



Remake of the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals

Progress Report – Threatened Species Expert Panel Review



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Cover Image: Nullica State Forest to Pambula in South East NSW. Photo: EPA

Published by:

Environment Protection Authority on behalf of the NSW Government

59 Goulburn Street, Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box A290, Sydney South NSW 1232

Phone: (02) 9995 5000 (switchboard)

Phone: 131 555 (environment information and publications requests)

Fax: (02) 9995 5999

TTY: (02) 9211 4723

Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

Report pollution and environmental incidents

Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only) or info@environment.nsw.gov.au

See also www.environment.nsw.gov.au

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Acronyms

DPI	Department of Primary Industries
EPA	Environment Protection Authority
FCNSW	Forestry Corporation of NSW
IFOA	Integrated Forestry Operations Approval
NSW	New South Wales
OEH	Office of Environment and Heritage
TSL	Threatened Species Licence

1. Overview

In May 2012, the NSW Government announced a remake of the Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals (IFOA) for the Eden, Southern, Lower North East and Upper North East Regions of coastal New South Wales (NSW). The government is committed to delivering a single Coastal IFOA that is modern, reflects regulatory best practice, incorporates advances in knowledge and technology, and is fit for purpose.

The objectives of the IFOA remake are to reduce the cost associated with implementation and compliance whilst improving the clarity and enforceability of the IFOAs. The government also committed to delivering these objectives with no net change to wood supply and no erosion of environmental values.

The government has set the following key principles to guide the remake and underpin the new IFOA:

- commitments made under the Regional Forest Agreements and NSW Forest Agreements will not be affected
- the new IFOA will not change the comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system
- the ability of Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW) to meet high-quality wood supply commitments established in the NSW Forest Agreements will not be reduced
- the new IFOA will be outcomes-focused and supported by monitoring, evidence and risk-management principles
- threatened species and their habitat will be better protected through an emphasis on landscape-based protection measures
- the new IFOA will be credible and transparent.

The government recognises that changes to threatened species licences and the move to a multi-scale landscape-based approach for managing the impacts of logging on species, populations and communities needs to be underpinned by the best available knowledge. To assist in this, a panel of qualified and experienced experts, including independent ecologists and botanists, was convened to review and advise the government on:

- the adequacy of proposed limit settings to mitigate logging impacts in time and space
- the adequacy of the proposed landscape, stand and site protections
- specific species requirements
- specific survey needs.

This progress report outlines the role and work undertaken by an expert panel.

The government is continuing to utilise the expertise and advice of the expert panel in the preparation of a draft of the new Coastal IFOA that will be released for public consultation prior to finalisation. A detailed report on the findings of the expert panel will be made publicly available with the release of the draft IFOA.

Further information on the remake of the four IFOAs for coastal regions of NSW can be found on the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) website at:

<http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/forestagreements/coastIFOAs.htm>

2. The expert panel process

An expert panel of 20 qualified and experienced ecologists and botanists was convened to determine the effectiveness of the proposed multi-scale landscape approach for protection of species, populations and communities.

The panel included flora and fauna experts from the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), Department of Primary Industries (DPI) – Science, EPA and FCNSW. The panel also included independent experts.

Panel members had extensive expertise in threatened flora and fauna that occur, or are likely to occur, in the forests covered by the new Coastal IFOA. Most panel members also had an understanding of the application of the previous threatened species licences (TSLs) and/or native forest biodiversity and management.

Throughout the expert panel process, the composition of the panel changed at different stages of the review to address identified gaps in expertise. This included engaging additional individuals with specialised knowledge and expertise to provide advice on mitigating the impacts of forestry operations on threatened species and habitat for regionally specific proposals. All new members of the panel were briefed and provided with information on past proposals and discussions prior to joining the expert panel process.

The government also consulted with a number of experts outside of the expert panel process. This was to ensure that adequate evidence and information was obtained on the suitability of the proposed TSL framework for threatened species and habitat known or likely to be affected by forestry operations in the Coastal IFOA area.



Remote sensor cameras monitoring threatened species near Merimbula. Photo: EPA.

2.1 Scope of the expert panel

The role of the expert panel is to provide independent expert opinion, information and evidence to inform the government's decisions on the proposed TSL framework. The panel's role is not to make decisions or endorse the proposed TSL framework.

The members of the expert panel process are required to:

- understand the basis of the TSL components of IFOA and the objectives and scope of the IFOA remake
- understand the proposed changes to the protection provisions at the landscape, stand and individual tree level
- advise on what these changes mean for species, populations and communities
- provide constructive feedback on the proposed multi-scale landscape approach for protection of threatened species, communities and populations
- provide expert advice on additional or alternative protection measures and survey requirements.

In reviewing and providing information and advice, the expert panel are asked to consider the IFOA remake's objectives as principles to guide the advice provided. These principles include the following, noting that the remake's overarching objectives are to deliver a new IFOA framework that maintains access to existing levels of wood supply and does not erode environmental values:

- reduce the costs associated with implementation and compliance
- improve clarity and enforceability
- recognise innovations in best regulatory practice
- incorporate advances in technology
- deliver a contemporary fit for purpose regulatory framework.



Sawlogs in Orara East State Forest, near Coffs Harbour on the NSW North Coast. Photo: EPA.

2.2 Expert panel workshops

The expert panel review process to date has been undertaken in two stages. The first stage was a preliminary review of the multi-scale landscape concept. The second stage was a more detailed review of the NSW Government's proposed landscape framework and specific TSL conditions.

2.2.1 Stage 1 – March 2014

In March 2014, members of the expert panel were engaged to review the proposed multi-scale landscape framework along with a list of all threatened species known or likely to occur in the forests covered by the new Coastal IFOA.

The expert panel was provided with:

- an outline of the multi-scale landscape concept being proposed
- a [preliminary](#) (PDF, 739KB) and [final report](#) (PDF, 1.4MB) by the Forests Practices Authority of Tasmania commissioned by the NSW Government as part of the IFOA remake. The reports detailed advice, recommendations, cross-jurisdictional comparisons and research around the proposed TSL thresholds, limits and framework
- comprehensive lists of all threatened flora and fauna that are known, or likely, to occur within the native forests covered by the new Coastal IFOA.

The NSW Government convened three workshops in Sydney between 18–20 March 2014. The workshops covered the concept of the multi-scale landscape model and discussed endangered populations as well as threatened and protected flora and fauna.

The expert panel provided advice on improvements to proposed thresholds to limit the impacts of forestry operations at the spatial and temporal scale, and on landscape conditions. The expert panel also provided advice on additional survey and specific protection measures to mitigate forestry impacts on species requiring additional protection.

The government relied on this information and advice to refine the proposed multi-scale landscape framework and develop specific licence provisions. The recommendations of the expert panel were also used to develop or improve specific requirements for threatened species protection and surveys.

2.2.2 Stage 2 – September 2014

In September 2014, the expert panel reconvened to discuss the adequacy and effectiveness of the detailed multi-scale landscape framework and specific TSL conditions. This included revised landscape, stand and species conditions based on the feedback and recommendations provided by the expert panel during the first stage of the expert panel review.

The government convened an expert panel workshop in Sydney on 10 September 2014 to discuss the proposed TSL conditions. In particular, the workshop focused on the adequacy of:

- the proposed overarching threshold limits of the landscape for managing the impacts of logging operations in time and space
- improvements to existing landscape exclusion zones, including high conservation old growth forest, rainforest, large forest owl landscape, ridge and headwater habitat corridors, forest management zones, rare forest (including rare non-commercial forest), heath and scrub, wetlands, riparian protection zones, rocky outcrops and cliffs, and general nest, roost and camp protection
- new landscape provisions, including minimum exclusion zone thresholds and threatened ecological community mapping
- new or improved stand-level protection, including hollow-bearing and recruitment tree retention, feed trees, wildlife habitat clumps, coarse woody debris, burning, and giant tree protection
- new species-specific landscape protections

- improvements to species-specific survey and protection requirements
- the proposed strategic monitoring framework.

Additional expert panel reviews of proposed flora management conditions and survey requirements were undertaken outside of the workshop.

Following the second stage workshop, further expert information and recommendations were provided to the government for consideration in the refinement and delivery of a draft Coastal IFOA.



River-flat eucalypt forest endangered ecological community in Bodalla State Forest on the NSW South Coast. Photo: EPA.

3. Key recommendations from the expert panel

The expert panel discussed the strengths and weakness of the proposed new multi-scale landscape settings.

The panel recommended that further assessment, analysis and/or modifications be made to:

- consider alternative settings to appropriately limit intensive harvesting operations (regeneration harvesting) within a subset of Blackbutt-dominated regrowth forests to prevent the cumulative impact of harvesting in this landscape
- ensure the management of harvesting operations continues to maintain connectivity and support the existing comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system
- determine appropriate settings to ensure that sufficient and suitable mature forests will be retained in the landscape management units to ensure forest structural diversity and refugia habitat is maintained over the course of multiple cutting cycles
- ensure the timeframes between each cutting cycle are suitable to enable species to persist in the landscape and recolonise between each logging event within a landscape management area
- ensure the area of intensive harvesting is of an appropriate scale that does not introduce a barrier or impediment to species movements
- provide appropriate temporal and spatial separation between adjacent logging operations to ensure the persistence of species and habitat, noting that longer return times to harvested areas are better for flora and fauna recolonisation
- ensure proposed species landscape exclusion zones are fit for purpose
- ensure the selection criteria for recruitment trees delivers on the intent to permanently retain trees with the highest likelihood to develop suitable hollows and persist in the long term.

The expert panel expressed general support for:

- proposed conditions for a large proportion of threatened species, however this was conditional to improvements being made to the final landscape protection model
- the proposal to move to monitoring with adaptive management where possible and away from individual record-based prescriptions for a number of species
- the proposal to move to a multi-scale landscape approach rather than record-based prescriptions for a number of species .

The expert panel also recommended that further work be undertaken to:

- obtain additional expertise for a small number of specific species to assess whether supplementary protection and survey measures are necessary
- have relevant experts review and update habitat models and survey requirements to ensure they are suitable for identifying species and habitats.

4. The government's response to key recommendations

The NSW Government is committed to ensuring that the IFOA remake is based on sound scientific evidence and that the new Coastal IFOA does not erode environmental values. The consideration of the information, evidence and advice provided during both stages of the expert panel review is an important step in delivering against this commitment.

The key recommendations of the expert panel identified that further work, development and analysis is required as part of the IFOA remake. This is to ensure that the multi-scale landscape-based protection measures in the new Coastal IFOA will not erode the protection of threatened and protected species and their habitat.

The EPA, FCNSW and DPI (Fisheries) are continuing to develop and refine proposed threatened species licence requirements at the landscape, stand and site scale. This includes adopting the key recommendations of the expert panel review where appropriate.

The government is continuing to engage with the expert panel and other expert ecologists and botanists. All relevant expert panel advice and recommendations will continue to be used to inform the development of the multi-scale threatened species licence (TSL) conditions.

The government will be conducting a demonstration trial of a range of proposed multi-scale landscape provisions, including options recommended by the expert panel. The trial will assess the application and enforceability of a range of proposed licence conditions or management approaches against the scope and objectives of the IFOA remake.

The trial will be jointly conducted by the EPA and FCNSW and will utilise the skills and experience of the expert panel and independent experts. The trial will commence in mid-2015.

The findings of the trial will help to refine the TSL requirements at the landscape, stand and site scale. This will inform the draft TSL provisions for the draft Coastal IFOA. The draft Coastal IFOA will be released for public comment before it is finalised.

Further information on the remake of the coastal IFOAs is available on the EPA's website at <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/forestagreements/coastlFOAs.htm>