

C. Summary of the original audit

The original report

This section summarises the objectives, conclusion, and key findings from the original audit. We tabled *Conserving threatened species* (Report 7: 2018–19) on 13 November 2018. The Department of Environment and Science has had almost 4 years to implement the recommendations.

Audit objective

The original audit assessed whether the Department of Environment and Science:

- identified and listed Queensland's threatened species
- was transitioning effectively to the common assessment method (a nationally consistent method for assessing and listing threatened species)
- had strategies and plans in place to effectively protect threatened species and their habitats
- was effectively monitoring and reporting on threatened species outcomes.

We concluded

Overall, the Department of Environment and Science's response to conserving threatened species lacked cross-program coordination and was unlikely to effectively conserve and recover many threatened species. The department had not taken a strategic approach; and had no system to prioritise, coordinate, and report on recovery activities, threatened species' population trends, and the effectiveness of conservation management. It had limited evidence of improvements in some threatened species' populations or status over time.

Because it had no strategy, the department was not prioritising its activities to achieve the greatest conservation outcomes. Instead, its activities were largely ad hoc and focused on a relatively few individual species.

It was also not proactive in listing species as threatened or updating those already listed. The department's decisions about which species received its greatest conservation efforts were often determined by iconic value, individual interests, departmental knowledge, and advocacy, rather than by objective assessments of appropriate priorities.

The department's lack of systematic and reliable monitoring of threatened species also meant it could not detect population changes or quantify the efficacy of its actions. It often could not show how it used resources to achieve the best conservation outcomes.

Conserving threatened species is a difficult and complex task that requires commitment and effort across government and beyond. During the audit, we received many submissions and met with landholders, researchers, and conservation groups who showed a high degree of commitment and passion for conserving threatened species.

While many groups remained enthusiastic, some expressed frustration and disillusionment with the coordination of activities and the support provided. The department has a lead role in coordinating work to conserve threatened species and harnessing the available enthusiasm, resources, and knowledge. The need to support, unite, and coordinate multiple stakeholders further heightened the need for a strategy with clear objectives, actions, targets, and measures.



We found

This is a summary of the original audit findings. More information is in the original report available on our website at www.qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/conserving-threatened-species.

Listing threatened species

The Department of Environment and Science (the department) did not proactively nominate species for listing or encourage Queensland's community of conservation researchers and stakeholders to make nominations. Therefore, the number of species listed in Queensland's Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 2006 was likely understating the actual number of species under threat.

Delays between the assessment process and the minister's approval were resulting in some species being assessed as threatened but not listed for years – in some cases for more than 7 years. This delayed plans and actions to protect species. There was no periodic or systematic review of species classification. The department did not know whether the extinction risk for these species had changed.

Implementing the common assessment method

Queensland was not on track to meet all its obligations to implement the common assessment method for assessing and listing native species, as outlined in the intergovernmental memorandum of understanding. There was no clear project owner or oversight committee. Without a comprehensive project plan, the department could not effectively determine major project deliverables, milestones, activities, and resources needed.

Planning and prioritising conservation

The department had no strategy or framework for conserving or managing threatened species. This is despite the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* requiring the department to develop an integrated and comprehensive conservation strategy for the whole of the state. Because it had no strategy, its efforts in managing threatened species lacked purpose, direction, and coordination.

Prioritising resources and investment

Scientific and biodiversity research shows that the number of species at risk of extinction at the time was increasing. The department was not systematically planning where to deploy its available resources to achieve the most effective balance of actions to protect habitats, mitigate threats and reduce species decline.

Protecting and recovering threatened species

The department largely focused on individual species, rather than taking a strategic approach to conserving all threatened species. The department did not have a method for prioritising which species would be subject to conservation and recovery projects.

Recovery of threatened species

Monitoring data on population status and trends was only available for a few species. This meant that only a few recovery programs could measure the change in species' population or status.

The department did not have a system to assess and prioritise which species should have management plans. It selected species for conservation based on species knowledge and individual interest within the department, their iconic value, or where significant work was done by external conservation bodies.

For many listed species with a recovery plan or species project plan in place, the department did not have enough information on the population and species distribution to measure and report on implementation success.

Appendix D lists the recommendations and our assessment of their status.

