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The Are Our Orchids Safe Down Under?

A National Assessment of Threatened Orchids in Australia

Australian governments at both the national and state/territory level have processes for listing threatened species under biodiversity conservation legislation. Australia has about 1700 species of orchids, comprising about 1250 named species in about 175 genera, plus at least 450 undescribed species. Currently, 195 orchid species are listed as threatened under national legislation, while the eight Australian States and territories list a total of 317 species as threatened within their (regional) jurisdiction.

Comparison of national and regional lists indicates a number of inconsistencies, with some orchids listed under different threat categories at the national and regional level, others listed at the national level but not at the regional level, and some endemic regional orchids listed at the regional level but not at the national level. This suggests that the national list underestimates the number of threatened orchids in Australia. In addition, comprehensive reviews of the conservation status of orchids within two States indicates the number of regionally and nationally threatened orchids is much higher than official lists suggest.

This paper examines the listing process, comparisons of regional and national lists of threatened orchids, and provides recommendations for improving the process of listing nationally threatened orchids.