

Media Statement

4 September 2023

EPA recommends approval for 10-year Forest Management Plan

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has recommended the proposed Forest Management Plan (FMP) 2024-2033 be approved subject to conditions relating to reporting, as well as the recommendation of an independent scientific review of prescribed burning.

EPA Chair Professor Matthew Tonts said central to the assessment was the unique and exceptional diversity of the South West's forests and the range of environmental, cultural and social values they held.

"The proposed addition of 400,000ha to the conservation estate would enhance the FMP area's biodiversity and ecological integrity and would be a good outcome for the State," he said.

Professor Tonts said that to ensure the health, diversity and productivity of this natural asset, the EPA had recommended prioritising the further protection of the northern jarrah forest, areas of significant conservation and biodiversity values, ecological linkages, and the expansion of existing reserves.

"Conditions on reporting progress on achieving that 400,000ha target are critical to good environmental outcomes and the successful expansion of the conservation estate," he said.

Professor Tonts said the EPA was also of the view that thinning had the potential to maintain the ecological integrity and biological diversity of forest ecosystems, however the identification and evaluation of disturbance avoidance zones and silvicultural guidelines were critical to ecological thinning locations.

"The EPA's strong preference is that ecological thinning does not occur in disturbance avoidance zones and existing and proposed conservation areas, and if it does, then there must be a robust evaluation of the expected benefits to forest ecosystems," he said.

FMPs provide the overall policy framework for protecting and managing forests on public lands and are prepared in accordance with the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*. Following the State Government's decision to end logging of native forests, this proposed FMP largely focuses on the management of forest ecosystems and incorporated management activities to address threats, reduce pressures, and protect intact ecosystems over the next 10 years.

The area contains a multitude of plant and animal species, ecological communities, rivers, streams, wetlands, and 26 forest ecosystems dominated by karri and jarrah

forests. The proposal is located across some 2.5 million hectares of land and waters vested in the Conservation and Parks Commission (the proponent) in the State's South West and includes activities such as ecological thinning, conservation reserve creation, and prescribed burning.

Professor Tonts said the EPA report also recommended an independent scientific review to give full consideration to contemporary science and knowledge on the impacts of prescribed burning on a range of environmental issues, particularly in the context of our changing climate.

“An independent review under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* would call on the expertise of independent scientists to consider prescribed burning approaches and implementation,” he added.

As part of its assessment of the proposed FMP, the EPA considered more than 3500 public submissions and undertook targeted sessions with 12 key stakeholders and groups. The comments received during these consultations and earlier online engagement were all considered by the EPA.

The EPA's report to the Minister for Environment is now open for a three-week public appeal period, closing 25 September 2023. Appeals should be directed to the [Office of the Appeals Convenor](#). The Minister for Environment will make the final decision on the proposal. EPA Report 1745 can be found on the [EPA website](#).

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