

endangered

by Jill Pryde



Unique bushland on chert

A very distinctive vegetation type occurs on a narrow band of low rocky hills between Moora and Watheroo. It is only found associated with exposed ridges and gravelly slopes of a type of rock known as 'Coomberdale (Noondine) chert'. This threatened ecological community's composition varies with soil depth and subsurface rock. On the upper slopes vegetation sub-types include tamar (*Allocasuarina campestris*), *Allocasuarina microstachya*, *Regelia megacephala* and *Xanthorrhoea drummondii* shrublands, *Kunzea praestans* scrublands and *Melaleuca calyptroides* and *Hibbertia subvaginata* heath.

Downslope the vegetation changes to desert gum mallee (*Eucalyptus eudesmoides*), rock sheoak (*Allocasuarina huegeliana*) woodlands and jam (*Acacia acuminata*) low woodlands. These sub-types are considered to

represent the 'core' areas of this threatened ecological community.

The community contains 12 'declared rare' or 'priority flora', including *R. megacephala*, that are either totally or largely confined to the chert hills. The distinctive *R. megacephala* with its dark green foliage and deep red flowers is found only on the tops of the ridges where chert is exposed and the soil is generally very shallow. The more common tamar shrubland occurs downslope or in deeper soils.

Chert is a flint-like form of quartz, and is a variety of silica. This rock type is valued for its high quality quartz which is mined mainly for silicon. The largest and most extensive outcrop of the Coomberdale chert occurs between Coomberdale and Dalaroo (a range of about 12 kilometres), mostly on private land. Only two areas of the Coomberdale chert threatened ecological community are in conservation reserves—Cairn Hill Nature Reserve and Watheroo National Park—at the northernmost end of its range.

The chert vegetation has a total range of about 42 kilometres, and is known from 10 main patches that cover about 750 hectares. Almost all occurrences are surrounded by agricultural land, many with little or no bushland buffer. Major threats include clearing for mining and other uses, grazing, weed invasion, altered fire regimes, and potentially hydrological change. It was ranked 'endangered' in 2001 due to restricted distribution and threats.

A recovery plan for the community is currently being updated, including a more comprehensive description based on recent detailed vegetation and condition mapping. The updated plan will help to determine future conservation priorities for the Coomberdale chert community. Recovery will require close collaboration with land managers, and some occurrences of this community have already been fenced by landowners to help protect the unique vegetation.

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