

NSW Regional Forest Agreements Scope - MER Plan

Background

- NSW has agreed to:
*'develop and maintain a coordinated **Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan**, including the identification of research priorities, within the broader Forest Management Framework across relevant forest management tenures and to support RFA outcomes reporting for ESEFM.'*¹
- The Premier has asked the Commission under a [terms of reference](#) to independently oversee and advise on a state-wide monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement program for NSW forests, including state forests, national parks, private native forests and crown forested land. Specifically, the Program will incorporate requirements for the monitoring, evaluation, reporting under the three NSW Regional Forest Agreements.
- As required under the terms of reference, the Commission has established, and independently chairs a NSW cross-agency Steering Committee to oversee the design, implementation, review and continuous improvement of the program.
- A [Program Framework 2019-2024](#) sets out aims, principles and deliverables over the next five years. It commits to deliver:
"the RFA monitoring, evaluation and research plan is designed, which identifies and prioritises monitoring and reporting obligations and commitments, and the extent of monitoring, evaluation and reporting required to satisfy each obligation and commitment by mid-2020" (Deliverable 1.7)

Purpose

- This paper proposes a scope for the NSW RFAs MER plan. The cross-agency Steering Committee has endorsed this scope.
- The scope addresses
 - the joint government response to the independent review of the NSW RFAs
 - the renewed NSW RFAs released in November 2018
 - the Program's terms of reference and the Program Framework 2019-2024.
- The Commission is now seeking feedback from the Australian Government on the attached scope.

¹ Under Clause 8A of the Regional Forest Agreements

Scope – NSW RFAs Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan

Outcome statement

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting programs are applied to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the obligations and commitments in delivering the objectives of the NSW Regional Forest Agreements.

Preamble

- (1) NSW agrees under Clause 8A of the NSW Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) to:
*‘develop and maintain a coordinated **Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan**, including the identification of research priorities, within the broader Forest Management Framework across relevant forest management tenures and to support RFA outcomes reporting for ESFM.’*
- (2) Under terms of reference from the NSW Premier, the NSW Natural Resources Commission (‘the Commission’) is responsible for chairing the NSW Forest Monitoring Steering Committee and overseeing the NSW Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program that will design a monitoring program for the RFA commitments.²
- (3) Under the Program Framework for the NSW Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program, an **RFA Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Plan** is to be designed which identifies and prioritises all monitoring and reporting obligations and commitments, and the extent of monitoring and evaluation required to satisfy each obligation and commitment by mid-2020.³

Roles and responsibilities

- (4) The Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan (‘the MER Plan’) for the NSW Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) will be developed by the State-wide Technical Working Group, peer reviewed by the Program’s expert panel, and endorsed by the **NSW Forest Monitoring Steering Committee**.
- (5) Once **the MER Plan** has been endorsed, all NSW agencies identified in the Plan are required to:
 - (a) implement the **monitoring, evaluation and reporting** program and projects identified under the Plan, including by required collecting, procuring, analysing, storing and making available monitoring data, research and reports for RFA regions;
 - (b) undertake **periodic and major reviews** and **develop public progress reports**, including by reporting on the Sustainability Indicators⁴ (Montreal Process criteria and indicators);
 - (c) contribute to any necessary **adaptive management** of the NSW Forest Management Framework and RFAs in response to relevant findings of the monitoring, evaluation and reporting program under the Plan, and the recommendations of the Steering Committee;
 - (d) participate in **public consultation** processes associated with the monitoring, evaluation and reporting program.

² Premier’s terms of reference for the NSW Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program, page 1.

³ Program Framework 2019-2024, deliverable 1.7, page 6. Note: under the Program Framework 2019-2024, the Plan is referred to as ‘Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Plan’. However, consistent with both the intent and the wording of the NSW RFAs, the Plan will be titled ‘Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan’.

⁴ “Sustainability Indicators” means qualitative or quantitative measures, at the regional (sub-national) level developed to assess the criteria for sustainable forest management, as described in *Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management Criteria and Indicators for the NSW Forest Agreement regions* (EPA 2017), and as amended from time to time.

- (6) The Commission, as the independent Chair of the Steering Committee, will review the reports delivered under the Plan, and will develop evidence-based **recommendations to improve forest management** and the NSW Forest Management Framework to be provided to the NSW Government. The NSW and Australian Governments can consider these reports, and progress on implementing any recommendations, through its review processes for the NSW Regional Forest Agreements, which formally occur every five years.

Objective of the MER Plan

- (7) To monitor, evaluate and report on implementation of the **commitments and obligations** of the NSW Regional Forest Agreements

Design and contents

- (8) The **Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan** must be designed to:
- (a) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the **commitments and obligations** under the NSW Regional Forest Agreements, including but not limited to:
- (i) monitoring, evaluation and reporting on **conservation values** including within the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system;
 - (ii) reporting on the **socioeconomic environment** associated with the forest estate, including on the socioeconomic status of state, regional and local communities in relation to forest-based industries, and the socioeconomic value of the ecological services that forests provide;
 - (iii) identifying status and trends of Matters of National Environmental Significance.
 - (iv) monitoring the **status and trends of forests and forest health**, including by reporting on the conservation status of forests and providing an explanation for any decline in health or loss of forest area;
 - (v) monitoring and reporting on **changes made to forest management practices** to adapt to the changing environment, including through **climate change adaptation** and mitigation measures in the management of the forest estate;
 - (vi) providing contemporary information on the contribution of NSW forests to the **global carbon cycle** and opportunities to **enhance carbon storage** in forests.
- (b) increase transparency and accountability on **Sustainable Yield**, noting that NSW has committed to managing the availability of timber resources for the State forest estate in accordance with Sustainable Yield estimates, calculated using FRAMES or an equivalent, including to:
- (i) take account of climate risks and adaptation measures;
 - (ii) ensure that FRAMES or an equivalent is maintained and continually improved and provide periodic reviews of wood product yields
 - (iii) undertake and make publicly available an independent review of Sustainable Yield estimates for each RFA region during each five-yearly review;
- (c) collect information across **all forest tenures** and use efficient and cost-effective approaches to gathering data, including remote sensing technologies;
- (d) identify, prioritise and coordinate funding of **forest research** within the plan and ensure it remains relevant and aligned to the research priorities established in the RFAs: ⁵

⁵ NSW Regional Forest Agreements (Eden (Attachment 6), North East and Southern), Attachment 7, Research Priorities.

- (e) inform measures and reporting on performance in relation to the **Sustainability Indicators**;
- (f) report on **improvements in coordination** of State and regional forest management matters, including in **shared services, research and community engagement**, and the collection of reporting information;
- (g) improve **transparency of reporting on resourcing**, where feasible, including reporting against targeted programs that deliver specific commitments contained in the NSW RFAs.⁶

Priority information

- (9) The Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan must:
 - (a) identify and focus on priority information needs for **adaptive forest management**;
 - (b) identify **evaluation questions** that will inform the program design;
 - (c) identify and **prioritise the commitments and obligations** under the RFAs and the extent of monitoring and reporting required to satisfy these commitments and obligations.
- (10) Determine priority information needs and evaluation questions through criteria, which will incorporate consideration of risks, opportunities and value for money.⁷

Review and reporting

- (11) The Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan under the NSW Regional Forest Agreements must incorporate reviews and public reporting of results and progress including:
 - (a) an **annual forum and review** of the monitoring, evaluation and reporting program results must be provided by the Steering Committee to the NSW Agencies involved in the RFAs and the Australian Government and must include:
 - (i) monitoring, evaluation and reporting program results;
 - (ii) progress on the Sustainability Indicators;
 - (iii) an assessment of the adequacy of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan
 - (b) a **major review** of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan must be completed with each formal review of the NSW Regional Forest Agreements, and must include:
 - (i) detailed reporting of monitoring, evaluation and research results;
 - (ii) detailed analysis of trends;
 - (iii) an assessment of the adequacy of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan
 - (c) **recommendations of any necessary changes** required to the NSW Forest Management Framework.
- (12) The reviews of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan must be overseen by the NSW Forest Monitoring Steering Committee.
- (13) Reviews of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan will be provided to the NSW agencies involved in the RFAs and the Australian Government and will be published on the Commission's website, or other location as approved by the Steering Committee.

⁶ These commitments are derived from the Joint Australian and NSW Government response to the Independent review of the report on progress with the implementation of the NSW Regional Forest Agreements for the combined second and third five-yearly reviews 2004-2014.

⁷ Program Framework 2019-2024, Deliverable 1.7.

- (14) The monitoring, evaluation and reporting program results under the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan will provide information to support the NSW Department of Primary Industries in the development of **five-yearly Progress Reports** on Regional Forest Agreements, as inputs to the five-yearly Regional Forest Agreement reviews.
- (15) Where possible, timing of reports will align with monitoring and reporting required for the NSW contributions to the national State of the Forests reports and the three NSW Regional Forest Agreements, including to support the five-yearly review process for the period July 2016 to June 2021. The next five-yearly review for the NSW Regional Forest Agreements will commence in 2024.