

Threatened Species Scientific Committee Annual Report 1 July 2004 – 30 June 2005

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee was established under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Over 2004-05, the Committee has continued to advise the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Heritage on the amendment and updating of the national lists of threatened species, threatened ecological communities and key threatening processes, together with the making or adoption of recovery plans and threat abatement plans.

Membership

The membership of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee in 2004-2005 was as follows: A/Prof Robert (Bob) Beeton (Chair); Dr Susan Briggs; Prof Gordon Grigg; Dr Libby Matiske; Dr Pamela Parker; Mr Guy Fitzhardinge; Dr Graham Harris; Prof Bob Kearney; Dr Rosemary Purdie; and Dr John Woinarski.

Meetings

The Committee held four meetings in 2004-2005. Three meetings were held in Canberra, on 15-16 September 2004, 8-9 December 2004 and 8-9 March 2005. The fourth meeting was held in Alice Springs on 14-17 June 2005.

Highlights of 2004-05 included:

- progressing Species Information Partnerships with States and Territories by considering the conservation status of a number of species listed inconsistently under the EPBC Act and State or Territory legislation
- a meeting held in Alice Springs attended by a number of key stakeholders to discuss the management of threatened species and ecological communities in the Northern Territory
- recommending the making of recovery plans for Australia's five threatened whale species (humpback, southern right, blue, fin and sei)
- progressing the new approach to the listing of ecological communities
- considering the conservation status of a number of commercially fished marine species

As highlighted in the 2003-04 annual report, the Committee held a workshop to discuss the development of a new approach to the listing of ecological communities on 7-8 June 2004 in Orange, New South Wales. The outcomes of this workshop are outlined in the 'Strategic Issues' section of this report.

Advice on the amendment and updating of the lists of threatened species, threatened ecological communities, and key threatening processes (Table 1)

In 2004-2005, there were 23 nominations for threatened species, 3 nominations for threatened ecological communities and 2 nominations for key threatening processes received under the EPBC Act. The number of public nominations received in 2004-2005 was similar to the number received in 2003-2004. In addition to new nominations, the Committee reconsidered 10 ecological communities which had previously been found ineligible for listing.

The Committee considered preliminary advices for 11 species, 12 ecological communities and 3 key threatening processes nominations. The Committee finalised its advice on 29 species nominations, 8 ecological community nominations and 2 key threatening process nominations.

The Committee's advice on 25 species nominations, 4 ecological communities and 4 key threatening processes was provided to the Minister in 2004-2005. There were 25 amendments to the list of threatened species, 3 amendments to the list of ecological communities and 2 amendments to the list of key threatening processes. Amendments to the list of threatened species comprised 20 new listings, 4 transfers to a higher category of threat and one plant being delisted as it was no longer recognised as a distinct species¹.

Advice on the making and adoption of recovery plans and threat abatement plans

Recovery Plans

In 2003-2004, the Committee gave preliminary consideration to 45 draft recovery plans, covering 53 species and two ecological communities, listed as threatened under the EPBC Act.

The Committee finalised its recommendations on 31 recovery plans, covering a total of 47 listed threatened species and one ecological community. Of the 31 recovery plans recommended, 29 were State recovery plans that the Committee recommended for adoption under the EPBC Act. These included recovery plans from the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, South Australia, and Western Australia.

Wildlife Conservation Plans

A wildlife conservation plan sets out the research and management actions necessary to support survival of a migratory, marine or cetacean species listed under the EPBC Act, which are not considered threatened but would benefit from a nationally coordinated approach to conservation.

In 2002, the Committee agreed that a Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds was a high priority and in 2004-05 the Committee considered the first Wildlife Conservation Plan developed under the Act, covering 36 migratory shorebirds species. The Committee agreed to make the plan available for public comment.

Critical Habitat

Following on from the Committee's recommendation in 2003-04, critical habitat for the Ginninderra peppercress (*Lepidium ginninderrense*) was added to the Register of Critical Habitat under section 207A of the EPBC Act in 2004-05. The listed critical habitat is the northwest corner of the Belconnen Naval Transmission Station, ACT, where the only known population of the species occurs.

Threat Abatement Plans

Four new Threat Abatement Plans (TAPs) were considered by the Committee in 2004-2005:

- Predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs;
- Beak and feather disease affecting endangered psittacine species;
- Infection of amphibians with chytrid fungus resulting in chytridiomycosis; and;
- Reduction in impacts of tramps ants on biodiversity in Australia and its Territories.

¹ Apparent anomalies between the numbers of nominations received, advices finalised by the Committee, advices provided to the Minister and amendments to the lists can be attributed to the continuing assessment and processing of nominations across financial years.

The TAP for feral pigs and beak and feather disease were recommended by the Committee for making by the Minister, whilst the chytrid fungus is still under the consideration of the Committee. The TAP addressing tramp ant species (including red imported fire ant) was recommended to be released for public comment.

In accordance with the EPBC Act requirement for five-yearly review of threat abatement plans, a review process is currently under way for the TAP for the incidental catch (or by-catch) of seabirds during oceanic longline fishing operations. A draft revised threat abatement plan was considered by the Committee in 2004-05 and will be made available for public comment as part of the review process.

Strategic Issues

Throughout 2004-05 the Committee discussed several strategic issues within its terms of reference, including the conservation of marine species, developing mechanisms for measuring the success of recovery plans, and effective solutions to the challenges of listing threatened ecological communities.

Defining and Assessing the Conservation Status of Threatened Ecological Communities

At the meeting in December 2003, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee agreed to hold a technical workshop to explore mechanisms to further enhance the process for defining and assessing the conservation status of ecological communities. The workshop was convened in Orange on 7 and 8 June 2004. A range of experts from universities, CSIRO, State government departments, the farming community and the conservation movement participated at the workshop.

The workshop addressed some of the key issues affecting the listing of threatened ecological communities and considered the inherent complexity of adequately identifying and defining broad-extent ecological communities. A new approach to listing of ecological communities has been developed to address these key issues. This new approach provides clearer articulation of the extent and value of communities. Traditionally ecological communities listed under the EPBC Act have been defined in such a way that a wide range of condition classes could be included, from good to poor condition. The new approach, developed by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee and agreed to in-principle by the Minister, gives EPBC Act protection to the remaining components of a particular ecological community (clearly delineated by condition classes) and provides recognition for those components that are degraded, but which are amenable to remediation to improve their state or help conserve some of their key ecological functions. Those components will be identified as suitable for Natural Resource Management investments such as the Natural Heritage Trust.

Over the course of 2004-05 the use of technical workshops to determine condition classes for nominated ecological communities was trialled (Table 2). The application of the new approach through technical workshops has been a success and the workshops have now become an indispensable component of the ecological community nomination assessment process.

Table 2 Technical workshops to determine condition classes for nominated ecological communities undertaken between 1 July 2004 and 30 June 2005

Ecological Community	Location	Date
Box Gum Grassy Woodlands and Derived Grasslands	Canberra	October 2004
Peppermint box grassy woodland and Irongrass Natural Temperate Grasslands of South Australia	Adelaide	February 2005
Weeping Myall Woodlands	Dubbo	March 2005
Western (Basalt) Plains Natural Temperate Grassland	Melbourne	April 2005
Victorian Western Basalt Plains Grassy Woodland	Melbourne	June 2005

Conservation Advice

As highlighted in the 2003-04 Annual Report, a major initiative of the Committee was the development of Conservation Advice at the time of listing, to facilitate the conservation of newly listed species and ecological communities, pending the development and implementation of recovery plans. Conservation Advice provides guidance to regional planning processes, community groups, land holders and any other interested stakeholders on immediate recovery and threat abatement activities that can be undertaken to assist the conservation and recovery of the newly listed species or ecological communities. In 2004-2005, the Committee developed Conservation Advice for 49 species and 9 ecological communities.

New Approaches to Recovery Planning

As highlighted in the 2003-04 report, an initiative for improving the efficiency of recovery planning was the development of more targeted plans. Concise recovery plans are now being developed that focus on key threats and identify priority actions that will make the greatest contribution to the recovery of the species. These plans are supported by background information documents, which describe the species' biology, threats and conservation status. By separating the statutory recovery plans from the background information, stakeholders can more readily identify the recovery actions in the plan, and the background information can be updated as necessary. In 2004-2005, the plans taking this approach that were considered by the Committee included the Abbott's Booby Recovery Plan, the Seabird Recovery Plan, the Sea Lion Recovery Plan, the three recovery plans for listed whale species, the Whale Shark Recovery Plan and the Handfish Recovery Plan.

Species Information Partnerships

The aim of the Species Information Partnerships with the State and Territory governments is to move towards a more truly national list of threatened species that is supported by the most up to date information available. Such a list will reduce duplication of assessment activities and allow for more targeted expenditure of limited conservation resources. Strong working relationships between the State and Territories and the Australian Government also facilitate the best possible conservation outcomes for threatened species as information is shared and recovery and threat abatement activities are undertaken in partnership.

During 2004-05 the Western Australian and Northern Territory governments provided information regarding endemic species as part of partnership agreements, and 47 species were assessed by the Committee for eligibility for listing as threatened under the EPBC Act.

To continue building on the Species Information Partnership formed with the Northern Territory government, the Committee held a meeting in Alice Springs in June 2005, where it met with

representatives from the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service, as well as other stakeholders, to discuss the conservation of threatened species.

As well as working with Western Australia and the Northern Territory, since the end of the 2004-05 financial year, the Committee has developed partnerships with Tasmania and South Australia, and will seek opportunities to develop partnerships with other States and Territories in the future.

Taxonomic and nomenclatural changes to listed species

In September 2005, the first stage of a consultancy was finalised with the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research (CPBR), in conjunction with the Council of Heads of Australian Herbaria. The project aims to produce a definitive list of agreed scientific names for the approximately 18,000 taxa of Australian vascular plants and is continuing in 2005-06.

This first stage was a review of the taxonomy of all vascular plants currently listed as threatened under the EPBC Act (approximately 1300) and vascular plants nominated for listing under the EPBC Act. The majority (1200) of listed plants require no amendment, however 107 species have been identified as requiring nomenclature changes. Fifty-one flora species have been identified as requiring a review of their eligibility for listing under the EPBC Act, as a result of taxonomic revision and change to circumscription. Any changes required to the list of threatened flora as a result of the taxonomic review will be considered by the Committee.

The CPBR is now reviewing the agreed scientific names of all other Australian vascular plants. This project is expected to be completed in early 2007.

Strategic relationships

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee is committed to ongoing learning and continues to take a consultative approach to its statutory roles and responsibilities and strategic interests.

The Committee continued to consult with scientific experts and interested parties, including non-government organisations, community and industry groups, on new nominations of threatened species, ecological communities and key threatening processes received under the EPBC Act.

Table 1 Threatened Species Scientific Committee assessment of nominations from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005¹

Group	Listed at 30/6/04 ²	Nominations received	Prelim. Advice	Listing advice			Ministerial decisions	Changes to the List	Listed at 30/6/05 ²
				Final Committee recommendations public nominations	Species Information Partnerships	Advice to the Minister			
Invertebrates	15	11	2	2	7	0	0	0	15
Fish	37	0	0	9	0	3	3	3	39
Frogs	31	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	31
Reptiles	50	1	0	1	3	0	1	1	50
Birds	125	0	0	5	2	9	9	5	129
Mammals	114	2	2	1	1	2	4	3	116
All Animals	372	15	5	19	13	14	17	12	380
Plants	1291	8	6	10	34	11	13	13	1302
Species	1663	23	11	29	47	25	30	25	1682
Added to list								20	
Deleted								1	
Transferred								4	
Rejected								5	
Ecological Communities	29	3	12	8	N/A	4	3	3	32
Added to list								3	
Deleted								0	
Transferred								0	
Rejected								0	
Key Threatening Processes	14	2	3	2	N/A	4	3	2	16
Added to list								2	
Deleted								0	
Transferred								0	
Rejected								1	
Total Items	1706	28	26	39	47	33	36	30	1730

1. Apparent anomalies between the numbers of nominations received, advices finalised by the Committee, advices provided to the Minister and amendments to the lists can be attributed to the continuing assessment and processing of nominations across financial years.
2. Covers all listed categories.