



## **ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OPINION - REMOVAL AND RELOCATION OF HABITAT TREE – BLOCK 2 SECTION 11 GUNGAHLIN (ESO202500039)**

In accordance with section 140 (4) of the *Planning Act 2023* (the Act), I provide the following environmental significance opinion:

### **APPLICANT**

Canberra Town Planning as represented by Jolien van Rensburg, Infrastructure Officer.

### **APPLICATION and DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL**

The applicant has applied under section 140 (4) of the Act to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for an environmental significance opinion to the effect that the development proposal set out in the submission is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact (the application).

The development proposal is for the removal and relocation of a habitat tree in Gungahlin as described in the submission.

### **LOCATION**

Block 2 / Section 11 Gungahlin (Removal site)

Block 5 / Section 248, Gungahlin (Relocation site)

### **MATTERS TO WHICH THIS OPINION APPLIES**

This opinion applies only to the development proposal as described in the application.

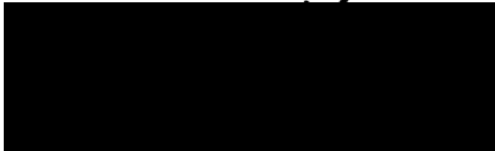
### **OPINION**

Provided the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the following conditions in addition to the mitigation measures contained in the supporting application for an ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.

This opinion is granted subject to the following conditions made under s140 (4)(b) of the Act:

1. All mitigation measures stated in the ESO application must be followed, unless agreed to by the Office of the Conservator.
2. The tree subject of this application will require ongoing inspection by a qualified arborist and structural engineer. The applicant is required to continue consultation with the receiving land custodian of Block 5 Section 248 - the Suburban Land Agency - to confirm who will be responsible for the ongoing management expenses for the life of the tree. Confirmation and details of this agreement are to be provided to the Conservator prior to the tree's removal.
3. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) must be submitted to and endorsed by the Conservator prior to any works commencing. The CEMP must detail the full methodology for moving and re-standing the tree.
4. Access to the site must be granted to Conservation Officers if a random compliance inspection is requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.

Attached is a Statement of Reasons for the decision.



Bren Burkevics  
Conservator of Flora and Fauna

8 September 2025

## STATEMENT OF REASONS REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The proposed development is a proposal mentioned in Schedule 1 of the *Planning (General) Regulation 2023* – requiring environmental impact statement, being:

*Part 1.2, item 16 - proposal that is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact on 1 or more of the following:*

- (a) a critically endangered species;*
- (b) an endangered species;*
- (c) a vulnerable species;*
- (d) a conservation dependent species;*
- (e) a regionally threatened species;*
- (f) a regionally conservation dependent species;*
- (g) a provisionally listed threatened species;*
- (h) a listed migratory species;*
- (i) a threatened ecological community;*
- (j) a protected native species;*
- (k) a Ramsar wetland;*
- (l) any other protected matter*

This proposal requires the removal of a remnant hollow bearing *Eucalyptus blakelyi* (Blakely's Red Gum).

Hollow-bearing Trees (HBT) are known to provide breeding habitat for a wide range of arboreal/avifaunal species, and of note for the northern ACT region, may include the Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*), a locally and federally listed threatened species.

*Part 1.2, item 25 - proposal that is likely to result in a key threatening process under the Nature Conservation Act 2014*

The proposal involves the removal and re-standing of a remnant *Eucalyptus blakelyi* (Blakely's Red Gum) tree.

The proponent is seeking an environmental significance opinion to remove the requirement for an environmental impact statement on the grounds that the proposal is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact and has applied to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for an opinion to that effect.

### **Meaning of *significant* adverse environmental impact**

An adverse environmental impact is ***significant*** if—

- (a) the environmental function, system, value or entity that might be adversely impacted by a proposed development is significant; or

- (b) the cumulative or incremental effect of a proposed development might contribute to a substantial adverse impact on an environmental function, system, value or entity.

In deciding whether an adverse environmental impact is *significant*, the following matters must be taken into account:

- (a) the kind, size, frequency, intensity, scope and length of time of the impact;
- (b) the sensitivity, resilience and rarity of the environmental function, system, value or entity likely to be affected.

In deciding whether a development proposal is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact it does not matter whether the adverse environmental impact is likely to occur on the site of the development or elsewhere.

It has been determined that the proposal is unlikely to have a significant environmental impact, based on the documentation submitted, known values of the site, and provided the works and ongoing management are carried out in accordance with the conditions attached to this ESO.

### **Project description**

The proposal will involve the removal of a large hollow bearing remnant tree from Block 2, Section 11 Gungahlin, to a site located 200m away on Block 5, Section 248.

The proposed method as described in the ESO application involves three steps for removal and re-standing. Step one is an initial climb of the tree to inspect hollows and ensure any fauna residing in hollows are safely moved on prior to its removal. Step two is the pruning of outer small branches and stems to assist in balancing the tree, making it manageable for transport and preventing any further unplanned breakages. The tree will then be strapped and held by a 50-tonne crane ready for cutting. The final step is the cutting of the tree as close to ground level as possible, using standard tree cutting methods. The trunk will be cut to create flat surfaces of solid wood to assist with its installation at the new location. Once cut, the tree will be placed on a truck bed and transported to the re-standing site.

A large pit measuring 20-25m<sup>2</sup> will be excavated at Block 5, Section 248, and the tree placed in the pit with a concrete slab poured around it. Some additional bracing using steel posts may also be required to provide additional support. The tree will be braced and supported by multiple rods bolted to the trunk, dependent on the integrity of the timber. A steel belt may be wrapped around the trunk and attached to rods concreted in the ground, as required. This method is preferable as the rods essentially act as stirrups, keeping the base of the tree elevated and reducing potential rot and decay of the trunk.

### **Documentation Submitted**

- PATH CO ESO Report
- Letters of Authorisation
- Form 1M.

### **Natural conservation values present**

#### REMOVAL SITE (Block 2, Section 11 Gungahlin)

The site where the tree is currently situated is characterised as a highly modified derived grassland that would have historically supported an open grassy woodland prior to settlement of the area, including the more recent development of the Gungahlin Town Centre. It is noted the application mentions this tree was approved for removal under the Gungahlin town Centre EDP DA20160671 however, there was a discrepancy around the labelling of this tree on the plans, and as such the applicant will need to apply for approval to remove this tree under a new DA. The large Blakely's Red Gum tree that is the subject of this application is the only remaining established tree on the block, with some small (<50cm tall) regrowth saplings observed to occur near the tree's base. The remainder of the site is an open exotic dominant grassland. A small number of common native species were observed, with most of the site dominated by exotic species such as Couch, Phalaris, African Lovegrass, Serrated Tussock, St Johns Wort, Capeweed and Blackberry.

The site has a low level of vegetation structural complexity and is generally devoid of terrestrial fauna habitat values, with a noted absence of any structural features such as fallen logs, rocky outcrops and dens/burrows. Fauna values across the block are limited to arboreal breeding and roosting habitat provided by the solitary large HBT within the site. The site has been fenced with exclusion fencing for several years, indicating fauna movement across the site is limited to a few arboreal species and birds. This tree supports numerous hollows on both the mid-trunk and larger limbs, and includes a mix of hollow entrance sizes from small (<10cm diameter) to large (20-30cm diameter) openings. The fauna observed to be using this tree during the four separate (dawn and dusk/nocturnal) surveys included a moderate number of mostly common bird species, and a single pair of Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*) (NC Act and EPBC Act vulnerable-listed), observed briefly in the tree canopy at dusk.

#### RECEIVING SITE (Block 5, Section 248)

The receiving site for the tree's relocation is comprised mainly of a grassy woodland, dominated by Blakely's Red Gum, with some Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) and Apple Box (*E. bridgesiana*). The woodland structure includes numerous large mature trees of mixed age including some naturally regenerating young saplings. The groundcover vegetation in this general area was observed to support some native species, including Tall Speargrass (*Austrostipa bigeniculata*), Corkscrew Grass (*A. scabra*), and Redgrass (*Bothriochloa macra*) as well as a small amount of Tufted Bluebell

(*Wahlenbergia ssp.*) and Sheep's Burr (*Acaena ovina*). Given these values, the patch of woodland would form part of a low condition example of the ACT-listed threatened Box Gum Grassy Woodlands (BGGW) on the basis that there is evidence of natural regeneration and the presence of 20 mature native trees per hectare. To note, this patch only extends as far as the area of tree cover and does not include the whole block.

The overall groundcover composition is comprised of mainly exotic species, including Couch, African Lovegrass, Phalaris, *Bromus sp.*, Goosegrass, Clover, Saint John's Wort, Ribwort Plantain, Sheep's Sorrel, as well as some Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) and Spear Thistle. The small open grassland area in the northwestern margins of the block where the HBT is proposed to be relocated to was observed to be dominated mostly by Couch, Phalaris, Tall Speargrass, with some African Lovegrass and Corkscrew Grass.

The fauna values of Block 5 include some moderate-high quality arboreal breeding and roosting habitat provided by existing hollow bearing trees onsite. The remainder of the site supports minimal suitable terrestrial fauna habitat values, with only a small amount of fallen timber observed within the site and a general absence of other structural features, such as rocky outcrops and dens/burrows, and only moderate-low level of structural complexity of the understorey vegetation.

### **Potentially Significant Environmental Impacts**

The vegetation at the removal site is highly modified, consisting of a single native tree (the subject HBT), with an exotic-dominant groundcover. Accordingly, the vegetation at this site is not regarded as forming part of any identifiable threatened woodland or grassland ecological community and is unlikely to support any listed threatened flora species. The block is not contributing to, or maintaining, ecological connectivity. The site has been fenced off for several years with exclusion fencing and is bordered on all sides by existing roads, including the light rail line on Hibberson Street along the southern block boundary. The site also sits within the outer margins of the Gungahlin Town Centre, comprising high-density buildings.

Superb Parrot was observed visiting the site and may use the tree for occasional stop off foraging, however it is not thought likely they would use this tree for breeding purposes due to: competition with a number of common species using the hollows, including Brushtail Possum and Sulphur Crested Cockatoo; the level of traffic, given its close proximity to urban areas; and lack of treed connectivity in the broader landscape. Given the tree is not supporting breeding habitat for any vulnerable or threatened species and will be re-stood to maintain its habitat value for common native species, its removal is not considered likely to result in a significant impact to threatened species, or significantly contribute to the loss of mature native trees and a lack of recruitment key threatening process.

The receiving site contains an area classified as low-quality BGGW and a number of existing mature native trees. Impacts to both values are avoided by the locating the tree in the NW corner of the block, a sufficient distance from both values.

Overall, the largest risk of the project is to the tree itself and the loss of habitat in the way of hollows if the re-standing is not successful. The applicant has engaged an engineer with experience in re-standing trees and considerable thought has been given to the works methods. It is noted the methods used for attaching steel rods to keep the tree slightly elevated will assist in preventing the tree trunk from decaying over time.

While it is understood the tree will die as a result of it being cut down and re-stood, it will continue to offer important habitat features with its multiple hollows. The tree is also likely to be able to be accessed by a larger number of terrestrial fauna than it does in its current fenced in location. The tree will require ongoing regular inspection to ensure it is stable and remains standing. A condition of this ESO ensures the costs of ongoing management and maintenance are confirmed prior to removal of the tree.

1. All mitigation measures stated in the ESO application must be followed, unless agreed to by the Office of the Conservator.
2. The tree subject of this application will require ongoing inspection by a qualified arborist and structural engineer. The applicant is required to continue consultation with the receiving land custodian of Block 5 Section 248 - the Suburban Land Agency - to confirm who will be responsible for the ongoing management expenses for the life of the tree. Confirmation and details of this agreement are to be provided to the Conservator prior to the tree's removal.
3. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) must be submitted to and endorsed by the Conservator prior to any works commencing. The CEMP must detail the full methodology for moving and re-standing the tree.
4. Access to the site must be granted to Conservation Officers if a random compliance inspection is requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.

It has been determined that if the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the above conditions attached to the ESO in addition to the mitigation measures

contained in the supporting application for an ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.