

2. Study Area

The study area comprises a 250 metre wide corridor along the proposed route, between Mailmans Track in the south and Lyons Road in the north. It generally follows the existing Pacific Highway, with deviations to the west and east. The corridor is approximately 8 km in length, with the total area investigated approximating 200 hectares. The study area is described in detail in Volume 1 of the accompanying EIS.

Within the corridor there are extensive areas of cleared and otherwise developed land. The present study focuses on those remnant vegetation areas containing important natural values, namely Areas 1, 5, 6 and 10 as described in Biosis Research (1997a) and shown on Figure 3. These areas were identified as containing important natural values. In addition, Areas 2 and 7 were briefly investigated for this study and was habitat considered suitable for the flora species *Eleocharis tetraquetra*. This species is presumed extinct in Schedule 1, Part 4 of the Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995). This species is found at the edges of permanently wet areas where it is unlikely to be dominated by other larger sedges. Typically this species will occur as isolated plants. The species distribution ranges from the recent recordings at Bonville (south of Coffs Harbour) to South-East Queensland (Greg Elks *pers. comm.*). Other than the assessment of amelioration measures proposed for the design and construction of the highway, no investigation was undertaken for the remainder of the corridor.

The study area traverses two important areas of Crown Land. Pine Creek State Forest lies at the southern extremity of the proposal while the proposed extension to Bongil Bongil National Park (currently Crown Land) is at the northern limit of the works. The land between comprises predominantly agricultural and rural residential holdings scattered with small remnants of native vegetation.

The study area lies within the NSW North Coast Biogeographic Region as defined by Thackway and Cresswell (1995). It has been identified as being of particular importance for flora and fauna as it falls within the zone of overlap between the tropical and temperate zones.