

**MEETING WITH BRENDAN WINTLE AND MARTIN MARON, TSR HUB**  
**Friday 30 August**  
**with Nicholas Post, Sally Box**

**What we want**

- To reach an agreed understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Hub.
- To decide on a way forward on the Spending to Save paper
- To identify and resolve a way forward on any upcoming activities where the Hub and Department have conflicting expectations about roles.

**What they want**

- To reach an agreed understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Hub.
- To decide on a way forward on the Spending to Save paper
- To agree on a way forward on the Horizon Summit
- To discuss principles around Hub interactions with MPs

**Key points**

**1. Roles and responsibilities of the TSR Hub**

- The primary role of the Hub is to deliver research to inform environmental decision makers.
- The Hub's end users and stakeholders include government (various departments and various levels of government), ENGOs, Indigenous groups, industry and the public.
- The aim of the Hub's public-facing communication is to establish the Hub as an authority on matters relating to threatened species conservation and to improve the public's interest in and awareness of threatened species, and involvement in their conservation. (*TSR Hub Communication and engagement Plan 2016*). This element of the Hub's communication is not explicitly about informing environmental decisions.
- In order to inform environmental decisions, the Hub should work directly and collaboratively with policy makers, not try to steer policy change through advocacy-like pathways (i.e. via the public).
- The Hub should be clear in their minds when preparing any public facing communications or media on what the objectives of that piece of communication are.
- Thank you to the Hub for maintaining a collaborative approach to working with the Department on communications products. Where there are ideas to develop products that are not a neat fit within the Hub's role of communicating research findings, we suggest that in order to ensure good outcomes the Hub discuss the objectives of these products with the Department ahead of developing them.

See **Attachment A** for background on what the key NESP and TSR Hub guidance documents say about the role of the hub in working with decision makers, communicating with the public and giving the Department notice of any publications and media.

## 2. 'Spending to Save' paper

### **Background**

The Wintle et al paper '*Spending to save: what will it cost to halt Australia's extinction crisis?*', which has been submitted to Conservation Letters, (**Attachment B**) builds on the Hub's analysis of the comparison between Australian and US spending on threatened species, which they undertook for their submission to the Senate Inquiry into Faunal Extinctions. Brendan also referred to these figures in his interview for the Four Corners 'Extinction Nation' program.

The Hub originally submitted this paper to us as an output under synthesis Project 7.7 – *Overlaying threat, threatened species ranges, threat mitigation and conservation options – a knowledge synthesis to inform a national approach to fighting extinction*. The project plan for Project 7.7 doesn't mention a paper or study like this as an output. There is some mention in the project plan about costs of conservation strategies for threatened species, but this is referring to the costs of particular actions to feed into recovery plans and plan allocation of investments.

After subsequent discussions with s. 47F(1), Brendan has agreed that it is a stretch to classify this paper as a Hub product and agreed to remove Hub branding/affiliation from the paper.

In his discussion with s. 47F(1) at the time, Brendan explained that the objective of this paper was to trigger high-level policy and political discussion about the need to increase spending on threatened species recovery and how this could be achieved. The intention was then to use this paper as a discussion starter to brief exec and the Minister's Office on the findings of the work and policy implications. Brendan said they wanted to highlight the need for transparent reporting of threatened species recovery expenditure and to work with the Department on how we could account for threatened species expenditure in order to support such reporting.

### **Department's concerns with approach**

- If the authors' objective was to trigger a discussion with policy makers, a more appropriate and constructive way of achieving this would have been to come directly to the Department to have this discussion, rather than trying to 'trigger' it through a publication (and the media).
- 'Triggering political discussions' is not one of the roles, responsibilities or objectives of NESP Hubs.
- Adopting an advocacy-type approach can make a Hub appear to have political bias, which undermines credibility of both the Hub and program as a provider of unbiased-science.

### **Options**

Option 1: The authors publish the paper without hub affiliation, after consulting the Department on their calculations of Australian Government spending on Threatened Species.

Option 2: They don't publish the paper.

Option 3: They publish the paper with a different set of authors, individuals who do not represent the Hub leadership and/or knowledge brokering team.

In discussing the options for this paper, we should focus on the objectives the authors were trying to achieve, and discuss whether this paper is likely to be the most effective way to achieve those. Given we have now agreed with the hub that this paper is not a hub product, it

is not really within our remit to instruct them not to publish it or to drastically change the authorship, but we may mutually arrive at this point through a discussion of how best to achieve their objectives.

### 3. Horizon Summit

#### ***Background***

The NESP Biodiversity Research Horizon Summit was originally planned by the Hub for March 2019. The Hub had discussed the plans for the summit with the Steering Committee at multiple meetings.

The Department had concerns with the timing of the proposed summit in relation to the announcement of the election, particularly around how this timing might affect the ability of senior Departmental representatives to participate, and reduce the impact of the outputs of the summit.

An additional concern was that the Hub had invited various MPs without discussing this with the Department. This compounded the timing concerns, again particularly around the ability of Departmental representatives and State Government representatives to participate freely in the summit.

Other concerns that the Department had with the summit proposal were that a planned output would be a high-level communique from the summit which all participants would sign on to, which the Department felt might be a challenge for state and Commonwealth department representatives.

Following discussions with the Department, the Hub agreed to postpone the Summit and informed invitees that it was postponed due to logistical issues. The Hub have been holding off on any further organising until they get the go ahead from the Department, but would be considering dates in late October/early November if the summit goes ahead.

Since March, the Hub have taken steps to address the concerns raised by the Department. They have updated the Horizon Summit proposal (**Attachment C**) to be clearer about proposed outputs of the summit and to clarify that signing onto the summit communique would be on an opt-in basis. They also don't plan to invite MPs to the rescheduled summit. The Hub are also keen to make sure the Department has a chance to input to the summit plan to ensure that it delivers outcomes we would find useful.

If the event goes ahead, the Science Partnerships Section will seek advice from our probity advisors (and pass this on to the hub) around how to frame the event to avoid any perception of advantage for the future environmental science program. We have had preliminary discussions with the probity advisors on this, and they indicated this should be easy to address.

Unless the Department has any remaining concerns that can't be addressed through discussion with the Hub, there shouldn't be any major risks with this event going ahead.

## 5. Other issues/ upcoming activities to be aware of

### ***Interactions with MPs***

The Hub will likely seek clarity on whether they can engage with MPs (i.e. including Ministers outside of the Environment portfolio and non-Government MPs) in the course of delivering and communicating their research. This is something they have done in the past, but in light of recent discussions with the Department around roles and responsibilities, the Hub leadership group is unclear on Departmental preferences regarding engagement with MPs.

### ***Email to MO re Yawuru Aboriginal Rangers visit***

On Tuesday, the Hub advised us that s. 47F(1) (s. 47F(1)) is assisting Yawuru Aboriginal Rangers to make connections ahead of an upcoming visit to Canberra (15-19 September). He is doing this primarily in his role as an Aboriginal scientist based in the ACT rather than as a s. 47F(1).

As part of this, s. 47F(1) is proposing sending an email to the Minister's Office on behalf of the Yawuru rangers requesting an opportunity for the delegation of rangers to meet with Minister Ley during their visit and to invite the Minister to attend a Welcome to Country at Mulligan's Flat.

The Hub provided a copy of s. 47F(1) draft email, saying this was for our information only and that s. 47F(1) was hoping to send it to the MO within the next day. His draft email included reference to his role as the s. 47F(1), and to TSR linkages with the Yawuru visit.

We have asked the Hub that if s. 47F(1) is sending this email in a non-Hub capacity to remove references to the Hub to avoid confusion. We clarified that if s. 47F(1) would like to make the invitation to the Minister in his Hub capacity, this would need to be done with the Department's involvement and we would need more lead-time than they have given us in this instance.

### ***Biodiversity Business Research Forum***

This forum is proposed for early 2020 to showcase Hub research (and related research from other NESP Hubs) relevant to those sections of the business sector leading Australia's engagement with biodiversity risks and opportunities. It will aim to raise the profile of biodiversity research relevant to business strategic planning, risk mitigation and investment decisions. (See proposal at **Attachment D**).

This forum was suggested/encouraged by s. 47F(1) and has been discussed at several Steering Committee meetings. It builds on the business engagement work that the ESCC Hub has done in the climate space and aims to start similar conversations in the biodiversity space.

### ***Policy Forum***

The Hub are proposing holding a high-level strategic policy forum (in mid to late-2020) to present Hub research to an audience of politicians and high-level policy makers. This would build on the Threatened Species Day Breakfast that the Hub held at Old Parliament House in 2017 where they presented bite-sized updates on their research to a varied audience of policy-makers.

### ***Senate Inquiry book***

The Hub have notified us that they are thinking of developing a book based on their submissions to the Senate Inquiry on Faunal Extinctions. There is some interest from external groups in contributing chapters to the book, such as other groups that made submission to the Inquiry (research groups and environmental lawyers) as well as other relevant key people like **s. 47F(1)**. The Hub are not proposing for this book to be a NESP-branded product.

TSR have framed their intention for the book as a 'neutral, research-based approach' along the lines of the tone of TSR's submission to the Inquiry.

### ***Input to EPBC Act Review***

The Hub have provided advice they intend to make a submission to the EPBC Act Review. They flagged that they were considering doing this as independent researchers rather than as the hub. After discussion with Nick, we have agreed that this would be a good approach.

The EPBC Act Review team have indicated that TSR have been identified as a potential source of valuable information to inform the Review.

### ***Other upcoming Hub events include:***

Sydney roadshow (in collaboration with Saving our Species) in late 2019/early 2020.

Mini-roadshow in Geraldton, WA -5-6 September 2019

Mini-roadshow at Territory NRM conference– 13-15 November 2019

Possible mini-roadshows in Tasmania, far North Queensland, Kimberley

Mini-showcases at the Department on:

- Freshwater (September 2019)
- Invasive species (TBC)
- Climate-biodiversity (TBC)

### **ATTACHMENTS**

A. What NESP and TSR guidance documents say about the role & objectives of the Hub

B. 'Spending to Save' paper

C. Horizon Summit proposal

D. Biodiversity Business Forum proposal

**ATTACHMENT A:****WHAT OUR GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS SAY ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE HUB**

(emphasis added for the purposes of this document)

Re working directly with decision makers:

- The NESP ... funds environmental research to **inform Australian decision makers**. (*NESP Guidelines 2014*)
- The NESP... supports research that ... builds relationships between scientists and policy-makers to encourage **collaborative problem solving on environmental issues**. (*NESP Guidelines 2014 and NESP TSR Hub Funding Agreement*)
- Hubs will work closely with the Department in developing their Research Plans. Hubs should also seek input from **other government departments, levels of government, environment non-government organisations, Indigenous groups and industry**. (*NESP Guidelines 2014*)
- The NESP delivers research for use by environmental decision makers and on-ground environmental managers at all levels, from **community groups to local, state and federal government policy makers**. (*NESP Knowledge Brokering and Communications Strategy 2019-2021*)

Re communicating with the public:

- The intended outcomes of the NESP are: ... research outcomes that are communicated clearly to **end users and the general public**, and stored in a manner that is discoverable and accessible. (*NESP Guidelines 2014*)
- The Threatened Species Recovery Hub will combine leading researchers, institutions and science communicators to achieve enduring improvements in management, policy, and **public awareness** of Australia's threatened species and communities. (*NESP TSR Hub Funding Agreement*)
- The aims of the Hub's public facing communication are to:
  - establish a distinctive and cohesive **identity as an authority on matters relating to the conservation of threatened species**
  - engage with the Australian community to help foster an informed **interest in and awareness of threatened species, and involvement in their conservation**. (*TSR Hub Communication and engagement Plan 2016*).
- The Hub will use and respond to print and electronic media to **help disseminate its research results and their implications**, to **maintain and enhance its public profile**, and to **contribute effectively to public interest and engagement in issues relating to threatened species**... Where required, the Hub will assist with media training for researchers. (*TSR Hub Communication and engagement Plan 2016*).
- Where relevant, Hub communication products will note any **policy and management shortcomings** related to threatened species in a manner that is **constructive and open**,

**and designed to improve such practice** (*TSR Hub Communication and engagement Plan 2016*).

- The Hub, and its personnel, will engage in public conversations about topical issues in a manner that is **orderly and objective, and does not bring disrepute to the Hub**. (*TSR Hub Communication and engagement Plan 2016*).
- The Science Partnerships Section provides support and guidance to NESP Hubs, in collaboration with hub specialist staff, for handling media issues, and identifying and managing communication risks. **Statements about research findings are carefully considered in terms of tone and emphasis, especially when commenting on policy options that stem from the findings.**

The following principles are applied:

- The Department respects and values the expert scientific opinions of researchers, and the contribution they make to public debate.
- The NESP will only achieve its objectives of informing environmental decision making and on-ground action if the **outcomes and implications of research are made publicly available, including through media. This includes findings that are adverse to current government policy.**
- The NESP's reputation as a source of excellent unbiased science/evidence will be supported by **factual statements and avoidance of emotional language and political advocacy.**

If NESP Hubs are approached by media for comments that involve **advocating, defending or publicly canvassing the merits (or otherwise) of government or opposition policies, or other matters that are unrelated to NESP-funded research, researchers are asked to avoid using their NESP hub affiliation.** Journalists should be advised that on-the-record quotes are attributable to individual researchers with their preferred institutional or expert title/role, or as a personal opinion. (*NESP Knowledge Brokering and Communications Strategy 2019-2021*)

*Re no-surprises:*

- The recipient must make all Research Outputs... publically available on appropriate institutional repositories and websites, and ensure that... a concise summary of the Material to be released has been **provided to the Department at least 5 working days before its release.** (*Clause 11.8 (a)(ii), NESP TSR Hub Funding Agreement*)
- If the **Department requires amendments** to a proposed form of words of a publication or announcement, the **Recipient must make the required amendment** before allowing the words to be published or announced. (*Clause 12.1 (c), NESP TSR Hub Funding Agreement*)
- The Recipient must perform the Activity in accordance with the Research Plan and must not make any amendments to the Research Plan, unless approved in writing by the Department (*Deed of variation in relation to research under NESP Threatened Species Recovery Hub 2017*)

- Where possible, **key stakeholders should be given advance notice of media and where appropriate given opportunity to provide input to any proposed media** (*TSR Hub Communication and engagement Plan 2016*)