

A501327

Lisa Corbyn
Director-General
Att: Environmental Outcomes Assessment Methodology
Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water
PO Box A290
SYDNEY SOUTH NSW 1232

cc. Alex Mc Millan, Natural Resources Commission

Dear Ms Corbyn

Re Comments on Proposed EOAM Amendments

The Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) supports the proposed amendments to the EOAM, involving a new Chapter 8 of the EOAM, because it continues to provide improved or maintained environmental outcomes for clearing assessments, but with reduced processing times.

I note further refinements to offset calculations have been informed through the recent testing process to provide consistency with the improve or maintain principle and that the benefits from streamlined provisions are strongly dependent on maximising automation of assessment steps.

The CMA considers the proposed streamlined assessment provides a more appropriate level of assessment for clearing proposals that fit one of the five categories proposed and is also consistent with the principle of achieving improved or maintained environmental outcomes. It will reduce PVP processing times by rationalising assessment effort to those aspects of the assessment process that determine assessment outcomes, based on drawing on the experience from five years of assessment using the EOAM. The benefits to processing times have been confirmed through testing processes involving CMA operational staff, including Hunter-Central Rivers staff.

The CMA considers the proposed amendments to be a relatively minor refinement of the EOAM and that all clearing categories in the draft Chapter 8 should be adopted as they are appropriate for streamlined assessment and relevant, given the majority of current clearing PVPs in coastal NSW would fit one or more of the proposed clearing categories. For the Hunter-Central Rivers region, it is particularly important that vegetation clearing categories 2, 3 and 5 are included, in order to achieve streamlining benefits.

Category 5 is important because it would be applicable to a majority of approved clearing PVPs in the Hunter-Central Rivers region, with improved or maintained environmental outcomes ensured through an appropriate assessment process derived directly from the full assessment process, with appropriate offsets to be secured.

Category 3 is important because of its high relevance to the extensive areas of degraded vegetation including derived grassland that occurs in overcleared landscapes in the Hunter-Central Rivers region. The current

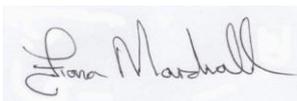
assessment process is overly onerous and rigid, thereby constraining opportunities to secure the conservation of high value offsets in overcleared vegetation. The category 3 definition as presented does not require less than 90% of benchmark for native species richness in the Hunter-Central Rivers region and this should continue to apply; otherwise this category will have negligible practical application, confirmed by analysis of actual species richness data.

The CMA suggests consideration of further refinement to the provisions requiring offsets to be comprised of vegetation of equal or greater Regional Value(s) than the vegetation to be cleared, involving expanding this to apply to all cases where overcleared vegetation is proposed to be cleared.

The CMA considers that the amendments provide many benefits including:

- Providing equivalent outcomes as the current EOAM, but with reduced administrative processing times, for low risk PVP applications.
- Reducing landholder waiting times.
- Increasing certainty available to landholders upfront on likely assessment outcomes.
- Enhancing flexibility in providing appropriate offsets.
- Assisting in securing viable high conservation value native vegetation as offsets, particularly in overcleared landscapes that are conservation priorities.
- Creating a more efficient process to facilitate the modification and re-assessment process of clearing proposals, which typically occur on high value coastal land.
- Reducing perverse outcomes associated with clearing proposals that can provide offsets to conserve high value forest and woodland in overcleared vegetation in perpetuity, but are instead being directed away from degraded derived grassland vegetation due to the rigidity of current assessment processes (because it is classified as overcleared). This is in turn resulting in clearing of remnant forest and woodland vegetation in good condition (because it is not classified as overcleared).
- Overcoming excessively onerous current process for applying minor variations.
- Reducing timeframes and improving environmental outcomes from developments requiring parallel “dual consents”, where development consent is also required from local government.
- Allowing staff resources to be directed towards activities such as auditing, monitoring, extension and strategic planning, due to efficiency gains.
- Increasing advice available to clearing proponents at earlier stages of proposal planning, resulting in better proposal design and conservation outcomes.
- Encouraging greater compliance with the NV Act 2003 including reduced misuse of RAMAs.

Yours faithfully



Fiona Marshall
General Manager
4 February 2011