

# Species information partnerships: sharing knowledge on threatened species

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The Australian and State and Territory Governments each maintain lists of threatened species. The Australian Government lists species that are nationally threatened both within and across State and Territory jurisdictions, while the State and Territory Governments focus on those species considered threatened within their jurisdictions. The assessment of species as threatened is the first step to promoting their recovery, and allows governments and decision-makers to identify those species in particular need of protection.

Different jurisdictions manage threatened species according to different laws. As a result, it is often difficult to compare threatened species lists across jurisdictions, and there is the potential for inconsistent assessments resulting in conflicting information on threatened species. For example, a species may be listed as 'endangered' in one state, yet in another state it may be listed as 'critically endangered'. This inconsistency may be due to the species being subject to a higher degree of threat in one particular state, or it may be due to the fact that in some states, 'endangered' is the highest listing category available. This has the potential to create confusion. This lack of consistency may also reduce the effectiveness of conservation actions, such as the development of recovery plans and implementation of threat abatement activities.

In 2004, the Australian Government initiated the Species Information Partnerships project with a number of State and Territory Governments. The objective of the Species Information Partnerships project is to develop a national approach to species listing, agreed on by all jurisdictions, such that:

- threatened species listing decisions are transparent and are based on rigorous science and the best available information;
- information about threatened species, including conservation status data sets, is shared between jurisdictions and;
- a greater consistency is achieved between listing processes across jurisdictions.

Through sharing data, and ensuring assessments are based on the most up to date information available, this approach will reduce duplication of assessment activities and allow for more targeted expenditure of limited conservation resources. It will also facilitate the best possible conservation outcomes for threatened species as information is shared and recovery and threat abatement activities can be undertaken in partnership, where appropriate.

During 2004, 2005 and 2006, the Species Information Partnerships project is focusing on removing inconsistencies between the State and Territory and the Australian Government lists of threatened species, through information exchange. This will establish a shared understanding of the conservation status of nationally threatened species. Following this, the Species Information Partnerships will aim to align listing processes so that new listings are consistently handled, information is shared and duplication is reduced.

Since its initiation, the Species Information Partnerships project has proved very successful. The Australian Government has developed cooperative working relationships with five States and Territories (as at August 2006) and will continue to work with the jurisdictions not yet involved in the project. As a result of the information received through the Partnerships project so far, 65 amendments to the EPBC Act's threatened species list have been made by the Minister. In August 2006, 10 Western Australian and 20 Northern Territory species were added to the list, 8 Western Australian and 2 Northern Territory species moved into a different category of the list, and 19 Western Australian and 6 Northern Territory species were removed from the list as information indicated they were no longer threatened.

By reducing duplication and inconsistencies in threatened species assessment, and improving information exchange on threatened species, the Species Information Partnerships approach provides for long term, ongoing management of threatened species lists in a truly national sense, and allows for improved conservation outcomes.