



## **Australian Government**

**Australian Government response to the Senate Environment  
and Communications References Committee report:**

**Effectiveness of threatened species and ecological  
communities' protection in Australia**

August 2014

# **Australian Government response to 'Effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia'**

## **Introduction**

On 7 August 2013 the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee tabled an inquiry report entitled 'Effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia'. The terms of reference for the inquiry were:

The effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia, including:

- a) management of key threats to listed species and ecological communities;
- b) development and implementation of recovery plans;
- c) management of critical habitat across all land tenures;
- d) regulatory and funding arrangements at all levels of government;
- e) timeliness and risk management within the listings processes;
- f) the historical record of state and territory governments on these matters; and
- g) any other related matter.

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to this report. An indication of the importance the Australian Government places on threatened species management is the recent appointment of Gregory Andrews as Australia's first Threatened Species Commissioner on 2 July 2014. The Commissioner will bring a new national focus to the conservation efforts for Australia's endangered native flora and fauna.

The response to each recommendation contains a statement as to whether the Australian Government agrees, agrees in part, or notes the Committee's recommendations. The meanings of each statement are included for reference below.

**Agreed** - The Australian Government agrees with the recommendation and has already, or will in the future, take the recommended (or similar) action. This is not a commitment to providing additional funding.

**Agreed in part** - The Australian Government agrees with part of the recommendation and has already, or will in the future, take the recommended (or similar) action in relation to that part only.

**Noted** - The Australian Government notes the recommendation.

**Not agreed** - The Australian Government does not agree with the recommendation.

## Responses

### Recommendation 1

- 2.125 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments prioritise their work towards reducing duplication and inconsistency between the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* list and state and territory lists of threatened species and communities, consistent with the aim of achieving a harmonised national list capable of accommodating regional or geographic listings within or across individual states. The Committee further recommends that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments work to establish uniform and integrated processes for the future listing of threatened species and communities.**

#### Government response: Agreed

The Australian Government supports the recommendation and intends continuing and improving arrangements to reduce duplication of listing effort, presenting information on all listed species in one place, and improving the consistency of listing processes.

The Department of the Environment (the Department) has had Memoranda of Understanding and other arrangements in place with states and territory governments in regard to list alignment. The Department intends continuing these or equivalent arrangements.

These arrangements are principally focussed on the assessment of species endemic to states and territories and are designed to lead to efficient and integrated assessment and listing processes for these species. These arrangements allow the Department to focus its assessment effort on species which are found in more than one state or territory.

When nominations for state or territory endemic species are received, they are referred to the relevant state or territory for assessment.

Once these nominations have been assessed at state or territory level, they are then reviewed by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (the Committee) which ensures that they meet the standards required under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The Committee assesses the status of species at the national scale and makes recommendations for or against listing based on this assessment.

The Australian Government currently reports the listing status of all species under both Commonwealth and state legislation through a single, publicly available website, the Species Profiles and Threats (SPRAT) database on the Department of Environment website. SPRAT provides biological and ecological information (including threats) on the EPBC listed species and ecological communities, as well as links to species-specific EPBC Act and state and territory government documentation.

There are differences between the assessment criteria and threat categories used for listing in each jurisdiction. Opportunities to further promote uniform and integrated processes for listing will be pursued, noting that this would require amendment of relevant legislation and practices in a number of jurisdictions.

## Recommendation 2

- 2.128 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities investigate a less complicated 'expressions of interest' process for the public to nominate threatened species and ecological communities for further consideration of their potential to be fully nominated by expert groups operating on a pro bono basis, as suggested by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.**

### **Government response: Agreed in part**

The Australian Government is committed to reducing the regulatory burden by streamlining regulatory requirements, with regulation only being imposed where absolutely necessary.

Any person may submit a nomination to have species or ecological community assessed for listing under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Given the regulatory implications of a species being listed, it is important that nominations include sufficient evidence and data to form the basis of an informed scientific assessment and that the level of information required in the nomination form is appropriate.

The Department has recently simplified the nomination form to remove duplication, to focus on the listing criteria as specified in the EPBC Act and the *EPBC Regulations 2000*, and to form the basis of an assessment by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

In addition, a plain English guideline is currently being developed to inform and assist nominators in the process of nominating a threatened species. This guideline will direct nominators to potential sources of expert advice that they may choose to access.

The Australian Government does not support an 'expression of interest' process which does not require nominators to address the EPBC Act's listing criteria and provide relevant information. This would divert the Department and the Threatened Species Scientific Committee away from nominations which address the listing criteria and are backed by supporting information, and would result in further delays in undertaking assessments and maintaining the currency of the lists.

The Department is working with the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to examine opportunities for drawing on the work of external specialist scientific groups. This approach would still require all EPBC Act criteria and requirements to be met, with sufficient evidence and data being considered to allow an informed scientific assessment.

### **Recommendation 3**

- 2.132 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities establish specialist scientific sub-groups to support the work of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.**

#### **Government response: Agreed**

The Department is working with the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to examine opportunities for drawing on the work of external specialist scientific groups. In particular, the Department is investigating a process that would encourage independent groups of experts to develop and submit action plans for groups of taxa. If all *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* criteria and requirements were met, it may be possible for these action plans to be rapidly considered by the Committee, and the threatened species lists to be updated more readily.

### **Recommendation 4**

- 2.133 The committee recommends that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, and specialist sub-groups, supported by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, commence systematic reviews of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* threatened species list, to be undertaken by taxonomic group, to be completed within the next five years and to continue to be undertaken at not less than five yearly intervals.**

#### **Government response: Agreed in part**

The Australian Government notes that knowledge about species and ecological communities changes over time, as does the state of those entities in the environment. The Department currently undertakes reviews of the status of listed entities as new information about their state is received.

Undertaking comprehensive reviews of all taxa would be a resource intensive exercise that is currently beyond the capacity of the Department.

## Recommendation 5

- 2.135** The committee recommends that the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* be amended to give the Threatened Species Scientific Committee power to recommend that the Environment Minister fund research programs for species or communities which are found to be ineligible for listing under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* due to data deficiency or geographical location, and that the minister be required to respond to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's recommendations.

### Government response: Agreed in part

The Australian Government does not believe that the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) needs amendment to allow the Committee to recommend research funding needs to the Minister.

When advising the Minister that a species or ecological community is not eligible for listing because of a lack of information or data, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee currently takes a risk assessment approach. It advises the Minister whether it believes there are concerns about the species or ecological community and makes suggestions on how the data gaps that prevent it meeting listing criteria can be potentially filled. While it is not possible to fund all such data gaps, the Department has previously funded this kind of research through the National Environmental Research Programme.

The Australian Government has appointed a Threatened Species Commissioner to promote the recovery of threatened species. The Commissioner will provide advice on priority actions needed to recover threatened species, including identifying areas where additional research may be needed.

In addition, under section 190 of the EPBC Act the Threatened Species Scientific Committee can advise the Minister about any action that is necessary to prevent a species or ecological community that is not eligible for listing from becoming threatened. The Minister is to have regard to this advice in performing any function, or exercising any power under the EPBC Act relevant to the species or community.

## Recommendation 6

- 3.137 The committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce into Parliament the proposed amendments to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* relating to 'emergency listing' of threatened species and communities as a matter of high priority.**

### Government response: Noted

The Australian Government recognises the potential benefit of being able to list threatened species and ecological communities rapidly, but considers that the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) already allows this.

Section 503(b) of the EPBC Act provides that the Minister can request advice from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee on amendments and updating the lists. The Minister can at any time request the Committee to undertake an assessment of a species for the purpose of determining its eligibility for listing within a very short timeframe.

Section 194G (3) of the EPBC Act provides that an item is eligible for assessment consideration and therefore inclusion on the Assessment List if the Threatened Species Scientific Committee itself wishes to nominate the item for inclusion. The annual Finalised Priority Assessment List (Section 194K) routinely includes the item "*Any other species/ecological community/threatening process nominated by the Committee*". This allows the Committee to include an item in an Assessment List at any time during the relevant assessment period. All species and ecological communities nominated by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee in that way form part of the Assessment List for that assessment period.

## Recommendation 7

- 3.129 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government amend the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to allow for the listing of threatened populations of species in a manner consistent with the objective of harmonising listings and listing processes with state and territory governments.**

### Government response: Not Agreed

The Australian Government does not agree with this recommendation as the ability to list 'threatened populations' already exists within the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Section 517 allows the Minister to determine that a distinct population of biological entities is a species, for the purposes of the EPBC Act. The Minister is then able to list that distinct population on the threatened species list.

This provision has been used to list threatened populations (separate and distinct from one another) such as the east coast and west coast populations of the Grey Nurse Shark, the south-east mainland population and Tasmanian population of the Spotted Tailed Quoll and the combined Koala population in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

The Australian Government believes that the use of section 517 should be limited to those circumstances where it leads to a significantly better conservation outcome than listing at the species level. Overuse of the provision in section 517 may detract from the national intent of the EPBC Act and introduce inefficiencies and complexities into its administration. For example it could encourage high numbers of nominations for listing of population segments focused on individual or localised threats or activities, where the species is not threatened over its national extent.

## **Recommendation 8**

**3.103 The committee recommends that the focus of the recovery planning process be on the development of national level strategic plans supported by short action plans for specific species designed to achieve specific objectives against which their success can be measured.**

### **Government response: Noted**

The Australian Government recognises that a wide range of plans, both statutory and non-statutory, support the recovery of threatened species. Conservation advices and recovery plans as developed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) are the primary statutory mechanism the Australian Government uses to guide decisions on threatened species and threatened ecological community conservation. In this way, conservation advices and recovery plans are national strategic plans of action for a threatened species or ecological community.

The Australian Government is developing more strategic approaches to allow better integration of recovery and threat abatement planning with regional and other planning initiatives. This includes increasing use of regional, multi-species and ecological community recovery plans. Regional recovery plans in place include those for the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges in South Australia, King Island in Tasmania, Border Ranges of New South Wales and Queensland and the Fitzgerald Biosphere in Western Australia. Such regional landscape approaches will not always be appropriate for the recovery needs of some species and therefore individual recovery plans will continue to be developed for particular species as appropriate.

The Threatened Species Commissioner will be working closely with the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to strengthen the connection between the statutory listing and recovery planning process and the implementation of conservation actions. The Commissioner will also develop a plan of priority actions to prevent extinctions and halt the decline of Australia's most threatened species.

In considering other strategic approaches, the Australian Government is reviewing the potential role of other planning initiatives, including national action plans such as the *Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010*, in informing and/or complementing the listing and recovery planning processes.



## Recommendation 9

- 3.105 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities adopt clear protocols to implement streamlined processes that lead to the establishment of relevant plans (including conservation advices, single species recovery plans, strategic plans supported by action plans, and multi-species and regional recovery plans) within strict timelines. The committee further recommends that the department's performance against those timelines be measured and made publicly available.**

### **Government response: Agreed in part**

The Australian Government has in place established procedures that lead to the development of conservation advices and recovery plans. These are guided by statutory requirements including timeframes prescribed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) for the listing of threatened species and ecological communities and the making or adopting of recovery plans. The Minister must make a decision whether to have a recovery plan or not within 90 days of the listing of the threatened species or ecological community (section 269AA). If required, the recovery plan for a listed threatened species or listed threatened ecological community must be made and in force within three years of the decision to have a recovery plan being made (section 273).

Recovery plans are only prepared where the listed species or ecological community has complex management needs due to its ecology, the nature of threats affecting it, or the number of stakeholders affected by or involved in implementing the necessary actions. Conservation advices are relied upon where the protection needs are well understood and relatively simple. As conservation advices are required to be published at the time of listing, they are an important mechanism to identify threats and priority recovery activities immediately, rather than waiting years for the development of a recovery plan.

The Australian Government is pursuing more strategic approaches to allow greater flexibility in the development of recovery plans and for their development at regional scales (see the response to Recommendation 8). A key role for the newly appointed Threatened Species Commissioner will be to contribute to a process of reform to simplify and streamline the statutory recovery planning process.

Statistics on statutory decisions including listings, the number of recovery plans adopted or made and those in preparation are available through the Department's annual reports. In addition, the Committee's annual reports are required to report on the making and adoption of each recovery plan, threat abatement plan and wildlife conservation plan (sections 284, 298). These reports are published on the Department's website.

## **Recommendation 10**

- 3.107 The committee recommends that action plans be developed with regard to the likelihood of available funds, and in a manner that allows for potential prioritisation of actions.**

### **Government response: Agreed in part**

Recovery plans developed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) are the primary mechanism through which Australian Government investment in threatened species conservation is targeted. A recovery plan is a plan made or adopted for the purposes of the protection, conservation and management of a threatened species or ecological community (s296A). Section 270 sets out the content requirements of a recovery plan. This includes the research and management actions necessary to stop decline of, and support the recovery of the species or community.

The Australian Government agrees that it is desirable to create opportunities for better linkages to funding initiatives that allows for potential prioritisation of actions. The newly appointed Threatened Species Commissioner will help promote the recovery of species by providing a stronger focus on the implementation of recovery plans.

The Australian Government has a long history of supporting land managers and community groups to undertake on-ground activities to achieve the conservation, sustainable use and restoration of Australia's natural resources and environment assets. The Australian Government's National Landcare Programme will continue to support and complement on ground activities to protect threatened species and ecological communities. The Australian Government is committed to working with all stakeholders to maximise the benefits of investment.

The Australian Government is committed to developing better prioritisation processes and decision-making tools that increase transparency, accountability and efficiency in prioritising resource allocation to threatened species conservation efforts. The Threatened Species Commissioner will work with all levels of government, scientists, the non-profit sector, industry and the community to ensure that efforts and investment to protect our native species are better coordinated, better targeted and more effective.

## **Recommendation 11**

- 3.109 The committee recommends that relevant action plans be developed in consultation with state and territory governments, as well as non-government organisations, to ensure planned actions are coordinated, supported and implemented.**

### **Government response: Agreed**

Recovery plans are currently developed with significant levels of consultation with all levels of government, non government organisations, industry, landholders, academic institutions and community groups. The development of many recovery plans are also overseen by a recovery team of representative stakeholders who collaboratively contribute to the drafting of the plan.

The Australian Government will continue to, as a priority, encourage the close collaboration and partnerships with state and territory governments and other stakeholders to effectively deliver protection measures for threatened species and communities. The new Threatened Species Commissioner will play a significant role in this regard.

## **Recommendation 12**

- 3.112 The committee recommends that all action plans contain key performance indicators for outcomes in specific locations against which funding is directed.**

### **Government response: Agreed in part**

Section 270 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) requires that recovery plans state criteria against which achievement of the objective is to be measured and specify the actions needed to achieve the objectives. These are used to help assess performance of a recovery plan when it is reviewed.

It is not practical to identify where all funding is to be directed at the time a recovery plan is being made. This is because funding becomes available from a range of sources over different time frames. Recovery plans act as a strategic mechanism to attract and focus funding rather than as a funding document themselves.

The Australian Government is working to facilitate improved monitoring and evaluation of outcomes from its investments in natural resource management. Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) planning is essential to implementation of projects for improved environmental and natural resource management, including projects for species recovery and threat abatement. The Australian Government recognises that key performance indicators are critical to the evaluation of investment in natural resource management activities and is currently developing consistent indicators across policies and investment programmes. It is a condition of funding under current programmes that recipients develop and report against outcome milestones.

The Threatened Species Commissioner will monitor the effectiveness of priority conservation actions and report to the Minister and to the public.

## Recommendation 13

- 3.115 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities conduct a review of all recovery plans older than five years. This review should include an evaluation of the extent to which actions identified in those plans have been implemented and success of those actions in recovering threatened species and ecological communities. The report of this review should be made publicly available and should consider where existing recovery plans can be incorporated into national strategic plans complemented by short action plans for certain species, as outlined in recommendation 9.**

### Government response: Agreed in part

Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) there is a requirement to review recovery plans at intervals no longer than five years. The Australian Government works with state and territory governments and other stakeholders to review these recovery plans as required. The review process assesses the performance of the recovery plan in achieving its stated objectives. Reviews are then used to guide any decision on whether a recovery plan needs to be revised and updated.

There are 494 recovery plans in place. The Australian Government acknowledges that the ongoing need to review such a large number of plans is a lengthy, complex and costly process that has led to the delays of many reviews. The Department is investigating strategic ways in which the review process can be streamlined to ensure more timely and responsive reviews in maintaining the currency of recovery plans. A more strategic approach to the monitoring, review and public reporting of recovery plan effectiveness will be an area of focus for the new Threatened Species Commissioner.

See also the response to Recommendation 8.

## Recommendation 14

- 4.139 The committee recommends that, in developing action plans, and allocating program funding, the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities consider greater use of predator exclusion fences and other forms of 'mainland island sanctuaries' for threatened species.**

### Government Response: Agreed in part

The Australian Government agrees that mainland island sanctuaries can be valuable tools for threatened species conservation. Predator exclusion fences are acknowledged as an effective method for preventing predation on critical weight range threatened species that are most susceptible to predation by feral cats and foxes. The Australian Government agrees that predator exclusion fences can benefit populations of a species when combined with other measures such as invasive species control. In areas of Australia where species are under pressure from multiple threats and where it is not possible to reduce the abundance of predators sufficiently for the recovery of a threatened species, an enclosure may be an essential tool. Enclosures need to be used with care to avoid unintended detrimental impacts on threatened and other species, for example where they require habitat connectivity.

The impacts of feral animals and plants are currently examined in conservation advices and/or recovery plans and in threat abatement plans and associated background documents. A predator exclusion fence may be included as part of an action within these plans. For some threatened species, baiting and trapping programmes to control predators may be a more appropriate action than a predator exclusion fence.

There has been targeted investment to support predator exclusion fencing as well as the control of invasive species through Australian Government funding. The Australian Government's National Landcare Programme will continue to support and complement a range of on-ground activities to protect threatened species and ecological communities. The Australian Government is committed to working with all stakeholders to maximise the benefits of investment, including through allocation of funding for the use of a range of invasive species management tools to support the recovery of threatened species.

See also the response to Recommendation 8.

## **Recommendation 15**

### **4.141 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities develop clear biosecurity strategies as part of action plans to protect island sanctuaries.**

#### **Government response: Agreed**

Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Pulu Keeling National Parks are managed by the Australian Government through the Director of National Parks (within the Department). The responsibility for developing action plans, including biosecurity strategies, to protect other island sanctuaries lies with the states and territories.

These national parks have management plans in place, which address quarantine and invasive species management issues. Biodiversity conservation management in these parks focuses on threatened species as components of the broader ecosystems. Conservation management actions include:

- Contributing to the development and implementation of species and ecosystem recovery plans. For example, Parks Australia is currently developing a multi-species recovery plan for Christmas Island for a more coordinated and holistic approach to threatened species management and has completed and is implementing a multi-species recovery plan for Norfolk Island.
- Management of key threats to listed species and ecological communities in Commonwealth reserves. Parks Australia is currently developing a Weeds Strategy for the Commonwealth reserves to help guide management of threats to native species and ecosystems from non-native invasive species.
- Collection and analysis of long-term monitoring data on threatened species. Parks Australia is currently undertaking a project to improve the systematic collection of long-term data for improving threatened species conservation.
- Developing structured decision-making tools for effective management of threatened species, including flying foxes on Christmas Island, by Parks Australia in conjunction with the National Environmental Research Programme.

## Recommendation 16

- 4.143** The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities develop regulations under section 301A of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* for the regulation of controlled invasive plant species within Australia. The Council of Australian Governments should be involved in the process, to ensure that these measures are developed in consultation with state and territory governments.

### Government response: Not agreed

The Australian Government does not consider that direct regulation under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is necessary to control invasive plant species and is confident existing measures are effective.

While it is possible to establish a list of invasive plant species under 301A that may threaten biodiversity in Australia, the Australian Government has processes in place to prevent invasive plants entering Australia. The Department of Agriculture uses a science-based quarantine weed risk assessment process to determine the weed potential of new plants proposed for import into Australia.

Within Australia, the Australian Government works with state and territory governments to regulate trade in invasive plant species through state and territory legislation. All governments have agreed on the list of 32 Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) and agreement is being considered on consistent regulation of the 12 of these species which were added in 2012. The development of a strategic plan for each WoNS helps define responsibilities and identify strategies and actions to control the species.

A further 28 invasive plant species that pose a high or serious potential threat to the environment, that have limited distribution within Australia at present, and that are amenable to successful eradication or containment programmes, have been placed on the national environmental alert list. Listing of these species assists experts to identify plant species that are in the early stages of establishment and have the potential to become a significant threat to biodiversity if they are not managed.

## **Recommendation 17**

- 4.145 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities develop specific research strategies in conjunction with relevant research institutions, such as Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre, to develop biological controls for feral cats and other high impact invasive species.**

### **Government response: Agreed in part**

The Australian Government agrees that biological control is an effective tool in the management of invasive species. While biological control offers the only sustainable continent wide solution to widespread established invasive species, it is less effective for rapid response management and only one of the potential control mechanisms that should be considered.

Threat abatement plans identify actions related to the investigation or development of biological controls where the potential exists and where stakeholders, including the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, believe there is merit in the research. For example, the threat abatement plan for competition and land degradation by rabbits lists "conduct research to maximise the effectiveness of existing biocontrols, and investigate new biocontrols" as an action.

The Department commissioned a review of potential biological control agents for feral cats in 1997 that concluded that all potential viral agents are already present in feral cat populations in Australia and there are no other candidates for biological control for feral cats. The Department is currently investing in the development of broad-scale bait for land managers to use as part of their control programmes.

Ongoing biological control options of rabbits and invasive fish using diseases and genetic approaches are funded in CSIRO through the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre. For example, this Centre has a research strategy for the landscape control of rabbits that focuses on the enhancement of the rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHD-boost) biocontrol.

Under the Department's research programme, a new research hub will be established to investigate options for improved threatened species recovery.

## **Recommendation 18**

- 4.147 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government target more environmental research funding and programs towards effective control methods for invasive species.**

### **Government response: Noted**

The Australian Government has a range of existing and potential funding sources for research investment. A number of these support research into effective control methods for invasive species, and this is expected to continue to be an area for investment.

The Industry portfolio has responsibility for a range of publicly funded environmental research which includes key responses to invasive species through the CSIRO, Cooperative Research Centres, and the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

The Department currently has a research investment stream through the National Environmental Science Programme. This Programme will have ongoing funding of \$25.5m each year. A number of research projects within the former National Environmental Research Programme have elements that relate to control of invasive species, including:

- Project 7.1 in the Tropical Ecosystem Hub – Invasive species risks and responses in the Wet Tropics.
- Project 11.2 in the Tropical Ecosystem Hub – Improved approaches for the detection of disease and prevention of spread in Torres Strait.
- Project 4.2 in the Northern Australia Hub – Feral cat management on Indigenous land.
- Project 1.3 in the Environmental Decisions Hub – The effect of multi-species interactions on the outcomes of invasive species management.
- Emerging Priority project - Research into the control of Yellow Crazy ants on Christmas Island
- Emerging Priority project – Support for the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment - Priority Threat Management of invasive plant species in the Lake Eyre Basin

The priority given to control methods for invasive species in future funding decisions will be considered alongside other environmental research and program funding priorities.

## **Recommendation 19**

**4.149 The committee recommends that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee considers listing 'wildlife disease' as an overarching key threatening process under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.**

### **Government Response: Noted**

The Australian Government agrees that there are wildlife diseases that are a threat to listed threatened species, and that being able to list key threatening processes at different scales can provide for flexibility in the approach to threat abatement.

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) provides for the identification, assessment and listing of key threatening processes with the nomination and listing process stated in the EPBC Act. Any person or organisation can nominate a key threatening process for consideration for assessment for listing. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee can also nominate key threatening process itself where it believes assessment is warranted. Under the EPBC Act, it is the responsibility of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to assess nominations of key threatening processes and provide advice to the Minister. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee would consider a nomination received for 'wildlife disease' and make a recommendation to the Minister regarding its assessment for listing. There are currently threat abatement plans in place for a number of key threatening processes relevant to wildlife disease:

- Beak and feather disease affecting endangered psittacine species;
- Infection of amphibians with chytrid fungus resulting in chytridiomycosis;



- Predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs.

## Recommendation 20

- 4.154 The committee recommends that all threat abatement plans contain realistic, measurable targets against which their effectiveness can be measured.**

### Government response: Agreed in part

Threat abatement plans establish a national framework to guide and coordinate the Australian Government's response to key threatening processes listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The Government's goal is to ensure threat abatement plans contain measurable targets where this is practical and cost effective. This is not always possible. For many threats, there is an absence of data, or even an agreed indicator that can be measured. For others the cost of measuring would be prohibitively costly.

The *Threat abatement plan to reduce the impacts on northern Australia's biodiversity by the five listed grasses*, made in 2012, contains measurable outcomes or outputs and priority timeframes against all of the actions within the plan. Future threat abatement plans are likely to take a similar format.

## Recommendation 21

- 4.157 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities conduct a review of all threat abatement plans older than five years. This review should include an evaluation of the extent to which actions identified in those plans have been implemented, and the success of those actions. The review should be completed within the next five years and subsequent reviews should be undertaken at not less than five yearly intervals. The reports should be made publicly available on the website of the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.**

### Government response: Agreed

The Department endeavours to review threat abatement plans within the five year timeframe in accordance with s279 (2) of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Reviews of five threat abatement plans were made publicly available on the Department's website in July 2013. These are for:

- Beak and feather disease affecting endangered psittacine species;
- Infection of amphibians with chytrid fungus resulting in chytridiomycosis;
- Dieback caused by the root-rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi*;
- Predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs;
- Reduce the impacts of tramp ants on biodiversity in Australia and its territories.

The Department is currently conducting reviews of the following threat abatement plans:

- Competition and land degradation by unmanaged goats;

- Competition and land degradation by rabbits;
- Predation by European red fox;
- Predation by feral cats;
- Impacts of marine debris on vertebrate marine life;
- Reduce the impacts of exotic rodents on biodiversity on Australian offshore islands of less than 100 000 hectares.

The review reports will be made available on the Department's website.

## Recommendation 22

**5.49 The committee recommends that the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* be amended to require the identification of critical habitat for listed threatened species and ecological community at the time of listing.**

### Government Response: Not Agreed

While it would be desirable to identify all critical habitat at the time of listing a threatened species or ecological community, information is not always available at that time. The lack of such information should not delay the listing process.

There are mechanisms for identifying and protecting critical habitat and other important habitat both at the time of listing, and afterwards. When a species or ecological community is listed, conservation advice developed by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee is published. This can identify important habitat for the entity and the Minister must have regard to it when decisions are taken under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) that affect the entity. In this way, conservation advices are mechanisms for enabling the regulatory provisions of the EPBC Act to afford a higher level of protection to important habitat of a listed species or ecological community

For listed threatened species, the conservation advice identifies important habitat and areas critical to the survival of the species where this is known at the time of listing. For threatened ecological communities, the current practice of providing conservation advice is considered to be equivalent to identifying critical habitat. The current practice involves specifying areas critical to the survival of an ecological community at the time of listing. This includes 'condition thresholds' that identify areas of the ecological community that are in the best condition and most functional, as well as recommending appropriate buffer zones, to help manage and protect sensitive and high condition areas effectively from disturbances and threats.

Where a recovery plan is made for a species or ecological community, it may also identify possible habitats that are critical to its survival and the actions needed to protect those habitats. Both conservation advices and recovery plans can be updated as new information becomes available.

In addition to these mechanisms, section 207A allows the Minister to list habitat as critical to the survival of a listed threatened species or listed threatened ecological community at any time after an entity is listed.

## **Recommendation 23**

- 5.52 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities ensure that all critical habitats for threatened species and ecological communities, as identified in Commonwealth, state and territory recovery plans and conservation advices, be compiled into easily accessible maps which are readily available online and updated at regular intervals.**

### **Government Response: Agreed**

The Australian Government supports increased access to information – including mapping of critical habitats – to assist with management and conservation of threatened species and is actively working to improve the quality and accessibility of such information, within the constraints of available resources.

Currently, the Department provides the Protected Matters Search Tool on its website. This tool allows the public to investigate the matters of national environmental significance (including *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) listed threatened species) which may occur in an area of interest. The tool is supported by maps which indicate the known and likely distribution of each EPBC Act listed threatened, migratory and marine species. These maps are maintained by a team of experts in the Department using data obtained from state and territory agencies, museums and herbaria, non-government organisations and researchers. A variety of techniques are used in preparing the maps including spatial modelling of the species range, statistical analysis of population clusters, detailed habitat mapping and expert consultation. Recovery plans are a key reference used when compiling the maps. The Department is preparing generalised versions of these maps for public release.

Indicative distribution maps for listed threatened ecological communities are also currently available on the Department's website.

## **Recommendation 24**

- 5.55 In light of the important contribution it should make to the protection of habitat for threatened species and ecological communities, the committee recommends that an audit be undertaken to identify all critical habitat within the National Reserve System.**

### **Government Response: Noted**

The Australian Government acknowledges that the range of tenures, both public and private, within the National Reserve System make a significant contribution to the protection of habitat for threatened species and ecological communities. An audit to identify all critical habitat within the National Reserve System would require the participation of all state and territory governments.

## **Recommendation 25**

- 5.56 The committee recommends that the Environmental Stewardship Program be maintained in order to continue to provide assistance to private land managers to manage and protect habitat for threatened species and ecological communities on their land.**

### **Government Response: Noted**

The Australian Government supports the provision of assistance to private land managers to manage and protect habitat for threatened species and ecological communities on their land.

The Australian Government has appointed a Threatened Species Commissioner to develop, implement and monitor threatened species recovery plans, aiming to ensure that efforts and investment to protect our native species by private land managers and others are better coordinated, better targeted and more effective.

## **Recommendation 26**

- 5.85 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities assess the success of private conservation organisations in establishing sanctuaries of critical habitat for threatened species to examine what lessons could be applied across the National Reserve System and how such private organisations could play an effective role in improving outcomes for threatened species, including within publicly owned assets within the National Reserve System. Such a role must be in cooperation with and following consultation with public land managers.**

### **Government response: Noted**

The Australian Government acknowledges and supports the important work of private conservation organisations which support and complement the work of government agencies in establishing and protecting sanctuaries of critical habitat for the conservation of threatened species and ecological communities. These private organisations implement practical, targeted, on-ground conservation projects such as fire management, feral animal and weed control in partnership with a range of other conservation and research agencies.

An assessment of the kind proposed would require the participation of all states and territory governments as well as private conservation organisations.

## **Recommendation 27**

- 5.88 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government continue to support the important contribution of all sectors of the community, including private sector and non-government organisations, landholders and community volunteers, in delivering outcomes for threatened species and ecological communities.**

### **Government response: Agreed**

The Australian Government has committed to the implementation of a National Landcare Programme that will provide support to a range of community groups and non-government organisations for delivery of outcomes for threatened species and ecological communities. The Australian Government will also engage broadly with private sector organisations in improving outcomes for threatened species.

The Green Army initiative will support Green Army teams to work alongside communities and support local conservation projects around Australia, drawing on local knowledge and efforts. Importantly, local projects supported by the Green Army will help to deliver on regional and national environmental priorities.

The Green Army will support natural resource management groups, Landcare groups, catchment management authorities, local councils and other community organisations to support and continue their important work.

An important part of the role of the Threatened Species Commissioner is to increase community awareness of threatened species and bring together the partners and resources necessary to implement priority actions.

## **Recommendation 28**

- 6.110 The committee recommends that, when the Biodiversity Strategy is reviewed in 2015, consideration is given to incorporating concrete targets that reflect the targets agreed to by Australia under the Biodiversity Convention.**

### **Government response: Agreed**

*Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030* was endorsed by the former Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council which comprised Ministers from all state and territory governments and the Australian Government. The incorporation of concrete targets reflecting those agreed under the Convention on Biological Diversity will be considered at the time of the proposed 2015 review, and will require the agreement of all state and territory governments.

## **Recommendation 29**

- 6.114 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government adjusts current funding under the Biodiversity Fund and Caring for our Country to provide targeted funding streams for threatened species and ecological communities. This dedicated funding should include funding for implementation of specific actions within recovery plans, conservation advices and threat abatement plans and advices.**

### **Government response: Noted**

The Australian Government will establish a new National Landcare Programme. The new programme will merge the previous Caring for our Country and Landcare Programmes. The Government will consider this recommendation in determining objectives, priorities and delivery mechanisms for the new programme. The Biodiversity Fund was linked to revenue from the Carbon Tax. Consistent with the Australian Government's policy to abolish the Carbon Tax, further rounds of the Biodiversity Fund will not be held.

Implementation of recovery plans, conservation advices and threat abatement plans and advices involves a range of stakeholders, including state and local governments, catchment management authorities, other regional organisations, and community organisations. The Australian Government is committed to working with all stakeholders to maximise the benefits of investment, including through ensuring that implementation of action plans is considered in project design where appropriate. The new Threatened Species Commissioner will play a role in monitoring the effectiveness of recovery plans.

## **Recommendation 30**

- 6.116 In light of the evidence that feral animals and fire regimes are two of the biggest threats to threatened species and communities, the committee recommends that funding programs give high priority to on-ground projects addressing feral animals and fire regimes.**

### **Government response: Noted**

The Australian Government may consider this recommendation in determining objectives, priorities and delivery mechanisms for the new National Landcare Programme.

The Australian Government endeavours to ensure that available funding from national programmes is directed towards projects that are of highest priority and which will deliver effective outcomes. As key landscape-scale threats to biodiversity, both feral animals and altered fire regimes are of concern to the Australian Government. The ongoing management of these two threats is largely carried out by individual land managers and state and territory governments. Any Commonwealth funding programmes aiming to reduce the impact of these threats on threatened species and communities would need to complement action underway by these other agents.

### **Recommendation 31**

- 6.120 The committee recommends that all funding grants under relevant Commonwealth government programs, whether for the management of threatened species, ecological communities, threatening species or invasive species should include metrics to establish initial benchmarks and requirements to measure the outcomes from the project against those initial benchmarks.**

#### **Government response: Agreed**

The Australian Government is working to facilitate improved monitoring and evaluation of outcomes from its investment. Good monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement are essential to improve environmental and natural resource management, including for the management of threatened species, ecological communities and invasive species.

The Australian Government recognises that relevant baseline data is critical to the evaluation of investment in natural resource management activities. It is a condition of funding under current programmes that recipients develop and report against outcome milestones, including providing baseline information for major projects under these programmes. The Australian Government is working towards developing consistent indicators across programmes to facilitate monitoring of all funding grants.

### **Recommendation 32**

- 6.122 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government adjust relevant funding programs to enable funding grants relevant to threatened species and ecological communities to be awarded over longer timeframes, subject to ongoing success against measured objectives.**

#### **Government response: Noted**

The Australian Government is in the process of implementing new programmes to deliver conservation and natural resource management outcomes, including the National Landcare Programme. The Australian Government has committed to supporting multi-year grants of up to four years.

### **Recommendation 33**

- 6.125 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government develop and implement a national species prioritisation program to guide decision-making in relation to funding for threatened species and ecological communities. This program should be regularly reviewed based on the best available scientific evidence.**

#### **Government response: Agreed**

The Australian Government is committed to developing better prioritisation processes and decision-making tools that increase transparency, accountability and efficiency in prioritising resource allocation to threatened species conservation efforts. The government is reviewing various prioritisation approaches and methodologies to assess their potential to guide development of a national approach. The new Threatened Species Commissioner will develop a strategic approach to threatened species conservation, including a prioritisation framework for species and conservation actions, building on government, non-government and community-based threatened species initiatives.

The Australian Government through the National Environmental Research Program Environmental Decisions Hub is undertaking an extensive research project exploring cost effective approaches to threatened species conservation and recovery. The overall aim of the project is the development of consistent scientific approaches for making a variety of decisions from allocating funds to threatened species, to monitoring threatened species, to determining critical habitat and whether or not landscape plans are more efficient than single species plans.

### **Recommendation 34**

- 6.127 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government establish the national biodiversity monitoring system and system of national environment accounts by 2015, as recommended by the Hawke review and *Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-30*.**

#### **Government response: Agreed**

The Australian Government supports improved monitoring of the state of the environment (including biodiversity) and the development of a system of environmental accounts, and is actively working to improve national monitoring and reporting, within the constraints of available resources.

The Department is developing a set of environmental indicators which can be monitored at local, regional and national scale to inform regional and national environmental accounts and state of the environment reporting. Biodiversity is a key theme of these indicators.

The Department is working with the Bureau of Meteorology and the Australian Bureau of Statistics to implement a system of environmental accounts during the 2014-2016 period. This work is part of the National Plan for Environmental Information initiative which will deliver improved access to high quality information to assist environmental decision-making. It will build capacity to monitor, detect and predict change in the environment and maintain this capacity over the long-term.



## Recommendation 35

- 6.130 The committee recommends that the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* be amended to require the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities report, as part of the regular preparation of national accounts to Parliament on the status of species, and communities listed as threatened under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.**

### Government response: Agreed in part

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) listing status of threatened species and threatened ecological communities is published on the Department's website, and is updated to reflect any amendments to the lists. This information could be incorporated into environmental accounts. The intent of this recommendation can be achieved without regulatory change, consistent with the government's commitment to simplify or reduce regulatory burden.

In addition, the new Threatened Species Commissioner will monitor the effectiveness of priority conservation actions and report to the Minister and to the public.

## Recommendation 36

- 7.112 The committee recommends that the Australian Law Reform Commission conduct a review of threatened species laws to ensure effective, comprehensive and consistent protections are in place across all jurisdictions.**

### Proposed response: Not Agreed

The Australian Government considers that the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) provides adequate protection for nationally threatened species. The effectiveness of state and territory laws in protecting species listed in each jurisdiction is a matter for the relevant state or territory government.

During the 29 April 2014 meeting of Environment Ministers there was a commitment to establishing a national review of environmental legislation and regulation. The Department of the Environment will work with states and territories to identify unworkable, contradictory or incompatible 'red tape' and consider opportunities for multi-jurisdiction reform.

## Recommendation 37

- 7.116 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government continues to work with state governments to improve the review, audit and monitoring arrangements for Regional Forest Agreements, with a view to ensuring that forestry operations avoid impacts on threatened species and ecological communities.**

### Proposed response: Agreed

The Australian Government is committed to Regional Forest Agreements as an appropriate mechanism for effective environmental protection, forest management and forest industry practices in regions covered by Regional Forest Agreements. The Australian Government is committed to working cooperatively with state governments to improve the administration of Regional Forest Agreements, including improving the review, audit and monitoring arrangement.

## Recommendation 38

- 7.119 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities conduct a review of those strategic assessments undertaken under *the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to date with a view to improving the process in the future. The committee recommends that this review be publicly released.**

### Government response: Agreed in part

The Australian Government considers that strategic assessments are an efficient and effective tool to address issues around environmental cumulative impacts, habitat fragmentation, connectivity and landscape scale solutions for nationally threatened species and ecological communities. There are currently six completed strategic assessments and ten others in progress.

While reviewing strategic assessments already undertaken can inform improving the process in the future, the Australian Government considers the performance improvement and review mechanisms that currently exist for strategic assessments are sufficient.

The Independent Review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), led by Dr Allan Hawke in 2009, included a review of strategic assessments. It considered strategic assessments an effective approach to protecting matters of national environmental significance, and made a number of recommendations on improving the process. Some of these recommendations have been adopted in subsequent strategic assessments, such as the current Upper Hunter coal mining, Perth-Peel and Great Barrier Reef strategic assessments.

Other performance improvement and review mechanisms currently exist for strategic assessments. Each endorsed strategic assessment usually includes processes for monitoring, evaluation and periodic review to assess whether outcomes for matters of national environmental significance are being met. As well, the Department internal processes ensure strategic assessment processes are implemented within a project planning framework of continual improvement. This includes considering up-to-date environmental research, such as that generated by the National Environment Research Programme, where practical and relevant.

#### **Recommendation 39**

- 7.123 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities conduct an audit and evaluation of the offsets granted under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to date, and make the results of this audit publicly available.**

#### **Government response: Agreed in part**

The *EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy* (the policy) was released in October 2012 and outlines the approach to the use of environmental offsets under the EPBC Act. The policy was developed to ensure a transparent framework for offset decision making and increase certainty for businesses and other stakeholders considering actions that may potentially be subject to an offset requirement, while also promoting consistency and providing robust, positive environmental outcomes. Accompanying the policy was the *Offsets Assessment Guide* which is a metric that gives effect to the policy's requirements for threatened species or ecological communities. The policy replaced a draft policy framework that had been in effect since 2007.

The policy acknowledges that the use of offsets is a developing area and commits to a one year technical review and a five year review of the policy approach.

#### **Recommendation 40**

- 7.125 The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities engage in extensive consultation with affected stakeholders prior to the implementation of amendments to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to establish cost recovery mechanisms for environmental assessment processes.**

#### **Government response: Noted**

The Australian Government has consulted extensively on cost recovery for environment impact assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). This included publishing a discussion paper for public comment in September 2011 and a draft Cost Recovery Impact Statement in May 2012.

On 14 May 2014 the Environment Minister introduced legislative amendments to allow cost recovery for these activities under the EPBC Act into Parliament. Further information about cost recovery arrangements is available on the Department's website.

#### **Recommendation 41**

- 7.127 The committee recommends that the minister and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities ensure that conditions on approvals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* are kept as straightforward as possible and worded clearly to ensure that conditions are enforceable.**

#### **Government response: Agreed**

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that conditions on approvals under the EPBC Act are clear, outcomes-focussed and enforceable. Conditions play an important role in the environmental approval process at both the Commonwealth and state and territory level.

The Australian Government is working towards a more streamlined process for environmental assessments and approvals, including a 'one stop shop' for environmental assessments and approvals. As part of the 'one stop shop' commitment the Australian Government is working with state and territory governments on a range of administrative streamlining measures, including the development of standard outcome-focussed conditions.

#### **Recommendation 42**

- 7.128 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government develop a new compliance strategy in consultation with the states for monitoring and compliance activities relating to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.**

#### **Government response: Not agreed**

The Department of the Environment's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) *Compliance and Enforcement Policy* is a strong and effective mechanism for ensuring compliance with the EPBC Act. In particular, it identifies how the Department interacts with state and territory agencies in compliance activities.

The Department also undertakes continuous improvement to ensure best-practice compliance and enforcement strategies are implemented across the Department. The Department will continue to engage with relevant compliance and enforcement networks across jurisdictions to progress development of inter-agency agreements and/or memoranda of understanding between the Commonwealth and relevant state agencies to clarify state and Commonwealth roles in investigating and responding to environmental crime and to ensure a co-ordinated response in investigation of contraventions of national and state environmental law.

The Australasian Environmental Law Enforcement and Regulators neTwork (AELERT) is a network of environmental regulatory agencies which are responsible for the management of natural resources, cultural heritage or the protection of the environment. Enhancing regulatory compliance capacity is a key objective of the network. The majority of the Department's Australian environmental partner agencies and co-regulators are members of the AELERT

network. AELERT therefore provides an excellent pathway for the Department to establish new compliance strategies as innovations or improvements in environmental compliance are disseminated throughout the network.

#### **Recommendation 43**

- 4.147 The committee recommends that the Australian National Audit Office conduct an audit of monitoring of compliance with approval conditions under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.**

#### **Government response: Agreed**

In July 2013, the Australian National Audit Office commenced an audit into the manner in which the Department monitors compliance with conditions attached to approvals made under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

#### **Recommendation 44**

- 4.147 The committee recommends that the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* be amended so that 'the fisheries provisions under Parts 10, 13 and 13A are streamlined into a single strategic assessment framework for Commonwealth and State and Territory-managed fisheries to deliver a single assessment and approval framework' subject to the objects of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.**

#### **Proposed response: Agreed in part**

The Australian Government supports reducing the administrative and regulatory process involved in making decisions under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act)..

Measures are already in place to streamline fisheries assessments administratively. For example, a single application from a fishery management agency currently informs the assessment conducted by the Department for decision-making under all relevant provisions of the EPBC Act. The fisheries management arrangements are then assessed for consistency with the Australian Government *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition*. In this way, a single application and assessment informs decisions under all relevant parts of the Act.

The Australian Government is committed to looking for more opportunities to remove unnecessary administrative and regulatory processes where this is feasible and ensures high environmental standards are maintained.