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Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions

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For more information about the EPBC Act and the responsibilities of landowners and managers in relation to TECs, contact the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage, and the Arts on (02) 6274 1111 or visit [www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened).

Possible impacts to threatened ecological communities are taken into account by State assessment bodies when applications to develop or clear land are evaluated during land use planning and environmental impact assessment processes. TECs are also indirectly protected under Western Australian legislation through the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* and *Environmental Protection (Clearing of Native Vegetation) Regulations 2004*. Under the *Environmental Protection Act*, any clearing of native vegetation requires a permit, unless done for an exempt purpose. A number of exemptions for day-to-day management purposes are prescribed under the Regulations, but these exemptions do not apply in environmentally sensitive areas. TECs have been defined under the regulations as environmentally sensitive areas so the exemptions from requiring a clearing permit do not apply in these areas. Any such clearing proposals must therefore be undertaken under a specific permit and be assessed for any environmental impact. Under the Act, the assessment of the impact of an application to clear native vegetation must take into account a number of clearing principles, one of which is the impact on TECs. Anyone considering the possibility of clearing within a threatened ecological community should contact DEC's Native Vegetation Protection section on 1800 061 025 or visit the 'land' section of [www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au) for more information on permit requirements.



## Conservation categories for threatened ecological communities

### Critically Endangered (CR)

Subject to major contraction in area or was already of limited distribution, and is in danger of severe modification or destruction in the immediate future.

### Endangered (EN)

Subject to major contraction in area or was already of limited distribution, and is in danger of significant modification or destruction in the near future.

### Vulnerable (VU)

Declining or declined in distribution and/or condition and whose ultimate security has not been secured or still widespread but will become CR, EN or PD in the near future if threatening processes continue or begin to operate.

### Presumed Destroyed (PD)

No examples are left or has been extensively modified such that it is unlikely to recover in the foreseeable future.

### Priority Ecological Communities

Possible threatened ecological communities that do not meet the stringent survey criteria for the assessment of TECs are added to DEC's Priority Ecological Community Lists under Priorities 1, 2 and 3. Ecological Communities that are adequately known, are rare but not considered to be threatened, or meet criteria for Near Threatened, or that have been recently removed from the threatened list, are placed in Priority 4. These ecological communities require regular monitoring. Conservation Dependent ecological communities are placed in Priority 5.

## More information

The Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC's) Species and Communities Branch within the Nature Conservation Division is responsible for coordinating threatened species and ecological community conservation.

For more information, including advice about managing a TEC, or to obtain or provide other information on TECs or possible TECs, contact the TEC Database Coordinator on (08) 9334 0116.

Information on TECs and examples of recovery plans are available at [www.naturebase.net/plantsandanimals](http://www.naturebase.net/plantsandanimals).

This information is accurate at March 2008.

# Conserving threatened ecological communities



Department of Environment and Conservation

Our environment, our future



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## About threatened ecological communities

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) is responsible for conserving Western Australia's biological diversity. This responsibility includes identifying elements of biodiversity that are under threat of extinction and seeking to ensure that they do not become extinct. In the past this has mainly involved plant and animal species but now DEC has developed a process for identifying and conserving threatened ecological communities.

### What is a threatened ecological community?

An 'ecological community' is a naturally occurring biological assemblage or group of plants and/or animals (or other living things such as microbes) that occurs in a particular type of habitat. Together with their habitat, ecological communities form ecosystems.

A threatened ecological community (TEC) is one that has been endorsed by Western Australia's Environment Minister as being subject to processes that threaten to destroy or significantly modify it across much of its range. It must also fit into one of the categories 'presumed totally destroyed', 'critically endangered', 'endangered' or 'vulnerable'. TECs may be at risk from threatening processes including land clearing, inappropriate fire regimes, inappropriate grazing, trampling, pollution, competition or predation from introduced animals, weed invasion, hydrological changes, salinity and diseases. Most TECs are either naturally restricted in distribution, or were once widespread but now occur only as remnants in cleared landscapes. However, a widespread ecological community may be listed as a TEC if information indicates that significant and widespread threats are active across its range. To be eligible for assessment as a TEC, an ecological community must be described so that all variations of it clearly fit the description and it is clear that it is distinct from all other communities. The distribution of the community must be known and it must have been searched for adequately to be confident that no significant areas of it remain undiscovered.



## CONSERVING THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

Proposed TECs are referred to the WA Threatened Ecological Communities Scientific Committee (WATECSC) for assessment. WATECSC is comprised of experts in the field of ecological community identification and conservation and includes representatives from DEC, tertiary institutions, the Western Australian Museum and other organisations and individuals. If WATECSC is satisfied that an ecological community is appropriately described, has been adequately surveyed and meets the criteria for listing as threatened, a recommendation for it to be listed as a TEC will be made through the DEC to the Environment Minister.

To date, listed TECs have primarily been identified through three types of information – regional surveys; expert knowledge in specific areas (primarily caves and microbial assemblages); and local surveys that have been verified in a regional context.

### Conserving threatened ecological communities

DEC approaches the conservation and management of TECs in cooperation with other landowners and managers. Many recovery actions are implemented with the involvement of recovery teams, catchment or Natural Resource Management groups, wildlife enthusiasts, school groups and the owners and managers of land on which the TECs occur.

DEC develops TEC recovery plans to detail actions that will be taken to ensure the long-term conservation of the communities. Where TECs occur on land that is privately owned or managed by other agencies, DEC seeks the support of these bodies or individuals and develops the plan in consultation with them. The plans require that DEC must obtain agreement from the appropriate landowners and managers



before recovery actions are undertaken on their land. This may include seeking resources for research and on-ground works.

Recovery teams advise, develop and oversee implementation of recovery plans for TECs. Recovery team members include DEC district staff, Species and Communities Branch staff and relevant representatives from other State Government agencies, local government authorities and catchment councils, including landowners, and members of non-government conservation groups.

Funding assistance for landowners and land managers may be available through the plans for conservation projects on TECs such as flora monitoring surveys, fencing, weed control or other necessary management. Potential funding sources include various State Government or non-government organisation programs or programs run through regional

Natural Resource Management groups including under the Commonwealth's Natural Heritage Trust or equivalent.

### Legislation

There is currently no Western Australian legislation that deals specifically with TECs. However, TECs that occur in Western Australia may be listed as nationally threatened under the Commonwealth Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Any person or organisation may nominate communities for listing. A number of State-listed TECs have been referred to the Commonwealth Government and have been listed under the EPBC Act following review at that level. There is a legal requirement that land managers who wish to undertake actions that are likely to damage communities that are listed under the EPBC Act refer the proposal to the Commonwealth Environment Minister.

