

# Nationally Threatened Ecological Communities – Eucalypt Woodlands of the Western Australian Wheatbelt



**This guide is for farmers, local councils and other land managers who may have Eucalypt Woodlands on their properties.**

The Eucalypt Woodlands of the WA Wheatbelt (or WA Wheatbelt Woodlands) are nominated for protection as a nationally threatened ecological community under Australia’s national environment law, the EPBC Act. A **scientific** assessment is under way to determine if these woodlands are threatened and, if so, what should be protected and done to assist recovery. The proposed listing only considers patches that are **large** and remain in **good condition**.

**This guide briefly explains the proposed listing and its implications. A draft scientific assessment, or conservation advice, is available for comment. See back page for details of how to get consultation documents and provide information.**

Southwestern WA is an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot, known for its diverse and unique wildflowers and animals. Many are found nowhere else in the world.

Eucalypt woodlands are a signature natural asset that characterises the broad wheatbelt landscape in the southwest. They are important to local communities, landholders and to Indigenous (e.g. Nyungar/Noongar) cultures.

Eucalypt woodlands once formed extensive stands across a large proportion of the WA Wheatbelt. They provided important habitat for many unique animals.



But woodlands have significantly declined.



Woodlands are now fragmented, and reduced to small, scattered remnants, often with weeds. In many places, woodland trees are no longer regenerating and replacing themselves.

**Why are the WA Wheatbelt woodlands important?** It is worthwhile to encourage land managers to [expand the eucalypt woodlands](#) (and relate this to environmental benefits and agricultural productivity).

There are many reasons why it's important to keep what's left of the WA Wheatbelt Woodlands, and to recover or expand remnants. Woodlands provide benefits to the environment and to agricultural productivity.

**Woodlands supply much needed cover to help stabilise and moderate the regional climate, which has become drier and more hostile due to the loss of resilient perennial cover.**

Keeping intact woodland vegetation helps to minimise serious salinity and erosion problems. It helps prevent salt pans from forming or spreading, and the loss of valuable topsoil from farmlands.



Remaining woodlands provide vital habitat for many unique plants and animals. They include some that are now threatened, such as Carnaby's Black Cockatoo.

Some woodland birds help to control pest insects that attack crops. Native insects play an important role in pollination and pest control.

The mass wildflower displays of woodlands and shrublands are a major tourist attraction across the wheatbelt.



**In many cases, supportive farming practices have helped to retain woodland remnants. Some remnants have been intentionally set aside by farmers because they occur along watercourses, hills and rocky areas, or serve as shelter for stock, windbreaks for croplands and pastures, and to prevent erosion. These patches also are important for conservation by maintaining biodiversity and wildlife corridors. Listing is intended to further support farmers who want to continue managing remnants of good quality for future benefits. See page 5 for more details.**

**Where are the WA Wheatbelt Woodlands found?**

The listing proposal applies to eucalypt woodlands in the Wheatbelt area, between the Darling Range and the western edge of the Goldfields.

**The WA Wheatbelt Woodlands are scattered throughout the hatched area.**

The WA Wheatbelt Woodlands now occur as mostly small, scattered remnants, many of which are degraded.  
**The proposed listing only considers patches that are large and remain in good condition.**  
 [See page 5 for details.]



The Great Western Woodlands mostly lies further east of the Wheatbelt, well into the Goldfields region.  
**The Great Western Woodlands are NOT part of the proposed listing. EXCEPT for some patches in the Avon Wheatbelt and Western Mallee regions.**

Jarrah-Marri and coastal forests/ woodlands mostly lie west of the wheatbelt and are typical of the Darling Range and south coast.  
**Jarrah, Marri and other tall coastal forests are NOT part of the proposed listing – including any patches in the Wheatbelt.**

**What woodlands are proposed for protection as the WA Wheatbelt Woodlands?**

The WA Wheatbelt Woodlands are found on the flatter landscapes and lower rises of the wheatbelt (landscapes 1-4 in the diagram).

The main trees are eucalypts with a single trunk. The tree canopy has at least 10% canopy cover. A mostly native understorey remains.

The eucalypts include many iconic trees of the Wheatbelt landscape, like salmon gums and York gums.



Salt salmon gum

**2. Salt lakes / surrounds. Trees such as Kondinin blackbutt, Lake mallets, Swamp mallets, Salt River gum, Salt salmon gum.**

**WA Wheatbelt Woodlands will NOT include:**

- Mallee woodlands.
- Non-eucalypt woodlands, e.g. with jam, sheoak, banksia, etc.
- Woodlands associated with rock outcrops and higher elevations.
- Vegetation with a sparse tree cover, under 10%.
- Paddock trees, small or narrow treelines and shelterbelts, or other low condition patches (see page 5).

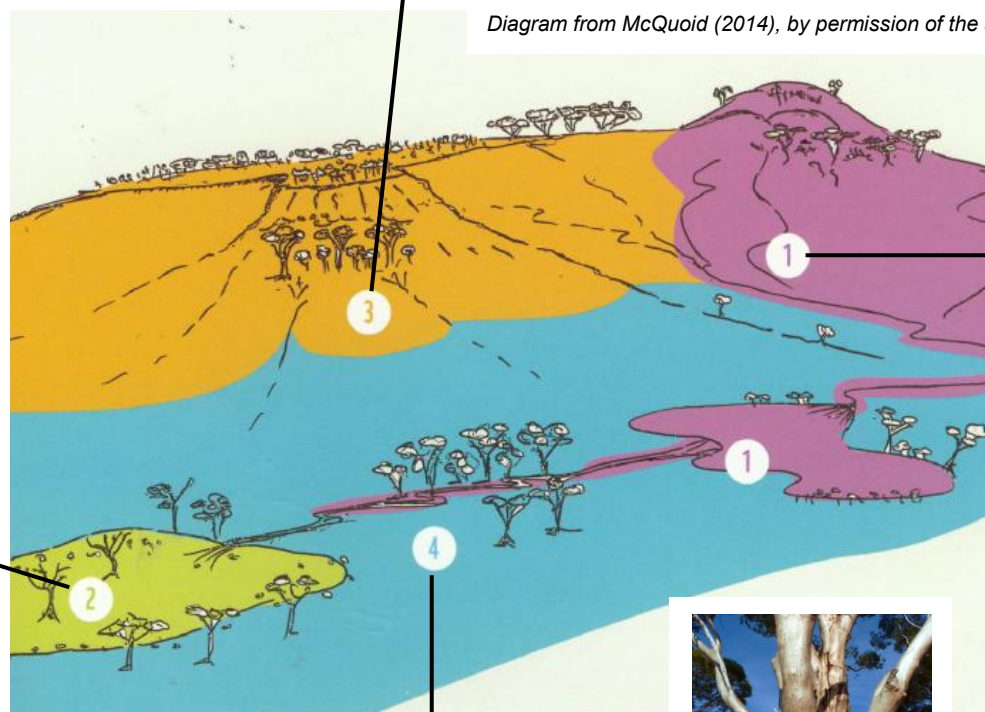


Diagram from McQuoid (2014), by permission of the author and publisher

**3. Breakaways and gravel rises. Trees such as various Mallets, Wheatbelt wandoo.**



Silver mallet

**1. Watercourses, wetlands & granite sands. Trees such as York gum, Flooded gum, Flat-topped yate.**



York gum

**4. Plains and valley floors. Trees such as Salmon gum, Red morrel, Gimlet, Merrit, Wandoo.**



Salmon gum

## How will the proposed listing affect developers and land managers?

Routine and existing, ongoing activities by farmers and business are not impacted by national listings. This has been the case for many ecological communities in other agricultural areas of Australia that have been listed. The main considerations are to seek: 1) approval first for any new activity that could significantly impact upon large, good quality patches of the woodland; and 2) funding opportunities to protect threatened communities and species on properties through Federal Government environment programmes (see link to website on next page).

### There are exemptions for ...

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

**Only new actions that may significantly affect a large, good quality patch of the ecological community need to be referred for approval. For instance, plans to convert high quality woodland remnants into crops, improved pastures or developments need to obtain approval first.**

### Environmental funding is available

**Land managers who retain high quality woodlands, or are seeking to restore high quality woodlands, on their properties may be able to seek funding to support their activities.**

National environmental funding programmes, such as the Green Army, Landcare and 20 Million Trees programmes are all under way. Many projects specifically target threatened species and ecological communities on properties.

### Condition thresholds apply

**National protection applies to woodland remnants that are large and in GOOD condition. These are now rare.**

To be considered large and in good condition, remnants on private land and other non-roadside land must have:

- a mostly native understorey (more than 50% cover of native plants); AND
- a minimum patch size of either.
  - o 5 hectares; OR
  - o 2 hectares IF the understorey has less than 30% total weed cover, or the woodland has 5 or more large, older trees per half hectare.

The condition of roadside remnants follows the methods of the Roadside Conservation Committee of WA – see next page for a link. Roadside native vegetation is managed by the State Government or by local councils

**Shelterbelts and windbreaks on farms, and narrow road verges, will usually be too small or too degraded to form part of the ecological community. Most patches left on farms, and many roadsides will fall outside the proposed listing.**



The paddock trees and stands on farms in this wheatbelt landscape are too small or degraded to be part of the WA Wheatbelt Woodlands.

Intact woodlands most likely remain in the reserve around the lake or along some road verges, e.g. in the foreground.

### What if I do have woodlands?

National protection focuses on new actions likely to cause serious damage to large areas of intact woodlands. For instance, new mines, major new road works, new housing and industrial developments, or proposals to convert large areas of intact woodlands for intensive grazing or cropping.

**Land developers should talk with the Australian Government Environment Department first to see if the action may significantly impact the woodlands and need to be referred for approval.**

### **Consultation on the proposed listing.**

The WA Wheatbelt Woodlands was nominated and accepted for assessment in 2011. The assessment is currently due to be completed by 31 July 2015.

Further information about the listing and consultation process, including draft documents open for comment are available online at the Department of the Environment:  
<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/comment>

The formal comment period closes on **30 June 2015**.

If you require more information or time to comment then please contact us:  
[epbc.nominations@environment.gov.au](mailto:epbc.nominations@environment.gov.au) or phone 1800 803 772

### **Want more information?**

Nathan McQuoid (2014). *Lifting the bonnet on Wheatbelt woodlands*. WWF.

Malcolm French (2012). *Eucalypts of Western Australia's Wheatbelt*

Farmnote 141/2000 *The value and benefits of healthy farm bush*.

[http://archive.agric.wa.gov.au/objtwr/imported\\_assets/content/lwe/vegt/rv/f14100.pdf](http://archive.agric.wa.gov.au/objtwr/imported_assets/content/lwe/vegt/rv/f14100.pdf)

Roadside Conservation Committee of WA

<http://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/off-reserve-conservation/roadside-conservation> especially their guide: *Assessing roadsides – a guide for rating conservation value* available through their Publications site.

Australian Government Department of the Environment – Farmers page

<http://www.environment.gov.au/land/farmers>

Australian Government environmental funding programmes (Green Army, National Landcare, 20 Million Trees): <http://www.environment.gov.au/about-us/grants-funding>

Contact your local NRM office or website

e.g. Wheatbelt NRM: <http://www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au/>