

20 July 2023

Greg LaManna
Director
LaManna Property Group
91 Cubitt Street
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Dear Greg

EPBC advice for Swamp Skink, 62 Collins Road and 170 Boundary Road, Dromana.
Our ref: Matter 39384

Biosis was engaged by LaManna Property Group to provide advice on the EPBC Act listed Swamp Skink *Lissolepis coventryi* for the proposed development at 62 Collins and 170 Boundary Road, Dromana.

Biosis completed a flora and fauna (biodiversity) assessment for the properties on 3 March 2016, following the completion of field surveys in October 2015. This assessment included targeted surveys for a number of ground-dwelling fauna, during which one Swamp Skink was recorded in the [REDACTED] study area. At the time of survey, Swamp Skink were listed only under the Victorian FFG Act but have since been listed as endangered under the EPBC Act (effective March 2023). As such, the species now requires further consideration to determine whether the proposed action would result in a significant impact to a Matter of National Environmental Significance.

Previous vegetation mapping has indicated that large portions of the study area comprise Damp Sands Herb-rich Woodland/Grassy Woodland Complex as well as areas of Swamp Scrub, both of which may provide habitat for Swamp Skink. Although the presence of Swamp Skink within the study area has been confirmed, it is currently unclear whether the study area has the potential to support an extensive population of Swamp Skink and subsequently, whether the proposed action will constitute a significant impact to the species. To address this, Biosis has suggested that a further assessment of the study area be undertaken to determine which portions may provide suitable habitat for Swamp Skink. We proposed to undertake the following tasks:

- Review previous vegetation mapping to highlight habitat types within the study area which are likely to support Swamp Skink.
- Undertake a site visit to inspect areas of potential value for Swamp Skink.
- Discuss the potential for the project to impact Swamp Skink and provide further recommendations.

Review and site assessment

Following a review of previous vegetation mapping, a site inspection was undertaken by a qualified zoologist (Jonathan Botha) on 7 July 2023. Consistent with previous assessment of the vegetation within the study area, patches of Swamp Scrub were identified primarily along drainage lines and areas of lower elevation. Noteworthy is that most of the low-lying areas were flooded during the current on-site inspection with many of the vehicle and bike tracks functioning as drains. Areas of higher elevation were typically comprised of introduced vegetation and Damp Heathy Woodland and Grassy Woodland.

Swamp Skink typically occur in wetland and saltmarsh habitats comprising dense understory vegetation, with little to no overstory (Clemann and Beardsall, Cogger 2014). However, the species has been recorded within a range of habitat types, including areas dominated by weeds and habitats of marginal quality surrounding wetlands and swamps. In this regard, concerns have been raised around assuming that the species is not present in marginal or unlikely habitats (Clemann 2000, Homann 2006). As such, we would consider it likely that most of the study area provides suitable habitat for Swamp Skink. The approximate areas considered to have the potential to support Swamp Skink are indicated in Figure 1.

Throughout much of the study area, there is sufficient understory vegetation to provide refuge for the species. There are sections with dense canopy vegetation, which may preclude light from reaching the understory and which may be less likely to support Swamp Skink. However, across these densely vegetated habitats, there are clearings which would provide suitable basking habitat for the species. As such, it is not possible to discount these areas as potential Swamp Skink habitat. Areas of particular interest include vegetation associated with the drainage line in the north-eastern portion of the site, as well as damp vegetation in the south-eastern corner of the site along Collins and Boundary Roads. The only portion of the study area which can be discounted as Swamp Skink habitat is immediately adjacent to the residential land along the western boundary and extending into the study area north of St Remo Place. This area largely consists of a cleared understory as well as an extensive area which has been modified into mountain bike trails and ramps.

The conservation advice for Swamp Skink (DCCEEW 2023) details the habitat critical to the survival of the species, as presented in the Matters of National Significance Significant Impact Guidelines 1.1 as areas that are necessary:

- for foraging, breeding and dispersal activities
- for the long-term maintenance of the species
- to maintain genetic diversity and long-term evolutionary development
- for the reintroduction of subpopulations or recovery of the species.

Further Recommendations

On the basis of our previous and current assessments, it is considered possible that the habitat within the study area could meet the criteria listed above and that a significant impact on a Matter of National Environmental Significance would result from the proposed action. This relates to the potential for impacts on Swamp Skink through the removal of suitable habitat. We therefore recommend that a referral is submitted to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment to determine whether the action requires approval under the EPBC Act. Biosis can assist with this process.

If the project is determined to be a controlled action under the EPBC Act, the policy for the provision of offsets under the EPBC Act may be applicable to addressing residual impacts on Swamp Skink. The offsets policy is set out on the DCCEEW website at: [EPBC Act environmental offsets policy - DCCEEW](#). Once a decision has been made about whether or not the project is a controlled action, discussion with DCCEEW would be advisable to determine whether, in principle, an offset may be applicable. If it is, then design of the project would need to reach a stage at which any residual impacts on the species can be quantified as a precursor to determining the nature of any offset requirements.

The extent of that offset will depend on the extent of habitat loss associated with the project. There is some scope that the existing reserve in the design could contribute to that offset but it is also plausible that an additional external offset would be required. If it is the case that an external offset is required that site would need to be identified and assessed and a management plan prepared as part of the process.

Please contact me if you have any enquiries.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Botha', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Jonathan Botha
Senior Zoologist

References

Clemann N (2000) Survival in the Suburbs! The (re)discovery of the threatened swamp skink *Egernia coventryi* east of Melbourne, with comments on the failure of Elliot traps in a survey of this species. *Victorian Naturalist* 117:180–183.

Clemann N & Beardsell C (1999) A new inland record of the Swamp skink *Egernia coventryi* Storr, 1978. *Victorian Naturalist* 116:127–128.

Cogger HG (2014) *Reptiles & Amphibians of Australia*, 7th edition. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water 2023, Conservation advice for *Lissolepis coventryi* (swamp skink), Canberra.

Homan P (2006) New locality records for reptiles, including the vulnerable swamp skink *Egernia coventryi*, in South Gippsland, 2001–2005. *The Victorian Naturalist* 123 (5), 335–338.