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Dr John Williams  
Commissioner  
Natural Resources Commission  
GPO Box 4206  
Sydney NSW 4206

Our File:A149221  
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Dear John

### **RE: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE EOAM METHODOLOGY**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to the proposed changes to the Environmental Outcomes Assessment Methodology (EOAM) proposed by the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC).

The Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority (Murrumbidgee CMA) has reviewed the changes as proposed by DECC and are generally supportive of the need for the changes to ensure consistency and clarity for CMA's to implement their obligations under the *Native Vegetation Act 2003* and *Native Vegetation Regulation 2005* (Regulations).

The Murrumbidgee CMA would like to highlight the importance that the EOAM should be consistent with the Regulations.

The following comments are provided as part of our review of the proposed changes:

- Currently an accredited expert cannot make a variation of the classification of the vegetation type or landscape type as being overcleared. The EOAM should reflect the Regulations.
- The proposed changes to Low condition need to consider the current definitions under the *Native Vegetation Act 2005* for consistency. Further, there is one definition for low condition in the Biodiversity Assessment (Sect 5.2.2) where there are three (3) definitions of condition under the Threatened Species Assessment (Sect 5.6), being low condition, paddock trees and moderate to good condition.

Further, with respect to Item 11 – Section 5.2.2, it is proposed to replace Points 2 & 3 with:

“2. a/ less than 50% of the groundcover vegetation is indigenous species...” . The Murrumbidgee CMA requests further clarification of two issues with respect to this change, namely :

- 1) if a site has, for example, 60% vegetation cover (indigenous and exotic) and 40% bare ground, rock, leaf litter, etc., does the <50% groundcover vegetation figure apply to the 60% vegetation cover only, or does it also include the other 40% cover at the site.
- 2) does this clause mean <50% of the *number* of species or <50% of the total species *cover*?

It would be useful to define the above in order to prevent any ambiguity in the definition of groundcover across CMAs.

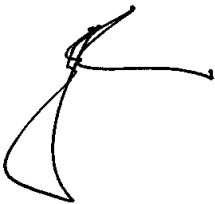
- The paddock trees assessment tool was recently developed by DECC for use by CMAs in assessing large scale paddock tree clearing proposals. There appears to be no mention of the paddock tree tool in the proposed changes to the EOAM. To ensure consistency across the state for assessment of paddock tree clearing proposals, there is a need to ensure this tool is embedded within the EOAM. The proposed change No 106 to 5.9 of the Threatened Species Tool mentions that sufficient area is required for paddock tree proposals but does not specify how it is to be calculated. Item 77 should include reference to the paddock tree tool for calculations.
- With respect to Item 30 – Section 5.3.3, development of New Table 5.2 with details of Scoring for Percent Cover of Native Vegetation within 1.79km (1000 ha) and 0.55km (100 ha), the Murrumbidgee CMA makes the following comments :
  - The Murrumbidgee CMA supports the concept of removing the 0.2km (10ha) radius from the percentage cover assessment. However, we are concerned with clustering the coverage into percentile bands of 10% as it appears to be unrealistic and presumes a level of accuracy that could be hard to determine in certain cases and could lead to unnecessary debate, inconsistency and non-repeatable assessments for monitoring and evaluation.
  - A more realistic approach is to group the cover in percentile bands of 20%, particularly as such a percentage banding is likely to minimise the subjective elements of individual assessors. Obviously scoring would need to be adjusted to reflect a change to 20% percentile bands.

- Following this recommendation, Item 34 – Section 5.3.3 may also need to be grouped in 20% percentile bands and the scores adjusted accordingly.
- The Murrumbidgee CMA supports the Murray CMA’s response that some shrublands are less than 1 metre and further work is required for determining methodology of assessing these shrublands. The definition of over-abundant is not defined clearly and is unlikely to be legally defensible. (Item 45).
- The terms ‘gain’ and ‘expected increase’ appear in Items 104 and 105 are new concepts in respect of the Regulations and have not been fully explained to CMA assessment staff.

The Murrumbidgee CMA would have preferred further time to consider the 100 proposed changes to the methodology. It would have been appropriate for DECC to demonstrate the final proposed changes through a series of workshops with CMA’s in addition to the Biodiversity Assessment Review process to ensure that CMA staff have a thorough understanding of the implications of the proposed changes.

Should you have any further queries, please contact Ray Willis, A/Program Manager at the Wagga Wagga office on (02) 6932 3268 during business hours.

Yours sincerely



John Francis  
A/General Manager  
Murrumbidgee CMA