
Briefing Paper: **Proposed Logging of Priority Lobster Protection Areas**

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Background

The giant freshwater lobster (*Astacopsis gouldi*) is an endemic Tasmanian species. It is the world's largest freshwater lobster, growing up to 1 metre long and 6 kilograms in weight.

Lobsters have been seriously impacted by fishing and poaching pressure, landclearing and degradation of habitat and associated runoff and sedimentation impacts. They are listed as 'vulnerable' under Australian and Tasmanian legislation, and as 'endangered' by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

A review and draft of the Lobster's Recovery Plan by the Commonwealth, with expert participation, have recommended a set of actions to stabilise and recover lobster populations. The draft recovery plan to replace the existing out-of-date plan (2006-2010) was released for consultation in August 2016.

The 2015 review of the progress of recovery planning identified that an approximately 30,000 hectare increase in the total area of reserves on public land, 'may greatly reduce the need for any active management of this species'. Protecting these areas is a highly efficient method of safeguarding the lobster's future that likely reduces the need for other actions.

An action to increase reservation areas in 'priority subcatchments' in the North West was endorsed in the draft recovery plan. Analysis shows that 37,000 ha of forested public land currently gazetted as Future Potential Production Forest occurs in priority areas.

These areas were protected as part of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement, specifically for the Lobster. They are currently classed as 'informal reserves' in Government assessments of 'protected areas' for Regional Forest Agreements and official figures on proportions of Tasmania that are protected.

Recommendations in response to proposed logging

The Tasmanian Government is currently considering its position in response to the protection proposals in the draft Recovery Plan.

At the same, the Government has proposed changing the tenure of the 357,000 hectares of 'FPPF' land to make it available for logging - including the 37,000 ha of priority subcatchments identified as critical priorities for lobster protection.

This exposes the Tasmanian Government to a clear policy conflict. On one hand, the risky, contentious and damaging proposal to log the FPPF land. On the other, an unambiguously positive conservation outcome that makes a major contribution to protection of an iconic threatened species, discharges responsibilities to adhere to joint conservation actions with the Commonwealth, and resolves a key social licence and timber market risk.

Much work has been done to understand the needs of the species. There appears to be no stakeholder contention or conflict over the areas needed for protection. The only conflict is being generated by the Government's action in seeking to log these forests.

Logging directly contradicts expert advice and state-Commonwealth cooperation on safeguarding a species from extinction, and raises unnecessary risks in relation to social licence and certification.

Protecting these catchments is a straightforward and uncontentious action for the Government. No-one is requesting the Government logs these areas, they are currently protected from logging and are classed as informal reserves, managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service.

Rather than pursue the current course, a win-win alternative is for the Government to revise its plan to log the FPPF land, and instead convert the 37,000 hectares of priority lobster subcatchments on FPPF land and manage these and adjacent existing reserves as a 'Lobster Nature Reserve'.

Potential Impacts of logging

Species Impacts

Securing the viability of threatened species through permanent protection of key habitats from threats, through formal protected areas, is a well recognised conservation action.

The recovery plan review identifies forestry, and associated issues such as habitat disturbance and particularly sedimentation, as key threats. Generally, Lobsters are demonstrated to have healthier populations in intact and less degraded catchments, whereas catchments with heavy and ongoing disturbance, while maintaining some populations, are much less secure.

Re-introducing disturbance into relatively intact catchments - specifically those catchments recognised as priority areas for protection - will result in damage to populations that are critical for the survival of the species.

Social Licence and Certification Impacts

Wood sourced from areas specifically protected and essential to safeguard the future of an iconic threatened species is highly unlikely to be an attractive product to timber customers. It is well known that both Japanese and domestic customers have committed to avoid products from the FPPF land in general.

Forestry Tasmania's application to secure FSC accreditation for the PTPZ forests it manages was submitted with the FPPF land considered as 'protected areas'. The determination of 'high conservation values' is highly dependent on the amount of forest protected in the landscape surrounding logging areas.

No issues were raised in relation to the Lobster in the FSC independent auditor's report by certifier SCS. However, this was when the priority Lobster areas were assessed as 'protected' in the FPPF land. If these high priority areas are logged, any future certification assessment is likely to consider whether additional areas of protection would then be required in Forestry Tasmania's allocated PTPZ production forests. This would potentially include other catchments, headwaters and riparian areas to compensate for the FPPF area to be logged by Government.

Additionally, if Forestry Tasmania 'handled' or sold any wood from the logging of Lobster priority catchments, it is open to complaints under FSC International's 'Policy for

association’, and risks have FSC certification stripped.

2. Priority Areas

Table 1: hectares of FPPF land in Lobster Priority Subcatchments

<i>Lobster Priority Subcatchment</i>	<i>FPPF (hectares)</i>
<i>Black and Dip Rivers</i>	<i>7,730</i>
<i>Flowerdale and Hebe Rivers</i>	<i>2,394</i>
<i>Frankland, Leigh and Lindsay Rivers</i>	<i>10,476</i>
<i>Horton River</i>	<i>13,405</i>
<i>Rapid River</i>	<i>3,634</i>
Total	37,639

Lobsters are restricted to river catchments of northern Tasmania that flow into Bass Strait, and the Arthur catchment flowing into the Southern Ocean on the takayna/Tarkine coast.

In general, Lobsters live below an altitude of 400m. They prefer well shaded streams with reliable good quality water flows and low sedimentation. Across its lifecycle, the species requires a diversity of under surface environments, from large logs and snags, undercut banks, shingle rapids and deep pools. It is known to travel over-land to seek out new, suitable habitat.

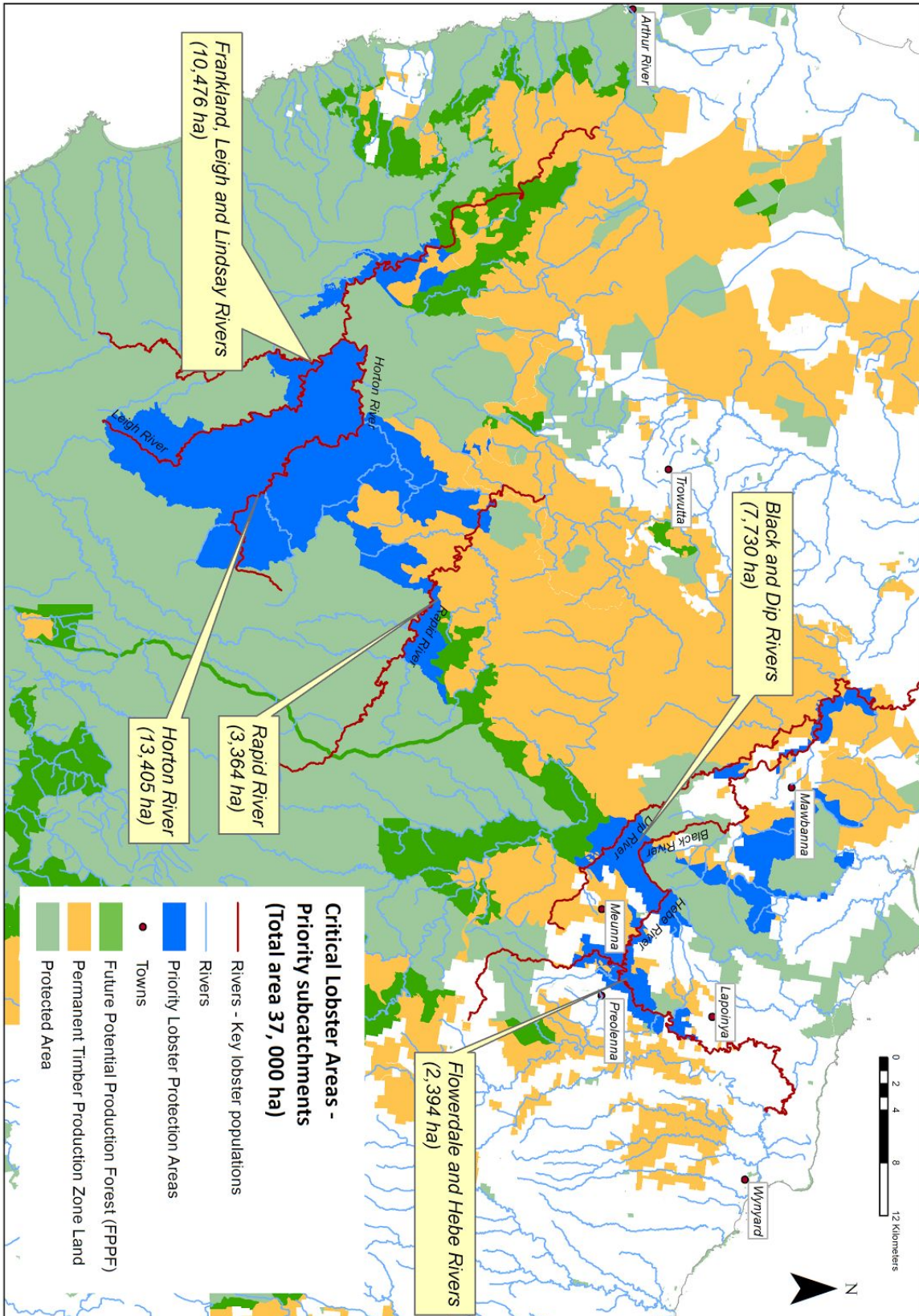
The current (2006 - 10) recovery plan identified the need for reservation of a number of important locations for the lobster. The 2015 recovery plan review notes that ‘key areas requiring protection have been identified on multiple occasions. This information needs to be incorporated into future management and recovery efforts’ and that ‘public land reserves have not been set aside for this species’.

The major remaining strongholds for habitat and population density are the Arthur, Frankland, Black, Dip, Flowerdale and Leven Rivers. Within these areas, there are specific sub-catchments with known population occurrences and high quality habitat, including:

- Black-Detention Catchment, specifically the Black and Dip River subcatchments;
- Arthur catchment, specifically the Upper Frankland sub-catchment, the Horton

River, and the Rapid River; and

- Inglis-Flowerdale catchment, specifically the Flowerdale/Hebe subcatchment.



What are Species Recovery Plans?

The Federal Minister for the Environment makes and implements recovery plans for threatened species or communities listed and in accordance with legal obligations under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

The plans set out research and management actions needed to stop the decline and support recovery. The aim of a recovery plan is to maximise the long term survival in the wild of a threatened species or ecological community.

Recovery plans should state what must be done to protect and restore important populations of threatened species and habitat, as well as how to manage and reduce threatening processes. Recovery plans achieve this aim by providing a planned and logical framework for key interest groups and responsible government agencies to coordinate their work to improve the plight of threatened species and/or ecological communities.

Before making a recovery plan for a listed threatened species or listed threatened ecological community, the Minister must:

- consult with the appropriate Minister of each state and territory in which the species or ecological community occurs
- consider advice from the [Threatened Species Scientific Committee](#)
- invite public comment on the proposed plan
- consider all comments received

Recovery plans are supposed to be kept up to date and reviewed regularly, and often involve a formal review by ad-hoc experts group and/or a permanent 'recovery team' that may include experts, relevant public servants, and key stakeholders.

