Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Energy

Recovery team governance - Best practice guidelines

December 2017

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Introduction

Australia is renowned for its diversity of unique plants and animals, with many species being found nowhere else in the world.

Unfortunately many of our species are in danger of extinction due to a range of ongoing threats.

Stopping the decline of, and supporting the long-term recovery of threatened species and ecological communities is a challenging task, involving many individuals, organisations and agencies.

A recovery team is a collaboration of partners brought together to develop and/or coordinate the implementation of a recovery plan, conservation advice or other program for a threatened species or ecological community or multiple species/communities.

These guidelines are designed to help recovery teams establish their governance and operating arrangements. It includes a template and checklist to assist teams in developing their terms of reference and aid annual reporting.

Context

A key commitment of the Australian Government's Threatened Species Strategy is to improve recovery practices. The Strategy recognises the importance of the recovery team model as a governance system to drive implementation of recovery programs and to report on progress and effectiveness.

These guidelines provide an overarching framework for establishing and operating effective recovery teams and sets out a series of 'best practice' principles to guide and support recovery teams in establishing best practice governance arrangements.

Governance is about the development of good processes for making and implementing decisions.

Good governance is efficient, effective, responsive, transparent, equitable and participatory.

A national reporting framework is also established to assist recovery teams in reporting on progress in achieving the objectives of a recovery program.

These governance guidelines and above mentioned reporting framework are key targets under the Threatened Species Strategy.

It is recognised that other planning systems and governance structures are in place leading to successful outcomes for threatened species conservation. These guidelines are intended to complement these systems and where beneficial and appropriate, can be applied more broadly.

What are recovery teams?

A recovery team is a collaboration of partners brought together by common objectives to develop and/or coordinate the implementation of a recovery plan, conservation advice or program for a threatened species, for multiple species or ecological communities.

For the purposes of brevity, the use of 'threatened species' in this document includes ecological communities.

Recovery plans and conservation advices are key planning documents developed under national environmental law that inform and guide threatened species recovery. Both the Australian Government and State and Territory governments may individually or jointly establish recovery plans for threatened species.

Some alternatives to recovery plans are action statements or conservation management plans.

A recovery team provides a forum to bring together diverse partner interests involved in the recovery process and to ensure that actions are implemented in an effective, coordinated and complementary way. While ultimate responsibility for the management of threatened species sits with relevant government agencies, the recovery team is a way of bringing together a range of implementation partners to work collaboratively to achieve the best possible conservation outcomes.

A recovery team is not usually a legal entity, but may consider options to become one where it benefits the function of the team.

When is a recovery team needed?

Depending on the complexity of the decisions and actions which need to be undertaken, and the number of parties who are involved in the management and recovery of the species, it is beneficial to bring together all of these interests in a co-ordinated way.

Recovery teams may be established when a lead government agency, community group or non-government organisation seeks a partnership with other stakeholders in order to drive the development and/or implementation of a recovery program.

Recovery teams may not be necessary for every species, and can require a significant commitment in the time and effort of participating partners. For example, a species might have a restricted distribution, the threats are reasonably well known and being managed and a small number of stakeholders need only to be involved in management action, therefore a recovery team may not be needed.

Priority for establishing a recovery team should be given to those species or communities whose conservation could benefit most from bringing together experts and stakeholders in a formal way.

As a guide, if the answer is 'yes' to any of the questions below, it is likely that the species would benefit from the establishment of a recovery team:

- Does the species or its recovery actions occur over multiple boundaries (e.g. geographic boundaries, different states/territories, local governments or a range of tenures)?
- Is a diverse range of parties interested and/or involved in the recovery of the species (e.g. government agencies, non-government organisations, industry, scientists, community groups)?
- Is the management of the species particularly complex and a range of expertise is required to identify or implement recovery actions?

- Does a recovery plan or other planning document identify the need for a recovery team? Is the species otherwise high profile or an identified priority species in policy or other strategic plans, for example under the Australian Government's Threatened Species Strategy?
- Are there multiple groups undertaking similar work that could be better coordinated as a whole, to avoid duplication and increase effectiveness?
- Would management, planning and implementation benefit from a range of perspectives and resources brought by different potential partners?

In establishing a recovery team, efficiencies and benefits may be gained if the recovery team is established to oversee the actions under a recovery program for a number of threatened species. This might be a group of species with similar management and recovery actions (a multispecies recovery plan) or a group of species and ecological communities whose collective distribution is spatially defined by an administrative or ecological region (a regional recovery plan).

If the answer is yes to the following questions, a multispecies or regional recovery team might be appropriate:

- Does the group of species occur in overlapping or adjacent locations, and have similar recovery actions that require coordination with other land management activities in the area?
- Do the species face the same, or similar, key threats, and is it more efficient to coordinate threat response across these species or at a larger scale

Responsibilities of a recovery team

Threatened species management is a complex and multi-disciplinary task, which is why recovery teams bring together the relevant expertise and skills to increase the chances of success of recovery for a species.

Recovery teams can have oversight for all, or parts of the recovery planning and implementation cycle including:

- the oversight of development and review of a recovery plan,
- planning and coordination of recovery program implementation,
- identifying potential partnerships to improve recovery outcomes,
- ensuring the adaptive management cycle continues,
- ensuring cost-effective recovery of threatened species,
- advising government agencies on management and coordination of threatened species activities, including identification of priority actions,
- coordination of communication, reporting and community involvement,
- sharing information with the community.

The development of terms of reference is the process through which responsibilities are identified, discussed and agreed upon. This may include having an agreed communication protocol that addresses conflicts of interest and confidentiality clauses as well as any broader communication messaging.

In identifying a recovery team's areas of responsibilities, it is also important to identify those roles which sit outside of a recovery team's terms of reference which can lead to potential conflicts of interest. For example:

- While a recovery team can provide advice to government agencies (and other organisations) on a recovery plan and its implementation, it is not the role of a recovery team to make decisions on policy issues.

- While a recovery team provides oversight of a recovery plan's implementation, the team's responsibilities should not entail broader public engagement under the recovery team name on issues beyond the agreed scope of the recovery plan. This does not preclude members raising other matters separately through and under their respective organisations' names.

Terms of reference should be responsive to these issues through clarity on team member's roles and responsibilities and through a communication protocol, or similar, identifying how communication is to be conducted within and beyond the team, for example to partner organisations, broader recovery networks and the wider community.

Establishing a recovery team

<u>Membership</u>

Recovery team membership should be fit-for-purpose, incorporating people whose interests, expertise or responsibilities intersect with proposed recovery action.

Membership should be relatively stable to retain experience, expertise and continuity, but adapt to the various stages of the recovery planning and implementation cycle, with membership dependant on the change in skills required during.

An adaptable approach is necessary to ensure that the right people are included in the team, at the right time. Maximum or minimum terms might be considered in some cases, as well as mechanism to ensure that members who have left the team can still contribute their knowledge in some way.

Team size should balance the need to include the necessary expertise and experience with the need to remain manageable. As a guide, teams are made up of a core group of about 10 members. If more members are required, and it is recognised that larger teams do operate successfully, consideration should be given to establishing recovery team sub-groups (see Structure section below). If a team considers that a core group of over 10 is required then the rationale should be provided in the terms of reference.

Consideration should also be given to whether a cap needs to be set for the number of representatives from each organisation.

Membership should generally include, but not be limited to those with knowledge of, expertise and/or experience in the species, in associated biological/ecological processes, species management and governance, small population/genetic management, manipulation of habitat/ or ecological processes or threat mitigation.

It is important to not only think of expertise but also broader representation from government agencies (all levels) who have a legal responsibility to protect and manage the species, communications experts, funding bodies, community groups and non-government organisations, the landholders who may own land on which the species occurs and Indigenous communities with a cultural connection to the species and on whose country actions are planned.

On balance, the team should include a membership mix of relevant experience and expertise who collectively are able to guide the development and/or implementation of a recovery plan.

Members should possess complementary skills to ensure all ecological, administrative and social aspects of species recovery are collectively covered.

A variety of members ensures that all viewpoints are considered. Members for a recovery team could include:

- relevant state/territory governments and where appropriate an Australian Government representative (e.g. for a Threatened Species Strategy priority species),
- local council and/or regional Natural Resource Management Group,
- researchers or species experts,
- land holders,
- community groups or non-government organisations,
- industry,
- Indigenous communities.

Whilst having a diverse range of participation is beneficial to ensuring a well-rounded approach to species conservation, it is essential that a mutual goal for the recovery team is established so that the team can work in a common direction.

Structure

While the structure of a recovery team should adapt to the current purpose it is still important to determine some specific roles and responsibilities for individuals. A Chair should be appointed and where possible a Coordinator or Convener to help facilitate administrative responsibilities. Where possible, a chair should be elected by all members of the recovery team.

The Chair provides leadership of the team; conducts meetings, leads decision making processes and facilitates development of an ongoing review of the team's Terms of Reference through which responsibilities are discussed, clearly identified and agreed upon.

There are no specific requirements for appointing a Chair, however they should demonstrate good leadership qualities including effective working relationships, strong facilitation and negotiation skills, and the ability to be an impartial decision maker.

Having a dedicated Coordinator position can increase the effectiveness of the recovery team. A Coordinator may manage communication, meeting arrangements, and reporting activities and be actively engaged in governance, research and planning. In some cases these tasks may be divided between the Chair and a Coordinator.

As an example the roles may entail:

Role of Chair	**Role of Coordinator**
Arrange agenda	Coordinate and chase-up action items
Lead meetings	Arrange meeting logistics
Lead decision-making process	Minute taking / noting agreed actions
Write and receive correspondence	Circulate documents and maintain records
Act as spokesperson	Coordinate annual reporting
	Develop and disseminate communication products
	Seek funding opportunities
Role of all members:	
Share information	Table issues from and report back to their organisation
Harness opportunities	Implement actions from meetings
Provide expertise	
Lead sub-groups (where required)	

It may be appropriate for a recovery team to create sub-groups (or working groups) to deal with specific issues or recovery strategies or to break a larger membership into smaller groups within the recovery team. Various models are available and could include sub-groups on disease, population management, emergency response, research, finance or fund-raising, risk management, captive husbandry, communication or stakeholder engagement.

A member of the recovery team should lead the sub-group in order to maintain communication between the sub-group and the overarching recovery team. Sub-groups are assigned terms of reference and specific tasks by the recovery team, to whom they report.

Team qualities

The characteristics of a successful team rely on:

- a shared goal: it is essential that all members understand the purpose and direction of the team,
- balanced representation: active participants with varied types of expertise –team members should be valued for their unique skills and experiences,
- being small enough to allow equal participation,
- clearly defined roles of members,
- members are listened to and trust each other's expertise and knowledge,
- members promptly share information that may affect the operation of the team,
- open, frank, clear and frequent communication: to keep the team focussed,
- a culture of support, confidentiality and sharing, of being inclusive and connected,
- a culture that supports innovation and adaption,
- effective evidence-based decision making: disagreements are discussed openly and constructively,
- effective leadership.

Basic as these concepts seem, they are integral to the success of a conservation recovery team. Developing terms of reference is a useful way of to ensure these factors are explicitly understood and agreed upon by members.

Terms of reference

All recovery team members should participate in developing agreed terms of reference for the recovery team. The terms of reference describe the team's operating rules and should be one of the first items of business when the team is constituted. Terms of reference establish the team's:

- role, purpose and objectives
- representation, knowledge and skills,
- responsibilities of members
- reporting and communication intentions,
- decision making process,
- structure including formation and duties of sub-committees, workgroups, and other groups,
- operational arrangements.

A template has been provided at the end of this document to assist recovery teams in developing and agreeing their terms of reference.

National Registration

A recovery team can submit their terms of reference to the Department of the Environment and Energy to be nationally registered if it is:

- developing or overseeing the implementation of an EPBC Act recovery plan or conservation advice, or multiple plans,
- operating consistently with these guidelines, and
- agreeing to report annually according to these guidelines.

A nationally registered recovery team's terms of reference should demonstrate how the team will operate in accordance with these best practice guidelines. To maintain registration the team should provide annual reporting in accordance with the national reporting framework.

To assist recovery teams in reaching best practice governance arrangements, a self-assessment check list is attached.

Becoming a nationally registered recovery team provides national recognition for your work. Registration provides a level of confidence that a recovery team has been established using best practice methods and will collectively provide a strong platform to stop the decline of, and support the recovery of threatened species.

A list of national recovery teams will be published on the Department of the Environment and Energy's website and recovery team reporting will be published annually. In seeking national registration a recovery team should provide contact details it is happy to make publically available should people wish to contact the team.

It is acknowledged that there are operating recovery groups or similar governance structures that may not wish to be nationally registered but nevertheless they are making a significant contribution to the recovery of threatened species. These guidelines are developed to be used to complement other planning systems and governance arrangements and can be applied more broadly if appropriate.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting are crucial for effective recovery effort. Such a framework enables tracking of a species status and measuring the effectiveness of investment and management interventions.

Reporting on progress helps to validate the efforts of all contributors and enables adaptive management, so that we can adjust our efforts accordingly. Recovery teams have an important role in communicating effectiveness of recovery programs.

A national reporting framework has been established for recovery teams to report on progress in achieving the objectives of a recovery program and compliment these governance guidelines. Consistent reporting by all nationally registered recovery teams will progressively build a national snapshot of species conservation efforts over time. Annual reporting will feed into the more comprehensive five-year formal reviews of recovery plans and conservation advices.

This reporting can also contribute to other national reporting such as State of the Environment and in reporting progress against Australia's international obligations such as under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Recovery teams should also undertake regular reviews of their efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of their terms of reference in order to identify both their achievements and opportunities for improvement. Consideration should be given to seeking independent review.

Developing terms of reference – a guide

This guide or template can assist recovery teams in developing their terms of reference. Governance arrangements should be fit for purpose, so the template should be applied as suitable to the recovery team.

All recovery team members should participate in developing agreed terms of reference for the recovery team. The terms of reference describe the team's operating rules and should be one of the first items of business when the team is constituted.

The supporting 'Recovery team governance – best practice guidelines' provide further context and should be used in drafting terms of reference.

Terms of reference should include the following headings below, or similar.

1. Background
2. Role of the recovery team
3. Recovery team membership
4. Roles and responsibilities of recovery team members
5. Structure
6. Decision making
7. Operational arrangements
8. Review and reporting
9. Endorsement
10. National registration

The following pages provides suggestions of what recovery teams may want to address under each heading in their terms of reference. It can serve as a template.

Teams can then use the attached checklist to ensure they have considered and addressed all governance elements.

<Name> Recovery Team
Terms of Reference

1. BACKGROUND

The terms of reference should include a short general introduction which provides context for the operation of the recovery team. Include:

- a short description of the listed species or ecological community as well its/their status under both Commonwealth and relevant state/territory legislation;
- recovery plan/s or conservation advice and status (for example - in preparation, in review, in place);
- short history of the recovery team including how it was convened;
- other relevant context as needed.

2. ROLE OF THE RECOVERY TEAM

The terms of reference should clearly define the role that the group is to perform for a specified period of time. The functions of the group may change over time and/or several functions may need to occur concurrently - terms of reference can be updated accordingly.

For example: The primary function of the XXX Recovery Team is to coordinate the development of the Recovery Plan for the XXX species or ecological community. To achieve this, the Recovery Team will:

- hold regular meetings which will have the purpose of XXX.
- provide advice to XXX.
- broker and encourage involvement of key individuals to XXX.
- communicate outcomes of meetings to XXX.
- undertake annual reporting XXX.
- etc.

3. RECOVERY TEAM MEMBERSHIP

Terms of reference should list membership and explain the processes on how membership is established, who set up the team, how invitations for membership should be made. Include terms of appointment.

The ‘‘Recovery team governance – best practice guidelines’ provides guidance on what to consider to determine representation, knowledge and skills needed to perform the function. Membership can vary according to function (which may also change over time), availability of published information, and the rate at which decisions need to be made.

You may identify membership in a table such as:

Name	Organisation	Reason for membership (examples)
		Representative of Government Agency accountable for species/community
		Representative of [NGO/group] which aims to conserve the species/community
		Species expert Key landholder Geneticist Population modeller Communications/engagement expert Habitat / ecological process expert Threat management expert

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF RECOVERY TEAM MEMBERS

List the roles and responsibilities team members perform. Identify specific roles of any appointed office bearers. Consider the overall size of the group. Describe the terms and process that will be used to identify members and manage membership. You may identify membership in a table such as:

Position	Responsibilities (examples)
Chair	Arrange agenda Lead meetings Lead decision-making process Write and receive correspondence Act as spokesperson
Coordinator (if applicable)	Coordinate and chase-up action items Arrange meeting logistics Minute taking / noting agreed actions Circulate documents and maintain records Coordinate annual reporting Develop and disseminate communication products Seek funding opportunities
All members	Regularly attend and participate in meetings Contribute their skills, knowledge and experience Endeavour to align and coordinate the work of their organisation Report as necessary to their organisation to share knowledge on progress and issues in conservation of the XXX species or ecological community Identify gaps in the knowledge relevant to the conservation and management of the XXX species or ecological community - new research projects etc. Seek to make available relevant information held by the organisations they represent to assist the conservation and management process. Lead sub-groups (where required)

Include processes and timeframes for reviewing membership and roles, and how members will be elected. This may change at different stages of the recovery program. For example:

> The above membership will be reviewed [insert time period annually, biennially etc., or specify a date xx/xx/20xx], and will be invited by [XXX}. The above position roles and responsibilities will be reviewed [insert time period annually, biennially etc., or specify a date xx/xx/20xx]. The position of chair [and include any other positions the team would like to vote on] will be assigned according to [include method/process – voting at annual meeting, by consensus or more than 50% etc.].

5. STRUCTURE

Terms of reference should describe the structure of the recovery team, particularly if there are any sub groups and how they will interact with recovery team. Governance structures usually evolve over time, so allow structure to remain dynamic, where sub-groups are temporarily or permanently established to service specific functions. Consider team size and whether multi-unit structures are required.

6. DECISION MAKING

Terms of reference must clearly explain how decisions are to be made – for example by consensus, 50 per cent voting etc. Describe any relevant procedural processes, such as when and how the chair should call a vote. Consideration may be given to developing a conflict of interest policy.

7. OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Outline operational arrangements and processes. Where necessary detail arrangements/processes under these key areas:

- Meeting details
    - meeting locations / frequency (for example x times per year) / nature (i.e. face-to-face, phone, email)
    - records and minutes ,
    - protocols for conduct, conflict of interest, confidentiality
- Information management
    - how is information, including any data, managed within the team including any agreements associated with data usage
- Communication
    - procedures for communicating – within the team, externally beyond the team for example to partner organisations, broader recovery networks
    - communication messages;
    - communication tools, for example website (provide link)
- Fees and expenses
    - If applicable and where appropriate, costs and expenses for meetings and attendance

8. REVIEW AND REPORTING

Outline:

- procedures for reporting – within the team, any external obligations, how reporting is to be coordinated and communicated,
- procedures for reviewing the team's efficiency, effectiveness and terms or reference. Consideration should be given to seeking independent review.

9. ENDORSEMENT

These terms of reference have been endorsed by the recovery team on <date>

<signature>

<name>

Chair <XXX Recovery Team>

10. NATIONAL REGISTRATION

Include a statement as to whether the recovery team is nationally registered and date of registration, or whether registration is currently being sought, and how the team will maintain that registration through annual reporting.

RECOVERY TEAM GOVERANCE CHECKLIST IN SEEKING NATIONAL REGISTRATION

A nationally registered recovery team's terms of reference should demonstrate how the recovery team will operate in accordance with these best practice guidelines. Use this checklist with the guidelines to self-assess your team's governance arrangements, and apply them as suitable. Please submit this checklist with your terms of reference in seeking national registration.

RECOVERY TEAM NAME	
ROLES AND FUNCTIONS	
Have you clearly defined the functions of the group over a specified period of time? Consider the team's role in:	
☐ Developing a recovery plan/conservation advice	☐ Planning/coordination of a recovery program implementation
☐ Identifying partnerships, funding opportunities	☐Other... detail
TEAM STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP	
In identifying your governance structure and team membership, have you considered and identified:	
☐ The size of the team: ensure that it is fit for purpose and manageable.	☐ The process that will be used to identify individual members and their terms of engagement
☐ Roles, functions, and responsibilities of positions created by the structure including chair and coordinator	☐ How membership might change over time and the process for changing this membership
☐ The appropriate range of expertise and experience needed, for example experts in the species, threat mitigation, disease, small population management etc.	☐ An appropriate mix of representation for example, from government, NRM groups, NGOs, research, Indigenous communities etc. to fit the recovery team's purpose
☐ Whether any sub-groups are required and how they will operate	☐ Other.. detail
OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS	
Are the following arrangements captured:	
☐ General operational arrangements including meeting details and record keeping	☐ Protocols for conduct, conflict of interest, confidentiality
☐ Communication protocol, both internal and external	☐ Reporting processes
☐ Decision making processes	☐ Other.. detail
APPROVAL FOR CONTACT DETAILS ON WEBSITE	
Note: Reference, unless otherwise requested, will only be made to 'Chair XXX Recovery Team. Contact XXX' <signature> <name> Chair <date> <Contact details - need only be a generic email, website if available>	