

Submission for the EPBC Agriculture Review

regarding the EPBC Listing of the

Swamps of the Fleurieu Peninsula

Nominated by the **Conservation Council of South Australia Inc**
and the **Nature Conservation Society of South Australia Inc**

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Summary

It is my opinion that the information put forward to the Minister for the listing of the **Swamps of the Fleurieu Peninsula** under the EPBC Act was misleading and based in the necessity for the Conservation Council of SA along with the Nature Conservation Society of South Australia to establish new projects.

The information that underpinned the listing submission was vague at best and there should have been some time and resources spent assessing what the full current extent of the Fleurieu Swamps was, both in range and structure before stating the conclusion that this ecological community was threatened. These results could have then been added to the existing Emu-wren survey of 1993 (the only known baseline data apart from estimates) and a differential achieved. From this point it could have been assessed whether any recovery was required and whether the listing was even necessary.

It is my opinion that there are many landholders already putting their private time and resources into nurturing the environment for the community and future generations. Some of the implied meanings behind certain required actions for the Fleurieu Swamps are insulting to current and past landholders.

Listings such as this restrict the normal activities of farmers and in some cases make running an agricultural business on the land impractical and un-viable due to red-tape, un-necessary paperwork, and extra costs that are not related to the normal activities of the farm in any way.

It also seems as though recent methodologies have assessed the current extent of Fleurieu Swamps to be at a level which would have negated the need for the listing in the beginning.

Details of the original Listing

Nomination and Findings taken from the **Advice to the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC) on Amendments to the List of Ecological Communities under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)**

To have a threatened ecological community listed under the EPBC Act there are six criteria available under which the nomination can be justified.

1. Decline in geographical distribution
2. Small geographic distribution coupled with demonstrable threat
3. Loss or decline of functionally important species
4. Reduction in community integrity
5. Rate of continuing detrimental change

6. Quantitative analysis showing probability of extinction

Of these six criteria, the nomination was justified by only three: 1) decline, 2) small geographic distribution, and 4) reduction in community integrity.

Of these three criteria, the **Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC)** judged that only two of these had been justified for the ecological community to be eligible for listing.

1. **Decline in geographic distribution.** The TSSC found that due to the relatively large decline in area of Fleurieu Swamps (estimated from over 2000ha down to 545ha in relatively good condition in 1993) that "the ecological community was eligible for listing as **vulnerable** under this criterion".
2. **Small geographic distribution coupled with demonstrable threat.** The TSSC found that the Fleurieu Swamps geographic distribution is "very restricted" and that the community is continuing to decline due to a number of demonstrable threats including "local population growth and agriculture, increased housing and settlement in proximity to remnants, vegetation clearance, cattle and deer farming, strawberry farming, water extraction..." etc. The finding was therefore that the "ecological community is eligible for listing as **critically endangered** under this criterion".
4. **Reduction in community integrity.** The TSSC found that the Fleurieu Swamps are highly fragmented and that "continuing fragmentation is resulting in loss of habitat for fauna..." etc. Due to the MLR Southern Emu-wren Recovery Team (1998) and their estimates and findings, as well as the draft *Strategy for the Conservation and Management of the Fleurieu Peninsula Swamps* which was referenced in the nomination the TSSC found that "the ecological community is **NOT** eligible for listing under this criterion."

The conclusion of the TSSC was "that the **Swamps of the Fleurieu Peninsula** ecological community has a very restricted distribution, and is subject to threatening processes to the extent that it has a high risk of extinction in the immediate future."

The TSSC therefore recommended to the Minister that the EPBC Act list be amended by including the **Swamps of the Fleurieu Peninsula** in the list.

Conclusion

One of the Research Recovery Actions outlined in the second **Draft Recovery Plan for the Fleurieu Peninsula Swamps** which was being written by the **Mt Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-wren and Fleurieu Peninsula Swamps Recovery Team for the Conservation Council of South Australia** was to "Improve spatial definition of Swamps and estimate the full extent of the Swamp ecological community" with the expressed measure of success defined as having a "GIS layer developed with estimated current extent of Swamps." Also, to "Develop an improved definition of Swamps and, if appropriate, update the EPBC Act nomination information accordingly." Further still, to "Investigate the potential for using rapid remote sensing techniques to determine changes in Swamp extent over time."

All of these actions point to the fact that there is a dire lack of knowledge of the extent (in area and structure) of the Fleurieu Swamps and what may or may not be required to recover them. It is difficult to believe that the Conservation Council of SA has any real understanding of the Fleurieu Swamps.

This is self-evident as their own fourth **Draft Recovery Plan for the Fleurieu Peninsula Swamps** states that:

In 1993 the extent of swamps was estimated using limited available data. Since then a number of methodologies have been applied with the most recent estimates based on vegetation, hydrology and land form. Analysis of the most recent data from 2009, called the Southern Fleurieu Wetlands Rapid Assessment (SFWRA), estimated the current extent of Fleurieu Peninsula Swamps to be 4,000 hectares.

The Swamps of the Fleurieu Peninsula must be well and truly repaired by now as the estimated swamp areas have begun at 2000 ha prior to settlement, 545 ha in 1993, and then to 4000 ha in 2009.

Our family moved to our current property in 1949, and in that time, while different swamp management strategies have been deployed over the years, they are still where they were eighty years ago.

Farmers on the whole do a great deal to look after their land, including the swamps, waterways, forests, pastures, weed management and soil health, spending thousands of dollars (mostly without external assistance) maintaining a property they can pass on to the next generation. We need to do all we can as a nation to help reduce unnecessary restrictions.

 **Walter June 2018**

