

Department of Defence
Annual Environmental Compliance Report 2023

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
01	23 Nov 23	Kate Smith	Prepare draft
02	01 Dec 23	Helen O'Shaughnessy	Approve final report

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 I have no knowledge of that authorisation being revoked at the time of making this declaration.

Signed

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Date	1 December 2023

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, with additional stages to be constructed later as required. As at November 2023, only the first stage, the CBD and access roads (Stage 1), has been constructed.

The construction and operation of the Urban Operations Training Facility at the MBTA in the Northern Territory was approved under the EPBC Act subject to conditions of approval issued by the (now) Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) on 16 December 2005.

Condition 9 of the EPBC Act approval requires the submission of a certificate stating that Defence has complied with the conditions of approval by 1 December of each year. This annual compliance report provides compliance information for the period 26 November 2022 to 22 November 2023.

Summary of usage 2022/23 reporting period

The UOTF was booked by user units on 11 separate occasions between 26 November 2022 and 22 November 2023. Of these bookings, 8 were booked specifically for military purposes, whilst the remaining 3 bookings were 'all areas' bookings and sectors that included the UOTF. The UOTF was booked for contractor activities 3 times, comprising no bookings specifically for the UOTF, with all 3 bookings for 'all areas' and sectors that includes the UOTF.

Range Control Officers undertook post activity inspections around general repair, maintenance, and replacement issues and outcomes after training activity and no environmental incidents were reported for the 26 November 2022 to 22 November 2023 training period.

2. Conditions of Approval

Table 1 – Compliance Table

Condition Number	Condition	Is the project compliant with this condition?	Evidence / Comments
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 approved CEMP addressed this requirement.
1 (b)	No parking of vehicles in sensitive environments, including water courses and drainage lines;	Compliant	The approved 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 approved 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 approved 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 Operation Environmental Management Plan (OEMP). The 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	Defence provided an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with the 2020 Annual Report. Defence is planning to revise the OEMP for reconsideration. The OEMP identified soil and vegetation monitoring sites within the UOTF area, and a surface water monitoring sites on an unnamed stream that flows into Craig Creek. Soil condition and vegetation monitoring occurs at site MBTA07, which is approximately 800 metres south of the UOTF. No additional photographic monitoring points for erosion were added within the UOTF area in 2023. No changes were detected in the soil condition, vegetation monitoring process or site changes, in this reporting period. Surface 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 the Northern Territory. 2019-2021 Biodiversity Monitoring Program (2018). Currently no changes are required to the Manual. A Water Quality Monitoring Plan – NT is under development. Surface water quality and sediment monitoring occurred at MBTA in March 2023. A comparative analysis of surface water was conducted with previous results with no notable differences with the exception of zinc levels at SW104 (MBTA WAT 8), which decreased to below the ANZG guidelines. The following monitoring samples occurred at: SW100 (MBTA WAT 2), SW101 (MBTA WAT3), SW102 (MBTA WAT 4), SW103 (MBTA WAT 7), SW104 (MBTA WAT 8), SW105 (MBTA WAT 9), SW106 (MBTA WAT 11), SW108 (MBTA WAT 13) and SW109 (MBTA WAT 14) MBTA WAT 2, 3, 4 and 9. No further water quality results post the annual water quality monitoring program are available. No exceedances were detected for heavy metals at WAT14. No exceedances of zinc and/or iron were detected at SW104 (WAT 8) and SW105 (WAT 9). Recommendations for future monitoring were made within the 2022-23 monitoring report and will be implemented by Defence.
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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 provided an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with the 2020 Report, as requested by DCCEEW. Defence is planning to revise the OEMP.
2 (c)	Monitoring frequencies appropriate for measuring change in the quality of water, soil and vegetation.	Compliant	The approved OEMP includes monitoring frequencies for measuring change in water, soil, and vegetation quality. Defence provided an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with the 2020 Report, as requested by DCCEEW. Defence is planning to revise the OEMP.
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 provided an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with the 2020 Report, as requested by DCCEEW. Defence is planning to revise the OEMP.

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 draft revised OEMP (October 2020) submitted previously to DCCEEW and currently being finalised by Defence. 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 Environmental Sustainment Manager (ESM). 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 have been reported to date.
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 approved and revised 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 and a SEG Environment & Sustainability Manager/Officer (ESM/ESO). Defence provided an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with the 2020 Report, as requested by DCCEEW. Defence is planning to revise the OEMP.
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 ESM. This requirement is stipulated in TASOs and OEMP (Sections 3.6 and 4.6).
-	Operations must not commence before the OEMP is approved. The approved OEMP must be implemented.	Compliant	In 2008, an OEMP was approved by the now DCCEEW. Defence provided an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with the 2020 Report, as requested by DCCEEW. Defence is planning to revise the OEMP.

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. Defence is planning to update the HEMP.
4 (a)	The OEMP approved under paragraph 3;	Compliant	The current HEMP incorporates the 2008 OEMP. Defence provided an initial draft of the revised OEMP (October 2020) with the 2020 Report, as requested by DCCEEW. Defence is planning to revise the OEMP.
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. The NT Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy is now under review as the Defence Landscape Management Manual has been finalised.
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 approved HEMP and the OEMP, which refers to the requirements to implement 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 OEMP and the HEMP. Chapter 10.6 and Table 10.2 of the revised OEMP (October 2020) submitted in 2020 to DCCEEW, contain information on thresholds for potential impacts and management interventions. There were no environmental impacts reported for the period between 26 November 2022 and 22 November 2023 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 approved HEMP. Extraction and usage of bore water in the area is minimal. One bore is located near the UOTF, with 2 associated water storage tanks (1 potable, 1 non-potable). During the dry season, bore water is used to fill a small dam near the UOTF for firefighting purposes. The bore is also used to fill flushing tanks for the two toilets at the UOTF facility. No changes to water bore usage were detected during the reporting period.
4 (e)	Annual monitoring of the impact of controlled burns and wildfire on different vegetation communities in the Mount Bunday Training Area and a fire management regime that implements appropriate fire regimes for each vegetation community identified in the Commonwealth Heritage values;	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. No updates were made in 2022. This plan considers sensitive habitats and vegetation types. Mosaic burn targets are set for areas accordingly. The plan's burn methodology involves early dry and wet season burns to minimise adverse impacts to vegetation. In 2023 there were no non-conformances. To prevent non-compliances, over recent years Defence has • Increased remote surveillance via fine scale resolution fire scar satellite imagery at MBTA as increased assurance over contractor performance; • Taken steps to improve Bushfire Mitigation Works planning by working with the EMOS to improve veracity of the Bushfire Mitigation Works. Defence is planning to update the site level BMP in collaboration with other stakeholders including neighbours and Bushfires NT. • Undertaken to monitor in accordance with the Defence Land Management Manual policy.

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 approved MBTA HEMP (2010). 'No-Go' areas are identified on Range Control maps, communicated in user range briefs and conditioned in TASOs. Revised core habitat maps were produced for MBTA in April 2016 to inform threatened species surveys. To date, no further reviews of the habitat maps have been done. Areas of <i>Eucalyptus tintinnans</i> and <i>Eucalyptus dichromophloia</i> (potential Gouldian Finch breeding habitat) were previously mapped adjacent to the UOTF. Gouldian Finch, Partridge Pigeon and Northern Quoll targeted surveys were undertaken in 2017, 2021 and 2023. No new sensitive areas were identified. Flora and fauna surveys were conducted in 2023 as part of the broader Northern Territory Training Area and Ranges environment studies. . No threatened species were observed within the UOTF footprint. Previously, the following EPBC listed fauna were observed at MBTA : • Yellow-snouted Gecko (<i>Lucasium occultum</i>); • Partridge Pigeon (Eastern) (<i>Geophaps smithii smithii</i>); and • Gouldian Finch (<i>Erythrura goludiae</i>) habitat is located outside the project footprint, no individuals were observed within the UOTF footprint. There are no threatened ecological communities within the project area. Management and mitigation measures, such as early dry season prescribed ground burning; and feral cat monitoring, will protect the above mentioned species.
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.	Not triggered	
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's compliance with the conditions of approval for the year to 22 November 2023.
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

No non-compliances were identified for the Urban Operations Training Facility (UOTF) Mount Bunday Training Area (MBTA) project.

4. New Environmental Risks

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