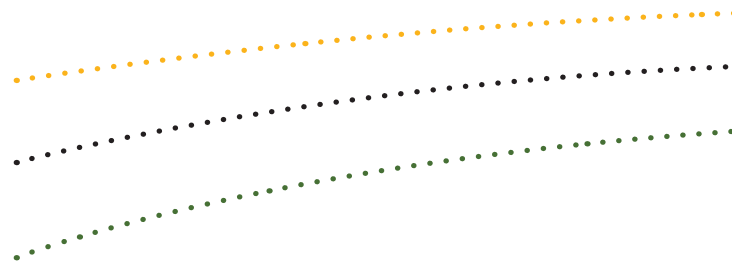




Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities



FARMING AND NATIONALLY PROTECTED COOLIBAH – BLACK BOX WOODLANDS

Since European settlement, most of the Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands of the Darling Riverine Plains and the Brigalow Belt South Bioregions ecological community has been cleared, or degraded by changes to flooding regimes, weed invasion, and in some circumstances heavy grazing and drift of herbicides and pesticides. The patches that remain in good condition are now protected under Australia's national environment law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), as an endangered ecological community.

What does national protection of Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands mean for farmers/graziers?

The national environment law is not about stopping farm business; it protects Australia's unique native plants and animals. In many cases, your supportive farming practices have helped retain remnant native woodlands.

You may need Australian Government approval if:

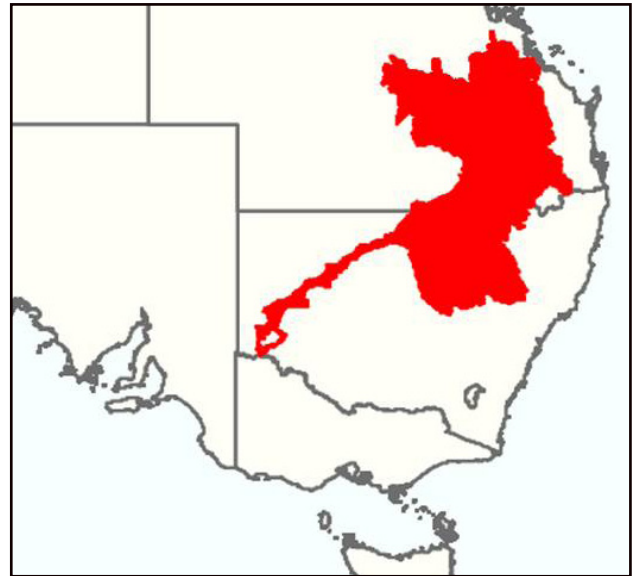
- the protected woodlands (or other protected matters) occur on your property, and
- a new, intensified or changed activity could have a significant detrimental impact on the ecological community.

If you are not sure whether your activity requires Australian Government approval, you can get free advice from the environment liaison officer at the National Farmers' Federation on 1800 704 520 (or email: environment@nff.org.au).



What and where are Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands?

This indicative map shows the outer boundary of the area in which the ecological community may occur. The community itself has been heavily cleared and is fragmented.



A more detailed map is available at www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=66

The Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands were once widespread on the inland floodplains of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland that are associated with the Darling River system and the southern part of the Fitzroy River system. This eucalypt woodland is found on the grey, self-mulching clays of periodically waterlogged floodplains, swamp margins, ephemeral wetlands and stream levees.

The main tree species in the canopy of the woodland are coolibah (*Eucalyptus coolabah* subsp. *coolabah*) and/or black box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*). Other trees you might find include: cooba, river cooba, belah, eurah, river red gum and bimble box (also known as poplar box).

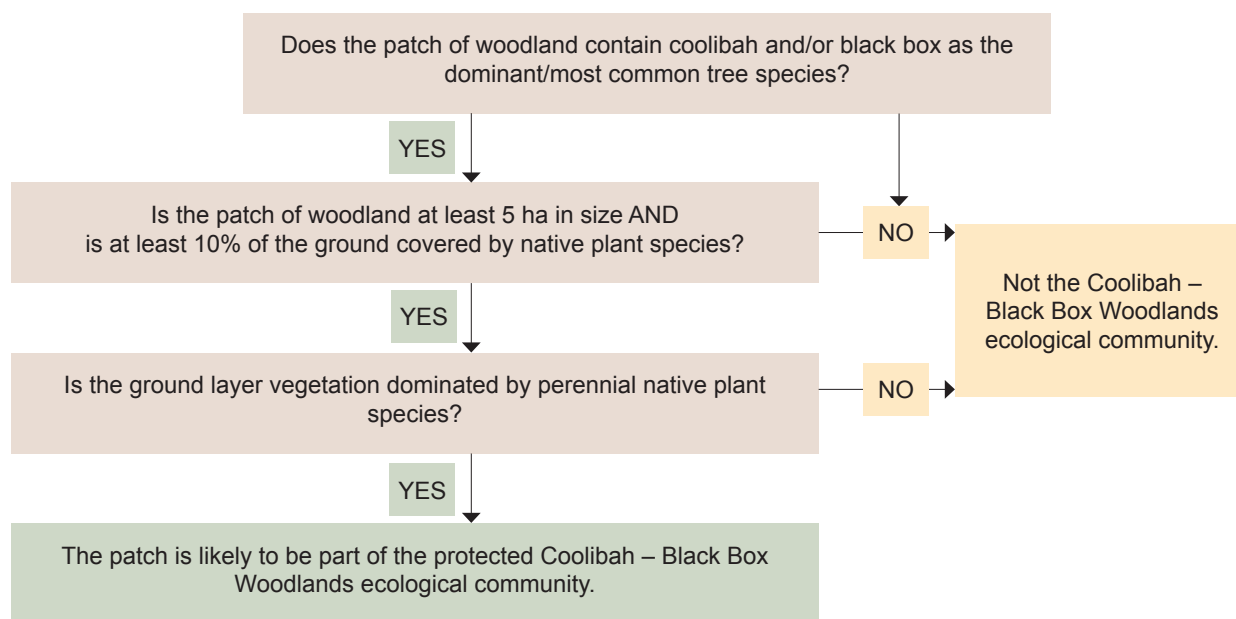
Medium to tall shrubs are typically sparse to absent in many areas of this ecological community, or may form clumps. Shrubs that may be present include: bitterbark, budda, gidgee, leafless ballart, lignum, nitre goosefoot, spiny saltbush, warrior bush, western rosewood, wild orange and wilga.

The composition of the ground layer will vary depending on past and present grazing pressure, as well as the drought and water regime. The native species present in the ground layer may include:

- Grasses: for example, button grass, curly Mitchell grass, native millet, neverfail, Queensland bluegrass, spike-rushes, Warrego summer grass and yelka
- Herbs: for example, caltrop, common nardoo, drumsticks, native carrot, New Zealand spinach, pigweed and sago-weed
- Various saltbushes and other small shrubs.

How do I know whether the Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands on my property is protected?

Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands is only protected under national environment law where it is in relatively good condition. The patch of the woodland must be at least five hectares (12.4 acres) in size, and have tree canopy cover that is at least 8 per cent. Additionally, at least half the perennial vegetation cover of the ground layer must be native grasses, herbs or small shrubs—not introduced species. The diagram below sets out the condition thresholds in more detail.



Woodlands that do not meet these criteria are not protected by national environment law. But they may still be protected under state regulations, such as the New South Wales *Native Vegetation Act 2003*, the New South Wales *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*, or the Queensland *Vegetation Management Act 1999*.

How does protection of Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands affect my farming activities?

This ecological community was officially protected under national environment law on 1 March 2011. Lawful activities that began before national environmental law came into effect on 16 July 2000 can continue without further Australian Government approval.



What routine farming activities do not need approval?

- maintaining existing fence lines, tracks, roads or fire breaks
- replacing or maintaining existing sheds, other farm buildings and yards
- maintaining existing grazing regimes (type of livestock, stocking rates and timing of grazing)
- controlling weeds (with minimal disturbance, or by selective spot spraying).

What farming activities might need approval?

Any activities that are likely to have a significant, irreversible or long-term detrimental impact on the ecological community may need Australian Government approval. These include:

- land clearing or substantial lopping of trees
- changing from grazing to cropping, or clearing understorey vegetation through cropping, excessive grazing or other methods
- substantially changing grazing management, weed control or fertiliser use
- new or altered burning regimes
- renovating or improving pasture by introducing exotic plant species, fertilisers, herbicides, mechanical disturbance or cultivation, addition of irrigation
- maintaining paddocks, lawfully cleared after 16 July 2000, where the community has regenerated, by excessive removal of native tree seedlings/saplings/suckers/regrowth.

If you are uncertain of your legal responsibility, you can contact the environment liaison officer at the National Farmers' Federation for help or go to: www.environment.gov.au/epbc

Do I need approval to manage regrowth?

In most cases, management of regrowth will not need approval under national environment law. Some regrowth is protected within the definition of Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands, given it is an important functional stage of its regeneration.

Management of regrowth may need approval where:

- management of the regrowth requires a permit under Queensland/New South Wales legislation (for example, because it is in a declared area of high conservation)
- the regrowth occurred before 1 January 1990.



Can I get help to improve or restore Coolibah – Black Box Woodlands?

There may be natural resource management projects funded by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative that can help you manage protected woodlands.

For more information on local projects go to www.nrm.gov.au or contact your:

- local NRM regional body—www.nrm.gov.au/nrm/region.html
- state facilitator—www.nrm.gov.au/contacts/ausgovt.html

Where can I get more information?

More information on this ecological community, its condition thresholds, threats and priority conservation actions is contained in the comprehensive listing advice and the shorter conservation advice for this ecological community, at: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=66.

For free advice on whether or not an activity may need Australian Government approval contact the Australian Government's environment liaison officer at the National Farmers' Federation (NFF).

Telephone: 1800 704 520

Email: environment@nff.org.au

Web: www.environment.gov.au/farming

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