

Communiqué 4: Sixth Steering Committee Meeting

This is the fourth Communiqué from the NSW Forest Monitoring Steering Committee, which oversees the NSW Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program. The Steering Committee includes NSW government agencies and independent scientific experts, as outlined under the Program's Terms of Reference.

State-wide evaluation questions

The Steering Committee endorsed a set of state-wide evaluation questions to monitor and evaluate ecologically sustainable forest management. These questions will guide the selection of, and investment in further forest monitoring, research and evaluation. The Commission team will seek further input from the NSW Bushfire Risk Management Research hub before finalising the questions in early March 2020. In-line with program principles, evaluation questions should evolve over time and respond to priorities and risks. Stakeholders and community will have the opportunity to provide ongoing feedback on the evaluation questions, including annual forums.

Project selection

The program will deliver monitoring, research and evaluation projects that align with evaluation questions and information needs. The Steering Committee endorsed a process and criteria to select projects. The committee will have the option to invite or open-call for proposals from agencies, community groups and research institutions. The committee aims to select initial projects by March 2020.

Regional Forest Agreements

The program will develop a monitoring, evaluation and research (MER) plan for Regional Forest Agreements by mid-2020. In addition, the Commission will ensure RFA commitments and obligations are tracked and emerging issues raised. The committee endorsed a scope for the MER plan. The Commission team will engage the Australian Government as a next step.

Coastal IFOA monitoring program

The Steering Committee proposed coastal IFOA monitoring program to the Environment Protection Agency and the NSW Department of Primary Industries in December 2020. The proposed program considered stakeholder and community feedback. Department of Primary Industries have endorsed the program. The IFOA technical working group will advance detailed design after EPA approval and reviewing implications of the 2019/20 wildfires.

Aboriginal Engagement Plan

The Steering Committee has endorsed an Aboriginal Engagement Plan for the program. The plan will focus on co-designing forest monitoring, evaluation and research projects with Aboriginal stakeholders and local communities. This will involve Aboriginal people in forest management and decision making. The Commission team will continue to work closely with

the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, NSW Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Executive Network in the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

Program evaluation plan

The Steering Committee endorsed a plan to evaluate program performance and promote learning. The committee completed an annual health check in-line with the evaluation plan. On governance, the committee noted the program had strengthened agency collaborating and information sharing across the cluster. The program needs to stay focused on strategic priorities to avoid stretching limited resources and ensure successful delivery. The committee will continue to seek opportunities to continue program funding, promote partnerships and strengthen agency coordination. The Commission will soon publish an annual progress report.