



Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities

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# FARMING AND PROTECTING THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED IRON-GRASS NATURAL TEMPERATE GRASSLAND

Since European settlement, most of the Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland of South Australia has been cleared, or degraded by pasture improvement and, in some circumstances, grazing. The small amount of natural temperate grassland of this type remaining in good condition is now protected under Australia's national environment law—the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

## What does national protection of Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland mean for farmers/ graziers?

National environment law protects Australia's unique plants and animals without stopping farm business. In many cases, your supportive farming practices have helped retain remnant native grasslands.

You may need Australian Government approval if:

- the protected iron-grass grassland (or other protected matters) occur on your property, and
- a new, intensified or changed activity could have a significant impact on the ecological community.

If you are not sure whether your activity requires Australian Government approval, you can get free advice from the environment liaison officer at the National Farmers' Federation on 1800 704 520 (or email [environment@nff.org.au](mailto:environment@nff.org.au)).

## What and where is Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland?

Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland mainly occurs on the slopes and hills of the Mount Lofty Ranges, west of the River Murray and throughout the mid north. Patches also occur on the eastern side of the River Murray near Taillem Bend, and may occur along the Hummocks Range north of the Gulf Saint Vincent.



This indicative map shows the outer boundary of the area in which the ecological community may occur. Within this boundary the ecological community itself has been heavily cleared and is very fragmented.



A more detailed map is available at ([www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/maps/pubs/peppermint-box-iron-grass.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/maps/pubs/peppermint-box-iron-grass.pdf))

Iron-grass grassland generally occurs on low hills above 380 metres above sea level, mainly on gentle hill slopes and foot slopes, but also on surrounding plains, hill crests, ridges, gullies and inter-dune corridors. The listed community occurs predominantly on loam soils but also clay-loams with an estimated clay content of 30–35 per cent, and in smaller proportions on other soil types. Surface pebbles are common at some sites and shale or sandstone rocky outcrops may also be present. The climate where this community occurs is typically Mediterranean, with hot dry summers and cool wet winters, and a mean annual rainfall of 280–600 millimetres. This tussock grassland comprises tussock-forming perennial grasses and iron-grasses with a range of herbaceous plant species occurring in the inter-tussock spaces.

The dominant and most characteristic plants in this grassland are iron-grasses (*Lomandra multiflora* subsp. *dura* and *Lomandra effusa*).



Perennial native grasses that occur include brush wire grass (*Aristida behriana*), kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*), spear grasses (*Austrostipa* species) and wallaby grasses (*Austrodanthonia* species).

Herbs may include blue bells (*Wahlenbergia* species), common everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*), creamy candles (*Stackhousia monogyna*), minnie daisy (*Minuria leptophylla*) and new holland daisies (*Vittadinia* species).

Trees and shrubs may occur in Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland but they are very scattered. The most common trees are native pine (*Callitris gracilis*) and sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*); shrubs include cryptandra (*Cryptandra* species), ruby saltbush (*Enchylaena tomentosa*) and sweet bursaria/christmas bush (*Bursaria spinosa*).

### How do I know whether the Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland on my property is protected?

Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland is only protected under national environment law where it is in relatively good condition. Areas of the iron-grass grassland of at least 0.1 ha with a large number of native plant species (more than 30) OR areas of at least 0.25 ha with more than 15 native plant species are likely to be protected.



IF tussock-forming perennial native grasses and iron-grasses dominate the ground layer (trees and tall shrub cover is less than 10%) AND:

If the patch is **0.1 ha or larger** AND has more than 30 native plant species INCLUDING at least 10 broad-leaved herbaceous species not on the disturbance resistant list\* AND at least 5 perennial native grasses AND at least one perennial native grass tussock per metre

OR

If the patch is **between 0.25 ha and 0.1 ha** AND has more than 15 native plant species INCLUDING at least 3 broad-leaved herbaceous species not on the disturbance resistant list\* AND at least 4 perennial native grasses AND at least one perennial native grass tussock per metre

then the listed ecological community of Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland of South Australia may be present.

\*Disturbance resistant species: *Ptilotus spathulatus* forma *spathulatus*; *Sida corrugata*; *Oxalis perennans*; *Convolvulus angustissimus*; *Euphorbia drummondii*; and *Maireana enchylaenoides*



## How does protection of Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland affect my farming activities?

This ecological community was officially protected under national environment law on 21 June 2007. Lawful activities that began before national environment law came into effect on 16 July 2000 can continue without further Australian Government approval.

### What routine farming activities do not need approval?

Farming activities that are unlikely to have a significant, irreversible or long-term impact on Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland do not require approval. These include:

- maintaining existing fence lines, tracks, roads or fire breaks
- replacing or maintaining existing sheds, other farm buildings and yards
- maintaining existing grazing regimes (type of livestock, stocking rates and timing of grazing)
- controlling weeds (with minimal disturbance, or by selective spot spraying)

### What farming activities might need approval?

Activities that are likely to have a significant, irreversible or long-term impact on Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland may need Australian Government approval. These include:

- land clearing
- changing grazing management, weed control or fertiliser use in a way that may affect the native plant or animal species of this iron-grass grassland
- renovating or improving pasture by introducing exotic species, fertilisers, herbicides, mechanical disturbance or cultivation, or addition of irrigation
- large-scale spraying that may significantly affect the plant or animal species of this iron-grass grassland
- developing infrastructure (for example, sheds, buildings or dams) at previously undeveloped sites.

If you are uncertain of your legal responsibility, you can contact the environment liaison officer at the National Farmers' Federation for help or go to: [www.environment.gov.au/epbc](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc)

### Can I get help to improve or restore Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland?

There may be natural resource management projects funded by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative that can help you manage iron-grass grasslands.

For more information on local projects go to [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au) or contact your:

- local NRM regional body: [www.nrm.gov.au/nrm/sa.html](http://www.nrm.gov.au/nrm/sa.html)
- state facilitator: [www.nrm.gov.au/contacts](http://www.nrm.gov.au/contacts)



## Where can I get more information?

More information on this ecological community, and its condition classes, threats and priority conservation actions is contained in the comprehensive listing advice and shorter conservation advice at [www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=37&status=Critically+Endangered](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=37&status=Critically+Endangered) and associated policy statement for this ecological community, at: [www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/peppermint-box-iron-grass-policy.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/peppermint-box-iron-grass-policy.html)

For free advice on whether or not an activity may need Australian Government approval contact the Australian Government's environment liaison officer at the National Farmers' Federation.

Phone: 1800 704 520    Email: [environment@nff.org.au](mailto:environment@nff.org.au)    Web: [www.environment.gov.au/farming](http://www.environment.gov.au/farming)

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### Disclaimer

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Image credits: *Lomandra multiflora* spp. *dura* tussock grassland, Mokota Conservation Park (Jean Turner), *Lomandra effusa* tussock grassland, eastern Mount Lofty Ranges (Jean Turner), *Lomandra multiflora* subsp. *dura* (Jean Turner), *Lomandra effusa* (Jean Turner), *Ptilotus erubescens* (Jean Turner), *Calostemma purpurea* (Rosemary Purdie), Pygmy blue-tongue lizard (female) (Peter Robertson).