



Monaro Grasslands

This guide helps landholders in the Monaro region determine if nationally protected grasslands are present on their farm, and if the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) applies to land management activities.

Landholders can use this guide if their farm is in the naturally treeless areas within the Snowy-Monaro Regional Council area of New South Wales.

What types of pasture occur in the Monaro region?

The Monaro region includes a mix of pasture types including; annual crops, introduced pastures and native grasslands.

The native grasslands contain a wide variety of species in a range of different compositions. Variations in condition, species richness and structure of the native grasslands are influenced primarily by past land use i.e. grazing intensity and fertiliser use; but also by geology, topography, aspect, soil structure and fertility, rainfall and climate.

The most widespread pasture type in the region is low diversity native grassland.

Which native grasslands in the Monaro region are nationally protected?

National environmental law as set out in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) only applies to native grasslands in the Monaro region in very specific circumstances.

Some grasslands of the Monaro region have special characteristics and are classified as moderate or high diversity native grasslands (pasture types 5 and 6 as described in *Pasture types of the Monaro region*). These are the most valuable elements of the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands Ecological Community, and are protected under national environmental law.

Some low diversity native grasslands also have the characteristics of this Ecological Community. Past and present land use history means that it is generally more disturbed and has an altered composition when compared to other less intensively managed native grasslands. These areas are not the focus of regulation under national environmental law.

Why are these native grasslands nationally protected?

Native grasslands are widespread in the Monaro and are an important part of the region's resilience and agricultural productivity.

The moderate and high diversity native grasslands of the Monaro region are nationally protected because they contain collections of plants and animals not found anywhere else in Australia. There are so few of these areas left, that without protection, there is a risk these grasslands will disappear. In addition, some low diversity grasslands are also protected under the current definitions in the EPBC Act.

National environmental law is designed to preserve the highest value and most unique biodiversity in Australia.



The Grassland Earless Dragon (*Tympanocryptis pinguicollis*) is an example of the unique species that occur in the Monaro grasslands. It is a grassland specialist with colouring and patterning which provides camouflage amongst the basalt soils and dry tussock grasses on the Monaro. It is listed as a threatened species under the EPBC Act.



Managing nationally protected grasslands

A landholder's knowledge of each paddock's management history can help to determine which areas of their property may be categorised as nationally protected grassland.

You can continue to undertake routine agricultural and land management activities on your farm even where nationally protected grasslands occur, including weed management.

However if you are planning to expand, intensify or change your land use including weed management practices (e.g. change from spot spraying to broad acre spraying) you may need to determine if these activities will impact protected grasslands including moderate and high diversity native grasslands. If so, national environmental law may apply and you should seek advice before proceeding.

What are the conservation priorities for nationally protected grasslands?

Pastures 5 and 6 are categorised as the most important and vulnerable of the grasslands in the Monaro region and are protected under national environmental law.

Education, improved awareness and investment to maintain the nationally protected grasslands is a conservation priority. The government will work with landholders to:

- Increase landholder awareness to improve identification and conservation of moderate and high diversity native grasslands.
- Support sympathetic land management practices for grazing and weed control that reduces the risk of extinction of the nationally protected grasslands.
- Seek conservation agreements with landholders to establish long term protection where appropriate.

How do I know if the pastures on my property are nationally protected?

- ✓ National environmental law regulates native grasslands that display the characteristics of moderate and high diversity native grasslands (Pastures 5 and 6).
- ✓ National environmental law does not regulate low diversity native grasslands, introduced or run-down introduced pastures or crops.
- ✓ National environmental law regulates weed management when activities also require removal of nationally protected grasslands (e.g. broad acre spraying).
- ✓ National environmental law does not prevent routine management activities in native grasslands in the Monaro region.



Where can I get help?

Detailed technical information about the nationally protected grasslands of the Monaro is available by reading the conservation advice for the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands Ecological Community prepared by the Department of the Environment and Energy.




If you would like to speak to someone from the Department of the Environment and Energy call us on **1800 803 772**. We can assist with advice about nationally protected grasslands and other protected matters in the Monaro region and help you to seek approval for land management activities if required.

You may also wish to talk to people in your local community about your property and plans. NSW Local Land Services officers and qualified experts such as ecologists or agronomists can assist with advice about mapping, regional ecosystems, clearing native vegetation, and if other state or local land management laws apply.



Pasture types of the Monaro region

Use this guide to help determine if you have nationally protected grasslands on your property and if your land management activities need approval under national environmental law.

Sample Images	Characteristics	Is a significant impact likely
PASTURE 1 – Crops		
	<p>Areas sown to annual crops.</p> <p>These areas have a history of herbicide use or soil cultivation to remove competition, fertiliser application and crop sowing.</p> <p>Lime or gypsum may also have been used to adjust the soil.</p> <p>Represents a relatively small area across the region due to topography and rockiness, soil fertility, rainfall and climate.</p>	No
PASTURE 2 – Introduced pastures		
	<p>Areas sown to exotic pasture species such as Phalaris, Cocksfoot, Perennial Ryegrass and Tall Fescue and pasture legumes.</p> <p>These areas have a history of cultivation or herbicide use and fertiliser application.</p>	No
PASTURE 3 – Run-down introduced pastures		
	<p>Areas of introduced pasture that have lost density and vigour over time and usually have been recolonised by native grassland species and introduced weed species.</p> <p>These areas share a common history with Pasture 2 areas, but have progressively lost their cover of exotic pasture species.</p> <p>Recolonising native grasses often become dominant and comprise over 50% of the groundcover. These pastures may represent a heavily modified form of native grassland and may include a number of more common native forbs.</p>	No

Sample Images	Characteristics	Is a significant impact likely
PASTURE 4 – Low diversity native grasslands		
	<p>These areas are dominated by native grass species and have no history of sowing introduced pasture grasses. They often have some history of fertiliser application and exotic legume introduction.</p> <p>They are typically dominated by Poa Tussock, Spear Grasses or Wallaby Grasses or a combination of these, but have a low diversity of non-grass native herb species.</p> <p>These grasslands are widespread across the region. They are important because they provide a stable, low input, low cost pasture that buffers and connects nationally protected grasslands and threatened species habitats.</p> <p>Landholders are encouraged to manage these grasslands by retaining their extent and condition, and actively managing perennial weeds.</p>	<p>No</p>
PASTURE 5 – Moderate diversity native grasslands		
	<p>Areas of natural grassland that retain a significant diversity of native species (as indicated by the presence of more than 12 non-grass native herb species). These grasslands have never been sown to introduced pasture and have little or no history of fertiliser use. They have been modified over time, mainly by light or intermittent grazing.</p> <p>Typically dominated by Poa Tussock or Spear grasses, they also include a diversity of other native grasses and forbs.</p> <p>More commonly found on less-arable land or other land not developed for a variety of reasons.</p> <p>Retention and sympathetic management of Pasture 5 is important in reducing the risk of extinction of the nationally protected grasslands.</p> <p>This pasture type also provides habitat for nationally protected animal and plant species.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>When:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converting Pasture 5 to crops or introduced pastures • Increasing production or controlling weeds
PASTURE 6 – High diversity native grasslands		
	<p>Areas of natural grassland that retain a significant cover of the naturally dominant native grasses, including Kangaroo Grass, Poa Tussock, River Tussock or Plains Sedge. They also include a wide diversity of other native grasses and forbs.</p> <p>These grasslands generally have no history of mechanical or chemical disturbance and only light or intermittent grazing.</p> <p>Pasture 6 provides the best examples of nationally protected grasslands in close to their pre-European state across the Monaro region.</p> <p>Pasture 6 grasslands have a limited extent, occupy a relatively small area and hold the highest conservation value. They require protection to ensure they do not become extinct in the Monaro region.</p> <p>They are commonly found in Travelling Stock Reserves, cemeteries, along roadsides, railway easements, town commons or reserves. They also occur on non-arable and lightly grazed areas of private land.</p> <p>Grasslands dominated by River Tussock or Plains Sedge are usually found in drainage lines, creek flats or lake margins.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>When:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converting Pasture 6 to crops or introduced pastures • Increasing production or controlling weeds