



COMMUNITIES FOR COMMUNITIES

Issue 13: December 2010

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Ecological Communities Section celebrates the International Year of Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of all species on earth. It is the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, their genes, and the terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems they form. It provides the fundamental building blocks for the many goods and services a healthy environment provides, including things fundamental to our health, like clean air, fresh water and food, as well as many other products such as timber, fibre and medicine.

In recognition of the International Year of Biodiversity, this issue of the Communities for Communities newsletter features two articles that reflect on some of the work being done by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPaC) to protect biodiversity. We feature an article on the Environmental Stewardship program, a Caring for our Country initiative that aims to maintain and/or improve the condition and extent of targeted matters protected under national environment law—the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*—in particular threatened ecological communities. And we take a look at the Australian Government's role as a development support partner in the Coral Triangle Initiative, a collaborative project formulated to improve marine biodiversity conservation and management in the Coral Triangle region across South East Asia and the Pacific.



We will also update you on the ongoing work of the Ecological Communities Section whose work to date has helped list 48 ecological communities as threatened under national environment law, representing about 165 entities that are listed or otherwise recognised as threatened under various state and territory jurisdictions. These 48 threatened ecological community listings protect about 2.4 million hectares of the native landscape, including biodiversity and related ecological processes, of which about 1 million hectares were listed in the past two years.

Call for new nominations

Why list ecological communities?

Ecological communities are unique and naturally occurring groups of plants and animals, and are one of eight matters of national environmental significance protected under national environment law. Threatened ecological communities are identified through a rigorous process of research and consultation with scientific experts, stakeholders and the public. Final advice is obtained from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC), an independent scientific body that advises the federal environment minister on the conservation status of native species and ecological communities.

Listing also raises awareness of these threatened ecological communities, the threats they face, and the plants and animals for which they provide habitat. Listing triggers the protection mechanisms of national environment law, and makes the communities a priority for funding and management to help with their recovery and conservation.

The department is now seeking nominations for threatened ecological communities, threatened species and key threatening processes to be listed under national environment law. The period for new nominations has started, and nominations for this assessment cycle must be submitted by 5pm on Thursday 24 March 2011.

Electronic submissions are preferred, although hard copy format is also welcome. (An accompanying CD with an electronic version of the submission would be helpful.)

Before you submit a nomination for an ecological community, please check to see whether it is already in the current lists, which are available at: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publiclookupcommunities.pl. Other references and recommended reading that may be useful in preparing nominations are recent listing and conservation advices, and recovery plans for threatened species and ecological communities.

These references and further information about threatened ecological communities, including policy statements for currently listed ecological communities, and priority assessments currently under way can be also found at: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/index.html.

Nominating an ecological community for listing as threatened is an important process and requires significant time and effort. This is because scientific rigour is important in prioritising nominations for assessment (as not all nominations will be assessed). If nominations are successful and the ecological community becomes nationally listed, it is a significant step towards its survival.

Updated nomination forms and guidelines are available at: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations-make.html



A more strategic approach to the listing of nationally threatened ecological communities

The list of threatened ecological communities currently contains 48 items (as at 30 September 2010). These mainly originated through public nominations for listing. Most listed communities are vegetation-based, which tend to be the best known types of ecological communities, and have some information that can be used to support listing assessments. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee and the department are aware that, despite a larger number of listings in recent years, the list is not yet comprehensive or representative of all threatened ecological communities across Australia. There remain gaps both in the list and in knowledge of national biodiversity at the community scale.

To more strategically determine where gaps may lie, the department looked at major vegetation groups from the National Vegetation Information System (NVIS). This estimated the pre-1750 and present extent for all 23 major vegetation groups nationally and within each of the 85 Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia bioregions. A summary of the national distribution of major vegetation groups is available at: www.environment.gov.au/erin/nvis/publications/major-veg-summary.html

The conclusions were as follows:

1. Many vegetation communities on the present list fall into two major vegetation groups: *Eucalyptus* woodlands and tussock grasslands. This is justified, as these are two of the most heavily cleared groups. A large part of their range coincides with the intensive land use zones of south-eastern Australia.

2. A number of major vegetation groups are not represented on the list of threatened ecological communities. In some cases this is justified because certain groups have not undergone any substantial decline in extent either nationally or bioregionally—for instance, Hummock Grasslands remain extensive throughout much of arid and semi-arid Australia. However, in other cases certain major vegetation groups show a substantial decline in at least part of their range. Mallee woodlands and shrublands, for example, have declined in extent in some bioregions, and merit further consideration as potential nominations for listing.
3. In addition to identifying specific major vegetation groups that are under-represented on the list, the analysis highlighted under-represented regions. The major under-represented region is the Avon Wheatbelt area of south-western Western Australia. This area has experienced an extensive decline in its natural vegetation, but very few ecological communities from there have been nominated or listed to date.

The department and the Threatened Species Scientific Committee will use this information to help tackle major gaps on the list of threatened ecological communities by encouraging appropriate future nominations and listings. The analysis will also be available in due course on the department's website for nominators to consider.



The current finalised priority assessment list (started 1 October 2010)

After last year's annual call for nominations of threatened ecological communities, threatened species, and key threatening processes to be listed under national environment law, the finalised priority assessment list (FPAL) for the assessment for the period beginning 1 October 2010 has been announced.

The following table outlines the list of ecological communities announced for this year. The assessments of nine ecological communities that started in previous assessment periods are also continuing.

Finalised priority assessment list for the assessment period starting 1 October 2010

Item	Australian distribution	Completion times
Ecological communities		
Claypans of the Swan Coastal Plains	WA	31 December 2011
Kangaroo Island Narrow-leaved Mallee (<i>Eucalyptus cneorifolia</i>) Eastern Plains Complex	SA	31 December 2012
Lowland Grassy Woodland and Forest of the South-East Corner Bioregion	NSW	31 December 2012
Melaleuca Woodlands of Queensland Coastal Plains	Qld	31 December 2011
Murray Valley Natural Grasslands of the Southern Riverina Bioregion	Vic, NSW	31 March 2012
Subtropical and Temperate Saltmarsh	Qld, NSW, Vic, SA, Tas, WA	30 June 2013
Western Sydney Dry Rainforest in the Sydney Basin Bioregion	NSW	30 June 2012
Any other ecological community nominated by the committee		30 September 2012

To view the most recent FPAL in full, including threatened species and key threatening processes, and for details of previous FPALs, go to: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations-fpal.html



New aquatic assessments under way

Wetlands of the Darling

The Wetlands of the Darling Basin ecological community was placed on the 2009 FPAL to be completed by 31 March 2012. A nomination to list the Macquarie Marshes as a threatened ecological community under national environment law was originally received in 2008.

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee decided to look at the national extent of this ecological community, and whether the Macquarie Marshes may be part of a broader wetland community associated with the Darling River. The committee agreed that a broader ecological community—the 'Wetlands of the Darling Basin'—be listed on the 2009 preliminary priority assessment list, and that it encompass the Macquarie Marshes nomination (with the title to be determined by experts).

The Darling Basin wetland system has been affected by river regulation, but still supports important areas for breeding by colonial water birds.

Once described, the ecological community is likely to include the terminal wetland systems of the Macquarie Marshes, Narran Lakes and the Gwydir (significant semi-permanent wetlands in north-west New South Wales). All these wetlands have areas declared as Ramsar listed wetlands of international importance. These wetlands also support a diverse flora, with many species at the edge of their range, as well as very diverse avian and reptilian faunas.

An expert technical workshop for this ecological community is proposed for the first half of 2011 to help refine its scope, context and boundaries. A preliminary description of the ecological community is currently being prepared for the expert workshop.

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Technical workshop reports

Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia ecological community

The area of north-east New South Wales and south-east Queensland is one of the richest and most diverse regions in Australia. Before European settlement, lowland rainforest was extensive throughout this region. Lowland rainforest of the Big Scrub, near Lismore, originally covered 1,600 square kilometres, and was the most extensive lowland rainforest in south-eastern Australia. Early settlers logged the region for red cedar, and cleared large areas of the highly fertile soils on which lowland rainforest is found for agriculture. Extensive areas have also been cleared for urban development.

In June 2010, a two-day workshop was held to define the Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia ecological community. The workshop brought together scientists with expertise in the ecological community from Queensland and New South Wales.

The ecological community was nominated as Lowland Subtropical Rainforest on Basalt and Alluvium in North East New South Wales and South East Queensland. At the workshop it was renamed the ecological community Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia. In the new name, 'subtropical' has been used to describe roughly where the ecological community occurs within eastern Australia rather than the specific type of rainforest that is in the ecological community. The ecological community is thought to primarily occur from Gladstone in Queensland to the Clarence River (near Grafton) in New South Wales, and may also include isolated areas between the Clarence River and Hunter River.



Workshop participants discussed the characteristics of the Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia based on plant species composition, faunal components, soils and geographic distribution within national bioregions/subregions (Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia—IBRA). Once the ecological community was defined, condition thresholds were developed to help landholders determine whether their land contained the ecological community, and at what point the community can be considered too degraded to trigger national environment law. The condition thresholds were composed of indicators such as a number of key species, minimum patch size, maximum cover of weed species, and the patch type (that is, whether the patch is a remnant with persistent residual trees or a patch of regeneration with active management). The thresholds can also help with recovery decision-making, and recommended management actions were suggested for consideration in the conservation advice (which is published at the time of listing).

A half-day field trip was held at sites around Lismore varying from those next to urban developments to those in Booyong Flora Reserve. The field trip enabled participants to view sites in good and bad condition, and helped to establish condition thresholds that can be applied on the ground.

The workshop report is an important step towards national listing, and greatly helps define the national ecological community. The next step is for the department and Threatened Species Scientific Committee to finalise a listing advice that determines listing eligibility in consultation with experts. The report is also open for public consultation at: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/index.html

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Booyong Reserve remnant (Matt White)



Laureldale remnant (Matt White)



River Murray—Darling to Sea ecological community technical workshop

Following on from the 2009 technical workshop, a further workshop was held in April 2010 to tackle important gaps identified in last year's workshop related to thresholds for both the listing criteria and condition classes (see Issue 12: February 2010. To view the report go to: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/workshop-river-murray.html). Under the guidelines developed by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee for assessing the six listing criteria of the EPBC Act regulations, certain thresholds enable the conservation status of a threatened ecological community to be ascertained—that is, whether it is critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable. These different levels of conservation status have different levels of protection under national environment law (for example, vulnerable ecological communities are not a matter of national environmental significance).

As part of the challenge with listing large aquatic systems for the first time, the suitability and applicability of these thresholds for aquatic ecosystems needed to be determined. They also needed to be quantified or qualified, if appropriate.

Also, the current assessment and listing process has the concept of 'condition class' to determine good quality versus severely degraded parts of the ecological community (in some cases heavily degraded parts have been excluded from listing protection). There is a need to look at whether this concept—and the existing thresholds associated with it—is suitable and/or appropriate for aquatic systems, and if so, what would their specific quantitative/qualitative aspects be. Outcomes of this workshop are being assessed.

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The gorge section, River Murray SA (Keith Walker)

New ecological community listings

Grey Box Grassy Woodlands and Derived Native Grasslands of South-eastern Australia

Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) Grassy Woodlands and Derived Native Grasslands of South-eastern Australia ecological community was listed as a threatened ecological community under national environment law on 1 April 2010.

The ecological community is a type of eucalypt woodland dominated by grey box trees with an understorey that mostly comprises grasses and other herbs. Patches of derived grassland are included within the national ecological community, where grey box has been cleared but the native ground layer is diverse and in good condition. This national ecological community was formerly extensive across inland south-eastern Australia, but has been heavily cleared. It now occurs in fragmented patches among a largely modified agricultural landscape across a broad distribution from central New South Wales through parts of northern-central Victoria into eastern South Australia, with disconnected occurrences in the Flinders-Lofty region near Adelaide, and west of Melbourne.



The Threatened Species Scientific Committee concluded that this ecological community merited listing as *endangered* because it has undergone a severe reduction in integrity across most of its range. The nature of the changes in integrity within the ecological community—as indicated by the loss of plants and animals, the invasion of weeds, the degree of fragmentation and the degradation of habitat values—are such that the regeneration of many patches is unlikely to occur within the near future, even with positive human intervention.

The committee also found that the ecological community has undergone a substantial decline (more than 85 per cent) in its geographic distribution. Threats include: vegetation clearing; fragmentation of native vegetation into small remnants; inappropriate land use regimes (heavy grazing, inappropriate fire regimes, herbicides and fertilisers); weed invasion; the relatively low level of protection in reserves; and climate change.

Listing will help preserve vital wildlife habitat and connectivity across whole landscapes and ecosystems to help many nationally and state threatened species, including more than 50 bird species, like the swift parrot and red-tailed black cockatoo, and hundreds of other plants and animals. It will also protect ecosystem services, including carbon storage and natural management of water tables and flows, and soil nutrient cycling, ultimately controlling erosion and salinity. The overstorey also provides shelter for stock, and the native grassy understorey serves as native pasture, which is a crucial resource during drought. This particularly applies to some of the largest and highest quality patches that occur within travelling stock routes and reserves in New South Wales. Well managed travelling stock routes and reserves effectively balance conservation with primary production

values. National listing should encourage better management, and provide additional protection for important patches, like travelling stock routes and reserves, by allowing for national coordination of recovery efforts, and covering gaps in state/territory protection.

Further information on this ecological community, including a detailed description, distribution map, species lists, reasons for listing, priority conservation actions, and a farmers fact sheet can be found with the listing advice and conservation advice at: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=86&status=Endangered

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Grey Box Grassy Woodland, Wagga Wagga (R. Purdie)



New information booklet available for the Gippsland Red Gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis* subsp. *Mediana*) Grassy Woodland and Associated Native Grassland

Another new booklet in the illustrated series on nationally threatened ecological communities is now available—the *Gippsland Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Associated Native Grassland Policy Statement 3.22*.

The booklet provides advice on how to identify the Gippsland Red Gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis* subsp. *mediana*) Grassy Woodland and Associated Native Grassland ecological community, explains why it was listed as critically endangered, and provides guidance on the national listing's implications and management.

The ecological community is limited to the central Gippsland Plain in south-eastern Victoria, where it was formerly extensive, but now occurs as mostly small and degraded patches. Most patches have a grassy woodland structure with a tree canopy dominated by Gippsland red gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis* subsp. *mediana*) over a ground layer with native grasses, grass-like plants and forbs. The woodland varies from open woodland with widely spaced, mature trees to regrowth stands where trees are thinner and more closely spaced. Localised pockets dominated by drooping sheoak or black sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata* and *A. littoralis*) may occur and are included as part of the ecological community. Some remnants are managed as native grasslands. In these remnants, the tree canopy is now mostly or entirely lost, but a sward of native grasses and herbs remains intact on the ground. Both the grassy woodland and grassland forms can have colourful wildflowers, including orchids and daisies, among the grass tussocks, especially in better quality remnants.

The booklet is available at: www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/gippsland-red-gum.html or the department's Species Profiles and Threats (SPRAT) database at: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=73&status=Critically+Endangered

Hard copies are also available through the department's community information unit on Freecall 1800 803 772 or email: ciu@environment.gov.au.



Woodland form of the ecological community at Fernbank Recreation Reserve, Victoria (R. Purdie)

New threatened species and key threatening process listings

Since the last newsletter, 25 species have been added to the threatened species list. This includes the assessment of one species from the 2009 finalised priority assessment list—the new Holland mouse (*Pseudomys novaehollandiae*), which was listed as vulnerable.





Pseudomys novaehollandiae (new Holland mouse) (Billy Lazenby)

Through the department's memorandum of understanding with state and territory governments, the species listing section has also administered the delisting of 12 species and the listing of:

- four Western Australian, one Tasmanian and one South Australian species as critically endangered
- two Tasmanian, one South Australian and one Western Australian species as endangered
- one Northern Territory and one Tasmanian species as vulnerable.

Details of recent changes to the national threatened species are provided in the table below.

Species	Category
<i>Acacia chinchillensis</i> (a shrub)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Austrostipa nullanulla</i> (club spear-grass)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Callistemon</i> sp. Boulia (L.Pedley 5297) (a shrub)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Dillwynia tenuifolia</i> (a shrub)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Diuris sheaffiana</i> (pine donkey orchid)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Eucalyptus blaxellii</i> (a tree)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Ipomoea</i> sp. Stirling (P.K.Latz 10408) (giant sweet potato)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Petrogale lateralis pearsoni</i> (Pearson Island rock-wallaby)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Pleurophascum occidentale</i> (a moss)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Pultenaea campbellii</i> (New England bush-pea)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Pultenaea stuartiana</i> (a shrub)	Delisted from vulnerable category
<i>Apatophyllum constablei</i> (a shrub)	Delisted from endangered category
<i>Pseudomys novaehollandiae</i> (new Holland mouse)	Listed as vulnerable
<i>Phascogale pirata</i> (northern brush-tailed phascogale)	Listed as vulnerable
<i>Tyto novaehollandiae castanops</i> (Tasmanian population) (masked owl)	Listed as vulnerable
<i>Antipodia chaostola leucophaea</i> (Tasmanian chaostola skipper)	Listed as endangered
<i>Ceyx azureus diemenensis</i> (Tasmanian azure kingfisher)	Listed as endangered
<i>Prasophyllum pruinatum</i> (plum leek-orchid)	Listed as endangered
<i>Ricinocarpus brevis</i> (a shrub)	Listed as endangered
<i>Azorella macquariensis</i> (Macquarie azorella)	Listed as critically endangered
<i>Hibbertia tenuis</i> (a shrub)	Listed as critically endangered
<i>Leucopogon spectabilis</i> (ironstone beard-heath)	Listed as critically endangered
<i>Pityrodia axillaris</i> (native foxglove)	Listed as critically endangered
<i>Scaevola macrophylla</i> (large-flowered scaevola)	Listed as critically endangered
<i>Verticordia apecta</i> (Hay River featherflower)	Listed as critically endangered

Listing and conservation advices for the species mentioned above can be downloaded from:

www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/sprat.pl



The conservation advice provides guidance on immediate recovery and threat abatement activities that can be done to ensure the conservation of the species.

For further information on species listings, contact Claire Edwards, Claire.Edwards@environment.gov.au or the Director, Species Listing Section by email at epbc.nominations@environment.gov.au or by phone 02 6274 2238.

Recently released recovery plans

The federal environment minister may make or adopt and implement recovery plans for threatened fauna, threatened flora and threatened ecological communities listed under national environment law. Recovery plans state what needs to be done to protect and restore important populations of threatened species and habitat, as well as how to manage and reduce threatening processes. Recovery plans achieve this by providing a planned and logical framework for key interest groups and responsible government agencies to coordinate their work to improve the plight of threatened species and/or threatened ecological communities.

To date, recovery plans have been made or adopted for 17 ecological communities. Two of these—the Semi-evergreen Vine Thickets of the Brigalow Belt and Nandewar Bioregions community, and the Great Artesian Basin Discharge Spring Wetlands community—were completed this year.

Great Artesian Basin Discharge Spring Wetlands

The community of native species dependent on natural discharge of groundwater from the Great Artesian Basin (hereafter Great Artesian Basin Discharge Spring Wetlands) is listed as endangered under national environment law. Great Artesian

Basin Discharge Spring Wetlands are located on the northern, western and southern margins of the Great Artesian Basin in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia. The overall objective of the recovery plan is to maintain or improve groundwater supplies to Great Artesian Basin Discharge Spring Wetlands, maintain or increase habitat area and health, and increase all populations of endemic organisms.

Semi-evergreen Vine Thickets of the Brigalow Belt (north and south) and Nandewar bioregions

Semi-evergreen vine thickets, often referred to as softwood scrub or bottle tree scrub, are most common on undulating plains on fine-grained sedimentary rocks (frequently shale) and on basalt hills and plains.

Semi-evergreen vine thickets are considered an extreme form of dry seasonal subtropical rainforest. It occurs in areas with a subtropical, seasonally dry climate on soils of high to medium fertility and is generally characterised by the prominence of trees with microphyll sized leaves (2.5–7.5 centimetres), and the frequent presence of swollen-stemmed bottle trees (*Brachychiton australis*, *B. rupestris*).

The thickets typically have an uneven canopy of 4 to 9 metres high with mixed evergreen, semi-evergreen and deciduous emergent tree species of 9 to 18 metres high. Vines, twining or scrambling plants are prominent. The overall objective of the Semi-evergreen Vine Thickets of the Brigalow Belt (north and south) and Nandewar Bioregions recovery plan is to maintain and conserve the environmental values of the Semi-evergreen Vine Thicket ecological community over the long term, by minimising the loss of both remnant and regrowth semi-evergreen vine thickets, and improving their condition and management.



To view the completed recovery plans for these ecological communities, and previously adopted or approved recovery plans for other threatened ecological communities, go to: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/recovery.html

Case studies: Environmental assessments and compliance

The listing of a threatened ecological community as nationally protected matter under national environment law helps to protect Australia's environment and biodiversity. It also increases awareness of significant ecosystems, habitats and native species that are under pressure, provides measures to assess and reduce potential impacts on the environment, assists with management options and provides targets for funding.

The legislation includes various enforcement mechanisms to manage breaches and to review the compliance of approved projects. Under the legislation, environmental assessments increase protection of threatened species and ecological communities by ensuring the impacts of approved projects on nationally protected matters are minimised, or by refusing approval for projects where impacts cannot be reduced to an acceptable level.

Boco Rock wind farm

(The following information is correct as of 29 September 2010 when the action was approved).

After a thorough environmental assessment, the Boco Rock wind farm, near Nimmitabel, New South Wales was approved under national environment law with strict environmental conditions.

The property comprises about 498 hectares of the endangered Natural Temperate Grassland of the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales and the

Australian Capital Territory (Natural Temperate Grassland). The site also provides habitat for the threatened grassland earless dragon and striped legless lizard.

The proposal to build and operate up to 122 wind turbines (a reduced number of turbines from the original proposal) and associated structure was authorised with approval conditions. The proponent is required to enter into an offset agreement to protect and manage in perpetuity a minimum of 750 hectares of Natural Temperate Grassland, which is to include a minimum of 150 hectares of habitat for the Grassland Earless Dragon and Striped Legless Lizard. Works are not to be undertaken in the breeding season of the two species at specific sites, and where impacts on their habitat is unavoidable. A relocation strategy is also to be implemented for Grassland Earless Dragon to adjacent habitat. The proponent is also required to develop and implement a revegetation and rehabilitation program, and a construction environmental management plan.

Indirect impacts to the threatened species and ecological community also needed to be considered, including issues of run-off, sedimentation and erosion, and the impacts of fragmentation, edge effects and potential for exotic species invasion, which were all to be addressed in an environmental management plan

Ongoing assessment of this proposal will be carried out right up until the project is decommissioned to ensure minimal environmental impact occurs.

For further information on environmental assessments and significant impacts on matters protected under national environment law go to: www.environment.gov.au/epbc/assessments/index.html



Contravening environmental law

Each year the department investigates all allegations of national environment law breaches, resulting in payment of heavy penalties or remediation orders.

In November 2009, the construction company Bridge and Marine Australia agreed to sign a \$30,000 enforceable undertaking with the federal environment department as an alternative to the matter going to court. A departmental investigation found that the company had breached national and Victorian environment laws at an industrial site in Ardeer, Victoria, where they cleared protected native grasslands, causing a significant impact on nationally threatened species.

In March of this year Cromwell Property Securities agreed to an enforceable undertaking to pay \$62,000 towards conservation research and protection of up to 13 hectares of threatened species habitat after they damaged nearly half a hectare of the nationally threatened Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain by removing boulders and using heavy machinery in the area.

In April of this year, Pyrenees Shire Council in Victoria was asked to pay \$155,000 towards the future conservation and protection of Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain after damaging about half a hectare of the protected grassland during road works. The council will pay \$17,500 towards research and recovery of the affected species, and \$19,500 towards rehabilitating the damaged area, and will protect one hectare of good quality grassland. The remaining \$118,000 will be spent on improving their environmental planning processes, including an environmental management strategy for the council area.

These cases are a good reminder for people and companies to check whether federal government approval is required for any activities or projects that could have a significant impact on nationally protected species or ecological communities. For more information on the approvals process go to: www.environment.gov.au/epbc/approval.html.

For more information on compliance under national environment law go to: www.environment.gov.au/about/publications/compliancepolicy.html

Environmental Stewardship Program

The Environmental Stewardship Program is part of the Caring for our Country initiative. The program aims to achieve improvement in the long-term protection, condition and extent of targeted high value nationally protected matters on private land. To date the focus of the program has been on threatened ecological communities.

Before European settlement ecological communities were extensively distributed within their geographic range, but due to clearing and agricultural practices what remains is highly fragmented, and only a small proportion remain in good condition. Therefore, it is important that the remaining stands of these communities are actively managed.

Many ecological communities are on productive private land, and consequently can benefit from both legislative and incentive approaches for effective conservation. Environmental stewardship uses competitive market based incentives to fund private land managers to maintain, rehabilitate and/or improve the condition and extent of nationally threatened ecological communities. Successful bidders are contracted and receive up to 15 years funding to carry out activities such as changes in



fire management practices, improved environmental weed management and feral animal control, repair and restoration of degraded habitats, expansion of existing remnant habitats and altered grazing, fertilisation and/or tillage regimes.

Between 2007 and 2009, the Environmental Stewardship Program focused on the Box Gum Grassy Woodlands of south eastern Australia through the Box Gum Grassy Woodlands project. This resulted in 26,470 hectares being managed for conservation by 201 land managers across New South Wales and southern Queensland who have long-term agreements with the Australian Government. During 2010–2011 the program will focus on multiple grassland and woodland communities through the Multiple Ecological Communities Project in New South Wales and South Australia. Through this project, the program is taking a more landscape focussed approach, with funding also being provided to manage buffer areas and connectivity corridors in addition to ecological community outcomes. Expressions of interest are currently being invited in New South Wales and South Australia from interested land managers. More information can be found at: www.nrm.gov.au/stewardship/mecp/index.html.

The Environmental Stewardship Program recognises the vital role farmers play in protecting our environment. The program provides opportunities for farmers to get involved in conservation on their land and as a result delivers positive outcomes for farms, the community and the environment.

For more information on Environmental Stewardship go to www.nrm.gov.au/stewardship/index.html



Box Gum Grassy Woodland, Hoskinstown, NSW (Michelle McAulay)



Box Gum Grassy Woodland, Williamsdale, NSW (Dragi Markovic)

The Coral Triangle Initiative on coral reefs, fisheries and food security: a collaborative approach to biodiversity conservation

The Coral Triangle region across South East Asia and the Pacific has the world's greatest coral reef diversity, comprising more than 600 species of coral over 75,000 square kilometres. This represents about 75 per cent of all known coral species.



The marine and coastal resources of the Coral Triangle sustain the health and livelihoods of some 240 million people who depend on them. It is a source of food and income, and protects coastal communities from extreme weather events. The region also provides major spawning and nursery grounds for commercially important fish species. The wellbeing and prosperity of current and future generations in the region are largely dependent on the health of these coral reef ecosystems, and the sustainable use of the resources they provide.

The marine and coastal resources of the Coral Triangle are subject to increasing pressures because of over-fishing; illegal fishing; destructive fishing practices; urbanisation; changed land use patterns; increased levels of pollution; and climate change.

Recognising the threats and importance of the region's coral reefs, in 2007 Indonesia led the other five countries of the Coral Triangle (Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor Leste) to initiate the Coral Triangle Initiative.

The initiative is focused on collaborative action to improve marine biodiversity conservation and management, to achieve sustainable livelihoods, food security and economic development. It is guided by a regional plan of action, which sets goals, targets and actions at the regional level. Each country has also recently developed a Coral Triangle Initiative national plan, detailing actions at the national level specific to their area.

The Australian Government is a strong advocate of the initiative. As one of six development support partners, the Australian Government's role in the initiative will be an important contribution to the sustainable management of the region's coastal and marine resources. It will also provide flow on environmental benefits to nearby areas, including Australia's marine resources.



Starfish, Great Barrier Reef (GBRMPA)

Australia's support to date has focused on establishing the institutional, governance and planning arrangements required to ensure the initiative is a strong, effective and representational forum. This includes technical assistance for the transition from the current interim regional secretariat, to a permanent regional secretariat.

Over the next 12 to 18 months, Australia's support program will extend to national level activities, aimed at Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste. Consolidation of support to these three countries will help ensure that support is directed to tackle some of the most pressing capacity development requirements in the region. Departmental officers travelled to these three countries in July 2010 to meet with Government officials, other support partners, non-government organisations, and community based organisations, to discuss options for Australian Government support.

To learn more about Australia's Coral Triangle Initiative support program, email CTIAUSFocalPoint@environment.gov.au.



Conferences and Events in 2010/11

1–3 December 2010: **Australasian Wildlife Management (AWMS) Society annual conference**, Torquay, Victoria

www.onqconferences.com.au/events/awms10/

6–10 December 2010: **Ecological Society of Australia 2010 annual conference**, Canberra

www.esa2010.org.au

5–7 January 2011: **7th International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability**, Hamilton, New Zealand

onsustainability.com/conference-2011/

9–11 February 2011: **Atmosphere, Oceans, Environment and Society (AMOS) and MetSoc NZ joint conference: Extreme weather**, Te Papa, Wellington, New Zealand

4–8 April 2011: **Greenhouse 2011 conference: The science of climate change**, Cairns Convention Centre, Queensland

greenhouse2011.com/page.aspx?docid=1

17–20 April 2011: **EnviroTox Conference: Sharing knowledge for a healthier environment**, Darwin Northern Territory

www.envirotox2011.org/

20–23 June 2011: **5th Australasian Vertebrate Pest Conference**, 'Security from the impact of vertebrate pest animals', Sydney, New South Wales

www.avpc.net.au/

28 June – 7 July 2011: **Earth on the edge: Science for a sustainable planet**, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Victoria

www.iugg2011.com/program-union.asp

23–30 July 2011: **XVIII International Botanical Congress**, Melbourne, Victoria

www.ibt2011.com/Program.htm

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