

MEDIA STATEMENT



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AUDITOR GENERAL FINDS NUMBER OF THREATENED SPECIES INCREASING AND FEW ARE IMPROVING

With WA's list of threatened species now over 600 and rising, Auditor General Colin Murphy has found that recovery action is not happening for most, and few are improving.

In his report tabled in Parliament today titled, Rich and Rare: Conservation of Threatened Species, Mr Murphy found that, in many areas, the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) is not providing effective protection and recovery to WA's threatened flora and fauna.

"Only a handful of threatened species are actually recovering, while the number of species on the list continues to grow," Mr Murphy said.

"My office has found that only one in five threatened fauna, and fewer than half of threatened flora species have recovery plans, and those plans that are in place are often not fully implemented."

The report also found that DEC's \$8.2 million threatened species program prioritises recovery plans and actions towards critically endangered species, leaving vulnerable and endangered species at increased risk of decline.

A major obstacle to DEC's performance is the long delay in drafting a Biodiversity Conservation Act, to replace the existing Wildlife Conservation Act 1950. DEC has pursued updated legislation for over 20 years.

The current legislation restricts DEC's ability to effectively conserve threatened species; existing protection measures are largely inadequate, and DEC does not have the power to access threatened species on private property to implement much-needed conservation action.

The report found that multi-species approaches to conservation can be effective in dealing with the growing number of threatened species.

"DEC is undertaking a number of multi-species approaches. For example, the Western Shield program has improved the status of several native mammals," Mr Murphy said.

"DEC is also acquiring land to secure species habitat, but less than half the nationally agreed target has been reserved in WA."

The Auditor General's report found a number of other areas for improvement, particularly:

- DEC cannot demonstrate that all of its threatened species conservation activities are effective.
- DEC has not identified habitat critical to the survival of all threatened species.
- State and Commonwealth threatened species lists are not aligned and 190 WA species do not receive protection from the Commonwealth Government.

"Increasing numbers of threatened species and the size of WA present a significant challenge for DEC," Mr Murphy said.

"Achieving the right balance between programs which benefit large numbers of species at once, with those targeted at individual species' needs, will be critical."

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