

Threatened Species Scientific Committee Annual Report 1 July 2006 – 30 June 2007

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee (the Committee) was established under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). During 2006/07, the Committee continued to advise the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Water Resources 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

Membership of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee from **1 July 2006 to September 2006** was as follows:

Associate Professor Robert (Bob) Beeton (Chair)
Prof Gordon Grigg
Dr Libby Mattiske
Mr Guy Fitzhardinge
Dr Graham Harris
Professor Robert (Bob) Kearney
Dr Rosemary Purdie
Dr John Woinarski
Associate Professor Peter Harrison
Dr Andrea Taylor

In September 2006, the membership of Dr Libby Mattiske and Professor Robert Kearney ended, and Dr William Humphreys and Dr Antony Lewis were appointed as new members.

Membership of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee from **September 2006 to June 2007** was as follows:

Associate Professor Robert (Bob) Beeton (Chair)
Prof Gordon Grigg
Mr Guy Fitzhardinge
Dr Graham Harris
Dr Rosemary Purdie
Dr John Woinarski
Associate Professor Peter Harrison
Dr Andrea Taylor
Dr William Humphreys
Dr Antony Lewis

Meetings

The Committee held four meetings in 2006/07, all in Canberra. The meetings were held on:

5-7 September 2006
28-29 November 2006
6-8 March 2007
26-28 June 2007

Highlights of 2006/07 included:

- Progressing Species Information Partnerships with states and territories by providing advice to the Minister regarding 40 Western Australian endemic species, 28 Northern Territory endemic species and nine South Australian endemic species which were listed inconsistently under the EPBC Act and state or territory legislation.
- Providing advice to the Minister regarding several complex threatened species nominations, including the Orange-bellied Parrot and the Christmas Island Pipistrelle.
- Providing advice to the Minister regarding two ecological communities – the Peppermint Box (*Eucalyptus odorata*) Grassy Woodland of South Australia and the Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grassland of South Australia.
- Providing recommendations to the Minister on Victorian recovery plans covering 40 species.
- Providing recommendations to the Minister to adopt a number of high profile recovery plans including the Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*), the Tasmanian Giant Freshwater Lobster (*Astacopsis gouldi*), the Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) and the Gouldian Finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*).

The Committee noted the passage of amendments to the EPBC Act. The amendments provide for a new streamlined listing process with a more strategic focus on those species and ecological communities in greatest need of protection, and the potential to broaden the scope of conservation benefit arising from EPBC Act listing processes.

Following the final report of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) the Committee noted the positive comment made on the work of the Committee and welcomed the Australian Government's commitment of new funding to support the implementation of the EPBC Act.

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

During 2006/07, there were 25 public nominations for threatened species, four public nominations for threatened ecological communities and six public nominations for key threatening processes received under the EPBC Act.

The Committee considered preliminary advices for six species nominations, one ecological community nomination and one key threatening process nomination. The Committee finalised its advice on 17 species nominations, and one ecological community nomination.

The Committee's advice on 31 species nominations and two ecological communities was provided to the Minister during 2006/07. There were 87 amendments to the list of threatened species and two amendments to the list of ecological communities, based on the Committee's advice. Amendments to the list of threatened species comprised 42 new listings, nine transfers to a lower category of threat, six transfers to a higher category of threat, and 30 species being delisted as they were either: no longer recognised as a distinct species; their distribution was found to be much broader than previously thought; their populations were found to be much larger than previously thought; or there were taxonomic issues with the species¹. Amendments to the list of threatened ecological communities comprised two new listings and no delisting.

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 reporting years.

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

Recovery Plans

During 2006/07, the Committee finalised its recommendations on 66 draft recovery plans, covering 106 species listed as threatened under the EPBC Act. Of the 66 recovery plans recommended, 63 were state recovery plans that the Committee recommended for adoption under the EPBC Act. These included recovery plans from New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia.

Threat Abatement Plans

In accordance with the EPBC Act requirement for a five-yearly review of threat abatement plans, 'Dieback caused by the root rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi*' was reviewed by a consultant. The Committee considered a revised threat abatement plan for release for public comment.

The threat abatement plans for fox, rabbit, goat and cat had previously been reviewed by a consultant and the Committee considered revised plans and recommended they be released for public comment.

Strategic Issues

Throughout 2006/07 the Committee discussed and initiated work on several strategic issues within its terms of reference. These included the assessment of data-deficient species, regional recovery planning, Indigenous engagement in marine recovery planning, mechanisms for the strategic assessment of threatening processes, and effective solutions to the challenges of listing threatened ecological communities.

Defining and Assessing the Conservation Status of Threatened Ecological Communities

During 2006/07 members of the Committee attended technical workshops for two ecological communities. The use of technical workshops continues to be a crucial part of the ecological community nomination assessment process, and provides a useful contribution to the work of the Committee.

Throughout 2006/07 work has progressed on a process for aligning state and territory listed ecological communities with the EPBC Act. The potential numbers for consideration for listing under the EPBC has been significantly reduced by taking into account the legal status of lists held by the states and territories, levels of endemism in potential ecological communities and their degree of protection.

Recovery Planning and implementing priority actions

A focus for the Committee in 2006/07 was to consider better ways to progress the large number of recovery plans in preparation and to ensure that the review of recovery plans adequately informs the decision making on the future needs of the species or ecological community. A comprehensive review of each recovery plan is particularly important now that a decision is required on the development of all new or revised recovery plans.

During the year a greater focus has been directed at adequately identifying priority recovery actions that can achieve critical conservation objectives within a reasonable timeframe.

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 states 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 2006/07, the Committee provided advice to the Minister regarding three Western Australian endemic species, and six South Australian endemic species. The Minister made a decision on six South Australian endemic species, 28 Northern Territory endemic species and 40 Western Australian endemic species.

The Committee would strongly support the Australian Government to seek opportunities to develop partnerships with other states and territories in the future.

Table 1 Processing of nominations and changes to the lists of threatened species, ecological communities and key threatening processes from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007

	<i>Species</i>		Ecological communities		Key threatening processes	
New public nominations received under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>	22		4		4	
Nominations on which the Threatened Species Scientific Committee has provided advice to the minister	20		2		0	
Threatened Species Scientific Committee advice to the minister carried over from 2005-06	1		2		0	
Ministerial decisions made on Threatened Species Scientific Committee advice	90*		2		0	
Number uplisted, downlisted, new, delisted, rejected	42, 6, 10, 29, 3		0, 0, 2, 0, 0		0	
Number of amendments to the list	87**		2		0	
Total number of listings as at 30 June 2007	1697		38		17	
Number of public nominations where an extension to the 12-month timeframe was required	16		28		4	
Number of ministerial decisions made on Threatened Species Scientific Committee Advice where the minister's 90-day deadline was met	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	14	7	0	2	0	0

* This number includes public nominations, and species brought via the Australian Government's Species Information Partnerships with the states of WA, NT and SA, plus other consultancies.

** This number represents all ministerial decisions made on TSSC advice minus three species that were found not to be eligible for listing.

Source: EPBC Act Annual Report 2006-2007