

Sample consultant brief for an area-wide planning study

In many cases councils and developers will engage consultants to undertake studies that inform or support planning decisions. For appropriate, meaningful information to be generated, it is essential that the consultants are adequately briefed.

This section provides a sample consultant brief that will be useful in many situations where specialist flora and fauna consultants need to be engaged. In most cases the sample brief will require modification to meet individual circumstances and inclusion of standard brief requirements. The focus of the brief should be to ensure that all information arising out of the study can be usefully applied in planning and related decision-making.

Sample consultant brief for flora & fauna study

1 Introduction & background

The land to be investigated has vegetation and fauna values which require assessment prior to the preparation of a draft local environmental plan which may allow for the land to be used for other purposes. The objective of the study is to develop an approach to facilitate assessment and integration of biodiversity conservation issues throughout the planning process.

Section 34A(2) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* requires councils to consult with the Director-General of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) prior to preparing an environmental study or draft local environmental plan if critical habitat or threatened species, populations or ecological communities, or their habitats, will or may be affected by the environmental study or draft plan. The methods outlined in the report are to provide the basis of the matters required by NPWS to be considered in the preparation of environmental studies and draft local environmental plans. The information can also be applied to the preparation of draft development control plans and other strategic planning projects and may also assist in streamlining future consultation processes with the NPWS in relation to draft plans and development proposals.

The *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* requires that the impacts of development proposals must be considered in the determination of development proposals and any actions likely to significantly affect threatened species require the preparation of a species impact statement. The methods for this study will form the basis for the council's assessment of threatened species issues at the various stages of the development process.

Different levels of survey and analysis are required at different stages and the general reconnaissance study undertaken in accordance with this brief will not substitute for a detailed species impact statement if it is found that this is required at a later stage in connection with a specific development application.

2 Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- establish with a reasonable degree of certainty the species occurring and likely to occur, and to identify field survey requirements for important species
- undertake targeted field surveys for important species such as listed threatened species likely to occur

- undertake suitable mapping of vegetation communities and fauna habitat to support the other objectives.

3 Tasks

Different levels of analysis are required to be undertaken as shown in the following table. This study is to undertake context and framework biodiversity studies for the purpose of the preparation of a local environmental plan and development control plan. These context and framework studies provide the basis for further work if this is found to be necessary.

Analysis required for biodiversity studies

Type of analysis	Survey required	Development stage
Context	Desktop reconnaissance Field reconnaissance	Environmental study, LEP and DCP
Framework	Site survey	Environmental study, LEP and DCP
Actions	DA survey (eg for preparation of a species impact statement)	Development application

Study outputs should be specified. For most biodiversity studies this must specify at least the following:

- mapping scale
- presentation scale
- digital and hard copy mapping requirements
- form of data collection and presentation
- list of species to be targeted for review and field survey.

4 Selection of consultant

Specific skills will be required for different aspects of the study. For example, the study requires skills in vegetation mapping, habitat assessment and identification of habitat corridors and vegetation links, and specialist skills are required for the assessment of threatened species that are likely to occur on the land. In addition, planning and development skills are necessary to integrate the scientific work with planning strategies, instruments and guidelines.

5 Methodology

The methods to be applied include the following stages:

1. Regional context and species inventory
2. Inventory of site scale biodiversity information
3. Site condition assessment
4. Site context assessment (relationships, corridor links, threats, changes and review of importance).

6 Planning and management review

Following these steps, biodiversity issues are able to be incorporated in decision making processes. Decisions can then be made in relation to appropriate planning and management actions (such as local environmental plan provisions and reservation of land for conservation purposes) and therefore what subsequent approaches should be applied to development assessment.

The scope of biodiversity to be surveyed or assessed is outlined in the following table.

Biodiversity categories to be surveyed or assessed

Group/ category	Purpose of study	Method	Presentation of results
Terrestrial fauna species	To determine presence/absence of species of amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles	literature review and field checking	Species list
Terrestrial invertebrate species	To undertake general review and determine presence of important species	literature review and field checking	List of identified important species only and general review of results. A number of species of invertebrates are listed of conservation importance.
Aquatic fauna species	To determine presence/absence of species of fish and aquatic invertebrates	literature review and field checking	Species list for fish, and review of invertebrates. (Note that aquatic species are under the jurisdiction of the NSW Fisheries)
Plant species	To determine species presence	Literature review and field checking	Preparation of site species lists (including native and introduced plants)
Plant communities	To determine characteristics (especially structure and floristics) and condition	Based on previous mapping and assessment	Map of communities
Fauna habitat	To determine likelihood of species occurrence	Field habitat assessment	Identification of fauna habitat types (may relate to plant community map)
Threatened species	To determine presence and likelihood. Where present to estimate population and identify threats.	Targeted field survey	Review of issues with reference to relevant recovery plans.
Endangered ecological communities	To confirm presence/absence	Mapping and site survey (structure and floristics)	Map of communities.
Bushland/Native vegetation	To determine what is bushland for purposes of SEPP 19, or native vegetation for the purposes of the NVC Act	Mapping of boundary	Map of bushland or native vegetation showing cadastral boundaries

Note that the information referred to in the table relates to initial survey for identification purposes for environmental study. Further targeted surveys may be required to accompany specific development applications or for the purpose of determination of conservation reserves or assessment and protection of corridor links.

Specific requirements for each of the stages in the methodology are shown in the following table, and includes suggestions for mapping scales for urban situations.

Summary of biodiversity study methods

Step	Purpose	Output	Comments
Literature review	Determination of known information for the general area to provide framework for assessment	Summary of results of past studies, review of context, list of references	Desirable in all situations
Regional context and species inventory	To summarise the relationship of the site to adjoining land and in terms of regional conservation trends and issues.	Should provide a written summary of context, map identifying regional biodiversity corridor context, list of likely threatened species that may occur on the site.	Reference is to be made to other elements indicative of the context of biodiversity, specifically geology, soils and landform.
Mapping of vegetation communities and identification of areas requiring field assessment	To identify priority areas for field survey having regard to regional context	Air photo interpretation and mapping of vegetation communities using appropriate scale photos. Identification of location of field surveys on map at 1:25,000 scale, both high priority areas and other survey areas	Should identify all priority areas for detailed field survey. The area to be surveyed in detail should be the immediate study area plus all land within 500 metres. Accuracy of vegetation community mapping should be at 1:4,000 scale for urban areas and 1:25,000 scale for rural areas
Inventory of site scale biodiversity information	Identification of species on sites, especially threatened species	Mapping showing location of records of important species.	Accuracy of mapping should be at 1:4,000 scale for urban areas. Threatened plant species are to be mapped on this scale.

Site condition assessment	Site condition indicates threats facing the site biodiversity and is a key element in determining the importance of species or communities and whether land should be reserved or other planning controls should be applied.	Mapping of vegetation communities in good condition.	Site condition assessments can be undertaken at the same time as inventory surveys. Condition provides a good indication of past impacts on biodiversity and the directions of change.
Summary of issues	Identification of issues affecting the management of biodiversity on the site	Summary table of key issues and assessment of significance. Should include an assessment of accuracy of results and level of certainty of conclusions.	Examples of issues are the impact of development, cultural significance, reservation of sites, survival of sites and protection of representative samples
Mapping	To map development constraints relating to biodiversity	1:4,000 scale map showing: 1. Where development may occur without further site survey 2. Significant areas where no development should occur or of high sensitivity requiring further surveys or a species impact statement 3. Areas of high conservation significance which could be reserved and/or managed for biodiversity conservation	Mapping should be in accordance with these 3 categories to facilitate future planning responses. The minimum area of mapping of vegetation communities is to be 50 m X 50 m and the locations of all threatened species are to be mapped at an accuracy of 20 metres if possible.
Planning and management review	Relates to analysis and interpretation of data. Address question of whether the flora and fauna studies will be in sufficient detail to avoid developers needing to undertake further studies at the DA stage.	Recommended matters to be included in future LEPs and DCPS	Important step for integrating biodiversity issues in development decision-making processes
Peer review	To provide for independent review of field survey results and conclusions.	Review report to be made to study steering committee by an independent authority.	This stage may often not be possible within the budgetary and time constraints.

7 Data sources

This section should briefly identify regional data that is available, aerial photographs, maps, published reports and the like.

There should also be liaison with local community groups, especially environmental groups to ascertain availability of records that may relate to native species occurring on the land.

8 Project management

Management issues that could be covered in the study brief include:

- Access to land to enable field survey.
- Data ownership and access.
- Project management.
- Provision for community involvement in the process of field survey and data collection and in presentation of the study results.
- Liaison with relevant government agencies including NPWS and NSW Fisheries and adjoining local government councils.
- Requirements for engagement of sub consultants. For example, targeted threatened species surveys could be required to be undertaken only by persons with a demonstrated history and knowledge of the species and the techniques used are to be documented in the report.
- Standard council brief requirements.

9 Report and presentation

Any requirements for the presentation of the report should be specified in the brief, including reporting requirements and distribution of final documentation.

10 Budget

This section must specify the budget for the project and expected completion dates.

11 General

Additional general background information or standard council brief requirements should be specified in the brief.