



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Energy

# **Tasmanian Forests and Woodlands dominated by *Eucalyptus ovata* (black gum) or *E. brookeriana* (Brookers gum): Proposal to list as a nationally protected ecological community**



*Eucalyptus ovata* shrubby woodland at Sandfly Recreation Area, south of Hobart.

The *Eucalyptus ovata* forest and woodland in Tasmania was nominated for protection as a nationally threatened ecological community under Australia's national environment law, the EPBC Act <sup>#</sup>.

The nomination was accepted in 2013 and a scientific assessment is now under way. This assessment culminates in a Conservation Advice and will:

- clarify what kind of vegetation is covered by the proposed listing;
- identify what evidence shows these forests and woodlands to be threatened; and
- recommend what can be done to minimise further damage to the ecological community and help recover degraded patches.

**This guide briefly explains the proposed listing and its implications.**

**The draft scientific assessment, or Conservation Advice, is now available for comment.**

**Your feedback on the proposal to list the ecological community as threatened is welcome.**

**See back page for details of how to get consultation documents and provide your comments.**

### **Images**

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Maps were prepared by ERIN (Environmental Resources Information Network) of the Department of the Environment and Energy.

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<sup>#</sup> *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.*

Tasmania contains many unique plants and animals, some of which are found nowhere else in the world, like the Tasmanian devil or the Huon pine. Tasmania is prized for its beautiful natural landscapes. Much of the State was – and remains – covered by various kinds of forests and woodlands. They are a signature natural asset important to local communities, landholders and to Indigenous cultures.

The nominated “*Eucalyptus ovata* forest and woodland in Tasmania” covers native forests with Black gum (*Eucalyptus ovata*) as the main tree canopy species present. It typically occurs on poorly draining, moist sites such as depressions and drainage lines across northern and eastern Tasmania, and the Midlands. Much of the landscape where the ecological community originally occurred is cleared and modified for agriculture or forestry.

The draft Conservation Advice recommends that the national ecological community be extended to also include forests and woodlands with Brookers gum (*Eucalyptus brookeriana*) as the main tree canopy species.

Black gum and Brookers gum are closely related species that look very similar and can be confused. Both species typically occur on wetter sites, with Brookers gum more common in the wet forests of north-western Tasmania, including King Island. Both forest types are on Tasmania’s list of Threatened Native Vegetation Communities.

Including both tree species in the one proposed national ecological community recognises they are similar in appearance, habitat and function, and avoids any problems associated with identifying which of the two tree species is actually present.

The new name suggested for the expanded ecological community is: “Tasmanian Forests and Woodlands dominated by *Eucalyptus ovata* (Black gum) or *E. brookeriana* (Brookers gum)” [or Black gum – Brookers gum forests in short].



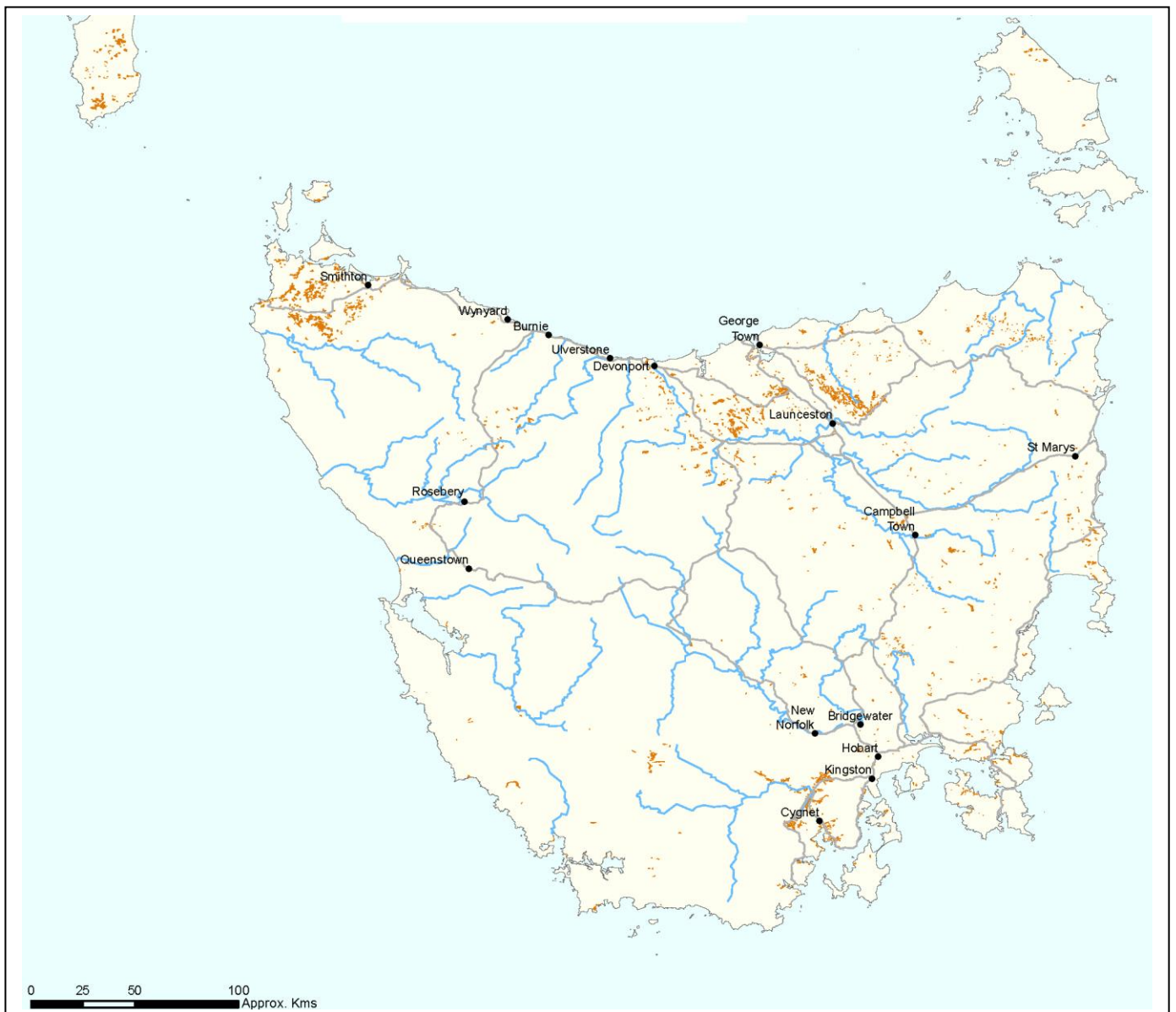
*Bark and leaves of black gum*



## Where are the Black gum – Brookers gum forests found?

The Black gum – Brookers gum forests mostly occur as scattered remnants across northern and eastern Tasmania, including the Midlands region and some Bass Strait islands.

The orange patches shows native vegetation where the tree canopy is mainly black gum and/or Brookers gum. Very little of these forests occur in the World Heritage Areas of the south west and central plateau.



Information for the map, above and the diagram on the next page is from the most recent Tasmanian vegetation mapping, known as TASVEG. This data are collected and managed by the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, and supplied to the Australian Government.

## Why are the the Black gum – Brookers gum forests threatened and why is it important to keep protecting them?

The draft Conservation Advice recommends the Black gum – Brookers gum forests may be eligible for listing as nationally **Critically Endangered**.

The draft assessment found that:

- It has declined in extent by about 90%, from about 230,000 ha originally to only 25,000 ha currently. Much of this was historically due to agriculture and forestry, but more so from urban/peri-urban clearing in recent times.
- The forests are fragmented, with most patches typically under 10 ha in size, and a small median size of about 2.5 ha. However, many patches remain connected, or near to, other kinds of native forest vegetation.
- The old growth component of these forests, that includes mature trees with hollows, has substantially declined since 1996.
- The ecological integrity of the forests has declined severely. Over a quarter of all patches are isolated from any other native vegetation, and many sites are invaded by weeds or support feral animals, e.g. deer.

The forest faces ongoing threats, from continued clearing (mostly peri-urban); invasion by weeds and feral animals; changes to the natural water flows of sites; inappropriate fire regimes and chemical uses; dieback diseases; and potential climate change impacts.

There are many reasons why it's important to keep what's left of these forests, and to recover or expand remnants. Native forests and woodlands provide benefits to the environment, to land productivity and to people.

- The remaining forests provide vital habitat for many plants and animals. They include some that are now threatened, such as the swift parrot and the eastern quoll.
- Keeping intact forest vegetation helps to minimise serious erosion problems. It helps prevent the loss of valuable topsoil from farmlands and salt pans from forming, especially in the Midlands region.
- Forest birds and bats help to control pest insects that attack nearby crops or plantations. Native insects living in forests also play an important role in the pollination of native and crop plants, and control of pests.

Supportive practices have helped to retain many forest remnants. For instance, some remnants are intentionally set aside by farmers because they occur along watercourses or gullies, or serve as shelter for stock and windbreaks for croplands and pastures. These patches are important for conservation because they still provide habitat for native species, and corridors for the movement of native wildlife.

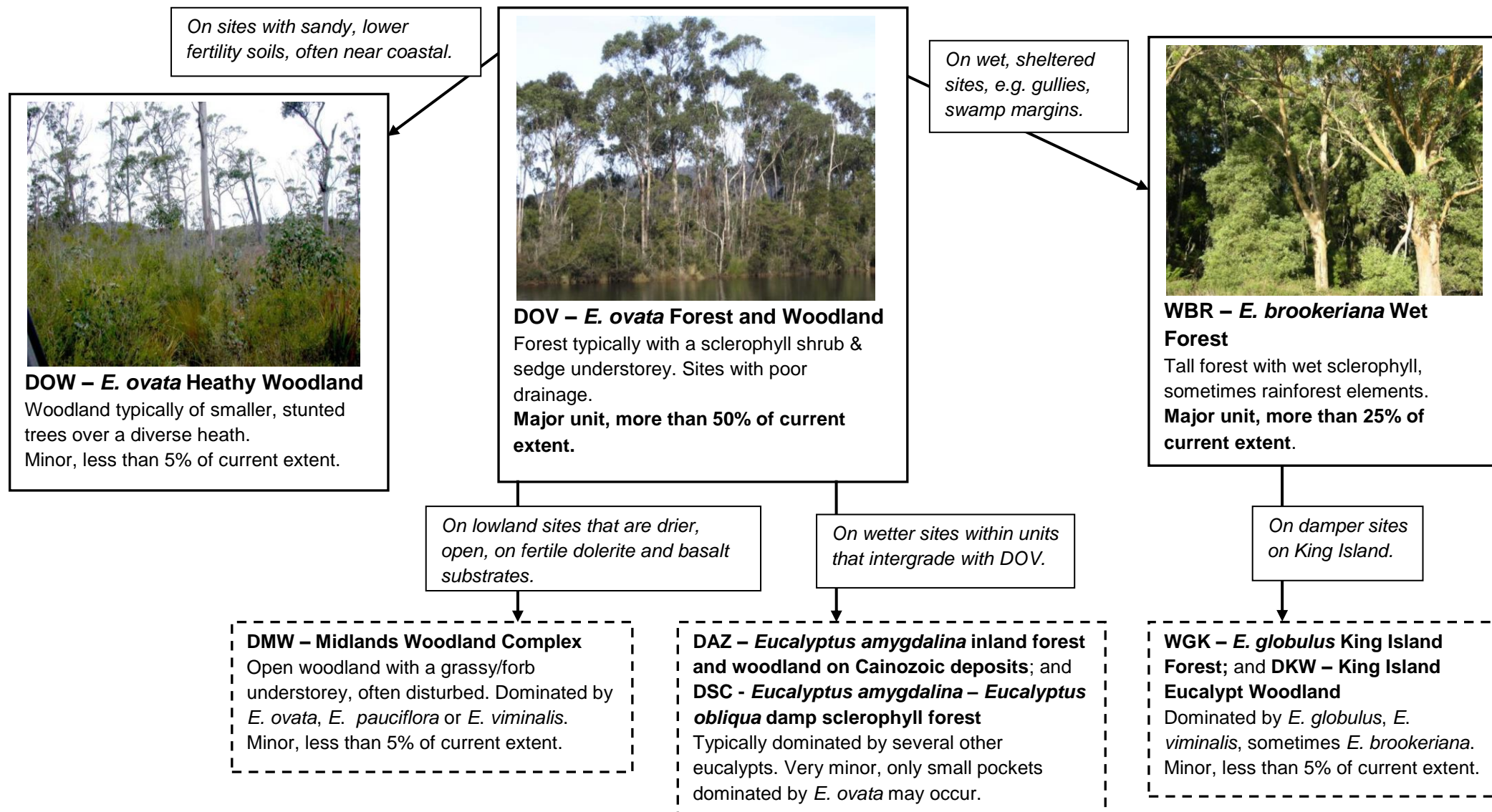


Eastern quoll  
*Photo credit: Leanne Chow*

**Listing is intended to further support farmers and other land managers who want to continue managing patches of forests that still remain in good quality, for future benefits.**

## What forests may be protected as the Black gum – Brookers gum forests?

The TASVEG vegetation mapping identifies three main vegetation units that make up the Black gum – Brookers gum forests: DOV, DOW and WBR. These are pictured in solid-lined boxes in the diagram, below. Some additional units have localised patches of Black gum or Brookers gum mixed among forests dominated by other eucalypt species. These are identified in dashed-lined boxes in the diagram.





## How can I tell if a patch of the Black gum – Brookers gum forests is present and in reasonably intact condition?

National protection is proposed to only apply to patches of the Black gum – Brookers gum forest that retain a reasonably intact understorey or other conservation values.

These are patches that are of reasonable size and:

- retain some native understorey vegetation cover; and/or
- have important habitat features, such as large trees with hollows; or
- are connected to other kinds of native forests and vegetation, so are part of a larger native remnant.

**Good quality patches look like this.**



**Tree canopy is dominated to co-dominated by black gum and/or Brookers gum.**

The tree canopy should have a solid crown cover of 5% or more and a minimum height of 5 metres.



### **A reasonably intact understorey.**

Most of the understorey vegetation cover is of native species (>50% perennial cover). The understorey typically has sedges and shrubs (but can be variable). The fewer the weeds and the higher the natural diversity of native plant species, the better the condition of the patch.

### **Presence of mature trees or connectivity with other native vegetation.**

These should be present IF the understorey has a lower native vegetation cover of 30-50%. These are important features that provide hollows for nesting and corridors for animal movement.

## How big should a patch of the Black gum – Brookers gum forest be?

Minimum patch size thresholds apply to the Black gum – Brookers gum forests.

### A minimum patch size of 0.5 ha (half a hectare (1.4 acres) applies where:

- An extensive native understorey remains, with more than 70% of the perennial vegetation cover being native species; OR
- A good quality native understorey remains (generally more than 50% perennial vegetation cover is native) with a higher diversity of native species present (more than 15 plant species per 0.5 ha); OR
- The patch has a lower cover of native species in the understorey (more than 30% perennial vegetation cover is native) AND it is connected to, and part of, a larger native vegetation remnant, where the size of the total vegetation remnant is 2 ha or more.

### A minimum patch size of 2 hectares (5 acres) applies where:

- The patch has more than 50% perennial vegetation cover as native species with a lower diversity of native species present (more than 10 plant species per 0.5 ha); OR
- The patch has a lower cover of native species in the understorey (more than 30% perennial vegetation cover is native) AND it retains mature canopy trees (4 trees per ha that either are large [>60 cm diameter at breast height] and/or have developed hollows).

## Patches of Black gum – Brookers gum forest that are too small or degraded don't need to be referred under national environment law.

This includes isolated paddock trees, small or narrow patches generally under 0.5 ha in size, and patches of trees where the understorey has been largely or entirely replaced by crop, pasture and weed species. This would apply to many patches on farms that serve as shelterbelts and windbreaks, or very narrow road verges, that are usually too small and degraded to require referral as a significant impact upon the ecological community.

These are shown in the example landscape images, below, taken around Hobart.





## How will national protection affect developers and land managers - what happens if I have the Black gum – Brookers gum forests on my land?

National protection only applies to **new** actions likely to cause **significant** damage to patches of these forests that remain in good condition. How you may be affected if the ecological community is nationally listed depends on:

- whether you have a large patch of good quality Black gum – Brookers gum forest on your land; and
- what you intend to do with any such patches.

### I want to keep my patches of forest or don't plan to do anything to them.

**If there are no new actions, then the listing won't affect you. Land managers who want to retain good quality forest, or intend to restore any forests on their properties may apply for funding to help with their conservation.**

Relevant national environmental funding programmes are under way and currently include Green Army, Landcare and 20 Million Trees and the Emissions Reduction Fund. They are designed to help people undertake conservation works across Australia. Regional Catchment or National Resource Management (NRM) groups also offer funding, advice support to help landholders look after their landscape and remnant vegetation.

Many projects specifically target nationally listed threatened species and ecological communities that occur on properties.

### I'm just doing usual routine activities to maintain my land, business, etc.

**There are exemptions in the national environment law that would apply here.**

Routine and ongoing activities by farmers and business are not impacted by national listings. This has been the case for ecological communities that have been listed in other agricultural areas of Australia, including the Lowland Native Grasslands of Tasmania listed in 2009. There are exemptions for:

- Activities that are already legally approved. For instance, existing cropping or pastoral activities, or developments that have already been approved. AND
- Long-term, continuing or routine activities, such as normal farm practices, property maintenance, weed or pest control, or usual roadside maintenance activities.

### I have a new development that might involve clearing these forests.

**The main consideration would be to seek approval first for any new activity that could significantly impact upon larger, good quality patches of the forest.** Referrals usually apply to **major** projects, for instance new mines or mine expansions, major new road works, new housing and industrial developments, or proposals to convert large areas of intact forest for plantations or cropping.

- **Check** you have the right type of forest present and if it's in good enough condition to be referred [see previous pages for some guidance or seek help from local NRM staff].
- **Plan** to avoid or minimise impacts to forest patches, especially the best quality patches.
- **Talk with the Australian Government Environment Department first** to check if the action may significantly impact any listed forests or species and needs to be referred for national approval.

Note that your current socio-economic circumstances plus any past environmental history can be taken into account when approving any action that has to be referred under the EPBC Act.

**The Tasmanian Government also has laws on vegetation clearance and protecting State-listed vegetation communities that may apply to certain activities. These operate through the *Forest Practices Code* and requires a Forest Practices Plan be developed and certified before any clearing can proceed. In many cases, similar information used for a Forest Practices Plan may be used for referral under national environment law.**

There also may be other nationally-protected matters that need to be considered, for instance any nationally threatened species likely to use the patch as habitat. Swift parrots, in particular, are known to use black gum forests as feeding and nesting habitat. Tasmanian devils, quolls or other listed species may also occur at some sites.

**Where do I get documents about the Black gum – Brookers gum forests, and how to comment on the proposal?**

The draft Conservation Advice and other information about how to make a submission, including questions to guide your responses, are on the website of the Department of Environment and Energy:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/comment>

**Where do I find information about the national environmental law and Australian Government funding programmes?**

Advice about Australian Government environmental funding programmes (e.g. Green Army, National Landcare, 20 Million Trees, Emissions Reduction Fund) can be found online at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/about-us/grants-funding>

Information about the EPBC Act referral and assessment process is available on:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/protection/environment-assessments/assessment-and-approval-process>

**If you have any questions, then please contact:**

the Federal Department of the Environment and Energy

Tel: 1800 803 772 or email [ciu@environment.gov.au](mailto:ciu@environment.gov.au).

OR

contacts given with the documents open for consultation at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/comment>