



CONSERVATION OF THREATENED SPECIES AND THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

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DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
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WESTERN AUSTRALIA

BACKGROUND

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) has developed rigorous procedures for the conservation of threatened species and ecological communities. This briefing paper provides guidance on these issues for those involved in the management of threatened species and ecological communities, or in research into their conservation biology.

Coordination of all threatened species and ecological community conservation is carried out by CALM's Nature Conservation Division, primarily through the Western Australian Threatened Species and Communities Unit (WATSCU).

THE RECOVERY PROCESS

The 'recovery process' provides the overall framework for the conservation of threatened species and communities. It can be summarised as:

1. review the conservation status of all taxa and ecological communities,
2. prepare conservation priority lists of threatened taxa and ecological communities,
3. where insufficient information exists to prescribe conservation actions, conduct the necessary research,
4. produce costed Recovery Plans, and
5. for each Recovery Plan, obtain funding, implement, and monitor and review implementation.

This process can be followed at national, State or local levels. In CALM, we are concerned with the State level, but we must be aware of national and local issues that interact with our work. For example, the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA) provides money to CALM under contractual arrangements for research into and management of threatened species and ecological communities and threatening processes. Their decisions on funding will be based on their perception of national priorities, which may differ somewhat from State priorities.

CALM's approaches to implementing the recovery process are:

1. Listing

The Wildlife Conservation Act provides for taxa of plants and animals to be listed as "threatened". CALM Policy Statements Nos 9 *Conservation of threatened flora in the wild* and 33 *Conservation of endangered and specially protected fauna in the wild* cover this area. Listings are reviewed and changes recommended by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee. Ministerial approval is necessary before changes are given legal status in a notice in the Government Gazette. There is currently no equivalent legislation or formal policy covering threatened ecological communities. However, an informal, non-statutory process, including advice from a scientific advisory committee, the establishment of the threatened ecological communities database, and steps for assigning ecological communities to categories of threat, is now in place.

2. Priorities

Methods used to decide priorities for conservation action for threatened species are described in CALM Policy Statement No. 50 *Setting priorities for the conservation of Western Australia's threatened flora and fauna*. A scoring system is used as a guide to allocating taxa to the IUCN Red Book categories of threat. For those

taxa categorised as 'Critically Endangered' or 'Endangered' each known population will be listed and prioritised for conservation management.

An important strategy that CALM is using to assist the listing, prioritising and conservation management of vascular plants, is the development of Regional and District Threatened Flora Management Programs. These review the status of declared threatened flora and of priority taxa in a CALM Region or District, develop local priorities and outline management needs for declared rare and priority taxa.

A process has been developed for ranking threatened ecological communities.

3. *Scientific research*

Within CALM, scientific research priorities and projects are developed primarily by Science and Information Division in consultation with WATSCU and others as appropriate. Bioconservation Group carries out most of the research relevant to the management of threatened species and ecological communities, while Bioresources Group provides information on distribution and status of species and communities and conducts taxonomic research. Funding for research can come from CALM's internal budgetary process or from external sources.

ANCA has described its approach to the recovery of threatened species and communities. This currently includes the preparation of "Research Plans" for threatened species and ecological communities. These are detailed plans for research into the conservation biology of threatened species and ecological communities, including detailed costs of Research Actions, prescribed in a similar way to recovery actions in Recovery Plans. However, in future ANCA is likely to consider research as one recovery action within a Recovery Plan. CALM is already taking this approach.

4. *Recovery Planning and implementation*

CALM Policy Statement No. 44 *Wildlife Management Programs* lays down procedures for the development and implementation of Recovery Plans and Interim Recovery Plans (IRPs). The Policy also covers the setting up and operation of Recovery Teams. As a general rule, the Team should be set up before the Recovery Plan or IRP is written and should be involved in its preparation. However, urgency may dictate that IRPs for Critically Endangered species or communities are written centrally by WATSCU in consultation with stakeholders. Recovery Teams will also be set up to coordinate the preparation and implementation of Regional or District Threatened Flora Management Programs.

RECOVERY TEAM MEMBERSHIP

Where CALM is the lead agency in developing and implementing a Recovery Plan, the membership of a Recovery Team must be approved by the Director of Nature Conservation. Proposals to develop a Recovery Team should be discussed with the Director of WATSCU and submissions must be made via WATSCU. Where CALM is the lead agency, the Chair of the Recovery Team will be a CALM officer. Where appropriate, the Chair will be a person from a Region or District in which the threatened species or community occurs. Where more than one CALM Region is involved, the Chair may be a person with a wide knowledge of the species or ecological community, eg, a Research Scientist.

As a general rule, Recovery Teams should include among their membership representatives of all groups that have a stake in or may be affected by the Recovery Plan. These include, where appropriate:

- CALM staff involved in managing or researching the species or ecological community,
- a WATSCU staff member,
- staff from other State Government agencies, such as Perth Zoo, Kings Park and Botanic Garden, Main Roads, or the Western Australian Water Corporation,
- external scientists with expertise in the species or ecological community, eg, from Universities or CSIRO,
- persons from local Government,
- landowners or land managers, preferably representing a local organisation such as a Land Conservation District Committee or catchment management group,
- representatives of funding agencies such as ANCA, WWF Australia or sponsors, and
- members of non-Government conservation groups, eg, local wildflower societies. Such people are asked to join where they can make a major contribution to the development or implementation of the Recovery Plan, not because they represent a particular group.

People appointed to Recovery Teams are expected to meet their own costs. In exceptional circumstances, eg, where interstate travel is required to attend meetings or where extensive country travel is involved, costs may be identified in the Recovery Plan and funding sought.

Recovery Teams should meet as often as required. All Recovery Teams must meet at least once per year.

CALM staff have and will become members of Recovery Teams set up by other agencies, eg, the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory and the South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Approval for a CALM staff person to join such teams must be given by the person's Director and the Director of Nature Conservation.

DUTIES OF RECOVERY TEAM CHAIRS

The Chairperson of a Recovery Team is primarily responsible for the efficient operation of the Team and for ensuring, in association with the Team, that the Recovery Actions are properly identified, prescribed in the Recovery Plan or IRP, and implemented. The Recovery Team Chair's duties include:

- Arranging meeting agendas, dates, times and places (where appropriate, dates should be coordinated via WATSCU to minimise travelling of Team members and to assist members from the eastern States).
- Circulating to Team members a Summary Record of each Team meeting. This should be a brief summary of outcomes and information, not detailed minutes, and should be done within two weeks of the meeting date.
- Arranging for an annual (calendar year) report to be prepared and ensuring that it is forwarded to WATSCU by 15 January each year (or as otherwise advised by WATSCU). The report should describe progress in relation to each Recovery Action specified in the Recovery Plan or IRP and highlight any difficulties encountered.
- Ensuring that any allocated external funds are spent only as specified in the contract.
- Ensuring that the Recovery Plan is updated if significant changes to recovery actions or funding are agreed by the Recovery Team.
- Ensuring that all relevant papers are placed on the CALM Recovery Plan file (a separate file for each Recovery Plan and IRP will be created by Corporate Information Section on advice from WATSCU).

Recovery Teams are action-oriented not policy-oriented and should not get involved in broad policy issues. Teams do not have the authority to make decisions that under legislation or CALM policy are the responsibility of the Minister, Executive Director or Director of Nature Conservation. Recovery Teams should not normally correspond with other Government Departments, landholders, business, etc. Members who wish to provide advice or information to such parties should do so on their own behalf or via their respective agencies or organisations. On occasions where there is a particular reason or need for the Recovery Team to correspond with others, the Chair should do so as official CALM correspondence, submitted via WATSCU to the Director of Nature Conservation, for approval.

RECOVERY PLANS AND INTERIM RECOVERY PLANS

CALM is developing a rigorous approach to the conservation of threatened species and ecological communities through Recovery Plans and IRPs:

1. For threatened and priority flora in the south west to develop Regional or District Threatened Flora Management Programs. These operate within a CALM administrative area, and provide a brief summary of each threatened and priority taxon. They highlight threatening processes and set overall priorities and actions for management and research.
2. For threatened ecological communities in the south west to progressively develop information on their status and conservation and compile this information into the Region and District Threatened Ecological Community Management Programs.
3. For all species and ecological communities ranked as critically endangered and the highest priority species and ecological communities ranked as endangered, to develop and implement detailed Recovery Plans. Where threatened species and ecological communities are ranked as critically endangered and there is

insufficient information to prepare a Recovery Plan, IRPs will be used as an interim measure. A paper on writing IRPs is available from WATSCU.

4. For threatened species and ecological communities ranked as Endangered, which do not currently have a Recovery Plan or IRP, to develop and implement Recovery Plans or IRPs for their conservation, once resources for this work become available.
5. For threatened species and ecological communities ranked as Vulnerable to ensure that monitoring and conservation actions are integrated into routine operations at the District level.

Policy Statement 44 provides guidelines for the preparation of Recovery Plans and Interim Recovery Plans. The most important part of a Recovery Plan or IRP is the list of Recovery Actions; tasks that must be implemented in order to ensure the conservation of the species or ecological community.

Recovery Plans are detailed documents and are appropriate for species or ecological communities where sufficient information is available to prescribe recovery actions with confidence. Interim Recovery Plans prescribe immediate actions that are necessary to halt the decline and commence recovery of a species or ecological community.

Recovery Plans and Interim Recovery Plans must include full costing of recovery actions for the full period of the Plan. CALM and other agency contributions, of both staff time and contingency funds, should be clearly identified. Details of calculations used to develop CALM's contribution and to develop the amounts of external funds to be requested should be recorded, either in an Appendix to the Plan or on the CALM file. Figures should be those worked out at the time of writing (ie, no allowance for future inflation).

Recovery Plans will be published by CALM after approval by the Corporate Executive, referral to the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority and endorsement by the Minister for the Environment. However, Recovery Plans are not immutable and should be considered to be evolving documents that will be amended in the light of new discoveries and experience.

Any translocations proposed must be approved according to procedures laid down in CALM Policy Statement No. 29 *Translocation of threatened flora and fauna*. Translocations, including establishment of threatened plants into wild sites of any land status, must not take place without approval.

WATSCU keeps a register of existing and proposed Recovery Plans, IRPs and of membership of Recovery Teams. Any person considering writing a Recovery Plan or IRP should contact WATSCU. Because resources are limited, it is vital that Recovery Plans and IRPs are prepared for threatened species and ecological communities in priority order as provided in Policy Statement 50, except where the Director of Nature Conservation approves otherwise.

EXTERNAL FUNDS

External funds are sometimes available for research into and management of threatened species and ecological communities and of threatening processes. The major sources at present are ANCA's Endangered Species Program and Invasive Species Program. Other ANCA programs, eg, States Cooperative Assistance Program, National Reserves Conservation System Cooperative Program and Save the Bush Program, may be appropriate for some applications. Other sources of funds include WWF Australia, corporate sponsorship and various Foundations.

WATSCU coordinates all applications to the Endangered Species Program. Other programs are coordinated by CALM's External Funds Coordinator.

ROLE OF WATSCU

The role of WATSCU is to coordinate, assist with and promote the conservation of Western Australia's threatened plants, animals and ecological communities. WATSCU staff are available to assist Recovery Team chairs and members to fulfil their duties.

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