

COASTAL SALTMARSH IN THE NORTHERN AG REGION

A nationally recognised Threatened Ecological Community (TEC),
Subtropical & Temperate Coastal Saltmarsh thrives in estuaries in our own backyard.

At home in the Northern Agricultural Region (NAR) From Kalbarri to Guilderton

Coastal saltmarsh is recognised as a TEC under the Federal Government's Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act and is currently listed as 'vulnerable'. Here in WA, State Government recognises coastal saltmarsh as a priority ecological community (PEC).

Coastal saltmarsh occurs along Australia's coastline (from Shark Bay, WA to southern QLD, including TAS) in estuaries and low-lying coastal lagoons with a tidal connection (surface or groundwater), including those on islands.

In the NAR, areas of the TEC can be found at Murchison, Chapman, Greenough, Irwin, Hill and Moore estuaries, and low-lying lagoons at Hutt, Leeman Lakes and Green Head.

Poorly mapped and understood in the NAR, bringing attention to this important ecological community will help guide vital restoration efforts, ensuring protection and conservation efforts for years to come.



Identifying the TEC

An area of coastal saltmarsh needs to meet certain criteria to be considered part of the EPBC-listed TEC. It must:

- Be located south of Shark Bay, WA (26° latitude) and central Mackay coast, QLD (23° 37' S), including TAS and islands in this region.
- Have a tidal connection, either via surface or groundwater. Can be regular or intermittent. Eg. opening of bar at river mouth.
- Occur on sandy or muddy substrates.
- Contain characteristic vegetation species in an area >0.1ha (this can include patches as long as they are <30m apart and their total area >0.1ha).
- Have proportional tree cover (from Mangroves, Melaleucas or Casuarinas) or ground cover (from seagrass or weed species) that is <50%.

Protecting Coastal Saltmarsh

Actions to protect the TEC in the NAR include:

- Identifying and eradicating weeds.
- Litter clean ups.
- Restricting 4WD and pedestrian access to certain areas.
- Interpretative signage and education campaigns.

We can all work together to take simple steps towards protecting coastal saltmarsh TEC.

Threats to Coastal Saltmarsh Within the Northern Ag Region

Invasive weed species can spread rapidly through coastal saltmarsh vegetation, increasing the risk of TEC classification being removed if weeds dominate >50% of the area.

Pollution, of both water quality and landscapes, can cause damage to saltmarsh vegetation and create unsuitable growing conditions.

Altered hydrology also affects growing conditions, with changes to the flow of water in to or out of an estuary impacting the flora and fauna supported by areas of coastal saltmarsh. A common example can be seen in sand bars across river mouths being interfered with by community members, creating man-made openings to the ocean. This can artificially alter the salinity and water levels in an estuary quite suddenly, potentially harming saltmarsh species.

Perhaps the greatest threat is pedestrian access and 4WD use, with beach goers mostly unaware of the importance of coastal saltmarsh. Walking trails and 4WD tracks fragment areas of vegetation, allowing weeds to populate on newly-bare ground.

The condition and size of saltmarsh patches can be altered significantly by environmental factors, putting the area at risk of failing to meet TEC size requirements.

Thankfully, coastal saltmarsh flora is resilient and fast-growing, able to regrow over pedestrian and 4WD tracks, if given the chance.

For more information please contact:

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