

Biodiversity science and the law

April 7 2016, by John Bailey, Sciencenetwork Wa



Last year the numbat (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*) was added onto the threatened species list. Credit: S J Bennett

One of the challenges facing biodiversity conservation is the integration of scientific knowledge and government decision-making.

Biodiversity science—both taxonomy and applied biology/ecology—operates on a long timeframe, while government is

often locked into a three or four year electoral cycle.

This mismatch is critical in WA where we have more than 10,000 plant species with 8,000 of those in the south-west region.

This high level of biodiversity and the threat it is facing from land clearing and climate change have led to it being recognised as one of only 35 international biodiversity hot spots.

To ensure that biodiversity science receives the consideration that it warrants requires many dominoes to line up: institutions to undertake that science with adequate funding, well trained scientists, and the accumulation of good data.

In addition, legislation is vital to ensure the integration needed.

The Leeuwin Group was established to argue for a proper role for biodiversity and environmental science.

The Leeuwin Group is an independent group of eminent scientists in their field who are committed to the conservation and protection of WA's biodiversity and natural environment.

Given the critical importance of WA's biodiversity the group's first project has been to prepare advice on the Biodiversity Conservation Bill 2015.

New biodiversity legislation is urgently needed in Western Australia and the government is to be commended for introducing the Bill into Parliament.

The Bill contains many long awaited features; e.g., statutory recognition for threatened ecological communities and provisions for recovery plans.

However, there are areas where best practice in the application of science to [biodiversity conservation](#) has not been achieved.

The Leeuwin Group believes that protecting the state's unique biodiversity must be underpinned by good science.

As they stand at present the objects of the Bill are inconsistent in mandating both conservation and use of biodiversity, without one prevailing over the other.

Research confirms that effective legislation must avoid internal inconsistencies and conflicts.

To increase the science underpinning the proposed law this inconsistency must be removed, and two additional objects added:

- To prepare, promote and regularly report on the effectiveness of a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy; and
- To ensure the progressive undertaking of comprehensive biodiversity surveys across the terrestrial and marine environments of the state.

A means to include the latest independent scientific thinking in decision-making about threatened species and communities, and threatening processes is essential.

The Bill must include an independent science-based advisory committee to advise the minister on threatened species, communities and threatening processes.

Its adoption in WA would bring us into current best practice.

The Leeuwin Group is particularly concerned that the new Bill allows

the approval of "taking" a [threatened species](#) even if it becomes extinct or to allow a threatened ecological community to be destroyed.

It is essential that these endangered elements of the state's [biodiversity](#) retain the highest level of protection.

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

Provided by Science Network WA

Citation: Biodiversity science and the law (2016, April 7) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-04-biodiversity-science-law.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--