



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Energy

Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands: a nationally protected ecological community



This information guide is designed to assist land managers, owners and occupiers as well as environmental assessment officers and consultants to identify, assess and manage the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community; a threatened ecological community, listed as critically endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), Australia's national environmental law.

This guide is a companion document to the approved Conservation Advice, which can be found on the Australian Government's species profile and threats (SPRAT) database at: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publiclookupcommunities.pl.

On this webpage, click on the details link—alongside the ecological community name—to download the documents and the map for the listed ecological community.

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Images

Front cover—Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands © Copyright David Eddy.

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The Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community. What is it? Why is it threatened? What does national protection mean for people in the region?

In summary:

- Australia's unique native grasslands have been placed under enormous pressure since non-Indigenous settlement. However, important remnants persist across several regions, including the South Eastern Highlands.
- The Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community was listed on 6 April 2016 as Critically Endangered under Australia's national environment law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).
- This listing updates and replaces a previous listing, for the Natural Temperate Grassland of the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, which was listed as Endangered in 2000. These revisions are based on new data collected after the original listing was made in 2000.
- This revised listing recognises a broader area of grasslands across the South Eastern Highlands and immediately adjacent areas in NSW, ACT and Victoria, and adds a 'minimum condition threshold', which identifies which areas of grassland are protected by the EPBC Act. Low quality grasslands that do not meet this threshold are not protected.
- The Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community is dominated by native tussock grasses with a rich diversity of wildflowers and other grassland plants and animals, with few trees or shrubs.
- It provides vital habitat for at least nineteen threatened species, such as the grassland earless dragon, striped legless lizard, pink-tailed worm lizard, golden sun moth, and button wrinklewort daisy, and is a refuge for many other locally-rare species.
- These native grasslands are important for agriculture as they provide year round forage, and are drought tolerant, including recovering quickly from extended drought. This makes them useful in low input production systems, and for fine wool production.
- Native grasslands also provide other ecosystem services such as carbon storage, improving water infiltration, reducing soil erosion and suppressing weeds.
- The national Threatened Species Scientific Committee classified the ecological community as Critically Endangered as its extent has declined by more than 90 per cent and it has a highly fragmented and restricted distribution. This has resulted in large reductions in the number and size of regional populations of many plants and animals, including local extinctions, and loss of ecosystem function.
- National listing is an important step in securing the future of the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands by:
 - requiring consideration of the impact of new developments on the grasslands
 - encouraging priority support for conservation and recovery efforts, including opportunities through Australian Government funding initiatives
 - raising awareness of the ecological community and priority actions to combat threats.
- The Conservation Advice for these native grasslands builds on the 2006 grassland recovery plan, outlining a range of priority research and management actions that provide guidance on how to protect, manage and restore this Critically Endangered ecological community.

- Protecting and restoring the native grasslands will conserve ecosystem services for people in the region, and support more resilient agriculture production.
- As has been the case since the original listing, routine property maintenance, land management and other established practices (e.g. most farming activities and managing fire breaks) do not typically require consideration under national environment law, particularly if carried out in line with other national and state laws covering native vegetation.
- Only activities that are likely to have a significant impact on the ecological community need to be considered under national environment law—activities such as large new developments, works or infrastructure. For example, permanently clearing areas of high-quality native vegetation for mining and energy infrastructure, changed agricultural production (e.g. cropping), telecommunication cabling, roadworks or residential/ industrial subdivision.

National ecological communities

Australia's national environment law provides a legal framework to list, protect and manage Matters of National Environmental Significance; including nationally threatened species and ecological communities.

The EPBC Act defines an ecological community as an assemblage of native species which inhabit a particular area in nature. In other words, ecological communities are groups of native plants, animals and other organisms that naturally occur together and interact in a unique habitat. Nationally listed ecological communities include forest, grassland, shrubland, wetland, woodland, marine, ground spring and cave communities.



Creamy candles *Stakhousia monogyna* in kangaroo grass *Themeda triandra* © Copyright Department of the Environment and Energy



Grassland earless dragon *Tymanocryptis pinguicolla* © Copyright Steve Wilson.

The native plants and animals in an ecological community have different roles and relationships that, together, contribute to a healthy functioning natural environment.

Listed ecological communities may become extinct, through loss of extent and/or function, unless threats are removed or better managed. However, remnants retain important natural values and have the potential to provide more habitat and ecosystem services if recovered.

Protecting wildlife communities also protects ecosystem services such as clean air, land and water. These benefit people and society both within and beyond the local areas where they occur and are essential to the greater productivity of our land and water.

National (EPBC Act) protection complements other conservation measures and is particularly vital for temperate grasslands as few remnants are protected in conservation reserves.

What is the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community?

The Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands is dominated by native tussock grasses with a diversity of wildflowers and other grassland-specialist plants and animals. The composition of a particular area (patch) of the ecological community is primarily influenced by its disturbance history (e.g. clearing, grazing and fire), but also by its size, recent rainfall and drought conditions.

Previously, the Natural Temperate Grassland of the Southern Tablelands of NSW and the Australian Capital Territory ecological community was listed in 2000. Since then, new data has shown that these grasslands occur more broadly across the south eastern highlands and adjacent areas. Therefore a review was conducted to assess the broader distribution and take account of new information, including the outcome of work associated with the 2006 Recovery Plan. The updated listing also introduced a minimum condition threshold, to help determine which patches should be considered a matter of national environmental significance (see *Are all patches protected under the EPBC Act listing?*), and which removed protection from low-quality patches.

The ecological community can be identified by these general features:

Landscape and soils

- The ecological community occurs at altitudes up to around 1200 m, and as low as 250 m in some parts of its distribution.
- It occurs on a wide range of topographic positions and on soils derived from a variety of substrates, including granites, basalts, sediments, colluvium and alluvium.

Vegetation

- It is a naturally treeless or sparsely treed community (less than 10% projective foliage cover from woody plants), which is characterised by native tussock grasses that are typically up to 1.0 m in height.
- There is usually a second, lower stratum of shorter perennial and annual grasses and forbs growing between the taller tussocks, and there may be a third discontinuous layer of even smaller forbs and grasses. Sedges and rushes may also occur, particularly in seasonally wet areas.
- The major dominant or co-dominant grass species are: *Themeda triandra* syn. *T. australis* (kangaroo grass), *Poa sieberiana* (snowgrass), *Poa labillardierei* var. *labillardierei* (river tussock grass), *Austrostipa bigeniculata* (kneed speargrass), *Austrostipa scabra* var. *falcata* (slender speargrass), *Bothriochloa macra* (red grass), various *Rytidosperma* species syn. *Austrodanthonia* species (wallaby grasses), and *Lachnagrostis filiformis* (blowngrass).
- The dominant or co-dominant grasses occur in association with a range of other native herbaceous species, including many forb and grass-like species.
- Wildflowers and other species that are most common with the grasses include *Acaena ovina* (sheep's burr), *Asperula* spp. (woodruffs), *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* (common everlasting, yellow buttons), *Convolvulus* spp. (bindweed), *Euchiton* spp. (cudweeds), *Leptorhynchus squamatus* (scaly buttons), *Lomandra* spp. (mat-rushes), *Plantago varia* (variable plantain) and *Vittadinia muelleri* (narrow-leaf New Holland daisy).
- The grasslands often intergrade with adjacent grassy woodlands, such as the nationally listed White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland ecological community.



Billy buttons *Craspedia variabilis* © Copyright Chris Watson



Natural temperate grassland with the endangered daisy *Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides* (button wrinklewort) at the Majura training area, ACT
© Copyright ACT Government



Top left: Kangaroo grass *Themeda triandra*; Top middle: Hill wallaby grass *Rytidosperma erianthum*; Bottom left: Bare-backed wallaby grass *Rytidosperma laeve*; Bottom middle: snowgrass *Poa sieberiana* © Copyright Michael Bedingfield; Right: Kneed speargrass *Austrostipa bigeniculata* © Copyright Michael Bedingfield.

Fauna

- Some characteristic and specialist fauna species of the ecological community are listed below:
 - Frogs: *Crinia signifera* (eastern common froglet), *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis* (spotted marsh frog)
 - Reptiles: *Pseudonaja textilis* (brown snake), *Tiliqua scincoides* (eastern blue-tongue), *Egernia cunninghami* (Cunningham's skink), *Aprasia parapulchella* (pink-tailed worm-lizard), *Delma impar* (striped legless lizard), *Tympanocryptis pinguicolla* (grassland earless dragon) and *Suta flagellum* (little whip-snake)
 - Mammals: *Macropus giganteus* (eastern grey kangaroo), *Vombatus ursinus* (common wombat)
 - Birds: *Coturnix ypsilophora* (brown quail), *C. pectoralis* (stubble quail), *Turnix velox* (little button-quail), *Vanellus tricolor* (banded lapwing), *Mirafra javanica* (Australasian bushlark), *Gymnorhina tibicen* (Australian magpie), *Anthus novaeseelandiae* (Richard's pipit), *Aquila audax* (wedge-tailed eagle), *Stagonopleura guttata* (diamond firetail), *Cincloramphus cruralis* (brown songlark), *C. mathewsi* (rufous songlark), *Cisticola exilis* (golden-headed cisticola) and *Petroica phoenicius* (flame robin)
 - Insects: *Keyacris scurra* (Key's matchstick), *Cooraboorama canberrae* (Canberra raspy cricket), *Perunga ochracea* (Perunga grasshopper), *Synemon plana* (golden sun moth).



Top row, left to right: Common wombat *Vombatus ursinus* © Copyright Dave Watts. Sundew *Drosera* sp. © Copyright Department of the Environment and Energy; Bottom row, left to right: Garngeg, Nyamin, Murnong, yam daisy *Microseris lanceolata*. © Copyright Department of the Environment and Energy. Wedge-tailed eagle *Aquila audax* © Copyright Brian Furby. Native geranium *Geranium solanderi* © Copyright Matt White.

Why is the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community important?

The Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community provides habitat for a range of native plants and animals that rely on grasslands for their homes and food. Remnant patches of the ecological community provide wildlife corridors and refuges in a fragmented landscape. These grassland patches also help improve air and water quality, and helps prevent or reduce soil erosion and weeds.

When native vegetation is cleared, habitat which was once continuous becomes divided into smaller separate fragments. This makes it harder for animals to roam or migrate and for plants to disperse. Many fragments of the ecological community are small islands—isolated from each other by grazing or agricultural land, or by roads, houses and other developments. Prior to the 20th century, when conditions were right the grassland and surrounding grassy woodlands would have on

occasions looked like a vast carpet of yellow, white, pink and purple wildflowers with emus and kangaroos grazing amongst them. The plains of Canberra, the Monaro and surrounding regions once contained some of the most extensive and diverse temperate grassland in Australia.

While most native grassland in the Canberra region has been lost or fragmented by improved pasture and then urban development, pockets of native grassland remain and provide crucial local biodiversity, natural beauty and amenity in parks, nature reserves and other land in and around the city. Some of these pockets occur at Canberra airport; St Mark's and York Park in Barton; Jerrabomberra Grasslands and around suburbs such as Crace, Dunlop, and Mitchell. Similar pockets occur around towns such as Cooma and Goulburn. Isolated populations of grassland animals and plants may be more vulnerable to local extinction. Therefore, connectivity between individual areas of grassland and with other areas of native vegetation, particularly grassy woodlands, is important. For example, connectivity increases plant pollination rates and the spread of plant propagules—the parts of a



Grassland conservation area in the ACT overlooking Lake Burley Griffin, St Mark's in Barton, not far from Parliament House
© Copyright Matt White.

plant that allow it to reproduce and spread. Therefore, even the smallest remnants within cities or on farms can be important “stepping-stones” or pollination/seed dispersal routes between larger grassland and grassy woodland remnants.

The ecological community provides vital habitat for many threatened and rare species of plants and animals. For example, patches of the ecological community in the Monaro region contain some of the best remaining habitat for the grassland earless dragon (*Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*). By listing the ecological community, additional protection is given to these species. These include four nationally-listed animal species: the golden sun moth (*Synemon plana*), grassland earless dragon, pink-tailed worm-lizard (*Aprasia parapulchella*), and the striped legless lizard (*Delma impar*).

At least fifteen nationally-threatened plant species are present, such as: golden moths orchid (*Diuris pedunculata*), basalt peppercress (*Lepidium hyssopifolium*), hoary sunray daisy (*Leucochrysum albicans* var. *tricolor*), maroon leek-orchid (*Prasophyllum frenchi*), Tarengo leek orchid (*Prasophyllum petilum*), dwarf kerrawang (*Rulingia prostrata*), and button wrinklewort daisy (*Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides*).

The native grassland listing provides benefits for the broader environment and associated ecosystem services, and also provides benefits and opportunities for land managers and the general public. Native grasslands can provide a range of benefits to agriculture as they are drought and frost tolerant, provide year round forage (particularly green summer feed), and can form an important part of low input production systems. They are more resilient to extended periods of drought than many exotic pasture grasses. Native grasslands have been important in fine wool production in Australia, and also provide important ecosystem services such as carbon storage, improving water infiltration, reducing soil erosion and suppressing weeds.

It is important to help prevent further decline of the ecological community by promoting recovery through landholder and community efforts. This, alongside the protection afforded by listing, reduces the risk of this unique and important part of the landscape being lost to future generations.



Top row, left to right: Endangered – Grassland earless dragon *Tympanocryptis pinguicolla* © Copyright Emma Cook. Vulnerable – Pink-tailed worm-lizard *Aprasia parapulchella* © Copyright Steve Wilson; Bottom row, left to right: Grassland earless dragon burrow © Copyright Melinda Brouwer. Endangered – Button wrinklewort daisy *Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides* © Copyright Emma Cook. Vulnerable (NSW) – Diamond Firetail *Stagonopleura guttata* © Copyright Brian Furby. Critically Endangered – Golden sun moth *Synemon plana* © Copyright E D Edwards

Where does the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community occur?

The ecological community occurs in and adjacent to the South Eastern Highlands region, within New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria. Local Government Areas across its distribution include (although the ecological community may not be present in all these areas):

- The Australian Capital Territory.
- NSW: Bathurst, Bega Valley, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Eurobodalla, Goulburn Mulwarree,

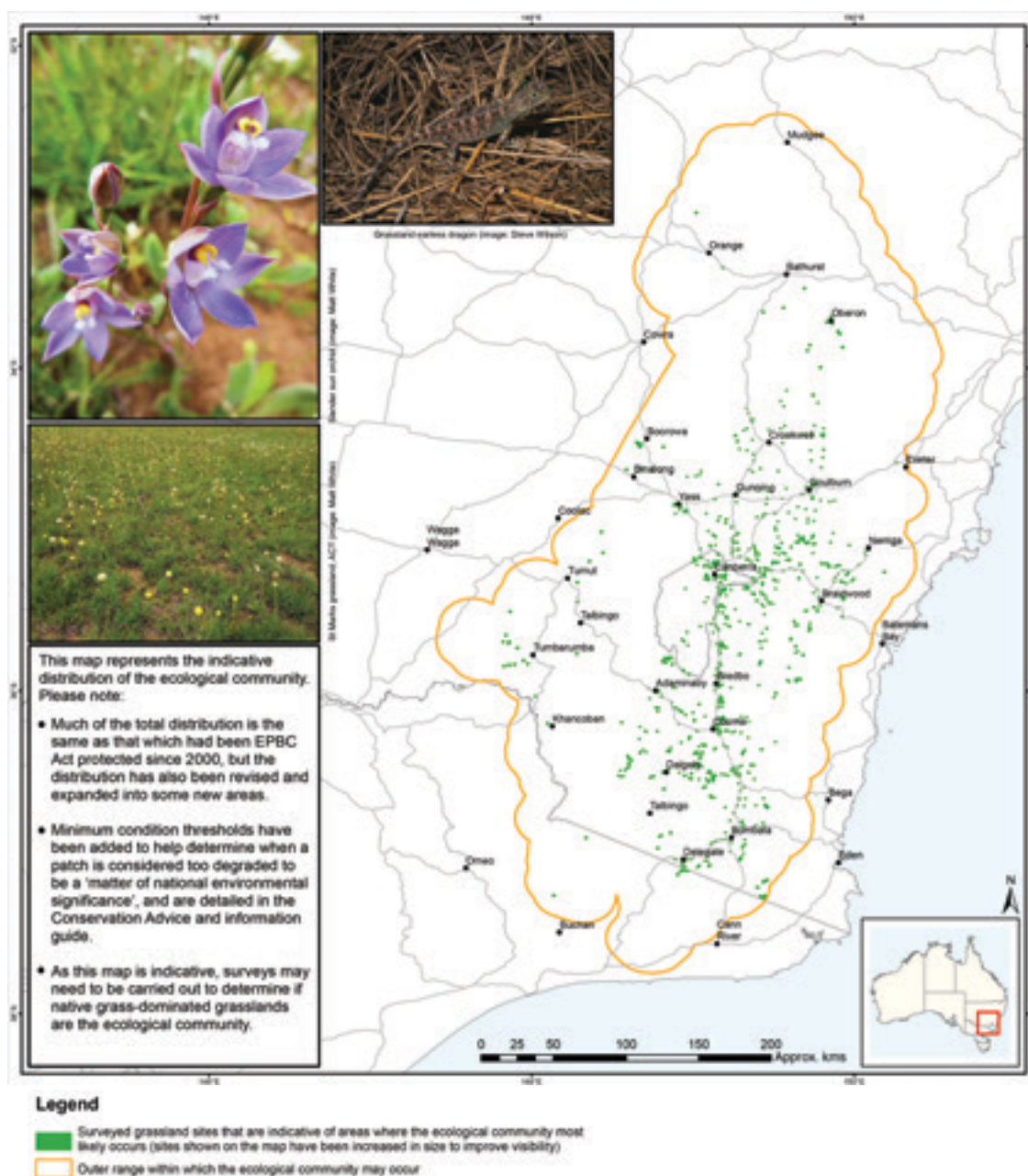
Gundagai, Hilltops, Lithgow, Oberon, Orange, Queanbeyan-Palerang, Shoalhaven, Snowy Monaro, Snowy Valleys, Upper Lachlan and Yass Valley.

- Victoria: East Gippsland and Towong.

(Local government area names and boundaries as at May 2016).

This map is available at: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/maps/pubs/152-map.pdf

Note that property-specific maps available from state agencies do not always identify EPBC-listed ecological communities.



Why does the ecological community need national protection?

In April 2016 the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Energy listed the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community, after considering the advice of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (the Committee). A rigorous assessment of the scientific evidence found that it met the eligibility criteria for listing as critically endangered under the EPBC Act, Australia's national environment law.

The Committee found that:

- the ecological community had undergone a decline of more than 90 per cent in extent
- the ecological community now occurs as highly fragmented patches, with most less than 10 ha in size

- it has experienced a very severe reduction in integrity due to the combined effects of: substantial clearing and fragmentation, nutrient enrichment (fertilisers and livestock waste), invasive flora and fauna, heavy grazing and changes to natural fire regimes.

The overall aim of nationally listing the ecological community is to prevent its decline and support on-ground efforts to ensure its long-term survival. The Conservation Advice for the ecological community outlines a range of priority research and management actions that provide guidance on how to manage, restore and protect it. This Conservation Advice can be found on the Department's website:

www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/pubs/152-conservation-advice.pdf



Top left: Slender Sun Orchid *Thelymitra pauciflora* © Copyright Matt White; Top right: Billy button *Craspedia variabilis* © Copyright Matt White; Bottom left: Blue devil *Eryngium ovinum* © Copyright Matt White; Bottom right: Early nancy *Wurmbea dioica* © Copyright Matt White.

Are all patches protected under the EPBC Act listing?

No, most national definitions of ecological communities specify condition thresholds which help to identify patches that are too small or degraded to be protected under the law. This allows national protection to focus on the best and most intact patches of the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community.

These condition thresholds mean that small and/or degraded patches or patches lacking high native diversity—such as remnants where native species have been largely replaced by weeds, or many native pastures—are excluded from listed ecological community and any actions that may impact them do not need to be considered under the EPBC Act.

Condition thresholds

The Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community is only protected under national environment law when it is in relatively good condition. A patch should first be

identified as being the ecological community (using the features listed on page 5 and covered in detail in the Conservation Advice document). Then it may be identified as being in relatively good condition (Moderate quality) if it meets the condition thresholds illustrated in the flowchart in Figure 1.

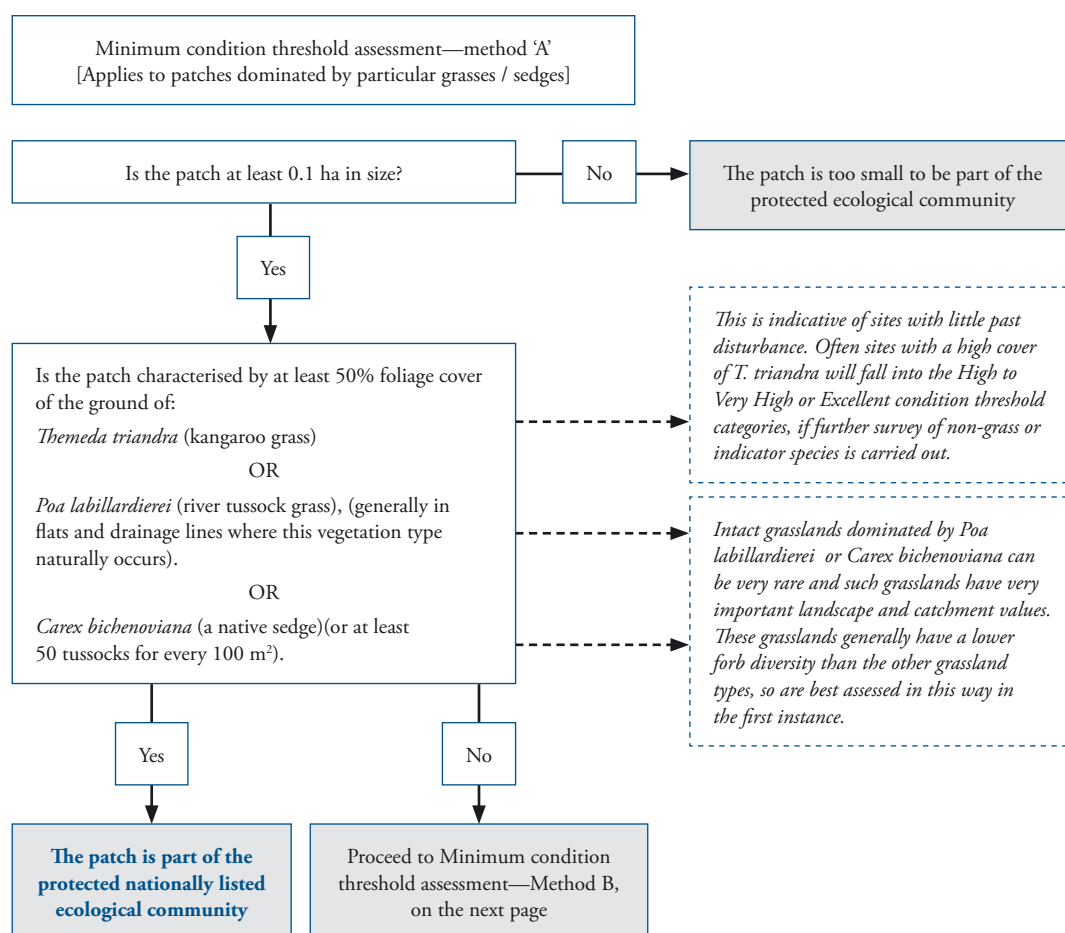
Although not part of the protected ecological community listed under the EPBC Act, it is recognised that patches which do not meet the minimum condition thresholds for Moderate quality, or higher, may still retain important natural values; particularly if they are near patches which do meet the minimum condition thresholds. As such, these patches should not be excluded from recovery and other management actions.

For further details of how to determine whether a patch of vegetation meets the definition and condition thresholds for the national ecological community see the Conservation Advice at: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/pubs/152-conservation-advice.pdf



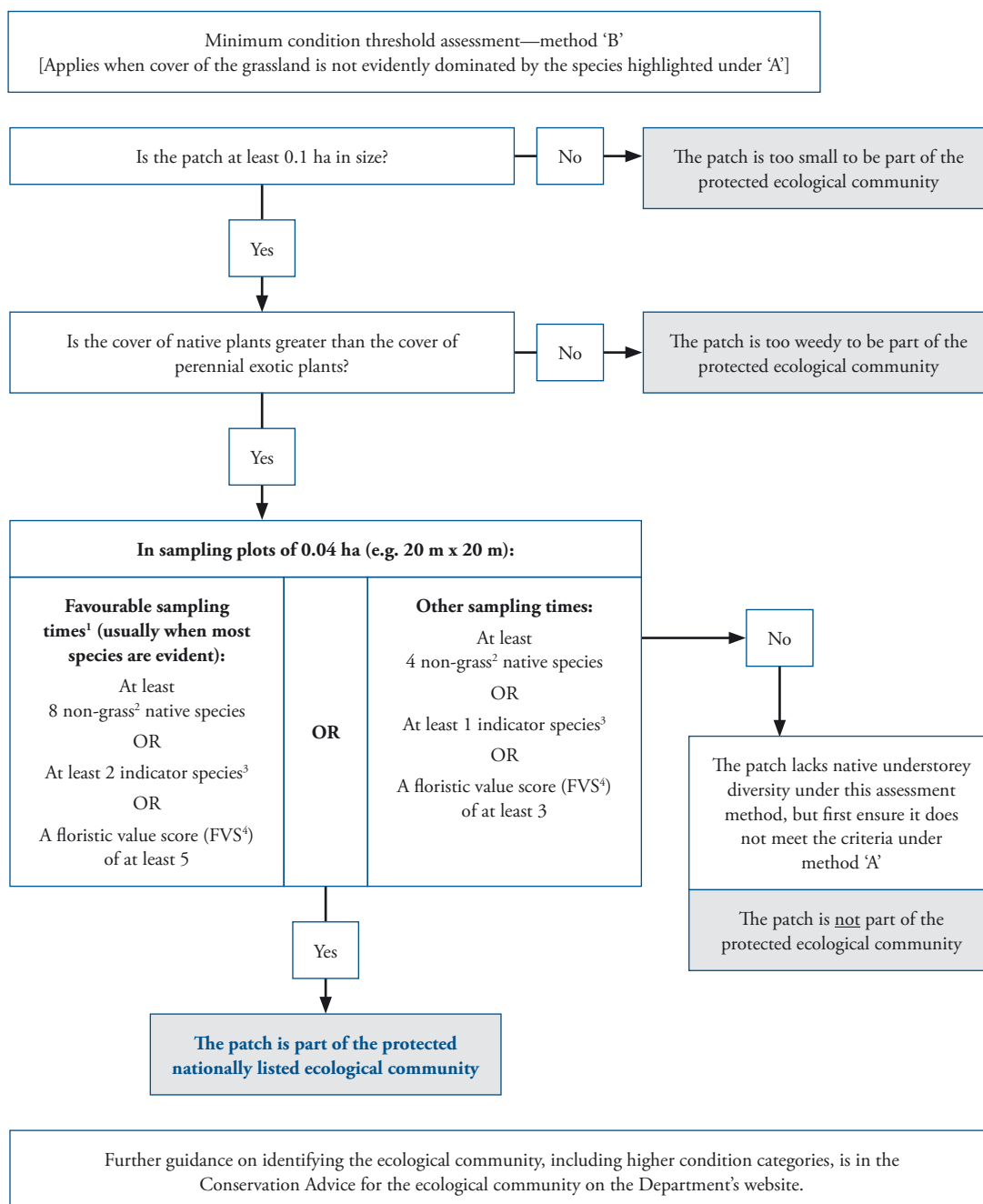
Wildflowers in the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands © Copyright Matt White.

Figure 1: Flowchart to help identify which areas (patches) of the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community meet the minimum condition thresholds (A and B) for national protection



Please note:

- Assessments of a patch should initially be centred on the area of highest native floristic diversity.
- Consideration must be given to the timing of surveys and recent disturbance.
- The minimum patch size for consideration as part of the listed ecological community is 0.1 ha (e.g. 50 m x 20 m), but other condition thresholds must also be met.
- The surrounding context of a patch must also be taken into account when considering factors that add to the importance of a patch that meets the condition thresholds.
- The list of Indicator species referred to in the Condition Thresholds, can be found on the Species Profiles and Threats (SPRAT) database, on the Department's website³.
- A relevant expert (e.g. ecological consultant, local NRM or environment agency) may be useful to help identify the ecological community and its condition.



1. To be assessed in spring to early summer, and/or other time when native plant species are most evident (e.g. significant recent rainfall that has stimulated flowering of native plants). Or if these conditions not present, counts may be estimated from multiple surveys of the same site in different seasons or years.
2. Non-grass species include forbs/herbs (wildflowers), lilies, orchids, rushes and low shrubs. It does not include trees and, for the purposes of these thresholds, sedges.
3. Indicator species are native plant species that are useful surrogates for conservation value of a patch, and are typically disturbance sensitive species. The list is found on the ecological community profile on the Species Profiles and Threats Database (SPRAT), on the Department's website.
4. Floristic Value Score is a method of measuring the quality of a grassland site, based on Rehwinkel (2015) (see the Conservation Advice for the full reference).

What are the benefits of listing the grassland ecological community as nationally threatened?

This updated listing complements other grassland ecological community listings across south-eastern Australia, which are amongst the most threatened vegetation types in Australia.

There are a number of benefits to listing ecological communities under Australia's national environment law. In the case of the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community, the listing will continue to:

- help protect the landscapes that provide the connectivity of wildlife corridors and refuges essential to the long-term productivity, health and biodiversity of the region
- protect habitat critical to recruit threatened (and other native) species at risk in the region—in turn, this helps sustain ecosystem services associated with the ecological community

- complement existing national and state protection for threatened species and ecological communities in the region and help defend the ecological community from future significant human impacts that may cause further decline
- raise awareness of the ecological community and its threats and encourage agencies and community groups to undertake conservation and recovery works and apply for environmental funding—the Australian Government has a variety of funding programmes to encourage land managers to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Conservation Advice, published at the time of listing, provides guidance and options for environmental decision-making, including priority research, conservation and rehabilitation initiatives.

The aim of the EPBC Act is to ensure that matters of national environmental significance are given due consideration, along with broader economic, social and other issues in the planning of any large projects; where possible, potentially significant, adverse impacts to the environment should be avoided. However, if impacts are unavoidable, then they need to be reduced, mitigated, or offset.



Left to right: Perunga grasshopper *Perunga ochracea* © Copyright Emma Cook. Kangaroo grass wet tussock grassland (foreground) © Copyright ACT Government.

What does the listing mean for landholders?

Business as usual for most routine activities

As has been the case since the original listing in 2000, it is important to note that the EPBC Act is only triggered if a particular activity has, or will have, a significant impact on a Matter of National Environmental Significance—a threatened ecological community, in this instance.

The normal activities of individual landholders, residents and councils will typically not be affected by a listing. Routine property maintenance, land management and other established practices—such as ongoing road maintenance works—are unlikely to have a significant impact and so do not typically require referral or other consideration under national environment law, particularly if carried out in line with other national and state laws covering native vegetation.

For instance, the following actions are unlikely to trigger national environment law:

- ongoing grazing, horticultural or cropping activities
- maintaining existing fences, access tracks and firebreaks
- maintaining existing farm gardens and orchards
- maintaining existing farm dams or water storages
- maintaining existing pumps and clearing drainage lines
- replacing and maintaining sheds, yards and other buildings
- targeted control of weeds and spraying for pests on individual properties or roadside verges
- road maintenance, including grading on the road edges.

Although the above actions are unlikely to trigger the EPBC Act, any impacts on patches of the ecological community should still be avoided where possible. For example, landholders should try to avoid native vegetation clearance in the ecological community and leave a minimum 30 m buffer zone to help protect the ecological community from spray drift (fertiliser, pesticide or herbicide sprayed in adjacent land) and other damage.

It is also important to note that human settlements and infrastructures, where an ecological community formerly occurred, do not form part of the natural environment and so are not considered to be part of the protected ecological community. This also applies to sites that have been replaced by crops and exotic pastures, or where the ecological community exists in a highly-degraded or unnatural state.

Whether or not an action is likely to have a significant impact depends on the sensitivity, value and quality of the environment which is impacted, and on the intensity, duration, magnitude and geographic extent of the impacts.



Echidna Tachyglossus aculeatus © Copyright Andy Heaney

Actions likely to have a significant impact may trigger national environment law

The EPBC Act is triggered if an action is likely to have a significant impact on the ecological community. If you consider that a proposed action is likely to have such an impact, or you are unsure, you should contact the Department to help you determine whether or not a proposed action will need formal assessment and approval under the EPBC Act. For further information on referral, assessment and approval processes, refer to the following website:

www.environment.gov.au/protection/environment-assessments/assessment-and-approval-process

Social and economic matters may also be taken into account for individual projects that may have a significant impact on the ecological community, through the EPBC Act approvals process. Strict timeframes apply to assessments to ensure decisions are made as quickly as possible.

The key diagnostics and condition thresholds outlined above for the ecological community exclude many patches on properties or along roadside verges that are considered too degraded for protection. In addition, the EPBC Act provides exemptions for continuing (routine) use or where legal permission has previously been given; see previous section on 'Business as usual for most routine activities'.

The major activity that is likely to have a significant impact on the ecological community is permanently clearing large or otherwise important areas of intact or high-quality native vegetation. Examples include:

- major mining, residential, commercial or other industrial development
- building new roads or widening existing roads
- converting large areas of native grassland into improved pastures or cropping fields.

To help reduce the significance of actions, the EPBC Act promotes the avoidance and mitigation of impacts from the early planning stage, wherever that is possible.

What can I do to look after the ecological community?

You can protect and promote the recovery of grassland remnants in your area. You can:

- avoid further clearance and fragmentation of the ecological community and surrounding native vegetation, with high-quality and relatively unmodified areas being particularly important
- minimise unavoidable impacts from any developments or other activities adjacent to the ecological community that might result in further degradation—for example, by applying a minimum 30 m buffer zone around the ecological community and avoiding hydrological and nutrient enrichment impacts
- plant local native grassland species, including native species from local threatened ecological communities
- remove non-native species from your property and don't plant or spread potential environmental weeds (e.g. avoid non-native grasses and daisies; check with your local authority); avoid fertilisers
- strategically manage grazing (e.g. through fencing, stocking density, seasonality, weed prevention) and avoid mowing or slashing the grasslands (unless for ecological reasons)
- practice environmentally safe bushwalking—keep to paths, don't remove or trample on plants, keep pets on a leash and take your rubbish home with you
- where possible and where trees occur within or at the edge of grasslands, allow dead and fallen trees and timber to remain where it is, to provide fauna habitat—avoid unnecessary 'tidying up', or collecting firewood
- report illegal or damaging behaviour (e.g. unauthorised fires or dumping) to appropriate authorities
- support local native vegetation and wildlife conservation (e.g. join a local Landcare or catchment group, natural history or a 'friends of' group, or Conservation Volunteers)
- participate in special events, information nights, and weed eradication programs in your local area.

The Conservation Advice gives further details of priority conservation actions for the ecological community. This can be found on the Department's website: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=152&status=Critically+Endangered

Are there other nationally protected ecological communities within this area?

Within the South Eastern Highlands there are other ecological communities protected under national environmental law including:

- Upland Wetlands of the New England Tablelands and the Monaro Plateau
- White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland.

For more information regarding these ecological communities, visit: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publiclookupcommunities.pl

Do state or local environment laws also apply?

Yes. However, such state and local laws complement, rather than replace or override national environment law. Information about state-listed ecological communities and vegetation management laws are available from the following New South Wales agencies:

- ACT – Environment and Planning Directorate
www.environment.act.gov.au/cpr/review_of_the_nature_conservation_act
- NSW – Office of Environment and Heritage
www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspecies/
www.environment.nsw.gov.au/vegetation/
- NSW – Riverina Local Land Services
riverina.lls.nsw.gov.au/
- NSW – South East Local Land Services:
southeast.lls.nsw.gov.au/
- Victoria – Department of Environment and Primary Industries
www.depi.vic.gov.au/environment-and-wildlife/biodiversity/native-vegetation
- Victoria – East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
www.egcma.com.au/

Where can I get further information?

The Conservation Advice for the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands ecological community is the definitive source of information on the listing of this ecological community. This can be found on the Department's website, along with the additional information about the ecological community and the EPBC Act, as listed below:

- A comprehensive Conservation Advice for the ecological community is on the Department's species profile and threats (SPRAT) database, at: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=152&status=Critically+Endangered
- The former National Recovery Plan for Natural Temperate Grassland of the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT), at www.environment.gov.au/resource/natural-temperate-grassland-southern-tablelands-nsw-and-act
- Details of the EPBC listing process at: www.environment.gov.au/topics/threatened-species-ecological-communities
- Details of the EPBC referral, assessment and approval process at: www.environment.gov.au/topics/environment-protection
- Details of Australian Government National Landcare Programme and Natural Resource Management organisations and initiatives are at: www.nrm.gov.au
- A separate factsheet on farming and national environmental law at: www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/factsheet-farming-and-national-environment-law-epbc-act
- Enquiries can also be made through the Department's Community Information Unit, by phone on 1800 803 772 (freecall), or email to ciu@environment.gov.au



Monaro Golden Daisy *Rutidosia leiopis* and chamomile sunray *Rhodanthe anthemoides* in flower © Copyright David Eddy.

If you need help to identify if Matters of National Environmental Significance may be present in your area of interest:

- Check the protected matters search tool at: www.environment.gov.au/epbc/pmst/
- Check the species profile and threats (SPRAT) database at : www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/sprat.pl
- Consult with relevant expert, such as an ecological consultant, local NRM agency (e.g. Local Land Services or Catchment Management Authority). They may be useful to help identify the ecological community and its condition, or
- Contact the Department's Community Information Unit, by phone on 1800 803 772 (freecall), or email to ciu@environment.gov.au



Natural Temperate Grassland with showy copper wire daisy *Podolepis jaceoides* in flower, Round Plain Cemetery © Copyright David Eddy.



The appearance of the grasslands may differ from year to year, due to factors such as rainfall and management history. Top Hut Travelling Stock Reserve at Dry Plains, near Adaminaby, in 1997 (left) and 1999 (right) © Copyright David Eddy.

