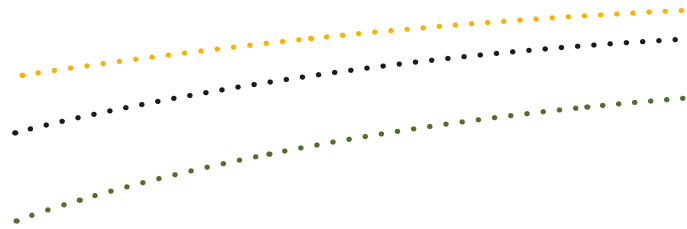




Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities



COMMUNITIES FOR COMMUNITIES

Issue 15: December 2011

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Breaking news!

Three ecological communities have been listed as threatened under national environment law. They are:



Arnhem Plateau Sandstone Shrubland Complex © Helena Mills

The endangered Arnhem Plateau Sandstone Shrubland Complex, which occurs mainly on the Arnhem Plateau in the Northern Territory.



Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia © Rosemary Purdie

The critically endangered Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia, which occurs in northern New South Wales and southern Queensland.



Eucalyptus fastigata Mt Gibraltar, © Vanessa Keyzer SEWPAC

The endangered upland Basalt Eucalypt Forests of the Sydney Basin Bioregion, which occurs in the Southern Highlands, Blue Mountains and Southern Tablelands of NSW.

For more information on these recently listed ecological communities go to:
www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publiclookupcommunities.pl



Changing of the guard – Threatened Species Scientific Committee chair



Former chair of the TSSC Associate Professor Robert JS Beeton.

After ten years Associate Professor Bob Beeton is taking his well earned retirement and leaving his position as chair of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

As inaugural chair of the committee Associate Professor Beeton has made significant and enduring contributions to the establishment of the committee and its approach and processes.

Associate Professor Beeton's decade long commitment and leadership of the committee has had a significant contribution to the conservation of threatened species and Australia's biodiversity. For national ecological communities, he oversaw development of groundbreaking landscape or

systems-level approach to wildlife protection and condition thresholds for broad national ecological communities. This approach remains internationally unique. The department would like to express its sincere gratitude to Associate Professor Beeton and wish him the very best for his future endeavours.

In saying goodbye to Associate Professor Beeton, the department welcomes Professor Helene Marsh as the new chair of the committee. Professor Marsh is a conservation biologist with nearly 30 years experience in research into species conservation, management and policy with particular reference to tropical marine and terrestrial wildlife of conservation concern. Professor Marsh is Dean of Graduate Research Studies and Distinguished Professor of Environmental Science at James Cook University.



Chair of the TSSC Professor Helene Marsh

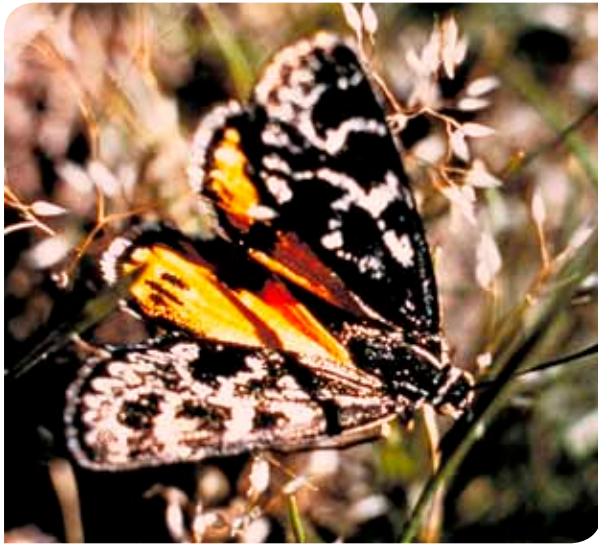
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New information guide available on two Victorian ecological communities



The *Synemon plana* (golden sun moth) occurs in the two Victorian volcanic plain ecological communities © E.D. Edwards

A new information guide has been released for two Victorian ecological communities, the Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain and the Grassy Eucalypt Woodland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain.

The guide is designed to assist land managers, owners and occupiers as well as consultants and the general public with the identification, assessment and management of the listed ecological communities. The guide also accompanies the listing and conservation advices.

These publications provide a detailed description of the two ecological communities. The listing advice is a technical document that explains in detail what an ecological community is, where it is known to occur, why it merits listing as nationally threatened and which conservation status applies to the ecological community. The conservation advice identifies priority management and conservation actions.

The information guide can be found at www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/grasslands-victoria.html

The conservation and listing advices are available at www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publiclookupcommunities.pl

Finalised Priority Assessment List for period beginning 1 October 2011

In September 2011, the Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke, agreed to the Finalised Priority Assessment List (FPAL) of ecological communities, species and key threatening processes for the 2012 assessment period

Assessment of the six ecological communities, eight species and one key threatening process placed on the list began in October. Assessments are expected to be completed in time frames of between 12 months and three years. The full FPAL is available at www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/pubs/priority-assessment-list-2011.pdf

The Eyre Peninsula Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus petiolaris*) Grassy Woodland and the Plant Communities on Ferricrete in South-West Western Australia ecological communities have been placed on the list as part of a process to align national state and territory lists of threatened ecological communities.

This approach was identified as a priority in the Australian Government's response to the recent review of national environment law. Both ecological communities have been identified as a priority for national listing
(continued page 5)



Isoodon obesulus subsp. *obesulus* (southern brown bandicoot) occurs in the two Victorian volcanic plain ecological communities © Andrew Tatnell SEWPAC

Priority Assessment List for the 2012 assessment period has been finalised



Overabundance of the noisy miner, *Manorina melanocephala* may exclude native birds from potential woodland and forest habitat.
© Brian Furby

Item	Australian distribution	Completion time
Species		
<i>Bidyanus bidyanus</i> (silver perch)	Murray-Darling System, SA, VIC, QLD, NSW, ACT	30 September 2013
<i>Brachychiton</i> sp. Ormeau (Ormeau bottle Tree)	South-east Queensland	30 September 2012
<i>Orectolobus maculatus</i> (spotted wobbegong)	Coastal waters off QLD, NSW, VIC, SA, WA	30 September 2014
<i>Pseudophryne corroboree</i> (southern corroboree frog)	Alpine Areas NSW	31 March 2013
<i>Pseudophryne pengilleyi</i> (northern corroboree frog)	Alpine Areas NSW, ACT	31 March 2013
<i>Rostratula australis</i> (Australian painted snipe)	All States and Territories	31 March 2013
<i>Selaginella andrewsii</i> (Tallebudgera spikemoss)	South East Queensland	30 September 2012
<i>Seriolella brama</i> (blue warehou)	Coastal waters off Victoria and Tasmania	30 September 2014
Key threatening processes		
Aggressive exclusion of birds from potential woodland and forest habitat by over abundant noisy miners <i>Manorina melanocephala</i>	QLD, NSW, ACT, VIC, TAS, SA	30 September 2014
Ecological Communities		
Eyre Peninsula Blue Gum (<i>Eucalyptus petiolaris</i>) Grassy Woodland	South Australia	30 June 2013
Eucalypt Woodlands of the Western Australian Wheatbelt	Western Australia	31 December 2013
Hinterland Sand Flats Forests and Woodlands of the Sydney Basin Bioregion	New South Wales	30 September 2013
Obligate Seeding Proteaceae and Kwongan of the Esperance Sandplains	Western Australia	30 September 2013
Plant Communities on Ferricrete in South-West Western Australia	Western Australia	31 March 2013
<i>Posidonia</i> Seagrass Meadows	NSW, VIC, SA, WA, TAS	31 December 2013

by their respective states. In addition a public nomination received in 2009, the Hinterland Sand Flats Forests and Woodlands of the Sydney Basin Bioregion ecological community, also includes three ecological communities identified by the NSW Scientific Committee as high priorities for potential assessment as nationally threatened ecological communities.

The Posidonia Seagrass Meadows ecological community is only the second marine ecological community to be added to the FPAL since 2007. The first, the Giant Kelp Forests of the East and South Coasts of Tasmania is still under assessment. Public consultation on the Giant Kelp Forests of the East and South Coasts of Tasmania is currently underway.

More information on previous FPALs and items currently under assessment can be found at www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/listing-assessments-fpal.html

More information on nominations open for public comment can be found at www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations-comment.html

The next call for nominations have recently been advertised. Nominations for any species, ecological community or key threatening process should be made by 22 March 2012. A conservation theme of "Corridors and connecting habitats (including freshwater habitats)" has been established by the minister and nominations that fit this theme are encouraged. Check the 'Latest News' section of the website www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/index.html for more information.

Information on how to nominate a threatened species or ecological community can be found at www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations.html

Public comment period open for three ecological communities currently under assessment

Draft descriptions of three ecological communities currently under assessment are now available for comment. The

draft descriptions of the Murray Valley Natural Grasslands of the Southern Riverina Bioregion, the Long Lowland Floodplain rivers of the Macleay/McPherson Overlap and the Giant Kelp Forests of South East Australia ecological communities are available at www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations-comment.html.

The comment period for the Murray Valley Natural Grasslands of the Southern Riverina Bioregion closes on 23 December 2011 and the comment period for the Giant Kelp Forests of South East Australia closes on 18 January 2012. The comment period for the Long Lowland and Floodplain Rivers of the Macleay/McPherson Overlap closes on 2 February 2012



Macrocystis pyrifera (giant kelp). © Neville Barrett

Technical Workshops on two ecological communities currently under assessment

Workshop on Wetlands of the Darling Basin ecological community

An expert technical workshop for the Wetlands of the Darling Basin ecological community was held in Dubbo, NSW, in March.

Twenty-five wetland specialists attended the workshop, including three members of the committee. The aim of the workshop was to refine the scope, context and boundaries for the ecological community which occurs in the Darling Riverine Plains IBRA Bioregion. The workshop also included a site visit to the Macquarie Marshes.



Macquarie Marshes. © Collette Barton. SEWPAC

The key objective for the workshop was to describe the ecological community's key diagnostic features, such as its landscape position, where, when and to what extent water is present in these wetlands and their characteristic biotic elements. Possible condition thresholds for the ecological community were also discussed. Condition thresholds help to distinguish between wetland areas of good and poor quality, and guide the determination of significant impacts and can assist with planning management and recovery actions. The challenging issue of wetland boundary delineation was discussed, including indicators that may be useful in dry conditions. Buffer zones were also looked at as well as how groundwater and groundwater dependent ecosystems should be considered. The importance of connectivity to the protection of the broadest range of habitat for water dependent flora and fauna was highlighted.

Workshop outcomes and subsequent consultation has led to refinement of the ecological community's description. Originally placed on the 2009 FPAL as Wetlands of the Darling Basin its new name of Wetland Complexes of the Upper Darling Riverine Plains better reflects the focus of this ecological community and inclusion of the iconic wetlands of the Macquarie Marshes, the Gwydir River and Narran Lakes.

Further background to this nomination can be found in issue 13 of the Communities for Communities newsletter (December 2010): www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/communities-newsletter/pubs/issue13.pdf

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Long Lowland Floodplain Rivers of the Macleay/MacPherson Overlap ecological community

An expert technical workshop was held in June 2011 in Gympie, Queensland to consider the definition and composition of the long lowland floodplain rivers of the Macleay/MacPherson Overlap ecological community. Originally nominated under the name Riffle/Pool/Sandbank Community of the Mary River (Queensland) Floodplain it was renamed following a recommendation from the committee that a broader national extent should be investigated. It was placed on the 2009 FPAL under the name of the Riffle Pool Bar River Community of the South East Queensland Bioregion.

Rather than including only river reaches with riffles, pools and/or bars as the original nomination suggested, workshop participants favoured a more holistic definition. Delegates recommended defining the ecological community as the community of organisms in the floodplain reaches of large floodplain, non-Wallum rivers in the Macleay/McPherson Overlap.

Wallum, in this instance, refers to coastal, healthy, nutrient-poor acidic rivers. The Macleay/McPherson Overlap is a transition zone between temperate and subtropical ecosystems and incorporates the most eastern parts of the Australian mainland. It is an area of exceptionally high biodiversity; the southern limit for many tropical species and the northern limit for many temperate species. It stretches from Bundaberg in Queensland, south to near Port Macquarie in New South Wales, and west to the Great Dividing Range. The ecological community



Elusor macrurus (Mary River turtle) © Ivan Lawler

contains a unique and rich biodiversity, including six species of freshwater turtle, the iconic and biogeographically significant Eastern Freshwater Cod and Mary River Cod, and the Australian lungfish.

Following the workshop, the ecological community under assessment has been renamed the Long Lowland Floodplain Rivers of the Macleay/ MacPherson Overlap. Based on the workshop outcomes a preliminary description has been developed. At this point the ecological community will encompass the following rivers and some of their major tributaries: the Burnett, Mary, Brisbane and Logan/Albert rivers in Queensland; and, at least the Clarence River in NSW.

The ecological community is found in inland alluvial floodplain river reaches of rivers with long floodplain sequences that have large catchments and meander north and south whilst heading eastwards to the sea. It occurs upstream of the river's estuary and downstream of the confined headwater streams and tributaries. The ecological community's assessment is due for completion by 31 March 2012.

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Gwydir wetlands by night. © Collette Barton. SEWPAC

New assessment completion timeframes for two ecological communities

Within the Murray-Darling Basin there are two aquatic ecological communities that are currently being assessed for potential listing as threatened under the EPBC Act:

The River Murray and associated wetlands, floodplains and groundwater systems, from the junction with the Darling River to the sea (on 2008 FPAL), and The Wetlands of the Darling Basin (on 2009 FPAL).

Following ministerial approval, extensions to the statutory assessment completion timeframe have been granted for these assessments. Both are now due to be completed by 30 September 2012.

Who's who in the Ecological Communities Section?

Director

Matthew White

Assistant directors

Gina Newton, John Vranjic and Tori Wright

Project officers

Paul Barraclough, Collette Barton, Ramone Bisset, Mark Bourne, Neisha Burton, Anthony Hoffman and Karina Richards.

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