

Frequently asked questions – Wild sandalwood

What is a biodiversity management programme and why does sandalwood need one?

In accordance with Part 5 of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act), the purpose of a biodiversity management programme is to provide for the conservation, protection, and management of native species. Sandalwood is a native species that has remained in commercial demand for over 170 years and as such, requires a biodiversity management programme to deal with matters that may impact on its continued ecologically sustainable use.

Sandalwood is listed as vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) red list. Why does the *Santalum spicatum* (Sandalwood) Biodiversity Management Programme (Sandalwood BMP) not address this?

The processes for assessing species' conservation status are separate to the purpose of a biodiversity management programme, being to set parameters to manage for conservation, protection and ecologically sustainable use. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) has received a nomination for sandalwood to be listed as a threatened species under the BC Act. As the species occurs in Western Australia and South Australia, the nomination is subject to the national Intergovernmental Memorandum of Understanding – Agreement on a Common Assessment Method for Listing of Threatened Species and Threatened Ecological Communities (see awe.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/cam). As such, the nomination has been referred to the Commonwealth to facilitate cross-jurisdictional assessment. Listing under the State's BC Act will be considered once the Commonwealth process is complete. The outcome of the listing assessment may change management of the species in Western Australia.

What is the link between the Sandalwood BMP and the review of sandalwood harvest limits?

The *Sandalwood (Limitation on Removal of Sandalwood) Order (No. 2) 2015* (Sandalwood Order) remains in place until 31 December 2026. As such, the Government is committed to the Sandalwood Order's prescribed quantities through licences and contracts until that time. The Sandalwood BMP contains a strategy to review and revise the Sandalwood Order quantities that may be taken while maintaining the productive capacity of sandalwood populations and associated ecosystems. With information gained from inventory and population condition monitoring consistent with actions in the Sandalwood BMP, DBCA expects to be able to provide informed recommendations to the Minister for Environment on future sandalwood harvest levels.

What are the sandalwood licensing guidelines that the Sandalwood BMP refers to?

The guidelines are being developed to provide guidance to DBCA staff in implementing aspects of the Sandalwood BMP that involve sandalwood licensing, licence application approvals and licence conditions for requirements such as regeneration, and for licence applicants to understand the information needed to successfully apply for a sandalwood licence.

Why is sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*) being considered for harvesting in Western Australia if it already listed as threatened on the IUCN red list and listed as threatened in South Australia?

The *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act) provides for the ecologically sustainable use of native animals and plants. The Taskforce for the Advancement of Aboriginal Economic Development recommended the ecologically sustainable use of sandalwood to provide economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities and regional businesses in a manner that does not diminish the viability and condition of wild sandalwood populations. The sandalwood industry provides investment for the enhancement of sandalwood regeneration. This investment provides opportunities for caring for country and employment for Traditional Owners.

Harvesting of sandalwood is considered where sustainability and other criteria are met. Licence applicants are required to provide a sustainability and establishment plan with their submissions. Re-seeding and associated monitoring are requirements of all licences.

What expertise is included on the DBCA internal working group for the review of the Sandalwood Order?

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) working group for the Sandalwood Order review is an internal working group comprising of staff from across various divisions and branches in DBCA. Expertise includes staff with extensive experience in sandalwood ecology, biogeography, population ecology, population modelling, licensing and compliance, invasive species management, and engagement with Traditional Owners and stakeholders.

How will independent expertise be incorporated into the review?

DBCA is mandated in accordance with the Sandalwood Biodiversity Management Programme and Part 5 of the BC Act to review the appropriate harvest (take) levels for wild sandalwood and provide informed recommendations to the Minister for Environment on future harvest levels. While an internal working group has been established for purposes of guiding the review process, a panel of independent reviewers has been appointed to provide input into the review. The independent review panel has a combined expertise in biodiversity conservation, population modelling and Traditional Owner engagement. Traditional Owners, Environmental non-government organisations and leading scientists will be able to provide input into the review and in 2025 there will be a public consultation period.

Why didn't the Sandalwood Order review process start sooner?

DBCA has been preparing for the review for an extended period and commenced re-measurement of sandalwood plots in 2022. The *Santalum spicatum* (sandalwood) Biodiversity Management Programme was finalised and released in late 2023 and this was important to complete first before formally commencing the review of the Sandalwood Order.

What are the terms of reference of the DBCA working group for the Sandalwood Order review?

The working group will oversee the process for the review of the Sandalwood Order, to advise the Minister to set a new order commencing from 2027, in accordance with the publicly available scope of works for the review of the *Sandalwood (Limitation of Removal of Sandalwood) Order (No. 2) 2015* (scope of works).

How will the recommendations of the Taskforce for the Advancement of Aboriginal economic development using wild harvest sandalwood, be considered?

As mentioned in the scope of works for the Sandalwood Order review, recommendations from the taskforce process will be considered where it is relevant to the scope i.e. allocation of take quota.

How will DBCA ensure that the review is open, transparent and inclusive?

DBCA will engage with the full range of stakeholders who are interested and/or impacted by any decisions around the quota/take levels of sandalwood that is made available for harvest. Stakeholders will contribute to best available information and input into the Sandalwood Order review. Stakeholder consultation will be thorough, open and transparent to ensure sound decision-making regarding the review of the Sandalwood Order. A public consultation process will be undertaken for a minimum of six weeks during 2025.

Will the availability of plantation sandalwood be included in the Sandalwood Order review regarding the view to reducing the take of wild sandalwood?

The role of the sandalwood plantation industry will be considered regarding formulating future wild take quantities, and with due consideration given to quality, markets, and government involvement.

How will the Commonwealth's assessment of the conservation status of sandalwood for consideration for listing under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) be integrated into the review, and will the review contribute to the assessment?

The review of the Sandalwood Order will be conducted alongside this assessment process. The information gathered will be crucial for the conservation of the species, irrespective of whether *Santalum spicatum* is listed as threatened under the EPBC Act.

How will the department ensure that the review is science-based to ensure that any level of take of wild sandalwood is sustainable and that an appropriate level of associated management, is implemented and maintained?

Since late 2022, a significant number of sandalwood plots have been measured across an extensive area of the wild sandalwood's distribution, providing information on occurrence, patterns of sandalwood recruitment, and rates of population increase or decline. In addition, a range of best available information will be used and a range of stakeholders will be consulted. The review process will be undertaken in accordance with the BC Act to ensure harvest limits enable ecologically sustainable use of sandalwood and limits set will have regard to the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

How will Indigenous Knowledge be incorporated into the review of the Sandalwood Order?

Traditional Owners are invited to provide input into the process at any stage. Where Indigenous Knowledge is permitted for use it will only be used if adhering to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights. One of the independent reviewers for the Sandalwood Order review has expertise in this area and DBCA is currently in the process of developing an Indigenous Knowledge protocol.