

Our Ref: 22178_DeGrey_Thomas_20221129_ltr.docx

29 November 2022

Sarah Thomas
Environment Superintendent
De Grey Mining Limited

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Dear Sarah

RE: Status of *Seringia exastia* at Hemi

De Grey Mining Limited (De Grey) is the proponent of the Mallina Gold Project (the Project), located in the Pilbara region and the Shire of Port Hedland, approximately 85 kilometres (km) south of Port Hedland, Western Australia (WA). The Project incorporates the Hemi resource deposit and includes several infrastructure corridors.

Ecoscape (Australia) Pty Ltd (Ecoscape) conducted a Detailed flora and vegetation assessment of relevant Project areas in 2021, to provide data and documentation to support the environmental approval process. This assessment recorded a location of *Seringia exastia* at Hemi (approximately 200 individuals) (Ecoscape, 2021). The location of *Seringia exastia* at Hemi were confirmed by Umwelt (Australia) Pty Ltd (Umwelt) during the 2022 Hemi Detailed Flora and Vegetation Assessment (Umwelt, 2022). Some Project footprints have been searched as part of the 2022 Hemi Detailed Flora and Vegetation Assessment (Umwelt, 2022); while no further locations were recorded, it is possible that this taxon occurs in unsurveyed footprints, and may be impacted by the Project.

Seringia exastia is currently listed as Threatened (Critically Endangered) under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) only; it was recently delisted from Threatened status in WA under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act). The listing of this taxon as Threatened was supported by knowledge at the time of listing, which indicated that this taxon was discrete from all other *Seringia* taxa on morphological grounds, and was known from a single population within the Port of Broome. Recent taxonomic work has determined that *Seringia exastia* is conspecific with (the same as) *Seringia elliptica*, a taxon widespread across northern and central WA, Northern Territory and extending into South Australia (Binks et al., 2020). Consequently, *Seringia elliptica* and *Seringia exastia* were synonymised under the oldest valid name, being *Seringia exastia*. This synonymisation has created an anomalous situation whereby *Seringia exastia* as now circumscribed is a common, widespread species that clearly no longer meets the criteria for Threatened status under either of the aforementioned Acts. It is expected

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that this taxon will be delisted on a Commonwealth level in the near future given its delisting in WA, but it is unclear when this will occur.

The entity recorded at Hemi was determined by Umwelt on morphological grounds to represent the now re-circumscribed *Seringia exastia*. The material is a good match for what was previously (prior to the genetic study by Binks et al. (2020)) formally recognised as *Seringia elliptica*; this corresponds with what was conventionally accepted prior to the genetic study by Binks et al. (2020), in that *Seringia elliptica* was known to be widespread in the Pilbara region, with Hemi being located within the taxon's known range.

The population at Hemi was not tested as part of the genetic study by Binks et al. (2020), and genetic studies of the entity at Hemi have not been undertaken as part of the identification process. Identification on morphological grounds is the standard method of plant identification for flora and vegetation assessments (and is discussed by the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in their *Technical Guidance for Flora and Vegetation Surveys for Environmental Impact Assessment* (EPA, 2016)); it is also the same methodology used by taxonomic experts at the Western Australian Herbarium. Large scale genomic testing of the population of *Seringia exastia* at Hemi, or any other taxon present in a survey area, is not feasible from a financial perspective unless supported with significant justification, and is considered unnecessary in this instance. Although it could be inferred that the somewhat unexpected results of the genetic study by Binks et al. (2020) may suggest that there are further hitherto unrecognised *Seringia* taxa that have been overlooked in the past on morphological grounds, this inference is purely hypothetical, could theoretically be applied to any taxa recorded by surveys for the Project and identified on morphological grounds. Importantly, there is no morphological evidence to suggest that this population differs from the now synonymised *Seringia elliptica*, and by proxy, the currently accepted *Seringia exastia*, and this determination is in keeping with currently accepted taxonomic knowledge.

At the time of the field survey program for the 2022 Hemi Detailed Flora and Vegetation Assessment (Umwelt, 2022), advice from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) was that an Application for Authorisation under Section 40 of the BC Act to Take Threatened Flora was required for *Seringia exastia*, until such time as the taxon is formally delisted, but that Targeted surveys for the taxon were not required. Therefore, this taxon was not considered during targeted surveys in 2022, in accordance with this advice, as outlined below.

A nomination to delist the species due to no plausible significant threats to the species has been prepared and considered by the WA Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC). We anticipate that at the next TSSC meeting recommendations will be made to the Minister to delist. However until changes are officially made to the threatened species list, S. exastia is still legally listed as threatened flora, and authorisation to take under section 40 of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 is still required. Although some loss of plants is likely to have occurred and will continue to occur during mining and road works in some parts of the species' distribution, this is not expected to be significant in the context of the entire population. Therefore there should be no impediments to granting authorisation, following the standard process of application made to DBCA's Species and Communities Program.


*To reduce timeframes and costs associated with approvals under the BC Act, DBCA will not require the standard targeted surveys to be undertaken to inform the threatened flora authorisation impact assessment for *Seringia exastia*. However, survey reports should still consider *Seringia exastia* as a listed threatened species and note the presence of the species within a survey area when*

encountered. Authorisation applications with basic details that the species is known to occur within the applied project area will be accepted and fast-tracked for approval.

It is presumed that the delisting of this taxon at the Commonwealth level is a formality, although the timeframe for its delisting is not known. However, until such time as it is delisted, it is considered that consultation with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) should be undertaken, to determine whether any proposed impacts to this taxon would constitute a controlled action under the EPBC Act, or whether any further survey for this taxon in unsurveyed footprints would be required to inform impact assessment under the EPBC Act.

We trust this information meets with your current requirements. Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned on 1300 793 267 should you require clarification or further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Coultas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Coultas

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References

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