



COMMUNITIES FOR COMMUNITIES



Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts



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From the Ecological Communities Section

This year we are releasing a bumper annual edition of the Communities for Communities (C4C) newsletter. 2008 has seen the assessment of a large number of nominations and an increased interest in what listing under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) means for various stakeholders.

The culmination of a number of years worth of work has also led to the listing of seven ecological communities. The new listings include:

- Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia
- Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains

To stay informed of decisions, to view listings and conservation advices, we encourage you to check out our website on a regular basis:

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

Conservation Theme

As outlined in issue 8 of the Communities for Communities newsletter, amendments to the EPBC Act in February 2007 established a new process for listing threatened species, ecological communities and key threatening processes. The new process is designed to improve the effectiveness of listing with a more strategic approach, focussing on those species and ecological communities in greatest need of protection.

As part of the new process the Minister may establish a Conservation Theme for listing threatened species, ecological communities and key threatening processes. The conservation themes for the assessment period, commencing 1 October 2009, are:

- terrestrial, estuarine and near-shore environments of Australia's coasts, and
- rivers, wetlands and groundwater dependent species and ecosystems of inland Australia (carryover theme)

Nominations for this assessment period are now open and will close on the 26th March 2009. Nominations of species, ecological communities and threatening processes relevant to the theme may be given priority for this assessment period. However, all nominations are welcome and the Committee will take a strategic approach in their consideration.

Check the website for more details on the call for nominations:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations-make.html>

Finalised Priority Assessment list for threatened species, ecological communities & key threatening processes

The 2008 Finalised Priority Assessment List is reproduced on the following page and is also available on the Department's website at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/priority-assessment-list.html>

Nominations received in 2008 which did not make the 2008 finalised priority assessment list will be reconsidered for inclusion in the 2009 assessment list along with any valid new nominations received before the 26th March 2009.

Communities for Communities

Finalised Priority Assessment List Assessment Period Commencing 1 October 2008

| Item | Assessment Completion Time |
|---|----------------------------|
| Species | |
| <i>Caladenia cremna</i> (Don's Spider Orchid) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Centrophorus harrissoni</i> (Harrisson's Dogfish) | 30 September 2010 |
| <i>Centrophorus moluccensis</i> (Endeavour Dogfish) | 30 September 2010 |
| <i>Centrophorus</i> sp. z (name change pending) (Southern Dogfish) | 30 September 2010 |
| <i>Cyclodomorphus praealtus</i> (Alpine Sheoak Skink) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Dissostichus eleginoides</i> (Patagonian Toothfish) | 30 September 2010 |
| <i>Engaewa pseudoreducta</i> (Margaret River Burrowing Crayfish) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Engaewa reducta</i> (Dunsborough Burrowing Crayfish) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Engaewa walpolea</i> (Walpole Burrowing Crayfish) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Nematoceras dienemum</i> (Windswept Helmet Orchid) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Lasiopetalum</i> sp. Proston (J.A.Baker 17) (a shrub) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Litoria myola</i> (Kuranda Tree Frog) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Phascolarctos cinereus</i> (Koala) | 30 September 2010 |
| <i>Prasophyllum atratum</i> (Three Hummock Leek-orchid) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Prasophyllum limnetes</i> (Marsh Leek-orchid) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Prasophyllum</i> sp. Wybong (C. Phelps ORG 5269) (an orchid) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Pterostylis</i> sp. Flat Rock Creek (D.L.Jones 15873 & K.J.Fitzgerald) (Spring Tiny Greenhood) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Sarcophilus harrisii</i> (Tasmanian Devil) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i> (Grey-headed Albatross) | 30 September 2009 |
| <i>Urolophus orarius</i> (Coastal Stingaree) | 30 September 2009 |
| Any other species nominated by the Committee | 30 September 2009 |
| Key Threatening Process | |
| Contemporary fire regimes resulting in the loss of vegetation heterogeneity and biodiversity throughout Australia | 30 September 2010 |
| The introduction of novel biota and its impact on biodiversity | 30 September 2010 |
| Any other key threatening process nominated by the Committee | 30 September 2010 |
| Ecological community | |
| Coolibah-Black Box Woodlands of the Darling Riverine Plains and the Queensland Brigalow Belt South Bioregions | 30 September 2010 |
| Cumberland Plains Woodland | 30 September 2009 |
| Lower Murray River and associated wetlands, floodplains and groundwater systems from the junction of the Darling River to the sea (nominated as Coorong and Lower Lakes (Lakes Alexandrina and Albert)) | 30 September 2011 |
| New England Peppermint (<i>Eucalyptus nova-anglica</i>) Woodlands | 30 September 2010 |
| Thrombolite (Microbial) Community of Coastal Brackish Lakes (Lake Clifton) | 30 September 2009 |
| Western Victorian Freshwater Swamps Community | 30 September 2010 |
| Temperate Lowland Plains Grassy Wetland | 30 September 2010 |
| Any other ecological community nominated by the Committee | 30 September 2010 |

New Ecological Community Listings

Victorian Volcanic Plains - Listing and Education Pack for the Natural Temperate Grasslands

On 21 June 2008, the Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains ecological community was listed as critically endangered under the EPBC Act.



(Photo: Reto Zollinger)

The assessment process involved a technical workshop with vegetation experts who are familiar with this ecological community so as to help determine the definition, extent and condition thresholds for the ecological community. Condition thresholds are used to identify when a patch is too degraded to be considered part of the nationally listed ecological community. In other words, very degraded components of the ecological community are excluded from the listed ecological community such that only the most intact and important patches are listed.



(*Austrostipa* sp. Spear grass - Photo: M. White)

The Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain is a type of native grassland that supports a variety of nationally threatened animals and over 20 threatened plants. The grassland is associated with the Quaternary basalt plains of south-western Victoria. The basalt plains stretch from the western suburbs of Melbourne to around Hamilton in rural Victoria. The vegetation is dominated by a native ground layer of tussock-forming perennial grasses interspersed with a variety of wildflowers. Few, if any, large shrubs and trees are present.

The ecological community can vary greatly depending on the time of year and the history of the site, such as intensity of grazing and recent fire history. The grasses that usually dominate are Kangaroo-grass (*Themeda triandra*), Wallaby-grasses (*Austrodanthonia* species), Spear-grasses (*Austrostipa* species) or Tussock-grasses (*Poa* species). Wildflowers and herbs grow among the tussocks, including daisies, lilies, peas and orchids.

An expanded list of key indicative species of the Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain can be found in the listing advice for this ecological community at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=76&status=Critically%20Endangered>



(Photo: T. Allen)

Following the listing, the Department produced an information brochure to provide the local people in the Victorian Volcanic Plains area with comprehensive information to help conserve the grasslands. The information brochure provides, amongst other things, "easy-to-read" guidance on assessing whether or not the community is present at a particular site. This brochure has been disseminated widely through local councils, catchment management authorities and Victorian government agencies. The information brochure is available at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/pubs/grasslands-victoria.pdf>

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A new project is under development where the brochure forms part of an 'education pack' folder that aims to outline to secondary school teachers and students how to go out in the field and assess whether or not the grassland is present; sites; how to mark out quadrants; and what tools and other materials to take. We hope that this will provide a valuable resource for local secondary schools, raising awareness of the existence and values of the ecological community amongst those to whom its future is so important, local kids.

If you would like to be involved or learn more please contact Matthew White, Director, Ecological Communities Section on (02) 6274 2317 or matthew.white@environment.gov.au.

If this initiative is well received, hopefully in the future such packs will form an integral part in the dissemination of information to local communities following new listings of ecological communities under the EPBC Act.

- Toby Golson / Anthony Hoffman, DEWHA

Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia

On 10 October 2008, the Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia ecological community was listed as critically endangered under the EPBC Act.



Port Macquarie - Littoral rainforest often appears a deeper green than the drier forest around it (Photo: F. Barzi)

The ecological community may occur close to the coast from northern Queensland southwards to eastern Victoria and on offshore islands. It occurs as a series of naturally disjunct and localised stands, on a range of landforms which have been influenced by coastal

processes including dunes and flats, headlands and sea-cliffs.

The appearance of this ecological community and its plant species can vary greatly depending on location, but it appears as a complex of rainforest and vine thickets. The vegetation generally is structurally diverse, with native trees, shrubs, vines and ground covers all potentially present.

The vegetation often has a closed canopy so when you are in the ecological community it often appears dark, compared to surrounding vegetation types. The canopy protects less tolerant species underneath it from salt-laden winds.



Bournda National Park - The deep green canopy of the Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia with drier coastal forest behind. (Photo: T. Wright),

The ecological community does not necessarily have tall trees. Trees can range in height from 1 to 25 metres, with the height of the canopy varying depending on the degree of salt and wind exposure. At times the canopy may have temporary gaps, due to natural disturbance such as storm events or tree fall, allowing more light into the understorey.

A range of plant types can be found including trees, shrubs, vines, herbs, ferns and epiphytes (plants that are supported by or grow on other plants). To the north, most plant species diversity is in the tree and shrub layers rather than in the lower layer. The converse generally occurs from the Sydney Basin Bioregion southwards.

The assessment of the ecological community included a workshop to obtain expert opinion on the nature and extent of the community. The workshop, held at Port Macquarie in September 2005, developed the condition criteria which a patch of remnant native vegetation must meet to be considered part of the listed community. This included patch size, species composition, structure, weed cover and other attributes such as location and coastal influences.

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The assessment was conducted on behalf of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee. This committee provides independent scientific advice to the Australian Minister for the Environment about whether ecological communities, species and key threatening processes warrant listing under the EPBC Act.

This listed ecological community is highly fragmented with most remaining patches being small in size (less than 10 hectares). The reduction in size and extent of this community is the result of previous clearing for coastal development and beach access. The Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia provides habitat for over 70 species of threatened plants and animals.

An information booklet is being developed to accompany the listing of the ecological community. This booklet aims to increase awareness, explain the reasons for the listing, provide advice on how to identify, assess and manage the ecological community and highlight the implications of the listing. The booklet will be offered as both a PDF file and a hard copy and will be available shortly.

The listing advice is always the definitive guide to determining whether a patch is part of the listed ecological community. The listing advice and indicative species lists for each bioregion may be accessed from the Department's website via the species profiles and threats (SPRAT) database:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=76&status=Critically%20Endangered>

Select the listing advice or species lists appropriate to each bioregion.

- Khia Atkins, *Ecological Communities Section, DEWHA*

New Threatened Species Listings

Mallee Emu-wren

On 7 September 2008, the Mallee-emu wren (*Stipiturus mallee*) was uplisted from vulnerable to endangered under the EPBC Act. The Mallee Emu-wren is one of Australia's smallest birds, weighing around 4-6 g. It has a long distinctive tail of six emu-like feathers, about 1.5 times longer than its body.



(Photo: T. Crittenden)

The species is confined to mallee regions south of the Murray River in Victoria and adjacent areas in South Australia. It principally occupies *Triodia* sp. (Spinifex) dominated vegetation that has not been burnt for many years. The Mallee Emu-wren feeds on beetles and other insects, as well as seeds and other vegetable matter. The main threats to the Mallee Emu-wren are inappropriate fire regimes and the effects of drought on habitat suitability. Remaining isolated populations are highly susceptible to wildfires and their limited dispersal ability can prevent birds from finding refuge in nearby unburnt habitat. In South Australia, recent wildfires have caused a rapid decline in the species' population.



(Photo: A. Fox and DEWHA)

The listing advice and conservation advice for the Mallee Emu-wren is available at:

www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=59459

The conservation advice provides guidance on immediate recovery and threat abatement activities that can be undertaken to ensure the conservation of the species. A recovery plan for the Mallee Emu-wren is also currently in preparation.

- Carly Rickerby, *Species Listing Section, DEWHA*

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Technical Workshop for the Nomination and Assessment of Inland Grey Box Woodlands

Scientists and others with expertise in Grey Box Woodlands attended a two-day workshop earlier this year at Wagga Wagga to discuss the nomination to list Inland Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) Woodlands under the EPBC Act. Workshops are an early and important step in the Department's assessment of new nominations and are used to develop a clear national description of the ecological community.

Participants were asked to identify what contributes to the uniqueness of the nominated ecological community. This was done by focussing on a range of questions. For example, where, geographically, are Grey Box woodlands found? What are the physical attributes of areas where this vegetation is found: the landscape, geology, soils, rainfall, altitude? What are the biological attributes: the vegetation structure - height and density, floristics of the canopy and understorey layers, as well as the main tree species associations?

Once the key diagnostic features of the ecological community have been identified, condition classes can be determined. Thresholds of condition identify areas of the ecological community that have a similar conservation value, or act as a measure of the extent to which different levels of degradation take the community away from its best quality defined identity. Factors used in determining condition classes include numbers, types and spread of native plants present; the level of weed invasion; and the size of an area.



Grey Box Woodland – New South Wales. (Photo: C. Barton)

Significantly degraded areas, that is, areas that don't meet the condition thresholds, will not be considered part of the ecological community.

During the workshop, participants visited a number of Grey Box sites in the vicinity of Wagga Wagga, NSW, viewing the vegetation to help inform the technical

discussions. For example, at The Rock Nature Reserve and adjoining Travelling Stock Route south of Wagga Wagga, Grey Box vegetation communities were observed. These ranged from Grey Box Grassy Woodland and White Cypress Pine to Grey Box Shrubby Woodland.

A report outlining the findings of the technical workshop will be released for public comment in the near future.



Eucalyptus microcarpa (a4717)
(Photo: ©M. Fagg, Australian National Botanic Gardens)

- Collette Barton, *Ecological Communities Section, DEWHA*

Council Information Package

A web-based information package has been developed by the Department as a pilot project to raise awareness of the benefits nationally listed ecological communities bring to the local communities and in whose hands much of the on ground conservation activities lie.

The package has been customised to deliver a comprehensive range of information in an easy to read form for posting on the websites of local councils in the Southern Tablelands region of NSW. The anticipated audience for the package is council workers, particularly environment officers, landholders and the local community in general.

The two listed ecological communities in the NSW Southern Tablelands Region, the *Natural Temperate Grassland of the Southern Tablelands of NSW and the ACT* and the *White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland* are briefly described along with the reasons for their listing under the EPBC Act.

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The values that ecological communities have are outlined including the conservation of habitat for threatened species and ecosystem services as well as their educational, recreational and aesthetic worth that amongst other things encourages regional tourism. Equally important are the productivity benefits for landholders that can flow from appropriate sustainable management of remnants of the ecological communities on their land.

Links are provided to conservation advices detailing best practice management activities for the ecological communities as well as to funding available through the Commonwealth Government's Caring for our Country initiative and to assistance provided by Conservation Management Networks, the National Farmers Federation and Catchment Management Authorities. Finally, both landholder and council legal responsibilities under the EPBC Act regarding 'significant actions' likely to impact upon the ecological communities are outlined.

Depending on its success, the intention is to provide such information to councils across the country in whose jurisdictions nationally listed ecological communities are located.

If you are interested in finding out more about the council information package, please contact Matthew White, Director, Ecological Communities Section on (02) 6274 2317 or matthew.white@environment.gov.au.

- Toby Golson, DEWHA

National Threatened Species Day

National Threatened Species Day is held on 7 September each year to encourage the community to help conserve Australia's unique native fauna and flora. It was first held in 1996, to commemorate the death of the last Tasmanian Tiger in captivity in 1936 in Hobart. The concept was developed by the Threatened Species Network, a community based program of the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Australian Government, as a way to showcase Australian threatened species.

By focusing attention on the plight of many of our threatened animals and plants, Threatened Species Day aims to encourage greater community support and hands-on involvement in the prevention of further losses of Australia's unique natural values.

A number of events were coordinated across Australia for National Threatened Species Day to raise community awareness about the plight of threatened species and to encourage community participation in conservation activities. Activities ranged from exhibitions and festivals, to displays, guided walks, workshops and a range of other community education and promotional activities.

Events this year included:

- *Golden Paw Award 2008, NSW* - Primary school students from NSW & ACT learn about and draw Australian threatened wildlife to win prizes for themselves and their schools. The best 600 entries were exhibited and Dymocks donated \$1 for every entry received to save threatened species in the wild.
- *Turn Down the Heat, QLD* - Guest speakers addressed this year's theme "Turn down the heat on threatened species", which reflected current community concerns about climate change and its impact on Australia's threatened flora and fauna.
- *Cox's Scrub Conservation Park, SA* - The field trip looked at habitat, tracks and traces of birds, reptiles and other species, and was presented by Dr Tim Milne and Janet Pedler.
- *Twist Night Stalk, WA* - A national citizen-based spotlight survey to determine numbers and distribution of Australian native species and feral pests in rural and metropolitan Australia. Results are published on the Night Stalk website and are available to state conservation agencies.
- *Mallee Lake Lascelles, VIC* - An interactive day for landholders and community members to learn about conserving and recovering threatened species in the Mallee region of Victoria.

The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts launched the occasion with an explanation on how it works to protect and conserve threatened species and biodiversity. This included displays about wildlife trade, threatened ecological communities and threatened species, along with a meet & greet of some special live animal guests in the foyer of the John Gorton Building, Canberra.

The launch was followed over the fortnight, by a series of speakers who addressed subjects which included the plight of the Mountain Pygmy-Possum, the recovery of threatened orchids, to plant biodiversity of the Mongolian steppes and Altai Mountains.

The Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett joined WWF Threatened Species Network program manager Kat Miller to urge Australians to use National Threatened Species Day, to learn more about our threatened species and how they can be protected. We can all take action to prevent further extinctions by restoring healthy numbers of endangered species and ecological communities in the wild.

Communities for Communities

"This year's theme 'Threatened today, extinct tomorrow' underlines how important it is to conserve our native birds and animals and their habitat before it's too late," Mr Garrett said.

Mr Peter Garrett used the day to announce the recipients of this year's Threatened Species Network Community Grants Program.

"This is the eleventh year the grants program has been run and this year \$500,000 from the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country initiative will go towards 25 projects around Australia," he said. "More than 40 nationally threatened plants, animals and ecological communities will benefit from this funding, including the southern bell frog, Carnaby's black-cockatoo, the bridled nail-tailed wallaby and several Tasmanian orchid species."

Ms Miller said people could do their bit by joining a conservation or community group and assisting with nature conservation activities such as tree planting and revegetation schemes.

"They can also ensure they keep domestic animals inside at night so they don't escape and become feral predators," she said.

For a full list of this year's grant recipients and their projects, visit www.wwf.org.au/tsn or www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/ts-day/projects2008.html

All Threatened Species Network Community Grants projects are funded by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative.

Upcoming Events

- The Australian Network for Plant Conservation Inc (ANPC) - Second National Forum

Minding our own biodiversity: Conservation on Private Land – 30 April to 1 May 2009, Halls Gap, The Grampians, Victoria.

A preliminary program will be available in late January 2009. To register your interest and receive updates, email the ANPC your contact details (anpc.asn.au with subject "Forum 2009"). (www.anpc.asn.au/conferences.html)

- The Fenner Conference on the Environment
The Art & Science of Good Environmental Decision Making

The Shine Dome, Gordon Street Canberra, 10 – 12 March 2009

More information is available at:
<http://www.conferenceplus.com.au/fennerconf/2009/index.cfm?mid=002.102>

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Merry Christmas