



# COMMUNITIES FOR COMMUNITIES



**Australian Government**

**Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts**



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## Issue 9: December 2007

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### New Government Sworn In

A new Government was sworn in by the Governor-General on 3 December 2007 and with the change in government came a name change for our Department. We are now called the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA).

The Hon Peter Garrett is the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts and Senator the Hon Penny Wong is the Minister for Climate Change and Water. Our web address remains unchanged so you can still find out all about us and what we do at [www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au).

### Merry Christmas from the Ecological Communities Section

It has been a busy year for all of us in the Ecological Communities Section with major legislative amendments and significant changes to the process for listing threatened species and ecological communities and key threatening processes.

As we look forward to what 2008 will bring, we would like to wish all of our readers a very Merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year. We look forward to bringing you more news on ecological communities, threatened species and related matters in 2008.



Have a native Christmas! – Christmas Bells (*Blandfordia nobilis*) and NSW Christmas Bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*)

(Photos by Denise Greig (left) and M Fagg (right), ANBG)

### 2007 Assessment Cycle Begins

The 2007/08 Assessment Cycle for listing threatened species, ecological communities and key threatening processes under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) commenced on 1 October 2007. The last issue of the C4C Newsletter highlighted the 20 species, 11 ecological communities and 4 key threatening processes under assessment during this cycle.

Work is well underway in assessing the eligibility of these items for listing under the EPBC Act. Some technical workshops have already been held for a number of nominated ecological communities and public consultation was undertaken for a number of species during October, with more expected in early 2008 on a range of species, communities and key threatening processes.

Keep an eye out on the Department's website for 'calls for comment'.

## Call for New Nominations



The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts is now accepting nominations for items to be included in the EPBC Act lists of:

- threatened species;
- threatened ecological communities; and
- key threatening processes.

These nominations will be considered for the 2008/09 assessment period commencing 1 October 2008.

Nominations must be submitted by 5pm on Monday 31 March 2008. Any person may nominate a native species, ecological community or threatening process for listing under any of the categories specified in the EPBC Act.

### Conservation Theme focuses on Inland Water



Yellow Water Lagoon, Kakadu (Photo by J. Baker)

As mentioned in previous issues of this newsletter, the 2007 amendments to the EPBC Act allow for the Minister to establish a Conservation Theme for listing threatened species, ecological communities and key threatening processes. The conservation theme for the assessment period commencing 1 October 2008 is: **Rivers, wetlands and groundwater dependent species and ecosystems of inland Australia.**

Nominations of species, ecosystems and threatening processes relevant to this theme may be given priority for this assessment period. Therefore, nominations relevant to river, wetland and groundwater-dependent species and ecosystems of inland Australia are encouraged.

However, you can still submit nominations that do not relate to this conservation theme and these will also be considered for inclusion in the priority assessment list.

### Before you submit a nomination...

Before you submit a nomination for a species, ecological community or threatening process please check to see if it is already listed, or has previously been considered for listing, by checking the current 'EPBC Act lists' available at the link below.

For more information, including instructions on how to make a nomination and to download a nomination form see:

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations.html)

## National Strategies for Invasive Species

The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council has two national strategies to combat invasive species - the Australian Weeds Strategy and the Australian Pest Animal Strategy. These strategies complement each other and the Intergovernmental Agreement on a National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions.

**The Australian Weeds Strategy** (a revision of the National Weeds Strategy) provides national leadership so all Australians can work together against the serious impacts of weeds on our environmental, economic and social assets.



Weeds have major economic, environmental and social impacts in Australia, causing damage to natural landscapes, agricultural lands, waterways and coastal areas. It is estimated that the agricultural cost of weeds to Australia is in the vicinity of \$4 billion per annum. The cost to biodiversity and landscape amenity is thought to be of a similar magnitude. Australia spends considerable time and money in combating weed problems and protecting ecosystems and primary production on private and public land. Weed problems are complex, with multiple causes, and efforts to reduce their impacts must be coordinated across all sections of society.

The three goals of the Australian Weeds Strategy are to:

- prevent new weed problems;
- reduce the impact of existing priority weed problems; and
- enhance Australia's capacity and commitment to solve weed problems.



# Communities for Communities



Top: Dense thickets of Privet and Lantana in a creek gully. (Photo: J. Baker)  
Bottom: Close-up of *Lantana camara*, a Weed of National Significance. (Photo: C.G. Wilson)

The focus of the **Australian Pest Animal Strategy** is to address the undesirable impacts caused by exotic vertebrate animals (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish) that have become pests in Australia, and to prevent the establishment of new exotic vertebrate pests.

Many pest animals cause significant damage to crops and seriously affect Australia's livestock industries by preying on stock and competing for pasture. Pest animals also cause severe land degradation by promoting soil erosion, stream turbidity and the spread of weeds. Competition, habitat destruction and predation by pest animals threaten the survival of many of Australia's native plants and animals. It has been estimated that eleven of Australia's major pest animals (wild populations of foxes, pigs, rabbits, mice, goats, carp, dogs, cane toads, camels, cats and horses) have negative impacts that cost

private and public landowners and users over \$720 million per annum.

The three goals of the Australian Pest Animal Strategy are to:

- provide leadership and coordination for the management of pest animals;
- prevent establishment of new pest animals; and
- manage the impacts of established pest animals.



Fox eating a baited rabbit. (Photo: B. Johnson)

Both strategies are available on the internet:

Australian Weeds Strategy:

[www.weeds.gov.au/publications/strategies/weed-strategy.html](http://www.weeds.gov.au/publications/strategies/weed-strategy.html)

Australian Pest Animal Strategy:

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/pest-animal-strategy.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/pest-animal-strategy.html)

Hard copies of the Australian Weeds Strategy are available through the Australian Weeds Committee Secretariat, telephone (03) 6344 9657. Hard copies of the Australian Pest Animal Strategy are available through the Community Information Unit on 1800 803 772.

- Julie Quinn, Invasive Species Section, DEWHA

## Technical Workshops for Ecological Communities

The Department holds technical workshops as a means to get consensus expert opinion about how nominated ecological communities could be listed under the EPBC Act. Expert opinion is particularly sought on how an ecological community should be defined, its national extent, how to recognise patches in good condition, and at what point patches can be considered too degraded for inclusion in listings (i.e. developing condition classes/thresholds). Workshops include a half-day field trip to enable experts and Departmental staff to see and discuss the issues involved with each nomination.

Technical workshops are a key step in the nomination assessment process but it is important to note that they represent one input to a complex assessment process.

# Communities for Communities

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee (the Committee) takes all available information into account when preparing its listing advice, including the outcomes from technical workshops, the relevant scientific literature and submissions from consultation with the public, experts and stakeholders. Considerable work is required in order to provide the Minister with sound scientific advice on whether or not a nominated ecological community qualifies for listing under the EPBC Act and to determine appropriate condition classes.

The Department publishes reports on the outcomes of technical workshops, along with the nominations, on its website for the purpose of consultation. The Committee welcomes the views of experts, stakeholders and the general public on all these documents to assist with its nomination assessment process. Documents are published as soon as practicable after each workshop on the Threatened Ecological Communities website at: [www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities.html)



Participants working through conditions classes for an ecological community at a technical workshop (Photo: P. Komidar)

## Technical workshop for a native grassland ecological community in Northern NSW and Queensland<sup>1</sup>

A two day technical workshop was held in Tamworth NSW on 27-28 November 2007. The workshop brought together scientific experts from Queensland and NSW to discuss the ecological community nominated as the ***Austrostipa aristiglumis* grasslands of the Liverpool Plains NSW** and its relationship to the southern part of the listed **Bluegrass (*Dichanthium* spp.) dominant grasslands of the Brigalow Belt Bioregions (North and South)** ecological community.

The workshop agreed that the Liverpool Plains Grassland and the Bluegrass Grassland in the Queensland portion of the Brigalow Belt South bioregion were part of the

same broader native grassland ecological community. Workshop participants discussed the diagnostic characteristics of this ecological community based on plant species composition, geographic distribution within IBRA bioregions/subregions, soils, hydrology, slope, and faunal components. Once the ecological community was defined, condition thresholds were developed to help landholders determine if their land contained the ecological community and at what point the community can be considered too degraded for listing purposes. The condition thresholds were composed of indicators such as a number of key species, minimum patch size and the maximum cover of weed species. Recommended management actions were also suggested by the workshop participants for consideration in the conservation advice.

A half day field trip to grassland sites in the Liverpool Plains was included in the workshop agenda. Sites visited were Red Bobs Reserve and some roadside remnants near Gunnedah. 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.

A workshop report is currently in preparation and is intended to be available for public consultation early in the New Year.



Liverpool Plains Grassland showing characteristic cracking clay soils and native forbs in foreground (Photo: B. Bell)

- Karina Richards, Ecological Communities Section, DEWHA

<sup>1</sup> The working title of this ecological community is the Native Grasslands on Basalt and Fine Textured Alluvium of the Brigalow Belt South, Nandewar, Western New England Tablelands, Northern Sydney Basin and Northern Darling Riverine Plains IBRA Regions ecological community.



# Communities for Communities

## Technical Workshop for the Central Gippsland Plains Grassland and the Forest Red Gum Grassy Woodland of Victoria

The Department held a two day technical workshop for ecological communities nominated in the Gippsland Plains region. The nominations are for the **Central Gippsland Plains Grassland** and the **Forest Red Gum Grassy Woodland of Gippsland**. Both of these ecological communities are listed as threatened communities in Victoria under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

The Forest Red Gum Grassy Woodland is a type of grassy woodland usually dominated by Gippsland Red Gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis subsp. mediana*). The Central Gippsland Plains Grassland is a natural temperate grassland often dominated by Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) with a variety of wildflowers scattered amongst the grass tussocks.

The workshop was held at Maffra, Victoria on 8-9 November 2007. A number of experts from the Department of Sustainability and Environment Victoria, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and the Gippsland Plains Conservation Management Network/Trust for Nature Victoria attended, along with representatives from DEWHA and the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

A half day field trip visited grassland and woodland sites at Maffra Cemetery, Fernbank, Stratford Highway Park and West Sale Aerodrome. The field trip enabled participants to view sites in a range of states and conditions and helped to establish useful condition thresholds.



Central Gippsland Plain Grassland at Maffra, Victoria showing Spear Grasses (*Austrostipa* sp.) and Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*) (Photo: R. Purdie)

Workshop participants concluded that the national ecological community should be broadly defined to include grasslands and grassy woodland in the Gippsland Plains. This takes into account the intergradation between grassland and grassy woodland, and studies which

suggest that the nominated ecological communities are derived from the same savannah woodland that occupied much of the Gippsland Plains in pre-European times. Any differences in present vegetation structure are largely due to different land use histories since European occupation, such as degree of tree clearing, grazing and fire frequency.



Gippsland Red Gum Grassy Woodland at Fernbank, near Stratford, Victoria. (Photo: R. Purdie)

The workshop suggested that the national ecological community be named the "Gippsland Plains Grassland and Grassy Woodland." It would cover four component Ecological Vegetation types in Victoria: 132\_61 LaTrobe Valley Plains Grassland (Gippsland Plain); 132\_62 South Gippsland Plains Grassland (Gippsland Plain); 55 Plains Grassy Woodland (Gippsland Plain); and 55 Plains Grassy Woodland (East Gippsland Lowlands).

The ecological community is limited to the Gippsland Plain, at altitudes of generally <100m and within the 400-700 mm/year rainfall zone. The ground layer is dominated by native graminoids and wildflowers with small native shrubs (under 1m height) typically absent and tall native shrubs (over 3m height) accounting for no more than 10% projective foliage cover. Where a tree canopy is present, it is usually dominated by Gippsland Red Gum but a range of co-dominant canopy species may be present. Condition thresholds specified separate criteria for the grassland and grassy woodland forms, based upon minimum patch sizes, native species diversity, native vegetation ground cover and cover of perennial weeds.

Whilst participants agreed on some threshold values at the workshop, it was resolved to confirm all threshold values by field testing at appropriate sites. Field testing has already been undertaken at a number of sites. Workshop participants also noted some recommended management actions for consideration in the conservation advice.

The workshop report will be prepared once field testing has been completed and is intended to be available for public consultation in early 2008.

- John Vranjic, Ecological Communities Section, DEWHA