

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

Copy to

PDR: MB17-000009

Secretary
Mr Papps
Mr Andrews
Ms Callister
Chief of Staff

To: Minister for the Environment and Energy (For Information)

HEYFIELD TIMBER MILL, LA TROBE VALLEY, VICTORIA

s22

Recommendation:

- 1. That you note long-term timber supply issues for the Australian Sustainable Hardwoods sawmill.

Noted / Please discuss

Minister:

Date:

Comments:

Clearing Officer: Sent:20/01/17	Jo Elphinstone	Acting Assistant Secretary, Program Support Branch, Biodiversity Conservation Division	Ph: 6275 9659 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	s22	Acting Director, Forests and Strategic Policy Branch Biodiversity Conservation Division	Ph: s22

Key Points:

- 1. Australian Sustainable Hardwoods operates the Heyfield Timber Mill (the Mill). The Mill is the largest hardwood processor in Australia and employs about 250 staff. The Mill processes Victorian ash species hardwood, including from the central highlands, home of the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum. s22

s22 - material irrelevant to scope of request



5. The future of Victorian forests is the focus of the Victorian Forest Industry Taskforce (the Taskforce) established by the State Government in late 2015, to make recommendations about how best to ensure industry growth, secure jobs and protect threatened species such as the Leadbeater's possum in Victoria's forest. The Taskforce consists of representatives from industry, unions and environmental non-government organisations.
6. The Leadbeater's possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) is a focus of the Taskforce. The Leadbeater's possum is the Victorian faunal emblem and protected under Victorian species legislation. It was also uplisted under the EPBC Act from Endangered to Critically Endangered in 2015. Its range is in the Victorian Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement Area which is adjacent to the Gippsland area. The Leadbeater's possum was identified for emergency intervention under the Australian Government's Threatened Species Strategy.

7. **s47C**

8. The new recovery plan has now been endorsed by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee and will shortly be provided to you to be 'made' (in force under law) under the EPBC Act.
9. If the proposed actions in the plan were implemented, noting there is no legal requirement to do so, timber harvesting operations within the Victorian Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement Area would be affected. The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources advise that the Central Highlands provides high commercial value forest.
10. Once in place, the recovery plan does not place any obligation on the State or other parties to implement actions. The extent of impacts to the forestry industry will depend on the extent to which relevant actions are agreed to and implemented by responsible agencies. These issues are identified in the draft plan. They are a key focus for the Taskforce.

11. **s22**

12.

13.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 35
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Program: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division (WHM)
Topic: Leadbeater's possum recovery plan
Hansard Page: -
Question Date: 14 March 2017
Question Type: Written

Senator Rice asked:

Has the National Recovery Plan for the Leadbeater's Possum been finalised? If not, when will it be?

Answer:

No, the National Recovery Plan for the Leadbeater's possum has not been finalised. The Department is preparing advice for the Minister, including on the 3,700 submissions which were received during the public comment period.

The Department anticipates providing this advice to the Minister in mid-2017.

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 36
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Program: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division (WHM)
Topic: Leadbeater's possum recovery plan
Hansard Page: -
Question Date: 14 March 2017
Question Type: Written



Senator Rice asked:

Has the National Recovery Plan for the Leadbeater's Possum been provided to Minister Frydenberg? If so:

- a) when was it provided?
- b) was it the final plan or some other version (draft or otherwise)?

Answer:

No, the National Recovery Plan for the Leadbeater's possum has not been provided to Minister Frydenberg.

MO REVIEW / CLEARANCE

Adviser: **s47F**Date: 21/4/17

CoS: **s47F**Date: 27/4

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 37
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Program: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division (WHM)
Topic: Leadbeater's possum recovery plan
Hansard Page: -
Question Date: 14 March 2017
Question Type: Written



Senator Rice asked:

Has Minister Frydenberg asked the Victorian government for its support for the release of the National Recovery plan for the Leadbeater's Possum? In particular, has Minister Frydenberg asked the Victorian Environment Minister for her support for the release and/or the substance of the plan?

Answer:

The Department is not aware of Minister Frydenberg having asked either the Victorian Government, or the Victorian Environment Minister, for support for the release and / or the substance of the plan.

MO REVIEW / CLEARANCE

Adviser: **s47F**Date: 21/4/17
CoS: **s47F**Date: 27/4

Copy to: **To:** Minister for the Environment and Energy (For Information)

Secretary
Mr Knudson
Ms Jonasson
Mr Oxley

MEETING WITH RUSSELL BROADBENT MP, GARY BLACKWOOD MLA, AND TIM BULL MLA ABOUT LEADBEATER'S POSSUM AND HEYFIELD SAWMILL IN VICTORIA

Chief of Staff

Timing: For meeting on 24 March at 8.30 am at your Electorate Office.

s22

Recommendation:			
1. That you note the contents in preparation for your meeting.			
			Noted / Please discuss
Minister:			Date:
Clearing Officer: Sent:24/3/2017	Matthew Dadswell	Assistant Secretary Program Support Branch	Ph: 02 6275 9659 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	s22	Director 20 Million Trees and Forest Policy	Ph: 02 s22 Mob: s22

Meeting with: Mr Russell Broadbent MP, Mr Gary Blackwood MLA, and Mr Tim Bull MLA to discuss Leadbeater's Possum (possum) and implications for the Heyfield Timber Mill (mill).

What we want: To explain that Commonwealth actions (up-listing and recovery planning) relating to Leadbeater's possum are not responsible for uncertainty of timber supply for the mill. Emphasise that operational supply is a state matter.

What they want: To highlight community concerns surrounding potential mill closure.

Issues and Sensitivities:

1. The supply of the mill is a matter for the Victorian Government and VicForests. National forest policy, including Regional Forest Agreements (agreements) and wood supply issues are the responsibility of the Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston
2. The draft possum recovery plan was considered by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee late 2016. The department is finalising a briefing package for your consideration.
3. Under the Regional Forest Agreement for the region, the recovery plan will not place binding obligations on Victoria or other parties to implement actions.

Consultation: YES

Attachments:

- A:** Talking points and background

Talking Points

Leadbeater's possum and Heyfield Mill – Talking Points and Background

- Timber supply and species protection in Victoria forests is a Victorian Government responsibility.
- The 200m radius timber harvesting exclusion zone around known Leadbeater's possum colonies is a Victorian Government policy established in 2014.
- The Government continues to view Regional Forest Agreements as the most effective way of achieving a balance between environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Should questions be raised about the Leadbeater's possum uplisting in 2015.

- Leadbeater's possum was uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered under the EPBC Act in April 2015. In making this decision, the then Minister considered advice provided by the independent Threatened Species Scientific Committee, submissions from experts, interested organisations and the wider community.
- The Leadbeater's possum is also listed under State law.
- Any inference that the critically endangered status of the possum under Federal law has impacted on the availability of timber resources for the Central Highlands forestry industry, and in particular the Heyfield Mill, is not correct.

Background

Attendees:

Russell Broadbent, MP, Federal Liberal Member for McMillian

Gary Blackwood, MLA, Victorian Member for Narracan (The Nationals)

Tim Bull, MLA, Victorian Member for Gippsland East (The Nationals)

Russell Broadbent MP has publicly stated –

“Not only is this mill important to Heyfield but it affects 7,000 more jobs across my region and into outer Melbourne”. <http://www.russellbroadbent.com.au/2017/02/08/putting-australia-first/>

Gary Blackwood MLA has stated –

‘Th[e] [possum] has had a direct and potentially disastrous impact on the Victorian native forest industry, in particular Australian Sustainable Hardwoods (ASH) in Heyfield.
<http://garyblackwood.com.au/?p=494>

Tim Bull MLA has stated –

“It was pleasing to hear Matthew (Guy, state opposition leader) state quite clearly that Gippsland jobs are a priority, that he recognises the importance of ASH to Heyfield and the region and the mill must be kept open by providing it with the necessary timber supply,”

<http://www.timbull.com.au/newsroom/media/728-guy-commits-to-supporting-heyfield-mill>

Heyfield Mill: Australian Sustainable Hardwoods operates the mill. It is the largest hardwood processor in Australia and employs about 250 staff. The mill processes Victorian ash species hardwood, including from the central highlands, home of the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum. The mill is supplied by state-owned logging company VicForests. ^{s22}

s22 - material irrelevant to scope

Copy to

To: Minister for the Environment and Energy (For Information)

Secretary
Mr Knudson
Ms Jonasson

LEADBEATER'S POSSUM UPDATE

Chief of Staff

s22

Recommendations:			
1. That you note the information relevant to consideration of a re-assessment of the status of Leadbeater's possum under the EPBC Act.			
			Noted / Please discuss
Minister:		Date:	
Comments:			
Clearing Officer: Sent: 31/03/17	Geoff Richardson	AS, Protected Species and Communities Branch	Ph: 02 6274 2531 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	s22	Director, Terrestrial Threatened Species	Ph: 02 s22 Mob: s22

Key Points:

1. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, has written to you outlining his concerns about the impact of Leadbeater's possum protection buffer zones on timber harvest volumes. He requested that you immediately consider reviewing the species' listing status (**Attachment A**).
2. The Leadbeater's possum was uplisted from the *Endangered* to *Critically Endangered* category under the EPBC Act in April 2015. The assessment was based on all available scientific data and undertaken on the possum's entire distribution across all land tenures.
3. Monitoring and modelling data demonstrate that the conservation future for Leadbeater's possum is precarious. Under current conditions, it is predicted the species will continue on a downward trajectory for at least another 50 years, before regrowth trees from the 1939 fires start to form hollows (for nesting) - the next five to six decades may represent a 'bottleneck' after which the Leadbeater's possum habitat extent may increase.
4. In its 2015 uplisting assessment, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee concluded that the population of the species had declined by more than 80 per cent over its last three generations (18 years). It was projected to decline by more than 80 per cent over its next three generations.
5. Assessment of the decline primarily focused on three causes: decline as a result of fire, decline as a result of harvesting (mainly clearfelling, but also thinning), and decline in habitat quality due to loss, without equivalent replacement, of hollow-bearing trees.
6. Background information on Leadbeater's possum ecology and distribution is at **Attachment B** and distribution maps are at **Attachment C**.

Threatened Species Strategy and recovery plan

7. At the time of uplisting in 2015 the then Minister, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, decided that the species still required a recovery plan and that the current plan needed review and revision.
8. The Australian Government's Threatened Species Strategy identifies the Leadbeater's possum as one of two mammals for emergency intervention. Minister Hunt released the emergency intervention – in the form of the Leadbeater's Possum Action Plan – in August 2015 (**Attachment D**).
 - a. He set a target to develop a new recovery plan within a year. The statutory timeframe for finalisation of the new plan is April 2018.
 - b. A revised recovery plan for Leadbeater's possum has been drafted and endorsed by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee. It recommends that the plan be made under the EPBC Act.

Core habitat – Central Highlands

9. The core habitat of Leadbeater's possum is within the area covered by the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement (RFA). Its management is the responsibility of the Victorian Government (further information on RFAs at **Attachment E**).
10. The 2009 Victorian bushfires burnt extensive areas across much of the Central Highlands RFA area, including 34% of the extent of montane ash forest and sub-alpine (snow gum) woodland – areas of potential Leadbeater's possum habitat.
11. In June 2013, the Victorian Government established the Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group (LPAG) to provide recommendations to government aimed at supporting the recovery of the possum while maintaining a sustainable timber industry in the Central Highlands following the bushfires. In 2014, the Victorian Government accepted all 13 LPAG recommendations and is investing \$11 million to implement these.
12. Prescriptions for forestry management including the 200m exclusion (buffer) zones around Leadbeater's possum's colonies are established and implemented by the Victorian Government. They were introduced through the Victorian LPAG process in 2014, before the species uplisting under the EPBC Act.
13. The Victorian Government is undertaking a review, to be completed in April 2017, of the effectiveness of these buffer zones in supporting the recovery of the possum and to assess their impact on the timber industry.
14. This review will also clarify how much production forest has been set aside by the Victorian Government to protect the Leadbeater's possum.
 - a. Verbal advice from the Victorian Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning is that if there were no buffers around any LBP colonies (including colonies identified since the 2014 prescriptions were applied), there would be ~5,000 ha of additional forest available for sustainable harvest
 - b. This represents ~8 per cent of the 62,600 Ha of production forest in the Central Highlands.

Recent surveys for Leadbeater's possum

15. Accurately estimating population size for Leadbeater's possum is difficult. There is no precise and robust estimate of the total population size for Leadbeater's possum. Recent published total population estimates range from ~ 3,000 – 11,000.
16. There have been substantial recent surveys for Leadbeater's possum, as part of the Victorian Government's effort to implement the LPAG's recommendations to facilitate establishing timber harvesting exclusion zones around known colonies. As a result of this, the number of sites with confirmed records for this species is increasing.
17. In his letter, the Deputy Prime Minister offered the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to lead survey work in the conservation estate to assist a review of the possum's status. For practical reasons, any Commonwealth-led surveys would have to be done in cooperation with the Victorian Government.
18. Advice from the Victorian Government is that in the current year of surveys (2016/17), they are surveying approximately 150 sites across the species range, in all land tenures including parks and reserves, and across unburnt areas and areas burnt in 2009.
19. The increasing number of sighting records reflects increased and more effective sampling effort and is important for protection of known colonies, and for refinement of distributional modelling and for population estimation. It is unclear if they indicate that the species is more widespread and numerous, and hence more secure, than previously recognised. In addition, the long term viability of colonies of possums reported at many of these newly recorded sites is unknown.

Reassessment of listing status

20. Should a re-assessment of the Leadbeater's possum status under the EPBC Act be considered, the legislation does not allow for unilateral changes to be made by you to the list of threatened species.
21. You can initiate a review of a species' status by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee at any time. The Committee must undertake public consultation on the available evidence about the species' threatened status before making a recommendation to you about whether to change the current listing level.
 - a. The usual assessment period is up to three years. Given that an assessment was only recently undertaken, this period could be significantly shortened.
22. In making a decision to amend the list of threatened species, including changes in listing status, you may only consider the species' eligibility for listing against the statutory criteria, or the effect listing is having or may have on a species' survival (s186(2)). Social and economic factors are not a relevant consideration, but can be considered later when approving actions that may significantly impact a listed species.
23. In making a decision to delete a species from the list, you must be satisfied that it is no longer eligible, and that the listing is not contributing to the survival of the species (s186(2A)). In making a decision to amend the list you must consider advice from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

Attachments

- A** Letter from the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP requesting a review of the Leadbeater's possum status – 26 March 2017
- B:** Leadbeater's possum ecology and distribution background information
- C:** Leadbeater's possum distribution maps – with/without 2009 bushfire overlay
- D** Leadbeater's Possum Action Plan
- E** Regional Forest Agreements background information

1. Leadbeater's possum is a very small (100 – 160g), nocturnal possum. Endemic to Victoria, it's the state's faunal emblem.
2. Thought to be previously extinct, the species was rediscovered in 1961. Almost all records are restricted to an approximate area of 3,000 km², or about 70 kilometres north-south x 80kilometres east-west, in the Victorian Central Highlands (Map 1). There is a separate and very small genetically distinct lowland population at Yellingbo.
3. Leadbeater's possum habitat is usually defined as montane ash forest dominated by mountain ash, alpine ash and shining gum with a dense understorey of *Acacia* and an abundance of large hollow-bearing trees. The species also inhabits sub-alpine woodland.
4. Within its main range in the Central Highlands, the species is patchily distributed with distributional gaps due to areas of unsuitable vegetation types, or due to temporary or permanent loss of suitable habitat because of loss of hollows, fires or timber harvesting.
5. Leadbeater's possum's live in small communal social groups 'colonies' of two to twelve individuals, with colonies normally including only one containing one breeding pair. These possums need suitable (large) hollows for denning and breeding, with multiple den sites within any single colony's home range.
6. Leadbeater's possums feed on carbohydrate-rich plant and insect secretions (e.g. sap, manna, honeydew) and invertebrates.
7. Density of hollow-bearing trees is recognised as a critical habitat feature. There are strong and quantified links between the abundance of hollow-bearing trees and the occurrence of Leadbeater's possum, with nest hollow availability the limiting factor to population size. The Leadbeater's possum typically selects hollow-bearing trees that are 190 - 450 years old as it takes a long period for the trees to form suitable and sufficiently abundant hollows.
8. The best habitat occurs in a multi-aged forest where the large trees, dead or live, provide hollows, and regenerating vegetation (younger forests) with a dense mid-storey provides food and movement pathways
9. The primary threats to Leadbeater's possum are habitat loss and ongoing deterioration of habitat quality including loss of vegetation type and structure. These threats result in a loss in the species' ability to shelter, breed, disperse, and feed. This situation has resulted in immediate population decline as well as ongoing decline in reproduction rates.
10. Leadbeater's possums are not found on burned sites, including those subject to low and moderate severity fire, or in clearfell logged or regenerated montane ash forest where hollow-bearing trees are largely absent, until required conditions have been restored.
11. Surveys have demonstrated that Leadbeater's possums have failed to persist in almost all areas burnt in the 2009 bushfire. That fire burnt extensive areas across much of the distribution of the species, including 34 per cent of the extent of montane ash forest and sub-alpine (snow gum) woodland potential habitat and 45 per cent of the Leadbeater's possum reserve system.

12. Almost all of the known distribution of Leadbeater's possum is on public land, managed as state forest or as conservation reserves. Some of the largest reserved areas in this range also serve as closed water catchments.
13. Of the just over 200,000 ha of 'potential habitat' (montane ash forest and snow gum woodland) within the range of Leadbeater's possum, 34 per cent is in dedicated conservation reserves, 31 per cent is available for timber harvesting and the rest is in state forests with some prescribed protective measures through informal reserves (Special Protection Zones) or prescriptions (Table 1).
14. It is unclear from the published information, what proportion of the state forest areas are set aside specifically for Leadbeater's possum protection and management.

Table 1. Tenure of lands in 'potential habitat' of Leadbeater's possum, as defined by Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group 2014.

Land use	Area (ha)	% total area
National parks and other permanent formal reserves	69,200	34
Special Protection Zones – reserves in State forest managed for a range of environmental reasons, including Leadbeater's Possum	29,300	14
State forest available for timber harvesting but excluded from harvesting due to biodiversity, regulatory, operational and prescriptive reasons	43,300	21
State forest available for timber harvesting and projected to be harvested	62,600	31
Total area of potential habitat within the range of Leadbeater's Possum in the Central Highlands (all ash forests and Snow Gum woodlands)	204,400	100

1. The core habitat of Leadbeater's possum is within the area covered by the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement; its management is the responsibility of the Victorian Government. Within the Central Highlands RFA area, forestry operations undertaken in accordance with the RFA do not require consideration under the EPBC Act.

s22 - material irrelevant to scope





The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP

**Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources
Leader of The Nationals
Federal Member for New England**

Ref: MC17-002327

The Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP
Minister for the Environment and Energy
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2601

26 MAR 2017

Dear Minister

Following discussions between yourself and Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston, you would be aware that there has been considerable concern about the impact of Leadbeater's possum protection buffer zones in the Central Highlands region of Victoria.

The current listing of the Leadbeater's possum as critically endangered and the associated impact of prescriptions, such as the 200 meter buffer zone (12.6 ha) around possum colonies, is impacting on sustainable timber harvest volumes and the ability of the Victorian forests to meet timber needs for the Victorian forest industry.

I'm aware that recent surveys, undertaken predominantly in the production estate, have found significant number of new colonies over the last two years, including in forest types other than ash and snowgum and in regrowth areas (including areas burnt as recently as the 2009 bushfires).

Recognising the availability of this new information, I request you immediate consider commencing work to review the status of the Leadbeater's possum listing. It is important that this review includes an assessment of the possum's presence in both the production and the conservation estate.

I am prepared for my Department to lead the survey work in the conservation estate to complement the work that has been undertaken in the production estate, in order to assist your Department in undertaking this review.

I encourage you to work with Senator Ruston in progressing this matter.

Yours sincerely

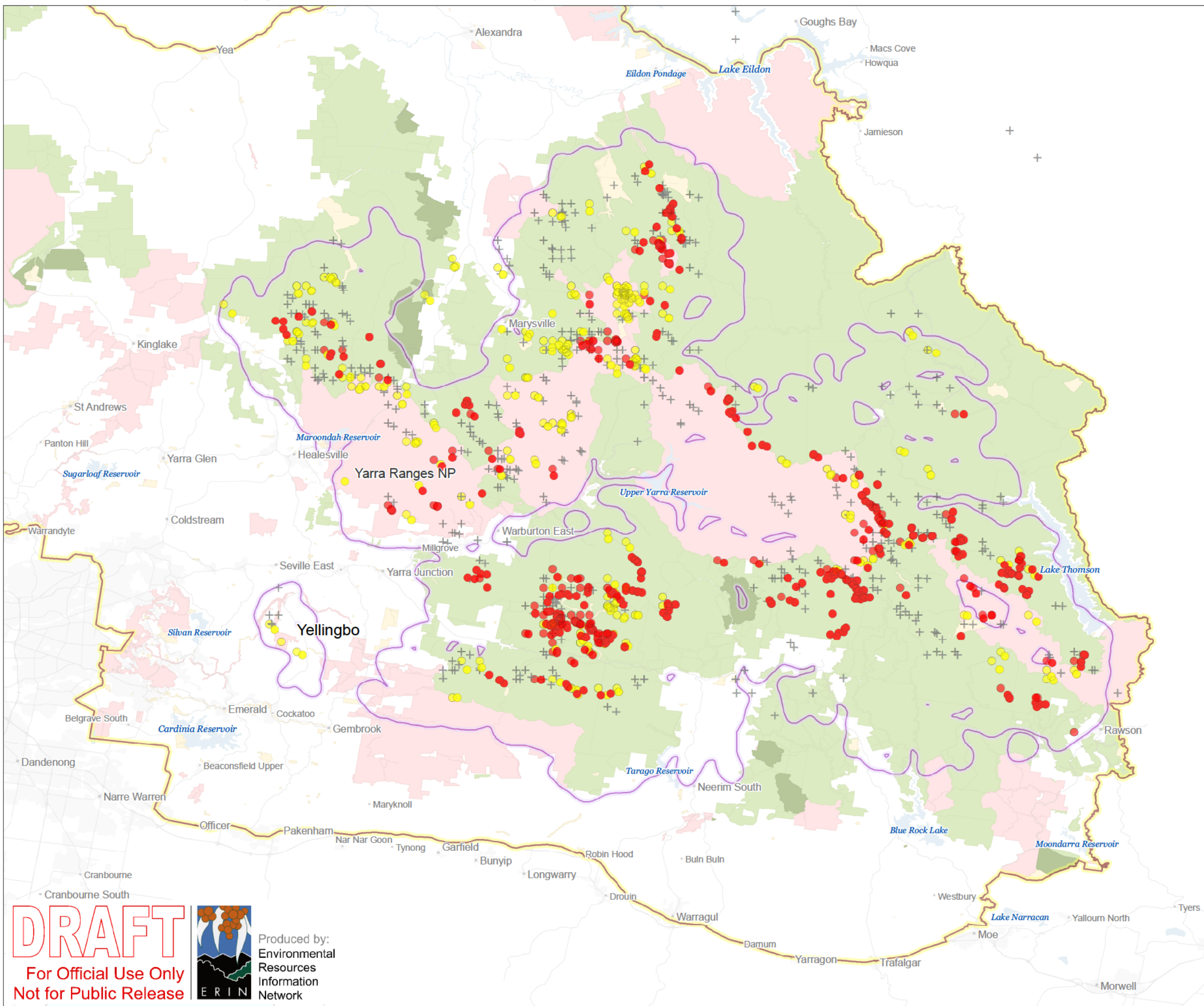
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Barnaby Joyce'.

Barnaby Joyce MP

Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) records



Australian Government
Department of the Environment and Energy



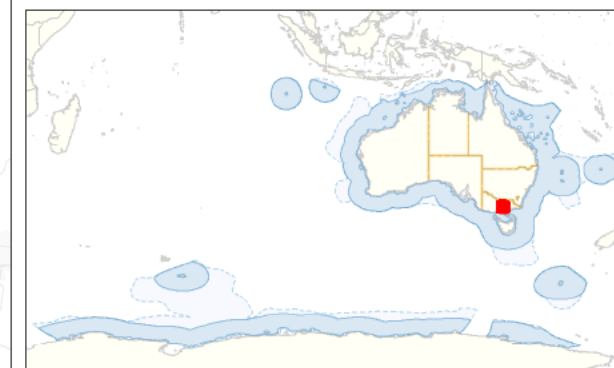
Legend

- Post-2009 Records
- 1990-2008 Records
- +
- 1960-1989 Records
- Outline of indicative Leadbeater's Possum distribution
- Central Highlands RFA
- Cities & Towns
- Roads
- Lakes/Reservoirs
- Non-perennial Lakes
- Public Land Management (PLM25)**
- Conservation Parks and Reserves
- Other Parks and Reserves
- State Forest
- Plantations

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Caveat: The information presented in this map has been provided by a range of groups and agencies. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and completeness, no guarantee is given, nor responsibility taken by the Commonwealth for errors or omissions, and the Commonwealth does not accept responsibility in respect of any information or advice given in relation to, or as a consequence of, anything containing herein.

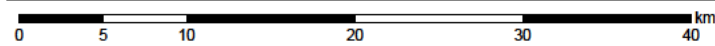
Contextual data sources:
The State of Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2015), *Public Land Management (PLM25)*
Dept. of the Environment (2015), *Species of National Environmental Significance Database*
Dept. of the Environment (2012), *Collaborative Aust. Protected Areas Database*
Geoscience Australia (2006), *GEODATA TOPO 250K Series 3*
Geoscience Australia (2006), *Aust. Maritime Boundaries*



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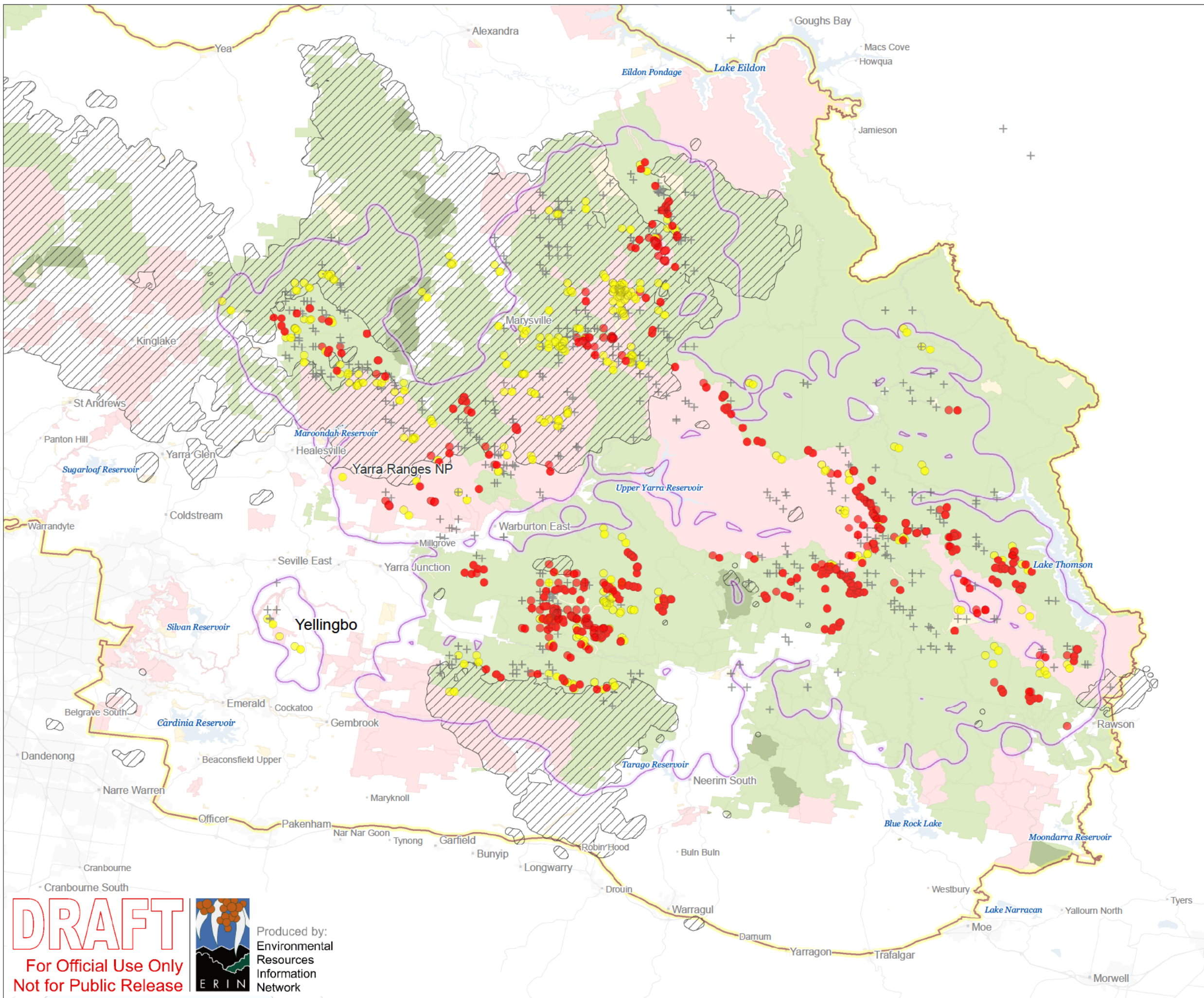
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Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) records - with 2009 bushfire extent



Australian Government
Department of the Environment and Energy

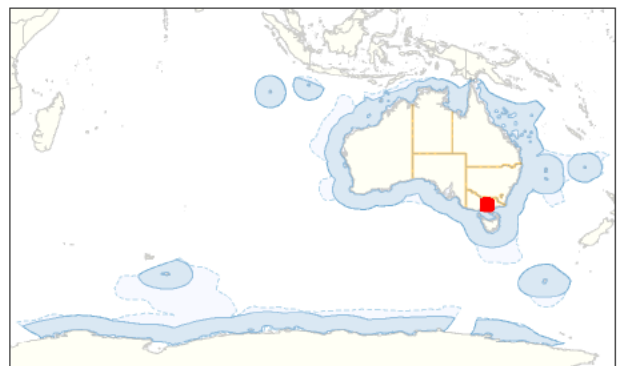


- Legend**
- Post-2009 Records
 - 1990-2008 Records
 - + 1960-1989 Records
 - Outline of indicative Leadbeater's Possum distribution
 - ▨ 2009 Bushfire Boundary
 - ▭ Central Highlands RFA
 - Cities & Towns
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 - Plantations

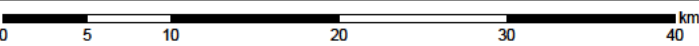
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Contextual data sources:
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 Dept. of the Environment (2015), *Species of National Environmental Significance Database*
 Dept. of the Environment (2012), *Collaborative Aust. Protected Areas Database*
 Geoscience Australia (2006), *GEODATA TOPO 250K Series 3*
 Geoscience Australia (2006), *Aust. Maritime Boundaries*



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Copy to:

To: Minister for the Environment and Energy (For Decision)

Secretary
Mr Knudson
Ms Jonasson
Mr Oxley
Ms Brunaro
Mr Tregurtha
Dr West
Mr Papps

**2017 FINALISED PRIORITY ASSESSMENT LIST – THREATENED SPECIES,
ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES AND KEY THREATENING PROCESSES**

Timing: 10 August 2017 – 20 business days from the receipt of advice (statutory deadline).

Chief of Staff
s22

Recommendations:

1. That you agree to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's Proposed Priority Assessment List for species and ecological communities (**Attachment D**) becoming the Finalised Priority Assessment List.

Agreed / Not agreed

s22 -material irrelevant to scope

Agreed / Not agreed

3. That you agree to the Committee's proposed assessment completion times in **Attachment D**.

Agreed / Not agreed

s22

Agreed / Not agreed

5. That you sign the letter to the Chair of the Committee at **Attachment M**.

Signed / Not signed

Signatory:



Date:

Comments:

4/8/17
Please include the headbatter position on this years list with the assessment time frame by 31 March 18.

Clearing Officer: Sent 14/7/17	Kylie Jonasson	First Assistant Secretary, Biodiversity Conservation Division	Ph: 02 6159 7286 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	Geoff Richardson	Assistant Secretary, Protected Species and Communities Branch	Ph: 02 6274 2531 Mob: s22

Key Points:

1. The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* maintains lists of threatened species and ecological communities and key threatening processes, which can only be amended by you on advice of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee – an independent expert committee appointed under the Act (**Attachment A**).
2. The Act requires an annual call for nominations to the lists. Nominations at **Attachment B** were considered by the Committee, alongside their own nominations, in determining the 2017 Proposed Priority Assessment List (proposed assessment list) at **Attachment D**. The Committee's reasons for including each item are at **Attachment E**. The Act requirements and timeframes for the nomination and prioritisation process are at **Attachments F and G**.
3. You have until 10 August 2017 (20 business days after receiving the proposed assessment list) to make any changes, after which it automatically becomes the Finalised Priority Assessment List (final assessment list) (s194K). You may add or omit items and change the assessment completion times. You may have regard to any matters you consider appropriate in making these changes, noting that reasons why any public nomination is not included in the final assessment list are published. Draft statements prepared by the Committee for items they have not included are at **Attachment H**.
4. Once an item is included in the final assessment list, the Committee must complete a scientific assessment and provide it to you for a listing decision. At that point you may only consider whether the item is eligible and the effect of listing or delisting.
5. In preparing the proposed assessment list, the Committee reviewed progress of assessments already under way. The Committee requests extensions of the assessment completion timeframes for a number of species included on previous final assessment lists in **Attachment I**.

Sensitivities and Handling

6. The Department has considered the implications of assessing the items on the proposed assessment list; summarised activities and sensitivities relevant to each item on the proposed assessment list (**Attachment J**); and mapped known and predicted distributions (**Attachment K**).
7. The Department recommends that you make no changes to the Committee's proposed assessment list of species and ecological communities.
8. There are two contentious issues to consider:
 - a. The Committee has not included the Leadbeater's possum in the proposed assessment list. The Committee will reconsider this nomination next year once data on newly discovered occurrences of the species are published. Further information is in **Attachments C and H**. You can choose to add the Leadbeater's possum to the 2017 final assessment list for assessment. If you do, the Department recommends an assessment timeframe of 31 March 2018 to ensure the new information is available to support the reassessment.

s22 -material irrelevant to scope

ATTACHMENTS

A: Background on the Threatened Species Scientific Committee

s22

H: Exclusion statements for publicly nominated items not included on the Proposed Priority Assessment List

s22

**Public nominations considered by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee
for the 2017 Proposed Prioritised Assessment List**

The Committee considered nominations received in response to the most recent call for nominations (13 January 2017 - 31 Mar 2017) and nominations received in response to the previous call for nominations (14 Nov 2015 - 31 Mar 2016) that were not included on the 2016 final list.

Shaded items have been included on 2017 PPAL; unshaded items have not been included

Species nominations	Common name	Location	Nominator	Year of nomination
s22 - material irrelevant to scope				
<i>Gymnobelideus leadbeateri</i>	Leadbeaters possum	Vic	s47F Australian Forest Products Association	2017

s22

s22

s22

Summary of the proposed assessment list

s22 - material irrelevant to scope

The Committee developed the proposed assessment list through a considered process based on a preliminary assessment of the degree of threat and potential benefit of listing for all eligible nominations by the public and items nominated by the Committee.

s22

s22

Public nominations

The Committee considered nine public nominations for species in 2017 and has included five of those on the proposed assessment list. There were an additional eight nominations that were received in 2016 which were not prioritised for inclusion in the 2016 final assessment list – these are automatically eligible for reconsideration in 2017. Of the eight 2016 nominations, the Committee has included four on the 2017 proposed assessment list.

The Department consulted relevant States and Territories regarding the priority of these nominations and availability of existing information and assessments. The responses received were provided to the Committee for their consideration in preparing the proposed assessment list.

There has been some media interest in the public nomination of the Leadbeater's possum for downlisting from Critically Endangered to Endangered, following a media release by the nominator. The Committee considered this nomination closely and determined that until the new information cited in the nomination was published, the nomination should not be considered a priority. The nomination will be automatically eligible for reconsideration in 2018. Should you wish to include it in the 2017 final assessment list, an appropriate assessment timeframe would be 31 March 2018 to ensure the new information is available to support the reassessment.

s22 - material irrelevant to scope

Committee nominations

s22

s22

Effect and Benefits of Listing:

Once listed as Vulnerable, Endangered, Critically Endangered or Extinct in the Wild, a threatened species becomes a 'Matter of National Environmental Significance' and is taken into account during assessment of new developments under the EPBC Act. If a species is listed or transferred to the Extinct category it is not a 'Matter of National Environmental Significance' (s18A(4)(a)(i)).

Listing as threatened can also assist in attracting Australian Government and third party investment in conservation action. Threatened species are a target in funding programmes including the National Landcare Programme and 20 million trees, and projects which identify benefits for listed threatened species and ecological communities are afforded higher priority.

Similarly, inclusion of a species in the list increases the potential to benefit from research effort, including through the National Environmental Science Programme.

Ecological Communities

s22

s22

**Exclusion statements for publicly nominated species, ecological communities and key threatening processes
not included on the proposed assessment list**

Species	Exclusion statement
s22	- material irrelevant to scope

s22

s22

Gymnobelideus leadbeateri
(Leadbeater's possum)

Gymnobelideus leadbeateri (Leadbeater's possum) is endemic to high altitude mountain ash forests in Victoria. In 2015, the status of this species on the list of threatened species under the EPBC Act was changed from Endangered to Critically Endangered. Additional survey work has been carried out since 2015, .however, details of the survey methodology and the data have yet to be released. The Committee therefore recommended excluding Leadbeater's possum from the 2017 FPAL because without this new information it is not possible to reliably reassess its status. The nomination is automatically eligible for consideration for inclusion on the 2018 PPAL.

s22

s22

Copy to

To: Minister for the Environment and Energy (For Decision)

Secretary
Mr Papps
Ms Jonasson

NOMINATION TO REASSESS THE LEADBEATER'S POSSUM LISTING STATUS

Chief of Staff
s22

Timing: 1 September 2017, to ensure an agreed approach for the Leadbeater's possum prior to the September Threatened Species Scientific Committee Meeting.

Recommendation:			
1. That you sign the letter at Attachment A responding to the Chair, Threatened Species Scientific Committee regarding the status of the Leadbeater's possum recovery plan.			
Signed / Not signed			
Signatory:		Date:	
Comments:			
Clearing Officer: Sent 08/08/2017	Geoff Richardson	AS, Protected Species and Communities Branch	Ph: 02 6274 2531 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	s22	Director, Terrestrial Threatened Species	Ph: 02 s22 Mob: s22

Key Points:

2. **Attachment A** is a letter to Professor Helene Marsh, Chair of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (the Committee), replying to a letter she wrote to you enquiring on the status of the revised recovery plan for the Leadbeater's possum (**Attachment B**).
3. Your letter advises the Committee of your decision to place the Leadbeater's possum on the 2017 Finalised Priority Assessment List (FPAL), and to delay finalisation of the Leadbeater's possum recovery plan until consideration of the assessment.
4. The following next steps are recommended as the basis for your reply to the Committee and for broader public messaging.
 - o As per your decision, finalise a reassessment of the Leadbeater's possum status by March 2018.
 - o Delay finalisation of the draft recovery plan until the reassessment has been completed, incorporating any new relevant information into the plan to ensure its currency.
 - o Develop a communication strategy outlining your proposed decisions and timeframe – to include standard correspondence words, social media content and media releases.

Background

Nomination to reassess the status of the Leadbeater's possum

5. On Friday 31 March 2017 the Department received a nomination from the Australian Forest Products Association to reassess the Leadbeater's possum status.
6. The nomination was assessed by the Committee in June 2017. The Committee recommended excluding Leadbeater's possum from the 2017 FPAL due to inadequacy of information availability.
7. You recently made a decision to include the Leadbeater's possum on the 2017 FPAL (MS17-000836).

Development of a Leadbeater's possum recovery plan

8. A new recovery plan for the Leadbeater's possum is drafted, and was endorsed by the Committee in December 2016 for your consideration to make under the EPBC Act. More than 3,700 public submissions were considered in finalising the draft plan.
9. The Leadbeater's Possum Action Plan, established under the Threatened Species Strategy set a target of end August 2016 to have the new plan in place. The statutory timeframe for completion of the new plan is April 2018. The existing Leadbeater's Possum Recovery Plan continues to apply until a new plan is made.
10. Victorian government officials have contributed constructively in the development of the draft recovery plan with both policy and scientific input, but they have not agreed to formally endorse nor jointly make this recovery plan with the Commonwealth.

Victorian Government's review of their forestry prescriptions

11. On 11 July 2017 the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning released a comprehensive review of the effectiveness and impacts of establishing timber harvesting exclusion zones around Leadbeater's possum colonies.
12. The review made six recommendations for the continued recovery of Leadbeater's possum, while maintaining a sustainable timber industry.
13. The Victorian Government is sharing available relevant information including survey data, with the Department. This will be a crucial information source to inform the possum's reassessment. You recently signed a letter to the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Victorian Minister for Environment acknowledging this (MS17-001019).

Sensitivities and handling

14. Given the Leadbeater's possum's iconic but threatened status, and the challenges of managing its habitat within the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement area, there is significant community interest in the species and its conservation.
15. There has been much community expectation in having a revised recovery plan in place by now to guide conservation effort. There have been two letter campaigns which focus on these delays. Further delays will likely draw further criticism.

16. In response, this brief will form the basis of a communication approach over the next nine months to explain the proposed approach. This will include close engagement with, and seeking further advice from, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee on the listing reassessment and any revision required to finalise the recovery plan.

Consultation: YES

17. Consultation has occurred with the Biodiversity Conservation Division, Office of the Threatened Species Commissioner, and Public Affairs.

ATTACHMENTS

- A:** Letter to Professor Marsh, Chair Threatened Species Scientific Committee
- B:** Letter from Professor Marsh, Chair Threatened Species Scientific Committee regarding the status of the Leadbeater's possum recovery plan



THE HON JOSH FRYDENBERG MP
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

MS17-000638

Professor Helene Marsh
Threatened Species Scientific Committee Chair
c/- Species Information & Policy Section
Department of the Environment and Energy
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

21 AUG 2017

Dear Professor Marsh

I refer to your letter concerning the status of the Leadbeater's possum draft recovery plan. I would like to thank the Committee for their consideration of the draft recovery plan and their expert advice provided in its drafting. I would also like to thank the Committee for their consideration of the public nomination to reassess the listing status of the Leadbeater's possum.

Given the Leadbeater's possum's iconic but highly threatened status, and the challenges of managing its habitat within the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement area, there is significant community interest in the species and its conservation as you are well aware. I am therefore particularly interested in new data that have been collected over the past three years which could provide us with a better understanding of the species' status and therefore better inform its long term conservation.

A major source of new information is the work undertaken by the Victorian Government over the past three years, including extensive targeted surveys for Leadbeater's possum across all tenures, as part of its commitment to implement their 2013 Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group recommendations. This set of data are now available to the Department with the recent release on 11 July 2017 of 'A review of the effectiveness and impact of establishing timber harvesting exclusion zones around Leadbeater's Possum colonies' by Victoria.

In light of this new information, I have decided to add the Leadbeater's possum nomination to the 2017 Finalised Priority Assessment List for assessment, and to also delay my consideration of the draft recovery plan. I acknowledge the significant work undertaken in the drafting of the plan and don't want to unduly delay my consideration of it. I have therefore set a short timeframe of March 2018 for completion of the listing assessment during which I also ask the Committee to consider whether the new information now available necessitates updating of the recovery plan.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Frydenberg', written over a horizontal line.

JOSH FRYDENBERG

ME17-014468

s22

From: s22
Sent: Wednesday, 28 June 2017 10:58 AM
To: MinisterialCorrespondence
Cc: Richardson, Geoff
Subject: FW: Leadbeater's letter from TSSC Chair [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]
Attachments: Correspondence - 1.2a Min 20170608 Leadbeater's Possum.pdf

Categories: Min Frydenberg Reply

Many thanks Geoff.

Corro team, this one is for Min Reply.

WHM

Thanks
s22

From: Richardson, Geoff
Sent: Wednesday, 28 June 2017 10:53 AM
To: s22
Subject: FW: Leadbeater's letter from TSSC Chair [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

s22

FYI - attached is a copy of the TSSC Chair's letter on Leadbeater's possum. It was sent through the mail system, and not emailed previously.

Regards Geoff

Geoff Richardson
AS - Protected Species and Communities Branch
Department of the Environment and Energy
T: 02 6274 2531
s22

From: s22
Sent: Wednesday, 28 June 2017 10:51 AM
To: Richardson, Geoff <Geoff.Richardson@environment.gov.au>; s22
s22
Subject: Leadbeater's letter from TSSC Chair [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Hi Geoff,

Attached as requested

s22
Threatened Species Scientific Committee Secretariat
Species Information & Policy Section
Department of the Environment and Energy
GPO Box 787 | CANBERRA ACT 2601
Tel: 02 s22 | Mailbox: TSSCSecretariat@environment.gov.au

THREATENED SPECIES SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Established under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
Minister for the Environment and Energy
Parliament House Office
M1:17, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

On behalf of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, I am writing to enquire on the status of the revised national recovery plan for the threatened Leadbeater's possum.

Development of the recovery plan involved extensive consultation and was undertaken over a relatively short time frame, following release of the Leadbeater's possum Action Plan in August 2015. The Committee finalised its consideration of the Leadbeater's possum recovery plan in December 2016.

We are aware that a large number of public submissions was received and these were considered in finalising the recovery plan. We are also aware of the great public interest in this species and the complexities and challenges associated with its management under the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement in Victoria.

Given ongoing concerns about the threatened status of the Leadbeater's possum, and its identification as a species for emergency intervention under the Threatened Species Strategy, having an up-to-date recovery plan in place as soon as practicable will be crucial in guiding collaborative conservation effort. The Committee is confident that the recovery plan, informed by the latest science, provides for those actions necessary to stop the decline, and support recovery over the long-term, of Leadbeater's possum.

I note the Committee is also currently considering a public nomination to downlist the Leadbeater's possum from critically endangered to endangered. The Committee's advice on the Proposed Priority Assessment List will be provided to you in due course.

I look forward to your advice on the timing and release of the final recovery plan.

Yours sincerely

s47F

Helene Marsh FAA FTSE
Professor
Chair

8 June 2017

Copy to:

To: Minister for the Environment and Energy (for decision)

Secretary
Mr Knudson
Ms Jonasson

**LEADBEATER'S POSSUM LETTER TO THE VICTORIAN MINISTER FOR ENERGY,
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Chief of Staff
s22

Timing: Letter requested by the MO.

6 AUG 2017

Recommendation:			
1. Agree to sign the letter to the Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change regarding the Leadbeater's possum and release of a Victorian report reviewing the effectiveness of timber harvesting prescriptions.			
			Signed / Not signed
Signatory:		Date:	
Comments:			
<i>Minister noted & signed letter.</i>			
s47F			
Clearing Officer: Sent	Geoff Richardson	AS, Protected Species and Communities Branch	Ph: 02 6274 2531 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	s22	Director, Terrestrial Threatened Species	Ph: s22 Mob: s22

Key Point:

- Following a request from ministerial advisors Mr s22 and Mr s22 on Wednesday 19 July 2016, attached is a letter to the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change providing an update on the status of the Leadbeater's possum and seeking ongoing collaboration and cooperation in the management of this species between Victoria and the Commonwealth.

ATTACHMENT

- A:** Letter to the Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change



THE HON JOSH FRYDENBERG MP
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

PDR: 17-001019

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
Level 17, 8 Nicholson Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

8 AUG 2017

Dear Minister 

I note the recent release of the report 'A review of the Effectiveness and Impact of Establishing Timber Harvesting Exclusion zones around Leadbeater's Possum colonies' by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. The data collected and analyses undertaken represent another important step in our understanding of the species and options for its ongoing management.

As you may be aware, my Department received a public nomination to reassess the status of the Leadbeater's possum under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. I am currently considering advice from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee on whether to proceed with its reassessment this year.

Given the significant community interest in the conservation of the Leadbeater's possum and the management challenges in the Central Highlands, any new data collected and shared could inform multiple planning and management approaches of mutual interest. I am therefore interested in accessing any new information that can be used to inform not only a potential reassessment of its status but also finalisation of the draft national recovery plan and ongoing management of the possum's habitat under the Regional Forest Agreement.

I understand that new location records collected by your department are being made available through a long standing data licencing agreement with my department and I welcome the availability of such information. I look forward to ongoing collaboration and further sharing of information to ensure alignment of conservation and management effort.

Yours sincerely

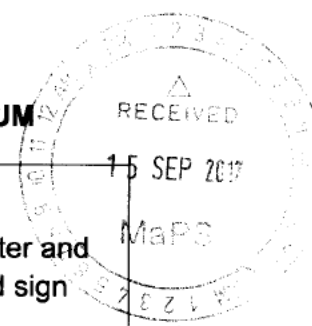
A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large loop followed by a horizontal line that tapers to a point on the right.

JOSH FRYDENBERG

Copy to:
Secretary
Mr Knudson
Ms Jonasson
Chief of Staff
s22

To: Minister for the Environment and Energy (For Decision)

RESPONSE TO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER LEADBEATER'S POSSUM



Recommendations:

1. That you note the information relevant to your reply to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP and sign the letter at **Attachment B**.

Signed / Not signed

Minister:

Date:

14/9/17

Comments:

Clearing Officer: Sent: 09/08/2017	Geoff Richardson	AS, Protected Species and Communities Branch	Ph: 02 6274 2531 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	s22	Director, Terrestrial Threatened Species	Ph: s22 Mob: s22

Key Points:

1. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, wrote to you outlining his concerns about the Leadbeater's possum protection buffer zones, requesting that you consider reviewing the possum's status and offering to support further surveys (**Attachment A**). A proposed response is at **Attachment B**.
2. You were provided an update on the Leadbeater's possum and Victorian Regional Forest Agreements on 31 March 2017 (**MS17-000107**).

Victorian Government review of prescriptions

4. Prescriptions for forestry management including the 200m exclusion (buffer) zones around Leadbeater's possum's colonies were established by the Victorian Government. They were introduced in response to the Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group (LPAG) recommendations in 2014, before the Leadbeater's possum was uplisted from *Endangered* to *Critically Endangered* under the EPBC Act in April 2015.
5. As one of the LPAG recommendations, the effectiveness of the timber harvesting exclusion zones in supporting the recovery of the Leadbeater's possum and a sustainable timber industry was recently reviewed and the report released on 11 July 2017.

6. In addition the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) was asked by the State Government to conduct separate assessments of the conservation values and the fibre and wood supplies in the state forests in eastern Victoria including those important for Leadbeater's possum. These reports were published in February and May 2017.
7. The Victorian Government is to consider the outcomes of the timber harvesting exclusion zones review along with the VEAC assessments in deciding on any further actions required to protect the Leadbeater's possum.

Reassessment of listing status

8. On 31 March 2017 the Department received a public nomination from the Australian Forest Products Association to reassess the status of the Leadbeater's possum. The nomination was based largely on the recent data collected by the Victorian government.
9. You added the Leadbeater's possum nomination to the 2017 Finalised Priority Assessment List with a completion date March 2018 (**MS17-000836**) and advised the Chair of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee of your decision (**MS17-001184**).
10. New data on the Leadbeater's possum collected by Victoria over the past three years is being provided to the Department and will inform the assessment process. You wrote to the Victorian Environment Minister the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP on 8 August 2017 (**MS17-001019**) acknowledging this and the need for ongoing collaboration and sharing of information to ensure alignment of conservation and management effort.

Further survey work

11. In his letter, the Deputy Prime Minister offered the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to lead survey work in the conservation estate to assist a review of the possum's status.
12. Since 2014 the Victorian Government has increased survey work to locate Leadbeater's possums as part of implementing the LPAG recommendations. As a result, the number of known colonies has increased. This information informed the Victorian Government review process and will inform the reassessment of the species under the EPBC Act.
13. Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston wrote to the Victoria Minister for Agriculture the Hon. Jaala Pulford MLC on this issue 8 August 2017 (copy to you **MC17-016576**) confirming the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources' interest in assisting the collection of new survey data on Leadbeater's possum and inviting discussion between the relevant Departments on further data needs.

Regional Forest Agreements

14. The core habitat of Leadbeater's possum is within the area covered by the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement. The Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement expires in March 2018.

15. s22 - material irrelevant to scope

16.

17.

18.

19.



Table 1: Proposed time frames

Month	Leadbeater's Possum reassessment timetable
Aug 2017	Leadbeater's possum placed on Finalised Priority Assessment List
Sep 2017	FPAL published; re-assessment formally commences
Oct 2017	
Nov 2017	TSSC consideration and release for 30 days public comment
Dec 2017	Public comments close
Jan 2018	
Feb 2018	
Mar 2018	TSSC consideration and final advice to Minister



Attachments

- A** Letter from the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP requesting a review of the Leadbeater's possum status – 26 March 2017
- B** Proposed response



THE HON JOSH FRYDENBERG MP
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

MC17-009202

14 SEP 2017

The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr  Joyce

I refer to your letter concerning Leadbeater's possum and your request to review its listing status and offer of your Department's support to undertake further surveys.

The prescriptions for forestry management including the 200m exclusion zones are established and implemented by the Victorian Government. They were introduced in response to the Victorian Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group (LPAG) recommendations in 2014, before the species was uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) in April 2015.

Since 2014 the Victorian Government has conducted extensive targeted surveys for Leadbeater's possum across all tenures, as part of its commitment to implement the LPAG recommendations. Between March 2014 and 30 January 2017, 537 new possum colonies were recorded. Based largely on this new information, my Department received on 31 March 2017 a public nomination to reassess the threatened species listing status of the Leadbeater's possum.

On 11 July 2017 the Victorian Government released their report, 'A review of the effectiveness and impact of establishing timber harvesting exclusion zones around Leadbeater's Possum colonies' which included analyses on new data collected.

In light of this new information I have added the Leadbeater's possum to the 2017 Finalised Priority Assessment List for reassessment under the EPBC Act, to be finalised by March 2018. New data collected by Victoria is being made available to my Department and I have written to the Victorian Environment Minister the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP supporting the ongoing collaboration and sharing of information on Leadbeater's possum.

Thank you for the offer for your Department to lead additional survey work in the Victorian Central Highlands. I note that Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston has recently written to the Victoria Minister for Agriculture the Hon. Jaala Pulford MLC on this issue and I welcome discussion between officers from our Departments with the relevant Victorian agencies.

I understand the third five yearly report on the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements (including the Central Highlands) will be released for public consultation soon. Public submissions, particularly those related to the Central Highlands, may include information on Leadbeater's possum. This information could be used by my Department to inform the reassessment of Leadbeater's Possum under the EPBC Act. I would welcome the sharing of any relevant submissions by your Department.

I look forward to working with Minister Ruston on the Joint Government Response to the Independent Review of the latest report on the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements and in negotiations to extend the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Josh Frydenberg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

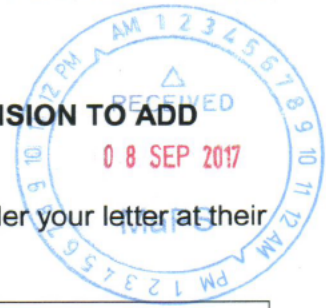
JOSH FRYDENBERG

Copy to:

To: Minister for the Environment and Energy (For Decision)

Secretary
Mr Papps
Ms Jonasson

**AMENDED LETTER TO SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE REGARDING DECISION TO ADD
LEADBEATER'S POSSUM AS A PRIORITY FOR REASSESSMENT**



Chief of Staff
s22

Timing: 8 September 2017 – to allow the Scientific Committee to consider your letter at their meeting on 12-14 September.

Recommendations:

1. That you note that your letter of 4 August 2017 to the Chair of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee regarding the 2017 Finalised Priority Assessment List (MS17-000836), did not reflect your decision to include the Leadbeater's possum as a priority for assessment.

Noted / Please discuss

2. That you sign the revised letter to the Chair of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee at **Attachment A**.

Signed / Not signed

Signatory:

Date:

4/8/17
JF

Comments:

Clearing Officer: Sent 25/08/17	Geoff Richardson	Assistant Secretary, Protected Species and Communities Branch	Ph: 02 6274 2531 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	s22	Director, Species Information and Policy Section	Ph: s22 Mot: s22

Key Points:

- On 4 August 2017, you agreed to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's Proposed Priority Assessment List for species and ecological communities becoming the Finalised Priority Assessment List for assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- You also included *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* (Leadbeater's possum) on the priority list with completion deadline of 31 March 2018, which you can do under section 194K(2).
- You are required by section 194K(5) to advise the Scientific Committee of all changes that you make to their proposed priority list.

4. The letter to the Scientific Committee Chair signed on 4 August, needs to be amended and resigned to advise the Committee of the inclusion of *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* (Leadbeater's possum) and the completion time for the assessment. The revised letter is at **Attachment A** for your signature.

Sensitivities and Handling

5. The Scientific Committee meets from 12 – 14 September, and will consider your letter regarding the Finalised Priority Assessment List at that meeting as part of their forward work planning.

ATTACHMENTS

- A:** Revised letter to the Chair of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee



THE HON JOSH FRYDENBERG MP
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

MS17-001184

07 SEP 2017

Professor Helene Marsh
Threatened Species Scientific Committee Chair
c/- Species Information & Policy Section
Department of the Environment and Energy
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Professor Marsh

Thank you for the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's Proposed Priority Assessment list of species, ecological communities and key threatening processes under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) for the assessment period commencing 1 October 2017.

I note the Committee's reasoning behind the inclusion and exclusion of species, ecological communities and key threatening processes on the proposed list. I have accepted the Committee's recommendations on the species and ecological communities to be included on the Finalised Priority Assessment List. I have amended the Committee's proposed list to include *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* (Leadbeater's possum) as a priority for assessment, with an assessment completion time of 30 March 2018.

s22 - material irrelevant to scope

I look forward to receiving your advice on these assessments in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "J. Frydenberg".

JOSH FRYDENBERG

Copy to:

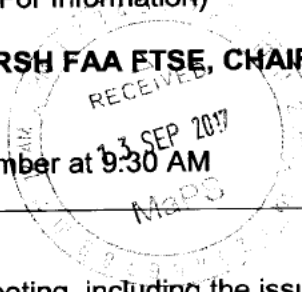
Secretary
Mr Knudson
Ms Jonasson

Chief of Staff
s22

To: Minister for the Environment and Energy (For Information)

MEETING WITH PROFESSOR HELENE MARSH FAA ETSE, CHAIR OF THE THREATENED SPECIES SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Timing: for meeting on Wednesday 13 September at 9:30 AM



Recommendation:

1. That you note the background to your meeting, including the issues likely to be raised by Professor Marsh.

Noted / Please discuss

Minister:

Date: 12/9/17

Clearing Officer: Sent: 12/09/17.	Geoff Richardson	Assistant Secretary, Protected Species and Communities Branch	Ph: 02 6274 2531 Mob: s22
Contact Officer:	s22	Director, Species Policy and Information Section	Ph: s22 Mob: s22

s22 - material irrelevant to scope

Issues and Sensitivities:

1. The 69th meeting of the Scientific Committee will be held from Tuesday 12 – Thursday 14 September. The meeting agenda is at **Attachment A**. Professor Marsh will excuse herself from the Scientific Committee deliberations to meet with you.
2. Priorities for assessment by the Scientific Committee: On 4 August, you agreed to the Scientific Committee's 2017 Proposed Priority Assessment List for species and ecological communities becoming the Finalised Priority Assessment List for assessment under the EPBC Act. You added Leadbeater's possum to the priority list with completion deadline of 31 March 2018, s22

s22

3. Appointments to the Scientific Committee: s22

s22

4. The replacement of the Threatened Species Commissioner: s22

s22

5. World Heritage: s22

s22

Consultation: YES

The Office of the Threatened Species Commissioner was consulted in developing this brief.

Attachments

s22

THREATENED SPECIES SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE 69

12 – 14 September 2017

Uluru Room, Level 4, John Gorton Building

Agenda

s22 - material irrelevant to scope



7. SPECIES

Other

- 7.1 Update on *Gynobelideus leadbeateri* (Leadbeater's possum) s22 [30]
Verbal (noting)

s22

ATTACHMENT B

Topics likely to be raised and suggested talking points

s22 - materials irrelevant to scope



s22

It is unlikely that Professor Marsh will raise the following, however if raised

The addition of Leadbeater's possum to the 2017 finalised priority assessment list:

Professor Marsh wrote to you on 8 June 2017 enquiring on the status of the revised national recovery plan for the threatened Leadbeater's possum.

On 21 August 2017 (MS17-000638) you thanked the Scientific Committee for their expert advice provided during the drafting of the plan, and for their consideration of the public nomination to reassess the listing status of the possum. In light of the new information provided through the Victorian Government's targeted surveys for Leadbeater's possums, you have added the Leadbeater's possum nomination to the 2017 Finalised Priority Assessment list, and due to this process, delayed your consideration of the draft recovery plan.

In acknowledgment of the significant work which has gone into the draft recovery plan, and to not unduly delay consideration of the plan, you have asked the Scientific Committee to provide its re-assessment of the conservation status of the Leadbeater's possum by 30 March 2018, and to consider if the draft recovery plan should be updated should new information become available. While this process occurs the current Leadbeater's possum recovery plan and 2015 conservation advice remain in place to guide conservation effort.

Talking points:

I understand that you consider the reassessment of Leadbeater's possum will be relatively straightforward, and the Scientific Committee will be able to reach a determination by 30 March 2018.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts in assessing the status of the Leadbeaters possum. I am confident that thanks to this process, my decision will be supported strongly by the latest available data.

s22

s22

2017 FINALISED PRIORITY ASSESSMENT LIST OF SPECIES, ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES AND KEY THREATENING PROCESSES

Talking Points

- The priority species and ecological communities to be assessed by the independent Threatened Species Scientific Committee for potential listing under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* have been finalised for 2017.
- The 2017 finalised priority assessment list contains 84 species and three ecological communities.
- The priorities were determined by the Minister based on advice of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, who reviewed public nominations received and identified species and ecological communities that the Committee considered to be a priority.
- Ten species nominated through the public call for nominations have been prioritised. These include the Leadbeater's Possum, which has been prioritised for reassessment following extensive targeted surveys by the Victorian Government over the past three years. These surveys have provided substantial new information which could provide the Scientific Committee with a better understanding of the species' status and therefore its conservation and management needs.

s22 - material irrelevant to scope

s22

- The assessment period commences on 1 October 2017. To ensure that advice to the Minister is based on the best available information, the Scientific Committee will invite comments on its draft assessment for each species and ecological community. This invitation will be advertised on the Department of the Environment and Energy's website.
- Following consultation, the Scientific Committee will provide the Minister with their advice on the eligibility of each species and ecological community and the potential benefit of listing.
- Threatened species and ecological communities listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* are protected as matters of national environmental significance. Approval is required for actions which may have a significant impact on these matters.
- Recognition of the national threatened status of species and ecological communities can also lead to funding for conservation actions from Australian government natural resource management programs.
- The 2017 Finalised Priority Assessment List will be published on the Department of the Environment and Energy's website at <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/assessments/fpal>

INCLUSION OF LEADBEATER'S POSSUM ON 2017 FPAL

Talking points

- The protection of Leadbeater's possum is a priority for the Australian Government under the Threatened Species Strategy.
- It's an iconic, threatened species with significant community interest in its conservation.
- That's why it's important for us to carefully look at any new data that have been collected recently which could provide us with a better understanding of its status and therefore its conservation and management needs.
- In March 2017 my Department received a threatened species listing nomination from the Australian Forest Products Association to reassess the Leadbeater's possum status.
- The nomination was based on new information that indicated possum colonies were more numerous than previously thought, using as a basis recent data collected by the Victorian government.
- The work by the Victorian Government over the past three years, including extensive targeted surveys for Leadbeater's possum, was undertaken since the possum was listed nationally as critically endangered.
- In light of this I have decided to add the Leadbeater's possum to the 2017 Finalised Priority Assessment List for assessment.
- The Finalised Priority Assessment List contains the species and ecological communities which will be assessed by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee in the assessment period starting 1 October 2017.
- I don't want to unduly delay my consideration of the plan. I acknowledge the significant work that has gone into the drafting of a new plan and the significant public interest in its finalisation.
- This is why I have set a short timeframe for completion of the listing assessment. I have asked the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to provide its re-assessment of the conservation status of the Leadbeater's possum to me by 30 March 2018.

- I have also ask the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to consider, as part of this process, whether the new information offers new and important data to inform finalisation of the draft Leadbeater's possum recovery plan.
- To inform the assessment, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee will invite comments from the public. This invitation will be advertised on the Department's website.
- While these two processes run the current Leadbeater's possum recovery plan and the 2015 conservation advice remain in place to guide conservation effort.