

Media Release

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Listening for the Masked Owl

Results from acoustic monitoring in the Central Highlands indicate masked owls continue to inhabit forest areas following timber harvesting operations.

Sustainable Timber Tasmania's recent expansion of its acoustic monitoring program to include masked owls is informing forest planning and on-ground management decisions in Tasmania's public production forests.

The expanded monitoring uses advanced acoustic technology to detect masked owl calls before, during and after harvesting operations, providing new insights into where the species is present and how it uses forest landscapes.

Early results from the program are encouraging. Recent acoustic monitoring was undertaken following masked owl observation in forest areas of the Central Highlands. High levels of owl activity were recorded, resulting in 16.4 hectares of suitable habitat being set aside during harvest. Surveys after harvesting confirmed continued owl presence. The results indicate harvesting operations have minimal disruption on owl occupancy and habitat.

The masked owl monitoring forms part of Sustainable Timber Tasmania's broader Acoustic Monitoring Program, now in its fifth year, which uses machine learning and large-scale data analysis to support adaptive forest management and conservation outcomes.

During the 2024–2025 financial year, more than 20,000 hours of acoustic data were processed across 36 forest coupes. Monitoring has continued into the current financial year, with surveys undertaken in priority areas where operations are planned.

Acoustic monitoring allows forest managers to gather information that would not otherwise be possible at scale, helping them understand whether masked owls are present within coupes, in adjacent reserves, or continue to use areas following harvesting. This information is then used to adapt forest practices, including adjusting harvest boundaries or applying additional protections where important habitat is identified.

Suzette Weeding, General Manager Conservation and Land Management, said the expansion of acoustic monitoring to masked owls strengthens how potential habitat is identified and managed in working forests.

“Acoustic monitoring is giving us clearer, real-time information about how masked owls use forest landscapes. That information helps us make informed decisions to minimise potential impacts on the species, while continuing to manage public production forests responsibly.”

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