



SAVING OUR SPECIES

Iconic species strategy



Photography

Cover photo: Southern corroboree frog (*Pseudophryne corroboree*), J Spencer/OEH.

Page IV & 1: Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*), R Nicolai/OEH

Page 2: Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*), M Irvin/OEH.

Page 3: Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*), J Turbill/OEH.

Page 4: Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*), R Nicolai/OEH.

Page 5: Brush-tailed rock-wallaby (*Petrogale penicillata*), P Bayne/OEH

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Page 7: Wollemi pine in a protected valley (*Wollemia nobilis*), J Plaza/OEH.

Page 8: Southern corroboree frog (*Pseudophryne corroboree*), D Hunter/OEH.

Page 9: Plains-wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) primary habitat, D Parker.

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Iconic species are important to us socially, culturally and economically.



Introduction

Iconic species are important to us socially, culturally and economically, and the community has high expectations for their effective ecological management.

This document outlines how NSW Government's *Saving our Species* (SoS) program creates the conservation strategies for ensuring the survival of iconic species.

There are six SoS iconic species: brush tailed rock wallaby, koala, southern corroboree frog, malleefowl, Wollemi pine and plains-wanderer.

The SoS program provides a framework for prioritising investment in threatened species and ecological communities in NSW, based on a cost-benefit approach. The program has categorised six threatened species as iconic species because of their inherent social values and ecological attributes.

Under SoS, species in the iconic management stream are the highest priority for investment. SoS takes a site-managed or landscape-managed species approach to the management of iconic species, with the 'iconic' label applied to recognise the community's interest in these species.

Objectives



Iconic species conservation projects have dual objectives. The main objective is to secure the species in the wild in NSW for 100 years, following the overarching objective of the SoS program.

The secondary objective is to leverage support for SoS from the wider community, through the species' role as flagship plants and animals for the program.

Investment in iconic species is prioritised firstly to meet the main objective by applying the SoS site-managed or landscape-managed species framework; and secondly by identifying culturally and socially significant sites that meet the community or flagship objective.

Social value refers to community interest and engagement in the conservation of iconic species, and the species' cultural and economic importance. Developing community and stakeholder partnerships to deliver conservation projects, while important across all management streams, is especially beneficial when developing iconic species projects. When we invest in high-profile species that can engage the community in threatened species conservation (Verissimo et al. 2011), these species contribute in a greater degree than others towards meeting the objective of the SoS program, which is 'To maximise the number of threatened species that are secure in the wild in NSW for 100 years'.

Amendments to the iconic species list

Species may be added to or removed from the iconic management stream in the future. Such decisions must take into account the expected benefit to the program (and its scale) and the likely project implementation costs. The benefits must also be weighed against the program's cost-effectiveness principles and our ability to maximise the number of threatened species being secured in the wild. Proposals for new iconic species must be managed by the SoS program manager. The final decision is made by the Minister for the Environment.

The iconic species



Four of the six species allocated to the iconic management stream were identified in 2012 by the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH). These four species have a history of strong engagement with the conservation community and the broader public, and are associated with diverse habitat types and geographic regions across NSW. They were nominated by OEH regional threatened species teams to represent community values in regional NSW. The Wollemi pine was identified in 2015 and added as the first iconic plant species because of its high profile as a living fossil. The plains-wanderer was identified in 2016 to bring attention to its uniqueness and decline in numbers.

Koala

A quintessentially Australian icon and well recognised nationally and internationally as uniquely Australian, the koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) is of very high significance both socially and culturally to the community. Its importance dates back through Aboriginal culture. Its presence represents healthy forested environments and ecosystems. The koala's status as an Australian icon helps to educate the community about Australia's unique and fragile environment and the species has an extremely important role in ecotourism.

Malleefowl

The nationally significant malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) is a symbol of nature's ingenuity in surviving in harsh, semi-arid environments. It is one of the hardest working birds. The female malleefowl lays more than her own body weight in eggs each season. Adult birds move more than 150 tonnes of material each year to build and maintain their nest, where their eggs are incubated by the heat generated from composting leaf litter, rather than their body heat. The species has a high profile among the bird-watching and conservation community for its rarity and unique appearance and behaviour. Many local communities across NSW and Australia are involved in citizen science projects monitoring malleefowl populations on a regular basis.

Southern corroboree frog

The southern corroboree frog (*Pseudophryne corroboree*) is a perfect flagship for SoS because of its striking appearance. It is representative of alpine environments and wetlands, and brings the alarming impacts of the chytrid fungal disease, as well as climate change, to our attention. This species is on the brink of extinction in the wild. Owing to the global threat of the frog pathogen affecting the southern corroboree frog, and international awareness of the frog recovery program and its innovative methods, the world is watching the fate of this remarkable species.



Brush-tailed rock-wallaby

Rock-wallabies are included in the largest group of the macropods (kangaroos, wallabies and their relatives). The beautiful brush-tailed rock-wallaby (*Petrogale penicillata*) is the most well known of the rock-wallabies. With its specialised feet and tail, it can leap acrobatically and gracefully round its steep and rocky habitat within the cliffs and mountains of the Great Dividing Range. It is a flagship species for the conservation of Australia's unique threatened mammals and rugged ranges of the eastern divide.

Wollemi pine

The Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) is popularly described as a 'dinosaur tree' or 'living fossil', and is considered one of the greatest botanical discoveries of our time. The Wollemi pine's ancestry is estimated to be 90–200 million years. Wollemi pine specimens have been successfully propagated and are now available for purchase throughout the world. The Wollemi pine is representative of Australia's unique evolutionary history and shows that we can still find something new and amazing in bushland close to where we live.

Plains-wanderer

The plains-wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) is a small ground-dwelling bird, similar in size to a quail but standing more like an emu. The plains-wanderer is endangered in NSW and the majority of the remaining population is found in the grasslands of the Riverina region of NSW. It is the only representative of the family *Pedionomidae* and genus *Pedionomus*, and is endemic to Australia.

Developing an iconic species project



SoS develops detailed and mapped conservation projects for each iconic species using an expert process similar to that for site-managed species. An interview of 1-3 hours duration, consisting of a structured series of questions, is conducted with a panel of experts on the species' ecology, distribution, threats and management requirements.

The structure of each project is based on either the SoS site-managed species or landscape-managed species stream, depending on the species' ecology and management requirements. Of the six species, the koala is categorised as a landscape-managed species, while the other five are considered site-managed.

Site-managed iconic species projects identify the number and location of management sites that maximise likelihood of success and minimise management effort required to ensure that each species is viable into the future.

Landscape-managed iconic species projects define the distribution and habitat of the species and identify critical actions at the management site, management area and statewide. Landscape-managed species projects also define specific site-based management and threat abatement activities that contribute to securing populations.

Iconic species projects draw on relevant data from existing strategies and plans (such as recovery plans, threat abatement plans, plans of management), expert knowledge, activities being undertaken by the community or other organisations, and the scientific literature.

Governance

Good governance is particularly important in iconic species conservation projects, given the species' high profile and the relatively high investment in projects designed to ensure their survival. This means that the principles of cost-effectiveness, investment prioritisation and clear accountability when evaluating and reporting are vital parts of iconic species projects.

Project steering committees

To ensure good governance, a steering group is formed for each iconic species to guide the planning and implementation of each conservation project. The main roles of this group are to:

- design the project and facilitate changes over time
- determine investment priorities
- consult with relevant stakeholders in NSW
- leverage support for the project
- oversee the monitoring, evaluation and reporting component of the project
- facilitate communication of the project's achievements to the community.



The steering committee may include representation from:

- an existing recovery team
- OEH staff, including the species project coordinator, regional staff including National Parks and Wildlife Service, and statewide scientific and program experts
- land managers significant to the project (e.g. local government, Forestry Corporation of NSW)
- academics/researchers actively involved in researching the species
- organisations or individuals with specific technical expertise relevant to the project (e.g. zoos, botanic gardens)
- community or special interest groups.

Engagement, communication and capacity building

Each project is designed to meet the dual objectives for the iconic management stream (see page 2). Projects must include the critical actions that are needed to meet the objective of iconic species being on track to being secure in the wild. In addition, iconic species projects must emphasise engagement, communication and capacity building, with actions designed to ensure that:

- more people in NSW value threatened species and ecological communities and are aware of the SoS program
- more partnerships are established with the community, stakeholders and volunteers
- corporate sponsors, philanthropists and developers are aware of opportunities to contribute to SoS
- the skills and the capacity of partners to invest in and manage iconic species in NSW are aligned with SoS
- projects are being delivered through partnerships with community and stakeholders to agreed standards and timeframes.

This means that iconic conservation projects have activities that encourage and improve engagement, communication and capacity building, in addition to on-ground (e.g. threat abatement) activities. Or engagement, communication and capacity building could be part of the on-ground component itself. Examples include encouraging the community to volunteer in the management or monitoring aspects of the project, consulting with landholders about how to manage their land for the benefit of the species, supporting local community groups who advocate for the species, or school education and awareness-raising programs.

The flagship status of iconic species can be used to raise awareness, leverage investment and engage more partners in the program. But all strategies must put the protection of the species first, as these species are often at risk from human disturbance – for example,



direct engagement with populations of the Wollemi pine in the wild is illegal in NSW.

Sites that are important for social or economic reasons may be identified as part of the iconic species project, but they are the second priority with regard to investment by OEHL, with the security objective taking precedence.

Project details, including site maps, threat and action descriptions, estimated implementation costs and annual outcomes, are stored in the SoS database, accessible by all stakeholders involved in the project's implementation. General information and site maps are also available to the public on the OEHL website.

Project review

The *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* requires conservation projects to go on public exhibition for at least four weeks.

Before they are placed on public exhibition, iconic species projects must be reviewed by relevant stakeholders. This includes public and private land managers of management sites, agencies or groups responsible for implementing actions, associated strategic OEHL programs (e.g. pest and weed management), scientists with relevant expertise in the species' ecology or management and local government. At this project development stage it may not be possible to consult with all individual private landholders within large management sites. But they must be consulted before any implementation impacting on their land.

Once comments from the public exhibition have been addressed, the projects are formally adopted by the Chief Executive of OEHL.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

The ability to evaluate management effectiveness and demonstrate return on investment is important, given the high profile of the iconic species. The framework for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on outcomes for these projects is outlined in the [SoS monitoring, evaluation and reporting guidelines](#). These guidelines measure success against the objective of securing species in the wild in the long term. The guidelines require projects to have a monitoring regime, and annual and long-term objectives for every threat under management and for species populations at each management site, in order to evaluate outcomes and link those outcomes to investment. This data is widely reported through annual species report cards.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting at contributing sites can also utilise this format. Community engagement activities must be included in reporting as part of the broader SoS program evaluation plan.

Measures of success for communication, engagement and capacity building strategies will be determined as part of the SoS program's monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan.



Iconic species conservation projects, like all other SoS projects, are designed and implemented under an adaptive management framework. Projects are regularly reviewed and updated according to the results of threat and species population monitoring to maximise effectiveness. An active adaptive management approach (i.e. experimental design with high statistical power) will be employed where relevant, particularly under circumstances where threat dynamics are poorly understood or the success rate of known management methods is uncertain.

Other conservation activities



Despite iconic species being a high priority for SoS investment, it is unlikely that sufficient resources will be available to do everything the community would like to see with regard to iconic species. The first priority in iconic species conservation projects is meeting the security objective – that species are secure in the wild in the long term. Then, as a secondary priority, the project can invest in other community engagement or promotional activities and/or other culturally and socially significant sites for the species.

A strict prioritisation framework is needed to guide this secondary resource allocation. Consistent with SoS principles, a cost-benefit assessment must be applied to proposed activities.

Cost

- How much does the activity cost?
- Is it good value for money?

Benefit

- Is the activity addressing the critical threats to the species via management or monitoring and/or communication and engagement?
- Can the activity demonstrate significant benefit in a broader sense to threatened species and the SoS program?

Likelihood of success

- Is there support from relevant partners (e.g. land managers, species experts, community groups) and access to the land?
- Do we have the required skills and knowledge to do the activity?
- Is there a rigorous plan for monitoring and evaluating outcomes (consistent with the SoS monitoring, evaluation and reporting guidelines)?

Long-term sponsorship of iconic species

Long-term sponsorship can create sustainable investment in iconic species. Iconic species are good candidates for targeted corporate sponsorship because of their popularity. Corporate engagement could benefit the species, the broader SoS program and the sponsors. Conservation projects for iconic species are developed as a discrete package of actions with a specific objective and estimated costs over 50 years (assuming some uncertainty). Therefore, potential sponsors could market their support in terms of ‘saving’ a particular species in the long term – a similar approach to other conservation organisations, whereby sponsors can ‘adopt’ species (such as Taronga Conservation Society Australia’s ‘Adopt an Animal’ program).

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