



**Ringtail Possums and Development
A Consultant's Viewpoint or
"I've Got Possums – Help"**

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Western Ringtail Possums

- Protected Species
- Political Football
- Pest

Do I Have Ringtails?

Contract consultant to conduct a survey

- Consultant needs to know a ringtail from a brushtail
- Surveys need to be done at night (spotlighting for possums) and day (dreys and scat counts)
- Surveys need to be done in fine weather conditions (Poor weather can limit usefulness of animal counts)
- Understand that possums are mobile (counts can vary on a daily basis)
- Target peppermints but ringtails can occur in other vegetation

How Many Possums are Too Many?

- Depends where you are.
- Criteria to determine whether any proposed clearing or other development is significant are different in the core habitat area (Busselton) compared to outside core area
- In Busselton area apply DEW Possum Strategy guidelines
- Outside of Busselton area apply EPBC Act Significant Impact Guidelines

DEW Possum Strategy (draft as of March 07)

- Three Areas – Core Habitat, Supporting Habitat and Primary Corridors
- Significant impact in Core Habitat area likely to be more than 0.5ha clearing of a patch of Peppermints (regardless of whether possums have been found in the patch) or a greater than 50% clearing of a remnant Peppermint habitat between 0.1-0.5 ha.
- Peppermint trees greater than 10cm diameter are most important.
- Significant impact in Supporting Habitat area similar to Core Habitat area except area of patch able to be cleared is slightly larger.
- Significant impact in Primary Corridors weren't defined in March

Outside Area Covered by DEW Possum Strategy

- Apply Significant Impact Guidelines identified in EPBC Act
- Significant Impact on a Vulnerable Species is an action that is likely to have a real chance that it will:
 - Lead to a long-term decrease in the size of an important population of a species;
 - Reduce the area of occupancy of an important population;
 - Fragment an existing important population into two or more populations;
 - Adversely affect habitat critical to the survival of a species;
 - Disrupt the breeding cycle of an important population;
 - Modify, destroy, remove or isolate or decrease the availability or quality of habitat to the extent that the species is likely to decline;
 - Result in invasive species that are harmful to a vulnerable species becoming established in the vulnerable species' habitat;
 - Introduce disease that may cause the species to decline; or
 - Interfere substantially with the recover of the species.

Significant Impact Guidelines

- An “Important Population” is a population that is necessary for a species’ long-term survival and recovery. This may include populations that are:
 - Key source populations either for breeding or dispersal;
 - Populations that are necessary for maintaining genetic diversity; and/or
 - Populations that are near the limit of the species range.

Significant Impacts Need to be Referred to the DEW

- Referral
- Decision on impact – Controlled Action or not
- Not a Controlled Action – EPBC Act Process complete
- Controlled Action – method of assessment determined (Assessment by Preliminary Documentation most likely for possums)
- Additional information will be required (On-site Mitigation and Off-site Conservation Offset)
- Documentation Advertised
- Proposal assessed by DEW
- Decision by Commonwealth Minister

Relationship to State EPA Process

- No direct relationship unless the EPA is assessing the proposal as a PER or ERMP – then the Bilateral Agreement may apply
- A proposal may be assessed by the DEW even if the EPA don't assess it at the state level (eg. Provence, Cape View)
- A proposal may be separately assessed by the DEW and the EPA (eg. Smiths Beach)

On-Site Mitigation

On-site mitigation for ringtail possums is possible because ringtail possums are able to live in developed environments.

Mitigation strategy should consider the following:

- Retain habitat
- Supplement habitat – revegetation, enhance linkages
- Provide linkages off-site – natural and artificial
- Assess ability for possums to move off-site during construction
- Translocate only if absolutely necessary
- Monitor possums retained on site

Conservation Offset

- DEW currently does not have an offset policy
- Therefore, use the EPA's environmental offset policy as a guideline
- EPA's environmental offset principles are:
 - Offsets should only be considered when all reasonable attempts to mitigate adverse impacts have been exhausted
 - offset package should address both direct offsets and contributing offsets
 - offsets should be "like for like" or better
 - offset ratios should be greater than 1 for 1 where the risk of failure is apparent
 - offsets must have a robust and consistent assessment process
 - offsets must meet all statutory requirements
 - offsets must be clearly defined, transparent and enforceable
 - offsets must ensure a long lasting benefit

Conservation Offset

- DEW in Canberra has negotiated conservation offset packages for possums.
- DEC are also able to assist in negotiating a conservation offset package that satisfies both the DEW and EPA processes.
- DEC approach focused on revegetating land managed by DEC in the conservation estate that is degraded
- Contributions to DEC research on ringtail possums also considered favourably
- How much money will it cost? Depends on the significance of the impact.

Conclusions

- Ringtail Possums are protected at the State and Federal level and need to be treated as such
- Ringtail Possums are able to survive in developed environments provided sufficient habitat is retained
- Enhanced revegetation of development sites and revegetation of reserves through Conservation Offsets could actually improve the conservation status of the Ringtail Possum
- Ringtail Possums should not stop development if they are addressed properly but they will cost time and money