form government.

Senators – The Upper House – 12 Senators represent each state and 2 per territory. Senators share power with the House of Representatives. The Senate reviews and sometimes blocks laws and keeps government in check.

Putting pressure on the MPs who represent you is the most powerful course of action to focus your advocacy work. Targeting Senators and local Councillors is also an option-just follow the same advice for meeting MPs in this toolkit.

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Change can occur at all levels - but who makes the decisions?

Decision makers

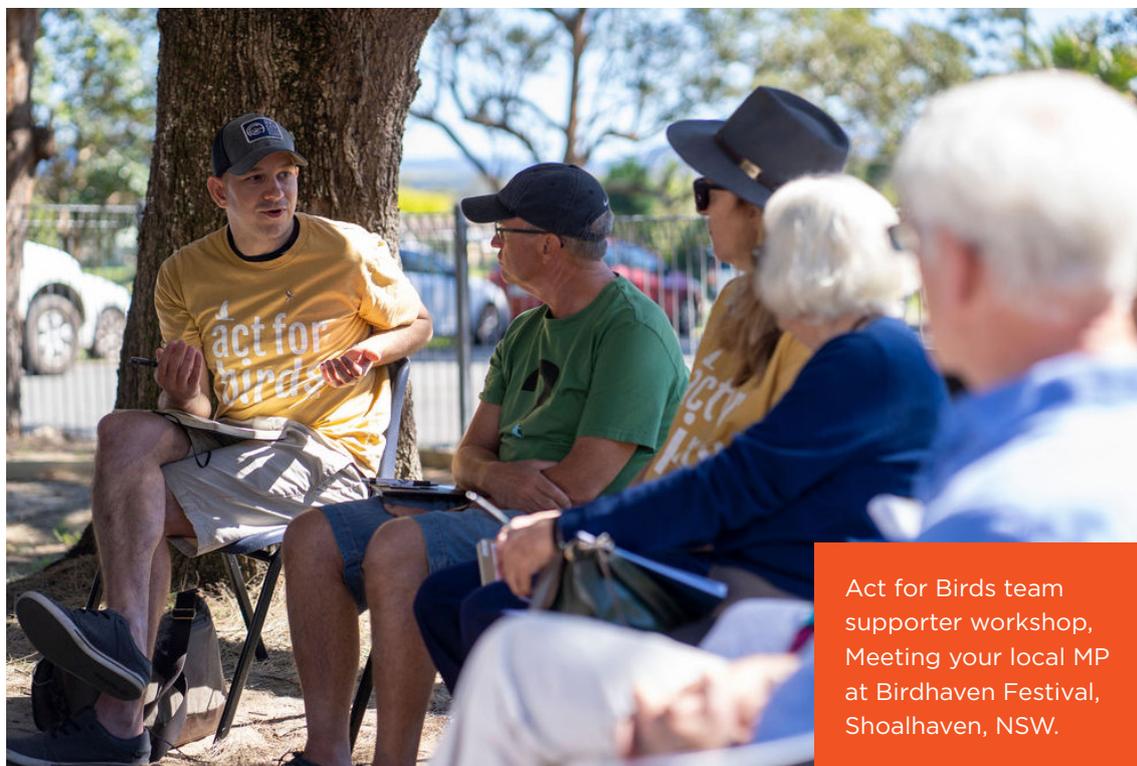
- Federal Ministers – e.g. Minister for the Environment (specifically regarding EPBC review and individual assessments)
- State Ministers (Planning, Environment, etc.)
- Victorian Minister for Environment (specifically regarding the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act/Wildlife Act and the Hooded Plover)
- State Departments
- Councils and Land managers

Influencers

- Cross bench
- Volunteers and ‘Friends of’ groups, local alliances of like-minded groups
- BirdLife branches
- Local engaged land managers

Key Stakeholders

- Local councils in impacted communities
- Local land or other tenure holders/authorities



Act for Birds team supporter workshop, Meeting your local MP at Birdhaven Festival, Shoalhaven, NSW.

How to get your MP to listen

Politicians are constantly in contact with their constituents; they receive lots of letters and emails, but when a voter takes the time to call or request a meeting, they are more likely to listen. They represent you and want to hear your views – you are more than just a voter. You do not need to be an expert – the fact that you are showing up representing your community is enough.

Who should you meet with

You can always seek meetings with MPs that are outside your own area, but you will have less success and will need to provide compelling reasons why the MP should meet with you. Generally MPs will not care about your issue unless you are their constituent. Also consider whether there is a Senator worth meeting who represents your local area.

Sometimes, you may be invited to speak to another member of staff. Do not underestimate their influence. Approach these meetings exactly as you would when meeting with an MP.

Request a meeting

Start the process with a phone call. If nothing else, this should tell you who manages the MP's diary and thus, who you need to contact directly. If you are lucky enough to speak to the Diary Manager on the phone, make a point of being friendly with them. Submit your request in writing via email as soon as possible after the initial phone call. You want the Diary Manager to remember you and the conversation you had over the phone. If you spoke about something specific, refer to it in the email.

Be persistent

If you haven't received a reply to your request within 10 days, you need to follow up with a call to the MP's office. Ask to speak to the Diary Manager directly. Remember that this person is your foot in the door, so always maintain a pleasant demeanour and be respectful.

Time your request for the greatest impact

Identify when your issue is likely to be discussed in parliament (or when your target is likely to be able to deliver your ask). Remember, it is always easier to impact policy decisions before they are made, rather than after.

Politicians are likely to be influenced by media and increased public discussion and debate. It is helpful if you are able to schedule your meeting during or ahead of periods of peak public interest.

Politicians are also far more receptive during election periods, although they may also be far busier. If you can schedule your meeting in the lead-up to relevant elections, this will give you a good chance of success, especially if your delegation includes a good cross-section of your community.

In order to give yourself the best chance of getting a meeting when you want it, schedule it with plenty of time. Generally, try to request a meeting about two months before the ideal meeting date. It's easier to get your preferred meeting date and to book in advance with state MPs, and more difficult with federal MPs. Do not attempt to schedule a meeting when parliament is sitting.



BirdLife Southern QLD hosts Welcome Back Shorebirds with Toondah Alliance partners - www.actforbirds.org/savetoondah

Take the right people with you

Most MP offices will ask the names of those attending when scheduling the meeting, to confirm they are local constituents. They'll ask you for this in advance, and may not agree to a meeting until you provide it, so it's best you confirm the people you'll be bringing well in advance.

Here are some guidelines to help you form an effective advocacy group:

First, it is much better to go in a group, rather than by yourself. Going in as a group gives you a greater chance of being taken seriously, listened to, and seen to represent a significant section of the community. However, having too many participants at a meeting can be just as damaging as going alone. It means there is a risk of too many viewpoints confusing the issue, the MP feeling like they are being 'ganged up on', etc. The ideal number of attendees is between three and six.

Next, consider which supporters would best represent your issue. Your aim in selecting your group members is to ascertain who will help you deliver a compelling story in a structured way, and who will help demonstrate that your issue is supported by people across all sectors of the MP's community.

Keep your request factual and concise

Your request should be concise and about why your issue is important or why your MP should meet with you. Think of it more as a statement of facts.

You will need to say:

- Who you are
- Where you live
- Why you want to meet with them
- Who else will be attending the meeting
- Include a VERY basic outline of what you would like to discuss.

This outline should be no more than two to three sentences or dot points. Ensure you focus on any information that is likely to be new or directly relevant to the MP with whom you are requesting a meeting. Give yourself the best chance of success by providing compelling reasons why the MP should be interested in meeting with you.

Some examples:

- You live in their electorate
- You are representing a group or organisation that has relevance to them or their electorate
- The issue has potential to impact their electorate directly
- Your group has strong representation in the MP's electorate
- You are about to start some work in the area

Choose a reason that demonstrates that your issue is not only important to you but important to your targeted MP and their community.

What do I write in an email or letter?

Introduce yourself and your issue

Your opening paragraph should be concise and straight to the point. Politicians receive hundreds of letters; and cannot read every word of every letter. Therefore, it is important that they know who you are, why you are writing and any request you are making from your opening.

Example:

I am writing on behalf of BirdLife Southern Queensland to request a meeting to discuss our concerns on the effectiveness of Australia's national nature laws in conserving migratory shorebirds and how we can work together to strengthen them.

Describe your issue and why it's important to you

Include a short paragraph that describes why this issue is especially important to you, your local area, and any local volunteer work you do with BirdLife groups in your community. Including facts will strengthen your argument and help get your point across in a more convincing manner. Make sure that you're concise and not vague.

Toondah Harbour example

Example:

Our current nature laws are failing the unique and threatened Australian birdlife , including migratory shorebirds, and we would like to seek your opinion and support on the solution. As local advocates working to improve the conservation status of Southern Queensland's threatened birds, we are of the opinion that a new generation of nature laws, as mapped out by the [Australian Panel of Experts on Environmental Law](#), presents a solution. This panel offers implementable conservation measures that have a real chance at protecting our local natural wonders for future generations.

Tip: Add a personal touch. Personal anecdotes help ground the issue for your local MP. Your story coupled with facts will connect the head and heart of your local MP.

Include any actions your local politician has already taken

Prior to writing, research your local Member's voting history, policies, media releases and public statements to see if they have taken any positive actions on your issue. If they have, be sure to thank them and present the case for further actions.

Reiterate your specific ask

Bring your letter full circle by clearly reiterating the action you are asking your local politician to take.

Example actions:

- Support/oppose an upcoming bill that is related to your issue by voting for or against it
- Raise the issue with the relevant Minister or Shadow Minister
- Make a public statement or discuss the issue in a media release
- Ask a question in Parliament
- Conclude with your contact details

Thank your politician and conclude by providing your contact details, email and telephone, and that you look forward to receiving their reply.

Important tips:

- 1. Keep it brief.** Your letter should be no longer than one page, should concisely convey your message and should include a specific ask of your local MP. If you have a report or paper that supports your claim, include them as an attachment and reference the attachment in your letter.
- 2. Time your request for the greatest impact.** Identify when your issue is likely to be discussed in council meetings or in Parliament, after it is mentioned in the media, or during an election cycle.
- 3. Be firm but polite.** Local Members are more likely to be receptive to a firm but polite letter.
- 4. Follow up.** If you have not received a response after a few weeks call your local MP's office asking for an update on a response to your letter. If you have spoken to the Diary Manager directly before, ask to speak to them again. Be both persistent and polite.

Sample letter

Re: Plight of Australia's migratory shorebirds

Dear [Sir/Madam] OR [Mr/Ms] [Surname],

As a local resident in your electorate, I am writing to request a meeting to discuss the plight of migratory shorebirds, one of the world's most threatened group of species. I would like to hear your views on how to conserve and restore the populations of these amazing birds.

[As above, say what has moved you to write - this might be a general concern, a local issue, recent news about migratory shorebirds, or one particular policy issue you are concerned about. If you represent a group of concerned constituents mention that here.]

There are 37 species of migratory shorebirds that regularly visit Australia during their non-breeding season, between the Australian spring and autumn, as part of their annual migration, a journey of many thousands of kilometres. Unfortunately, along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (or migratory flight path) significant regional declines have been identified in at least 18 species, with some species seeing population declines of over 80% in the last 30 years.

Coastal development of shorebird habitat throughout Asia, but also here in Australia, poses the most significant threat. Other threats include climate change, pollution, human disturbance, hunting and fisheries by-catch.

Migratory shorebirds are protected under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act (1999) as well as bilateral agreements with China (CAMBA), Republic of Korea (ROKAMBA) and Japan (JAMBA) and the Convention on Migratory Species (Bonn Convention). However, I believe the Australian Government is not upholding its obligations nationally and internationally to protect these special birds.

Could you please contact me to arrange a suitable meeting time?

You can contact me at [email] or on [telephone]. Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to meeting you.

Yours faithfully,

[Your Name]

[date]

The meeting

Get to know your MP

MPs are people, just like you. They have interests and values, and there are certain ways of framing a discussion that will appeal to one individual more than another. The more you know about your MP, the better you will be able to tailor your case and your ask.

Try to find answers to the following questions:

- What party does the MP belong to and what is the party position on your issue?
- Do they hold any position in government or on the shadow front bench which is relevant to your issue/ask, or could be used for leverage/influence?
- What are their values and why did they get into politics?
- What are their biggest concerns for the community they represent?
- What have they said on record? (Looking at their initial parliamentary address is a good place to start).
- What causes do they support?
- What are their interests outside of Parliament?
- What are their views on key issues related to the issue you want to discuss?
- Are they a member of any parliamentary committees or working groups?
- Are they in a safe or marginal seat?

You will need to do some research. You can, of course, use Google to search for key terms along with your MP's name. You can also look at your state's parliamentary website or your MP's personal website, if they have one.

Many MPs are active on social media, and if you follow their accounts you will learn a lot about them and the issues they consider to be important. If you're not on Twitter, **see our toolkit [here](#)**.

You can also look at speeches they have made in Parliament by checking out the Hansard Records on your state's parliamentary website. Finally, there are a few independent websites which offer profiles of the policy positions of members of parliament, such as **They Vote For You and Open Australia**. www.theyvoteforyou.org.au/ www.openaustralia.org.au/

You don't want to waste your MP's time by asking for a commitment or explanation that has already been made public. Check the Government's website and recent news articles on the issue to double-check you know what the Government and/or your target MP has been saying already.

Also ensure you know how to pronounce your MP's name correctly, and how to address them.

NB: Your MP will usually bring another member of staff into the meeting with them.

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In Canberra: Fiona Blandford (BirdLife Australia Community Organiser) and BirdLife member Sally Forsstrom join Healthy River Ambassador Melissa Gray and Traditional Owners Badger Bates and Rene Woods in meeting MP for Parkes Mark Coulton. Margaret Macdonald

At your Meeting – Say what you want to say

Make an Agenda

Generally, there are four key components that should be considered and allowed for at any meeting with an MP:

1. Welcome and introductions

- Share your stories and stories of the community
- Ask your delegation to introduce themselves and their role in the community
- From your homework, comment of a topic of interest to your local MP

2. Make your case

- Describe the issue and why it matters to the community
- Using your personal and community story-provide a solution through what you all support
- What you want your MP to do: talk to their party about your community issue; raise it in Parliament; or advocate locally on behalf of your issue

3. Discuss

It is not uncommon in these meetings that you will learn things you didn't know before. This may include information about roadblocks for your issue, the political processes, who supports your position, etc. Equally importantly, by listening you will be able to gauge what level of understanding your MP has on your issue, and adjust your delivery accordingly. For instance, if your MP shows a lot of interest in a particular case study or statistic, drill into it a little further. If they seem uninterested in others, do not go into too much detail. If an objection is raised or a question asked, address it immediately.

4. Wrap up and confirm commitments

- Cover all of your key messages and confirm their response
- Summarise the actions for each person coming out of the meeting, with associated timelines
- Know when your MP will deliver, and ask who to contact for a follow-up
- Hand over your briefing document
- Thank the MP and all staff present for their time
- Ask to take a photo
- Ensure you have exchanged business cards with your MP AND all staff present

Practise and be prepared – Use your time well

If you have prepared well for your meeting, things should flow quite smoothly. Even so, there are a few key things to remember:

- First impressions count
- Give yourself plenty of time
- Behave like you're making a friend
- Listen, listen, listen!
- Only go into a meeting to discuss one issue.
- Do not use more than three case studies or stories to support your position.
- A few key statistics are good to have up your sleeve, but remember that these statistics should be relevant to the MP
- Personal stories and photos from constituents are a great way to demonstrate your case
- Prepare for your meeting as if your MP knows nothing about your issue

Prepare for the meeting based on the time you have been allocated. This will usually be 15–30 minutes, but can depend on the MP and their availability. Allow time for your MP to respond and for discussion, and be prepared for your meeting to be cut short – these things happen.

Assigning roles will help ensure the meeting goes smoothly, you cover everything you need to cover in the allotted time, and that you avoid the undesirable situation of people speaking over the top of one another.

When allocating roles:

- Who will introduce the members of your delegation (including name, address and one fact that highlights their role in the community or the diversity they bring to the group, e.g. their job)?
- Who will deliver the case around the issue?
- Who will deliver personal stories supporting the case (maximum three)?
- Who will deliver the ask?
- Who will conclude the meeting and summarise commitments and timeframes for follow up? (This person will also hand over any supporting documentation.)

Familiarising yourself with the issue and speak in your own words. This allows you to be confident and comfortable, and avoid being railroaded or losing your cool if you are put under pressure by your MP. That said, you will not be expected to know everything there is to know about your issues. It's fine to say you don't know something or that you'll get back to them. It is far more important to demonstrate that you and your community care than it is to demonstrate extensive knowledge of the issue.

Don't assume the MP knows much about your issue, or even anything about birds and ecosystems. Pitch it at a very basic level, use proper English and do not use acronyms or abbreviations. You will quickly get a sense of whether you need to speak in more depth and you may need to adopt a higher-level tone.

Know what effect your issue has had on the community that the MP represents, or the likely impacts on that community. A broader knowledge of the issue can be helpful, but it's the impact on and the feelings of the local community that will be most compelling to your MP.

Try to take two or three key facts and/or statistics into the meeting with you.

Familiarise yourself with common counterarguments and be equipped to deal with these in case they are raised in the meeting. Check in with the BirdLife Australia Campaigns team for any information or visual materials we can help you with.

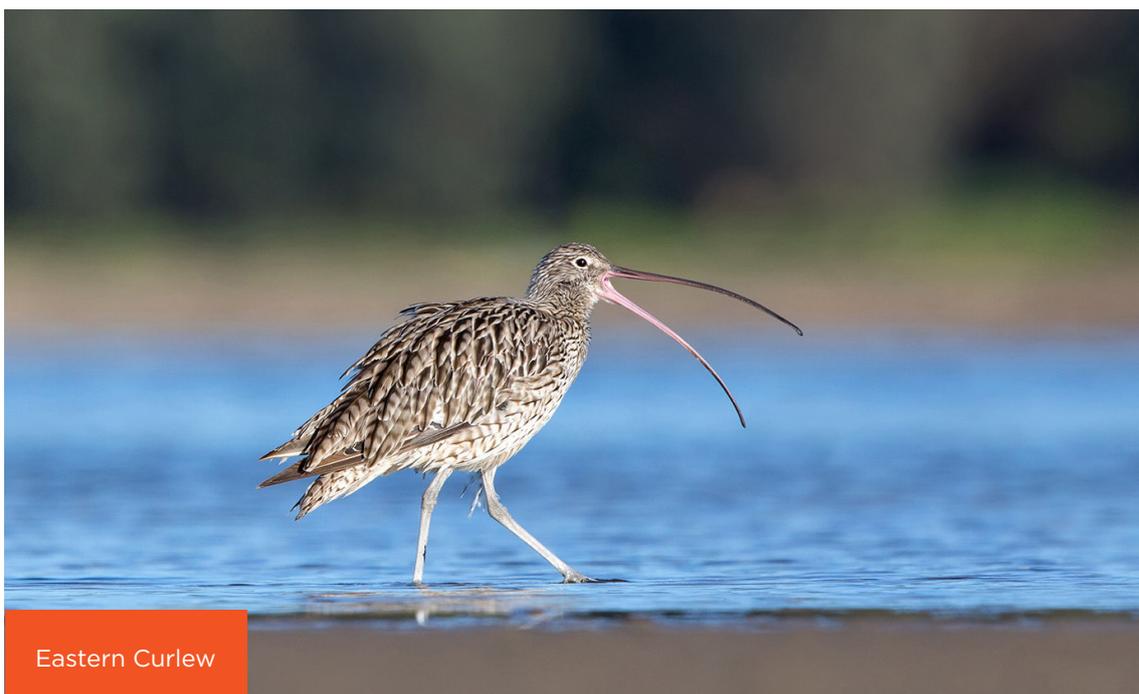
Don't be afraid to ask questions to get a better understanding of your MP's motivations and drivers. In this situation its better to ask than tell.

- Who else has come to see you about similar issues?
- What case did you put forward?
- What references are you using to form that view?
- Why did you take that position in Parliament?

Take supporting material

It is usually best to hand the MP some briefing documentation at the end of the meeting, rather than at the beginning. This is to avoid wasting the valuable time you have with them while they look through the material, and also a situation where they are half-listening and half-flicking through a document you have provided.

Remember, your MP will likely have an advisor or two with them. Take three or four copies of any resources you wish to give to your MP, and also give them to any other staff present at the meeting.



Items to take to the meeting

- A summary of your key messages, to check you have covered everything before walking out of the meeting
- A (brief) briefing document that summarises your case studies, including maps, outline of your ask and contact details leave this at the end of your meeting. Also identify what needs to be sent or dropped of later.
- Business cards
- A camera or camera phone for taking a photo

Train for success

You don't need formal training to have a successful meeting with your local MP, but running through the meeting a few times ahead of the day can make a big difference. About a week before your scheduled meeting, agree on your ask, what you'll present and how, and your individual roles. Practise delivering your parts and answering tricky questions; make notes on what could be improved, and run through it again.

If you can get an ex-politician or someone familiar with this environment to play the role of the MP, this is helpful. Remember that you're not just practising delivering facts, but developing relationships based on values and principles.

Photos and other collateral are also important to obtain and test with others.

After your meeting

Debrief

Sit down as a team to discuss the meeting as soon as possible after it has concluded. Ideally, this will happen directly after the meeting so it is fresh in people's minds. You want to talk about what worked, what didn't and what might be improved upon for the next meeting. You may also want to use this opportunity to create your follow up email, discuss any other follow up actions required and assign roles—for example, who will contact the MP and when.

Follow up

Send the MP a follow up email ASAP after the meeting concludes. This should not be more than 48 hours after the meeting.

First and foremost, thank the MP for their time and consideration. Make sure you have sent through any further information that was promised to the MP.

In this email, you should also remind the MP of any further information they committed to getting to you, as well as any other commitments they made at the meeting. Having these commitments down in writing is important, and will also help ensure that the MP knows this is something you expect delivery on, and will follow up as required.

Stick to timelines

If you've presented your case well, and have participated in the meeting following the guidelines above, you will have given yourself a great chance of getting a commitment on your ask. You will have also attached timelines to this commitment. Make sure you set yourself a reminder to follow up on any commitments before the deadline.



If you do not receive a response within a week or by the newly-allocated deadline, you will need to follow up again.

Do not get impatient or frustrated. MPs are dealing with many issues at any given time, and there is every chance that, while your issue may be your top priority, it may not be theirs. If you remain politely persistent you will eventually get the promised action.

Keep your MP up to date

One thing that is often overlooked is tracking the development of an issue and its presence in the community and local media, and sharing this with your MP.

If they are genuinely engaged in your issue, this will be a valuable help for them and will keep them interested. It will also strengthen the relationship you have started to build.

Send these updates during times when there are significant developments or changes regarding your issue. Do not contact your MP with every article published on the issue.

Post on your MP's social media accounts

You may not agree with your MP's position on the issue you are discussing, but it is important to remember that your relationship with your MP is important and gives you power. Putting a comment on their Facebook page thanking them for meeting with you is rarely done, and should earn you some brownie points. Also see our 'Twitter for Advocacy' and 'Writing a letter to the editor' sections of this toolkit'.

Engage the local media

If you have captured strong quotes, have approval to use them and have taken a good picture, you may be able to engage local media through talk-back radio and letters to the editor, for example.

You should only do this if there is a strategic reason to do so, and you should always consider what impacts it will have on the relationship you are building with your MP.

Engage: Local council

Your local council can be a useful ally in protecting your local birds and their habitats.

Councillors are responsible for developing links with the community and representing that community's interests in the council. Council staff are responsible for providing advice, implementing council's direction and taking action on council decisions.

As the structure of local councils vary by state and territory its best to do some background research including which councillor(s) represent your district or ward, if there is a conservation or environmental officer on staff, agendas for upcoming council meetings and any public comment opportunities.

Here are some useful links to find your local council and learn more:

Victoria

www.knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/home

New South Wales

www.yourcouncil.nsw.gov.au

Western Australia

www.mycouncil.wa.gov.au

South Australia

www.lga.sa.gov.au/sa-councils/councils-listing

Tasmania

www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/local_government/local_government_directory

Queensland

www.qld.gov.au/about/how-government-works/local-government-directory

Northern Territory

www.nt.gov.au/community/local-councils-remote-communities-and-homelands/find-your-council

Meet your local councillors(s):

Similar to Members of Parliament, councillors are voted in at elections and it is their job to represent their local community.

One of the best ways to engage your councillor on your specific issue is to contact them directly and/or arrange a meeting in writing. You can follow the same process as in our 'How to get your MP' to listen [here](#).

It is important to note that, depending on the council structure and governance, your councillor may be acting in a part-time capacity and only work certain days. Your council's website should have more information and councillor contact information.

Council Meetings

Councils hold monthly general meetings to discuss council business and to make decisions. Councils can delegate some of their decision-making powers to special committees or working groups (e.g. Urban Planning Committee). These committees will have separate meetings. While most council meetings are often open to the public, there will be varying levels of public participation and opportunities to address the council.

If you want to address your council at a general meeting or committee meeting you can ask your local councillor to raise a motion, present a petition (see below) or invite you to make a public statement. Some councils allow for public question time at each general meeting and may require the questions to be submitted in written prior to the meeting. Check your council's website for more information.

Bring a group!

If you are not able to address your council directly you can still get their attention by bringing a delegation of concerned locals to observe the council meeting, especially if your local issue is on the meeting agenda. Councillors take note of how many people attend meetings and if there is a large delegation it will help show there is community interest in that issue.

Petitions

Petitions are a great way for you or your group to make a special request of council in relation to a specific issue. The formal requirements for petitions vary from council to council and may require a formal report, vote or response from your council. To learn more about petitions check your council's website and get in contact with BirdLife Australia Campaigns team to see what petitions BirdLife Australia is running.

Public Engagement Opportunities

Councils often undertake community consultation on major strategies, plans or policies to determine public sentiment and concerns (e.g. Local Development Framework or Local Biodiversity Action Plan). These consultations can be informal (e.g. phone call or workshops) or formal (e.g. a statutory public submission period). Check your local council's websites for upcoming opportunities.

Media: New and old media and how to use it

“We’re living at a time when attention is the new currency. Those who insert themselves into as many channels as possible look set to capture the most value.”

Pete Cashmore, Founder of mashable.com

Media: Write a letter to the editor

Letters to the editor are a very easy way to get your message into the local paper. It enables you or others to voice an opinion to your local politicians and to educate readers.

You can use letters to correct or interpret facts in response to an inaccurate or biased article, to praise or criticise a recent article or editorial, or simply provide your opinion on a current issue.

Without exception, the letters section is one of the most highly read sections in the paper. Make sure you read the paper before you write to get an idea of the format. This is a great opportunity to reach the public – it is best to write early and often about your issue.

Be brief. Generally, 150 to 200 words in three to four paragraphs are ideal. If you can't contain the letter to that length, consider asking someone to help you edit it.

Be timely. Capitalise on recent news and events that have been covered in the paper or that have happened locally – write within 24 hours if possible.

Make one clear argument. Your letter or piece should be in favour of or critical of a particular position taken by the paper, described in an article or opinion piece. Be subjective, don't make personal attacks.

Cite the article. Be sure to mention the title and date of the article you're responding to in one of your first two sentences. For example, "Dear editor, Your recent coverage of Toondah Harbour (Locals up in arms, May 11, 2016) was a thoughtful piece..."

Think local. Emphasise the local effects of the problem and/or solution you write about.

Don't be discouraged if your letter is not printed. Every time you submit a letter, you are educating the editor of your paper and paving the way for future letters to be printed.

You must include your name, address and daytime phone number in your letter; they won't print your street address. Instructions for submitting a letter to the editor are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear or on the paper's website. Find out from your local paper the best way to send a letter. Most prefer e-mail.

NOTE: If you have captured strong quotes from your MP and have approval to use them and have taken a good picture, you may be able to engage local media through talk-back radio and letters to the editor, for example. You should only do this if there is a strategic reason to do so, and you should always consider what impacts it will have on the relationship you are building with your MP.



Sample letter to the editor

In response to the slashing of \$213 million from Federal biodiversity funding, our local Carpentarian and Kalkadoon Grasswrens are facing extinction. These rare birds were severely impacted by the fires of 2011 and 2012 and they need our help. Working hard with local volunteers we have a chance to save and protect the birds from extinction.

Rather than cutting biodiversity spending, the Federal Government must develop a threatened species recovery fund to save species like grasswrens from imminent extinction. With so little information known about these species, it would be a terrible shame to lose them before we have had a chance to get to know them.

— **Fred Chatter**, BirdLife North Queensland

Media: Twitter for advocacy

Twitter connects journalists, opinion makers, politicians and activists. It's a great platform to get your message to the right people to show how many people in our community act for birds.

Mainstream media and political staffers often track Twitter to see which issues are trending and which are boiling over. When news breaks, news outlets also often feature eye witness photos and videos people share on Twitter.

Getting started

You can **sign up for a free account** – just create a username (your twitter handle), add a profile image and write a short bio about who you are or what you're interested in. You don't have to use your real name.

Follow people

You can follow other people on twitter people you know in real life, organisations you support, journalists and news organisations you like, climate scientists, celebrities etc. This means you see the tweets they post in your feed. You can also find interesting people to follow by clicking on hashtags you're interested in.

BirdLife Australia

@BirdlifeOz

The Guardian Australia

@GuardianAus

ABC News

@abcnews

BirdLife Australia CEO

@PaulSullivan_au

BirdLife Australia President

@Martine_Maron

BirdLife Australia Head of Conservation

@Samantha_Vine_

Get tweeting!



GEORGINA STETLER

Tweet as-it-happens. People love to be in the know and up-to-the-minute tweets win.

Once you've set up an account, you can post short tweets (updates of up to 250 characters)

- **Add links to the article** you just read, or to your website. Just copy-and-paste, add pictures, a screenshot of the chart/image in what you're linking to, or an original image from your phone.
- **Embrace the selfie** particularly if you're at a special event or with notable people.
- **Mention people** by using their @andrewhunter (If you're already following the person, their handle should auto-complete).
- **Be timely** tweet as it happens. People love to be in the know and up-to-the-minute tweets win.
- **Use relevant hashtags** when you want to be part of a bigger conversation, but don't go crazy. 1-2 hashtags maximum per tweet. Add a comment to your retweets to give them your own spin, or explain why you're sharing them. All tweets are public but only people who follow you can see them in their feeds.

Like this one from our Conservation Campaigner Andrew Hunter:



Twitter lets you **tweet at** people using the @ sign beside their usernames: "Hello @twitter!" People will use your @username to mention you in tweets, send you a message or link to your profile.

You can also click the **reply** button to publicly respond to a tweet. If you'd like to send a person you a follow a private message, you can **direct message** them.

See above where Andrew tweets [@ScottMorrisonMP](#)

You can also 'like' and '**retweet**' tweets from other people to share them on your timeline with people who follow you. You can also retweet news articles, videos, petitions, photos etc.

#Hashtags

Twitter's great for tracking topics or themes, grouped using the symbol # (**hashtag**). If you include a hashtag in your tweet, people who follow you can click on it and see all the other tweets using that same hashtag. It makes it easy for users to follow subjects and topics they're interested in.

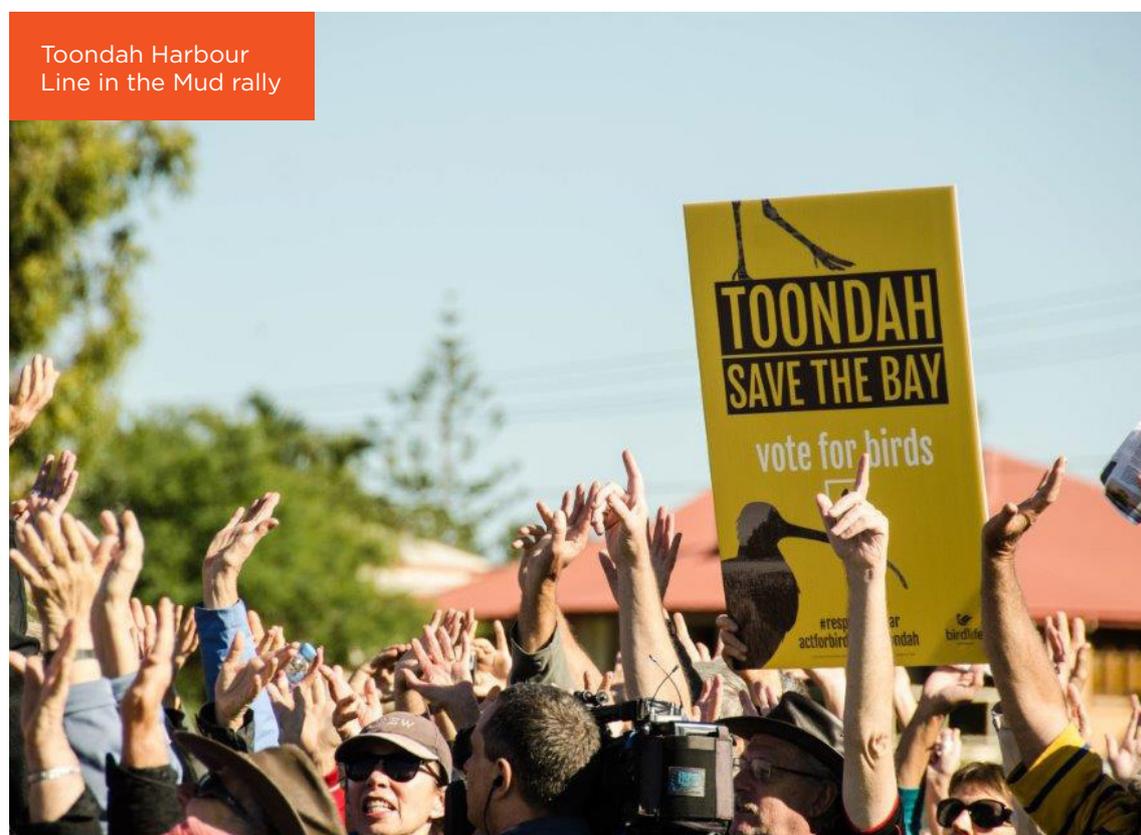
If enough people use a hashtag or talk about a specific topic at the same time, it can start **trending**, so millions of people can see it.

Here's an example of an BirdLife Australia tweet featuring three hashtags. Click on each hashtag and you'll see all the other times people have tweeted about it:

www.twitter.com/BirdlifeOz/with_replies

From www.actforbirds.org/how-to-use-twitter-for-advocacy

If enough people use a hashtag or talk about a specific topic at the same time, it can start trending, so millions of people can see it.



Get active: Join or start a local group

There are lots of ways to get involved and help out on our local campaigns. A great first step is to see who else is in your community. There could be a BirdLife branch, volunteer group or affiliate focusing on the same issues you are interested in. To find out who our local branches and groups are, see [here](#).

If you can't find a group acting to protect birds and focusing on your members of council or parliament, start your own group or alliance. All you need is a few people close by and in the same electorate who share your concerns, and a commitment of a few hours a month. Check out your local electorate [here](#).

A good way to bring people together around an issue and to think about birds and nature, is to lead a bird walk or a field trip. Being in the outdoors can make it easier to comfortably speak about the birds and places you love and why you want to protect them. Showcasing the birds or habitat at risk is a great way to build a relationship with your community and local MP.

To find out more about BirdLife Australia campaigns and setting up an Action Group, contact our team at www.actforbirds.org/



Migratory Shorebirds
volunteer workshop,
BirdLife Mildura.

FIONA BLANDFORD



Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.



Add your voice

[join us](#)

[volunteer](#)

[donate](#)

birdlife.org.au