

# Leard State Forest Coal Mines Clearing Audit

## Fact Sheet

August 2016

### Where is the Leard State Forest mining precinct?

The Leard State Forest mining precinct is located approximately 460 kilometres north-west of Sydney in the Namoi Region of NSW and consists of the Maules Creek, Boggabri and Tarrawonga Coal Mines.

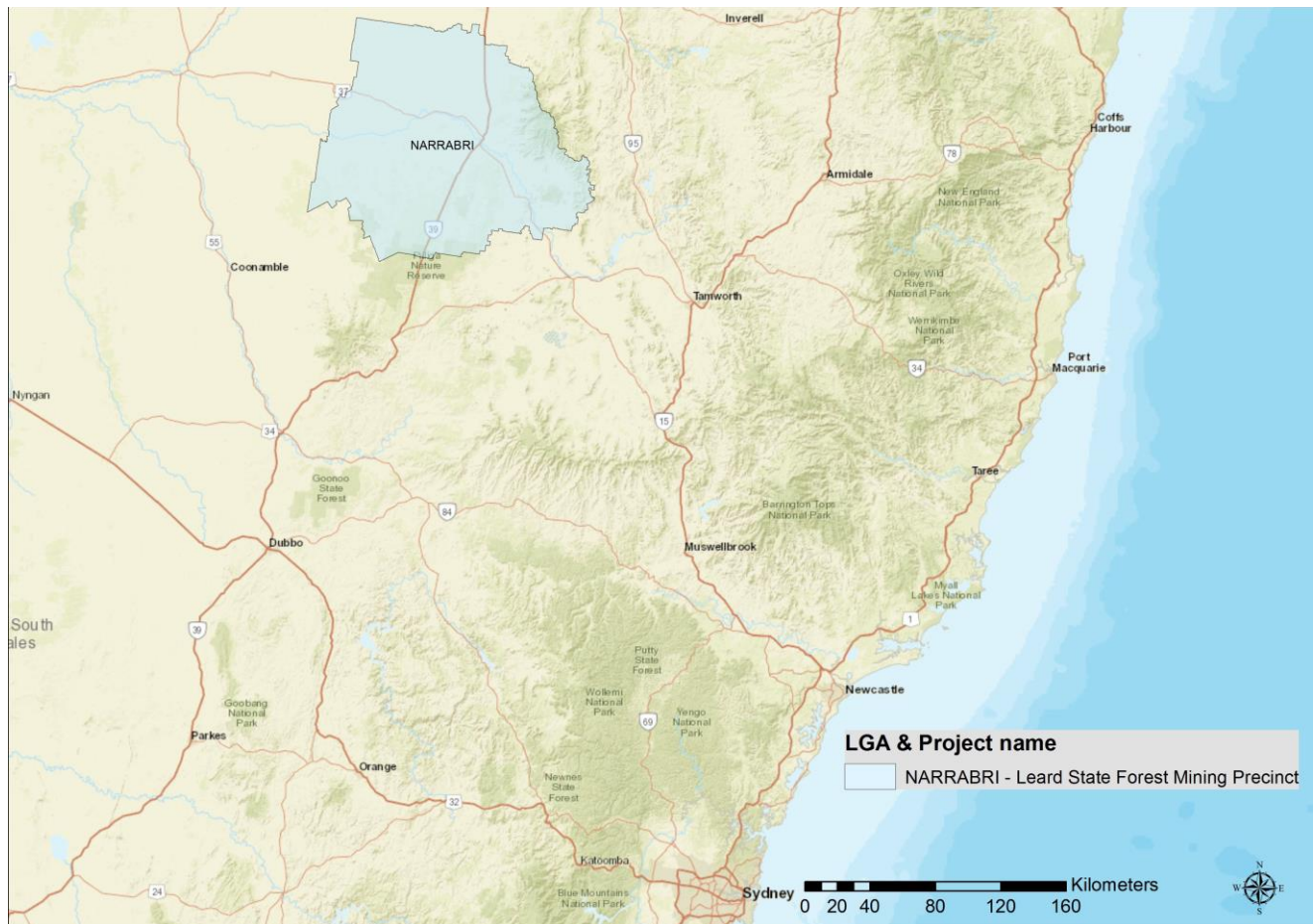


Figure 1 – Location of Leard Forest Mining Precinct

### Why did the Department audit clearing activities at the Leard State Forest precinct coal mines?

This audit has been conducted in direct response to community concerns. It is important that the community has confidence these mines clear vegetation in accordance with the restrictions contained within respective biodiversity management plans.

### What was the focus of the audit?

The audit focussed on vegetation clearing protocols contained in each coal mine's respective biodiversity management plans including the on-ground implementation of clearing protocols, compliance with the requirement to cease clearing once the 35°C limit is reached, the siting and

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maintenance of the approved meteorological station in accordance with the relevant standard and the qualifications of ecologists engaged by the company to assist the clearing.

### When was the audit undertaken?

The Department's Compliance Unit carried out the inspections during clearing operations in February and March 2016.

### What were the results of the audit?

The Leard Forest precinct coal mines were found to be generally operating at a high level of compliance with their BMP vegetation clearing commitments.

All three coal mines in the Leard State Forest mining precinct:

- Implement a two stage clearing process where habitat trees are removed separately to the understorey vegetation. This process allows fauna an opportunity to leave their habitat trees prior to felling. Once felled, trees are left for a period to allow fauna to relocate. This process is accepted as one of the best practice mitigation measures for clearing and was observed to be followed by all three mines;
- Cease clearing when the temperature exceeds 35°C at onsite weather stations. The Department verified that the cease clearing protocols were implemented at all three mines during the audit. This requirement is in place to allow animals to seek refuge in the hottest part of the day.

The onsite weather stations that measure temperature have been located and calibrated in accordance with Australian Standard 3580. The Australian Standard ensures that monitors are sited, calibrated and maintained to an appropriate standard to ensure they provide reliable meteorological data. All three mines weather stations were found to be sited and calibrated in accordance with the standard ensuring the accuracy of data relied on to comply with the 35°C limit ;

- Use teams of field officers and ecologists during the tree felling process to identify, assist and when appropriate, relocate fauna to predetermined locations within the remanent Leard State Forest. At least one clearing team member present during the tree felling process is a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist.

### Identified Non Compliances/Improvement Opportunities

- The audits of the Leard Forest precinct coal mines identified the following non-compliances which were assessed in accordance with the Department's Compliance Policy:

#### Maules Creek Coal Mine

One non compliance was identified at Maules Creek Coal:

- The Maules Creek Coal BMP and Water Management Plan (WMP) contains commitments to implement and maintain erosion and sediment controls. An unmaintained section of sediment fence and inappropriate sediment controls were observed in the clearing area at the time of the audit. Maules Creek Coal were advised of this issue and immediately ceased topsoil clearing activities.

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In a subsequent inspection, the Department confirmed that the sediment fence had been repaired and appropriate sediment controls were installed and topsoil recovery recommenced. This low significance breach has been recorded. Maules Creek Coal will ensure that erosion and sediment controls are implemented and maintained in accordance with commitments contained in their BMP and WMP.

There were no improvement opportunities identified for the Maules Creek coal mine.

### Boggabri Coal Mine

There were no non compliances identified at the Boggabri Coal Mine.

One improvement opportunity was identified at the Boggabri Coal Mine.

- While all habitat trees to be cleared were observed identified with a "H", the painted markings were faint. Boggabri Coal Mine will use a different tagging system or paint to mark trees prior to next year's clearing activities.

### Tarrawonga Coal Mine

One low risk non compliance was identified at the Tarrawonga Coal Mine:

- While the Tarrawonga Coal Mine has translocated fauna to a predetermined location in the Leard State Forest, the Office of Environment and Heritage had not approved the Translocation Strategy. A Warning Letter has been issued to Tarrawonga in relation to this non-compliance.

There were no improvement opportunities identified for the Tarrawonga coal mine.

### What is the ongoing monitoring and future actions?

The Department will continue to undertake regular inspections of these coal mines.

The Department will follow up with the Leard Forest Precinct coal mines throughout the year to ensure all non-compliances are addressed and opportunities for improvement have been considered prior to next year's clearing window.