

NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee

Conservation Assessment of *Helichrysum calvertianum* (F.Muell.) F.Muell. (Asteraceae)

J Scott May 2019

NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee

Helichrysum calvertianum (F.Muell.) F.Muell. (Asteraceae)

Distribution: Endemic to NSW

Current EPBC Act Status: Not listed

Current NSW BC Act Status: Not listed

Summary of Conservation Assessment

Helichrysum calvertianum is found to be eligible for listing as Vulnerable under Criteria B1ab(iii, v) + B2ab(iii, v); and Vulnerable under C2a(i).

The main reasons for the species being eligible for listing as Vulnerable are that: i) the species has a highly restricted geographic range with extent of occurrence (EOO) = 673 km² and the area of occupancy (AOO) = 40 km²; ii) the species has an estimated population size of between 2,500 and 3,500 mature individuals; iii) its habitat and some populations continue to be threatened by ongoing habitat disturbance; (iv) there are estimated to be <10 locations; and (v) the lower bound for the number of mature individuals in each population is <1,000.

Description and Taxonomy

Helichrysum calvertianum (F.Muell.) F.Muell. (Asteraceae) is described in PlantNet (2019) as a “twiggy subshrub to 30 cm high, much-branched; stems glabrescent with sparse woolly and minute glandular hairs, the lower leaves caducous leaving prominent scars. Leaves crowded, linear, 3–8 mm long, 0.5–0.8 mm wide, margins revolute and concealing the lower surface, surfaces green and glabrous, viscid. Heads terminal and solitary on branches, hemispherical, 0.7–1 cm long, 1–1.5 cm diam.; involucre bracts with margins woolly-ciliate towards base, laminae reflexed at maturity; intermediate bracts longest with white papery laminae often tinged pink towards the apex, outermost bracts golden and hyaline, innermost with long claws and with small white papery laminae. Florets numerous, all bisexual. Achenes oblong, terete, minutely glandular; pappus of many barbellate bristles, subplumose at the tip.”

Distribution and Abundance

Helichrysum calvertianum is endemic to New South Wales (NSW) where it is currently only known from the Wingecarribee Shire on the Central Tablelands. Seven populations of *H. calvertianum* are currently known. The south-eastern extent of the distribution is at Fitzroy Falls; the south-western extent is Penrose State Forest, the northernmost population is in the Joadja – Wanganderry area, and there are other populations between Welby, near Mittagong, and Belanglo State Forest. An old herbarium collection made in 1898 by Maiden from Barbers Creek may be from near Tallong, however there have been no other records from this area since then. A population from Mt Gibraltar near Mittagong found in 2004 could not be relocated by searches in 2010 or 2016 and may have become extinct (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016).

Helichrysum calvertianum has a highly restricted geographic distribution. The extent of occurrence (EOO) was estimated to be 673 km², based on a minimum convex polygon enclosing all mapped occurrences of the species, the method of assessment recommended by IUCN (2017). The area of occupancy (AOO) was estimated to be 40 km². This calculation was based on the species occupying 10 (2 x 2 km) grid cells, the spatial scale of assessment recommended by IUCN (2017).

There are currently incomplete data on the number of mature individuals of *Helichrysum calvertianum*. For the few collections that have population details, descriptions of abundance range from “occasional” to “locally frequent”. Population estimates, where available, range from 100 plants or less (Penrose and Belanglo State Forests), to approximately 1,300 plants at Welby (NSW Bionet database; NSW Herbarium records). No formal survey of population abundance for the species across its distribution has been undertaken. Douglas (*in litt.* June 2016) states “total number of individuals is estimated from database records and recent field observations to be > 2,500 and <3,500 mature plants.”

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Ecology

Helichrysum calvertianum is a perennial paper daisy flowering from winter to summer (PlantNet 2019). It occurs in dry sclerophyll forest (PlantNet 2019) and heathland with rock outcrops, predominantly on Hawkesbury sandstone (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016).

The known sites are at an approximate altitude of between 650 and 855 m (estimated from relevant topographic 1:25 000 map series). The highest altitude corresponds to the Mt Gibraltar site where the species has not been sighted since 2004 despite searches in 2010 and 2016 (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016). Rainfall across sites ranges from 850 mm pa at the westernmost sites, to over 1,500 mm at the easternmost site (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016).

Benson and McDougall (1994) suggested the species is found in dry eucalypt woodland on sandy soil in areas with over 900 mm of annual rainfall. They also suggested that the seeds are wind dispersed. The fire response of *Helichrysum calvertianum* is unknown (Benson and McDougall 1994).

Threats

Past Threats:

The habitat of *Helichrysum calvertianum* would appear to be naturally fragmented (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016) as the species generally occurs on Hawkesbury Sandstone rock outcrops. Past land clearing in the central tablelands area of NSW has reduced the extent and connectivity of this habitat.

Current Threats:

Recreational vehicles. Many of the sites (in particular the sites at Welby and in Belanglo State Forest) are near to tracks and prone to ongoing disturbance from vehicle usage and from track maintenance activities. Douglas (*in litt.* October 2017) summarised recreational threats as “Damage to and death of plants through crushing by vehicles (trail bikes, 4WDs and potentially mountain bikes); erosion of habitat by vehicle use in highly erodible and skeletal soils; siltation of downstream [*sic*] habitats affected by upstream [*sic*] erosion; increased weed invasion through weed propagules introduced on vehicles (tyres etc.)” (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016).

Other Disturbance. The proximity to tracks for most of the known populations means there is disturbance from track usage and maintenance activities in addition to the disturbance from recreational vehicles above. The plants at Welby are also threatened by dumped soil and rubble, and clearing for maintenance under power lines. Upslope of the Penrose SF population, woodland has been partially cleared to provide a fire buffer to the adjoining pine plantation, and this upslope area is subject to ongoing vehicle and rubbish impacts (Bionet Atlas sighting accessed June 2018). The habitat of the Canyonleigh population has been disturbed by road construction (S. Douglas *in litt.* October 2017).

Feral animals. Feral animals are likely to adversely impact on mature plants and limit ongoing recruitment. “Browsing, grazing, and digging (followed by erosion) due to feral animals including rabbits, hares, goats and deer species. Rabbits appear to be the main concern at this stage.” (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016).

Weed invasion. The Fitzroy Falls population is adversely impacted by weeds (*Erigeron karvinskianus* (Bonytip Fleabane) and *Rubus anglocandicans* (Blackberry)). There has also been encroachment from *Pittosporum undulatum* which now dominates the nearby forest and may be an indicator of a lack of fire in the habitat. The riparian habitat where this population occurs is more prone to weed invasion than sites in dry habitats (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016). Weeds at the Welby site include *Briza* sp. and *Conyza* sp. (NSW Herbarium records). The Penrose SF site is very small and has been affected by shading (and possible allelopathic impacts from pine needles) from *Pinus radiata* adjacent to the site (S. Douglas *in litt.* October 2017, December 2018)). However, some of these affects in Penrose SF have been recently mitigated by conservation actions (S. Douglas *in litt.* December 2018), though ongoing control is required.

Loss of a population:

The Mount Gibraltar population could not be detected in targeted searches in 2010 and 2016 and has not been seen since 2004 (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016). The loss of the species from this site may be due to

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a combination of high intensity fire, erosion of skeletal soil habitat on rock outcrops, rabbit impacts and recreational pressures (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016).

Potential Future threats:

Underground coal mining is proposed beneath a part of Belanglo State Forest (HumeCoal 2018). It is currently unknown if any infrastructure or activities associated with mining will adversely impact *Helichrysum calvertianum* or its habitat.

Inappropriate fire regime. Although the impacts of fire on the species are not known, changes to fire frequency (including an absence of fire) may affect the recruitment of new plants.

Adverse climate change impacts: In the region where *Helichrysum calvertianum* occurs, the number of days over 35°C is expected to increase by 2030, particularly in summer (Adapt NSW 2018), exacerbating drought impacts on sites with shallow soils. In addition, the frequency of severe fire weather events is expected to increase by 2070 (Adapt NSW 2018), increasing the risk of frequent fire in habitats where the species occurs.

Assessment against IUCN Red List criteria

For this assessment it is considered that the survey of *Helichrysum calvertianum* has been adequate and there is sufficient scientific evidence to support the listing outcome.

Criterion A Population Size reduction

Assessment Outcome: Data Deficient.

Justification: To be listed as threatened under Criterion A the species must have experienced a population reduction of $\geq 30\%$ (VU threshold) over three generations or 10 years (whichever is longer). There are insufficient data to assess *Helichrysum calvertianum* against this criterion.

Criterion B Geographic range

Assessment Outcome: Vulnerable under B1ab(iii, v)+B2ab(iii, v).

Justification: *Helichrysum calvertianum* has a highly restricted geographic range.

Extent of Occurrence (EOO): The EOO was estimated to be 673 km², based on a minimum convex polygon enclosing all mapped occurrences of the species, the method of assessment recommended by IUCN (2017). To be listed as Endangered under Criterion B1 a species must have an EOO of <5000 km². *Helichrysum calvertianum* meets the EOO threshold for Endangered under Criterion B1.

Area of Occupancy (AOO): The AOO was estimated to be 40 km². This calculation was based on the species occupying 10 (2 x 2 km) grid cells, the spatial scale of assessment recommended by IUCN (2017). To be listed as Endangered under Criterion B2 a species must have an AOO of <500 km². *Helichrysum calvertianum* meets the AOO threshold for Endangered under Criterion B2.

Although *Helichrysum calvertianum* meets the thresholds of EOO and AOO for an Endangered species, the relevant subcriteria (see below) are only met at the Vulnerable threshold.

In addition, at least two of three other conditions must be met. These conditions are:

- a) The population or habitat is observed or inferred to be severely fragmented or number of locations = 1 (CR), ≤ 5 (EN) or ≤ 10 (VU).

Assessment Outcome: Subcriterion met at Vulnerable threshold.

Justification: *Helichrysum calvertianum* is estimated to be found at seven locations. To determine the number of locations (as per definition IUCN 2017) the most plausible threats at the different sites over the entire range of the distribution of *H. calvertianum* were considered. Adverse disturbance to the habitat is a threat at most of the sites however it was judged that disturbance impacts on each site independently rather than collectively. There is insufficient information to ascertain if there are separate locations within each population, so it is assumed each population constitutes a separate location.

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Helichrysum calvertianum is unlikely to be severely fragmented, but this remains uncertain. A species is considered to be severely fragmented if most of its individuals are found in small and relatively isolated subpopulations, and the subpopulations may go extinct with a reduced probability of recolonization (IUCN 2017). "If >50% of its total area of occupancy is in habitat patches that are (1) smaller than would be required to support a viable population, or (2) separated from other habitat patches by a large distance" (IUCN 2017). Whilst the dispersal mechanism of *H. calvertianum* is unknown, species in the family Asteraceae are largely wind dispersed. It is likely that there are habitat patches between many of the populations that are not too distant to limit dispersal of seeds.

- b) Continuing decline observed, estimated, inferred or projected in any of: (i) extent of occurrence; (ii) area of occupancy; (iii) area, extent and/or quality of habitat; (iv) number of locations or subpopulations; (v) number of mature individuals

Assessment Outcome: Subcriterion met for (iii) and (v). Continuing decline is inferred for quality of habitat and the number of mature individuals.

Justification: "Continuing declines at any rate can be used to qualify taxa under Criteria B or C2. This is because taxa under consideration for Criteria B or C are already characterized by restricted ranges or small population size." (IUCN 2017). There is ongoing disturbance to the habitat at most of the sites where *Helichrysum calvertianum* occurs. Predominately this is from vehicle use and track/power line maintenance and associated erosion effects, but there is also localised rubbish dumping and clearing. Rabbits and weeds are also impacting the species and its habitat at several sites. These adverse effects are expected to continue.

At one site, the population has not been relocated since 2004, despite searches in 2010 and 2016. This possible loss of the Mt Gibraltar population is likely due to "a combination of fire and erosion of skeletal soil habitat on rock outcrops, possibly worsened by rabbit diggings and recreational pressures" (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016).

- c) Extreme fluctuations.

Assessment Outcome: Data Deficient.

Justification: Currently there are no available data to assess the likelihood of extreme fluctuations in *Helichrysum calvertianum*.

Criterion C Small population size and decline

Assessment Outcome: Near threatened to Vulnerable via C2a(i).

Justification: The population size of *Helichrysum calvertianum* is estimated to be between 2,500 and 3,500 mature individuals (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016). To be listed as Vulnerable under Criterion C, a species must have between 2,500 and 10,000 mature individuals. Whilst data on abundance of *Helichrysum calvertianum* are lacking for many of the sites, expert opinion indicates there are likely to be <10,000 mature individuals in total, hence a precautionary approach is that *Helichrysum calvertianum* meets the total population threshold for listing as Vulnerable under Criterion C.

At least one of two additional conditions must be met. These are:

C1. An observed, estimated or projected continuing decline of at least 10% in 10 years or 3 generation (up to a max. of 100 years in future).

Assessment Outcome: Data Deficient.

Justification: There are insufficient data to assess *Helichrysum calvertianum* against this criterion.

C2. An observed, estimated, projected or inferred continuing decline in the number of mature individuals.

Assessment Outcome: Subcriterion met.

Justification: "Continuing declines at any rate can be used to qualify taxa under Criteria B or C2. This is because taxa under consideration for Criteria B or C are already characterized by restricted ranges or small population size." (IUCN 2017). Continuing decline is inferred by the disturbance to the habitat at most sites where *Helichrysum calvertianum* occurs. Predominately this is from vehicle use and track/power line maintenance and associated erosion effects, but there is also localised rubbish dumping and clearing. Rabbits and weeds are also impacting on several sites. At one site, the population has not been relocated since 2004, despite searches in 2010 and 2016.

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This possible loss of the Mt Gibraltar population is likely due to “a combination of fire and erosion of skeletal soil habitat on rock outcrops, possibly worsened by rabbit diggings and recreational pressures” (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016). These adverse effects are expected to continue.

In addition, at least 1 of the following 3 conditions:

- a (i). Number of mature individuals in each subpopulation ≤ 50 (CR), ≤ 250 (EN) or ≤ 1000 (VU).
Assessment Outcome: Subcriterion likely to be met at Vulnerable threshold.
Justification: One of the populations (Welby) was estimated to contain approximately 1,300 plants in a survey conducted in December 2010 (S. Douglas NSW Bionet records). The number of mature individuals currently at this site is unknown but due to the ongoing high level of disturbance at this site, there is currently likely to be less than the previous estimate of 1,300. No other populations are currently thought to have more than 1,000 mature individuals. In summary at present, a lower bound estimate would be that no sites have more than 1,000 mature plants, but an upper bound would be that one site may have more than 1,000 mature plants.
- a (ii). percentage of mature individuals in one subpopulation = 90-100% (CR), 95-100% (EN), 100% (VU).
Assessment Outcome: Criterion not met.
Justification: No one population is known to contain >90% of mature individuals.
- b. Extreme fluctuations in the number of mature individuals
Assessment Outcome: Data Deficient.
Justification: Currently there are no available data to assess the likelihood of extreme fluctuations in *Helichrysum calvertianum*.

Criterion D Very small or restricted population

Assessment Outcome: Criterion not met.

Justification: The population size of *Helichrysum calvertianum* is estimated to be between 2,500 and 3,500 mature individuals (S. Douglas *in litt.* June 2016). *Helichrysum calvertianum* does not meet the threshold for listing under Criterion D.

D2. Restricted area of occupancy (typically <20 km²) or number of locations (typically <5) with a plausible future threat that could drive the taxon to CR or EX in a very short time.

Assessment Outcome: Criterion not met.

Justification: The area of occupancy (AOO) and number of locations exceed the indicative thresholds and it is not likely that the species could plausibly be driven to critically endangered or extinction within a very short period of time.

Criterion E Quantitative Analysis

Assessment Outcome: Data Deficient.

Justification: Currently there are not enough data to undertake a quantitative analysis to determine the extinction probability of *Helichrysum calvertianum*.

Conservation and Management Actions

There is no NSW Saving Our Species site-managed program for *Helichrysum calvertianum*. The following actions are derived from available threat information.

Habitat loss, disturbance and modification

- Assess disturbance and habitat loss at each site. Assess feasibility for restricting recreational vehicle access at sites where damage to the habitat is occurring. Assess means of reducing disturbance from foot traffic at affected sites.

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Invasive species

- Undertake weed control within known habitat.
- Assess presence and effects of feral animals at each site. Establish a program for management and control.

Ex situ conservation

- Establish an ex-situ seed bank collection with collections from all known sites.

Stakeholder Management

- Reduce disturbance to the species habitat at the sites that are frequently visited by the public.
- Liaise with Forestry Corporation of NSW regarding the protection of populations of *Helichrysum calvertianum* from recreational vehicles and weed encroachment at Belanglo and Penrose State Forests.
- Report new records of *Helichrysum calvertianum* to the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.

Survey and Monitoring priorities

- Survey known sites of *Helichrysum calvertianum* and potential habitat to assess abundance and population structure (adults versus seedlings or juveniles).
- Monitoring should be conducted to determine:
 - If disturbance of the habitat is affecting *Helichrysum calvertianum* plants.
 - The response of *Helichrysum calvertianum* to disturbance (if it occurs e.g., stem death, resprouting, leaf browning, flowering or fruiting) or fire. Conduct post fire monitoring of recruitment.
 - The influence of management actions on threatening processes. Has there been any further encroachment of weeds in the habitat? Is there any damage evident from feral animals or forestry activities or other activities?

Information and Research priorities

- Understand the ecology of *Helichrysum calvertianum*.
 - Pollination ecology – determination of pollination method (e.g. wind, insect), identification of pollinators.
 - Seed biology – germination and dormancy mechanisms, seed viability and longevity, seed dispersal and predation. Is germination promoted by fire cues?
 - Recruitment and establishment – survival rates of seedlings (germination and survival of seedlings post fire), causes of mortality, population modelling (e.g., impact of seedling loss), growth and development rates.
 - Response of *Helichrysum calvertianum* to fire (are plants killed, do they resprout, post-fire recruitment from seed germination and seedling survival).
 - Response of the species (adults and juveniles/seedlings) to grazing impacts.
- Understand the habitat of *Helichrysum calvertianum*.
 - Defining commonly co-occurring species.
 - Defining environmental characteristics.
 - This would also provide a baseline against which to monitor future change.

References

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