

CONSERVATION CATEGORY DEFINITIONS

for Western Australian Ecological Communities

An **ecological community** is a naturally occurring assemblage of organisms that occurs in a particular habitat, as defined in the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act). Ecological communities may comprise various life forms including plants, animals and microorganisms.

The scale at which ecological communities are defined will often depend on the level of detail in the information source, therefore no particular scale is specified.

THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

T Threatened ecological communities

A **threatened ecological community** (TEC) means an ecological community that is listed under section 27(1) of the BC Act as a critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable ecological community, or is a rediscovered ecological community to be regarded as a threatened ecological community under section 33 of the BC Act. Assessment of the conservation status of ecological communities is carried out in accordance with the BC Act listing criteria and the requirements of Ministerial Guideline Number 1 and Ministerial Guideline Number 4 that adopt the use of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Ecosystems Categories and Criteria.

Categories of threatened ecological communities are:

CR Critically endangered ecological communities

A threatened ecological community listed in the category of critically endangered under section 27(1)(a) of the BC Act, as determined by criteria set out in section 28 of the BC Act and the ministerial guidelines. A critically endangered ecological community faces an extremely high risk of becoming eligible for listing as a collapsed ecological community in the immediate future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines.

Examples of use:

- 'Assemblages of the organic springs and mound springs of the Mandora Marsh area' is listed as a critically endangered threatened ecological community under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.
- 'Assemblages of the organic springs and mound springs of the Mandora Marsh area' is listed as critically endangered under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.
- Listing reference in a table – column heading: BC Act; row text: CR.

EN Endangered ecological communities

A threatened ecological community listed in the category of endangered ecological community under section 27(1)(b) of the BC Act, as determined by criteria set out in section 29 of the BC Act and the ministerial guidelines. A threatened ecological community faces a very high risk of becoming eligible for listing as a collapsed ecological community in the near future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines.

Examples of use:

- 'Herb rich shrublands in clay pans (floristic community type 8 as originally described in Gibson *et al.* (1994))' is listed as an endangered threatened ecological community under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.

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- 'Herb rich shrublands in clay pans (floristic community type 8 as originally described in Gibson et al. (1994))' is listed as endangered under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.
- Listing reference in a table – column heading: BC Act; row text: EN.

VU Vulnerable ecological communities

A threatened ecological community listed in the category of vulnerable ecological community under section 27(1)(c) of the BC Act, as determined by criteria set out in section 30 of the BC Act and the ministerial guidelines. A vulnerable ecological community faces a high risk of becoming eligible for listing as a collapsed ecological community in the medium-term future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines.

Examples of use:

- 'Calothamnus graniticus subsp. graniticus heaths on south west coastal granites' is listed as a vulnerable threatened ecological community under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.
- 'Calothamnus graniticus subsp. graniticus heaths on south west coastal granites' is listed as vulnerable under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.
- Listing reference in a table – column heading: BC Act; row text: VU.

COLLAPSED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES**CO Collapsed ecological communities**

An ecological community listed by order of the Minister as collapsed under section 31(1) of the BC Act. As determined by criteria set out in section 32 of the BC Act, an ecological community is eligible for listing as a collapsed ecological community at a particular time if, at that time —

- there is no reasonable doubt that the last occurrence of the ecological community has collapsed; or
- the ecological community has been so extensively modified throughout its range that no occurrence of it is likely to recover —
 - its species composition or structure; or
 - its species composition and structure.

PRIORITY ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

Priority is not a listing category under the BC Act. The Priority Ecological Communities list is maintained by the department and is published on the department's website.

All fauna and flora that may be present in an ecological community are protected in WA following the provisions in Part 10 of the BC Act. The protection applies even when these species occur in an ecological community that is not listed as threatened, and regardless of land tenure (State managed land (Crown land), private land, or Commonwealth land).

Ecological communities that may possibly be threatened ecological communities that do not meet the criteria for listing under the BC Act because of insufficient survey or are otherwise data deficient, listing are added to the department's Priority Ecological Communities for Western Australia list under priority 1, 2 or 3. Ecological communities that are adequately known and not threatened but rare, near threatened, or have recently been removed from the threatened list are placed in priority 4. The name and short description for the ecological community must be accepted and sufficient to meet the *specifications for ecological communities that may be considered for listing* in Ministerial Guideline Number 4. This supports clear identification in the field and provides for their consideration in decision making under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*.

P1 Priority 1: Poorly known ecological communities – very few occurrences, very restricted distribution

Ecological communities that are known from very few occurrences with a very restricted distribution (generally ≤5 occurrences or a total area of ≤100ha). Occurrences are believed to be under threat either due to limited extent, or being on lands under immediate threat (e.g., within agricultural or pastoral lands, urban areas, active mineral leases) or for which current threats exist. May include communities with occurrences on land managed for conservation. Communities may be included if they are comparatively well-known from one or more localities but

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do not meet adequacy of survey requirements and appear to be under immediate threat from known threatening processes across their range.

Examples of use:

- 'Banded Ironstone Hills with *Dryandra arborea*' is listed as a Priority 1 ecological community by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.
- 'Banded Ironstone Hills with *Dryandra arborea*' is listed as Priority 1 on the DBCA Priority Ecological Communities List.
- Listing reference in a table – column heading: DBCA; row text: P1.

P2 Priority 2: Poorly known ecological communities – few occurrences, restricted distribution

Communities that are known from few occurrences with a restricted distribution (generally ≤ 10 occurrences or a total area of ≤ 200 ha). At least some occurrences are not believed to be under immediate threat (within approximately 10 years) of destruction or degradation. Communities may be included if they are comparatively well known from one or more localities but do not meet adequacy of survey requirements, and are under threat from known and described threats.

Examples of use:

- 'Aquatic invertebrate communities of peat swamps' is listed as a Priority 2 ecological community by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.
- 'Aquatic invertebrate communities of peat swamps' is listed as Priority 2 on the DBCA Priority Ecological Communities List.
- Listing reference in a table – column heading: DBCA; row text: P2.

P3 Priority 3: Poorly known ecological communities – inadequately surveyed

Communities may be included if they are comparatively well known from several localities but do not meet adequacy of survey requirements, and known threatening processes exist that could affect them. This category includes three sub-categories:

- (i) Communities that are known from several to many occurrences, a significant number or area of which are not under threat of habitat destruction or degradation.
- (ii) Communities known from a few widespread occurrences, which are either large or with significant remaining areas of habitat in which other occurrences may occur, much of it not under imminent threat (within approximately 10 years).
- (iii) Communities made up of large, and/or widespread occurrences, that may or may not be represented in the reserve system, but are under threat of modification across much of their range from processes such as grazing by domestic and/or feral stock, inappropriate fire regimes, clearing, hydrological change, etc.

Examples of use:

- 'Assemblages of gypsum dunes of the central and southern wheatbelt' is listed as a Priority 3(iii) ecological community by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.
- 'Assemblages of gypsum dunes of the central and southern wheatbelt' is listed as Priority 3(iii) on the DBCA Priority Ecological Communities List.
- Listing reference in a table – column heading: DBCA; row text: P3(iii).

P4 Priority 4: Adequately known ecological communities – rare, near threatened, or recently removed from the threatened list

Ecological communities that are adequately known and either rare but not threatened, near threatened, or have recently been removed from the threatened list. These communities require regular monitoring.

- (i) Rare: ecological communities known from few occurrences that are considered to have been adequately surveyed, or for which sufficient knowledge is available, and that are considered not currently threatened or in need of special protection, but could be if present circumstances change. These communities are usually represented on conservation lands.
- (ii) Near threatened: ecological communities that are considered to have been adequately surveyed and that do not qualify as conservation dependent, but that are close to qualifying for a higher threat category.
- (iii) Ecological communities that have been removed from the list of threatened communities during the past five years.

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Examples of use:

- 'Nimalaica (Nimalarragun) claypan and associated wetland assemblages' is listed as a Priority 4(ii) ecological community by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.
- 'Nimalaica (Nimalarragun) claypan and associated wetland assemblages' is listed as Priority 4(ii) on the DBCA Priority Ecological Communities List.
- Listing reference in a table: column heading: DBCA, row text: P4(ii).