

# NSW SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

## Determination to make a minor amendment to Schedule 1A of the Threatened Species Conservation Act

The Scientific Committee established by the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (the Act) has made a determination to amend the description of the Thick-billed Grasswren (eastern subspecies), in Part 1 of Schedule 1A (CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES) by removing *Amytornis textilis modestus* (North, 1902) and inserting *Amytornis modestus obscurior* (Mathews, 1923) and *Amytornis modestus inexpectatus* (Mathews, 1912). This determination is made pursuant to Division 5 of Part 2 of the Act.

The Scientific Committee has found that:

1. *Amytornis textilis modestus* (North, 1902) (family Maluridae) is currently listed as a Critically endangered species in Schedule 1A of the Act. Recent taxonomic revisions (Black *et al.* 2010; Black 2011; Austin *et al.* 2013) have elevated *Amytornis textilis modestus* to full species status; *A. modestus*, the Thick-billed Grasswren.
2. All New South Wales (NSW) populations previously referred to as *Amytornis textilis* are now considered to be *A. modestus*. The name *A. textilis* refers to populations in South Australia and Western Australia—the Western Grasswren.
3. Grasswren systematics are complicated because of subtle geographic variation and highly cryptic behaviour, hindering collection of specimens and study of living birds. *Amytornis modestus* is a small (16 cm), furtive, terrestrial, rusty brown songbird with white streaks on the head and body, short wings and a long cocked tail, similar to other NSW grasswrens, but lacking the facial patterns of Grey Grasswren *A. barbatus* and Striated Grasswren *A. striatus* (Higgins *et al.* 2001).
4. Of seven subspecies recognized within *Amytornis modestus* (Black 2011; 2016) two are found in NSW and are endemic. *Amytornis modestus inexpectatus* (Mathews, 1912) is known from specimens collected in the 1800's in central NSW. *Amytornis modestus obscurior* is known exclusively from north-western NSW. Some authors also refer to these northwestern populations as *A. modestus inexpectatus* (Mathews, 1912) and do not recognize *A. modestus obscurior* as a separate subspecies (Christidis *et al.* 2013).
5. The central NSW subspecies, *Amytornis modestus inexpectatus* (Mathews, 1912) has contracted from the eastern part of its range (Higgins *et al.* 2001). There are confirmed historical records from two locations: (1) three birds from Yandembah, around 40 km southeast of Mossgiel, in the Lower Western Region, possibly collected in November 1886 and (2) three specimens obtained by Gould collected from the lower Namoi River valley, inland northern NSW, in December 1839 or January 1840, but precise locality unknown (Higgins *et al.* 2001; McAllen 1987; Parker 1972).
6. The north-west NSW subspecies, *Amytornis modestus obscurior* is known from two specimens collected on Mount Arrowsmith Station near Milparinka in October 1912 (McAllan 1987) and a clutch of eggs collected north-east of Tibooburra in 1936 (McAllan 2000; Black & Longmore 2009). Parker *et al.* (2010) re-discovered this population in August 2008 near Packsaddle, to the east of the 1912 record (Black 2011; first photograph of a living bird in Black 2016). The Packsaddle locality is presently the only known extant population of *A. modestus* in New South Wales and the only known population of *A. m. obscurior*.

Dr Mark Eldridge  
Chairperson  
Scientific Committee

Exhibition period: 14/07/17 – 08/09/17

Proposed Gazettal date: 14/07/17

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ESTABLISHED UNDER THE THREATENED SPECIES CONSERVATION ACT 1995

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