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RE: Recommendations from the Leadbeaters Possum Recovery Team for inclusion in the Leadbeaters Possum Action Statement

The Leadbeaters Possum Recovery Team convened on 23 February 2012. A key action arising from the meeting was to provide recommendations to the Department of Sustainability and Environment on inclusions required to update the Leadbeaters Possum Action Statement. Members of the Recovery Team were asked to provide recommendations to the Chair for compilation and submission to the relevant Environment and Water Managers.

1. Required Action:

That the recommendations provided in this letter are supplied to the Leadbeaters Possum Action Statement author for inclusion in the Statement.

A summary is provided along with detailed information on the recommendations around the management prescriptions. The Recovery Team is available to help the author discuss the finer points of the recommendations and can meet the author upon request.

2. Summary:

Summary of areas in the Action Statement that require updating:

- Update the estimated number of animals present in the wild;
- Update threats to include those occurring after 2009 fires i.e.
 - Logging
 - Loss of stags – large tree crisis
 - Loss of future suitable habitat.
- Update amount of LBP habitat burnt during 2009 fires
- Update conservation objectives given current knowledge;
- Include relevance of Recovery Plan to recovery actions;
- Include results of recent surveys (ANU, ARI, ARCUE, Zoos Vic);
- Include information on removal of Lake Mountain Animals and Yellingbo;
- Update Actions to include a landscape scale approach and measurable targets;
- Update description of habitat type and diet and relate to threats and actions;
- Include information on emergency response strategy and collection of animals including a policy and procedure;

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- Review format of Actions to make more readable;
- Include comprehensive survey methods as developed by ARI.
- Update management prescriptions - see detailed section following this summary.

3. Management Prescriptions – Detailed Recommendations:

Key changes recommended to the management prescriptions are provided along with supporting information.

3.1 Key changes recommended:

- Take out any reference to 1900, pre-1900 classification as it the age of the trees that is more relevant to a point in time;
- Change trees age down from 120 to 100 years old. Justification based on Zone 1A not just to protect current habitat but also forest that has the potential to become high quality habitat in the future. This is supported in the CH FMP.
- Concern that individual large trees may not be protected under “zones” that deal with forest patches. We want to make sure individual trees are looked for and protected. Created options Zone 2 definitions.
- Change from 12 to 6 hollow bearing trees per 3 ha in prescriptions based on decreased availability of habitat trees, research on habitat requirements showing of 4.2-10 habitat trees required per 3 ha.

3.2 Supporting information on recommended changes to Management Prescriptions:

3.2.1 Objectives of the Prescriptions

These prescriptions provide a set of rules that all agencies engaging in timber extraction in public forests are obliged to follow to protect habitat for Leadbeater’s Possum. These prescriptions are the primary instrument through which Leadbeater’s Possum habitat is protected as required by the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

The zoning system operating in State forest will reflect the relative long-term stability of some good existing and developing habitat containing living hollow-bearing trees (Zone 1A) and the expected impermanence of other good habitat where many existing hollow-bearing trees are dead and likely to collapse in the near future (Zone 1B). A further zone, Zone 2, will consist of remaining forest, where the Management Prescriptions will be applied to protect existing habitat components for their on-site value and to enhance the value of adjacent habitat. Where solitary large trees are present, the Large Tree Rule applies.

3.2.2 Definitions within the Prescriptions

The following definitions require further development as they currently are open to interpretation:

- Public forest: must include water catchments, national parks etc.
- Hollow-bearing Tree: any tree, regardless of age or specie type, that demonstrated a hollow.
- Mixed Age Ash Forest: more than one age class is present
- Area Calculations: any shape polygon, tenure blind, does not need to be entirely within the intended timber harvesting coupe. Habitat trees do not have to be equally distributed over the polygon.
- Buffer: area of no disturbance around protected zone or trees
- Forest patch or stand:

3.2.3 Application of the Prescriptions

A Summary is provided along with detailed zone definitions.

Summary:

- These prescriptions apply to all timber harvesting in public forests.
- Determination of habitat availability (e.g. hollow bearing trees) is to be based on the “Survey Standards: Leadbeater’s Possum” produced by DSE 2012.
- If Zone 1 areas become unsuitable or offer little potential as habitat for Leadbeater's Possum through successional or other change, (which is likely for Zone 1B during the next 30 years), they will be reassessed. Conversely, areas that develop the essential components for Zone 1 classification through passage of time, or changed circumstance will be reclassified as Zone 1.
- Zone 1 forest is not to be included in sawlog and pulpwood yield calculations.
- The roles of Zone 1, including the minimum areas of assessment, will be reviewed following improved habitat resource assessment, reserve establishment and subsequent population viability analysis (PVA), to ensure effectiveness in contributing to the major conservation objectives.

Zone Definitions:

Zone 1

The minimum area for assessment and establishment of Zone 1 type forest is 3 ha.

Zone 1A - Leadbeater's Possum (and other wildlife) conservation as the major priority.

Forest patches or stands in any of the following three classes:

- Ash forest 100 years old or older, or
- Mixed-aged Ash forest where the oldest age class is 100 years old or older, or
- Ash forest less than 100 years old with at least 6 live hollow-bearing trees per 3 ha.

Zone 1B - Leadbeater's Possum (and other wildlife) conservation and timber production as joint priorities.

- Ash forest less than 100 years old with at least 6 living or dead hollow-bearing trees combined with a basal area of at least 5m² of *Acacia dealbata*, *A. obliquinervia* or *A. frigescens* per 3 ha.

Zone 2 – version a

Timber production as the major priority, but excluding for conservation purposes existing components of habitat.

- Ash forest less than 100 years old with any feature of Zone 1, but less than 3 ha in size
- Ash forest less than 100 years old with any feature of Zone 1B, but less than 3 ha in size.

Zone 2- version b

Timber production as the major priority, but excluding for conservation purposes any existing components of habitat and a minimum 50m radius protection buffer.

- Ash forest less than 100 years old with any feature of Zone 1, but less than 3 ha in size
- Tree protected under any other management prescription or policy, such as trees established prior to 1900 and “Giant” trees (Ref: Giant Trees Policy).

If Zone 2 version a is included it will need to a separate Large Tree Rule, example follows:

Large Tree Rule

All large trees, alive or dead, irrespective of their age or species, are protected from harvesting and must have a protective buffer of a minimum size of 50m radius applied (0.79ha).

The protection buffer must:

- i. Be included in the coupe plan prior to the commencement of harvesting,
- ii. Be clearly marked prior to the commencement of harvesting,
- iii. Retain all existing vegetation,
- iv. Prohibit all mechanical disturbances
- v. Have appropriate protective measures applied to reduce the potential for damage during coupe regeneration burns.

Large tree dimensions:

- At least 1.5m Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) or Circumference 4.7m
- At least 5m in height

Justification:

- Recent stag fall data shows a dramatic loss of large trees and later stage Leadbeater's Possum stags. Particularly loss of stage 8 & 9
- 1.5m DBH tree large enough that if a fire goes through it has a better chance of surviving and if not, it is likely to form hollows
- 50m radius should provide adequate protection from cumulative impacts from harvesting including coupe regeneration burns and wind damage.

4. Conclusion:

The Leadbeaters Possum Recovery Team is concerned with the rapid and dramatic loss of habitat for Leadbeaters Possum that has been exacerbated by the 2009 wildfires. It is the opinion of The Leadbeaters Possum Recovery Team that the recommendations put forward will contribute to slowing the decline of this species and hopefully support recovery of the species. We are available to help the author of the Action Statement with any clarification of the recommendations and further contribution to the development of the Action Statement.

Regards

Dr Bram Mason

Chair, Leadbeaters Possum Recovery Team