

Comments on the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act has failed to provide an enabling policy framework that ensures protection of threatened species and ecological communities. It has proven unwieldy and unresponsive, with no clear identification of responsibility particularly for species and ecological communities that span multiple Australian states and Government jurisdictions.

An example of this is the nomination for listing 'Psittacine Circoviral (beak and feather) Disease' (PBFD) as a Key Threatening Process. This was one of the first threatening disease processes to be submitted under the *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992* (ESP Act) and it took almost a decade for PBFD to be listed in April 2001 as a key threatening process under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

The current threat abatement plan (TAP) for PBFD written in 2005 has not been effective in mitigating this risk to critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable species. A Working Group met infrequently and has stagnated since its last meeting in 2009. Very few of the Actions recommended in the TAP have been carried out and it is also at least 2 years overdue for review. At its last meeting in 2009 the working group clearly identified that the development of a vaccine to be the highest priority research action needing to be undertaken, particularly to combat existing and continuing problems in the critically endangered Orange-bellied parrot captive breeding program.

More than one decade since PBFD was listed as a key threatening process it continues to be a significant threat to the survival and abundance of two endangered species: the Orange-bellied Parrot, the Swift Parrot the Norfolk Island Green Parrot as well as the Western ground parrot and very little has been achieved in mitigating this threat. Fifteen threatened psittacine bird species have been identified by the TAP as being threatened by PBFD and these bird species cover a wide range of local and state Government jurisdictions throughout Australia. Efforts to mitigate this problem on a state by state or project basis would be extremely cost inefficient and would ultimately result in much duplication of resources and efforts.

The Orange-bellied Parrot captive breeding program (a significant part of the Recovery Plan for this species) which initially encountered major problems due to PBFD continues to be negatively impacted by this disease. Recovery actions to improve the size of the wild population include monitoring and managing PBFD in the captive population, and development of a vaccine have not eventuated despite erroneous information listed on the Threatened Species & Ecological Communities web site.