

Endangered frog invokes a Fauna Impact Statement in northern New South Wales

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Fauna Surveys for Environmental Impact Statements once dealt almost exclusively with mammals and birds. However, this may be changing with the advent of Fauna Impact Statements, which follow from the passage of the *Endangered Fauna (Interim Protection) Act* 1991. It was through this Act that all frogs were included as fauna under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* 1974, and thus received the protection previously afforded to birds, mammals and reptiles.

The Sphagnum Frog, *Phyloria sphagnicolus* is listed under Schedule 12 (Part 2, Vulnerable and Rare) of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* 1974 as amended by the *Endangered Fauna (Interim Protection) Act* 1991. Even within its range it is rarely observed by the public because it spends much of its time hidden under leaf litter in boggy soaks and streams, its breeding populations are small, and it is restricted to montane rainforest along the eastern escarpment of New South Wales from the Comboyne Plateau in the south, to Mt Hyland Nature Reserve in the north (Anstis 1981; Webb 1989). Australian Museum records contain only 18 known locations for the species. However, recent work, including the current NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service's North-east Forest Survey, has found a number of previously unknown locations within the mentioned range.

This small, rare rainforest frog has recently risen to prominence by becoming the subject of a Fauna Impact Statement to be carried out in Dorrigo National Park. The Sphagnum Frog was found in a small soak during a survey of an area adjacent to a winding section of the main Dorrigo-Bellingen road. The Bellingen council is proposing to straighten a dangerous section of the road by cutting through one of the bends. This however would bring the roadwork into close proximity with the small soak where the Sphagnum Frog lives.

The Director-General of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service determined that the Bellingen Shire Council should prepare a full Fauna Impact Statement with special emphasis on any effect the roadwork may have on the Sphagnum Frog and its habitat.

The Sphagnum Frog's breeding season is from late spring to early summer. Its breeding biology is quite unusual, with males making their single note mating call from small wet chambers in mud that are covered with leaf litter (Anstis 1981). Occasionally rock crevices or Sphagnum moss are used as a mating chamber. When mating takes place, foam nests are produced containing a relatively small number of large eggs. The tadpoles do not leave the chamber until they emerge as metamorphlings. They derive all the nourishment from their egg during this period. The fact that *P. sphagnicolus* stays in the nest from egg to juvenile suggests that the maintenance of a population's direct environment may be particularly important for its survival.

It is a positive sign that the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has required a Fauna Impact Statement that concentrates on an endangered frog. It is a clear indication from the authorities that the need to conserve frogs is not only being acknowledged, but is now being acted upon.

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