

Department of Defence
Annual Environmental Compliance Report 2020

EPBC Act Approval 2004/1458
Urban Operations Training Facility (UOTF)
Mount Bunday Training Area (MBTA), Darwin, NT

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Document Version Control

Version	Date	Approved by	Details / Reason for Change
1	16 Oct 2020	M. Grierson	draft for approval holder
2	27 Nov 2020	Taloni/Grierson	feedback to proponents
3	30 Nov 2020	K.Taloni	consolidate evidence/comments
4	1 Dec 2020	K.Taloni	final for delegate signature

Declaration of Accuracy

In making this declaration, I am aware that sections 490 and 491 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) (EPBC Act) make it an offence in certain circumstances to knowingly provide false or misleading information or documents. The offence is punishable on conviction by imprisonment or a fine, or both. I declare that all the information and documentation supporting this compliance report is true and correct in every particular. I am authorised to bind the approval holder to this declaration and that I have no knowledge of that authorisation being revoked at the time of making this declaration.

Signed



Full name (please print)

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Department of Defence
ABN 68706814312

Date

1 December 2020

1. Description of Activities

The approved action involved the construction and operation of an Urban Operations Training Facility (UOTF) at Defence's Mount Bunday Training Area (MBTA) in the Northern Territory to allow military training in an urban environment.

The project proposed the construction of an urban village setting, including a Central Business District (CBD), shanty towns, a community area, a residential area, an industrial area and open spaces. The original proposed schedule was for the immediate construction of the CBD and access roads (Stage 1), with additional stages to be constructed later as required.

The UOTF was booked by user units on 29 separate occasions between December 2019 and 27 November 2020. Of these bookings, 12 were booked specifically for military purposes, and the remaining 17 bookings were all-areas bookings and sectors, which included the UOTF. The UOTF was booked for contractor activities 15 times, including one booking specifically for the UOTF, with the remaining 14 booked for all-areas and sector that includes the UOTF.

Range Control Officers undertook post activity inspections around general repair, maintenance and replacement issues, and outcomes after training activities. No environmental incidents were reported for the training period between December 2019 and 27 November 2020.

The construction and operation of the Urban Operations Training Facility at Mount Bunday Training Area in the Northern Territory was approved under the EPBC Act subject to conditions of approval issued by the Department of the Environment and Energy (DoEE) (now Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment (DAWE)) on 16 December 2005.

Condition 9 of the EPBC approval requires the submission of a certificate stating that Defence has complied with the conditions of approval, by 1 December of each year. This report provides compliance information for the period December 2019 to 27 November 2020.

2. Conditions of Approval

Table 1 – Compliance Table

Condition Number	Condition	Is the project compliant with this condition?	Evidence / Comment
1	The person taking the action must submit to the Minister for approval, at least two months prior to construction, a revised Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to manage the impacts of the construction activities on the environment. The CEMP must include:	Compliant	The final CEMP was submitted to the Department in January 2006. Construction commenced 10 July 2006 and was completed in July 2007.
1 (a)	No construction activities involving the use of earth moving machinery to be undertaken during the wet season from beginning December to early March;	Compliant	The 2006 CEMP addressed this requirement.
1 (b)	No parking of vehicles in sensitive environments, including water courses and drainage lines;	Compliant	The 2006 CEMP addressed this requirement.
1 (c)	Measures to mitigate impacts on the environment during construction activities, including: i. Erosion of soil from wind and water ii. Revegetation of disturbed areas using endemic grass species	Compliant	The 2006 CEMP addressed this requirement.

1 (d)	Measures to address the occurrence of fire including the following: i. A protocol for reporting occurrences of fire and ii. Steps to be taken to control and extinguish fires	Compliant	The 2006 CEMP addressed this requirement.
-	Construction must not commence before the CEMP is approved. The approved CEMP must be implemented.	Compliant	The 2006 CEMP was implemented during the construction phase. A post construction compliance report was submitted to the Department in September 2008.
2	The person taking the action must submit to the Minister for approval, two months prior to operation, a program to ensure the maintenance of the existing soil, water and vegetation qualities on the UOTF area. The program shall include:	Compliant	The UOTF became operational in August 2007. In August 2007, the then Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts issued interim approval for Defence to proceed with the operation of the UOTF subject to finalisation of the OEMP. The final OEMP (December 2008) addressed maintenance of existing soil, water and vegetation qualities of the UOTF.

2 (a)	Soil, water and vegetation monitoring sites within the UOTF area and water quality monitoring sites within Craig Creek;	Compliant	The 2008 OEMP identified soil and vegetation monitoring sites within the UOTF area and a water monitoring site on an unnamed stream that flows into Craig Creek. Defence are providing an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with this Annual Report, as requested by DAWE. Soil condition and vegetation monitoring occurs at site MBTA07, which is approximately 800 metres south of the UOTF. Additional photographic monitoring points for erosion were identified in the UOTF area. Water quality monitoring occurs at site MBTA WAT-14, which is located on a stream that feeds Craig Creek and upstream of Eastern Road. MBTA07 is incorporated into the NT/K Environmental Monitoring Manual (2008) and Northern Territory 2019-2021 Biodiversity Monitoring Program (2018). MBTA WAT-14 is incorporated into the NT Water Quality Monitoring Manual (2016). In 2019 there was no water available at WAT-14 to be sampled. Surface water, groundwater and sediment quality monitoring occurred at Mt Bunday Training Area in May 2019. Results were compiled within the NT Defence Water Quality Monitoring Report (August 2019). Results were compared to their respective Site-Specific Trigger Values (SSTV) as detailed in the Estate Services – Central and West Northern Territory Water Quality Monitoring Manual (Department of Defence, Rev 7 March 2016), the 2017 monitoring results as well as current relevant guidelines. MBTA WAT 2, 3, 4 and 9 were unable to be accessed to be sampled (due to live firing restrictions). One minor exceedance out of a total of 4 surface water and 4 sediment samples collected was observed. This metal exceedance for copper was consistent with the previous monitoring round with the same level of copper being recorded in 2017. Copper levels have been recorded as consistently exceeding ANZECC guidelines in this location for many years. Recommendations for future monitoring were made within the 2019 monitoring report and will be implemented where appropriate by Defence.
2 (b)	Establishment of baseline indicators for soil, water and vegetation using the information derived from the monitoring sites; and	Compliant	The 2008 OEMP identifies baseline indicators for soil, water, and vegetation monitoring. Six years of data established baseline indicators for soil and vegetation. Water quality monitoring uses ANZECC guidelines as the baseline indicators. Defence are providing an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with this Annual Report, as requested by DAWE.
2 (c)	Monitoring frequencies appropriate for measuring change in the quality of water, soil and vegetation.	Compliant	The 2008 OEMP includes monitoring frequencies for measuring change in water, soil, and vegetation quality. Defence are providing an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with this Annual Report, as requested by DAWE.

3	The person taking the action must submit to the Minister for approval, at least two months prior to operation, a revised Operation Environmental Management Plan (OEMP) to manage environmental impacts of the operational activities in the UOTF area. The OEMP must identify:	Compliant	Interim approval was issued by the Department in August 2007 under the provision that a more detailed OEMP would be submitted. A final OEMP was submitted in December 2008. Defence are providing an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with this Annual Report, as requested by DAWE.
3 (a)	A protocol that outlines the parameters for operational activities that will be permitted during the wet and dry seasons, thresholds for unacceptable environmental impacts resulting from those activities, and strategies or measures to address those impacts;	Compliant	Defence adopts a combination of formal and indicative thresholds to guide the implementation of environmental management strategies at MBTA. This management framework will be applied to the impacts associated with the UOTF as documented in Table 10.2 of the revised OEMP (October 2020) submitted to DAWE with this report. MBTA is closed to user units during the wet season. MBTA will usually close in early December and reopen when ground conditions are suitable. Higher ground is typically suited for certain activities by April / May. Training Area Standing Orders (TASOs) have replaced range standing orders and the TASOs detail operational activities permitted at the UOTF. TASOs also outline the process for booking the UOTF which includes a march out inspection by the Range Control Officer (RCO) and / or Environment Officer (EO). Any unacceptable environmental impacts are dealt with as an environmental incident and user units repair or pay for repair of any damage. No unacceptable environmental impacts were reported for 2020.
3 (b)	Human waste management for the different scales of training activities (e.g. from platoon to battalion level and above); and	Compliant	Requirements addressed in 2008 OEMP. Port-a-loos are utilised on MBTA, along with a number of composting toilets (two located at the UOTF) situated in key locations to reduce the requirement for field drop toilets or latrines. If drop toilets are required locations must be approved by Range Control. Defence are providing an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with this Annual Report, as requested by DAWE.
3 (c)	Assembly areas for vehicles which must be located so as not to damage sensitive environments, including watercourses and drainage lines.	Compliant	Vehicles only use formed roads unless approval is granted by RCO and EO. This requirement is stipulated in TASOs and the 2008 OEMP (Sections 3.6 and 4.6). A post training season aerial survey conducted in November 2017 did not detect any significant changes in vegetation.
-	Operations must not commence before the OEMP is approved. The approved OEMP must be implemented.	Compliant	Interim approval was issued by the Department in August 2007 under the provision that a more detailed OEMP would be submitted. A final OEMP was submitted in December 2008.

4	The person taking the action must revise the Mount Bunday Training Area Environmental Management Plan within 2 years and the Plan must include:	Compliant	The MBTA Heritage Environmental Management Plan (HEMP), was last updated in 2010 to provide guidance on the management of heritage and environment at MBTA and incorporate several developments and changes in use including: - UOTF construction; - new military platforms (tanks, helicopters etc.); and - findings and recommendations from natural and cultural heritage studies, audit and inspection reports, and monitoring reports prepared since 2006.
4 (a)	The OEMP approved under paragraph 3;	Compliant	The current HEMP incorporates the 2008 OEMP. Defence are providing an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with this Annual Report, as requested by DAWE.
4 (b)	The monitoring program to be developed and approved under paragraph 2 including the baseline indicators for the quality of the natural environment;	Compliant	Monitoring requirements listed in the 2008 OEMP are included as management actions in the user guides of the HEMP. Further land condition monitoring which was programmed for 2020 as per the Northern Territory Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy and Program (2018) did not occur because the Defence contractor identified issues with the program and had to re-prioritise of two other sites. It is planned to review the program and make improvements when the Defence national land management manual is finalised, which is likely to be released in 2021.
4 (c)	A program of measures to respond to and mitigate adverse impacts as a result of the use of the UOTF area;	Compliant	The program consists of the current HEMP and the OEMP, which refers to the requirements to implement RSOs (now TASOs) to respond to and mitigate potential impacts as a result of the use of the UOTF. Thresholds and management action interventions are detailed in the 2008 OEMP and the HEMP. Chapter 10.6 and Table 10.2 of the revised OEMP (October 2020) submitted with this report for DAWE approval, contain information on thresholds for potential impacts and management interventions. There were no environmental impacts reported as a result of the use of the UOTF area for the period between December 2019 and November 2020 inclusive.
4 (d)	Actions to establish the rate of sustainable bore water extraction, and monitoring to ensure usage does not exceed that rate;	Compliant	Requirement is addressed in current HEMP. Any extraction or usage of bore water in the area is minimal. One bore is located near the UOTF, with an associated water storage tank. During the dry season, bore water is used to fill a small dam near the UOTF for firefighting purposes, if required. The bore is also used to fill flushing tanks for the two toilets at the UOTF facility.

4 (e)	Annual monitoring of the impact of controlled burns and wildfire on different vegetation communities in the Mount Bunder Training Area and a fire management regime that implements appropriate fire regimes for each vegetation community identified in the Commonwealth Heritage values;	Non-compliant	The HEMP includes the requirements for managing and monitoring fire regimes at MBTA. These requirements are implemented via regional bushfire management plans and the site specific MBTA bushfire management plan. The MBTA Bushfire Management Plan (2018) was developed to guide the implementation of the fire program. This plan considers sensitive habitats and vegetation types. Mosaic burn targets are set for areas accordingly. The program's burn methodology involves early dry and wet season burns to minimise adverse impacts to vegetation. During 2018, MBTA fuel load assessments were done in accordance with the BMP. A late wet season, cool-burn was conducted in the asset protection zone surrounding the UOTF. Visual inspections were performed to ensure the burn achieved the planned outcome. Three late season bushfires were recorded at MBTA, the UOTF area was not affected by late dry season fires. Defence has issued Estate Maintenance and Operational Services (EMOS) contractors a non-conformance notice regarding Bushfire Mitigation Works at MBTA in 2020. EMOS did not comply with the Bushfire Management Plan and over burned MBTA. Bushfire Severity has not yet been calculated. It was reported as a bushfire incident via TASMIS. To address and prevent re-occurrence Defence: 1. Has increased remote surveillance via fine scale resolution fire scar satellite imagery at MBTA as increased assurance over contractor performance; 2. Taken steps to improve Bushfire Mitigation Works planning by working with the EMOS to improve veracity of the Bushfire Mitigation Works. Defence will also update the site level Bushfire management Plan in collaboration with other stakeholders including neighbours and Bushfires NT; and 3. Defence will monitor, noting upcoming change to monitoring via the Land Management Manual policy.
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4 (f)	The identification of sensitive areas, habitats and Commonwealth Heritage values of the MBTA and measures to protect those environments including identifying 'no go' areas.	Compliant	Sensitive areas, habitats and heritage values identified in MBTA HEMP (2010). 'No-Go' areas are identified on Range Control maps, communicated in user range briefs and conditioned in RSOs. Revised core habitat maps were produced for MBTA in April 2016 to inform threatened species surveys. Areas of <i>Eucalyptus tintinnans</i> and <i>Eucalyptus dichromophloia</i> (potential Gouldian Finch breeding habitat) were mapped adjacent to the UOTF. Gouldian Finch, Partridge Pigeon and Northern Quoll targeted surveys were undertaken in 2017. The MBTA Gouldian Finch Threatened species management plan (TSMP) was issued in July 2018. The NT biodiversity monitoring program (2018) recommends targeted actions and outcomes for the survey of partridge pigeon, Gouldian finch, northern quoll and yellow-snouted Gecko (YSG). YSG had a desktop review completed in July 2018 and YSG TSMP reviewed and re-issued in July 2018. No TSMP is recommended for northern quolls at this stage. Routine environmental monitoring to include active herpetofauna searches for YSG. Waterhole counts for Gouldian finch to be undertaken every 3 years in mid/late dry season. Waterhole to be include in MBWH4 (border of Jabiru/Craig Ck Sectors) in waterhole count. A restricted area/no-go zone may be considered, including for MBWH4.
5	The person taking the action must prepare and submit for the Minister's approval a plan to address the decommissioning and rehabilitation of UOTF area. The plan must be submitted 12 months prior to decommissioning commencing. The plan must address:	Not Applicable	There are no plans to decommission the facility. The following conditions are not relevant at this point in time.
5 (a)	The timeframe and milestones for decommissioning;	Not Applicable	
5 (b)	Criteria to determine when decommissioning works will cease or be suspended during wet periods;	Not Applicable	
5 (c)	Methods used to decommission the UOTF;	Not Applicable	
5 (d)	Measures to control erosion and sedimentation of watercourses;	Not Applicable	
5 (e)	Controls to prevent the spread of weeds and pathogens; and	Not Applicable	

5 (f)	Rehabilitation of the UOTF area.	Not Applicable	
-	Decommissioning cannot commence until the plan is approved. The approved plan must be implemented.	Not Applicable	
6	The person taking the action must provide the Minister with a report detailing compliance with the plan required under paragraph 5 within three months of completion of decommissioning	Not Applicable	
7	If the person taking the action wishes to carry out any activity otherwise than in accordance with a program or plan referred to in paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 the person taking the action should submit for the Minister's approval a revised version of any such program or plan. If the Minister approves any revised program or plan so submitted, the person taking the action must implement the program or plan instead of the program or plan as originally approved.	Compliant	

8	If the Minister believes that it is necessary or desirable for the better protection of the environment to do so, the Minister may request the person taking the action to make specific revisions to a program or plan approved pursuant to paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, and to submit the revised program or plan for the Minister's approval. The person taking the action must comply with any such request. If the Minister approves any revised program or plan pursuant to this condition, the person taking the action must implement the program or plan instead of the program or plan as originally approved.		DAWE requested Defence to revise the currently dated Operational Environmental Management Plan (December 2008) to include up-to-date site information and current practices. Defence are providing an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with this Annual Report, as requested by DAWE. The revised OEMP aligns monitoring activities at the UOTF with Defence's Northern Territory Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy and program (2018) and MBTA management plans:	
9	On 1 December each year, the person taking the action must provide a certificate stating that the person taking the action has complied with the conditions of approval.	Compliant	This report details Defence compliance with the conditions of approval for the year up to 27 November 2020.	
10	If, at any time after five years from the date of this approval, the Minister notifies the person taking the action in writing that the Minister is not satisfied that there has been substantial commencement of construction of the UOTF, construction must not thereafter commence.	Not Applicable	The Action commenced in 2006.	

3. Correcting Non-Compliances

A non-compliance against condition 4(e) occurred for the approved action. This non-conformance was identified using Defence's standard procedures, including those in the OEMP/HEMP for the UOTF.

The Estate Maintenance and Operational Services (EMOS) contractors did not comply with the Bushfire Management Plan and over burned MBTA. Bushfire Severity has not yet been calculated. It was reported as a bushfire incident via TASMIS. Defence issued the EMOS contractor with a non-conformance notice regarding Bushfire Mitigation Works at MBTA in 2020.

To address and prevent re-occurrence Defence:

1. Has increased remote surveillance via fine scale resolution fire scar satellite imagery at MBTA as increased assurance over contractor performance;
2. Taken steps to improve Bushfire Mitigation Works planning by working with the EMOS to improve veracity of the Bushfire Mitigation Works. Defence will also update the site level Bushfire management Plan in collaboration with other stakeholders including neighbours and Bushfires NT; and
3. Defence will monitor, noting upcoming change to monitoring via the Land Management Manual policy.

4. New Environmental Risks

There were no new environmental risks observed for the approved action.