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EPBC 2013/6713

Ms Deb Callister
Assistant Secretary
Assessments (Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania) and Policy Implementation Branch
Department of the Environment
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Callister

Request for variation to Ecological Thinning Trial in NSW and Victorian River Red Gum Forests

I am writing on behalf of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) to request a variation to the Public Environment Report (PER) as the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is no longer a co-proponent of the trial.

In addition to this request for variation, OEH is seeking Commonwealth approval for the ecological thinning trial. Enclosed for publication is a revised PER and appendices, which take into account the public submissions received in 2014. A letter of support from the River Red Gum Adaptive Management Scientific Advisory Committee is also enclosed.

Subject to approval of the PER by the Commonwealth Minister of the Environment, and favourable weather conditions, it is intended that all thinning treatments associated with the trial will be conducted by the end of June 2016.

Details of the proposed variation

To maintain the scientific rigour of the trial, this variation to the PER involves replacing the 10 sites previously located in Victoria's Barmah National Park with 10 equivalent sites in the NSW Murray Valley National Park. This will allow the trial to be completed solely in NSW.

The following alterations have been made to the PER to account for the 10 additional sites in NSW and the public submissions that were received for the original PER, published in 2014:

- The title has changed to "Ecological Thinning Trial in New South Wales River Red Gum Forests"
- Addition of an addendum to the PER, showing updates to site names, locations, haulage routes and haulage distances
- Plot coordinates have been updated in Appendix 2
- Pre-treatment site assessment surveys have been updated in Appendix 4
- The Victorian operations plan has been removed from Appendix 5
- A review of public submissions has been included in Appendix 11.

Reasons for the variation

The Victorian Department of Environment (now Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning) is no longer 'a person proposing the action'. OEH agrees to be the sole person proposing the action. To maintain the scientific rigour of the trial, the 10 sites in Victoria have been replaced with 10 sites in NSW.

Comparison of the impact on matters of environmental significance between the original proposal and the variation

The trial's impact on matters of environmental significance is unchanged.

In the original proposal, thinning treatments were to be undertaken in 396 hectares (44 × 9 hectares) of the 66,000 hectare River Red Gum forests of Barmah–Millewa in Victoria and NSW, with control sites covering an additional 198 hectares (22 × 9 hectares). The area subject to treatment constituted 0.6 per cent of the total area of these forests.

All 22 trial sites will now be located within the NSW Central Murray Forests Ramsar Site. The 180 hectares originally planned for treatment in Victoria will be transferred to NSW. Environmental impacts of the activity remain the same but the sites are concentrated within 42,000 hectares of the NSW Murray Valley National Park - Millewa Precinct. These sites are geographically dispersed within the park and, at a landscape scale, the increase in intensity of the activity in NSW is not significant.

Desktop assessment and field surveys were conducted as part of the NSW site selection process, and are described in Section 2.2.3 of the PER. This included avoiding known occurrences of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) - listed threatened species such as the superb parrot and any ecological communities listed under the EPBC Act.

In both the original and varied proposals, suitably qualified ecologists have conducted pre-treatment site assessment surveys to determine the presence of, or potential habitat for, EPBC Act listed species and communities. These transverse surveys covered the area within each plot and extend 100 metres beyond the boundary of the plots to record any adjacent species or habitat feature.

In accordance with the original proposal, protective buffers will be placed on mapped waterways and unmapped drainage lines. The increase in intensity within the NSW Central Murray Forests Ramsar site is not significant at a landscape level. The original assessments in Table 5.8 and Table 5.9 of the PER still apply, whereby no significant impacts are predicted to occur to the Ramsar site as a result of the proposed ecological thinning trial.

Any impacts on matters of national environmental significance that were not included in the original proposal

No new matters of environmental significance or controlling provisions are relevant to this varied proposal. The additional 10 sites, as proposed, are located in the same area of NSW within Murray Valley National Park, where the proposed action was deemed to be a controlled action. The three controlling provisions in the original proposal (wetlands of international importance, listed threatened species and communities and listed migratory species) are also relevant to this varied proposal.

Any alternatives, mitigation measures or offsets to compensate for additional impacts

The original proposal detailed all impacts on matters of national environmental significance, there is no need to find any alternatives, mitigation measures or offsets to compensate for additional impacts.

If you have any enquiries on this matter please contact Mr Tim O'Kelly, Senior Project Officer (Forestry) National Parks and Wildlife Service, on 03 5483 9110 or at tim.okelly@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



MICHAEL WRIGHT
Deputy Chief Executive
National Parks and Wildlife Service

23 OCT 2015

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Enclosures

