



# COMMUNITIES FOR COMMUNITIES



**Issue 1: September 2005**

## Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of the *Communities for Communities Newsletter*. We hope this newsletter will help to keep you informed about ecological community nominations under consideration, and listings made, by the Australian Government.

This newsletter will be produced quarterly in an electronic format. Our aim is to provide community groups with an information source they can use when compiling their own newsletters. So feel free to use any articles and pictures that may be of interest.

While primarily targeting ecological communities, the newsletter may also include information on new species nominations and listings, as well as recovery plans and threat abatement plans.

On the right of the newsletter you will find a link to register your interest in receiving future editions and to provide us with feedback. Please use this opportunity to tell us what you think of the newsletter.

## Just what is the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*?

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is the piece of the Australian Government's environmental legislation that provides a national focus for the protection of the

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environment and conservation of biodiversity.

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Australia's natural areas have environmental values that provide benefits for us and for future generations. Conservation of our biological diversity is important because it not only helps provide clean air and water, but also has major economic benefits. These include maintaining agricultural productivity, providing ecotourism opportunities, serving as a source of future medicines, and supplying renewable resources such as construction materials, clothing and paper.

One of the important applications of the Act is the protection of matters of National Environmental Significance (NES):

- World Heritage properties;
- National heritage places;
- Wetlands of international importance (Ramsar wetlands);
- Threatened species and ecological communities;
- Migratory species;
- Commonwealth marine areas; and
- Nuclear actions (including uranium mining).

These matters of NES act as triggers for the assessment and approval process. This means that when a person proposes to take an action that they believe may need approval under the EPBC Act, they must refer the proposal to the Australian Government. Certain actions may be exempt from requiring approval.

Further information on referrals, assessments and approvals can be found at <http://www.deh.gov.au/epbc>.

## **What are we talking about when we say ecological community?**

An ecological community is an integrated assembly of native species that inhabits a particular area in nature. Species within such communities interact and depend on each other - for example, for food or shelter.

Some examples of endangered ecological communities are the Buloke woodlands of the Riverina and Murray-Darling depression bioregions in southern NSW and Victoria; the Bluegrass (*Dichanthium* spp.) dominant grasslands of the Brigalow Belt Bioregions (North and South) in Queensland; and the critically endangered swamps of the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia. As can be seen from these few examples, endangered ecological communities are spread all around Australia.

The listing of threatened ecological communities is the first step to promoting their recovery. Once an ecological community is listed as threatened under the EPBC Act, its recovery is assisted using conservation advice provided by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee and the development of a Recovery Plan. Where appropriate, a Threat Abatement Plan may further contribute to the management of a listed ecological community.

Three categories exist for listed threatened ecological communities. An ecological community may be listed as:

- Critically Endangered if it is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the immediate future
- Endangered if it is not critically endangered but is facing a very high risk of extinction in the near future  
*or*
- Vulnerable if it is not critically endangered or endangered but is facing a high risk of extinction in the medium-term future.

To date there are 35 ecological communities listed under the EPBC Act. Details of these can be found on the Department's web site at <http://www.deh.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publiclookupcommunities.pl>

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Banner photographs: Whitebox Woodlands - H. Mills. (Inset) Bluebell - P. Komidar.



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## Update on ecological community listings during 2005

Listings for five ecological communities have been completed so far during 2005.

### Swamp Tea-tree ( *Melaleuca irbyana* ) Forest of South-east Queensland

The Swamp Tea-tree Forest is a type of forest that is characterised by the presence of Swamp Tea-trees, usually as a thicket about 8-12m high. An open canopy of eucalypt trees may emerge above the Swamp



Swamp tea-tree (*Melaleuca irbyana*) Forest of South-east Queensland and;

(Inset) Swamp tea-tree - P. Donatiu, Greening Australia Queensland

Tea-tree thicket. The ground vegetation is sparse, mainly grasses and herbs with few shrubs.

The Swamp Tea-tree Forest only occurs in south-eastern Queensland, in the local government areas of Beaudesert, Boonah, Logan, Ipswich, Laidley and Esk.

The Swamp Tea-tree Forest was listed as a critically endangered ecological community on 15 April 2005, due to its very restricted distribution and vulnerability to ongoing threats. Only about 660 hectares of the forest remain intact. Much of the original extent has been cleared or is affected by the activities of stock and feral animals, or invaded by weeds.

The Swamp Tea-tree Forest is listed in Queensland under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. It is

recognised as two endangered regional ecosystems: 12.9-10.11 and 12.3.3c.

Priority conservation actions that can assist in the recovery of the Swamp Tea-tree Forest are to:

- prevent further clearing of the ecological community through mechanisms such as local council zoning or conservation covenants with land managers;
- identify and fence the best quality patches of the ecological community; and
- remove and manage weeds.

Further information on the listing can be found at the Department's web site at: [www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/swamp-tea-tree-forest.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/swamp-tea-tree-forest.html)

## Temperate Highland Peat Swamps on Sandstone

The Temperate Highland Peat

Swamps on Sandstone are temporary or permanent swamps that occur on a sandstone substrate and share similar vegetation. Sphagnum bogs and fens occupy the wetter parts while sedges and shrubs occur in the drier parts of

the swamps. Some are hanging swamps on steep valley sides, where water exits the ground between sandstone and claystone layers of rock. Other swamps occur in natural depressions or along watercourses.

The swamps occur in the Blue Mountains, Lithgow, Southern Highlands and Bombala regions of NSW.

The Temperate Highland Peat Swamps ecological community was listed as an endangered ecological community on 12 May 2005, due to its restricted distribution and vulnerability to ongoing threats. Only 3,000 hectares of this ecological community remain. Many of the swamps have been damaged by introduced animals, such as cattle, horses, rabbits and pigs. Swamps may also be at risk from the impacts of increased fertiliser runoff, residential development, clearing, weeds and fire. In the past, peat mining caused severe damage to some swamps.

This ecological community is also listed as endangered under the NSW *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* as a part of the 'Montane Peatlands and Swamps of the New England Tableland, NSW North Coast,



Wingecarribee Swamp - DEH;

(Inset) Coral Heath - © M. Fagg, ANBG

Sydney Basin, South East Corner, South Eastern Highlands and Australian Alps bioregions' ecological community.

Priority conservation actions that can assist in the recovery of the ecological community are to:

- develop conservation covenants with relevant land managers;
- fence important remnants to control the impacts of certain introduced animals;
- identify seasonal and long-term fluctuations in water flows and water quality regimes within the swamps;
- minimise impacts from changes to water flow and water quality;
- manage weeds within and immediately adjacent to existing remnants; and
- rehabilitate degraded remnants with local species known to occur in those swamps.

Further information on the listing can be found at the Department's web site at: [www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/temperate-highland-peat-swamps.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/temperate-highland-peat-swamps.html)

## **Weeping Myall - Coobah - Scrub Wilga Shrubland of the Hunter Valley**

This ecological community consists of Weeping Myall trees up to 10m high with Coobah and Scrub Wilga. Yarran and Stiff Canthium are also present in the small tree/shrub layer.

The ground layer is dense and

primarily grassy. Grasses include Kangaroo Grass, Wallaby Grass, Snow Grass and Barbed Wire Grass. Some exotic grasses have also invaded the site.

There is only one patch of this ecological community in existence, at Jerry's Plains in the Hunter Valley, NSW. It is considered likely to be a relic from the last ice age when the Hunter Valley would have been dominated by western semi-arid vegetation.

The Weeping Myall - Coobah - Scrub Wilga Shrubland of the Hunter Valley was listed as critically endangered, on 1 August 2005, as it has undergone a severe decline since European settlement, and its current very restricted distribution leaves it vulnerable to ongoing threats.



Weeping Myall - Coobah - Scrub Wilga Shrubland of the Hunter Valley - H. Mills

(Inset) Scrub Wilga. © M. Fagg, ANBG



The ecological community is not currently listed as threatened in NSW, but the NSW Scientific Committee has made a preliminary determination to list it as an endangered ecological community under the *NSW Threatened Species Act 1995*.

The priority recovery and threat abatement actions to assist in the recovery of this ecological community are:

- facilitate a conservation agreement for the site;
- management and control of weeds; and
- restrict access to the ecological community for firewood collection or recreation.

Further information on the listing can be found at the Department's web site at: [www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/weeping-myall-hunter-valley.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/weeping-myall-hunter-valley.html).

## **Blue Gum High Forest of the Sydney Basin Bioregion and**

## **Turpentine-Ironbark Forest of the Sydney Basin Bioregion**



Blue Gum High Forest of the Sydney Basin Bioregion - P. Komidar;

(Inset) Wombat Berry - M. Fagg © ANBG

These two ecological communities are often adjacent and may intergrade with each other. The Blue

Gum High Forest is a tall forest that has Sydney Blue Gum as a common tree in the canopy. Smaller trees, shrubs and a diverse ground layer of herbs, grasses, ferns and vines grow underneath the tall tree canopy. Blue Gum High Forest typically occurs in high-rainfall areas with deep soils derived from Wianamatta Shale.

The Turpentine-Ironbark Forest occurs on drier sites and has a tree canopy that is not as tall as for the Blue Gum High Forest. The tree canopy of Turpentine-Ironbark Forest is dominated by Turpentine and a variety of eucalypts, including several species of ironbark. Smaller trees, shrubs and a ground layer of herbs and grasses grow underneath the tree canopy.

The Blue Gum High Forest and the Turpentine-Ironbark Forest are restricted to the Cumberland Plain and adjacent plateaux of the Sydney region.

Both the Turpentine-Ironbark Forest and the Blue Gum High Forest were listed as critically endangered

ongoing threats. Less than 5% of either forest remains in good condition and retains its structural integrity. The existing remnants continue to be threatened by clearing, mainly for urban development, and weed invasion.

The Blue Gum High Forest is also listed as an endangered ecological community under the NSW *Threatened Species Conservation Act* 1995, while the Turpentine-Ironbark Forest is recognised as two separate endangered ecological communities in NSW. These are known as the Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest and the Blue Mountains Shale Cap Forest.

Priority conservation actions that can help recover the Blue Gum High Forest and/or the Turpentine-Ironbark Forest are to:

- prevent further clearing or fragmentation of each ecological community;
- create buffer zones and link fragments through restoration of remnants;
- identify and fence important remnants to minimise adverse impacts;
- manage weed infestations; and
- develop and implement appropriate management regimes to prevent further loss or decline.



Turpentine-Ironbark Forest of the Sydney Basin Bioregion - M.Cufer, NSW DEC;

(Inset) Turpentine flowers - © M. Fagg, ANBG

Further information on these listings can be found at the Department's web site at [www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications](http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications).

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## **The nomination assessment process**

Once a nomination is received, the first step is to make sure that it contains all the information required in the EPBC Act Regulations.

It is then referred to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, a scientific body appointed under the EPBC Act to provide independent advice to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. Assessment by the Committee may take up to 12 months or a longer period if approved by the Minister.

At a preliminary consideration of the nomination the Committee identifies any issues that may require further investigation or clarification. If necessary, it may request additional advice from relevant experts, including individuals, non-government organisations and government agencies. A workshop with experts is the next step to define and describe the nominated ecological community. Further consultation workshops may be held with stakeholders and community groups.

During the assessment period the nomination is placed on the Department of the Environment and Heritage website for a two month public consultation phase, allowing organisations and individual members of the public with an interest in the nomination to provide comments.

Based on all available information, the Committee assesses whether the nominated ecological community should be listed under the EPBC Act, and in which category. The Committee's advice is then provided to the Minister who makes the final determination within 90 days.

The Minister informs the nominator and relevant Australian Government Ministers, industry organisations, local councils, conservation groups and other relevant organisations by letter of the decision.

The listing advice and accompanying information products are placed on the Department of the Environment and Heritage web site.

## Current nominations

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/index.html>

### a) open for public comment

- [Mission Road Viney Hardwood Forest of Norfolk Island](#) - invitation to comment closes **Tuesday 11 October 2005**.

### b) available for public comment shortly

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee received these nominations at its most recent meeting in September 2005. The nominations will be placed on the web site in the near future.

- Calcarene Dune Woodland of South Eastern Australia
- Temperate Lowland Plains Grassy Wetland
- Murray Valley Grassland of the Riverina Bioregion
- Forest Red Gum Grassy Woodland of Gippsland, Victoria *and*
- Central Gippsland Plains Grassland of the South East Coastal Plain

### c) closed for public comment

Whilst these nominations are now formally closed for public comment late comments may be accepted.

- [Coolabah/ Black Box Woodlands of Northern NSW Wheatbelt and Queensland Brigalow Belt](#) (NSW/ Qld) - invitation to comment closed **Tuesday 13 September 2005**
- [Ribbon Gum - Mountain Gum - Snow Gum Forest](#) (NSW) - invitation to comment closed **Tuesday 13 September 2005**

If you would like further information on the listing of threatened species, recovery plans that are in place, and threat abatement plans for key threatening processes please have a look at the Department's web site at:

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/index.html>

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/recovery/index.html> and

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/tap/index.html>

You can find the on-line newsletter and subscribe at:

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/communities-newsletter/index.html>