

Clarence Environment Centre
admin@cec.org.au
Mr John Edwards
Honorary Secretary

Dear Mr Edwards,

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) wrote to you on 13 July 2012 following your correspondence of 3 June 2012 regarding Grange State Forest compartments 362 and 360. This initial correspondence detailed the EPA's initial determinations regarding matters such as the Eastern Chestnut Mouse, Lowland Rainforest and Bell Miner Associated Dieback. The EPA also noted that it was continuing a number of investigative steps to determine other matters, specifically related to Hastings River Mouse and habitat tree destruction. The EPA has now finalised its determination into these matters.

Hastings River Mouse

The EPA has assessed the steps taken by Forests NSW against the provision of the Integrated Forestry Operations Approval for the Upper North East (IFOA) that relate specifically to the protection of Hastings River Mouse habitat from specified forestry activities and provides you with the following information.

Grange State Forest - Compartments 362, 367 and 368

The IFOA requires Forests NSW to search for and protect areas which are moderate to high suitability for the Hastings River Mouse (HRM) within 200m of HRM records, and exclude specified forestry activities from these areas in accordance with condition 6.13 of the Threatened Species Licence (TSL). Prior to 7 November 2011, Forests NSW were required to implement the habitat suitability surveys consistent with conditions 6.13 and condition 8.8.9A. On 7 November 2011 an amendment to the TSL was approved by the Minister for the Environment, Robyn Parker, changing the requirements related to Hastings River Mouse.

The EPA notes that Forests NSW undertook pre harvest ecology surveying for compartments 362, 367 and 368 in Grange State Forest during March to April 2005. The EPA further notes that ecological surveying was undertaken in accordance with the old prescriptions consistent with condition 8.8.9 of the TSL. The EPA notes that Forests NSW reported that a total of 28 rapid habitat assessments had been undertaken within these compartments, with a corresponding 200 traps reported, equating to 800 trap nights. The EPA also notes that one HRM individual was trapped.

In consideration of these actions, the EPA has determined that Forests NSW HRM surveys were done in accordance with TSL requirements. Forests NSW have informed the EPA that they were implementing the full 800m exclusion zone around the HRM record, despite some areas within the zone being assessed as low quality HRM habitat.

Grange State Forest - Compartments 360, 364, 365, 366, 374, 375, 376

The EPA has reviewed information provided by Forests NSW and understands that Forests NSW conducted ecological surveys prior to the amendment for the HRM being approved (7 November 2011). The EPA has noted that Forests NSW have acknowledged that not all ecological surveying had been

completed by this date and the EPA understands that they are reviewing their practices under the new survey arrangements. Forests NSW have informed the EPA that they undertook 10 rapid assessments of habitat quality through the compartments consistent with TSL requirements. The EPA understands that the habitat assessments undertaken by Forests NSW indicated that the majority of area was considered to be moderate quality habitat for HRM. Accordingly, 200 traps were reported, equating to 800 traps nights. Forests NSW reported that the trapping did not yield any HRM individuals. Under the amended TSL condition for HRM (condition 6.13) Forests NSW were not obligated to protect any of these areas of potential habitat, or any areas greater than 200 metres from the record identified in compartment 362, such as the areas in the south western corner of compartment 366. Forests NSW also reported to the EPA that it chose to implement TSL condition 7(b)(xii) for compartments 360, 364, 365 and 375, in lieu of conducting surveys, which required exclusion zones to be implemented around all modelled habitat within compartments.

The EPA considers that Forests NSW searched for and protected HRM habitat in accordance with the provisions of the Upper North East TSL. The EPA notes that the Clarence Environment Council identified 22 freshly cut stumps within the south western corner of compartment 366, an area initially highlighted in 2005 to be excluded from harvesting. The EPA has assessed this to determine compliance with the provisions of the TSL and have determined that Forests NSW operations in this particular instance have not breached HRM related provisions of the TSL by harvesting in this area.

Habitat Tree Removal

The EPA has assessed Forests NSW operational documents and notes that the documented reason why a grey gum habitat tree was purposely felled near to log dump 9 was due to safety risks posed to operators. The EPA has noted that Forests NSW filed a non compliance incident report against the contractor, stating that this tree was removed without approval with from Forests NSW supervising forest officer. The EPA has also noted that Forests NSW issued the contractor a fine for removing this habitat tree without their approved. The EPA has also been informed that Forests NSW have marked and retained another habitat tree to replace the felled habitat tree.

The EPA will continue to monitor Forests NSW practices with respect to the selection, protection and longevity of habitat, recruitment and feed trees as well as the protection of threatened species and their habitat including HRM as part of our priorities. The EPA appreciates you bringing these matters to our attention and trusts that this information is of assistance. Should you require any further information in regards to the above matters, please feel free to contact myself on 02 9995 6703.

Yours sincerely

GREGORY ABOOD
Manager Crown Forestry Operations
Environment Protection Authority