

OFFICIAL



Auditor-General for Australia



29 August 2022

Senator Sarah Hanson-Young
Committee Chair
Environment and Communications References Committee
By email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Hanson-Young

INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S EXTINCTION CRISIS

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) presented the following performance audit report to the Parliament that you may find relevant to the above inquiry.

- Auditor-General Report No.19 of 2021–22 [*Management of Threatened Species and Ecological Communities under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*](#)

Information about what the audit assessed, concluded, and recommended is attached. The audit report is available online at anao.gov.au.

Should the Committee require further information in relation to this matter, the ANAO would be pleased to provide a briefing at a time convenient to you or appear as a witness at a hearing.

To arrange a briefing, please contact our External Relations team at external.relations@anao.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Rona Mellor PSM
Acting Auditor-General

OFFICIAL

OFFICIAL

Auditor-General Report No.19 of 2021–22 *Management of Threatened Species and Ecological Communities under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of threatened species and ecological communities under the EPBC Act.

To form a conclusion against this objective, the following high-level criteria were applied:

- Is the administration of the listing process effective?
- Have effective arrangements been established to develop and implement plans and advice?
- Is the administration of the listing and planning processes timely and efficient?
- Does measurement, monitoring and reporting support the achievement of desired outcomes?

The audit concluded that:

- The administration of threatened species and ecological communities under the EPBC Act is partly effective. The department is unable to demonstrate it is efficient. There is limited evidence that desired outcomes are being achieved, due to the department's lack of monitoring, reporting and support for the implementation of conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans.
- The department's administration of the listing process is partly effective. The process to determine what should be considered for listing could be improved by establishing a strategy to ensure it identifies the species, ecological communities and key threatening processes that will have the greatest impact on achieving the objectives of the EPBC Act. Largely appropriate definitions and guidelines have been established to set out when items are eligible for listing, but procedural guidance for undertaking listing assessments does not fully capture all relevant requirements of the EPBC Act and is not complete, up to date or consistently implemented.
- The department is partly effective in developing and supporting the implementation of conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans. Procedural guidance for development needs updating and is not fully followed, and arrangements for review and update are not appropriate. There are arrangements to prioritise some funding programs and align them with conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans. There are not currently any other effective arrangements to provide coordinated support for or obtain assurance over the implementation of conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans.
- Most listing assessments are completed within statutory timeframes, although some species assessments and most ecological community assessments require extensions. Recovery plans, recovery plan reviews, threat abatement plan reviews and changes to the list are not completed within statutory timeframes. The department is unable to demonstrate that its efficiency has improved over time. Systems and processes partly support timeliness and efficiency.
- Measurement, monitoring and reporting arrangements are not sufficient to support the achievement of desired outcomes. The statuses of some threatened species are monitored, but most species are not. The statuses of ecological communities and key threatening processes are not monitored. There is no measurement, monitoring or reporting on progress, or on the contribution of listing assessments, conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans to their desired outcomes. Available information does not indicate desired outcomes have been achieved.

The report included the following six recommendations:

OFFICIAL

Recommendation No.1

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment develop a strategy to ensure that its processes for determining what should be considered for listing identify the species, ecological communities and key threatening processes that will have the greatest impact on achieving the objectives of the EPBC Act.

Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment response: Agreed.

Recommendation No.2

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment regularly review, update and implement procedural guidance, training and quality assurance arrangements, to ensure listing assessments are conducted in an effective manner that meets legislative and procedural requirements.

Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment response: Agreed.

Recommendation No.3

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment establish arrangements to:

- ensure conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans are reviewed and updated; and
- ensure all reviews assess whether the objectives and actions of the plan have been completed.

Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment response: Agreed.

Recommendation No.4

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment:

- establish arrangements to obtain assurance over the implementation of conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans; and
- use the results of these arrangements to identify conservation advice, recovery plans or threat abatement plans that require departmental support or coordination.

Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment response: Agreed.

Recommendation No.5

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment measure its efficiency, timeliness and use of resources in listing assessments and conservation planning, and use these measures to inform a targeted approach to improving its timeliness and efficiency.

Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment response: Agreed.

Recommendation No.6

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment establish a framework for measurement, monitoring and reporting on listing assessments, conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans that includes:

OFFICIAL

- information on how listing assessments and the development and support for the implementation of conservation plans have contributed to the achievement of intended outcomes;
- aggregate output information on the department's progress against listing assessments and the development and implementation of conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans, to better support internal decision-making; and
- a schedule for periodic evaluation.

Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment response: Agreed.