

**Sent:** Friday, 24 October 2014 10:40 AM  
**To:** Murphy, Chris; Hall, Mark  
**Cc:** Bartlett, Fiona; O'Neill, Paul; Maas, Sylvana; Carey, Mark; Oxley, Stephen; Callister, Deb  
**Subject:** preliminary advice on Australian Painted Snipe [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]  
**Importance:** High

Chris and Mark

You have sought preliminary advice on the referral EPBC 2014-7356 in relation to potential issues for threatened and migratory species. The most significant appear to be potential impacts on the Australian painted snipe.

*Preliminary advice on the Australian Painted Snipe – EPBC 2014-7356*

The Australian Painted Snipe (APS) is a stocky wading bird that occupies shallow freshwater, and sometimes brackish, wetlands across a large part of Australia. Since the 1950's its population has undergone a severe decline and in May 2013 it was up-listed from vulnerable to endangered under the EPBC Act. The main threat identified for this species is the loss and degradation of wetlands.

The APS is a cryptic species that is usually only seen singly or in pairs. Surveys undertaken at the Caley Valley wetland, including on areas that are the subject this referral, recorded what may be the largest number of APS at one time. The species was detected in high numbers both on, and adjacent to, the site proposed for onshore disposal of dredge spoil at Abbot Point.

Birdlife Australia recognises the Caley Valley wetland as refuge habitat used by wetland birds, including the APS, during drought. The site also contains known breeding habitat for the APS.

Based on the number of APS detected at the site the Migratory Species section considers the Caley Valley wetland, including the area proposed to receive dredge spoil, as one of the most, if not the most, important sites for this species in Australia. Removal and degradation of habitat at Abbot Point would likely:

- Lead to a long term decrease in the size of a population (the CIA estimated the site contained 2.3% of the total population);
- Disrupt the breeding cycle of the species;
- Modify and destroy habitat for the species to the extent that the species is likely to decline; and
- Interfere with the recovery of the species.

The Conservation Advice for the APS identifies a number of Regional Priority Actions that include:

- Ensure there is no disturbance in areas where the species is known to breed, excluding necessary actions to manage the conservation of the species
- Control access routes to suitably constrain public access to existing and future breeding sites on public land
- Minimise adverse impacts from land use at known sites

- Manage any changes to hydrology that may result in changes to water table levels, run-off, salinity, algal blooms, sedimentation or pollution
- Manage any disruptions to water flows
- Manage any other known, potential or emerging threats including inappropriate fire regimes and coastal port/infrastructure development.

#### Additional information needed

Little is known about this cryptic species which will make it difficult to manage. To assess the impact of the proposal on the APS a comprehensive habitat assessment of the Caley Valley wetland is needed to enhance our understanding of important habitat features of the APS and its ecology. This must include fine-scale mapping of suitable APS habitat based on data from the Abbot Point site and other similar sites where the species has been detected. This will help determine the percentage loss of habitat associated with the proposal and provide information needed to manage remaining habitat. Ideally targeted surveys would also be conducted under different environmental conditions to determine if the site is utilised all year or seasonally. An assessment of other wetlands in the region that may, or do, provide habitat for the APS would also be helpful in determining the relative impact of the proposal.

Please let me know if you need anything further at this time.

Regards Geoff

**Geoff Richardson**

Assistant Secretary | Protected Species and Communities Branch  
Department of the Environment