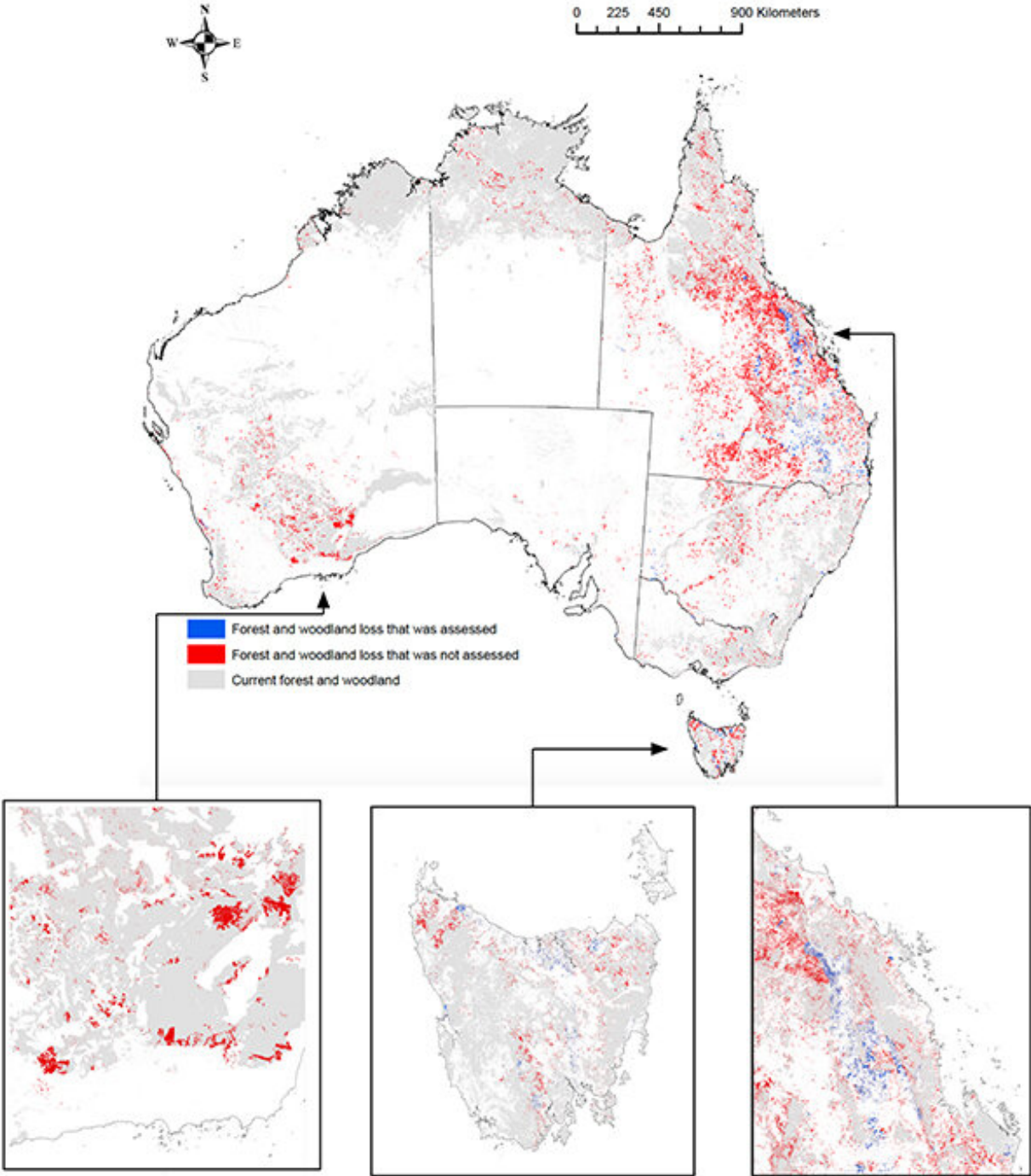


Threatened species habitat destruction shows federal laws are broken

September 9 2019, by Eleanor Fischer



Credit: University of Queensland

Human activities have destroyed more than 7.7 million hectares of

threatened species habitat, revealing critical failures with Australia's federal environmental protection laws.

A University of Queensland-led study has revealed that less than seven percent of this destruction was referred to the Federal Government for assessment, scrutiny required under Australia's flagship environmental legislation, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

Lead author and Ph.D. candidate in UQ's School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Michelle Ward, said habitat for our most imperiled species should be regulated, maintained, and fully protected.

"It's alarming for a species to lose 25 percent of its habitat in less than two decades—it must be addressed," she said. "Species threatened with extinction are a matter of national environmental significance and need to be protected and conserved."

The authors looked at the distributions of 1,638 terrestrial threatened species, terrestrial migratory species and threatened ecological communities, quantifying the loss of potential habitat and communities since the EPBC Act came into force.

The team found that more than 7.7 million hectares of potential habitat and communities were cleared between 2000 and 2017.

While 1,390 or 84 percent of species suffered loss, the Mount Cooper striped skink, Keighery's macarthuria and the Southern black-throated finch lost 25 percent, 23 percent and 10 percent of potential habitat respectively.

The koala lost approximately one million hectares of habitat since 2000.

Dr. Martin Taylor from the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia, one of the paper's senior authors, said it was a national scandal which should outrage the community. "It's hard for any reasonable person to see how seven million hectares of unassessed, unapproved destruction of threatened [species habitat](#) can be other than unlawful. The government is failing to enforce a law designed to halt Australia's extinction crisis. It's as if the cops are asleep at the wheel, while all the shops up and down the street are looted. Most of the destruction is to create livestock pasture. Why are agricultural developers not referring their clearing for assessment? This cannot be allowed to continue," he said.

The Federal Government will begin reviewing the EPBC Act no later than October 2019.

The study was published in *Conservation Science and Practice*.

More information: Michelle S. Ward et al. Lots of loss with little scrutiny: The attrition of habitat critical for threatened species in Australia, *Conservation Science and Practice* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/csp2.117](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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